

Title of meeting: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 10 July 2014

Subject: Adoption Improvement Grant

Report by: Kate Freeman, Commissioning Manager, LAC

Wards affected: All

Key decision: Yes

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The Government recently confirmed a further year's grant for Adoption Reform. The grant is not ring fenced and totals £181,403. There are ambitious national reforms in relation to Adoption activity that we are translating into our local practice and as such, the activities around the recruitment and training of staff, marketing and recruitment of adopters will require on-going investment. In order to continue to make the necessary improvements and given also that adoption remains a national and a local priority and one that has a focused separate Ofsted judgement during inspection, it is critical that we continue with our planned programme of change.
- 1.2. In line with the above, this report outlines the proposed action plan for Adoption and Special Guardianship, and how the planned actions are likely to achieve improved performance in the key areas of permanence for children. The report includes a progress report against the previous Adoption Grant spend, and identifies areas that need continued investment in order to sustain the progress made to date and develop further the post adoption and permanence offer that must be in place for children and families.
- 1.3. Last year saw Adoption investment through a 2 year grant. The improvements made in line with this focused on structural, process and practice reforms as well as targeting the children waiting for Adoptive parents.

- 1.4. The improvements include:
- Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders have increased from 15 to 26 AO's and 16 to 27 SGO's.
 - Numbers of approved adopters have almost doubled from 20 in 2012/2013 to 37 in 2013/2014.
 - Numbers of children aged 0-5 years in the care system have reduced from 93 to 87 against a 27% increase of new episodes of care (for all children).
 - Average number of days from entering care to moving in with their adoptive family has improved from 852 in 2012/2013 to 583 in 2013/2014.
 - Care proceedings court timescales have reduced from 56 weeks to 37 weeks and are on a reducing trajectory.
- 1.5. Positive progress has been made although within this progress the growth in Special Guardianship Orders has meant in consequence that the requisite support services require further development. In line with this a scoping exercise has been commissioned to help us plan effectively for this growth, which was concluded in June '14.
- 1.6. Whilst adoption performance has much improved as can be evidenced in the report, there was an unexpected 27% increase of new episodes of care in 2013/2014. The "follow on" permanency planning and placement identification continues to require resourcing. (Appendix 1)
- 1.7. All Local Authorities have been given the Adoption Improvement Grant and the market place continues to be challenging and competitive. It is now an "adopter led" market and in order to continue to attract adopters we have to ensure our offer to them is attractive. In particular adopters want reassurance about the post adoption support passport and speed of the process. Both of these require significant resources to deliver effectively.
- 1.8. The Ofsted Framework for single inspection has been updated and has a focus in its judgements around permanent plans for children and post adoption/SGO support planning.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members are asked to:
- a. Approve the full allocation of the adoption improvement grant for 2014/15 to enhance the funding allocation previously approved and to ensure that progress to date is not impeded.

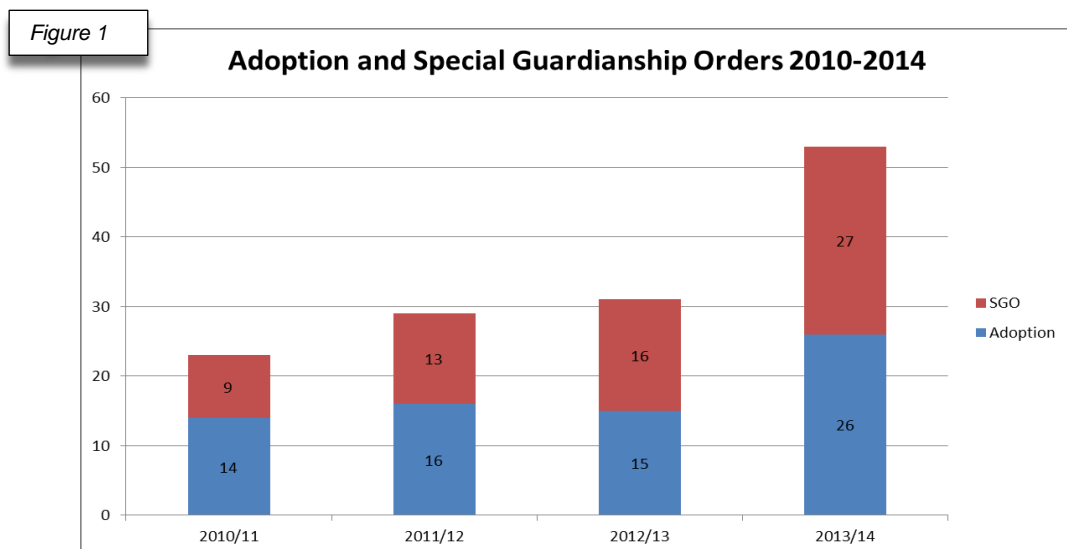
- b. Approve the implementation of the attached revised action plan, in order to continue to increase our supply of adopters to meet expected demand, and target the performance on our matching of children to adopters, which has shown a predicted slight dip this year.
- c. Approve the plan to develop and embed additional Special Guardianship support in order to respond to the growing numbers of those arrangements and to ensure high quality on-going support to families to prevent those children re-entering the care system.
- d. Recognise the need to adjust budgets in 2015/16 to meet on-going commitments within the action plan

