



# Adoption Service

## Annual Report

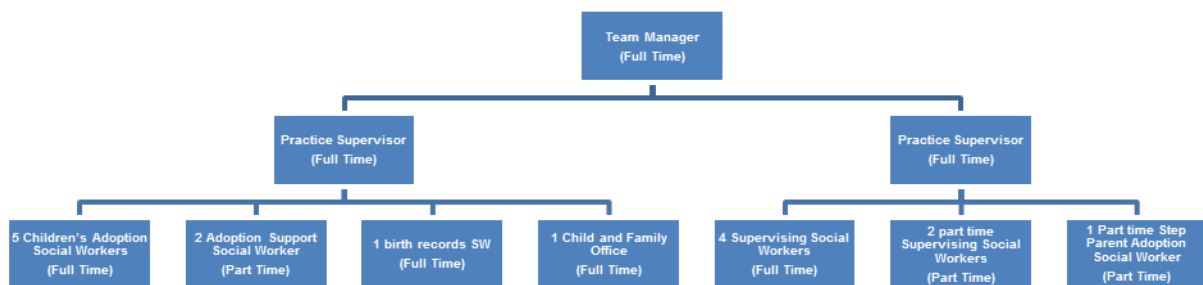
### 2011/2012

## **Introduction**

The Adoption Service continues to provide services to children, adoptive family members and birth family members as required by the National Adoption Minimum Standards 2003, National Adoption Minimum Standards 2011, Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children Act 1989 and 2004.

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

## **Service Structure Chart.**



The adoption Service is staffed by a Team Manager, two Practice Supervisors, five children's Adoption Social Workers as well as four full time and two part time Supervising Social Workers. The adoption support team has one birth records Social Worker, one full time and two part time Adoption Support Social Workers and one part time Step Parent Adoption worker. There is also a part time therapy worker.

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 and therapeutic parenting courses for adoption support. The intermediary Social Worker carries out the agency's statutory duties of birth record counselling for adopted adults and some intermediary trace and introduction services for adopted adults and birth relatives. The Adoption Support Social Workers complete work directly with adopters and adoptees 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 co ordinates 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 2011/2012**

Adoption Orders granted April 2011 – March 2012

- C23 outturn at March 2012 was 58
- Including 14 Special Guardianship Orders

- NI 61 (placement of children within 12 months of best interest decision adoption) = 84.1%

This performance ensures that Lincolnshire is still amongst the highest performing authorities nationally. There has been a small decrease in performance this year which is entirely due to the placement of children with highly complex, medical, and behavioural needs.

There has been a rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders to secure long-term families for children. In 2011/12, 14 children and young people were made the subjects of Special Guardianship Orders with their previous foster carers. Not only do Special Guardianship Orders provide placement stability and security and improved outcomes for children and young people, they reduce the numbers of children and young people remaining/becoming looked after. Thus reducing costs to the Local authority. Out of the 14 Special guardianship orders granted. There were 6 children over the age of 10 made subject to SGO's, 2 boys and 4 girls ranging in age from 13 –17 years.

### **Progress in relation to identified Development Goals from Annual Report 2010/2011**

#### **Targeted Recruitment**

Our recruitment strategy was aimed at carers coming forward that could better meet the needs of the children awaiting placement, we successfully placed five sibling groups and reduced applications for adopters looking for children under 2.

As the year progressed, a change in our profile of looked after children meant we had a greater need for placements of children under 5 and so changed our strategy quarterly to encourage applications from people to come forward for under 5's. The strategy also targeted prospective adopters that would consider uncertain medical outcomes, disabilities, or siblings groups. A campaign for eastern European adopters in November 2012 led to 3 applications from that community and a further 11 from non-white British applicants.

A targeted recruitment and marketing strategy remains in place for these priority groups and is reviewed quarterly. However Lincolnshire will continue to recruit a diverse range of adopters in order to increase the national pool of adopters and choice of placements.

#### **Increase of direct placement scheme to meet the needs of relinquished children.**

This scheme continues to develop with a small number of placements each year. As you will see below this corresponds with small numbers of children who come to us having been relinquished for adoption. Three children were placed under this scheme in 2011/12. Direct placements mean that children can be placed as early as possible with their permanent family.

