



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 14 November 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Children, Young People and Education
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Y

**SUBJECT: Annual Adoption Report**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report which provides a review of adoption activity for 1.4.23 to 31.03.2024 and 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.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board notes the content of this report and the Annual Adoption Report (Appendix 1).

## 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

•20 children received Should Be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions during the whole year. Of the 20 children, 12 were in the 0-2 age range 5 in the 3-4 age range, and 3 in the 5-8 range. This cohort included high numbers of sibling groups of two (almost half of the children). The number of children with additional needs amongst those with new plans of adoption has dropped from previous years.

- On 31/03/2024 there were 10 children with a plan for adoption, subject to placement order. This means that Court agrees with the Local Authority care plan of adoption. This number had not risen during the second half of the year although the cohort of children had changed. 5 of the children had been waiting less than 2 months and a family had been identified for one of these. 3 of the remaining 5 children had been waiting over 6 months and the final 2 have had Placement Orders for over a year, however one had just experienced a disruption. The children who have waited longer are all children who statistically we might expect to wait longer due to the level of their needs (health, development or behavioural), age and/or being part of a sibling group.
- 54% of children who joined an adoptive family joined a family approved by Adoption Now. These placements do not attract an interagency fee. This percentage is lower than the target of 60% and reflective of the high level of need of the children previously waiting for families.
- 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 21 children matched and 22 children placed with their adoptive parents during the year's reporting period.
- Timeliness for children in terms of matching is very good for those children adopted within the year. Some work is needed to improve the quality of reports being presented to panel, particularly the Child Permanence Reports which are key documents. The number of Early Permanence Placements has significantly dropped to just 1 over the past year. Whilst 1 child experienced a disruption the number of disruptions remains extremely low.
- In terms of approved Adopters there have been 58 which is the lowest annual number since the Regional Adoption Agency was formed. This should be seen in the context of a national reduction in the number of adopters approved and a national shortage of adopters in comparison to children waiting. Our recruitment and marketing strategy is working, as when compared to other Northwest RAA's and the national figures Adoption Now is holding it's place in the rankings. High numbers of adopters continue to withdraw during stage 1 or 2 of the assessment and often after considerable work has been completed. The cost of living appears to remain a factor in people feeling unable to adopt.
- The need for Adoption Support for families continues to show a year on year increase with no increase in resources to meet this need. Where it is not possible to allocate to a social worker for immediate assessment due to the high demand and capacity issues, support is offered during the wait through the duty service. Demand for access to records in its broadest form (ie by adult adoptees, therapists and other professionals working with adoptees and by family members of deceased adoptees) also continue to increase year on year, as do requests for adoption allowance assessments and reviews. The combination of this work, along with extremely high levels of complexity within the families being supported, is putting the service under increasing pressure.

---

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

No Policy implications

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There has been no increase in the operational budget for Adoption Now since its forming in 2017. The end of year finances evidence that this position can be held for a further year but a complete review will be needed during this coming year with implications for costs to the Local Authority for 2025/26.

Given the adopter shortage both in house and nationally this is likely to be felt with increased costs relating to children remaining in care for longer whilst awaiting a family, further costs for care for some children for whom adoption will not be achievable in the current climate and likely higher costs relating to interagency fees. This latter however may not be felt so keenly given that the complexity and age of children coming through has reduced compared to children placed during the last financial year, and this may result in more Blackburn with Darwen children being placed in house despite the adopter shortage.

Whilst the financial position of the Regional Adoption Agency is detailed in the attached report, the financial performance for Blackburn with Darwen's adoption service in 2023/24 was as follows.

The service returned a total overspend against its allocated budget of £92,655. This was due in part to the costs of using agency staff to cover vacant posts, with the remainder due to an overspend of £89,503 on adoption allowance payments. These overspends were partially offset by an underspend of £70,510 on the costs of placing children with adopters outside of Adoption Now and therefore attracting a placement fee.

A full review of adoption allowances has now been completed and is expected to produce efficiencies in 2024/25.

**7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS.** Provision of this report is in line with obligations to provide an update to the Executive of the Responsible Body being Executive Board of the Council.

## 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**

N/A

---

**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.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
-----------------	----------

<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Suzanne Kinder</b>
-------------------------	-----------------------

<b>DATE:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
--------------	---------------------------------

<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	
--------------------------	--