3. Background

3.1. The DfE published an update to the adoption scorecards covering the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2013. The scorecards were originally introduced as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system. A report was completed for Cabinet on 1st July 2013 outlining the structural reform and practice development that was needed to increase the number of children moving through to adoption.

Progress update

3.2. Portsmouth have seen a significant increase in children achieving permanence through adoption and Special Guardianship, through system changes, refined processes, improved social work practice and increasing staffing capacity. See Figure 1.



3.3. There has also been a year on year increase of approved adopters, with a significant increase in 2013/14, as a direct result of increased staffing resource and enhanced marketing strategies. See figure 2.

Figure 2

From	To	No. of prospective adoptive families
2010	2011	11
2011	2012	18
2012	2013	20
2013	2014	37

3.4. Activity has been on-going and focussed on 4 key areas, as identified in the Adoption Grant Spending Plan, April 2013.

3.4.1. Early intervention and improvement in quality of assessments:

- Lowering social worker caseloads
- Lowering ratio of supervisee to manager
- Increasing admin support to social workers
- Provision of clinical supervision as well as management supervision
- Concurrent assessments of family members
- Doubling numbers of family group conference (FGC's)
- Increasing capacity of teams to respond to case work demands

3.4.2. Tracking, monitoring and improving QA processes:

- Improving processes and tracking for PLO and Court work
- Fortnightly permanence panel tracking of children's permanence plans.
- Increasing capacity of IRO Service to ensure effective reviewing of cases.
- Performance for 2 of the indicators on the adoption scorecard have been subject to a great deal of analysis due to the fact that performance is still not where we want to be and systems are continually improved and refined as performance is evaluated.

3.4.3. Marketing and Recruitment of Adopters

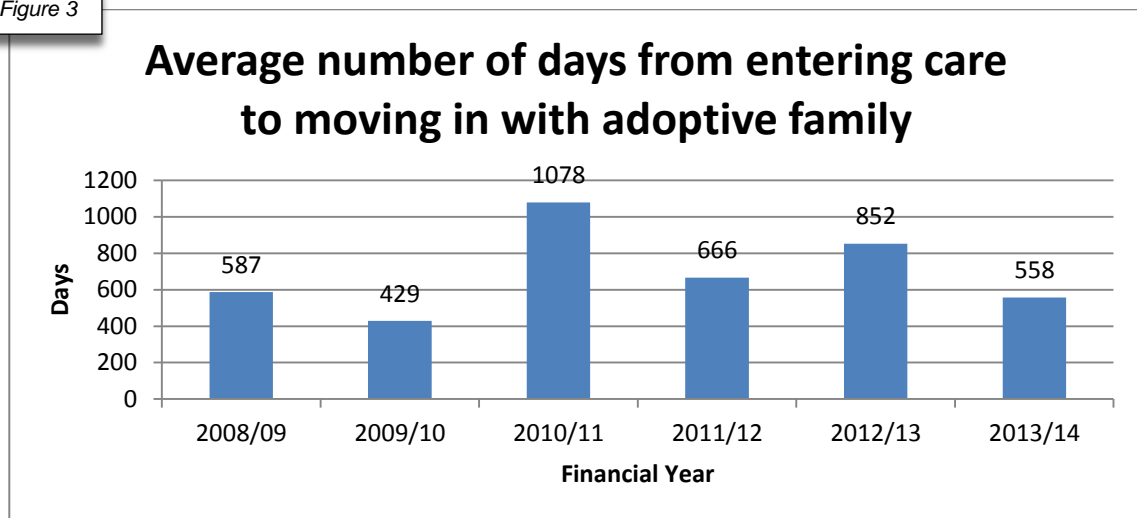
- Increase in adoption panels to 2 x month
- Refreshing all adoption marketing materials and website upgrade
- Joint project implementation to scope and develop a "super consortium" approach across the South Coast