**Adoption Panel Training:**

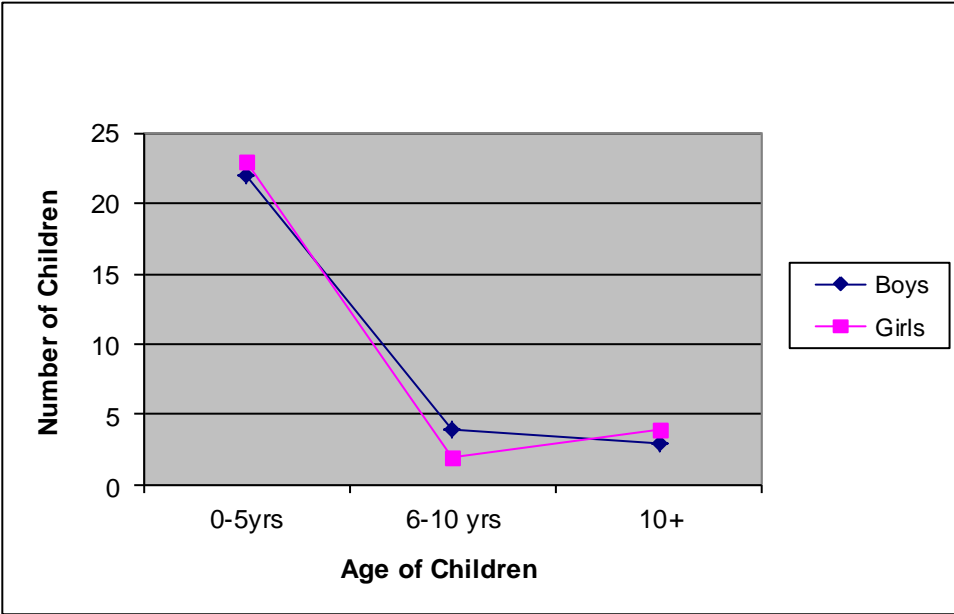
Panel have now had training on both sibling issues and an induction programme is in place for all new members. A number of changes to the panel process were introduced in April 2012 with the issue of Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011 including new quoracy arrangements and the introduction of a central list for panel members from which a panel can be constituted rather than a set membership. This gives panel greater flexibility to ensure it is always correctly constituted. Panel continue to play a critical role in scrutinising the work of the adoption service and providing a quality assurance function for reports on adopters and children.

**Implementation of National Minimum Standards Adoption 2011**

New National Minimum Standards were introduced alongside amendments to the Adoption Agencies Regulations in April 2011. Achievement of progress in the area was clearly evidenced by the Ofsted Inspection judgement of the adoption service as Outstanding in January 2012. Key elements in this for the child include clear timescales for completion of Life Story Books and Later in Life Letters following adoption which was an area for improvement identified in the recent Ofsted inspection. Additional timescales relating to timescales for review panel and court applications have been introduced. For adopters there is the introduction of a timescale of 8 months from application to approval and a compulsory requirement to refer on to the National Adoption Register 12 weeks following approval.

**Adoption activity for 2011/2012**

**Profile of children adopted 2011/2012:**



Lincolnshire Adoption Agency achieved 44 adoption orders during 2011/2012 an increase of 5 from the previous year's figures 54. In addition to this 14 were Special Guardianship

Orders, counted by the DfE as adoptions because they have secured permanence for children unable to live with birth family relatives.

The group included 27 male children and 31 female. The largest group consists of 0-5 years with 44 children in this category. Of these there were 21 boys and 23 girls. Usually there is more than one child from the birth family to place and the children are, wherever possible and appropriate, being placed with an older sibling.

In this year there were placements of 2 sibling groups of three children, aged 8, 4 and 1yr, and 8, 5, and 3 years respectively. There were also 2 sibling groups of 2 children placed ranging in age from aged between 2yrs and 6 years. There were 31 single placements one of whom was a child aged 11 years, with the other 29 being children under the age of 5 yrs, with over 50% being under 3 years old at the time of placement. This fits with adopter profiles as a single child 0-5 years remains a strong preference for many members of the public making enquiries about adoption. There are 6 children placed in the 6-10 years category, 16 children in the 2—5 years, and 20 children under 2 years when placed.

