



Annual Adoption Report 2019/2020

Introduction

This report provides information about the Adoption Service and outcomes for children looked after by Lincolnshire County Council, from the period April 2019 – March 2020 inclusive. The purpose of the Annual Report is to inform the public, Elected Members, partners and staff of the progress and developments of the Adoption Service during this period.

The County Council's Business Plan outlines the organisational values that reflect the Council's Vision and Purpose, providing a set of consistent, simple values that will guide our attitudes and behaviours. These values define how we do things, and are the principles by which we work together and with our customers and partners, and are underpinned by the following statement:

Our vision

Is working for a better future by

- Building on our strengths
- Protecting your lifestyle, and
- Being ambitious for the future

Our purpose

- Investing in infrastructure and the provision of services
- Commissioning for outcomes based on our communities' needs
- Promoting community wellbeing and resilience
- Influencing, coordinating and supporting other organisations that contribute to the life of Lincolnshire, and
- Making the best use of all of our resources

Our purpose within Regulated Services is to ensure that every child in every part of the county achieves their potential, responding appropriately to the assessed needs of all looked after children and young people, to ensure that their life chances are maximised by their experience of the service. The vision is 'Putting Children First'

National Adoption Agenda

The Government continues to maintain a clear focus on minimising delay for children with a plan for adoption and maximising the potential pool of adopters.

On the 13th March 2014, the Children and Families Bill received royal assent and became the Children and Families Act 2014 on 22nd April 2014. To reflect the changes, regulations, National Minimum Standards and the statutory guidance for adoption were amended and came into force in July 2014. The changes inherent in the Act have continued to be implemented in Lincolnshire, with the establishment of Foster-to-Adopt placements, a two-stage approval process for adopters, and the development and expansion of support services to adoptive families.

On the 1st May 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was rolled out to all local authorities. The fund offered a fast, simple service for local authorities to apply to, meaning that adoptive families can access the support they need, as and when they need it. To access the fund, adoptive families need to have an assessment of adoption support needs completed by the local authority. Where the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial to a family, the local authority can apply to the ASF on the family's behalf, who will then release the funding to the local authority.

In June 2015, the government published its proposal for the regionalisation of adoption services. The rationale behind this proposal was outlined as:

"By the end of this Parliament, we want to see all local authorities being part of regional agencies. We want to accelerate the pace of change to ensure those children for whom adoption is the right path, are given the best chance of finding a loving, forever family as quickly as possible. This year, we want to provide up to £4.5M of start-up funding to support early adopters to take forward their proposals."

The government invited local authorities and voluntary organisations to combine their resources and submit an expression of interest to become early adopters of regionalisation.

In response to the proposal, The East Midlands Adoption Consortium submitted, and was successful, in its bid for government granted development funding to progress plans for an adoption agency, which would bring together five local authorities, three unitary authorities, and three voluntary agencies into a new regional adoption agency across the East Midlands area. Lincolnshire was a member of the Consortium supporting the development of the project. Over the period 2018/19 Lincolnshire continued to be involved in planning for the region. Nottingham city, Nottinghamshire, Derby city and Derbyshire operated a 'pilot' regional agency, and then launched as a regional adoption agency last summer. Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland continued to work cooperatively together to develop a partnership with a now established regional family finding group and plans in place to coordinate the work processes across the region.

Developing the workforce to ensure all social workers have the skills and knowledge to make swift and robust decisions about the best placements for children to meet their short and long term needs, was seen as a priority, and in Lincolnshire the adoption staff have all been involved in the Signs of Safety framework in order to support their work. In addition all of the 'SSW' have completed their 'adult attachment interview' training in order to improve the quality of the adopter assessments, and to assist in the process of matching children to adopters.

In April 2019 Lincolnshire were commissioned by Rutland to deliver adoption services on their behalf, so a contract was developed with them, and over the course of the year Lincolnshire conducted a marketing campaign in Rutland and the first adoption information evening in Oakham, where several couples expressed an

interest in becoming adopters . There have been regular meetings with Rutland staff to ensure that the work is completed in a timely way and to track cases. Lincolnshire were actively involved in Rutlands OFSTED inspection in February 2020, by holding a training event with Rutland staff, providing children and adopters files for evidence, and meeting with the inspector. The comments on adoption services in the Rutland OFSTED inspection report were positive.

At the end of March 2019 the statutory adoption register run by Coram BAAF ceased to operate, so Lincolnshire joined the Linkmaker system, which enabled SW staff and adopters to access information on children nationally and to have Lincolnshire children on the national system. This has been effective as the regional colleagues also use this system so there is a regional area where the family finding for the region is held , but also the option to have children on the system nationally so that approved adopters seeking a child can do so through this system .

In April 2019 Lincolnshire were inspected under the new ILACS system by OFSTED and, along with the rest of children's services, were rated 'outstanding'. This was the third consecutive 'outstanding' for Lincolnshire adoption team.

In January 2020 Lincolnshire became involved in a pilot project for Coram/BAAF which focussed on the 'Together or Apart' assessment model which had been constructed and developed by Shelagh Beckett to assist SW's with the task of making lifelong decisions regarding the placing of sibling groups. Unfortunately due to Coronavirus it has not been possible to develop the work on this as was planned so the project has been extended and will be modified to a 'virtual ' model of delivery .

There remains a clear alignment of the local, regional and national agenda which is encapsulated in Lincolnshire County Council's vision "*that every child in every part of the county should achieve their potential*". To achieve this, the work of the Adoption Service is delivered according to the principles that the Council adheres to, specifically:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Safeguarding
- Aspiration and Well-being
- Learning and achievement
- Best use of Resources

In addition to the above principles, four strategic outcomes for children have been agreed by Children's Services.

- Children and young people are Healthy and Safe
- Develop to their full potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Learn and Achieve
- Children and young people are ready for Adult life.

The report details how the activity of the Adoption Service fits within the framework of the above principles.

Progress on Development Goals identified in 2018/2019 Annual Report

Early Intervention and Prevention

The use of the Signs of Safety model has continued to be embedded into practice, with all of the staff having completed training. The supervising SW's are using 'mapping' as an effective tool in the initial assessment of prospective adopters. The children's workers have developed their skills in using 'words and pictures' to enhance children's understanding of their situation and the plan for adoption and 'groups supervision' and 'problem solving circles' have become part of the day to day work.

