



Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Time and Date

2.00 pm on Tuesday, 17th January, 2017

Place

Dame Ellen Terry Room, Council House, Coventry CV1 5RR

Public Business**1. Apologies****2. Declarations of Interests****3. Minutes** (Pages 3 - 6)

(a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November, 2016

(b) Matters Arising

4. Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2015/16 (Pages 7 - 34)

Report of the Director of Childrens Services

5. Adoption Service Annual Report 2015/16 (Pages 35 - 66)

Report of the Executive Director of People

6. Outstanding Issues

There are no outstanding issues

7. Any Other Business

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

Private Business

Nil

Chris West, Executive Director, Resources, Council House Coventry

Monday, 9 January 2017

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Suzanne Bennett, Governance Services Tel: 024 7683 3072 e mail

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Membership: Councillor: E Ruane (Cabinet Member) and P Seaman (Deputy Cabinet Member)

By invitation Councillors M Lapsa (Shadow Cabinet Member)

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting
OR if you would like this information in another format or
language please contact us.

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Coventry City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 16 November 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor Ruane (Cabinet Member)
Councillor M Lapsa (Shadow Cabinet Member)
Councillor P Seaman (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Employees (by
Directorate)

People: S Watson

Resources: N David, A Groves, U Patel

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 April 2016 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. Concordat on Children in Custody

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Children's Services which provided an overview of the Concordat on Children in Custody.

The Government had written to all local authorities about the transfer of children, who have been charged and denied bail, from police custody to local authority accommodation. Police forces have a duty to secure these transfers under Section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and local authorities have a duty to accept these transfers under section 21 of the Children Act 1989. However, as a number of reports in recent years have highlighted, there are currently widespread failures to meet these statutory obligations nationally.

It is of the greatest importance that police and local authorities work together to ensure that the welfare of children is protected and these statutory obligations to some of the most vulnerable children in society are met. Children should not be spending the night in police cells when the law entitles them to be transferred to alternative accommodation. To improve transfer arrangements, two factors are essential; a clear understanding of the respective duties and effective local collaboration between police forces and local authorities. It is to drive improvement in these areas that a multi-agency Working Group on Children in Custody, led by the Home Office and Department for Education, has developed the Concordat on Children in Custody as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Concordat clearly sets out each party's responsibilities and provides a protocol for how transfers should work in practice. Between its signatories, it is both an agreement of understanding and a declaration of commitment to ensuring that these duties are fulfilled. The Government will be publishing the Concordat in England shortly and would like all local authorities, police forces and PCCs to become signatories in advance so that commitment to children in the area can be reflected in the published document. The Government are strongly encouraging local authorities to sign up, to make contact with each other and to use this Concordat to begin the process of ensuring that children in custody are given the protection to which the law entitles them.

The Cabinet Member requested clarification on the 14 cases where bail was refused between January 2015 and February 2016; whether the 14 cases referred to one child and a number of incidences or a number of children. In addition, the Cabinet Member requested that the figures for the total number of cases from February 2016 to November 2016 be emailed to members for information.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People:

- 1. Approves the Concordat on Children in Custody as set out in the attached document as Appendix 1.**
- 2. Endorses the proposal to sign the Concordat as a statement of intent to work with the West Midlands authorities as one single force.**
- 3. Agrees to developing local agreement to ensure operational arrangements are in place.**

4. Outstanding Issues Report

There were no outstanding issues.

5. Improving and Redesigning City Council Children's Residential Care Provision

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of People which sought approval to consult on improving and redesigning City Council children's residential care provision.

The Ofsted Inspection of Coventry's Children's Services published in March 2014 judged the three areas of 'Looked After Children', 'Leaving Care' and 'Adoption Performance' as requiring improvement. In response to the need to improve Children's Services in Coventry, The Children's Services Strategy 2016-2018 was developed to set out a Vision for Children's Service and a detailed transformation programme that would support the improvement of Children's Services and would place children at the heart of everything the Council do.

The improvement of these services sits within the context of a significant savings pressure for Children's Services with a requirement to achieve in excess of £7 million in 2017/2018, rising to in excess of £11 million from 2018/2019.

The Children's Services Transformation Programme converts the vision for the service into action that would ensure sustainable service improvement in Coventry. The programme comprised of eight discrete projects, largely falling under the 2 broad themes of workforce redesign and looked after children placements.

Children's Internal Residential Care Redesign was one of the eight projects and sets out to improve the quality of children's homes provided by the Council, whilst realising revenue benefits. It was planned that the redesign of the service would reduce spend on external residential provision by creating additional internal capacity by utilising the existing resource tied up in the current provision. The proposal was to provide homes with additional capacity, higher levels of occupancy and improved quality of care that represent better value for money.

The report recommended a period of stakeholder consultation to explore options for the reconfiguration of the service by providing 4 smaller homes for children to replace the existing provision at Gravel Hill and The Grange children's homes. The proposal is based on an identified need to create a more coherent, modern and suitable model of provision for the future care of Coventry's children and young people who require a residential home while they are being looked after by the local authority.

The Cabinet Member requested a report to be submitted to his next scheduled meeting detailing information in relation the current contract and to the commissioning of services, the cost implications and service providers.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People supports a period of consultation on the proposal to change the way that Council operated Children's Residential Care Homes are provided.

(Note: This item was considered as urgent business, the reason for urgency being to enable the consultation process to commence without any delay.)

6. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 2.20 pm)

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Public report
Cabinet Member

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Name of Cabinet Member: Councillor Ed Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report: Director of Children Services

Ward(s) affected: None

Title: Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2015/16

Is this a key decision? No

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet Member about the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2015 and March 2016.

The performance of Coventry Fostering Service is critical to delivery of high quality local placement that can meet the diverse needs of Coventry's looked after children.

The report summarises the activity of the service over the past 12 months. It highlights the challenge of adequately recruiting the number and type of carers who can meet children's needs and the critical requirement for on-going support and supervision of these carers. The report also considers the role of the senior management Fostering Steering Group and the members Task and Finish group in providing additional scrutiny and input.

Recommendations:

1. The Fostering Service Annual Report 2015/16 is accepted.
2. The updated statement of Purpose is approved

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 Statement of Purpose

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Coventry Fostering Service 2015/16

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 This report considers the activity by the Coventry Fostering Service during the year April 2015 to March 2016. Located within the Family Placement Service, Coventry Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, approval, preparation, training, supervision and support of foster carers.
- 1.2 Coventry City Council is committed to ensuring that, wherever possible, children are supported to live and be brought up within their family and community network. Where this is not possible and children need to become looked after by the authority, this should be in a family setting or in a placement which prepares them for this. As far as is possible, this will be with Coventry approved foster carers.
- 1.3 Foster Care is a regulated area of social work practice and there have been a range of regulations and statutory guidance issued by the Department of Education (DfE). The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (last updated in 2011) also provide the framework within which the service is required to operate. The standards also profile the central importance of the child's relationship with their Foster Carer and the need for Foster Carers to be recognised as core members of the team working with the child. There is a recognition that Foster Carers need to be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting and provide care in the same way as any good parent would do.
- 1.4 The service has been working to an improvement plan, primarily focused on improving the overall quality of the service, increasing the capacity of Coventry Foster Carers whilst decreasing reliance on more expensive Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 1.5 At the end of March 2015 there were 147 approved mainstream households and in March 2016 these increased to 148 approved households. The service recruited an additional 20 Foster Carers approved but this gain was offset by a loss of 19 fostering mainstream households who were either deregistered or chose to resign. A further 5 connected persons fostering households were deregistered as carers secured special guardianship orders or the children they were caring for became adults.
- 1.6 The number of children placed internally increased from 137 at the 30/04/15 to 149 at the 31/03/16 (utilising 61.6% of the approved capacity). The original target was to secure 175 households and to have 180 children placed internally by the end of 2015/16. Due to a fall in numbers of children placed internally in 2014/15, this was reviewed, and an action plan for in-house placements, was put in place to ensure the service still met target by focusing on occupancy as well as recruitment; reducing places that were on hold or vacant, as well as increasing Foster Carer placements by 19. This target was not achieved, but the service managed to increase numbers to retain their 14/15 baseline position of approximately 150.
- 1.7 In order to strengthen Coventry's position to drive the recruitment of foster carers and to compete with other providers, Coventry introduced a skills fee per child and allowances in line with those recommended by the National Fostering Network in 2015 and these were agreed and implemented in consultation with foster carers and the Coventry Foster Carers Association
- 1.8 The Council also introduced a Fostering Friendly Employer policy which was approved in July 2015 by Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and launched across the Council in September 2015.
- 1.9 At the end of March 2016, there were 585 looked after children.

Of the 585 children 431 children were placed in foster care.

Of the 431 children 149 children were placed with Coventry foster carers compared with 134 in 2014/15. This equates to 35% were placed with internal foster carers.

Of the 431 children 257 children were placed with Independent fostering agencies and this is a reduction compared with the 279 children in 2014/15.

Of the total number of children looked after 26% are placed with Coventry foster carers. This is an improvement since March 2015 when only 22.8% were placed internally

At the end of March 2016, a further 22 children were placed with family and friends carers.

1.10 Coventry Foster Carers could be from the family or friendship network of the child. There were 17 households where the carers were related. The majority of carers' households are not related to the child and are expected to care for children from a wide variety of backgrounds and for different durations. Of the household foster care as of March 2016 these households offered 242 placements (i.e. 1.6 placements per household). These carers are known as mainstream carers. Whilst the number of children in placement per household has remained constant at 1.6 the number of foster household approved has increased slightly.

Recruitment, Approval and Resignations of Mainstream Carers

Mainstream carers	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Approved households	137	147	148
New carers recruited	18	27	20
Carers lost	24	17	19
Number of available Placements	226	250	242
Placements utilised as at the 31/3		137 (54.8%)	149 (61.6%)
Recruitment/Assessment Mainstream Carers	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of Initial enquires	224	290	312
Assessments started at stage 1	64	69	112
Assessments commencing to stage 2	NK	22	39
Number of households approved (excluding family and friends)	18	27	20
Conversion Rate - Enquiry to Application (assessments started)	29%	24%	36%
Conversion rate Application (assessments started) to Approval	28%	39%	18%

1.11 Overall in 2015/16 the conversion rate from enquiry to approval was 6.4%, which is a reduction from 2014/15 at 9.3%. Generally we would look for a 10% or better conversion rate, which would reflect a targeted recruitment campaign that is attracting households that have the capacity and the qualities to become foster carers, and then a sound assessment process to turn

these into households approved. A targeted recruitment campaign (from December 2015) and changes to the application and approval process have been put in place to address this reduction, and yield better results moving forward.

