



**Adoption Service  
6 Month Report  
(Incorporating the Adoption Panel 6 Month Report)  
April 2019 - September 2019**

### **National Agenda and Developments**

The Government has maintained its spotlight on adoption. The Department for Education published a new adoption policy paper, *Adoption-A Vision for Change*, on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2016. This paper explains how the government plans to address challenges in the adoption system over the next four years. The vision for 2020 is an adoption system where:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence.
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care.
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay.
- Every adoptive family has access to an on-going package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

Other key announcements include:

#### **Regional Adoption Agencies.**

The DFE continues to support proposed RAAs, and there are a considerable number of regional adoption agencies around the country who have 'launched ' and are operating. In our area Adoption East Midlands, which incorporates Nottinghamshire, Nottingham

City, Derbyshire and Derby City has launched as a region with Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire and Leicester City developing plans to operate as a 'partnership'. The partnership has launched family finding arrangements, worked on proposals for shared data, budgets and has completed work on aligning processes and procedures.

**Workforce:** Developing a robust continuous professional development programme to enable social workers to develop the skills they need to make and support robust permanence decisions.

**Adoption Support Fund:** Continuation of the ASF fund was agreed for a further 6 months until September 2020 was announced so that support could continue to adopted young people and their families in the transition period, as organisations change to regional arrangements. This would include children with special needs up to age 25, children adopted from other countries via inter-country adoptions and support to special guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.

**Health:** The DFE launched new Education and Health plans for adopted and looked after children. These will set out best practice to be followed in treatment/support of these children.

**Education:** Use of legislation to expand the role of virtual schools' heads and consider how designated teachers can continue to support children who have left care under an adoption order or an SGO.

## **Introduction**

This report will detail both the current performance of Lincolnshire Adoption Service and our response in developing the service to respond positively to the challenges set out in the government agenda. In both performance and development the focus remains on providing children in Lincolnshire, with a plan for adoption, and the best possible outcome.

The Adoption Service continues to provide services to children, adoptive family members and birth family members as required by the National Adoption Minimum Standards 2014, Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations, the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and is supported by the Adoption Statutory Guidance 2014.

The Adoption Team is a single countywide service with office bases at Lincoln, Sleaford and Louth. The service is committed to seeking out best practice and promoting innovative ways to reduce delay and recruit the widest possible choice of adoptive families.

This report also incorporates the Adoption Panel 6 month report. The Adoption 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*'.

This sub-standard is linked to standard 25.6 of the National Minimum Standards detailing the need for these reports to cover the following:

- Number type and age of children awaiting adoptive placement
- How long they have been waiting
- Agency's responsiveness in relation to applications to adopt i.e. timescales
- Number of children placed for adoption since last six monthly reports
- Number of disrupted placements
- Number of children where there has been a change of plan.

The report also provides an overview of the work of the service, including performance against the adoption scorecard and developments to ensure children achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Adoption Service has considered the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and how these may impact upon the work of the Adoption Service. As a result, the service has increasingly sought to focus across the broader permanence agenda working effectively with other teams within children's services and key partners in health and education.

The Adoption Service is staffed by a Team Manager, three Practice Supervisors, six Children's Adoption Social Workers and the Family Finding Coordinator, as well as 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 and one children and family's officer.

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 Officers co-ordinate 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. In addition they support the SWs in the task of "Family Finding".

### **Adoption Performance April 2019-September 2019**

#### **Adoption Scorecard**

The most relevant indicators refer to the years ending 31 March 2019.

There are 3 main indicators pertinent to adoption performance:

- (A1) Average time between entering care and being placed for adoption, this remained at 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, well above the all England average of 56%.
- Adoptions as a percentage of children leaving care remain strong at 12%.

Lincolnshire performs better than the average performance across our statistical neighbours, on all measures.

The vast majority of Lincolnshire children are placed quickly and this is confirmed by the performance against the A2 indicator; which at the end of March 2019 was 74 %.

