



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

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| REPORT OF: | Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education |
| LEAD OFFICERS: | Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS) |
| DATE: | Thursday, 11 April 2024 |

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| PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: | Children, Young People and Education |
| WARD/S AFFECTED: | (All Wards); |
| KEY DECISION: | N |

SUBJECT: 6 monthly Adoption report

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has written this report which provides a review of adoption activity for 1.4.23 to 30.9.23. It includes Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) children specific information.

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the Executive of the Local Authority. It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30th Sept 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 1) Read and consider the content of the report.
- 2) Recommend any aspects of consideration, amendment or clarification as required.

3. BACKGROUND

Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) that provides Adoption Services on behalf of a consortium of six Local Authorities. These include Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside. Blackburn with Darwen staff are seconded to the RAA. Tracking of cases takes place monthly. Seconded RAA staff and their manager attend this meeting (now held by Teams) to consider the children's adoption journey.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- During the 1st 6 months of the financial year 11 children were subject to a decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA). Of the 11 children, 7 were in the 0-2 age range, 2 in the 3-4 age range, and 2 in the 5-8 range.

- On 30/09/2023 there were 10 children with a plan for adoption, subject to a placement order. This means that the Court agrees with the Local Authority care plan of adoption. 4 of these children at the time were progressing with links. Of the remaining 6 children, 2 had only been waiting for under 2 weeks, 1 had been waiting under 6 months, and the other 3 had been waiting between 6-12 months since the making of a placement order. Significantly, all except one of the 10 children with a placement order were children who we might expect to wait longer by virtue of age, being part of a sibling group, significant medical and or developmental needs, emotional and behavioural needs, or a combination of these factors. The cohort also included 3 sibling groups of 2.
- Children are matched by sharing their profile through several family finding strategies. Link Maker is a key tool, it is a safe and secure online platform that supports Family Finding for BwD children. All of Adoption Now's families and children are placed on the forum, enabling family finders and families to search for a potential match. We are also still holding Activity Days/ Fun days with other RAA's across the Northwest, which is currently being funded by the DfE, in recognition of the collaborative work between Adoption Now and the North West RAA's.
- There were 16 children matched and 17 children placed with their adoptive parents.
- In terms of approved Adopters there have been 22. This is a drop when compared to the same period last year, which was 28. This is a national problem, and not localised to Adoption Now. Nationally there is a decrease in adopter approvals of 7%. Our recruitment and marketing strategy is working, as when compared to other Northwest RAA's, our registration of interest numbers are the highest. The numbers of adopters who are withdrawing are on the increase, this is thought to be around the concerns of families increasing their size due to the cost-of-living rise, and the complexities of assessments due to the National adoption strategy. The projected total for the year of approved adopters, given the numbers of applications in progress is 78, which is higher than last years 69, and may make up some of the shortfall. However, this needs to be treated with caution given the complexities of assessments.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No Policy implications

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The operational budgets supporting adoption are transferred to Adoption Now at the beginning of each financial year and combined with the budgets from the other five local authorities. The budget for salaries and the cost of placing children with external agencies sits with the Local Authority. The costs of placing children with Adopters outside of Adoption Now in the first half of 2023 amounted to £82,780 with forecasted expenditure for the full year being £333,300. This would return a forecasted underspend against the available budget of £6,900.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

No legal implications

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No resource implications

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

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. (*insert EIA link here*)

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. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

None required.

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.

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| CONTACT OFFICER: | Suzanne Kinder |
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| DATE: | |
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| BACKGROUND PAPER: | Adoption Report – 6 monthly. 1.4.23 – 30.9.23 |
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