

Adoption Annual Report

2018/19



Executive Report



Together we make a difference

Bolton
Council

ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Oldham
Council

BLACKBURN
DARWEN

Bury

Tameside
Metropolitan Borough

Introduction

Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities outlined in other Council plans.

18 months ago there was a significant change in the way that adoption services were delivered as Adoption Now went live on 20th November 2017. Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of six Local Authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

Data relating to children remains local data relating to Blackburn with Darwen children however, adoption support and recruitment data now covers the Region. This report will outline local data but will also include statistics and information that is for Adoption Now as an Agency which is reflective of all 6 Local Authorities.

Adoption Agency Business – Children in Blackburn with Darwen

Children with an Adoption Plan in the Borough

During the year, 26 children were subject to a decision that they should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA). The vast majority of these children are of white British origin however two children were of Pakistani origin.

In terms of the age of those 26 children, 18 were aged birth – 2 years, 3 children aged 3 – 4 years, 5 children aged 5 – 7 years.

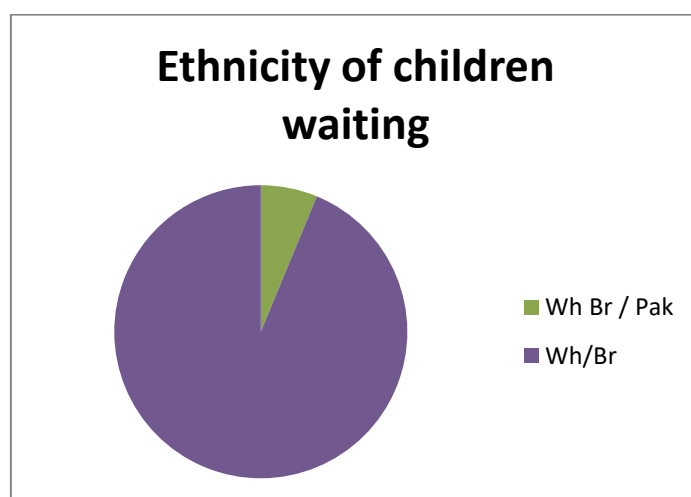
There were 5 sibling groups of 2, 1 sibling group of 3 and the rest were single children. Two of those children had Huntington's disease in the family which carries a 50% chance of this being inherited by the child.

Therefore 15 out of the 26 children were in the harder to place cohort due to sibling groups, or having high level uncertainty in terms of their health and development for example.

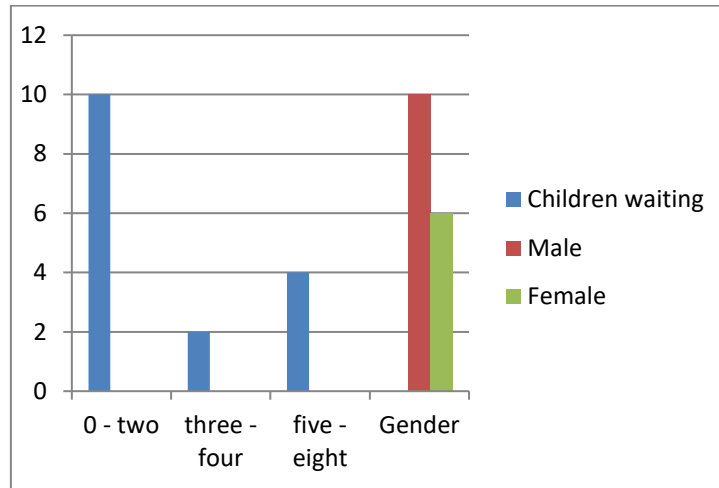
Children Awaiting a Match with Adopters

On 31st March 2019, there were 16 children with a plan for adoption (subject to a placement order made) awaiting a placement. Two of those children have a 50% chance of developing Huntington's disease, two had very recently been made subject of placement orders and 1 child has significant developmental delay. There were 3 sibling groups of two waiting.

15 children are of white British heritage with 1 child from dual heritage background. (see chart below).



Age and Gender of children waiting



Continued efforts to match all of the children waiting will include them being profiled at exchange days where adopters can come and discuss children available for adoption with Social Workers and Foster Carers, and all will be invited to attend a Family Adoption Day run by Adoption Now if this is appropriate for them. Similar National events also run such as Activity days. These are events whereby adopters and children meet at a large party and spend time together informally as part of an organised event. It has been proven to be very effective in finding families for some older children and those who are part of sibling groups.

