



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director – Children's Services

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	03 September 2021
Subject:	Family Adoption Links - Regional Adoption Agency Progress Update

Summary:

This report sets out progress relating to the development of the Regional Adoption Agency – Family Adoption Links.

Actions Required:

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is invited to review and seek assurance in regards to the progress of the Regional Adoption Agency.

1. Background

The Government's Education and Adoption Act (2016) set out expectations for adoption services through the establishment of regional adoption agencies (RAA). By the end of 2020 every local authority was expected to become part of a RAA.

Following discussions with East Midland's authorities, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire and Leicester City agreed on an aligned partnership model and this was further strengthened by the formal inclusion of North Lincolnshire Council in early 2020.

It was agreed that Lincolnshire County Council would become the lead authority for the RAA and the partnership was launched in October 2020 under the banner of Family Adoption Links.

The RAA oversees a number of key areas of adoption provision including the recruitment of adopters, assessment and training, matching and placement of children, along with delivery of post adoption support services.

The strategic vision is managed by the Partnership Board chaired by the Director of Children's Services (DCS) – Leicestershire and with senior level representation from all partner agencies. Actions and developments are commissioned by the Board.

An interim Head of Service (HOS) was appointed and oversaw the final preparation and launch date.

An actual pooled budget was created within the RAA to fund central hub staffing costs including the RAA Head of Service post, marketing officer, data analyst and business support officer. All of these were in post by April 2021. The provision of the posts was funded by equal contributions from all partnership authorities. This has augmented the central Government grant allocation and provided firm staffing foundations for the first 18 months of operation. The intention is that the partnership will deliver a range of financial benefits, including better value for money through economies of scale and a decrease in the number of children requiring specialist, intensive and costly placements/services.

The HOS post will govern the management and decision-making of those local authority budgets in conjunction with the adoption managers that hold responsibility for the budgets locally. This will ensure consistency in decision-making and assist with regional improvements.

A regional programme of communications and virtual briefings are being drawn together to ensure staff, adopters, courts and partners are kept fully informed of developments.

Progress

The partnership has developed the “Family Adoption Links” regional brand. This regional brand reflects the vision, mission, values and strategic outcomes of the partnership.

The partnership appointed an interim Regional Head of Service, responsible for the delivery of the RAA. Unfortunately the post holder left the role and since June 2021 a temporary Head of Service has been appointed until successful recruitment is finalised. It is anticipated that a permanent HOS will be in post by autumn 2021. The Regional Head of Service has a single line of accountability to the Management Board and undertakes a range of key functions in conjunction with service leads across the partnership.

A revised partnership website is under construction. The website will be the most important element in our approach to recruitment and support to adoptive parents and as such, the key component in uniting the partnership as a RAA. This easy to find, easy to use site will offer dynamic engagement with users thanks to its visual simplicity, clear signposting, clever copy and most importantly the ease with which users can make contact with us through a variety of mediums. The website will set the tone for professional, consistent and outstanding services we seek to provide as a partnership and become, ultimately, a single point of contact for those interested in becoming adoptive parents and in time, for those seeking post adoption support and training.

The Data Analyst has worked collaboratively with partnership representatives to deliver an agreed submission to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Board on a quarterly basis. Work is taking place to deliver a regional data set that will support recruitment and family finding activity. Microsoft Power BI will provide accurate adoption reporting facilities for both individual local authorities and the region, and provides visuals that will

support the presentation of adoption data for any OFSTED inspection. Work is currently taking place to facilitate the sharing of this to all partner authorities.

The partnership has brought together regional operational managers responsible for adoption from each partner. This group demonstrates a shared purpose to deliver services for families that are locally determined but at the same time have clear links to wider local, regional and national priorities. The group meets monthly and a service lead is allocated to core functions essential to develop a regional approach. The workstreams are Assessment and Training, Family Finding and Post Adoption Support.

The Assessment and Training workstream is led by Georgina Oreffo from Leicester City. An agreed modular approach to both pre and post approval training is in place. The mode of delivery will be enhanced by the development of the website which will act as a hub for on line and face to face training modules. The ambition is for courses to be available to adopters across the partnership which should enable more rapid access and provide staff flexibilities.

The Family Finding workstream is led jointly by Anne Johnson from Lincolnshire and Ellie Taylor from Leicestershire. The ambition of the partnership is to provide a consistent approach to family finding and ensuring that the partnership is able to meet the needs of most children requiring adoption. The adoption of a single approach requires practice to change for some partners and proposals for achieving a whole partnership approach will be made to the Family Adoption Links Board.

Post Adoption Support is the other key workstream and is led by Karen Everatt from North Lincolnshire. It builds on the practice delivered within the aforementioned workstreams. All partners have a different post adoption support offer and that is likely to remain the case. The ambition is for all adopters at the point of initial contact, to have information about the support available with the website signposting the local details. An identified area of need is the provision of therapeutic interventions. The partnership delivers a range of interventions and will need to consider whether it would be more cost effective to adopt a single intervention in the mid-term.