These remain to be strong figures compared to both statistical neighbours and the national average. There continues to be a small cohort of children whose timescales will fall out of the target and this is due to applications from parents for leave of the court to appeal Placement Orders and Adoption Orders. This year has seen a slight decrease in the number of children with a plan of adoption, from 30 last half year to 25 this year, which indicates that there continue to be high numbers of children who may have a decision for adoption and that the numbers being placed on Special Guardianship Orders have plateaued.

The backlog of children awaiting placement has remained fairly low throughout the year so that all but a small number of children with special needs/disabilities or in sibling groups were waiting. Most of the children are being matched with adopters very swiftly.

The balance between the numbers of children with a plan for adoption and the numbers of approved adopters waiting has changed this year with an increase in the numbers of adopters waiting, so that there were more adopters waiting than children waiting.

### **Key Performance Indicators**

Adoption Orders granted April 2019- September 2019

- 31 Adoptions [ a 50% increase from last year]
- 25 Special Guardianship Orders. [11 less than last year]

The number of children adopted between April and September 2019 has increased considerably with a 50% increase on last year and is well above 'target'. Many of these cases have been delayed in court due to contested hearings. The number of Special Guardianship Orders has continued to reduce slightly.

## **Adoption Panel Activity for 1st April 2019 – 30th September 2019**

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 Agency Advisor along with Team Managers from Fostering, Adoption, FAST, Children Looked After 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 and RE H 2019 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 Advisory Group (QAAG) 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 that any key points these raise 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 considered in their decision making process.

The Agency 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 journey well. The reports are written in a style which is easy to read and enables the reader to clearly understand key decision making of the agency. The reports are mindful and sensitive to the various audiences who will be reading each child's personal story. The reports are clearly evidencing the necessary checks and balances when summarising why alternative carers have not been assessed positively.

There has been clear consideration made as to how the views of children who are nonverbal, can still be included in the reports. There has been clear evidence of some words and pictures direct work undertaken with children to ascertain their wishes and feelings.

The wishes and views of birth parents can sometimes be difficult for the workers to report on due to the family disengaging with the workers; these instances are increasing and those where the family have disengaged the worker has detailed the reasons why the views have not been forthcoming.

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

The use of Signs of Safety is clearly evidenced appropriately in the reports and is well embedded.

This approach has provided the reports with consistency and enables the reader to see clear evidence of the concerns for the child summarised in a user friendly way, without detracting from the main focus of a Child Permanence Report.

Between April 2019 and September 2019, the following children have had a decision to support a plan for Adoption made by the Agency Decision Maker compared to the previous 3 years.

## Half Yearly Figures

**01.04.19 to 30.09.19**

	2019/2020 (April – Sept)	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Boys approved for adoption	12	12	18	35	17	12
Girls approved for adoption	7	13	14	20	6	8
<b>Total children approved for adoption</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>20</b>
Single children approved	17	16	15	41	15	16
Children in sibling groups of two	1 [2]	4 [8]	4 [8]	4 [8]	2 [4]	2 [4]

Children in sibling groups of three	0	0	3 [9]	2 [6]	0	0
Children in sibling groups of four	0	0	0	0	1 [4]	0
White British children	15	25	27	52	22	19
Other white background (European)	3	1	1	1	1	1
Other	0	0	4	2	0	0
Age Range 0 - 2	17	14	19	32	15	11
Age Range 3 - 5	2	2	11	15	6	8
Age Range 6 - 8	0	1	2	6	2	1
Age Range 9 -11	0	0	0	2	0	0
<b>% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.6</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

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

	2019/20 (April – Sept)	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Total Children	14	17	32	55	23
Linked with adopters in timescale NMS 17.7	8	13	9	23	17
Linked with adopters outside timescale NMS 17.7	6	2	3	3	1
Awaiting link	29		20	29	1
Returned to family	2		0	0	4
<b>% meeting the National Minimum Standard 17.7</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>94.5%</b>	<b>95%</b>

### **Suitability of Prospective Adopters**

There have been 12 Panels in this period. This figure is a decrease to the previous year, which was 13 Panels. In that time the following applicants have been approved;