- 1.11 The timeliness of assessments has been poor with only 6 of the 20 assessments being completed in the statutory timescales. One of the contributors to delays in the meeting statutory timescales are the medical reports and the timeliness of DBS checks. Robust monitoring and case tracking meetings which proactively review all activity within the service have been established.
- 1.12 In March 2016 a small recruitment team was established which includes 1 fte social worker and 2 recruitment officers (G5) and this is located within the Assessment team. It fast tracks fostering enquiries, offers and undertakes initial visits within 72 hours and supports all recruitment activity. The end to end process for managing the carer journey has been re-engineered so as to produce a much more timely response to enquiries.
- 1.13 All recruitment activities in relation to prospective carers (including initial visits and assessments) are tracked on a weekly basis to ensure that carers were assessed rapidly and to prevent drift. In addition, the performance of the service is supported by a comprehensive performance score card which is reviewed monthly.
- 1.14 Preparation and training groups have been held for all prospective foster carers who have already had an initial visit from a recruitment social worker within the fostering team. The training, which is delivered by the fostering team and involves foster carers as well as looked after young people or care leavers. The training materials have been updated in line with the revised "Skills to Foster" training pack.
- 1.15 One of the main areas of focus for the service has been is to improve the quality of support given to Foster Carers. A comprehensive training programme is in place and ensures all carers undertake their Induction Training, Support and Development Standards which is a regulatory requirement. In turn the standard of care has improved as Foster Carers knowledge, awareness and understanding has increased with improved training. Carers requested crèche facilities be made available and these are now in place for some courses.
- 1.16 The appointment of the Recruitment and Development Officer for fostering and adoption has created capacity in the service to drive the recruitment of foster carers. The Recruitment and Development officer has sharply focused the recruitment campaigns. These have been more evident since November 2015. There has been strong leadership from the Director and Members, in particular Councillors Ruane and Ken Taylor in driving the visibility of the marketing campaigns.
- 1.17 Coventry has a strong marketing strategy and brand which includes both fostering and adoption. It utilises current research undertaken by Fostering Network and the Department of Education to incorporate value modes within the key messages inherent to the campaigns - "Childhood Memories" and "Alfie's journey". There is on-going activity to strengthen relationships with business partners, faith and community groups. This includes
 - Coventry Sports Foundation
 - Coventry Railway Station and Virgin Trains
 - The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Positive Images Festival
 - Free Radio and Hillz FM.
 - Imagination Café
 - Faith and Community groups
 - Warwick University
 - Coventry University

- 1.18 Coventry has a strong social media presence established with interactions from media and existing carers. Recruitment activity has included extensive use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Our online content on the website is regularly updated and feedback about the website has significantly improved.
- 1.19 The launch of the 'Alfie's Journey' film has further increased the reach and awareness in the City. The film has won an International Film Award.
- 1.20 Activity and impact in 2015/16 can be measured by the following.
- 76K impressions on Twitter
 - 44K circa views of 'Alfie's Journey' over different online platforms
 - 1822 Likes on our Facebook Page (from 1054 in April 2015)
 - 257 Followers on Twitter
 - 20 information sessions will be held by end of March 2016.
 - 4 Interviews on Hillz FM
 - 3 festivals attended (Godiva, Positive Images, Hillfields)
 - 3 Interviews on BBC CWR (two with foster carers)
 - 2 Free Radio Storycorners held
 - 3 articles in Citivision
 - 3 children's storytime event targeting BME communities by end March 2016
 - One exhibition online and at Herbert Art Gallery in June 2015
 - Warwick Arts Centre showing 'Alfie's journey' on big screens
 - Christmas Light Switch showed 'Alfie's Journey'
- 1.21 The Recruitment and Development Officer supports developments in the Service with regard to an effective communication and retention strategy, providing strong challenge. This includes;
- Monthly Foster Carers Newsletter established providing up to date and relevant information.
 - Dedicated page for the FCA included in the newsletter each month
 - A closed group Facebook page set up Coventry Foster Carers' Association set up and now fully operational
 - Facilitated capacity building with the Coventry Foster Carers Association
 - Online Survey for the FCA foster carers needs from a foster carers organisation
 - Led on the consultation for the fees and allowances
 - +
 - Organised a tax and benefits session for carers and produced a guide for all carers
 - Supporting foster carers to set up a weekly foster carers meet up (now running)
 - Engaged foster carers in recruitment (advertorials on Free Radio, interviews, website and social media content and attendance at information events)
 - Developing an evidenced based approach to advice and support for fostering families in regard to the impact of fostering on sons and daughters of foster carers
- 1.22 The Coventry Foster Care Association is a strong and enabling partner in driving improvements in the service and over the last year there have been jointly agreed areas for service development. The Association has been involved in the recruitment of key posts and are involved in a range of recruitment and support activities. They have regularly attended service meetings. Their support in the recruitment and marketing activity has been outstanding.
- 1.23 The Association has grown and has reviewed its membership and officer roles. The Foster Carers' Association have re-elected a full management committee and have clear work plan focusing on:
- Representing foster carers' views
 - Raise awareness and celebrate the role of foster carers
 - Provide peer support and social opportunities for foster carers and children.

Service Improvements.

- 1.24 Events where the service and Council acknowledges the valuable work our foster carers do in meeting the needs of looked after children have been held during 2015/16 and this has included an annual summer event, seasonal celebrations as well as an annual award ceremony with buffet. Elected members, senior management and staff from the fostering, adoption and social work teams attend this important celebration. The award ceremony presents individual awards for achievement and loyal service to Coventry's foster carers.
- 1.25 A monthly welcome event hosted by the Lord Mayor has been established to thank those applicants who have come forward and been approved to become Coventry Foster Carers. This event also allows these newly approved foster carers to meet members of the team they have joined including the Placements Team, Fostering management and the Foster Carer Association.
- 1.26 **Out of Hours Telephone Support Service;** The out of hours telephone support service for foster carers is available for foster carers and is operated by fostering team staff and runs 365 days per year.
- 1.27 **Occupancy Levels** – a key priority is to increase occupancy levels in utilising foster carer beds. The number of children in internal placement throughout 2015/16 was an average of 139 children. Based on the number of children at the end of April 15 and the end of March 16 occupancy levels had improved. See table above in 1.10 for occupancy percentages.
- 1.28 Recruitment and assessment activity in 2015/16 has not led to the anticipated increase in foster carer households. There has however been some gains in more children being placed internally. The matching considerations for older children and placing siblings together is a factor that has meant the children cannot always be placed where foster carers have capacity.
- The shortfall in in house placements that can meet the needs of sibling placements and older children has been reflected in the targeted recruitment campaigns, the assessment of new carers and the development of support packages.
 - There has been targeted work undertaken to maximise the gains made in the net increase of Fostering Households by reducing the number of carers on hold. Over the last year these have reduced to 11.5% of foster carers on hold compared with 20.9% of fostering households in 2015. 9 carers on hold returned to fostering and a number were deregistered or resigned.
 - Improvements in the decision making to remove a carer from the vacancy list have been addressed and this is reflected in the number of carers who have either resigned or have been deregistered.
- 1.29 Improving in-house occupancy is a critical priority and has been the focus of the Fostering Steering group, further work was completed to determine the most realistic increase in numbers for 2015/16.
- 1.30 An analysis of the children placed in external placements confirmed that this was required to ensure siblings groups stayed together or placements to meet the needs of older children with complex and challenging behaviours. Approval categories for foster carers are wider now enabling more flexibility in placing children as their needs arise.

1.31 The carers lost to the service equates to 25 and 5 of these are connected persons, All carers are offered and exit interview with a manager in the service and their feedback has been used to improve service outcomes. Understanding the reasons for leaving the service, with a managerial review of all decisions is crucial. Below is the analysis in the past 2 years for the reasons.

Reason	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Permanence plan for child	5	1	2
Connected Persons - temporary approval or young person now 18	/	2	3 2
Move to another agency as moved 30 miles away from Coventry	/	/	1
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement and moved more than 30 miles outside the City	10	9	12
Dissatisfied with quality of service	/	/	1
Safeguarding (Termination)	2	2	/
Resigned prior to quality of care and safeguarding issues	1	1	4
Other – including death	/	2	/
Total	18	17	25

1.31 Feedback from foster carers leaving the service is welcomed and carers are offered exit interviews undertaken by the Team Managers. Feedback from carers on the quality and consistent support from the both children’s social worker and supervising social worker has also been sought and this is fundamental to improving the retention, as well as maintaining the good will and flexibility of Foster Carers. Further work is planned in 2016 to work with children’s teams to embed a more effective team around the child and improve placement stability for our children.

1.32 In March 2015 at the Annual Fostering Conference departmental managers acknowledged the significant short falls in the current approach to engaging and involving Foster Carers in the core tasks of care planning by the supervising social worker and children’s social worker. The conference noted that this had led to foster carers feeling isolated, not valued and with their expertise with and knowledge of the child not being recognised or used. A follow up consultation exercise was undertaken to inform what will be a refreshed fostering support strategy for 2015 – 2017. This work has now been completed.

1.33 As a result of these shortfalls a Team around the Child approach has been adopted by the Service. This requires foster carers to be involved in all stages of the care plan development and delivery. During the last year a number of joint training events and co-production workshops with foster carers and children’s social workers have been held to strengthen relationships and support to carers. The culture of “team around the child” continues to be embedded and requires robust challenge and drive from supervising social workers and fostering managers.

- 1.34 In June 2015, the launch of Delegated Authority has enabled foster carers to take more day to day responsibility for the care of the child and subsequently this will mean a greater sense of security for the child i.e. the person looking after them is also the same person who can make many key decisions. This will be further supported by the development of the Support Strategy which was developed jointly with the Foster Carers Association, the Family Placement Service and Children's team.
- 1.35 The KEEP programme intervention has continued to be offered to both foster carers and Special Guardians. In 2015/16 13 carers completed the course. Results continue to show that carers value the 16 week programme and report improved behaviours for specific children.
- 1.36 The completion of Foundation training in Theraplay by 7 staff in the Family Placement Service has meant the delivery of monthly workshops to Foster carers on effectively using these principles whilst working with children. Feedback from the monthly workshops which involve the child has been that this relationship based intervention is meeting the needs of carers who are working with children who have a number of attachment related behaviours.
- 1.37 **Oversight and Challenge** – In light of the challenge of recruitment and retention of foster carers, members' led Task and Finish group was established in 2014 to provide further scrutiny of the Service plans and the relationship with the foster carers and the Association. Its report was accepted in April 2015 by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Most of the recommendations arising from the report have been considered and implemented, The Fostering Steering Group has continued to meet to provide problem solving forum to ensure the accelerated improvements required are delivered on time. Both interventions have provided the critical oversight the agency has required and the input to address what had been long standing problems in data management and sustaining a customer service focus.
- 1.38 **Fostering Panel** - Improvement has been made to the Fostering Panel to make sure it worked in an efficient and effective way. Monitoring sheets are completed for each case presented at panel and the panel provides feedback to the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision as to whether a Foster Carer should be approved. The Fostering Panel meets on a fortnightly basis and it feeds back any issues or concerns to the Registered Manager.
- 1.39 Sarah Borthwick was the independent chair of the Fostering Panel but offered her resignation in 2016. The Panel met a total of 18 occasions and was quorate on each occasion. The Panel has continued to provide the service detailed feedback on the quality of the work discussed and has noted continued improvements in the assessments and foster carer reviews. Panel has however been concerned with the quality of social work practice as reported from foster carers and asked the Service Manager to consider prioritising improving relations with the children's social workers. Panel training in allegation management took place in July 2015 and this involved all staff and managers of the service.
- 1.40 **National Developments:** In 2015 The Government stated their intent to develop Regional Adoption Agencies to ensure that adoption services are delivered on a greater scale, and with more innovative approaches to practice and as such have real potential to improve outcomes for children. In December 2015, Coventry in partnership with Warwickshire, Solihull, After Adoption and Barnardos West Midlands secured approval to establish a regional adoption agency. In September 2016 Worcestershire joined the partnership. It also includes Coventry University as a key stakeholder. The partnership is named Adoption Central England (ACE).
- 1.41 To undertake this work a Regional Adoption Board was established in December 2015. The establishment of Adoption Central England (ACE) will have an impact on the Family Placement Service which currently operates as an integrated fostering and adoption service.