3.4.4. Training and development of staff

- Embedding accredited systemic practice training for practitioners and an aligned managers' course to ensure the child is always at the centre of practice
- Permanence planning, concurrent planning, foster to adopt and sibling assessment training delivered

3.5. The investment in staffing resources has made a significant impact on adoption performance as can be seen by the graphs below.

Figure 3



3.5.1. This graph shows year by year outturn and highlights that year 2010/11 was the year that particularly impacts on this indicator.

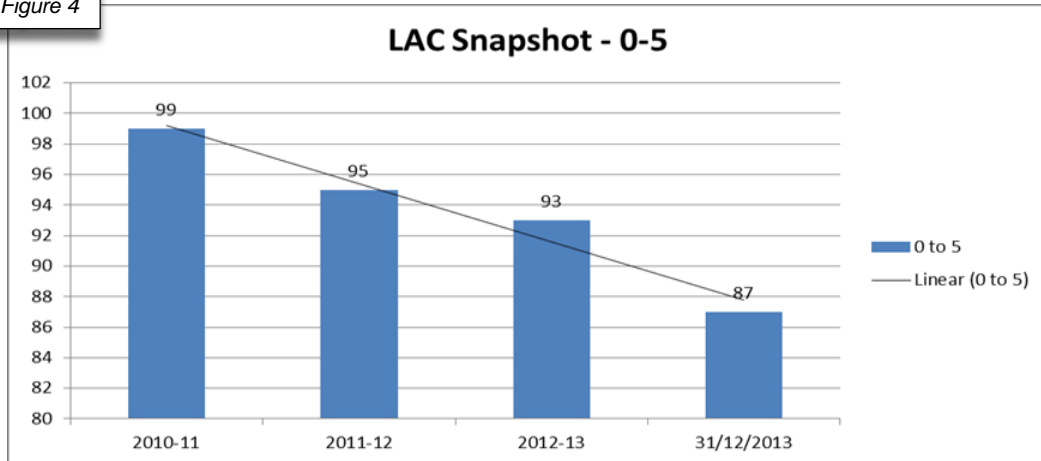
3.5.2. The features that led to delay were:

- Lengthy historic care proceedings spanning back to 2002
- Long term foster carers adopting children
- Waiting for sibling placements, rather than separating children
- Historic practice of multiple family assessments

3.5.3. The LAC snapshot graph shown below in figure 4 shows a steady decline at year end of the number of 0-5 year olds in the care system, even though we have had a 25% increase of children entering care (figure 5). This is attributable to the Social Work Matters Transformation strategy, Permanence Action plan and associated investment.

The resultant improved tracking and reviewing arrangements have also had a significant impact on the quicker through put of children from initial placement to their permanent placement.

Figure 4



3.6. As can be seen from the figure below, there has a 25% increase of children aged 0-5 years coming into the care system. This increase was not predicted and therefore was not reflected in the original Adoption Reform Grant Spend Plan.