	2019/20 (April – Sept)	2018	2017	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	17	13	12	22	32	24
Of which Foster to Adopt	6	5	8	14	12	0
Foster to Adopt New Applications	5	4	6	5	No Data	No Data
Foster to Adopt Subsequent Applications	1	1	2	9	No Data	No Data

	2019/20 (April – Sept)	2018	2017	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	14	12	6	13	20	14
Approved for two children	3	1	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	0	1	1

	2019/20 (April – Sept)	2018	2017	2016/17	2015/16
White British	16	13	12	21	29
Asian/Asian British – Indian	0	0	0	1	2
Other white background	1	0	0	0	1

The Prospective Adopter 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 14 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.

## Analysis

There is evidence within the minutes of Panel that detail the robust 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 14 days ahead of either the approval/link 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 clear assessment 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.

Any discrepancies between the child and the potential adopters must be detailed in the reports and an explanation as to why this match is seen as suitable and how these discrepancies can be alleviated within the support plan. The Panel Members will also assess the relative strengths of each match.

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 consistently ensure that the adopter/adopters can maintain and have an understanding regarding the ethnicity or cultural aspects of children and have been satisfied that they 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 appropriate and detailed to ensure that the needs of the individual child can be met in the suggested placement.

The agency continues to work very well with the Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs playing a more integral role in this feedback. This has allowed the agency and Panel to work collaboratively to develop any areas for training.

## **Analysis**

The reports continue to have been to a high standard with good child centred support plans on all the cases. Workers have fully addressed and offered evidence in the matching criteria and in cases where discrepancies exist, the support plan details how these issues can be managed within the placement.

All cases which came to panel had clear arrangements for the sharing and management of Letter box contact information which is vital to achieve a good placement.

### **Children Awaiting Placement**

The number of children waiting for an adoptive placement as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 was down to 13 children as compared with 19 children in the previous year. From these 13 children, there were two children with links already booked and three children who were in the process of being adopted by their foster carers. In the group of eight children left, there were two sibling groups of three children, one group of two siblings. Linkmaker, regional family finding, other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies have all been approached. There is regular scrutiny through monthly family finding meetings, of the progress of all children who do not have confirmed link. Senior managers review all children who have not been linked at the 12 weeks stage, through a dedicated Family Finding Review Panel and all social workers are encouraged to meet the government timescales wherever possible. There were an increasing number of children who have had a best interests decision, but where there were then delays in the court arena as a result of additional assessments, viabilities or contests from birth parents has meant that the placement order has not been granted so that family finding cannot progress.

### **Developments**

The Panel have completed training on Attachment Style Interviewing, The Impact of Smoking and Autism awareness.

### **Future Training for Panel**

Further development identified is the challenges of foster to adopt.

Further agency awareness of cerebral palsy.

"Transitions" and the role of the foster carer in moving children on to adoption.

Further review of Adoption Support.

## **Adoption Marketing & Recruitment Activity Report 1<sup>st</sup> April - 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

### **Information Evenings, Marketing and Advertising**

The service's campaign for the 2019-2020 year is a continuation from the previous year with adverts using imagery which depicts the priority needs groups for the service i.e. siblings, additional needs, children aged 3+ and those placed under the foster to adopt scheme. The tag lines and images have been refreshed for 2019-2020 as follows:

*"Someone to keep us together" Could you be their someone? (Siblings)*

*"Someone to be my champion" Could you be his someone? (Additional needs)*

*"Someone to give me a future" Could you be her someone? (Child aged 3+)*

*"Someone to give me stability" Could you be her someone (Foster to adopt)*

Whilst the service is now working in partnership under the Adoption East Midlands banner and will conform to the AEM branding, the campaign message is the same as the previous year for LCC with the aim of building on its success.

During this period two information evenings were held as follows:

- Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June - Branston Hall Hotel in Lincoln, 7:00pm - 9:00pm
- Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June - Brackenborough Hotel in Louth, 7:00pm - 9:00pm

These were attended by 15 prospective households with 5 households completing an Initial Expression of Interest Form, 3 of which had initial visits booked.