There were 4 children who were adopted by their foster carer, 3 boys and 1 girl aged between 2 years and 7 years. Also there were 2 children who were placed with their older siblings into adoptive families. One of these was a local family where the baby girl was the third child in the adoptive family, and one was out of county where the child again became the third child in the family.

Five of the children were relinquished babies, three girls and two boys. Of these three were non-white British children. Two were of Eastern Europe heritage, and one was a British/ Portuguese dual heritage child. One of these babies was placed in a direct placement, straight from the hospital and the other 4 were placed very early with their prospective adopters. One of the babies was adopted within 6 months of being born, and the other 4 were adopted within a year of being born.

There were a number of sibling groups in this cohort, and currently the service is seeing an increase in children coming forward for adoption in groups.

### **10 children were part of a sibling group**

2 siblings = 3 groups

2 siblings = 2 groups.

Whilst the number of sibling groups coming through has not reduced, there has been a reduction in the number of adopters coming forward for sibling groups so this remains a strong focus for our recruitment strategy

### **Profile of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2011/12**

During April 2011 to March 2012, 54 children received a best interest decision of adoption this is an increase of 3 from the previous year's figures of 51. Of these children there were the following groups of siblings:

- 1 group of 4 children
- 4 groups of 3 children
- 8 groups of 2 children
- 22 single children

There is an increase in the number of sibling groups who are being approved for adoption and in addition to this 4 of the single children have older siblings already adopted who will be approaching to see if they can accommodate another placement. A further 4 of these children have birth mothers who are already pregnant again so there will be further siblings to place.

#### **Age Ranges of children with a best interest plan of adoption 2011/12:**

0 - 5 years	=	48
6 - 10 years	=	6
10 plus	=	0

The predominant ethnicity of the children is white British. However, there is a small increase in the numbers of dual heritage children. There were 2 Latvian children, one dual heritage British Portuguese, one dual heritage child of Caribbean heritage and 50 white British children. The matching policy for Lincolnshire already matches the approach advocated in the new Adoption Action Plan specifically to ensure that the child is not kept waiting for the perfect ethnic match if there is a good family who can meet all their other needs.

Whilst children under 5 years continue to be the largest age group placed for adoption, these children often come as part of a sibling group with older children and this can present a challenge to find adoptive placements, as adopters continue to show the greatest interest for one child in the 0-5 age group. The recruitment strategy does take this factor into account and the target for campaigns has been for adopters willing to consider a sibling group that does include a wide age range.

There is an overall increase in numbers of children with an adoption plan which is a reflection of the overall numbers of Looked After Children for Lincolnshire in 2011/2012. We need to work hard to maintain sufficient numbers of adopters for the under fives age group, whilst also ensuring adopters are available to meet the needs of sibling groups.

#### **Placement of Children within 12 months of the best interest decision for adoption 2011**

Adoption is subject to one national indicator NI61 that measures the length of time it takes to place a child with their adoptive family once a best interest decision for adoption has been made by the Agency Decision Maker.

As shown in the comparison table below Lincolnshire has shown consistently high performance against this indicator. Performance is high in both statistical group and national comparison:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
All England	75.1%	75.6%	75%	72.4%	74%	
Stat neighbour	76.3%	68.2%	69%	70.4%	71.4%	Will be available Sept 12
Lincolnshire	91.9%	87.2%	84.6%	89.7%	90.2%	84.1%

**Current performance for NI61 (best interest decision to placement) = 84.1%**

This equates to 37 of 44 children were placed within 12 months of best interest decision.

On the occasions where children were placed outside of the timescale the delay has been due to the extremely complex needs of the children. However, when a placement was achieved, it was with their existing foster carers, this ensured they maintained the continuity of placement. In this context the achievement should be seen as a positive outcome despite the delay in placement.

During 2011/12 37 children have been linked with adopters, which is an increase of 6 children as compared to last year.

**Children Awaiting Placement at the close of 2011/12**

There were 49 children awaiting placement at the end of 2011/12. All but 17 of these have clear plans for placement which range from a family being explored through to children whose link has been formally approved at panel, and are in the process of being introduced into the new family.

All of these children but four received a best interest decision during the preceding year. Only four children had been waiting for a placement since 2010. Two of these were children part of a sibling group of 4 children, where efforts to place together had created delay. One is a child with complex special needs, and the other was a child who had had an adoption disruption and needed some time to settle, before pursuing a further adoption placement.