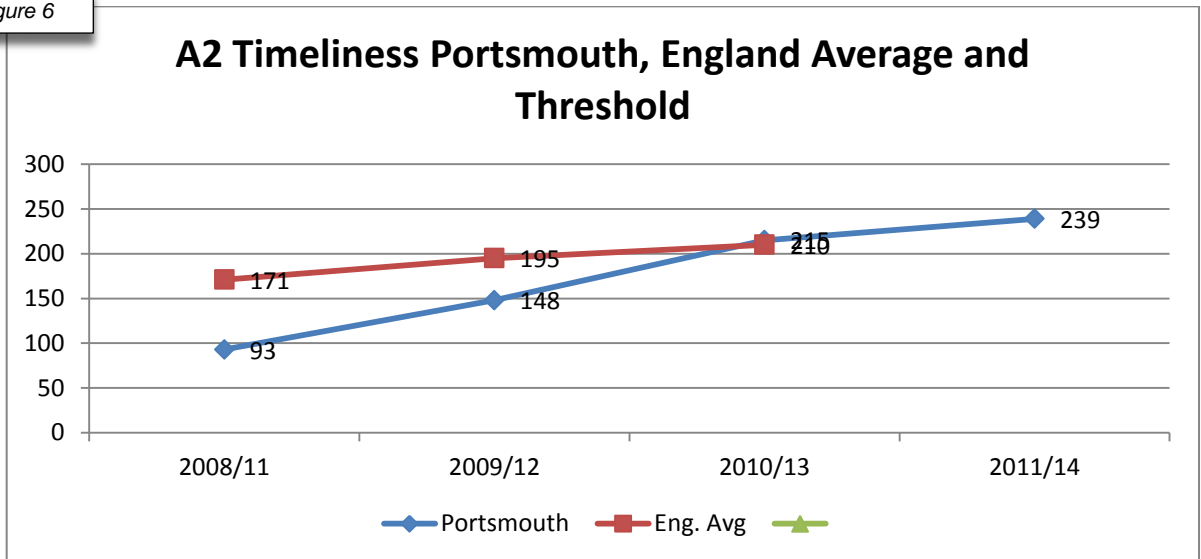
Figure 5

Numbers of children entering care					
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Change (12/13 to 13/14)	% Change (12/13 to 13/14)
AGE 0-5	50	60	75	15	25.00%
AGE 6-13	32	25	48	23	92.00%
AGE 14+	40	44	41	-3	-6.82%
TOTAL	122	129	164	35	27.13%

3.6.1. As can be seen in figure 6, there are a number of children where the matching process between a child and their adoptive placement exceeds the England average of 210 days, 67% (35) of our children are matched within the nationally expected timescale. It is important to note that for many children outside that timescale it is a positive story because either they have been adopted by their foster carer (and therefore have not experienced any change of placement) or we have persisted in locating a placement so that siblings can remain together. We are also working with health colleagues currently, to look at the impact of children with medical needs such as chromosomal deficiencies as a factor in delay.

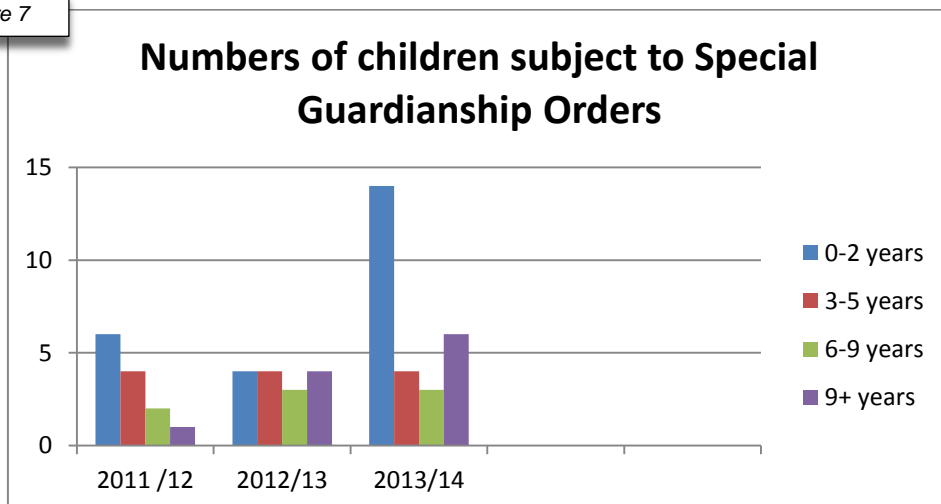
3.6.2. The increase in adoption activity has impacted significantly on our family finding capacity and this will remain an area of focus for this year's spend.