There was continued high performance on the adoption scorecard performance against key threshold measures. We continue to perform well in this area, which means that wherever possible Lincolnshire children are placed with their adoptive family as quickly as possible, many within the government timescales.

There has been an increase in the number of families who we have been able to help through the Adoption Support Fund, and have increased the training to adopters to enable them to parent therapeutically. There has been the introduction of a new 'transitions' course open to both adopters and foster carers, which has been designed to improve the transitions for children from foster care to adoptive families, using a therapeutic model.

Adoption Scorecard

The most relevant indicators refer to the years ending 31st March 2016, 31st March 2017 and 31st March 2018

There are 3 main indicators pertinent to adoption performance:

- (A1) Average time between entering care and being placed for adoption, this has decreased to 372 days with the all England average having decreased to 486 days and statistical neighbour average of 466 days. Lower is better.
- (A2) Average time between gaining authority to place and achieving a match is 141 days, significantly lower than the all England average of 201 and the statistical neighbour average of 203. Lower is better.
- (A3) The percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 74% in Lincolnshire, slightly down on last year but still well above the all England average of 56%.
- Adoptions as a percentage of children leaving care remain strong at 12%.

For the single year 2018/19, performance for Lincolnshire (A1) as at 31st March 19 was 344 days, with (A2) reducing to 141 days. For the 2019/20 year the average was 403 [A1] and 141 [A2] (these are Lincolnshire figures as the most recent scorecard has not been published).

These remain to be strong figures compared to both statistical neighbours and the national average, and the challenge going forward will be to remain 'on target'. The increase in the A1 is indicative of the length of care proceedings becoming longer, but the A2 remains the same, and indicates that Lincolnshire children are being

placed in a timely way wherever possible. There continues to be a small cohort of children whose timescales will fall out of the target and this is due to them being difficult to place or applications from parents for leave of the court to appeal Placement Orders which has been a cause for delay. This year has seen a similar number of children with a plan of adoption, from 42 to 43. The trend for high numbers of children placed on Special Guardianship Orders, has reduced. The number of children coming into care following a marked increase last year, has levelled. The number of adoption orders granted this year has gone up significantly from 41 for 2019, to 53 for 2020. This increase is likely to be due to the numbers of adoptions which were contested and therefore took a longer period in the court arena, so many of these adoption orders were from previous years.

Regionalisation Agenda

The East Midlands was one of 19 areas that were given funding to progress scoping work around an East Midlands RAA. The initial expression of interest submitted to the DfE was on behalf of eight local authorities (Lincolnshire, Derby City, Derbyshire, Leicester City, Leicestershire including Rutland, Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire and Peterborough, and three voluntary Adoption Agencies; Adopt Together, Coram East Midlands and Family Care). An East Midlands RAA Transition Plan was submitted to the DfE and there was extensive work on this throughout the year. Adoption East Midlands launched as a regional agency in the summer of 2019. This left Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland continuing to work as a partnership, planning the various different 'workstreams' which need to be agreed before regionalisation can take place. In January 2020 North Lincolnshire made the decision to join the partnership and since then have been part of the regional planning. This continues to be progressed.

A governance structure has been established with representatives from across the region forming the Project Governance Board.

Safeguarding

Over the course of the year 'Signs of Safety' has continued to be incorporated into the adoption process wherever possible as a model for assessing matches, adoptive placements and for risk assessments, and in direct work with children whilst preparing them for placement. Staff members in the team have been actively involved in developing the use of 'words and pictures' in direct work with children assisting them in understanding the reasons they are in care, and were not safe in their birth families.

The supervising social workers in the team have all now completed their adult attachment style training and are using this alongside 'mapping' as a way of analysing their initial assessments of adopters, in order to ensure that we are assessing and approving adopters who will be able to manage the needs of the children who require adoptive placements.

Aspiration and Well-being

Maximise the benefits to adoptive families in Lincolnshire arising from the Adoption Support Fund. There has been an increase in the number of families who have been provided with therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund to assist families in utilising therapeutic parenting techniques in their family life.

Over the course of 2019/20 there were been 145 applications to the Adoption Support Fund in order to provide therapeutic input for adopted children and families. The amount of funding granted from the fund to cover these was £350,000.

There were cases where individual therapy was delivered either by therapeutically trained staff within the Post Adoption Team, or by external providers. In all of the cases there were individual sessions using Theraplay, therapeutic Lifestory work, DDP or sensory integration therapy. There were also a number of cases where there was a detailed assessment of therapeutic needs, followed by an intensive period of therapeutic input and attachment focussed therapy, delivered from the external provider. All of the families in receipt of these services have reported them to be positive in helping them to meet the challenge of parenting their adopted children.

Learning and achievement

Maintain strong links with the virtual school and ensure adopted children in schools receive the full benefit from initiatives including the Pupil Premium.

To implement adoption support training for all adoption social workers to enable team members to work effectively across all adoption support tasks, creating a flexible workforce who can respond to the changing needs of the service.

During 2019/20 the majority of adoption staff have continued to be trained/supported in 'Theraplay', so that they can support adoptive families with children newly in placement to use therapeutic parenting models in order to enhance the building of positive attachments in the early stages of placement. In some of the cases, where sibling groups are placed, there is an intensive package of Theraplay to support the transition from foster care into adoptive placement. To compliment this, there are three clinicians within the Adoption Support Team who are trained in Dyadic Therapy, Filial Therapy and Family Therapy, thus creating a flexible and sustainable adoption service.

Also the Team was able to further extend the range of post-adoption activities for children and families during school holidays with groups focussed on music making at Soundlinks, which resulted in the young people attaining awards. There were watersports activities which promoted confidence, built skills and teamwork; forest schools for the younger children to promote awareness of nature and give them new skills and two photography workshops which provided new skills and creativity. All of these activities enabled adopted children to meet one another and provided an

environment in which the children could talk about being adopted as well as increasing self-esteem.

Lincolnshire were involved in producing a podcast for BBC radio 4 which has won a number of awards, and promoted public awareness about adoption. This podcast continues to be used by a number of local authorities in their training and preparation of adopters.

Best use of Resources

Use and embed new case management recording system in adoption whilst maintaining business as usual.