There were nine sibling groups awaiting placement at the end of the year. Seven were groups of 2 children and there were two groups of 3 children, and one group of 4 children. The placement of sibling groups presents by far the greatest challenge for the service but one which we continually strive to meet, particularly through our 2012/13 recruitment strategy.

**Adopters approved as suitable to adopt during 2011/12**

A total of 30 adoptive parents were approved to adopt UK children during 2011/12 and one other approved for an inter country adoption. This is an increase of four from 2010/2011.

<b>Profile of adopter approval:</b>	
Adopters approved for 1 child	22
Adopters approved for 2 children	7
Adopters approved for 3 children	1
Total:	30

<b>Adopters approved to adopt in following age ranges:</b>	
0 – 5	25
5+	5

Adopters approved for Inter country adoption	1
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Of the 30 approved adopters, the following have these non-standard profiles:

Foster carers applying to adopt a foster child/ren	5
Adopters approved for a direct placement	1
Adopters applying to adopt a sibling of their adopted child/ren	1

In almost all cases, prospective adopters have matched the needs of children awaiting placement and our approach, in line with new government expectations, has been to ensure children are not delayed in order to achieve the 'perfect match'.

There have been fewer adopters this year who have been approved to adopt the larger (3+) sibling groups and no adopters were approved to specifically adopt children with disabilities. This is not an issue specific to Lincolnshire and reflects a national trend we will respond to this challenge through our targeted recruitment approach.

### **Panel Activity**

The Adoption and the Adoption/Permanence panels have met on 29 occasions between 1 April 2011 and the 31 March 2012.

The adoption panel and the agency decision-maker work together to make timely and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives. Panel monitor two Minimum Standards that address timescales for children's plans and one concerning timescales for applicants.

### **Children Plans – NMS 17.6 and 17.8**

Since April 2011 the National Minimum Standard 17.6 "Adoption panels make a considered recommendation on whether the child should be placed for adoption within two months of the statutory review where adoption was identified as the permanence plan" has been measured at panel:



Period	Cases that met timescale	Cases that did not meet the timescale	Total	% within the timescales
April – September	4	8	12	33%
October – March	18	17	35	51%

National Minimum Standard 17.8 requires the adoption panel to make a considered recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular prospective adopters within six months of the adoption agency’s decision-maker deciding that the child should be placed for adoption:

Period	Cases that met timescale	Cases that did not meet the timescale	Total	% within the timescales
April – September	7	6	13	54%
October – March	11	7	18	61%

### Applicants

Since April 2011 the National Minimum Standard 17.7 “Adoption panels make a considered recommendation on the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt within eight months of receipt of the prospective adopter’s formal application to be assessed” has been measured at panel:

Period	Cases that met timescale	Cases that did not meet the timescale	Total	% within the timescales
April – September	7	8	15	47%
October – March	8	7	15	53%

### Analysis

With regard to the data concerning applicants during the period April 2011 – March 2012, we can see an increase in the number completed within the 8 months timescales. This will be due to the reducing number of cases which commenced prior to the introduction of this measure in April 2011. The requirements of the National Minimum Standards has resulted in a development of processes such as booking link panels as soon as Children’s plans have been recommended, and booking applicants panel dates from the date that they have been accepted to ensure that the National Minimum Standard is met.

In order to further improve the process with regard to children’s plans, the adoption team meet on a monthly basis with our Legal Advisers. This is to ensure that these cases are completed on schedule and to enable Social Workers to have the expert witness statements available to them as soon as possible.

Children’s plans are now coming to panel more regularly within the prescribed 6 week period following the statutory review. This ensures that the decision to place a child for adoption is made promptly to minimise delay.

**Panel Development and Training**

In line with the National Minimum Standards issued in 2011, Lincolnshire County Council have introduced a “central list” of panel members to enable each panel to be quorate and maintain a core of experience in the issues around in fostering and with the assessment and preparation of foster carers.