Figure 6



3.7. As can be seen from the chart below, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of children subject to SGO's in 2013/2014, 67% of whom were under 5. This high rate of increase also has semblance with recent case law (regarding BS) which require courts to ensure that adoption is the only option and that all family avenues have been exhausted before a Placement Order is made.

Figure 7



3.8. There are a number of implications that need to be considered so that these arrangements can be adequately supported. Research identifies that these carers are usually older (often grandparents) and are likely to be lone carers, have illness/disability, are more likely to be financially in need, as well as living in overcrowded conditions. There are significant

implications for support which needs to be intensive for the first two years to prevent early breakdown and there is statistically a higher chance of breakdown than adoption (5.7% compared to 3.7%). The complex and often dysfunctional family relationships mean that contact arrangements often require supervising and mediation between family members is generally required. Given that the age of children made subject to Special Guardianship Orders is predominantly in the younger age range, support services will be required for longer.

3.9. There are currently over 100 Special Guardianship arrangements and 50 post adoption cases supported. The support offer includes Early Years, Therapy and Social Worker support.

3.10. Next Steps

- There continues to be significant areas of practice and activity that require dedicated and intensive input in order to sustain the improvement of our adoption and permanence practice in line with Government expectations. These are outlined in the revised action plan and require full allocation of the Adoption Improvement Grant in order to deliver.
- The Government also introduced a universal fee of £27,000 for each adoption placement purchased. Previously there was a local consortium agreement where participating authorities exchanged placements at nil cost. This new universal fee clearly impacts on Portsmouth and if applied to 2013/2014, when 11 children were placed with other agencies adopters, equates to fees of £297,000. Whilst some of this would be offset by selling Portsmouth adopters to other agencies, there still needs to be sufficient budget to fund new placements into the future.
- The complexity of children we place for adoption is growing. As more information is available about the impact of chronic neglect, alcohol and drug misuse, domestic abuse on the developing foetus, and trauma on the developing brain of young children, adoptive parents are increasingly being asked to provide therapeutic "re-parenting" to the children we place. This requires skilled Adoption/Special Guardianship support, both in the early days of placement and throughout a child's life.
- The growing numbers of special guardianship arrangements (currently in excess of 100) have received little preparation for whom they are caring and require a range of services from supporting contact to supporting families on the verge of safeguarding concerns. It is anticipated that as our early help offer develops further momentum that demand on the front end of Children's Social Care Services will reduce in order to reinvest some of that resource

in the post special guardianship/adoption support. However, the support offer has to be sustained through the investment of this Improvement Grant, in line with this.

- There is a need to increase the access to education psychology time, medical advisor time and CAMHS input.
- A review in PCC was recently undertaken to consider the benefits of being part of a larger South Coast Consortium of Adoption agencies for sharing adopters and developing our services. The Project Manager has reported on the necessary development for this "super consortium" which will require a dedicated post, with shared costs across several Local Authorities.

3.11. Without the further Adoption Improvement Grant the existing momentum of change will be seriously undermined and impeded.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. In order to achieve the required development of post support services and sustain the progress to date, the full Adoption Reform Grant will be necessary. The Government priority is to continue to increase the numbers of adopters available for children and to reduce the length of time children wait for adoption. The previous Adoption Reform Grant focused on system and staffing reforms required to achieve immediate improvements in numbers of children adopted and numbers of adopters. The follow on work will focus particularly on the post adoption support and Special Guardianship services, as the volume and complexity of these cases is growing. (Appendix 2)
- 4.2. Continued investment in the adoption team is necessary to ensure sufficient skill and capacity is available to undertake the assessments of adopters and the matching of children to adopters in a timely way. If investment is not sustained this will lead to a dependency on other agencies to supply our adopters at £27,000 per placement, plus support costs.
- 4.3. Development of the post adoption offer of an "adoption passport" in line with Government policy requires ongoing investment. There are currently 50 Portsmouth adoption placements being supported by the Adoption Support Team as well as over 100 Special Guardianship arrangements being supported.
- 4.4. Progression of the project to develop a South Coast "Super" Consortium will require investment in terms of project management and staffing commitment to ensure Portsmouth's needs as an adoption agency are not overlooked and undermined by the larger County Authorities. As the

consortium develops, it is anticipated that there will be mutual benefits for all of the constituent Local Authorities.