Advertising which took place during this quarter directed people to the events and included:

- Paid-for Facebook campaign running from 21<sup>st</sup> May - 4<sup>th</sup> June (directing people to the Lincoln event), and 29<sup>th</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> June (directing people to the Louth event). An additional boost for the Louth event also went out from 30<sup>th</sup> May - 11<sup>th</sup> June.
- Digital adverts on the Lincolnite website (including mobile) from 21<sup>st</sup> May - 4<sup>th</sup> June, and on the Lincolnshire Reporter website (including mobile) from 29<sup>th</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> June advertising both events.
- 50,000 digital impressions targeting Louth, Horncastle and Skegness areas on the JPI Media website from 24<sup>th</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> June advertising the events and linking through to website to book onto an event.
- Advert in Skegness Standard on 29<sup>th</sup> May advertising the Louth event.
- Advert in Louth Leader on 29<sup>th</sup> May advertising the Louth event.
- Advert in Horncastle News on 29<sup>th</sup> May advertising the Louth event.
- Internal communications went out on 30<sup>th</sup> May advertising both of the events.
- Lincs FM advert from 31<sup>st</sup> May - 11<sup>th</sup> June.
- Twitter feeds on LCC Twitter account went out from 31<sup>st</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> June.

Also during this period the service was represented at the Lincolnshire Show on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June.

Generic Facebook posts continue to be done sporadically on the Fostering and Adoption page and convey key messages including who can adopt, what support the service offers, good news stories, and to advertise information evenings etc.

## Recruitment Statistics

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April to the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, 77 adoption and 12 foster to adopt Initial Expressions of Interest forms were completed, and 10 completed Registrations of Interest forms were returned. During this period there were also 17 approvals; 11 for adoption and 6 for foster to adopt.

## 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.
<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 following assessment of need, individual adoption support packages and therapeutic interventions.

### Tier 1

In addition to Adoption East Midlands website, the Adoption Service offers a website to all adopters resident in Lincolnshire, which outlines the adoption support services available. This is accessed via the main County Council website and is a valuable resource of information for adopters and adopted children. There is guidance on telling children about adoption, contact with birth family and the risks of social media. The site also publicises training events, seminars, adoption activities for children and support groups and also enables the adoption service to consult users about planned future services. In addition to the website adopters can contact the adoption helpline for advice and guidance.

The Adopter Focus Group continues to give direction to the current needs of adoptive families, and the move to assisting with funding of activities for Adoption Support Groups to put on activities such as attending local Farm Activity Centres, has resulted in more families have accessing activities and services at a local level.

The service received only 24 [5 from other agencies] referrals for birth records counselling. In the main this has involved a two-hour schedule 2 counselling interview. The individual has been provided with a safe space and opportunity to talk through their thoughts and feelings about their adoption. The conflicting feelings that they often have is between 'loyalty' to their adoptive parents, and the need to know and understand more about their birth family.

Applicants have ranged from 18 years of age to several in their 70s. Many of those who adopted in the 1960s and 1970s have stated that they had positive childhoods.

However, some reported much less positive experiences and this was the first time they had felt able to speak to someone about this. Although we are not a mediation agency we have given advice and guidance about how to use the information that they have received, and many have managed to trace their birth family.

Many of the younger applicants have experienced traumatic childhoods which have included periods in the care system and therefore there can be extensive information to explain. Where necessary, referrals have been made to Birth Ties for support to Birth Families where vulnerable applicants have located birth families and wanting contact. There were only 2 enquiries from birth relatives seeking advice and support with tracing adopted relatives.

The Birth Ties Service, now delivered by PAC UK, supplies counselling to birth relatives who have lost their children to adoption. They also provide some very useful support to birth parents with regards to writing appropriate letterbox updates, and assisting them to come to terms with their situation.

## **Contact**

### **Indirect Letterbox contact activity**

As of 30 September 2019 there were 656 children on the letterbox, which is an increase on last year.