**Panel Training**

There has been a range of training undertaken by panel this year to assist them to manage the changes to regulations and National Minimum standards. These include:-

- 24 June 2011 Lincolnshire Family Justice Council Training Day
- 14 September 2011 review of Serious Case Review (Cheshire)
- 21 September 2011 Discussion Group “The Ministers Discussion Group with Young People on Adoption”
- 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012 BAAF Joint Training with Adoption Team and Panel considering Assessment styles
- 7<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012 Bite size training on Adult Attachment style Interviews

The 2012 Ofsted inspection of the adoption service made the following assessment of panel as 'strongly independent with clear expectations about the quality of reports presented to panel.....panel is not afraid to defer or turn down applications, and the agency decision maker does not always agree with panel's recommendations. This process of independent checks and scrutiny ensures that children are offered the optimum conditions to prosper and thrive in the care of their adoptive parents with whom they are carefully matched.'

**Adoption Support**

Adoption Support continues to be organised on a tier level as follows:

<b>Tier 1</b>	Wide minimum support to adopters includes: Contact co ordination, 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, newly established, seminars for grandparents of adopters.
<b>Tier 2</b>	All of tier 1 and in addition adoption support groups/activities for adopters and for children affected by adoption.

<b>Tier 3</b>	Previous tier support plus specific adoption support include assessment of need, individual adoption support packages, Theraplay clinic sessions to promote attachment. This tier also includes access to primary mental health services and CAMHS.
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**Tier 1**

The Lincolnshire 'Opt to Adopt' website is a valuable resource of support to adopters and adopted children and is regularly updated. This secure site has chat postings with advice re parenting an adopted child, information re theraplay techniques, safeguarding information including how to help a child access the internet safely. The site advertised 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.

The service received 90 referrals for Birth records counselling which is broadly in line with last year and 21 enquiries from Birth Relatives seeking advice and support in tracing which is down a third from last year. Lincolnshire does not provide intermediary services.

Birth Ties service delivered by After Adoption, supplies counselling to birth relatives who have lost their children to adoption. The contract is at capacity and provided counselling to 32 birth parents/relatives during this year.

## Contact

### Indirect Letterbox contact activity

#### April 2011 - March 2012

Area team adoptive family from	No. of new cases added	No. of cases removed**	No. of exchanges	No. needing reminder	Total no. of current cases
West Lindsey	4	3	77	0	64
East Lindsey	5	4	45	5	37
Lincoln	4	2	35	3	31
North Kesteven	12	5	80	20	70
Boston	1	1	24	3	24
South Kesteven	4	2	77	20	73
South Holland	1	2	26	2	24
OOO*	4	5	79	25	63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>386</b>

#### Direct contact

- 8 Direct contacts between adopted children and birth parents
- 17 Direct contacts between adopted siblings
- 14 Direct contacts between adopted children and their non adopted siblings
- 8 Direct contacts between adopted children and birth grandparents

#### Tier 2

Lincolnshire Adoption Service continues to offer 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. The service introduced a grandparent's support group in 2011 and due to the success of this service this has been expanded across the county. We have now embedded our programme of social activities to be organised during the school vacation to enable adopters and children to meet and network when there is practical space. These include the highly successful Hill Holt and

Caistor activity days supplemented by more local drop in groups such as 'Chat and Chill' and 'Stay and Play' for under 5s.

### **Tier 3**

This tier provides support to those families who require direct adoption support to the family with tailored plans of support intervention. All referrals first receive via the FAST team to see what additional support can be provided through our universal and targeted services. Works will 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 and Psychotherapy. In addition to the above services, we provide direct financial support to 172 families through the period 2011-2012. This totals £703,880 which means that we supported families for an average £4,092 each.

During 2011/2012 the support service received 26 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.

### **The National Agenda**

The Government is committed to improving the adoption system by reducing delay and placing children faster with stable loving families.

Whilst the Government recognises that some agencies provide an "excellent service" in finding families and placing children, there is a need to ensure the adoption system works consistently well for all children and adopters, irrespective of which agency is involved.

In April 2012, The Action Plan for adoption was published, which sets out proposals for tackling delay in the adoption system. It outlines what the government intends to do to accelerate the whole adoption process so that more children will benefit from adoption and more rapidly

- Legislate to reduce the number of adoptions delayed in order to achieve a perfect or near ethnic match between adopters and children
- Swifter use of the National Adoption Register
- Encourage all local authorities to seek to place children with their potential adopters in anticipation of the court's placement order.
- Speed up the adopter assessment process from 8 months to 6 months.
- Introduce a fast-track process for those who have adopted before or who are foster carers wanting to adopt a child in their care.
- Develop the national Gateway to adoption as a consistent source of advice and information for those thinking about adoption.