The service will need to separate its functions and establish a distinct Fostering Service and Adoption Service. This work will progress in 2016 and the first step towards achieving this will be the appointment of managers for Fostering and Adoption Services.

1.42 The priorities for service going forward are:

1. Disaggregate the fostering and adoption services and manage the change smoothly.
2. Secure foster carers for sibling groups and older children including teenagers.
3. Maintain an aggressive and robust focus on marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
4. Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the children placed in internally.
5. Review and strengthen the training and development offer to foster carers
6. Continue to work with children's teams to embed the Team around the Child with a focus on Placement stability .
7. Implement the Foster Carers Support Strategy

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

That the Fostering Report is noted and the updated Statement of Purpose accepted.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 Not applicable

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 Not applicable

5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

	<u>2015/16 Budget</u>	<u>2015/16 Outturn</u>	<u>2015/16 Variance</u>
	£000	£000	£000
Internal Fostering	5,100	3,733	(1,367)
<u>External Fostering</u>	9,615	10,255	640
<u>Residential</u>	10,380	11,987	1,607
Total Placements	25,095	25,975	880

The above table shows the 2015/16 outturn position. The unachieved increase in internal foster care placements discussed in paragraph 1.6 accounts for approximately half of the overspend in this area. This includes the budget and cost for residential placements also, as for budgetary control purposes we monitor the placements budget as a whole.

5.2 **Legal implications**

6. **Other implications**

Any other specific implications

6.1 **How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

The Family Placement Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a fostering, adoption and other permanent placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting – that of securing

appropriate family placements for 'Looked After Children' (LAC), as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

This risk is being managed through the Fostering Steering Group and Children's Operational Management Group and both groups provide robust challenge to the delivery against the targets set for the service, in examining the increase in foster carer households and occupancy of approved beds.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Increasing the numbers of internal foster carers and children placed internally will reduce the need for more costly external placements..

6.4 Equalities / EIA

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment was undertaken as part of the Fundamental Service Review in 2012.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

Report author(s):

Name and job title

Liz Gosling
Interim Service Manager

Jivan Sembi
Head of Service

Both of these authors have now left Coventry City Council so the report is presented by:-

Katherine Robinson
Service Manager - Fostering

Directorate: People

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Katherine Robinson	Service Manager Fostering	People		5/1/17
Tina Pinks	Lead Business Partner - Finance	Resources		05/01/17
Keith Francis	Interim Head of Service	People		5/1/17
Names of approvers: (officers and members)				
John Gregg	Director of Children's Service	People		9/1/17
Rachael Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources		05/01/17
Eileen West	Lead Accountant	Resources		29/11/16
Julie Newman	Legal Services	Resources		9/1/17
	Human Resources	Resources		9/1/17
Councillor E Ruane	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People		3/1/17	3/1/17

Appendices

Statement of Purpose – Coventry Fostering Service

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF COVENTRY CITY FOSTERING SERVICE

(Revised July 2015)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement. This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with Ofsted. The statement is updated and amended annually.

2. National Legislative and Policy framework

Coventry Fostering Service is run in accordance statutory requirements outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care

3. Policy Statement

- 3.1 Coventry Fostering Service believes that every child Looked After should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children.
- 3.2 Coventry Fostering Service recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible.
- 3.2 The first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends (known as connected person's carers) and supported under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this placement is deemed suitable and the child is looked after. Other placements may include a child and parent/s being placed together in a foster home.
- 3.3 Coventry is committed to placing children and young people with our approved foster carers and has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by Coventry and their families. We are also committed to placing children and young people with Coventry based foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible.
- 3.4 Each child/young person will have access to service that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Individuality, difference and diversity are valued and celebrated and children's health, well-being and educational needs are given high priority to ensure that they reach their full potential
- 3.5 Children's safety and welfare are actively promoted in all fostering placement together with protection from abuse and other forms of significant harm.

4. Aims

- 4.1 The main aim of Coventry Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster care placements for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being, the service is committed to:
 - ensuring that foster carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.
 - ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and that children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.
 - ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of value for money for the council

- multi- agency working and developing partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children
 - working at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the well - being of children in public care in Coventry.
 - respecting the rights and responsibilities of Looked After children and their carers and involve them in all aspects of service delivery.
- 4.2 The fostering service also aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community and from the connected persons networks of looked after children wherever this best meets their needs.
- 4.3 We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children. The service assesses each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role and to supervise and support carers in order they promote and achieve the highest standards of welfare, safeguarding and outcomes for looked after children.
- 4.4 The Service is involved in assessing potential carers for their suitability to be granted Special Guardianship in court proceedings, together with arrangements around support to those granted such orders.

5. Objectives

- 5.1 To ensure that there is a choice of high quality foster care placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children and young people.
- Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Personal Development Plan
 - To promote a safe, stable and enabling environment ensuring that children and young people are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect.
 - To promote the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing each child with the opportunity of developing their full potential, through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life chances.
 - To have a positive regard to for the child or young person's racial, religious and cultural needs. All children should have equal access to local family based care

- The individual child's needs/ wishes and feelings are paramount and are taken into consideration in relation to their placements
- Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate.
- To promote contact for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement, and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate
- To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process by providing the relevant information.
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities by having adequate support mechanisms in place and as outlined in their terms and conditions and the foster carer agreement
- The Skills Fee scheme ensures quality by providing a competency and skills framework with clear expectations for foster carers, together with a training and personal development programme.
- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all.
- Ensure that service performance is monitored, assessed with outcomes measured via a Quality Assurance Framework.
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers
- Consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and have regular meetings and consultation with foster carers, senior managers and elected members.
- Consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard.
- A commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children in public care

6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest

- 6.1 Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children who are subject to National Standards and Data protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

- 7.1 Coventry Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision. It has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our connected persons- carers.

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care. They will be provided with a Children's Guide to Fostering
- Every child who is looked after will have a safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan
- Every child looked after will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding
- Every child looked after will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity
- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this
- The fostering service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote contact between looked after children and their family and other significant persons
- Foster carers have a handbook (fact file) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards

8. Children's Guide

- 8.1 Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is

accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

9. Services Provided

9.1 The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

9.2 Coventry operates a Skills Fee scheme which incorporates the majority of approved foster carers. All Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). Weekly allowances are paid at Fostering Network recommended rates. The Skills Level fees operate at four levels which sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements.

9.3 Level 4 Carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests.

9.3 The differing types of foster carer approval are:

Short Term:

Time limited placements across all skills levels.

Long Term:

Planned, permanent placements across all skills levels.

Respite:

Planned, child needs led support for placements and agreed support for carers across all levels.

Support Care:

Part of a package of support (including day care and child minding) where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their families and prevent children coming into care.

Connected persons Carer:

Providing placements for children and young people known to the carer.

Respite Care:

Short breaks provision, sitting scheme and long term placements for disabled children.

10. Management Structure

Executive Director

Gail Quinton

Director of Children's Services

John Greig

Principle Social Worker

Vicky White

Head Of Service

Jivan Sembi

Service Manager & Registered Manager of the Fostering Agency

Elizabeth Gosling
(since 6th October 2014)

Family Placement Service Teams & Managers:

Assessment Team: Mike Tomkinson and Bonnie Moulton
Support Team: Stuart Lance-Pencheon and Sharon Benedict
Permanency Team: Pat Branson, Kath Evans and Ruth Homer
Panels Manager: Marian Eagleson
Recruitment and Development Officer – Rachel Brown

10.1 There are 3 teams in the Family Placement Service and these are bases on functions within the service.

- The Recruitment and Assessment Team is responsible for fostering, adoption, step parent and special guardianship assessments.
- The Support Team provides on going support to mainstream foster carers and adopters, Connected persons Carers, and Special Guardians.
- The Permanency team works with the Neighbourhood teams to identify the needs and profiles of the child/ren requiring permanency, whether via adoption or fostering, at an early stage to begin to inform the assessment team of the types of placements that are likely to be required and track possible matches of children with carers as they make their way through the system.
- A Panels Manager to oversee both Fostering and Adoption Panels.

10.2 All Team Managers are responsible to the Service Manager and the management group share responsibility for developing policy and procedure in

line with national regulations and standards to ensure a safe and stimulating environment for Looked after children.

- 10.3 The City council appoints elected members to corporately oversee the work of the Children's Social Care Service and delegates certain responsibilities to the Assistant Director who is the responsible individual for financial management, management systems and the safe care of children. The Head of Service is the Agency Decision Maker for fostering.
- 10.4 There are currently xx full time equivalent qualified social workers across the service (including Managers) with differing responsibilities for and within the service. All workers hold a social work qualification apart from three child and family workers based in each of the teams who support life story work, carer recruitment enquiries and carer retention tasks.

11. Protecting children from harm

- 11.1 Coventry Service operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers and staff.
- 11.2 Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service development and best practice, for example: poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement; child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.
- 11.3 Children are made aware about these procedures through their social worker, fostering supervising social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's Rights Advocacy service independent of the service.

12. Provision of Therapeutic Services.

- 12.1 The Service has a referral route to the Journeys and Coventry Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), who provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, some consultation to carers and other professionals. CAMHS comprises of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and child and adolescent mental health practitioners with expertise in children's mental health. This is accessed the single front door. .

13. Provision of Health Promotion Support Services

- 13.1 The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children in conjunction with other nurses within the team, oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and have input into the health promotion of Young People. Dedicated paediatricians advise the fostering panels on medical issues for applications to foster. The Service Fostering Service works with others in children's services to ensure looked after children's needs are addressed. The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve.

14. Provision of Educational Support Services

- 14.1 There is a virtual head teacher for Looked After Children to look at improving the attainment attendance and exclusion issues and to improve partnerships with schools in Coventry. There is a qualified teacher based in the service providing training, support and advice to foster carers regarding their looked after children's educational needs.
- 14.2 Coventry fostering service recognises the need to improve Looked After Children attendance at school. The Fostering Service works closely with the carers in addressing this issue and this has resulted in a significant improvement in attendance of children in foster care in recent years.
- 14.3 Within Children's Services we have an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school. We work together with our colleagues to ensure that this only occurs in exceptional circumstances and not as a rule.
- 14.4 The Fostering Service works alongside and supports educational initiatives for looked after children by promoting children's educational needs to our Foster Carers. Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people and, where appropriate, the supervising social worker will also attend. Within the educational setting, young people in year 10 and 11 can access 1:1 tuition.

15. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

- 15.1 Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people with the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.
- 15.2 Foster carers and their families are able to access the Passport to Leisure. This gives free access to certain leisure facilities. The council as a whole provides a 'Corporate Offer' to foster carers, their families and looked after children improving free access to a range of council services, including sports and leisure opportunities such as free swimming lessons and free gym use.
- 15.3 We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs. We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism.
- 15.4 We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. Fostering supervising social workers assist and advise carers with issues such as appropriate placement matching and with trans racial placements.

16. Care leavers provision

16.2 The Route21 Looked After Children's social work teams work closely with the Fostering Service and other professionals to provide a holistic approach to meeting young people's needs. Coventry is committed to supporting young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life and preparation for independence if this supports them more effectively. The 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people age 18 - 21years.