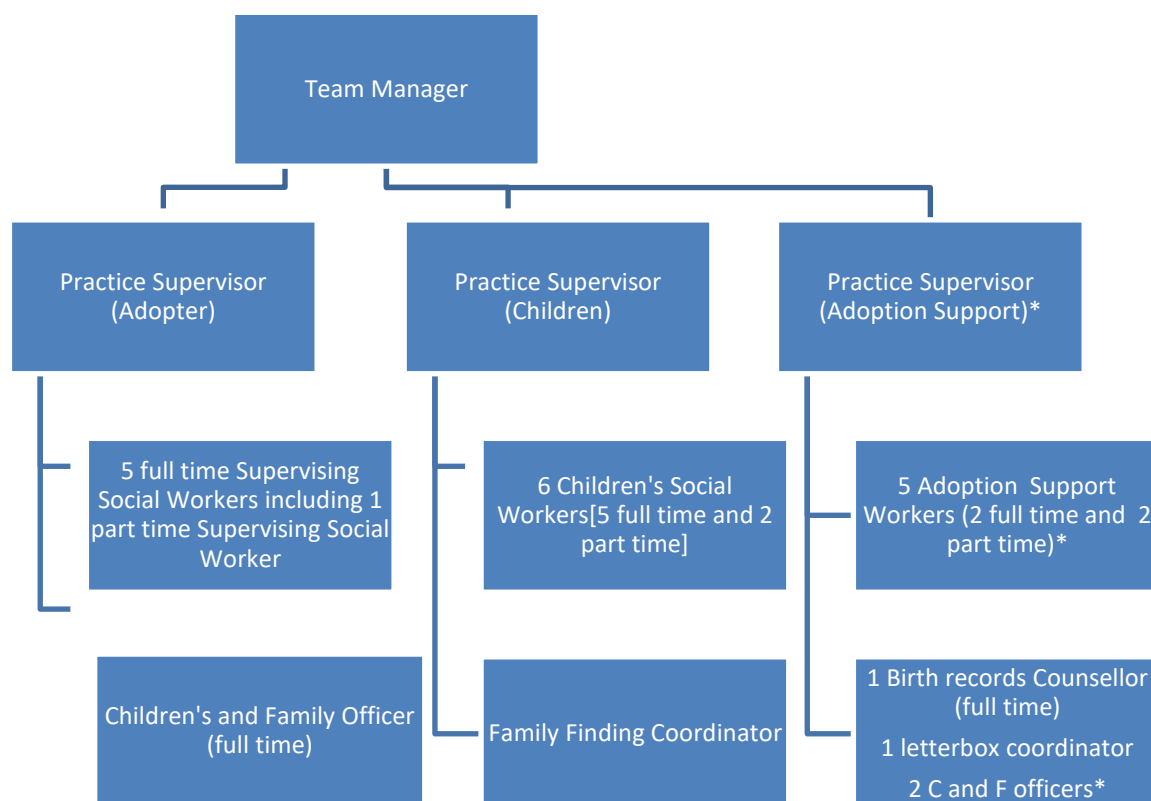
Staffs in the post adoption team have been involved in rebuilding the Mosaic system so that it is now a useful and effective recording system which is being used by all team members. The final part of the build was to ensure that the adoption support workflows are correct and effective .This has now been completed so that the system can be used effectively throughout the service

The post adoption team have begun to develop a range of services for SGO support, to enable them to have access to training, support groups, and advice and guidance. Support proposed will be two-tiered, with the FAST Teams completing the formal reassessment of SGO support plans. The Adoption Support Team has developed an information leaflet and helpline for Special Guardians. Guardians will be granted access to the e-Learning currently available for foster carers and a quarterly newsletter is being developed. Applications to the ASF will be managed through the adoption service.

Service Role and Structure

The core duties of the Adoption Service remain broadly unchanged. The Adoption Service continues to provide services to children, adopters and birth family members as required by the National Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 as issued by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the [Care Standards Act 2000](#), Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, the Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005) and the Adoption Statutory Guidance July 2014, the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

The Adoption Team remains a stand-alone countywide service with office bases at Lincoln, Sleaford and Louth.



The Adoption Service is staffed by a Team Manager, three Practice Supervisors, six Children's Adoption Social Workers and six Supervising Social Workers. The Adoption Support Team has one Birth Records Social Worker, two full-time and two-part time Adoption Support Social Workers, a Children and Families Officer who manages the 'letterbox' and an adoption support worker who supports adoptive families in the community. At the end of the year a new early help worker was appointed to focus on the needs of SGO carers and provide them with support and assessments.

The Children's Adoption Social Workers progress children's plans for adoption. The Supervising Social Workers recruit and assess prospective adopters, as well as completing step parent adoption assessments. Supervising Social Workers also deliver preparation training courses for adopters. A qualified Social Worker in the Adoption Support Team carries out the agency's statutory duties of birth record counselling for adopted adults. Lincolnshire does not provide intermediary services but does provide limited assistance in tracing where it is able. The Adoption Support Social Workers complete work directly with families who have adopted and who are struggling to manage issues specifically linked to their adoption. In addition they organise groups and activities to support adopters and adopted children. The Children and Family Officer coordinates the indirect contact arrangements for adopted children and birth relatives together with the completion of life story work for the preparation of children placed for adoption.

Adoption Performance

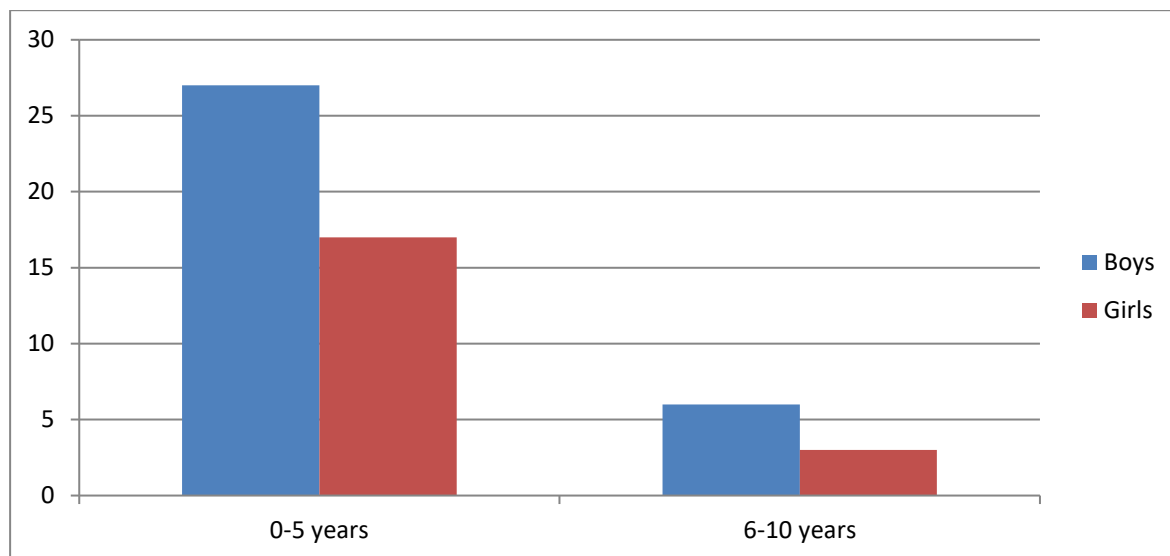
Adoption Orders granted April 2019– March 2020

- In the year to March 2020, 53 adoption orders were granted.
- In addition 33 Special Guardianship Orders were granted.