Family Finding Activity

Professional links and relationships have continued to result in some positive matches, especially with the voluntary agencies who are now partners of Adoption Now. The regional placement group meeting has been redesigned and continues to operate on a monthly basis to encourage matches with local voluntary adoption agencies. Link Maker continues to be a useful tool, which is an online service where adopter profiles can be viewed, and children waiting can be enquired about making potential links. Children have been placed immediately on Adoption Match which is a child-led matching service which replaced the Adoption Register, once a placement order is made if there are no families able to be explored from within Adoption Now.

The development of Adoption Now means that families that would have been approved by the six local authorities are all part of the same organisation and are immediately available to Blackburn with Darwen's children as potential adopters. These placements do not incur an interagency feel. It is practice to search for a family within Adoption Now in the first instance and then to look further afield to other local authorities, RAAs or voluntary adoption agencies nationwide.

On 31st March 2019 the National Adoption Register ceased to operate. Prior to this it has been a requirement for all children waiting for families for three months or more to be added to that register along with adopters who are waiting. There are some likely alternative proposals however none are imminent. A small number of links for children would have been made via the Register but Link Maker has been a much more useful family finding tool for Blackburn with Darwen children so we are not expecting there to be much of an impact.

Children Placed for Adoption

There have been 18 children placed with adopters this year and 21 children matched (the numbers of matched and placed children may be different due to early permanence placements and children matched just before the end of the year but not yet placed).

Of matches presented to panels between April and September, there have been 6 Blackburn with Darwen children matched with adopters. There was a sibling group of 2, a relinquished baby and a foster carer adoption.

The scorecard data for children adopted since 1st April 2018 is as follows : -

Measure		BwD average
Placement Order to Matching (A2)	Scorecard Indicator - 121 days	125
Child entering care - adoption placement (A1)	Scorecard indicator – 426 days	355

These figures show that during the year timescales were met on A1 and just marginally over on A2. This still represents excellent performance when measured against National standards. The Scorecard measures are not 'counted' until the year after an Adoption Order has been made, therefore these positive figures will not influence the published Scorecard results for some time yet. The current 'in year' figures are extremely positive and would place Blackburn with Darwen's timeliness in placing children for adoption amongst the best in the country.

Children Adopted

24 adoption orders were made during the year. It is these children to whom the score card data refers.

Most adoption orders have been made in a timely fashion despite birth parents requesting leave to contest in the majority of cases.

Adoption Disruption

There have been two disruptions since 1st April 2018 and both in the first half of the year. A disruption is identified as a placement where the child has moved in with adopters and then the placement has failed. In one case the child's adopter was diagnosed with a very serious illness within a few weeks of her being placed. She was able to move back to her foster carers and has subsequently been placed with other adopters. The other was a child who was part of a larger sibling group and a decision was made to separate him from his siblings. This child is now matched with other adopters. In neither of these cases were the local authority felt to have failed in their duties.

Adoption Now Agency Business – Adopters

The following information is specific to Adoption Now as an Agency and provider, and not specific only to Blackburn with Darwen.

Adopter Recruitment for Adoption Now

Background

Nationally, there is a shortage of adopters and the number of children available is rising again as the 'looked after' population rises both nationally and locally. This happened shortly after many adopters had to wait for long periods, as a consequence of case law that changed the practice of the courts in terms of agreeing adoption plans for children.

The recruitment strategy of Adoption Now has been to dispel this myth, with a go live campaign visibly showing with balloons how many children were available in this area alone.

The marketing and recruitment team became fully staffed in June 2018 and recruitment campaigns have significantly increased with attendance at 15 local events across the six local authority areas and beyond over the summer months, billboard campaigns, bus, tram and train campaigns, radio campaigns and significant social media advertising. Early signs are that this activity has increased enquiries from prospective adopters.

Adopter Recruitment across Adoption Now

The total number of adoptive families approved in the year was 73 by Adoption Now Agency. This is an increase on the 67 of the previous year but due to two families withdrawing due to last minute serious health concerns and others where issues arose late on in the assessment process it did fall a little short of the expected number of 77.

