

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 led 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.

Report author(s): Jivan Sembi (Shirley Gounder to present)

Name and job title: Registered Manager and Interim Service Manager

Directorate: People Directorate

Tel and email contact: 0247 7683 1873 – shirley.gounder@coventry.gov.uk
Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor / approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date report sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Keith Francis	Interim Head of Service	People	23/12/16	06/01/17
Eileen West	Lead Accountant Business Partnering	Resources	N/A	
Paul Ferris	Performance and Information Team	People	23/12/16	06/01/17
John Gregg	Director of Children Services	People	06/01/17	06/01/17 Cleared by

				K. Francis
Councillor Ruane	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People			
Rachael Sugars	Finance Manager	Resources	03/01/16	04/01/16
Julie Newman	Legal Manager	Resources	06/01/17	09/01/17
Kate Eales	Human Resources Manager	Resources	06/01/17	06/1/17

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Appendix 1 – Statement of Purpose