For the six month period there were 25 new children added and 23 children removed as they turned 18.

### **Tier 2**

Lincolnshire Adoption Service offers adoption support groups across the county, coordinated by adopters supported by the service. There are currently four support groups across the County. As service user feedback indicated interest in social activities being organised during the school holidays, there are a number of activities arranged throughout the year. During this period children attended events at various venues

### **Activities for Children –**

- Woodland Adventure Days for primary age children – 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> 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
- Activities Away, outdoor water based activities for secondary age children – 1<sup>st</sup> August – 11 children attended and 15<sup>th</sup> August – 10 children attended
- Circus Skills – for primary age children – 30<sup>th</sup> May – 8 children attended and 8<sup>th</sup> August - 8 children attended.

Lincoln City Football Club Sports Activity Day – 28th August - for primary age children – 15 children attended

### **Training**

- Talking about Adoption workshops – 12<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> June 2019 - 16 people attended
- Therapeutic Parenting Post Placement Day – 24<sup>th</sup> April – 18 people attended
- Therapeutic Parenting Transition Day – 22<sup>nd</sup> May – 20 people attended

### **Tier 3**

This tier provides support to those families who require adoption support assessments and tailored plans of support /intervention.

- Behavioural difficulties children
- Attachment difficulties
- Life story work
- Contact issues
- Requests for funding for therapeutic support
- Requests for respite care
- Request for theraplay input
- Mediation for adoptive families to maintain the adoptive placement

Referrals to the Adoption Support Team are accessed via the Customer Services Team or by calling the Adoption Support Help Line. Issues of Safeguarding or where the child and family need to be supported through Child in Need, these cases continue to be dealt with by Family Assessment and Support Teams and they may refer to the Adoption Support Team if they identify a post adoption support need.

During the six month period, Adoption Support Services responded to numerous contacts of which resulted in advice and information or allocation to a social worker for a full assessment.

47 applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund, of which 46 were successful and resulted in £191,287.27 funds being available – this is significantly higher as at the term of the financial year there was a data cleansing exercise completed and included funds that were required to be sent back and re-applied for, due to this an average application per child is not able to be calculated.

A further 10 cases referred to the adoption support team that did not result in an application to the ASF within the first half of the year.

Training courses provided by the Adoption Support team included Transition training (open to adopters and foster carers); Talking About Adoption and Therapeutic Parenting. Families wait for approximately 8 weeks and in the first half of the year there were on average 15 children on the waiting list at any given time.

## **Developments**

Referrals are now being taken via CSC – this has improved the contact of referral information and more accountable decision making and robust assessment.

The Adoption Support Service are providing a consultation role to support Early Help and Social Care colleagues to have an allocated social worker to inform the existing child's plan and access the ASF without full allocation to an adoption support social worker in order to manage this resource – this has been instrumental in ensuring more children eligible to access the ASF are accessing this and it is hoped that this will also influence children's services to be more trauma and attachment informed in their day to day practice. Early Help workers and social care colleagues are invited to the in – house training the adoption team offer and there has been very positive feedback from this.

Better co-working with Kinship team is in place reducing time from order to ASF therapies being in place.

Adoption Support have extended the SGO offer- developing an SGO support group in Lincoln and over the next year this will be extended to Grantham and Skegness.

Adoption Support now have a tailor made MOSAIC workflow which will support the specialist work the social workers are doing and will ensure reports are more efficiently used to manage the work.

## **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.

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.

## **Children and young people are Healthy and Safe**

Maintain progress on improving adoption scorecard performance against key threshold measures to minimise delay for children requiring adoption placements, to ensure that all children are placed with adoptive families at the earliest opportunity where they will be safe and well cared for.

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, to promote positive attachments for children.

Through the regional lead, to continue to participate and support the emerging regionalisation agenda, positioning Lincolnshire at the forefront of any development.

Continuing to provide adoption support at early stage in placements for sibling groups, in order to promote therapeutic parenting, and attachment work early in the placement

### **Develop to their full potential in their early years and are ready for school**

Continue to run training for foster carers and adopters together, on 'transitions 'in order to assist smooth transfers of children into their adoptive placements.