The last year has been used to develop learning around what works in adopter recruitment so that recruitment can be better targeted as we move forward.

Adopter recruitment has been targeted at a wide geographical area from our 6 Local Authorities over the past 12 months with a view to building up a profile of adopters from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Targeted marketing has taken place specifically focussed on recruiting from Asian communities and the LGBTQ community (see recruitment activity).

The chart below shows the ethnicity of adopters recruited. It shows that adopters are still predominantly white British which matches the pattern of children we are placing.

CHART 1: Adopter Recruitment by Ethnicity 01/04/18 TO 30/03/19

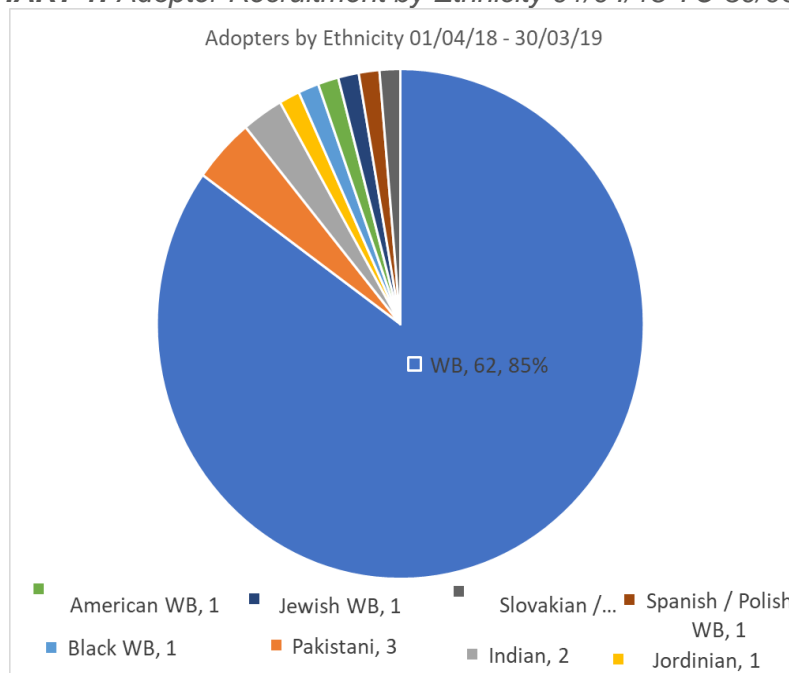
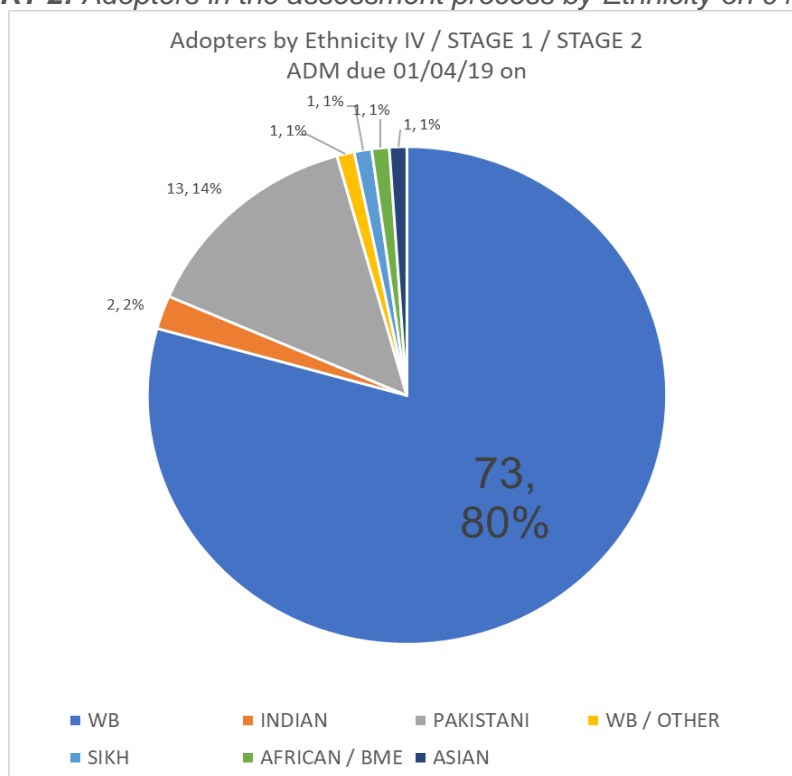