The Regional Head of Service is a temporary appointment in post pending successful recruitment of a permanent Head of Service. As such the focus since June 2021 has been very much on progressing the core pillars of practice as outlined above, upon which the partnership approach can fully develop. At the same time the post is continuing to engage key stakeholders within and beyond the Council to align services and to identify broader opportunities for transformation and development. This includes representing the region to the Department of Education (DfE), at the National RAA Leaders Group and the Regional Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board.

2. Conclusion

The partnership development has taken place against a backdrop of a pandemic and staff changes. Development of the partnership is centred on core areas which when completed will provide the partnership with genuine momentum and provide opportunities to modify

adoption practice and create some staffing efficiencies. Progress is very much in line with the expectations of the revised Government strategy for adoption "Achieving Excellence Everywhere" issued in July 2021.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Not Applicable

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	RAA Data Dashboard

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by John Harris who can be contacted on 079202 74866 or by e-mail at john.harris@lincolnshire.gov.uk

RAA Data Dashboard

The below examples of our Family Adoption Links reporting dashboard demonstrate how we as a RAA are moving towards a centralised reporting hub, granting the ability to report both locally and regionally, with scope to increase this to nationally once the infrastructure is in place.

Centralised reporting is an opportunity to propagate our RAA identity, reduce ambiguity and silo working, and promote sharing best practice. It is just as much about making a cultural shift in the way we operate as a RAA, combined with improving our efficiency, and creating more time to focus on value adding tasks.

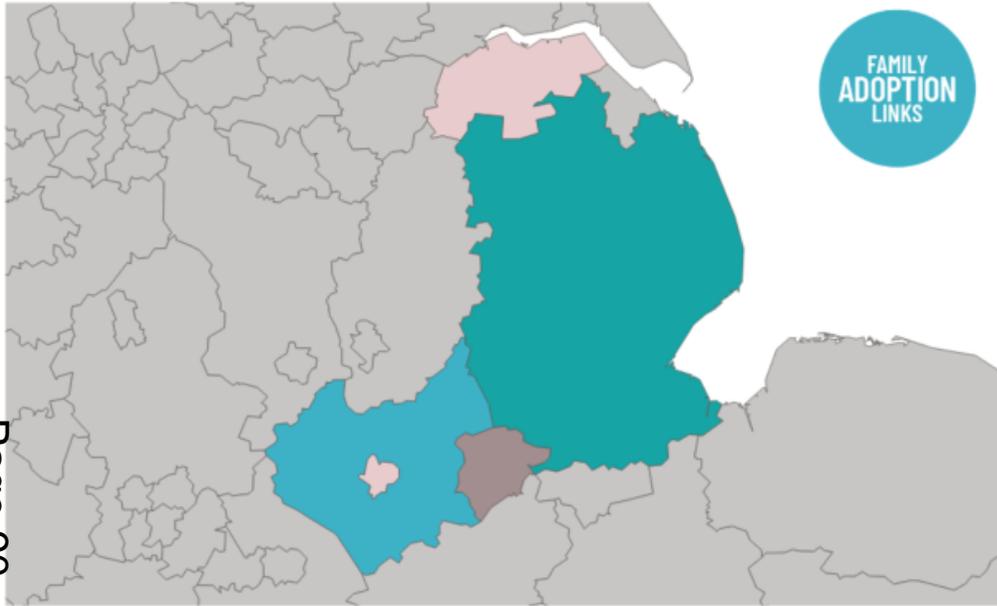
The below views show a proposed view of our adopter portfolio with regards to some key metrics that were defined by the service manager. These views can be tailored by the user to see the local and regional position and each visualisation can be further deep dived to provide more clarity behind the figures and encourage a curiosity around our data.

Moving to a centralised dynamic reporting tool across the RAA will enable a cultural shift in managers being able to use data to manage service delivery in a timelier manner. It will help to reduce duplication, as one report can then be used by each local authority to report on their individual performance without having to create their own specific view, and will in essence give us one version of the truth, as we will all be reporting off the same base data.