- 4.5. The cost of caring for a Looked After Child per year ranges between £20,000 and £150,000 per annum. Through the development of our early help offer to families and by ensuring our adoption planning is prompt, targeted and supported, it is expected that the overall number of LAC will reduce to 290 and that the duration in care will also reduce.
- 4.6. The post adoption service requires investment in order to respond to the growing and on-going numbers of children supported via Special Guardianship and Adoption and the associated variable demands. Families need help and support at different times and the expectation is that they can access support when they need it. Portsmouth's offer of post adoption support is an integral part of the overarching marketing and recruitment strategy. Unless we are competitive, prospective adopters will go to other Local Authorities.
- 4.7. The plan for on-going expenditure for years 15/16 will be realised through:
 - i. The embedding of early help and the Social Work Matters transformation will lead to further reduction of care proceedings/timely conclusion of these, fewer children in care and an associated transfer of resource from the Protection and Court Teams.
 - ii. Through the development of the super South Coast Consortium, it is hoped that Local Authorities will jointly commission post adoption services.
 - iii. Offset costs of post adoption packages with the transfer of fostering allowances to cover the increasing burden of cost.

5. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Not necessary at this stage.

6. Legal Comments

The aims of the report are consistent and support the current aim that adoption should be, as a process and outcome provided to children and is an option that the Courts will require to be considered when assessing what orders may or may not be made at the conclusion of care proceedings.

7. Head of Finance Comments

The Adoption Reform Grant was first made available last year as a mixture of ring-fenced and un ring-fenced funding which the Cabinet allocated in its

entirety to the Children's portfolio to meet an approved service plan for developing the service in this area.

The 2014/15 allocation of £181,403 was not anticipated at the time of preparing the budget and it is not ring-fenced despite having expectations of usage attached to it. It is our normal practice for such grants to be taken as corporate funding.

The proposals in this paper include on-going commitments in respect of staff employment. Given that the funding available is one-off grant funding there will be a need to take on board the on-going commitments within the available cash limit funding from next year.

Current indications are that the Portfolio will face real difficulty in keeping expenditure within its existing cash limit allocation following an overspend in 2013/14 approaching £2.3m.

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Signed by:

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

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by:

Appendix 1

ADOPTION REFORM GRANT: PART B - GRANT DETERMINATION (2013 - 2014): No 31/2117

ANNEX D

Organisation Name:		Theme/Grant Ref no:	
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Please provide details of the ways in which the money was spent on adoption in 2013 – 2014:	
Item	Amount spent
Structural reform and increased workforce capacity/purchasing adopters	£297,068.40
Overhaul and renewal of marketing materials, web re-design.	£30,561.39
Adopter involvement in family finding/recruiting.	£4,865.37
Taylored post adoption therapeutic support and 3d sector support.	£45,974.92
Tracking, monitoring, quality assurance systems.	£25,918.00
Training/consultancy/consortium	£25,621.05
Total	£430,009.13

Please provide a summary of the approach taken by the local authority in spending this money, highlighting the innovative elements of this approach :

Workforce development and structural reform

- Child permanence reports moved from the Adoption team to the Looked After Children team, who then work jointly through the care

proceedings to ensure relevant information is gathered at an early stage.

- Embedded robust public law outline process, including Family Group conferences in all cases at an early stage.
- BAAF training delivered to key staff on permanence planning and impact of early neglect.
- 2 stage assessment process embedded and effectively working.
- Additional Social Worker and Practice Leader posts developed and funded to undertake the child permanence reports, adoption planning and family finding.

Marketing and web design

Commissioned an external Consultant to review and rebuild our adoption website.