This year has seen an increase in the number of adoptions in Lincolnshire with 53 adoptions being now well above the average .Some of those were orders which have been before the court for many months as a result of having been actively contested by the birth parents which has created considerable delay and therefore the time between placement in adoption and the adoption order being made has been much longer .The number of children being placed on SGO's has significantly reduced from 63 in 2018/19 to only 33 in 2019/20. Performance against the Adoption Scorecard has already been discussed in detail above with performance against all three threshold measure continuing to show good performance which is consistently better than the statistical neighbours, and the England average .

Adoption Activity for 2019/2020

Profile of children adopted 2019/2020:



Lincolnshire County Council achieved fifty three adoption orders during 2019/2020, an increase of 12 from the previous year and taking the figure above the average number for Lincolnshire. Also there was a change in the demographic as there were 33 boys and 20 girls. There were a number of cases which had been delayed in the courts for many months due to contested adoption cases. Contested adoption cases have become a common theme, as more adoptions are being contested by birth parents and the court are giving birth families every opportunity, before making the final decision. This would also account for the increased number of children adopted in the 6-10 age range which has increased by almost 100%.

Lincolnshire has continued to achieve high performance levels for the timely placement of children. There are fewer children waiting and many of the children are pre-matched prior to the court granting the Placement Order. In addition to this, 33 Special Guardianship Orders were granted and these are counted by the DFE as part of the adoption performance measure.

In this year four of the children were placed in Foster-to-Adopt' placements, prior to being adopted, where they benefitted from being securely attached to their prospective adopters from as early as possible in the process. Six children were adopted by their foster carer, which is a significant increase as there were only three children last year. This has implications for fostering and for funding, but has meant that a number of children who would have been difficult to place have been able to remain in their placements and become a member of the family, so is a really positive outcome for the child.

There were seven sibling groups. There were three sibling groups of three children and there were four sibling groups of two. The other thirty four children in the cohort were all singletons. In terms of a profile of ethnicity, there was one child of Eastern

European heritage, two of Middle Eastern heritage. All other children were recorded as White British.

Profile of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2019/20

During April 2019 to March 2020, forty four children had an agency decision of adoption, of which 38 went on to, be subject to a placement order. This was slightly less than the previous year's figure of 48, with 45 children made subject to placement orders, so in fact the figures were similar .The number of Special Guardianship orders has reduced significantly to only 33 .

Of the 44 children there were the following groups of siblings:

- 3 groups of 3 children
- 3 groups of 2 children
- 29 single children

This is an increase in the numbers of sibling groups as compared to last year's there are 3 groups of three who may be difficult to place. There continued to be use of kinship placements and Special Guardianship Orders throughout the 2019/20 performance year, but at a much lower rate with the numbers of children in care remaining fairly steady .By the year end one of the groups of three were not made subject to placement orders and remained with relatives, the other two were delayed in the court process and have not yet had a final hearing .

Age ranges of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2019/20

- 0 - 5 years = 38 [47]
- 6 -10 years = 5 [1]
- 10 plus = 0 [0]

Previous year performance in brackets.

The predominant ethnicity of the children with a best interest plan remains White British although there were three children of Eastern European heritage.

In line with the Government's intention set out in the Children and Family Bill 2014, the matching policy for Lincolnshire is clear that it seeks to place children with adopters who will actively seek to meet all their needs, including those that arise from their culture and ethnicity. However this will not be achieved at the expense of delay for the child in securing an adoptive family.

Children under 5 years remain the largest age group placed for adoption; these children often come as part of a sibling group with older children and therefore the target of the service's recruitment strategy continues to target adopters willing to consider sibling groups and older children.

Profile of children placed for adoption

With regard to placements made this year 28 children were placed as opposed to 38 the previous year, showing that the numbers with adoption plans had reduced somewhat as compared with the year before. Of these, 24 were singleton placements, 4 children were placed in 2 sibling groups of 2, and no groups of three were placed. Of these sibling groups, one of the groups had one child over five. All but two of the other children placed were under five with 22 of them being placed before they were 2 years. There were 18 boys placed and 10 girls, so a similar proportion to last year.

Overall, with some variation in the numbers of sibling groups, this is similar to the previous year as approximately 25 under 5's a year seems to be fairly constant. There has been a significant increase in the number of cases which are delayed in court awaiting placement orders and this has created delay for 10 children who were not placed within NMS 17.7 as they waited several months to be made subject to a placement order.

Children Awaiting Placement at the close of 2019/20.

At the end of March 2020, there were 11 children whose plans were not agreed by the court and who did not yet have a placement order. There were a further 5 children whose plans were changed by the courts and who either returned home or were placed with relatives on an SGO. There were therefore only 7 children awaiting placement. There are 3 young children who have special needs or complex health /development issues. There are a sibling group of 3 children and one older child who will be difficult to place and whose legal position is complex. In addition, there were 8 children who were provisionally linked but not yet formally matched.

Adopters approved as suitable to adopt during 2019/20

A total of 28 adoptive parents were approved to adopt during 2019/2020, with no adopters approved for inter-country adoption. Seven of these were also approved for Foster to adopt. This is a decrease with 15 less adopters than last year's figures but we still ended the year with adopters awaiting placements so were able to meet the referrals for children with adoption plans coming through the system. The focus of the work during this year was to match the children waiting and place them into adoptive families at the earliest opportunity. The trend changed from one of children waiting to one where adopters are ready and waiting so that we always have approved adopters waiting to select positive matches with. At 31/03/2020 there were 10 [7] adopters approved and waiting, eight of which were being considered for possible links. In addition there were four adopters fostering children with a view to adoption.