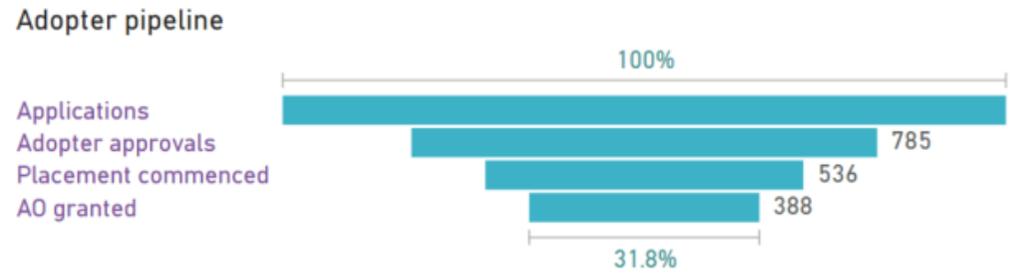
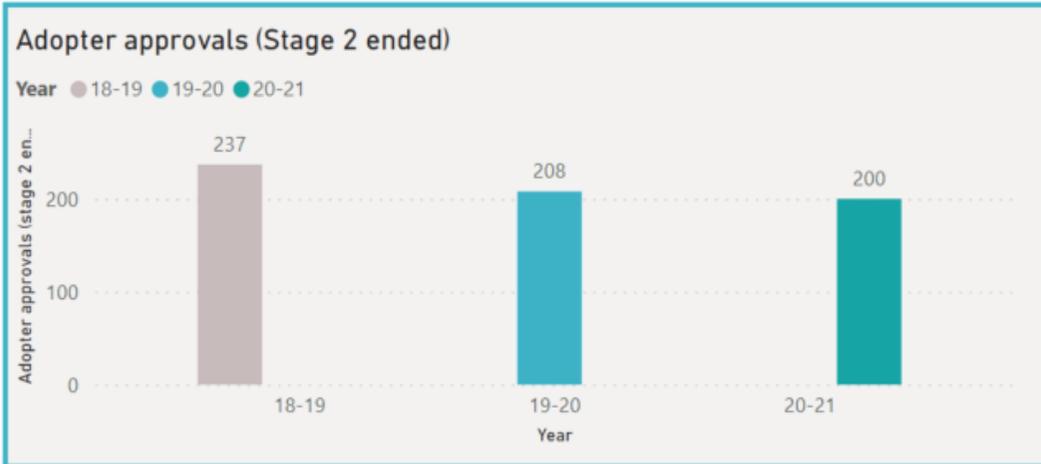
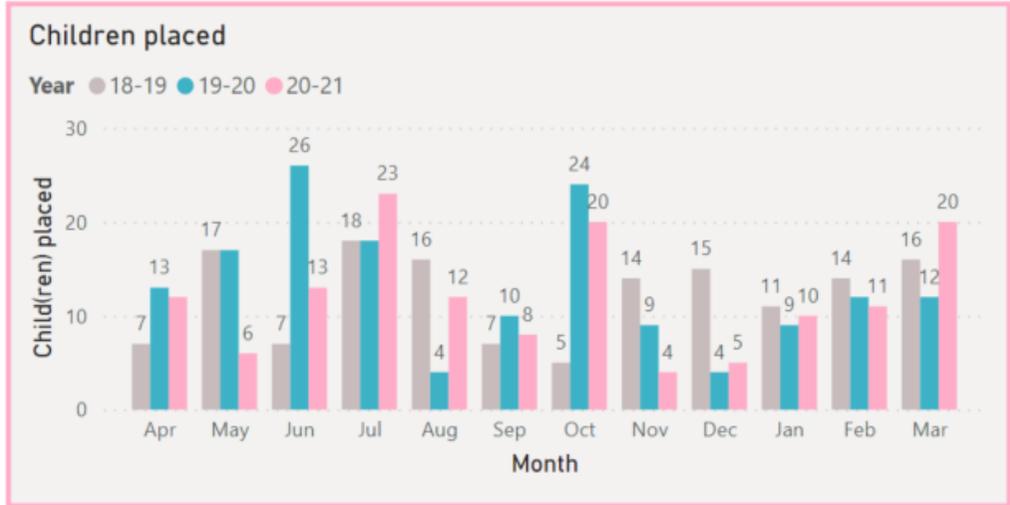
Alongside creating meaningful dynamic reports, we should also be focusing on the data extraction and validation process, seeking to eliminate manual effort where possible and ensure consistency across the piece.



RAA Adopter Portfolio Dashboard:

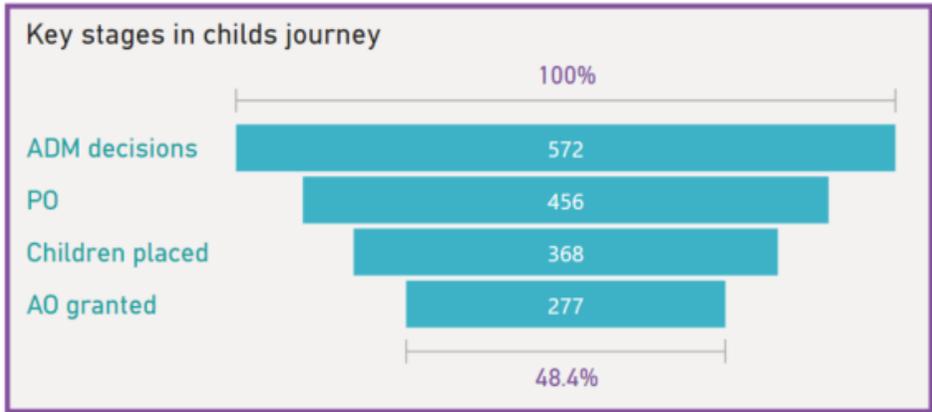
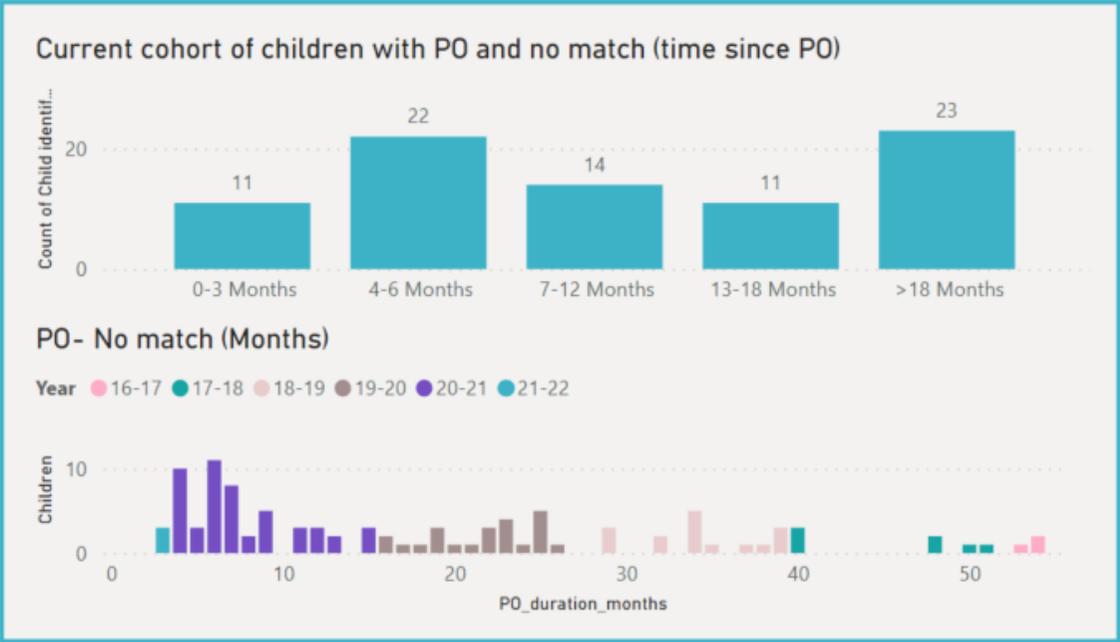
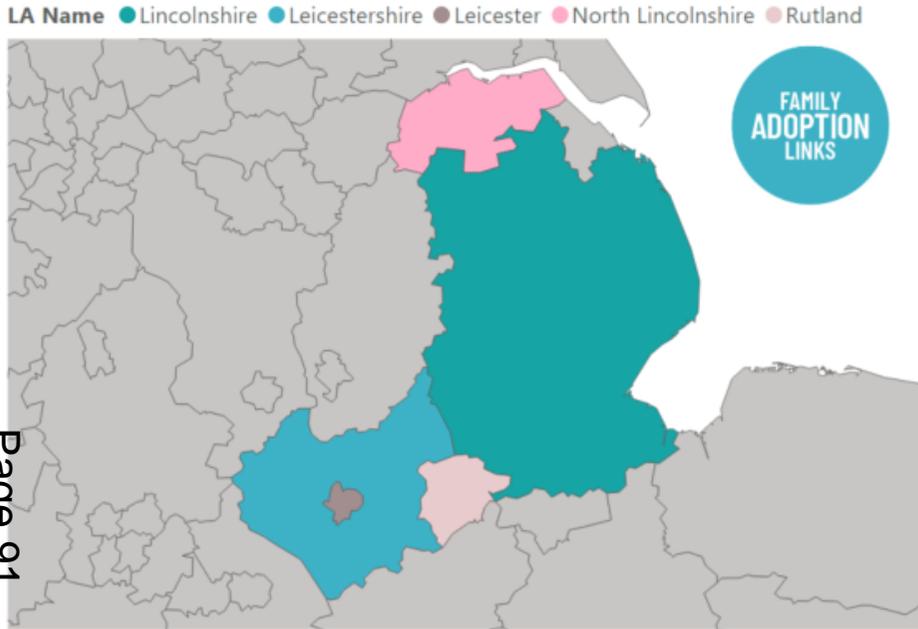


Page 90



RAA Child Portfolio Dashboard:

Page 91



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