17. Recruitment of Foster Carers

17.1 The Fostering Service has a recruitment strategy which utilises up-to-date data regarding the gaps in current resource provision. Currently, more places are needed for teenagers; sibling groups; children and young people with disabilities or additional needs.

17.2 There is an ongoing recruitment strategy and the adoption and fostering pages within the Coventry City Council website are updated regularly and include details of information sessions which are held approximately every 4 weeks across the City. The Fostering Service uses a variety of media, including digital and audio to recruit new carers. The strategy is informed by national research and local evaluation and analytics to ensure that methods utilised are most likely to achieve the desired results. A distinctive brand has been established and maintained and our 'reach' within our target communities has been extended. We work closely with the corporate communications team on our marketing and media strategy.

17.3 We are engaging with our foster carers and young people who have experiences of foster care to help recruit carers and have implemented a 'Foster Friendly Employers' strategy is in place for Coventry City Council, which will enable the service to develop closer relationships with local businesses. The examples from the other Local Authorities area are being incorporated into our strategy and we are offering a range of benefits, offers and events for Foster families and their looked after children.

18. Approval and Assessment Process

18.1 Persons over the age of 21 may apply to become a Foster Carer (but between the ages of 21 and 25 yrs we will need to have evidence of relevant transferable skills and / or related experience). Initial responses and advice to enquirers from the recruitment team are welcoming and within set timescales, normally the same working day.

18.2 There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult. Interest is welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

- 18.3 The majority of initial enquiries and registrations of interest about fostering with Coventry are received through a range of sources including information events, the dedicated recruitment phone line and via email.
- 18.4 The website is regularly reviewed to ensure information is up to date, accessible and user friendly. When a person contacts the Service to express an interest in fostering they will be able to have a discussion with a social worker who will explain the process, take some initial information and offer an initial home visit if appropriate.
- 18.5 At the home visit we will discuss fostering with the enquirers and members of the family, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework and play and participate as a full family member.
- 18.6 If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is made and statutory checks are completed. Whilst checks are in progress applicants are invited to attend training and preparation groups ('Skills to Foster') is then made. The preparation training undertaken utilises the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' course which includes subject areas on Child Development; Separation and Loss; Working Together; Safe Care; Moving On.
- 18.7 The service runs 6- 8 Skills to Foster courses a year, normally at evenings and weekends and as demand dictates. The training is run by qualified fostering supervising social workers, experienced foster carers with contributions from care experienced young people and colleagues from health and education .
- 18.8 When preparation training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment that includes the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends).
- 18.9 All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references:
- Disclosure and Barring Checks on all members of the household over the age of 18
 - Child Protection Checks
 - Local Authority Checks
 - Three personal references
 - In addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children
 - living in the household

Foster carers are additionally asked to undertake:

- A full medical examination with their GP. (Applicants for short breaks are asked to complete a medical questionnaire which is sent to their G.P. for verification / comments)
- A work reference from present or previous employer
- To agree to the department making contact with any schools which

their children attend to ascertain the school's view on their involvement / suitability

- To agree to the department making contact with ex partners regarding their application to foster.
- If the family have lived outside the UK, checks from the country of origin or previous residence are also requested.

18.10 The majority of foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment. The depth of this assessment will depend on the role for which the carer is being assessed, with appropriateness and proportionality being the measure of this. All potential carers are invited to be fully involved in the assessment and to use self completion sheets as a tool to look at their competencies. The fostering service uses the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form C foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments.

18.11 Connected persons foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010). Connected persons foster carers are not normally required to produce a portfolio or evidence of experience and skills. They are encouraged to do so and can also access the 16 week KEEP programme..

18.12 The assessment of a foster carer would take place in the applicant's home over a period of six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties. The assessing social worker would ensure that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment. The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family. We make a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, the skills and competencies which they would bring to their new role and help them to think about their reasons for a applying to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs including disabled children and this is made transparent.

18.13 The assessments, together with a portfolio of evidence of experience and skills compiled by the foster carer are presented to a fostering panel. Applicants are encouraged to attend with the assessing social worker. All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicant/s. The social worker's assessment is shared with them prior to the panel.

18.14 The fostering panel meets monthly and is independently chaired and comprise of people from a variety of backgrounds. They consider and recommend the approval, or not, of all foster carers. The recommendation then goes before the Agency Decision Maker who makes a final decision. Any appeals can be made within 28 days and may either make further representation to the fostering panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to the agency.

18.15 All foster carers are subjected to an annual review of their status as foster

carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. Annual reviews are undertaken by SSW and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and family, Supervising Social worker, Child's Social Worker, Looked After Child / Young Person and other professionals involved with the placement. A report is presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first reviews, significant changes to the carer's registration or cases of concern.

19. Support, Supervision and Training of Foster Carers

- 19.1 All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support. The supervising social worker undertakes a minimum of four supervisory visits per year to approved carer(s) and additional regular visits as required (monthly). They also make at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with the foster carer are recorded.
- 19.2 The completion of Foundation training in Theraplay by 7 staff in the Family Placement Service has meant the delivery of monthly workshops to Foster carers on effectively using these principles whilst working with children. Feedback from the monthly workshops which involve the child has been that this relationship based intervention is meeting the needs of carers who are working with children who have a number of attachment related behaviours
- 19.3 The service believes that it is important that foster carers are able to access support and at the time that they need it. During office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker they can contact a Duty supervising social worker for advice and support. The supervising social worker will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer and be able to offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering and the care of the child.
- 19.4 Additionally, every looked after child has an allocated social worker. This person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child. If this worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with any urgent problems or issues.
- 19.5 If additional support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty team or access a carer support line outside of core hours.
- 19.6 Coventry fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently commissioned through Fostering Network) where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations. The fostering service believes that carers should be fully reimbursed for the costs of looking after a child, and provides weekly allowances at Fostering Network recommended rates. In addition, travel and other additional payments are made available to carers together with essential equipment for the task. Payments in the form of a weekly fee are available to carers who meet specific requirements on the Skills Level fees .

- 19.7 At times, all children can have accidents that cause damage. When such damage occurs, carers are initially asked to claim on their own household insurance. Any excess payments or increase in premiums that results from this can be reclaimed from the department. In the event of the carer's insurance not covering the loss or damage, a claim can be submitted for consideration by the Fostering Service.
- 19.8 The Fostering Service provides a range of foster carer support groups, assisted by supervising social workers. The groups generally involve carers across all skill levels and take place in the daytime at a variety of venues across the city.
- 19.9 Foster Carers Handbook and Diary. All Foster Carers are provided with a electronic link to the handbook and diary which gives factual information which they need to know about the service and to perform their role. This includes key information and guidance on safe care; allegations; education; medication; recording and record keeping; the role of social workers and key policies and procedures. Policies and procedures are also available to carers online via the Departments children's procedures manual.

20. Training

- 20.1 The Fostering Service believes that a comprehensive training programme for both staff and foster carers is key to their personal and professional development. Training provides people with the required skills and knowledge, necessary in providing a high quality service. It is also key to safeguarding children, foster carers and their families by informing them of how to care for children safely.
- 20.2 Training is an opportunity for all foster carers to acquire new skills, assist with personal and professional development and explore new ideas via peer support and group discussion.
- 20.3 The KEEP programme intervention has continued to be offered to both foster carers and special guardians. It has now become part of the mandatory training for carers who are approved to take children within the age of 4 to 11. Results continue to show that carers value the 16 week programme and report improved behaviours for specific children.
- 20.4 The Fostering Service has a clear training strategy, covering pre-approval training to potential applicants, induction training for newly approved carers and post approval training which incorporates the Children's Workforce Development Council / Training and Development Standards certification A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available and reviewed regularly, meeting the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career. Connected persons foster carers are also provided with targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children.

21. Complaints Procedure

- 21.1 The City Council Children's Social Work Service operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Compliments leaflet, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement.
- 21.2 Birth Parents are given a copy of the Complaints and Compliments Leaflet in the Information Pack for Parents which is provided by social workers of children in placements.
- 21.3 It is the role of the child's social worker to give them the complaints leaflet for looked after children and to inform them of the Role of the Children's Rights Service. The child can also make their views known through the review system and they are sent a consultation form about the placement prior to the foster carer review. Details of how to complain and how to contact Ofsted are available in the Children's Guide to Fostering.

22. Allegations

- 22.1 All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through Coventry Safeguarding Children Service, reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Investigating Allegations against Adults Caring for Children. The Coventry Safeguarding Children Board policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker.

23. Monitoring performance

- 23.1 The performance of the Service will be monitored at a number of levels and in a number of ways:
- Ofsted will inspect regularly to ensure that the Service complies with legislation and standards
 - Report annually to the council's Executive Board.
 - Report quarterly and annually to Corporate level (Elected Members)
 - Report monthly on service performance to Head of Service and Fostering Steering Group
 - Activity will be monitored at a strategic level against the objectives, performance indicators and tasks as contained in the Improvement Plan.
 - In addition to the above, a Quality Assurance and Performance framework monitors the Fostering Service key requirements.
- 23.2 The following Key Performance Indicators will be used to monitor the Fostering Service:

Performance Indicators:

- No and percentage of children looked after in foster care and adoption.

- National PSA target – Placement Stability (% of children under 16 years looked after for 2.5 years or more in the same placement for at least 2 years)
- The Fostering service will recruit new foster carers and increase the number of carers for children (targets as agreed).
- All assessments will be completed within 6 months.
- All newly approved carers will carry out agreed induction training within first year of approval
- Continuous auditing of carer case files to ensure statutory compliance and good practice standards

24. Contact details

The Service is currently based within the Children's Social Work Service at:

Family Placement Service
Civic Centre 1,
2nd Floor
Little Park Street,
Coventry
CV1 5RS
Telephone: 024 7683 1873

OFSTED Contact Details

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Fax: 0300 123 3159 email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
website: www.ofsted.gov.uk



Name of Cabinet Member:

Children and Young People – Councillor Ed Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of People

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Adoption Service Annual Report 2015/16

Is this a key decision? No

Executive Summary:

This report considers the activity and key performance for Coventry Adoption Service in line with the adoption agency statutory duty to provide a report about the children who are in the care of the local authority and who are waiting to be placed with new families in 2015-16. The report has updated statement of purpose for 2015/16.

Coventry's policy is to always seek to achieve permanence for all looked after children. Achieving permanence for looked after children is a key driver and permanence depends on securing the right placement for the right child at the right time. One of the key functions is to ensure that each looked after child has a plan for permanence by the time of their second statutory review, as set out in the statutory guidance. This is progressed through our care planning through to Adoption if required.

In the past twelve months there have been continued developments of significant policy changes. Policy and service improvement are to be welcomed and supported as a driver to deliver good permanent outcomes for our looked after and adopted children. Coventry Adoption service aims to provide a comprehensive adoption service including post order support which is consistent with best practice and national minimum standards.