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	6	10	5	12	6

Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	1	4	9	5	0
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	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	1	1

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16
White British	25	40	21	29
Asian/Asian British – Indian	0	1	1	2
Other white background	1	1	0	1
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0	1		

In order to reflect the government's aspiration to encourage foster carers who then go on to adopt we supported four foster families with children in placement to apply directly to the courts for an Adoption Order. This was a lower number than last year. We will continue to maximise our capacity to recruit for larger sibling group through a mixture of targeted recruitment and the flexible use of support packages for families seeking to adopt three or more children

The Recruitment Team

During this period, the Recruitment Team still consisted of a dedicated Team Manager, three Supervising Social Workers, and Marketing and Recruitment Officer. The team were supported in their role by two Recruitment Co-ordinators.

The role of the Recruitment Co-ordinator is to log and track initial enquiries, and to act upon the information received and process enquiries in a timely manner.

The Marketing and Recruitment Officer is responsible for delivering the adoption recruitment strategy and subsequent campaigns.

The Adoption Service continued to undertake its own initial visits to determine the suitability of prospective adopters up to the approval stage.

Marketing & Recruitment

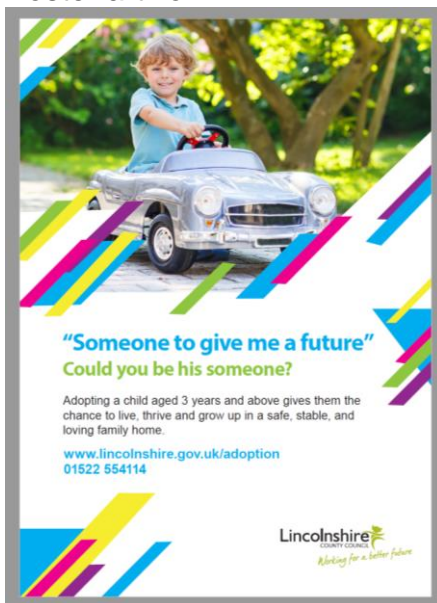
Marketing and recruitment activity stepped up again in 2018-2019 as more children were seen coming through for adoption, and there was an increase in the numbers of adopters coming through the process. In 2019/20 the numbers levelled out again and there were adopters awaiting placement, as the numbers of children reduced slightly .

Advertising campaign

During this year Lincolnshire Adoption Service continued with the campaign to attract more prospective adopters. The campaign idea was to get people to think about if they could meet a child's needs with advert imagery depicting the priority needs groups for the service i.e. children aged 3 year and over, children with additional needs, siblings, and those placed under the foster to adopt scheme with the tag lines:

- *"Someone to give me a future" Could you be his someone?* (Child aged 3+)
- *"Someone to be my champion" Could you be her someone?* (Additional needs)
- *"Someone to give me stability" Could you be his someone* (Foster to adopt)
- *"Someone to keep us together" Could you be their someone?* (Siblings)

Poster artwork:



A full advertising schedule occurred for the year including:

- Paid for Facebook adverts
- Local advertising within several publications owned by Johnston Press (including digital)
- Local advertising within several publications owned by Iliffe Media (including digital)
- Lincs FM
- Advertising on The Lincolnite and Lincolnshire Reporter websites
- Lincolnshire Life Magazine
- Int Comms
- Local press releases

All advertising in the media directed people to the information evenings to learn more about adoption from staff and approved adopters so that they could make an informed decision about if adoption was right for them and their family.

Information evenings

The adoption information evenings were run in Lincoln and Oakham in June, Lincoln and Louth in October for adoption week and Lincoln and Boston in February 2019-2020. They were all from 7pm – 9pm with the format of the evening being short talks from social workers about what adoption is, why children need adopting and what adopters the service currently needs i.e. those for children aged 3 years and over, sibling groups, children with disabilities and additional needs, and children who have been placed under the Foster to Adopt scheme. This was followed by an animation which was commissioned to explain the process to adopt in a visually engaging and easy to understand way. Two adopters/adoptive families then share their experiences of adoption both through a 15 minute talk to the audience. Finally the support which is on offer from the Adoption Support Team was presented to the audience. The evenings finish with time for the audience to mingle with the adopters and staff to ask any questions they may have one-to-one. If anyone is interested in filling out an IEI at this point they are also invited to do that.

Information evenings run throughout 2019-2020:

- Tuesday 4th June at Branston Hall Hotel, Lincoln
- Tuesday 12th June at Breckenborough Hotel, Louth
- Tuesday 15th October at Branston Hall Hotel
- Thursday 17th October at Greetham Valley Hotel, Oakham
- Wednesday 5th February at Branston Hall Hotel, Lincoln
- Tuesday 11th February at Boston

The information evenings proved to be successful with an average of 16 households attending each event and 3- 4 IEIs being completed at each.

County Shows

The adoption service also had representation at Lincolnshire Show on Wednesday 19th and Thursday 20th June 2019 in the main Lincolnshire County Council marquee.

Facebook

The eagerly anticipated dedicated fostering and adoption service Facebook page was launched on 18th June 2018 and gained almost 400 followers within the year. The page is being managed by the Marketing and Recruitment Officer for the fostering and adoption services and is predominately being used as a marketing aid to recruit more foster carers and adopters, and to convey key messages including who can adopt, good news stories, and to advertise information evenings etc.

Identity

During 2017-2018 an identity was created for the fostering service which was used on information booklets, the website, advertising etc. A twin identity using different primary colours was created for the adoption service during 2018-2019 and has been rolled out on the information booklet, website and advertising. The idea being that given time, the identities will begin to resonate with the public as being Lincolnshire County Council's Fostering or Adoption Services just by looking at them after they have been in the public eye for a while.

Newsletter

The service has continued to deliver a quarterly e-newsletter to approved adopters which contain information, guidance, news, and events locally and nationally which are in the interests of our adopters.

Figures

Adoption IEIs received = 163

Foster to adopt IEIs received = 24

Total IEIs = 187

Adoption ROIs received = 23

Foster to adopt ROIs received = 7

Total ROIs = 30

This gives a conversion rate of 15% for adoption from enquiry to application, 30% for Foster-to-Adopt from enquiry to application; with a total conversion rate of 16% from enquiry to application. This is a slight reduction as compared to the figures for the previous year.