Developed new marketing materials to underpin our recruitment campaign.

Family Finding/Recruitment

- Increased team capacity to reach a broader group of prospective adopters, and recruited independent assessors for out of area adopters.
- Participated in Adoption activity day and involved in the planning for our 2nd adoption activity day.
- Upgraded our childrens profiles to make them more attractive and child friendly.
- Invested in better technology to enhance DVD development.
- Increased number of adoption panels.

Tracking/Monitoring

Revised and strengthened our permanence panel to ensure it had a clear scrutiny and tracking function. Chaired by Head of Service, and cross-service membership of Team Managers ensures a whole service approach to permanence planning.

Systems review ensured that the linkage between legal privilege meeting, statutory reviews and permanence panel is much clearer.

Training/ consulting

BAAF training has been commissioned on a range of specialist areas including fostering for adoption, early impact of emotional neglect (informing early intervention strategies)

- Panel training has been undertaken and a central list developed.
- Project Manager appointed to undertake various scoping exercises, including the scoping and recommendations to be part of a much larger South Coast Consortium, and development of a permanence team.

Post adoption/therapeutic support

- Tailored bespoke therapeutic interventions have been purchased for

our out of area adoptions for a significant period of time (post 3 years).

- Enhanced the post adoption support team with a QSW and further development work being planned.

In summary the development and extension of our adoption services has required far more investment than the ring fenced grant allocation, and will continue to need investment for subsequent years

Please provide a summary of the impact this expenditure has had on the local authority's provision of adoption services to date :

- Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders have increased from 15 to 26 AO's and 16 to 27 SGO's.
- Numbers of approved adopters has almost doubled from 20 in 2012/2013 to 37 in 2013/2014.
- Numbers of children aged 0-5 years in the care system have reduced from 93 to 87 against a 27% increase of new episodes of care (for all children).
- Average number of days from entering care to moving in with their adoptive family has improved from 852 in 2012/2013 to 583 in 2013/2014.
- Care proceedings court timescales have reduced from 56 weeks to 37 weeks and are on a reducing trajectory.

Appendix 2

Resource Action Plan

Area of Focus	Required Development	Action needed	Person	Budget 2014/2015	Sustainability 2015/2016
Structural reform and increased workforce capacity/adoption purchase	Development of SGO hub	4 x FTE posts	LAC Commissioner	£126,000	Social Work Matters and early help
	Panel advisor post	5 x PL post	Team Manager, Adoption	£23,000	£30,000
	Ensure demand and supply of adopters is appropriate	Purchase of 2 adopters to keep up with the need for placements	Team Manager, Adoption	£56,000	Through selling own adopters in consortium this will be nil cost
	On-going funding of PL post to deliver 2 stage assessment and family finding SW	Continue to fund PL post adoption team	Team Manager, Adoption	£85,000	Re-align resource from elsewhere in service
	Work with comms on a cutting edge marketing strategy	Appoint marketing post to ensure competitive market strategies	Team Manager, Comms	£20,000	Cost of post will be offset by children being adopted and no longer LAC
Marketing materials	Continue to have live campaigns	Involvement of adopters in marketing materials	Marketing Officer	£3,000	Cost will be covered by reducing LAC
	Continue to have live campaigns	Creative, competitive marketing strategy	Marketing Officer	£10,000	On-going but offset by reduction of LAC
Post adoption/SGO support	Ensuring offer of support is effectively communicated and implemented	Range of interventions to be available to families in and out of city	Team Manager, Adoption	£55,000	CAMHS grant and consortium jointly commissioned
Trading/QA	Continually strengthen our tracking process to ensure whole service approach to permanence	Ensure service is ready for inspection against the standards	LAC Commissioning Manager	£26,000	£26,000
		Undertake review of permanence panel to ensure it is delivering required outcomes			
		Develop some project capacity to assist with this			
Training/consultancy/consortium	Ensure workforce are kept up to date with changes in guidance, regulations, practice and expectations	Develop the Super South England Consortium	Team Manager, Adoption	£14,000	£4,000 through efficiencies of consortium
		Training to staff regarding Special Guardianship implications			
				£418,000	