In 2015/16 54 children were adopted and 20 adopters approved.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is recommended to:-

- 1. Accept the Adoption Service Annual report for 2015/16**
- 2. Approve the updated Statement of Purpose is approved as appended to this report**

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 Statement of Purpose

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Adoption Service Annual Report 2015/16

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Adoption Service is located in the integrated Family Placement Service and is responsible for the recruitment, assessment approval, training, and preparation of adopters and matching of children and provision of support to adopters.
- 1.2 Permanence planning for children who become looked after commences as soon as children’s social care become involved with children and their families. The primary aim of permanence planning is to ensure that all looked after children and young people are provided with care arrangements that deliver continuity, consistency and security of care and support. Delivering this will promote the child’s attachment to their carers and develop a sense of security, self-esteem and identity.
- 1.3 Developing a permanence plan is a staged process involving parallel planning, where a number of options are explored at the same time before a final decision can be made. The options for permanence are:
 - to return home
 - be placed with relatives or other connected persons (special guardianship)
 - be placed for adoption
 - permanence via fostering
 - placement in residential care (for small number of children)

1.4 Overall Adoption Performance for 2015/16

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of enquiries	163	128	136	161
Adopter applications received	40	49	37	35
Adopters approved	28	47	38	20
Number of children adopted	40	52	70	54
Number of children placed with adopters	25	68	53	52
Number of children awaiting match	25	38	6	33
Number of disruptions	1	1	3 (4 children)	2 (6 children)

At the end of March 2016 there were 580 children looked after; of these:

- 59 children - were subject of the decision that they “**should be placed for adoption**”. For 9 children this decision was reversed at the conclusion of the court proceedings resulting in 6 children being placed with their families on alternative orders and 3 children placed in permanence foster care.
- 32 children - were made subject to placement orders by the court.
- 49 children - were matched with prospective adopters
- 52 children - were placed with adopters

- 1.5 Consistent with the national picture there is mismatch of adopters approval category where adopters are approved for either a single child or under the age of 2, and the profile of children awaiting adoption who are aged between the ages of 3 and 6 years or children with either 1 or 2 siblings.

Children adopted' are those for whom an Adoption Order, giving full legal parental responsibility to the adopters, has been granted through the courts. 'Children placed with adopters' are those who have been placed with their prospective adoptive parents pending an application to court for an Adoption Order.

- 1.6 The marketing campaign "Adopt and Foster for Coventry" has been refocused to recruit adopters who are able to meet the needs of older children and sibling groups. In addition to local recruitment. The service have dealt with 48 enquiries during the period 2015/2016 compared to 78 enquiries in 2014/2015. Enquiries are followed up with social worker contact and Adoption Information Packs were also sent. The website has been updated and improved and in addition Information Meetings have been held regularly. In addition Coventry actively engages in a range of adopter led matching events which include National Adoption Exchange Days, local and sub-regional exchange meetings.

- 1.7 Adoption Preparation and Assessment: The service has continued to deliver Adoption Preparation Groups and these are held on different days in order to provide as much flexibility as possible. Key facilitators have been identified who assume responsibility for facilitating and leading the preparation groups alongside a co-worker and an approved adopter.

- 1.8 Since In January 2015 Coventry has subscribed to Adoption Link which is a web based search engine. Adoption Link allows adopters and social workers to search across the country for a child or adopters. This has strengthened family finding and provided a highly effective tool for linking children with adopters. In addition, regular exchange meetings take place within the service to expedite the linking of children who have a plan for adoption with adopters who are either approved or about to be approved. However on occasions there are no suitable adopters from within the awaiting adopters.

- 1.9 On 8th July 2015 the Government announced an additional £30m for adoption and this was used to fund the inter-agency fee for a targeted group of children for a year. The fee is the amount of money paid when a local authority places a child with an adopter approved by another adoption agency (either a Local Authority or Voluntary Adoption Agency). This is to cover the costs incurred by that agency in recruiting, assessing, approving and family finding that adopter along with an element for adoption support. Claims against the fund are made on a quarterly basis when children have been placed.

- 1.10 The placements eligible for funding are for the hard to place groups of children:

- Children who have been waiting for 18 months or more since coming into care;
- Children who are aged five or over at the time of placement;
- Children who are in a sibling group of two or more and placed as siblings at the time of placement;
- Children who are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background
- Children who are disabled

1.11 The use of the interagency fee has been utilised and in 2015/16, twenty two children were placed with adopters registered with other adoption agencies (14 with a local authority and 8 with a Voluntary Adoption Agency). This is a significantly higher number compared with 2014/15 when 11 children were placed with adopters approved by other agencies. Of the twenty two children, 9 were placed before 8th July 2015 and the fees for these children could not be claimed.

1.12 All adoption agencies are required to ensure adopters and children are placed on the national register. Adopters' details are placed on the register if it is unlikely that they will be matched with a child within three months of approval. Adoption Match manages the national statutory database of children and adopters on behalf of the Department for Education.

1.13 Adoption Support

I. Training and support for adopters: Coventry in partnership with Solihull and Warwickshire have developed and delivered training and support groups for adopters who meet regularly and last year the focus has been on attachment, education and training for adopted families extended family members. In addition the service is developing an adopter mentoring / budding scheme to improve the support adopters will have. It is anticipated that this will be fully operational in 2016.

II. Training staff to deliver effective support: Coventry has worked closely with Solihull and Warwickshire in setting up training for social workers in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) at level 1. This will ensure that a high level of experienced support is available at the point of contact for adoptive families. The aim is that the early intervention will result in a reduction in the need, for a higher level of psychological support in the future. The aim is that the early intervention will result in a reduction in the need, for a higher level of psychological support in the future.

III. Adoption Support Fund: in May 2015 the Government introduced the Adoption Support Fund and nationally 3,000 families received agreement for funding in 2015/16. In Coventry during 2015/2016, there were 11 families who have secured funding for post adoption therapeutic support.

IV. Adoption financial support: Adoption allowances are subject to an assessment for support services in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005) and a financial assessment is carried out where the Authority considers that financial support may be required for a child who is currently looked after. In addition, adopters may be provided other financial support for therapeutic interventions or practically, in terms of costs towards purchasing a car where large sibling groups are adopted. In July 2015, the financial support policy was reviewed and approved by the Cabinet Member. In 2015/16, there were 76 families received an adoption allowance in respect of 144 children.

1.14 **Adoption Panel** has a good central list that enables the panel to remain quorate. The panel is chaired by a person who is highly experienced in all aspects of children's social work and specifically in adoption. In 2015 the retirement of the Panel Advisor lead to the appointment of new panel advisor. The management of the panel by the professional advisor has enabled the smooth running of the panel and Agency Decision Maker process. In 2015/16 the panel met on 22 occasions and considered 40 matching reports, 21 prospective adopter reports and adoption placement disruption reports.

1.15 Nationally, the numbers of looked after children who were adopted has decreased for the first time in recent years, but this was anticipated as in 2015 as the number of placement

orders granted reduced and a reduction in the number of children placed for adoption. At March 2016, this represented a decrease of 12%. The National Adoption Leadership Board has linked this to the impact of two relevant court judgements, known as Re B and Re B-S.

- 1.16 For many children decisions about their permanence are considered within court proceedings. Court processes do affect timeliness of decision making. Coventry has reviewed its legal planning processes in 2015 to enable us to meet the recommended 26 weeks target for proceedings to be concluded. At March 2016, Coventry and Warwickshire Family Justice Board reported that care proceedings were concluded on average within 26.3 weeks.
- 1.17 In Coventry, the number of children adopted have remained steady at an average of 50 adoptions since 2014, the exception being in 2014/15 when a number of children who with complex needs and of an age where it was more difficult to find adopters were progressed. Coventry has experience a slowing number of placement orders being made.
- 1.18 There have been also been changes to the conduct of hearings of adoption applications. This process ensures birth parents are provided with an opportunity to seek leave to appeal because of a change in circumstances; in most cases this now happens. To date no birth parent has been successful in seeking leave, however it does mean there is further time period for the order to be granted.
- 1.19 **Adoption scorecard:** In 2012, the Government introduced scorecards as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system and measure how quickly children are placed for adoption. The Adoption Scorecard focuses on the following three indicators:

For Children who have been adopted in the last three years:

A1 Average time between a child entering care and moving to an adopter family.

The DfE target set for 2015/16 onwards is 14 months (426 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

DfE target set for 2015/16 onwards is 4 months (122 days)

For Children who have been adopted or who should be adopted:

A3 The number and percentage of children who waited (or are waiting) less than 21 months for an adoptive placement before 2012, 20 months from 2013 and 14 months from 2015/16.

The DfE target set for 2015/16 onwards is 14 months (426 days). There are no % targets in the scorecard just the DFE number of days - The Adoptions scorecard as at 31st October is as below which maybe shows this clearly than the way it is presented in the annual report. 426 is the correct target in days for A3.

- 1.20 There has been a marked improvement in the timeliness and of decision making on children entering care and being matched and placed with their prospective adopter since April 2013. For indicator A1, the one year averages show that in 2012/13, it took Coventry 821 days on average between a children entering care and moving in with their adoptive

family. At the end of March 2015, performance had improved to 533 days. At the end of March 2016, this was at 595 days, against the national target of 426 days.

See table below

Adoption Scorecard	1 year average					3 year average					
	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	DFE Target	2015/16	2010/13	2011/14	2012/15	2015/16	All England Average	Statistical Neighbours
A1	821	610	533	426	595	884	733	643	587	593`	586
A2	402	193	159	122	234	343	280	216	189	223	239
A3	63 46%	124 73.4%	161 59%	426	155 53.6%	92 29%	165 42%	253 50.6 %	277 49.1%	47%	48%
Months	<20	<18	<16		<14	<20	<18	<16	<14	<16	<16

The impact of three children with complex needs and of an age where it was more difficult to find adopters has impacted on the performance in these areas. This is a reflection on the service's commitment to doing what's right for children rather than considering the performance indicators.

Focused work has seen a significant improvement in the timeliness of adoption.

(A1) The average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family is currently 394 days compared with 595 days in 2015/16. This is improving picture against the DfE target of 426 days.

(A2) The average time between a local authority receiving a court authority to place a child and deciding on a match is currently 194 days compared with 234 days in 2015/16 and a DfE target of 122 days.

(A3) The number of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 95 which is 61% compared with 155 (54%) in 2015/16.