Adoption Panel Activity for 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020

The Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 17.2 provides a requirement for:

“Adoption Panels to provide a quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the Panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.”

Children’s Plans for Adoption

As part of the Quality Assurance Process for children to be considered for Adoption, these reports have been scrutinized in advance by the Panel Advisor along with Team Managers from Fostering, Adoption, FAST, Looked After Children and the Independent Reviewing Service. The Quality Assurance meeting is available each week and cases are booked in consultation with Legal Services and the Adoption Team in advance to ensure the timescales in relation to Care Proceedings are met. This process allows for a rigorous cross-agency check to ensure that the work is of a high enough standard and that the child’s wishes and views are recorded.

When compiling these reports the current Foster Carers provide a profile for the child, which is circulated. The views of parents and birth family are detailed within these reports. If there are no views then the Advisor will request that the facts and reasons why there are no views from the parents are recorded.

Written Legal Advice is provided independent of the case holder and ensures that any matters concerning Re B-S (Children) 2013 are well evidenced for the Agency Decision Maker and that the plans are robust and there are no legal issues which may prevent the plans from being considered.

The Quality Assurance meeting will collectively scrutinise each report to ensure that in their opinion the Welfare Check list has been addressed and that, if any expert reports have been requested in Care Proceedings these are available. This is particularly important in order to ensure there is a balanced approach and that key points raised have been considered fully within the Childs Permanence Report.

A summary of the assessments are included in the Child Permanence Report and copies of those expert reports are available to the Agency Decision Maker in good time to be read.

The Panel Advisor liaises with the agency to provide any actions and feedback from this forum; this may be addressed with the Adoption Service, FAST Teams, Independent Reviewing Service and Legal Services.

The Agency Decision Maker considers the welfare check list in particular:

“the relationship which the child has with relatives and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including (i) the likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of its doing so, (ii) the ability and willingness of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, to provide the child with a secure

environment in which the child can develop, and otherwise to meet the child's need and (iii) the wishes and feelings of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, regarding the child, to ensure that any recommendations made have taken account of these relationships.”

Analysis

Child Permanence Reports detail the child's history well. They are written in a style which is easy to read and consideration is made to how the views of children who are nonverbal, can still be included in the reports.

The wishes and views of birth parents can be difficult for the workers to report on due to the family disengaging with the workers. It would be beneficial to see further evidence of how workers have utilised restorative/relationship based practice to engage with birth family in this early junction. This may have a bearing on a number of outcomes for both the parents and how many contested cases are addressed.

The reports addressing a child's plan of adoption are written to a high standard and they utilise the Signs of Safety tools in their analysis. The reports detail the child's history well and are easily read and understood. The report details the challenges that a child may have faced in their early life including matters which detail the harm which was attributed to the care given to them by their birth family.

The reports also provide significant insight into the functioning and experiences of the birth family and extended family members, this allows for a fuller understanding of who was considered and an explanation as to why they could not offer care to a particular child.

This is key important information for prospective adopters and in due course the child themselves who may come to view these reports at a later stage.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, the following children have had a decision to support a plan for Adoption made by the Agency Decision Maker compared to the previous year.

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Boys approved for adoption	29	24	35	17	12
Girls approved for adoption	15	27	20	6	8
Total children approved for adoption	44	51	55	23	20
Single children approved	31	38	41	15	16
Children in sibling groups of two	5 [10]	5 [10]	4 [8]	2 [4]	2 [4]
Children in sibling groups of three	1 [3]	1 [3]	2 [6]	0	0
Children in sibling groups of four	0	0	0	1 [4]	0
White British children	42	45	52	22	19
Other white background (European)	1	2	1	1	1
Other	2	4	2	0	0
Age Range 0 - 2	36	39	32	15	11
Age Range 3 - 5	8	8	15	6	8
Age Range 6 - 8	0	3	6	2	1
Age Range 9 -11	0	0	2	0	0

Age Range 11+	0	1			
% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.6	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Between April 2019 and March 2020, the following children have been placed for Adoption.

National Minimum Standard 17.7

The Adoption Panel makes a considered recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular adopters within 6 months of the Adoption Agency Decision Maker deciding the child be placed for adoption.

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/14
Total Children	44	51	55	23
Linked with adopters in timescale NMS 17.7	18	19	23	17
Linked with adopters outside timescale NMS 17.7	10	11	3	1
Awaiting link	6	21	29	1
Awaiting link – no placement order	6			
Returned to family	1	0	0	4
Change of care plan	2			
Adopted via Direct Application	1			
% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.7	65 %	78.5%	94.5%	95%

Suitability of Prospective Adopters

There have been twenty three Adoption/Permanence Panels in this period. In that time the following applicants have been approved;

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	6	10	5	12	6
Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	1	4	9	5	0

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	1	1

	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16
White British	25	40	21	29
Asian/Asian British – Indian	0	1	1	2
Other white background	1	1	0	1

Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0	1		
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% reports meeting the National Minimum Standard 10.6 timescale 82%

Again these reports have all been prepared by social workers who meet the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005.

Panel Administration requests the papers are available fourteen days ahead of the Panel date to allow the quality assurance process to take place. Reports are passed to the Advisor who checks that the applicant's statutory checks have been completed and that health checks as well as health and safety checklists have been completed. Alongside this the Advisor will ensure that the assessment is completed and that it adequately covers aspects of the couple's or individual's strengths as adopters and their ability to provide safe care to a child.

The report must ensure that the couple's or individual's child care experience, background history and life story, including education, is detailed as well as their support network and what attitude they have regarding contact arrangements for the future. The couple's or individual's financial details should be contained in the report.

The quality of Prospective Adopters Reports is very good and Adult Style Attachment interviews are being used as well as evidence from referees to appropriately explore skills and strengths.

On occasion the Advisor and Chair have required additional work to be completed prior to formal consideration by Panel however this is rare.

If there is any third party information or clarification of issues sought by Panel the workers will be asked to join Panel ahead of the applicants.

A further quality assurance check has been agreed when Lincolnshire are considering a link with out of county adopters. These PARs will be checked by both the PS in Lincolnshire and the Panel Advisor to ensure they comply with the standards in Lincolnshire.

Analysis

There is evidence within the minutes of Panel that detail the sound nature of Panel's consideration of applicants. The current central list provides us with panel members who have the experience and understanding of the adoption process in order to be able to consider the assessment.