- Introduce a score card system to measure improvements and overall performance in tackling delay across the adoption service.

New Framework for inspection came into effect from 1st April 2012. The inspection framework aims to raise standards and drive improvement in the sector. This will require a greater focus on improving outcomes for children and young people, and reducing delay. The local authority will receive 10 days notice of a full inspection. Services judged outstanding will continue to be inspected once in each three year inspection cycle.

### **The Family Justice Review panel**

The Family Justice Review panel was appointed to review the whole of the family justice system in England and Wales, looking at all aspects of the system from court decisions on taking children into care, to disputes over contact with children when parents divorce. It was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education, and the Welsh Government.

The family justice system is a network of organisations and individuals from many different professions all working co-operatively and collaboratively so that the system achieves its aims. The review concluded that Public Law cases are taking too long. Care proceedings currently take on average 56 weeks to conclude. These delays contribute to the 2yrs it takes on average for a child to be adopted.

The FJ Review has concluded that the time limit for care proceedings should be set at 6 months. There are also amendments to statutory instruments. The Department for Education has published amendments to the Statutory Guidance to reflect the changes to be implemented by the Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012, which will come into force on 1 September this year. The primary change made by the Regulations is that Adoption Panels will no longer be involved in the agency's process of deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the Court will be involved in the decision. Panel will still be required to consider cases and make recommendations where the child's parents will consent to the child being placed for adoption. Where the child's parents are not prepared to consent, where care proceedings are ongoing or where the child has no parents, the case must be referred direct to the agency decision maker (ADM). (Ch 2, para 64).

The adoption Panel has been briefed by the panel adviser in regard to this and the possible implications that this may have on the work of the agency and the panel.

### **Development goals for 2012/2013**

- Sustain Performance against new Balance Scorecard \*
- Successfully implement early provisions of government 'Action Plan for Adoption'
- Evaluate and implement the introduction of a four day post placement training course for all adopter to assist them in the early stages of the placement

- Maintain recruitment performance for key groups
- Introduce Safebase training for all adopters. Safebase is a nationally recognised programme delivered in partnership with a national adoption charity to assist adopters manage some of the more challenging behaviours adopted children present

\* Note: The balanced scorecard is a set of key measures relating to timings for a child's journey through care. At present we are exceeding all target measures for the current year and the following year

## Summary

The past 12 months have been successful for the Adoption Service with increased levels of recruitment and successful adoptions of children. The achievement of an outstanding judgement for the adoption inspection in January 2012 was a positive endorsement for the service.

The inspectorate found that the overall quality rating is outstanding.

*'Children enjoy outstanding developmental outcomes with quick progress to successful placements with their adoptive parents. Children's needs are central to the operation of the service and they benefit from a wealth of good practice from staff who are highly competent, well supported and appropriately qualified. Safeguarding features strongly at every stage and the service ensures that children are protected and kept safe from harm. The adoption panel plays an important and highly effective role in determining the ability of prospective adopters to safeguard children and meet their needs. Excellent inter-agency working provides children and their adoptive parents with an efficient and effective service which helps to sustain and maintain adoptive placements. The service learns through consultation with children and adapts the delivery of services accordingly.'*

The adoption support service continues to develop and is seeking to manage the growing requirements from adopters who are accepting the placement of increasingly complex children. The introduction of the balanced scorecard allows the service to compare itself, favourably to its statutory neighbours and other local authorities. Recruitment remains a challenge although Lincolnshire performance is keeping pace with other areas. Lincolnshire is increasingly being recognised as a centre for outstanding practice and has received numerous approaches from other local Authorities to share good practice. Recently the Adoption Service was approached to contribute to a 'Children and Young People Now' magazine to share some of the learning from the recent inspection report.

The coming year will present a number of challenges specifically surrounding the bill to enact the key elements of the Adoption Action Plan. Lincolnshire is well placed to meet most of these challenges and benefits from a strong track record in operational and strategic delivery as well as high levels of support from elected members.



V5 5.7.12

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