- 1.21 There have been 2 disruption of 6 children placed with prospective adopters this year and both disruptions have been subject to a review and learning from this has been shared with the service. The needs of the children are subject to further assessments and all of the children remain placed with foster carers. The permanence plans for the children are twin tracked to secure adoption or permanence in fostering.
- 1.22 This improvement re A2 has been achieved through robust case progression discipline in court, the allocation of permanency worker for all children with possible plan of adoption and senior management oversight in case tracking. As a result although the average time is higher than the national average, they are not yet meeting the floor targets set by the Department for Education. Coventry's performance is now more in line with our statistical neighbours and other West Midlands authorities.
- 1.23 **Regional Adoption Agencies.(RAA);** The Government are committed to ensure that adoption services are delivered on a greater scale, and with more innovative approaches to practice to improve outcomes for children. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 came into force in March 2016 and allows the Government to require local authorities to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by another adoption agency, allowing for regional approaches. The Act amends the Adoption and Children Act 2002, so that local authorities are no longer required to maintain an adoption service within their area but may secure provision by other local authorities or registered adoption societies. Under the new section, the Secretary of State may direct one or more local authorities to make arrangements for all or any of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by another local authority or adoption agency.
- 1.24 The Department for Education have provided funding to accelerate progress and enable Councils to establish regional adoption agencies. These agencies will need to consider a system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible; recruitment taking place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters large enough and well enough matched to the needs of children waiting; and high quality adoption support services available nationwide.
- 1.25 Coventry in partnership with Warwickshire, Solihull, Worcestershire Councils and two voluntary adoption agencies, After Adoption and Barnardos West Midlands have formed a regional adoption agency. It also includes Coventry University as a key stakeholder. The partnership is named Adoption Central England (ACE) and this may become the name of the agency.
- 1.26 To undertake this work a Regional Adoption Board was established in December 2015. Adoption Central England is also one of the 6 national 'Demonstrator projects'. As well as attracting a sum additional funding to develop the RAA, the Demonstrators meet monthly as a group looking at key issues such as finance to help all the projects develop. It provides us with the opportunity to work directly with the Department for Education and the national Adoption Leadership Board to give a Midlands perspective. This is a reflection on the progress made in this area.
- 1.27 For Coventry this will mean that in 2016 the Family Placement Service will need to be disaggregated to establish a Fostering Service and an interim Adoption Service. Managers for both services will be recruited and it is anticipated that they will be in post by the summer 2017. It is anticipated that the service will transition to the RAA in 2017.
- 1.28 The key priorities for the service in 2016/17 are as follows:

1. Maintain continued improvement in adoption timeliness for children by use of robust tracking and performance management with the aim to meet the challenging Department of Education targets
2. Manage a smooth transfer from an integrated family placement service to an adoption service .
3. Engage with the West Midlands Adoption Leadership Board and Adoption Central England Board to meet the required milestones and manage the transition to the regional adoption agency.
4. Targeted recruitment of prospective adopters for children older children and sibling groups.
5. Refresh and review Fostering to Adopt with approved adopters.
6. Continued focus on improving quality of practice and support
7. Completion Life Story work in a timely manner
8. Continuous improvement of Post Adoption Support with access to the Adoption Support Fund
9. Maximise the funding available for Inter Agency fees

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 It is a regulatory requirement that the executive receives reviews and approves the Statement of Purpose on an annual basis.

1. The Adoption Service Annual report for 2015/16 is accepted
2. That the updated Statement of Purpose is approved.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

None

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 Not applicable.

5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources

5.1 Financial Implications

The summary financial position for Adoption Services in 2015/16 is shown in the table below:

	Budget	Actual	Variation	
Adoption Summary - 2015/16	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Adoption Allowances	921	1,145	224	See 5.1.1
Inter-Agency Adoption:				

Adoption Purchases	269	373	104	
Adoption Sales	0	(227)	(227)	
Adoption Grant	0	(162)	(162)	
Sub-total of Inter agency	269	(16)	(285)	See 5.1.2
Other costs	128	175	47	Professional fees and support service recharges
Total Variation (under)/overspend	1,317	1,303	(14)	

The overall variation for this area in 2015/16 was an underspend of £14k. Further detail is provided below.

5.1.1 Adoption Allowances: Financial support may be paid to prospective adopters and adoptive parents to help secure a suitable adoption, where a child cannot otherwise be readily adopted or remain adopted for financial reasons. In 2015/16, the overspend against this budget was £224k, with allowances paid for 177 children. This activity has increased in recent years.

5.1.2 Inter-Agency adoption: This is for the purchase and sale of adoption placements. For 2015/16 the authority received £162k in grant from the DfE for a targeted group of children (see section 1 of this report for more detail). Overall, there was an underspend on this budget of £285k in 2015/16, largely as a result of the additional government funding.

5.1.3 Adoption Support Fund: This fund was made available in 2015/16 providing therapeutic services and support for the child and the family. This is a separate cost centre to the main one in the table above with £23k spend in 2015/16.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 National Minimum Standards stipulate that the executive side of the local authority, receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months; Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users; satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

5.2.2 Regulations require that each local authority compiles a Statement of Purpose that must be kept under review. National minimum standards stipulate that the review must be at least undertaken annually.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The Adoption Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a permanent placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting, that of securing appropriate family placements for Looked After Children, as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The timeliness of adoption and securing permanence in a timely fashion is being managed through robust case tracking for children in proceedings and for those with an adoption plan. The service reports progress on Adoption Performance to the Improvement Board, Corporate parenting Board, Cabinet Member, Scrutiny Board and the People Directorate Management team.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The Adoption Service contributes to Children's Social Care Services performance (within the People Directorate) against key indicators that are closely scrutinised both internally and externally on an ongoing basis.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

Equalities / EIA: An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been undertaken by the service in 2012 as part of the fundamental service review undertaken at that time.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Social workers work extensively across key partner agencies to support the interests of looked after children and ensure a coherent multi-agency approach. On-going partnerships will be required to ensure services are focused on meeting the Council's continuing statutory duties and priorities for looked after children to achieve permanence.

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www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings

Appendix 1 – Statement of Purpose

COVENTRY CITY ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

July 2016 (updated)

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

1.	Introduction
1.1	Pursuant to the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, as amended by the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005 every adoption agency has to produce a Statement of Purpose and is required to review the Statement of Purpose.
1.2	The Statement of Purpose of the Agency is formally approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for Children and Young People and is available on the Coventry City Council Website to anyone seeking a copy.
2	The Statement of Purpose covers the following matters
2.1	The aims, values and principles of Coventry Adoption Services
2.2	The functions and activities of the Adoption Services
2.3	The name, qualification and experience of the manager of the service
2.4	Information about the organisation and staffing of the service
2.5	Systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of services provided
2.6	Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.
2.7	Information about the complaints procedure
2.8	The address and telephone number of Ofsted and the Children's Rights Director Officer
3.	The Aim of Coventry's Adoption Services
3.1	To provide a comprehensive adoption and post-adoption service, including the provision of Adoption Support Services to adopters and children affected by the adoption process consistent with best practice and national standards and requirements.
3.2	To provide services which are appropriate and tailored to the particular needs of service users and people affected by adoption, in particular potential service users are welcomed without prejudice and given clear information on the services provided by the agency.
3.3	Consistent with Coventry City Council's duty towards children who are Looked After, where adoption is the plan, to ensure that they are placed with families who can offer them safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood. In particular, the Adoption Service seeks to safeguard and promote the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

	wish to use its services
3.4	To find adoptive homes for all children looked after in Coventry who require a permanent family through adoption.
3.5	Where children cannot be placed within the agencies own resources the Service will seek to make arrangements with other Adoption Agencies to secure placements for children.
4	Values of the Adoption Service
4.1	<p>The Service;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond • Affirms that where possible it is best that children are brought up by their own birth family • Ensures the child's welfare, safety and needs are the paramount considerations and at the centre of the adoption process • Considers the child's wishes and feelings and takes them into account at all stages. • Seeks to avoid delays in adoption to minimise impact on the health and development of children • Responds promptly to the requests of and work with people affected by adoption, being respectful of their ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexuality, gender and disability, and their experience and understanding of adoption. • Takes account of and values children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language when decisions are made • Aims to ensure the particular needs of disabled children are fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made. • Values and respects the role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family. • Understands that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. • Works with others to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption • Where the service provision involves an adopted adult and their birth relatives it is the wishes and feelings of the adopted adult that take precedence. • Works in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered and that the needs of service users are met effectively
5.	Principles of the Adoption Service
5.1	<p>The principles on which the service is based include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for the confidentiality of all those involved. • Children's needs are placed first in all decision-making and actions.

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services will not discriminate against groups or individuals. • Services will be delivered effectively and efficiently. • There is a commitment to monitor and review services. • There is a commitment to involve users in the ongoing review and development of the service. The service consults service users on decisions in relation to their service provision, seeking and welcoming feedback, using this feedback in its management and development of the service. • The Agency, as a function of Coventry City Council, has written policies and procedures in place for working with service users with physical, sensory and learning impairments, for whom English is not the first language. There is a commitment to ensure that communications take due account of physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of children, birth parents/guardians, prospective/adoptive parents and staff. • Arrangements are made through appropriate interpreters for those who are unable to understand a document to have it read, translated or explained to them.
6.	Who Receives Adoption Services
6.1	<p>Adoption Services are provided to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who are to be adopted. • Birth parents or guardians. • Prospective and approved adopters and adoptive siblings, including advice to those who are seeking to adopt from overseas. • Children and their adoptive parents who require Adoption Support Services. • Adopted adults and members of their birth families. • Step-parents wishing to adopt. • Private adoption applicants.
7	Overview of the Work of the Adoption Service
7.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide a child/children/young person with a permanent family by adoption, which will meet the child's need for stability, security, love and a resource into their adulthood and beyond • Recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a range of prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of Coventry children. • Assistance to locality social workers in counselling pregnant women who wish to place their baby for adoption. • Making available counselling and support either within the service or by external referral for all birth families with an adoption plan for their children. • Ensuring children are supported throughout the adoption process, appropriately engaged, involved, prepared and offered counselling commensurate with their age and understanding. • Schedule 2 counselling for adopted adults and advice regarding

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

	<p>Intermediary Services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment, preparation, training and support for people who wish to adopt a child from abroad whether in-house or via referral to other agencies. • Providing advice and consultation to locality workers working with a child and family where adoption is the plan. • Preparing reports for Adoption Panel and courts on aspects of adoption work. • Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels and courts regarding aspects of adoption work. • Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels where a match has been recommended for a Coventry approved family. • Offering of an Adoption Support Service after placement and after an order has been made in accordance with Adoption Support Regulations 2005. • Participation in the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium including the exchange of approved applicants to facilitate the placement of children. • Joint working and partnership arrangements with other local authorities/agencies to maximise the aims of Coventry Adoption Service
8	The Name, Qualifications and Experience of the Manager
	<p>Responsible Manager of the Adoption service since September 2016.: Shirley Gounder Interim Service Manager Adoption Children's Services People Directorate Room 229 Civic Centre 1 Earl Street Coventry CV1 5Rs Tel no: 02476 831873 Fax 02476 294660</p>
8.1	<p>Professional qualifications</p> <p>Shirley to add</p>
9.	Structure of the Adoption Service
9.1	<p>The Permanency team is responsible for the arrangements for children and undertake all case management including discussion with birth family members where adoption is the plan for the child. Independent counselling and support of birth parents is available through a commissioned service offered by After Adoption in line with the Adoption Regulations.</p>

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

9.2	<p>The Adoption Service has 3 teams, Assessment, Support and Permanency who work as an integrated service with the Family Placements Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assessment Team is responsible for recruiting foster carers and adopters. This team works with adoption enquirers to determine initial eligibility, delivers pre application training, and helps those who confirm their interest in adoption to complete their application undertaking pre approval assessment and training and booking Panel. • The Support Team provides the ongoing support of adopters and foster carers. They make arrangements for adoptive placements and support new families through to adoption. • The Permanence team is responsible for the children with an adoption plan and as well as family finding the team twin tracks children with an Neighbourhood Teams.
9.3	<p>Managers are responsible for supervising the work of the teams' social workers, all of whom are qualified. The majority of social workers are Senior Caseworkers who satisfy the requirements within the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 (which includes 3 years post qualification experience in child care social work, including direct experience of adoption work). Staff who have not yet achieved that level of qualification are supervised by a staff member who has met the requirement.</p>
9.4	<p>The staff involved in the service have a wide range of experience of working in the field of child-care and family placement, including international experience. Staff are representative of the diverse backgrounds in Coventry, including White British and Asian heritage.</p>
10	<p>Staffing of the Adoption Service</p>
10.1	<p>The Head of Service LAC Service Manager Family Placment Service 6 Full Time Team Managers 5.2 FTE Senior Practitioner Xxx FTE Social Worker posts Xxx Children and Family workers 1 FTE Panel Advisor fostering and adoption.</p>
11	<p>Monitoring Arrangements to ensure effectiveness and quality</p>
11.1	<p>Arrangements are in place to ensure that the service provided by the Adoption Service is effective and that the quality of the service is of an appropriate standard. These include the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report are considered by the Cabinet Member for Social Care each year and are subject to Cabinet Scrutiny • A summary of progress against adoption targets is contained within the quarterly report of the Directorate and considered by Cabinet each quarter