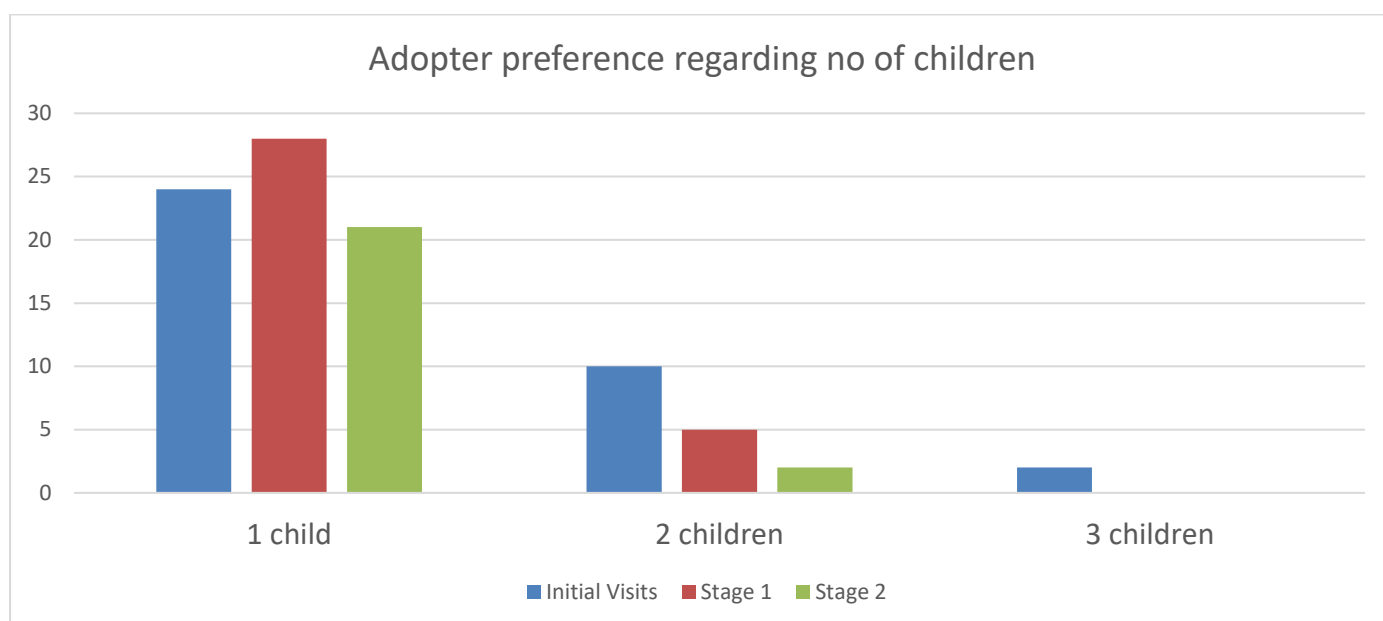
CHART 2: Adopters in the assessment process by Ethnicity on 01-04-19



Adopter Preferences

There is still a preference for single children predominantly aged from birth to 2 years amongst adopters being recruited. However, the 36 pending initial visits currently on record have seen an uplift in willingness to consider sibling groups. This figure could rise as we proactively discuss sibling groups during early visits.

CHART 3: Adopter preference regarding no of children



Data as of 09/04/19

We currently have the following number of adopters at various stages in the process:

Initial Visits: 36

Stage 1: 33

Stage 2: 23

TOTAL ADOPTERS in the system is 92

Available Adopters: 11 (3 on hold) = 8 of which 3 White British / 3 Pakistani / 1 Asian / 1 Indian

Most adopters are being identified for children very quickly and where they have waited any length of time that is due to them having a very specific matching criteria or being on hold for personal reasons.

b. Children waiting for Adoption across Adoption Now

Tracked children	Children Post-SHOBPA	Children awaiting placement
237	40	119

Data current in March 2019

In the past year we have seen an increasing number of sibling groups of two to three children awaiting adoption. Currently there are 20 groups of 2 siblings, and 5 groups of 3 siblings awaiting placement. Tracking information shows it is likely these groups will continue to grow.