There has been further development in using the referees as a positive source of evidence for the assessment with workers using the referee interview to confirm the views of the workers or in some cases to appropriately challenge the prospective adopter's views.

The Prospective Adopter Reports continue to be of a high standard with only single numbers where further information has been needed to achieve the standard.

These reports have all been prepared or been supervised by social workers who meet the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005.

Panel Administration requests the papers are available fourteen days ahead of the Panel date to allow the quality assurance process to take place. Reports are passed to the Advisor who checks that the applicant's statutory checks are up-to-date and that health checks as well as health and safety checklists have been completed and that a comprehensive and detailed contact plan is included within the reports.

The Panel Advisor will request any update of reports, medicals and support plan be prepared ahead of Panel to be circulated to Panel Members ahead of the deadline

The Advisor quality assures all the reports to ensure that a full assessment is provided with a clear analysis as to why this particular family has been suggested as the best match for the child and how they will best meet the child's needs.

Further work has been completed with the staff on developing a more thorough narrative by adopters on why they wish to adopt a particular child. This further identifies any potential support needs between the child and the potential adopters. The Panel Members will also consider the relative strengths of each match and also any areas where they may require further clarity.

The quality of these reports has been good with positive matches for sibling groups and single children. Reports have detailed the needs of children and how the prospective adopters will meet these needs.

Panel have consistently raised issues regarding the ability of couples to maintain the ethnicity or cultural aspects of children and have been satisfied that couples are committed to meeting the child's needs in this area.

Panel minutes show the various matches of children to couples and single carers and confirm that questioning has been relevant and focussed upon the specific task i.e. the match with the adopters to ensure that the needs of a child can be met in the suggested placement.

Adoption Support

The period covered by this report has seen further improvements to the range of adoption support services are provided within the framework set out within the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. The majority of the support is now provided through the Adoption Support Fund, but the therapists within the team still provide packages and there is a limited commissioned service through independent providers. The service is provided on a tiered basis dependent on assessed need.

Tier 1	Wide universal support to adopters includes: Contact coordination, helpline advice, information via the Lincolnshire adoption website. Birth records counselling for adults. Also included in this tier is counselling for birth relatives whose children have been adopted as well as seminars for grandparents of adopters.
Tier 2	All of tier 1 and in addition adoption support groups/activities for adopters and for children affected by adoption. These include a programme of activities which bring adoptive children together to share experiences of

	adoption as part of leisure activities. This tier also included the Safebase parenting programme.
Tier 3	Previous tier support plus specific adoption support include assessment of need, individual adoption support packages, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Theraplay, EMDR, and Non Violent Resistance, Extended Life Story Work. This tier also includes access to primary mental health services and CAMHS. Since the spring of 2015 with the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund, government funding has been made available to provide for therapeutic input to adoptive children and their families in recognition of their lifelong needs.

Tier 1

The Lincolnshire Adoption website remains the first point of support for adopters and adopted children and during the period covered by the report all written and web materials have been benchmarked against best practice and revised. This secure site has information regarding Theraplay techniques, safeguarding information, including how to help a child access the internet safely. The site advertises adoption activities and groups and enables the Adoption Service to consult users about planned future services. Links to services from Children's Centres and a range of education services are also available from this site. In addition to the website service users can contact the Adoption Helpline for advice and guidance. Adopters can also access a range of e-learning modules.

Adopters can sign up to receiving a regular electronic newsletter which provides information on forth-coming activities, useful short articles offering advice, and encourages contributions from both adoptive parents and children.

In 2019/20 the service received 52 referrals for birth records counselling, which is less than last year, and only 10 enquiries from birth relatives seeking advice on tracing, which is less than in the previous year. Callers enquiring about tracing relatives were signposted to other agencies as Lincolnshire does not provide intermediary services. Thirty four people were provided with counselling services and regular sessions and there were 10 requests from out of county where the file information was summarised and provided to the other authority.

The birth families service is now provided by PAC UK who took the contract from After Adoption and provides counselling to birth relatives who have lost their children to adoption. The contract is at capacity and provided counselling to 36 birth parents /relatives during this year, although with the reduction in numbers of birth parents in care proceedings the nature of the referrals has changed with more of the work now being focussed on birth relatives at a later stage in the process, who may have been self-referrals or referrals through the 'letterbox'.

Contact

Indirect Letterbox contact activity

April 2019 – March 2020

As of 31st March 2020 there were 664 children on the letterbox.

For the twelve month period there were 45 new children added and 36 children removed as they turned 18.

Access to birth records counselling – 52 referrals (10 were requests from other agencies for our files)

Birth relative enquiries – 12 enquiries (for recording and signposting only)

There are 8 letterbox arrangements for families who hold Special Guardianship Orders and 4 where children are not adopted but letterbox contact was ordered by the court.

Direct Contact

- 14 children have direct contact with birth parents
- 16 with siblings
- 15 with non-adopted siblings
- 5 with grandparents

Tier 2

At the core of provision in this Tier is the offer of adoption support groups across the county, coordinated by adopters supported by the service. Attendance by adopters at these groups continues to vary but those who attend report they are appreciated. In addition there have been courses delivered in therapeutic parenting , transition to adoption , life story work and 'telling' all of which have been well attended and have had positive feedback from attendees .

We have further developed our programme of social activities to be organised during the school holidays to enable adopters and children to meet and network. We have provided funding to these Localised Adoption Support Groups totalling £3,500. The groups are adopter led and held Christmas parties, outings to local venues such as Rand Farm Children's Park, family swimming sessions, Eco Centre in Skegness and days at the beach. We have provided the following during the past year

There were:

Woodland Adventure Days for primary age children – 3 days in July 2019 – 11 attendees

Music Tech Workshops for secondary age children – series of one-day events with the same group of up to 10 children – held in April, June, September 2019 & February 2020

Activities Away, outdoor water based activities for secondary age children – 2 events in August 2019 – 1st August with 11 children and 15th August with 10 children

Theatre Workshop for primary age children – 3 days in February 2020 – 11 attendees

Circus Skills – for primary age children – 30th May with 7 attendees and 8th August with 8 attendees

We also continue to provide on-going training to adopters and this has included;

Talking about Adoption workshops – June 2019 – 16 attendees

Courses planned by the Training section for adopters, and SGO carers were advertised in the newsletters as available to be booked via the LSCB website:

Tier 3

This Tier provides specialised therapeutic support to those families who require direct adoption support with tailored plans of support intervention. All adoption support referrals are now completed by the Adoption Support Team. Safeguarding Referrals continue to be assessed by the Family Support and Assessment Teams. Over a hundred adoption/SGO support assessments have been completed and the majority indicated some form of therapeutic intervention was required. Cases can be allocated to Post Adoption Support workers who are trained to provide specialist therapeutic input across a range of therapeutic models including Dyadic Therapy, Theraplay, Psychotherapy, EMDR and Non Violent Resistance, but the vast majority are commissioned using the adoption support fund grants .