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers provide monthly performance information in respect of their team • Adoption Service targets are reported on within the Quality Improvement Framework for the Directorate • All staff have regular supervision provided within the framework of a supervision agreement • There is an annual performance appraisal system in place • Information about children and prospective adoptive families is contained within the CHARMS database and the Teams Adoption Tracking Database and on Protocol • The annual report covering the activity and performance of the Adoption Team is presented each year to the Adoption Panel • Prospective adopters are interviewed at the end of the preparation groups to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the training and provide information for the home study assessment • Prospective adoptive parents are invited to give written feedback after the training sessions to enable the trainers to evaluate the effectiveness of the course • Prospective and approved adopters are asked for written feedback at all stages of service provision • Managers from the Placement Service meet with relevant managers in the Neighbourhood and Looked After Service to progress children's plans for adoption • A fortnightly review meeting is held following every Adoption Panel to track the progress of approved adopters, children waiting adoption, proposed matches and children linked with new adopters. The database is updated regularly and a copy is made available to relevant staff including the Service Manager for monitoring purposes. Prospective adopters who do not have placements are identified through this process and made available where appropriate to other agencies seeking adoptive parents • The policy and procedures of the Adoption Agency are in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures, "Working together to Safeguard children 2015 " and "What to do if you're worried a child is being abused". These procedures include a written child protection policy that includes the management and reporting of child protection issues. All staff and service users have access to the agencies child protection policy, upon request • Service Level Agreements with other Agencies are reviewed at a minimum annually
12.	Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters
12.1	The main consideration of the Adoption Service is to provide adoptive families for children that will allow them to grow up in a secure and positive environment and reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.
12.2	The needs of children requiring adoptive placements are complex and

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	diverse. In order to meet these needs the Adoption Service will work flexibly and be willing to consider options that offer the potential to provide a suitable adoptive home for a child
12.3	The Adoption Service accepts applications to become adopters from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion. Accordingly promotional material for recruitment states clearly that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
12.4	The agency does not discriminate against people on the grounds of weight, smoking, health or other lifestyle issues but adopts a common sense approach that considers the specific needs of children and applicants likely ability to meet those needs through a child's developing years. All prospective applicants have a medical and on occasion medical opinion may advise an applicant is not fit to proceed.
12.5	The agency has a clear system in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive parents, publishes the priority statement with its information pack and reviews it regularly in the light of changing patterns of need. Where those enquiring are unlikely to meet the needs of local children needing adoption they are referred to other agencies
1.6	A copy of the written eligibility criteria, information on becoming an adoptive parent and what is expected of adopters is provided on request. Information is given about children who need families locally at the initial visit and there are preparation groups and information provided to help prospective adopters decide whether to proceed further.
12.7	Those wishing to adopt from another country are also given information about adopting from other countries. They are informed of the processes that they must follow, the countries they may adopt from, and the eligibility criteria of those countries whether this is directly or through referral to other agencies.
12.8	The Adoption Service continually seeks to improve its service and actively seeks user experience feedback from enquirers at different stages through the recruitment, preparation and assessment process.
12.9	The Adoption Service will provide training, preparation and support to its adopters. Applicants are given information about the preparation and support services available to adopters, and given the opportunity to talk to others who have adopted children
12.10	Enquirers are sent an Adoption Information Pack within 5 days of their enquiry, giving comprehensive information on the adoption process, criteria for preparation, acceptance, prioritisation, and information on the range of children seeking adoption placements. Enquirers are invited to confirm their

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	<p>interest in adoption by returning a form to the Recruitment Team who will then undertake a local authority check. Those who fail to reply are followed up by letter. The new stage 2 adoption preparation and assessment is embedded in accordance with the regulations and there is information about this on the agency website.</p>
12.11	<p>Home Visits are made to all who confirm their interest to give enquirers additional information and to offer preliminary advice as to the eligibility of applicants to adopt. Enquirers who seem likely to be able to offer an adoption placement are invited to submit an application form and attend training. When this is received Agency checks and references are taken up</p>
12.12	<p>Pre Adoption Training Courses are held 4 times per year, ensuring that potential applicants do not have to wait too long for a place on the course. The course is designed to offer applicants an opportunity to explore adoption and its implications in a non-threatening way and to decide whether or not adoption is for them from an informed perspective.</p>
12.13	<p>Adoption Training Courses include the experience of adopters as well as inputs from a range of professionals. Potential applicants are invited to reflect on their own learning and a brief interview is held at the end of the course to summarise the key learning points.</p>
12.14	<p>Assessment and Approval Assessments are completed using the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their development needs. Assessors seek evidence throughout the assessment process to focus on the issues they are likely to encounter and identify the competencies and strengths they have or will need to develop.</p>
12.15	<p>Where the prospective adopters are already foster carers of the child they wish to adopt, they are invited to participate in the same preparation groups as other prospective adopters or are provided with alternative training.</p>
12.16	<p>Status, health and enhanced DBS checks, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about prospective adopters. Enhanced DBS checks are undertaken on members of their household aged 18 or over and an explanation is given to prospective adopters as to why the checks are undertaken.</p>
12.17	<p>In addition, where applicants have worked with children or are employed in the caring professions references are taken up from those employers. A current employer reference is required for all applicants. Where applicants have been in a previous relationship where children have been born efforts are made to contact the previous partner, except where this is contra-indicated on safety grounds, to establish their view of the applicant</p>
12.18	<p>Birth children of the applicants are also contacted where practical to establish</p>

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	<p>their view of the applicants desire to extend their family through adoption. The assessor interviews at least two personal referees and one family member. Written accounts of the referee's views of the applicant are obtained and presented to Adoption Panel. The agency has a checklist of issues to be addressed by assessors interviewing referees.</p>
12.19	<p>Following completion of the Adopter's Report, including a brief account of training and preparation undertaken, reports of referee visits (confidential unless referee wishes the reference to be shared with adopters), and all other relevant reports these are sent to members of the Adoption Panel in the week preceding the Panel. The application also includes a questionnaire to advise Panel if adoptive parents are prepared to agree to notify the adoption agency if their adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards, the applicant/s views on contact and their willingness to pass on information to the birth parents if they wish to have it.</p>
12.20	<p>Applicants are invited to attend if they wish to present their views to Panel. There is an explanatory leaflet available to applicants explaining the Panel process and another leaflet introduces Panel members. There is a private room available for applicants waiting to speak with Panel.</p>
12.21	<p>Panel Members will have had the opportunity to consider the written reports in advance of Panel and identified any salient issues. (The Adoption Decision Maker is also sent a copy of the papers to enable these to be read prior to the minute from Panel being sent.) Prior to considering an application the Assessing Social Worker is invited to join the Panel.</p>
12.22	<p>The Chair of Panel will briefly introduce the application and identify key strengths in the application. The Medical Advisor is invited to comment on the applicant/s' health background and any necessary points affecting the application are clarified. Any relevant legal issues are raised with the Legal Adviser.</p>
12.23	<p>Panel members are then invited to comment on the application and the Chair formulates these comments into issues to address either to the assessor or to the applicant/s. The applicant/s and the assessor are then invited to join the Panel. Applicants are welcomed and then any agreed questions are put to them. The applicant/s are invited to ask any questions of Panel and then to leave after Panel discussion.</p>
12.24	<p>The applicants are invited back into Panel to hear the recommendation of Panel following Panel discussion and this will be confirmed in writing once the Agency Decision Maker has considered the matter.</p>
12.25	<p>Following Panel the minute of the meeting is completed by the Adoption Administrator and is circulated to the Members of the Panel for approval. The minutes are then given to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker reflects on the papers and Panel recommendation and then returns his decision to the named Manager of the Adoption Service for transmission to applicants within 7 working days of Adoption Panel recommendation.</p>

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12.26	Approved Adopters are allocated a named Support Social Worker to give them on-going support and guidance throughout their adoption journey from placement through to adoption and beyond
12.27	Approved adopters who are waiting for a placement match are reviewed each year by the Adoption Service. If the review suggests a change is required in their approval a report is presented to Panel. Adopters are invited to comment on any report and have a right to be heard by Panel, as with their initial report. Any subsequent change recommended by Panel is subject to the same process of confirmation by the Agency Decision Maker as their original recommendation.
13	Matching adopters and children and Placement
13.1	The Recruitment Team prepares an annual plan containing the agency's strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally
13.2	The Family Finding social workers who oversee home-finding for children, receives information on all children with adoption plans, advises the Assessment Team of emerging trends and needs, seeks authority for specific child advertising, maintains the links with the National and Local Consortium Adoption Registers and takes a principle role in arranging for possible links between adopters and children waiting.
13.3	Children are matched with adopters who best meet their assessed needs. Wherever possible this will be with a family which (a) Reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language; and (b) Allows them to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs
13.4	Where the child cannot be matched with a family which reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language, every effort is made to find an alternative suitable family within a realistic timescale to ensure the child is not left waiting indefinitely in the care system. Where children cannot live with a family as set out in (a) and (b) above, the children's social worker will explain and record this, having regard to their age and understanding.
13.5	In matching children with approved adopters, the agency seeks to ensure that it takes into account the views and feelings of the child as far as these can be ascertained based on age and understanding, the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and the birth family, potential adoptive parents and their children
13.6	There is a clear procedure for matching children with potential adopters. Children's Social Workers complete BAAF Children's Permanence Report along with a Checklist of Needs and a profile of the child. This is used to inform the Home-finding process. Suitable matches are identified and passed to the social worker to consider. The Social Worker, Family Finder and/or the Prospective Adopters support Worker will visit the Prospective adopters to

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	explore further.
13.7	If the prospective adopters express interest in going forward then an Adoption Placement Report is prepared and considered by Adoption Panel along with the relevant Child's Placement Report, the Adopter's Report and the relevant minutes of any Adoption Panel that has considered the child or applicant. The Panel recommendations are conveyed to the Agency Decision maker for a formal decision
13.8	Adopters are invited to prepare a folder of information for the child about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
13.9	A planning meeting is held, chaired by a Team Manager, to consider in detail the transition of the child from the foster placement to the new adoptive home. Planning meetings are attended by the appropriate representatives from the Children's Neighbourhood or Looked After Service, the Adoption Team, the prospective adopters and the foster carers. There is an agreed format for the Adoption Planning meeting which is completed and signed by all parties (Adoption Placement Plan).
13.10	Adoptive parents -support All successful applicants are allocated an adoption link worker whose task it is to support the adopters through the waiting period, consider any potential matches and discuss appropriate matches with applicants prior to formal matching meetings.
13.11	Opportunities are taken to use the waiting period to assist adopters continue to prepare for the placement of a child. Where necessary the adopters will be helped to increase their childcare experience. Additional training is offered as necessary. There is an Adopters' Support Group that applicants are invited to attend. All waiting and approved adopters receive a regular newsletter from the Adoption Team.
13.12	Following placement support in the form of paid travel expenses, a means tested settling in allowance and additional financial help is agreed subject to criteria to assist adopters in the introductions period.
13.13	The Agency operates a means tested Financial Support Adoption Scheme to assist adopters of limited means and those where the children are likely to cause greater than normal expense. Where the adopters are foster carers there is a transitional period during which adopters may receive an enhanced financial support adoption allowance.
13.14	The adoption link worker will continue to support the adopters before and during the placement of a child to ensure they are well prepared in advance of the child coming to live with them. Adopters are fully involved in planning meetings around the introductions of the child and care is taken over the timing of the introductions and a number of review meetings built in to ensure that the placement is progressing in a satisfactory way and to give all parties, including the adopters an opportunity to withdraw if they are not confident