To promote adopters to register adopted children with early years activities

To continue to provide activities for adopted children which build their skills and recognise their achievements.

To extend the use of support services with Special Guardians, in order to support them in parenting.

To extend the 'play and stay' groups in order to fully promote a 'theraplay' model of parenting.

### **Learn and Achieve**

To continue to promote the creative use of 'pupil premium ' in schools to assist the learning and development of adopted children.

To work in partnership with school as part of TAC meetings and assist in children's TAC plans.

Maximise the benefits to adoptive families in Lincolnshire arising from the Adoption Support Fund.

### **Children and young people are ready for Adult life.**

To continue to provide a variety of opportunities for adopted children in order for them to spend time with other children who are adopted.

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

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

## **Summary**

The challenge for 2019 has been to realign services in line with the regionalisation plans and to manage the fluctuating numbers of children's cases coming through against the need to recruit adopters who are able to meet their needs. The service will continue to embed the changes to practice resulting from statutory and legislative reform, as well as local changes such as those in the court arena and translate them into positive outcome for children being adopted, adoptive families and those needing support post adoption.

Performance in 2019 against the key threshold measures in the adoption scorecard has improved both for the single year and for the three year rolling average. The number of adoptions completed so far this year has been significantly higher than in previous years. There is an indication that our ability to meet the timescales for A1 [time between coming into care and being placed for adoption] are being affected by the increase in the court timescales for care proceedings. In addition to this there has been a marked increase in the number of contested adoptions which has created a backlog of cases and has been challenging as SW staff have been actively involved in court proceedings

In addition the levelling of the number of SGO'S has meant that there has again been an increase in the numbers of children with a plan of adoption, so marketing and recruitment activity was increased in line with this, in an effort to maintain high performance. The number of adopters approved in this six month period has increased accordingly.

The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted along with the rest of Children's Services in May 2019. The inspection was undertaken under the new ILACS Framework, with a clear focus on outcomes for children. The 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.

Lincolnshire continued to be involved in 'Partners in Practice' and there was interest from a range of other providers around the strategy, systems and practices which sit behind the success of the service. This has 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.

Going forward the service will look to respond positively to the challenges presented 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.

## **Further developments**

In the early part of 2019 the adoption support PS was involved in developing 'workstreams' on Mosaic in order to provide a framework for adoption /SGO support work, along with ways of collating data.

In the spring/summer of 2019 there were several new initiatives.

Lincolnshire Adoption Service continued to play an active part in the development of the 'regionalisation ' project for the Adoption East Midlands, and continued to work on the 'partnership' between Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire and Leicester City.

Lincolnshire was approached by Rutland and has been commissioned to deliver adoption services for a period of 18 months on their behalf, to provide positive outcomes for adopters and children from the Rutland area .Lincolnshire ran a targeted recruitment programme in Rutland resulting in several prospective adopters coming forward.

The adoption support team has continued to make positive and creative use of the adoption support fund, which has provided funding for many Lincolnshire adopters and SGO carers to be provided with therapeutic interventions. The services for SGO carers have been a focus, and there have been some SGO carers groups set up, and arrangements are in place for there to be a social event at Christmas for SGO carers and children.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Clearly the pace of change within the Adoption Service continues. It is driven both externally by the regionalisation agenda and internally by a commitment to provide excellent outcome for adoptive children and their families.

Performance against external and internal targets remains strong although will provide continuous challenge to maintain high performance. The comprehensive 'end to end' programme of development outlined within this report and last year's annual report underlines the adoption service's commitment to reflect on its performance on an on-going basis, to continue to build on success and to look for innovative ways to improve the lives of children placed for adoption.

The team strives to ensure that our adopters and children receive timely, high quality adoption support in line with our obligations under the adoption passport. We will also continue to be inspection ready, strive to improve on the scorecard performance year on year, and be involved in the planning for the new regional adoption agency.

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