

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

LEAD OFFICERS: Strategic Director of Children's & Education (DCS)

DATE: Thursday 11th February 2021

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Children, Young People and Education

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

KEY DECISION: N

SUBJECT:

Adoption Six Monthly Report 2020/21

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Adoption Now, Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) have compiled this Report with additional local information included by Blackburn with Darwen, Service Lead. The Report details a summary of the period April to September 2020 with analysis, data and patterns that may support service development.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board notes the Adoption Six Monthly Report alongside Appendix 1.

3. BACKGROUND

Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing Adoption Services on behalf of a consortium agreement with six Local Authorities; Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

Data remains local data relating to Blackburn with Darwen children, with Post Adoption Support, Recruitment and Assessment data including regional data.

This is the six monthly Report produced by the Head of Service from the RAA, with additional information and oversight from Blackburn with Darwen's Service Lead. Local Authority employees remain seconded to the RAA to date. There is a regular Adoption case-tracking meeting held to enable the Local Authority to have continued shared information and updates about the progress of children with Adoption Care Plans for children in the Borough. This also allows financial oversight and monitoring.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Key highlights from Appendix 1 to be considered alongside this report include:

- During the first 6 months of the year, 10 children were subject to a decision that they should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA). This compares with 18 in the same period last year, and represents quite a reduction, it is possible that Covid-19 has had an impact on numbers. Those children who did receive a SHOBPA decision were primarily of white British origin. In terms of age, 4 children were in the 0 – 2 age range, 3 were in the 3 to 4 age range and 3 in the 5 + age range.
- On 30th September 2020, there were 10 children with a plan for adoption (subject to a placement order) awaiting placement and not yet matched. Of this number 5 children had no potential links identified, and the other 5 were either linked, had a plan to be adopted by a foster carer, or were

subject to a change of Care Plan to return to their birth family. This number of 10 waiting included two sibling groups of 2, one child was older with significant additional needs, the other included a much older child. One child was in the upper age range and of dual ethnicity.

- Continued efforts to match all children waiting will include them being profiled at Exchange Days where adopters can come and discuss children available for adoption and all will be invited to attend a Family Adoption Day run by Adoption Now if this is appropriate for them. A new virtual event called 'Link and Play' is being used to facilitate such events while Covid rates are high and groups cannot meet in person. This is an innovative alternative to an activity day devised by Adoption Now staff.
- There have been no disruptions of adoption placements during this review period. A disruption is identified as a placement where the child has moved in with adopters, and then the placement has failed. This figure is positive as it suggests matches are appropriate and placements successful.
- This year in 2020/2021 the Board have set an aspirational target of 100 adopter approvals. By the end of September 2020, 27 new families had achieved approval at panel. There were 21 approvals in Quarter 2 2020 which is positive. Despite the challenges created by offering training and assessment sessions virtually, the recruitment team continue through uncertain times, and projections are positive.
- This year, 6 adopters have been matched with sibling groups of two. There are a further 5 approved families offering a sibling placement to two children and seven coming through in assessment with a similar offer. Compared with last year's 12 month data, where only six families were matched with siblings, this is a strong indicator that the recruitment drive to encourage more families to consider more than one child is effective.
- Last year, 58% of Stage 1 assessments were completed within the two-month timescale and 86% of Stage 2 assessments were within the 4 month target timescale. At this half year point, the team performance for timeliness has so far reduced only slightly despite the pandemic: 52% of stage 1 assessments and 81% of stage 2 assessments have been within timescale. Stage 1 delays are more often related to statutory checks since March 2020 and have been Covid-19 related. Stage 2 delay has been due to complexities arising in assessment or life events, again in a number of cases exacerbated by Covid-19.
- Of the 27 approvals at this halfway point report, 85% of reports were judged good or excellent by panel members. This is a significant achievement considering all assessments have been presented to panel during the current Covid-19 pandemic and the vast majority of them have been completed largely virtually.
- The DfE allocated up to £213,000 for Adoption Now to claim, in order to provide a package of additional support for Adopters and Special Guardians, and that the funding would remain in place until the end of September 2020. This has since been extended until 31st December 2020. A varied package of support was sourced and commissioned and 9 successful applications were made to the fund that have been supporting families on an immediate and needs led basis.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no Policy implications.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In accordance with the agreed financial model, the operational budget for Adoption was combined with five other North West Authorities when the RAA was formed in 2017.

A total of £124,000 was spent on placing children with outside agencies in the 6 months to September 2020 compared to £192,000 for the same period last year. Current forecasting shows expected expenditure on inter-agency adoption fees in 20/21 of £274,000 against the available budget of £323,500, a forecasted underspend of £49,500. The Adoption Service as a whole is currently forecasting an underspend of £56,300.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

None required/undertaken.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Ailsa Smith/Pamela Price
DATE:	18/02/21
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Report to be considered alongside Appendix 1