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	about the success of the placement. Adopters confirm in writing their acceptance of the placement before the child is placed.
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13.17	The Adoption Agency has arrangements in place to offer information, support and advice to prospective adopters who receive a proposed match with a child from an overseas authority.
13.18	Throughout the preparation, assessment, and support stages of adoption the agency emphasises to parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and encourages them to provide this to the adopted child at appropriate stages of their development.
13.19	The initial screening, preparation/training, assessment/home study and support strategies of the agency are designed to assist adopters to understand and combat the effects of racism and any other form of discrimination.
13.20	At all stages in the adoption process the agency seeks to ensure that the adoptive parents are assisted to understand the need for the child to develop and maintain a positive self-identity and their role in assisting the child to reflect on and understand her/his history, in an age appropriate way, and to keep appropriate memorabilia.
13.21	Where there are difficulties in the placement or the adoption disrupts the adopters' link worker and the child's social worker will provide information and support to the adopters and to the child. Where there is an adoption breakdown a disruption meeting is held involving all parties to assist in understanding the issues and identify any learning in moving forward.
13.22	The purpose of this meeting is not to apportion blame but to understand the relevant factors and assist all parties to come to terms with the facts and to move on, and most importantly to inform the process of finding a new more appropriate placement for the child.

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13.23	Where the disruption occurs during introduction then the meeting is chaired by a Team Manager from the Adoption Service. Where the adoption disrupts post placement an independent consultant is employed to chair the meeting. A short report from the Disruption Meeting is presented to the Adoption Panel to assist the Panel in its own learning.
13.24	In line with the Adoption Support Regulations and Guidance the Adoption Service revises and updates its procedures and practices to take account of new regulations. In particular adopters and others affected by regulations who are entitled to a review of their support needs, including a review of their financial support, may access the Adoption Support section of the Adoption Team to initiate a review. The Agency Advisor undertakes the role of designated Adoption Support Services Advisor.
13.25	The range of Adoption Support Services to be offered includes access to the full range of statutory and non statutory services offered by the local authority and partner agencies to children and families in Coventry, within the same framework of eligibility as other children and families. In addition the agency will provide, following assessment, and in line with the criteria in the Regulations and Guidance the following services:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support (ASR 3.1.a) • Support groups / Activity Days for adoptive parents and adoptive children (ASR 3.1.6) • Support for contact arrangements between adoptive children and their birth relatives or with other people with whom they share significant relationships (ASR 3.1.c) • Therapeutic services (ASR 3.1.d) • Services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement or adoption, including respite care (ASR 3.1.e) • Counselling, advice and information (S2(6) (a) of the 2002 Act) • Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or threatened disruption is in danger of occurring. Organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)
14	Birth Parents and Birth Families
14.1	The Agency recognises that birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. The Agency seeks to ensure they are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
14.2	Children's Social Workers are committed to a partnership approach towards planning with birth parents over children's futures and wherever possible birth parents are fully involved in planning for the child's future placement. Parents are consulted over the plan for adoption, the type of family to be considered, issues around contact, religious preferences, and any other matters of importance to the birth parent.

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14.3	The views of the birth parents on adoption and contact are obtained by the Permanency Social Worker for the child and included in the BAAF Child's Permanence Report presented to Panel.
14.4	The child's Permanency Social Worker is required to seek to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth parents and birth families about themselves and life before the child's adoption to assist the child to maintain his heritage. This will include information about the child's birth and early life, the birth family's view about adoption and contact and provide up-to-date information about themselves and their situation. This information is contained within the BAAF Child's Permanence Report and in a "later life" letter prepared by the worker for the adopters. A copy is also included in the child's adoption file.
14.5	Children's Permanency Social Workers are expected to share information about the content of the Child's Permanence Report with the birth parents and to record their view on the contents of the report.
14.6	When adoption is considered as the plan for a child, or where the agency considers that "parallel planning" is required because the parents ability to achieve the changes required to parent a child safely are uncertain. Regulations require that an opportunity for independent counselling and support is to be offered to birth parents. The agency has made arrangements for the appointment of a worker independent of the child's social worker to support birth parents where adoption has been identified as the plan. This service is provided under contract from another agency who seeks to offer a proactive service to all birth parents, including an element to ensure that the birth parent's views are sought on what has been written about them and their circumstances in the Child's Permanence Report for Adoption Panel. This information is then made available to Adoption Panel when considering a plan for adoption or a match with prospective adopters.
14.7	Additional information on local and national support groups is made available through the Adoption Team. Post adoption contact arrangements, including letterbox contact between birth families, adopted children and their new families, are facilitated by the Adoption Support Team
15	Adoption Panel
15.1	The function of Coventry's Adoption Panel is to make quality and appropriate recommendations about the suitability of prospective adopters, and their continuing suitability, and the matching of children and of approved adopters. The Panel seeks to promote the welfare of children at all times. Where disruptions occur, the Panel receive a report and discuss this to see what lessons may need to be learned.
15.2	The Policies, procedures and functions of the Panel are contained within the Department's Procedures Manual. Copies of these are given to every Panel member. Membership of the Adoption Panel is in line with the National Minimum Standard, Regulations and Guidance.

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15.3	There is an annual training day organised for Panel members and including members of the Adoption Team. Panel members are able to attend individual courses when felt to be beneficial to their role on Panel. New Panel members receive a full induction and all Panel members are appraised annually.
16	Agency decisions
16.1	The Adoption Agency's decision will be made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the Adoption Panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.
16.2	The Decision Maker will take into account all the information surrounding the case and the Panel's recommendation before making a considered and professional decision. The agency decision will be made within 7 days of the Adoption Panel and given to the Agency Advisor who arranges for formal notification to be given to the relevant parties.
16.3	Immediately following the Adoption Panel the recommendations of the Panel are passed on orally to the parents or guardian of the child and prospective/approved adopters, as appropriate by the relevant social worker or adoption link worker. The formal decisions of the Panel are conveyed orally to the child by the child's social worker in an age appropriate way and in writing by the Decision Maker to the parents and to the adopters if birth parents do not wish to be informed a case note explanation is placed on file.
17	Work with Children
17.1	There is a Children's Guide to adoption that is suitable for all children for whom adoption is the plan. This is given to the child as soon as that decision has been taken. It includes a summary of what happens at each stage (including at court), and how long each stage is likely to take.
17.2	The children's guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate, how to make a complaint and how to contact the Children's Rights Director or Ofsted, along with a shortened version of the Statement of Purpose. Where necessary, arrangements can be made for the Guide to be reproduced in a variety of formats suitable for the needs of specific children.
17.3	Children's social workers prepare children for adoption by direct counselling, life story work and work around their wishes and feelings. Clear and appropriate information is obtained for the child from the prospective adopters about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
17.4	At all stages in the adoption process the wishes and feelings of the child are considered by the child's social worker, properly represented at planning meetings, and taken fully into account during all stages of the adoption process.

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18	Information about the Complaints Procedure, and Independent Review Mechanism
18.1	Prospective adopters are advised of the Department's complaints procedure and given information on how to make a complaint. They are also given information about the Council's representations procedure and the Independent Review Mechanism.
18.2	There is a leaflet available explaining the Independent Review Mechanism and this is made available to all applicants whose application is recommended for refusal.
18.3	<p>The Directorate has a Children's Complaints Manager oversees the operation of the Complaints system and arranges for them to be investigated. Complaints can be made in writing by email on CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk or by letter and addressed to:</p> <p>Children's Complaints Manager Civic Centre 1 Little Park Street Coventry CV1 5RS</p> <p>Tel: 0800 269851</p>
18.4	The complaint is registered and action taken to investigate any concerns. The Children's Complaints Officer will monitor the outcome. In most instances, complaints will be followed up by the manager with direct responsibility for the service. This is because local managers are usually best placed to sort things out quickly, and in most cases a speedy resolution is the most appropriate response.
18.5	If the complaint is very complicated, involves a number of service areas or has not been resolved at a local level, a more senior Manager or an independent investigator may investigate it. If the complaint is about a registered service, an Inspector from Ofsted may investigate it.
18.6	Complainants should be contacted by letter or phone, within 3 working days of the complaint being received to let the complainant know what is happening, who is dealing with the complaint and how to contact them. Complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible, ideally within 10 working days. Occasionally it is not possible to resolve complaints within the period. This may be due to the complexity of the complaint and the number of people who need to be interviewed. If this is the case, then the person dealing with the complaint will keep the complainant informed
18.7	When work on the complaint is complete, the complainant will be informed of the outcome. If the complaint has required a formal investigation, the outcome will be reported fully and in writing. This will include the action taken to investigate the complaint, how any conclusions have been drawn and details

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	of any action that has been or will be taken to rectify problems or make improvements.
	However, if the investigation has involved the use of Human Resources procedures, there will be details that cannot be shared as they must remain confidential. Similarly, if the complaint has been on behalf of someone else, their personal information is protected by the Data Protection Act and so the level of detailed information provided will be limited. Anyone not satisfied with the way Coventry Adoption Service has investigated a complaint can contact the Children's Complaints Officer to ask for further investigation.
	If a complaint was subject to a formal investigation and the complainant is not satisfied with the process, there is an option of writing to the Complaints Manager to request an independent review of the process.
19	Independent Review Mechanism
	Adopters are given a leaflet in respect of the Independent Review Mechanism in their initial information pack. They are made aware of their capacity to make presentations to the agency, or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of the adoption agency's qualifying determination (which is that it considers a prospective adopter not suitable to adopt a child). Adopters are also given information about the Complaints Procedure.
19.2	Ofsted regulates social care services in England, such as children's homes, residential family centres and fostering and adoption services. All Adoption Agencies must meet national minimum standards and the associated regulations, set by the Government, in order to qualify for registration. From time to time parents, and others with an interest in children's social care, have concerns about the quality of these care services.
19.3	When considering complaints, Ofsted do not act as a complaint adjudicator. They do not decide if complaints are upheld, partially upheld or are unsubstantiated. Instead they will investigate concerns to make sure that the social care provider continues to meet the national minimum standards and associated regulations and remains suitable for registration.
19.4	A complaint can be made by letter (see address below) or email (enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or by telephone (0300 123 1231) or in person. Ofsted National Business Unit Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD
19.4	The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, is responsible for promoting and protecting the rights of children and young people, and making sure their voices are listened to.

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	<p>The Commissioner's office can advise children in care and children adopted on how to voice a complaint about a Local authority. The advice line is independent of the Government and exists to make sure that young people's rights and entitlements are upheld and that their views are taken seriously. The service is free and fully confidential.</p> <p>Help at Hand is open between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.</p> <p>Their contact details are:</p> <p>Children's Commissioner for England Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT Telephone:0800 528 0731. Email: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk</p>

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