In addition to the above services, we provided direct financial support through allowances for over 100 adoptive families through the period 2019-2020. This totals £750,000 over the year.

During 2019/20 the support service received 145 new referrals that became support cases under Tier 3. The requests for support covered the following areas:

- Attachment difficulties
- Life Story work
- Contact issues
- Requests for funding for support
- Requests for respite care.
- Request for therapeutic or Theraplay input
- Mediation for adoptive families to maintain the adoptive placement.
- Child on parent violence.

It is clear that the service is managing some extremely complex cases with children who have significant difficulties. This is indicative of the Service being able to target support appropriately and reflects a small but highly skilled team. The significant support from the Adoption Support Fund has made a positive difference to the speed at which these specialised services can be delivered, and the range of services which can be offered to adopters. 145 applications were made to the fund and all were successful. A total of £350,000 was claimed from the fund in 2019/20.

The Local Authority continues to invest in the on-going training of Adoption Support staff ensuring that Clinical supervision is available to therapists within the Team and that staff participate in on going therapeutic training to ensure that the needs of families can be met. This has included further training in DDP and Therapeutic Lifestory work.

National Changes for 2019/20

Lincolnshire has been actively involved in developing plans for a regional adoption agency and is in the process of developing a 'partnership' with Leicester , Leicestershire, Rutland and North Lincolnshire who joined us in January 2020.

The target date for achieving regional adoption agencies is 2020, so there will be the need to progress plans for this over the next 12 months ,with the 'launch' of the new regional adoption partnership.

It is essential that going forward the agency has a clear focus on how best to deliver services in a way that maximises the impact of limited resources and that will include looking at efficiencies which can be delivered through the regionalisation agenda.

Service planning

Our development goals for the coming 12 month period continue to be aligned to the five County Council principles set out at the beginning of the report and the objectives for children which are set out below.

Children and young people are healthy and safe.

To continue to develop the 'signs of safety 'model, and utilisation of restorative practice, in the adoption process, and as the framework for preparing children for placement. Plans are in place for the children's SW to undertake 'restorative ' work wherever possible in their work with birth parents.

Maintain and consolidate progress on improving adoption scorecard performance against key threshold measures to minimise delay for children requiring adoption placements.

Ensure that placements are timely either through placing children as soon as they are subject to a Placement Order or through an early placement scheme, in order to promote positive attachment and making best use of in house , regional and national family finding.

To maintain focus on children's health checks

To extend the range of training available to adopters, to provide them with therapeutic parenting skills

To plan and implement training for 'family and friends' of adopters, and enable them to support families in their role as adopters.

Children develop full potential in early years and are ready for school

- Extending the Adoption Support Service to include intensive support at the early stage in placements for sibling groups, in order to promote therapeutic parenting, and attachment work early in the placement, so that children are 'ready for school '.
- Making use of the Caring 2 learn project with adopters.
- Support and develop 'play and stay' adoptive family groups to promote social learning.
- Making good use of nursery provision for adopted children.

Learn and achieve.

- Maximise the benefits to adoptive families in Lincolnshire arising from the Adoption Support Fund.
- Continue to make best use of the pupil premium to support adopted children in school.
- To be creative and innovative in terms of developing children's activities to include a 'Talk about Adoption' workshop.
- Continue the 'Transitions ' training course for adopters and foster carers together.

Children and young people are ready for adult life.

- Increase the link with the 'leaving care service' to ensure smooth transitions for adopted/SGO young people into independent living .
- To continue to provide activities for adopted children who build their skills, recognise their achievements, and build their confidence.
- Support adopted young people who are in full time further education.

Best use of Resources

- Explore options to broaden Adoption Support Model to other permanence options starting with Special Guardianship Orders.

- Through the regional lead, to continue to participate and support the emerging regionalisation agenda, positioning Lincolnshire at the forefront of any development.
- To make best use of the teams resources to develop adoption support services

Summary

The challenge for 2019/20 was to adjust services in line with the significant service developments, whilst maintaining high levels of performance against government targets. There have been issues relating to the court process, which has created delay for some children, and made the government timescales more challenging to achieve. Also, as more birth parents are contesting adoption orders, this increases the period of time that the cases remain open. The caseloads for the adoption SW's have increased, so all have worked hard to manage this.

There has been a reduction in numbers of adopters coming forward, but this has been sustainable as there were less children coming through, and so we have adopters awaiting placement and thereby still have choice of placement. The Service will continue to embed the changes to practice resulting from statutory and legislative reform and translate them into positive outcomes for children, adoptive families and those needing support post adoption.

There has been extensive activity and progress in building the post adoption / SGO services, and an additional post was established to support SGO families. In addition the team have made significant progress in the management of the Adoption Support Fund to enable Lincolnshire families to benefit from a range of therapeutic services.

Performance in 2019/20 against the key threshold measures in the adoption scorecard has remained high both for the single year and for the three year rolling average. The number of adoptions completed this year was back to the average but the timescales have consistently improved. The number of children waiting at the year-end has decreased due to the team being proactive in family finding.

The Adoption Service was subject to scrutiny by Ofsted along with the rest of Children's Services in April 2019. The inspection was undertaken using the new ILACS Framework with a clear focus on outcomes for children. To again achieve a judgement of 'Outstanding' was a strong endorsement of the professionalism and expertise within the team and the confidence shown to it by senior managers and the council as a whole.

There has been continued interest from a range of other providers around the strategy, systems and practices which sit behind the success of the service. This led to a number of invitations to showcase the Service at regional and national events which has enabled the agency to assist other LA adoption agencies in getting to "Good" and has raised the profile of Lincolnshire's Adoption Service. Hopefully the next year will see further involvement in showcasing our Service.

Going forward the Service will look to respond positively to the challenges presented through austerity and the regionalisation agenda and, in so doing, maintain its strong focus on delivering excellent outcomes for the children of Lincolnshire who have a plan for adoption.



Yvonne Shearwood
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