The agency is increasingly seeing children of dual heritage and with a variety of emotional or physical support needs. Most of our children are still White-British, but we are seeing increasing numbers of children from Central and Eastern Europe.

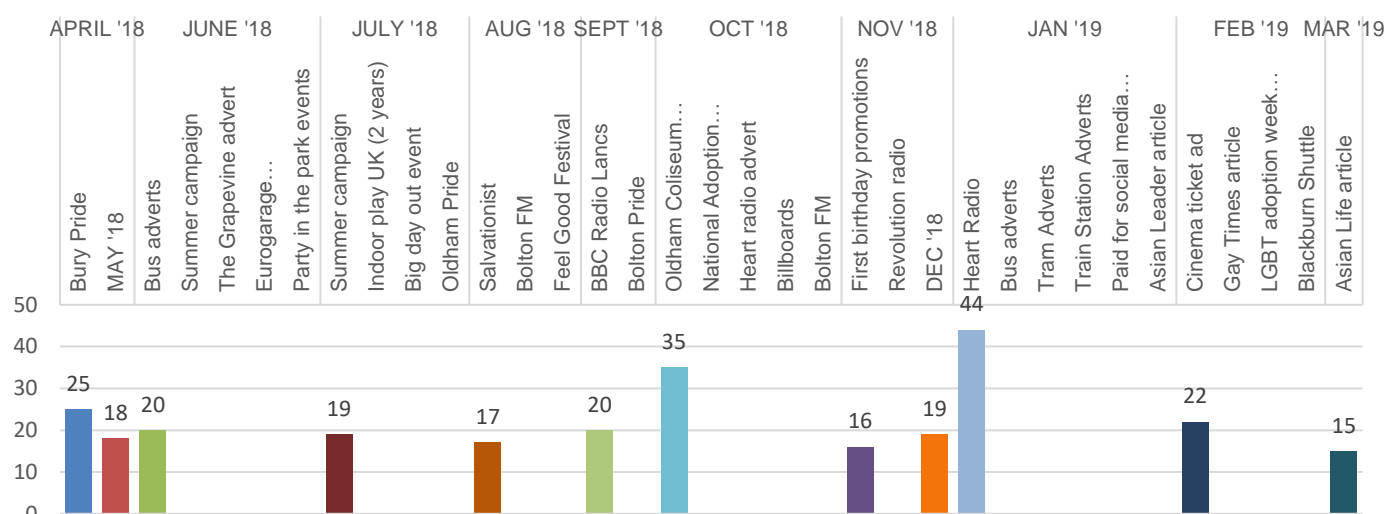
Whilst nationally the data says there are few young children, we have seen an increase in babies with adoption orders. Tracking data shows this too is unlikely to change at least in the short term. Currently 90 of the 237 children tracked are 1 or under.

The marketing team are using this information to inform all aspects of marketing and the recruitment process. For example, we inform callers during initial enquiries and highlight waiting children during information evenings. Recruitment and Assessment Social Workers see the monthly reports of children waiting and are encouraged to discuss this during initial visits. The line, "you don't have to be perfect to adopt" is used as Adoption Now Marketing to show that adoption is an option for everyone trying to build a family. Activity in the coming year will focus on attracting adopters for priority groups and return to debunking long established myths around the time it takes to adopt that feedback shows to persist.

c. Recruitment Activity

The data below shows the number of enquiries received by month in line with marketing activity:

Marketing Activity v Enquiries by month



The chart above shows spikes in enquires during periods of heavy marketing activity including radio campaigns and outdoor advertising (*accurate at time of reporting*).

An updated recruitment strategy was agreed by the Board made up of 6 Local Authority Directors/Senior Leaders in December 2018 and an annual recruitment plan exists alongside this strategy to support the need to recruit more adopters.

Using the above data and anecdotal information the recruitment plan for the year 2019/20 has been devised and includes more of the successful marketing methods namely radio, outdoor and transport-based campaigns. There will be consistent and regular activity throughout the year with larger bursts around key campaign times i.e. National Adoption Week, Summer and New Year. This year will also see a focus on the Adoption Now website and online advertising to drive enquiries, supported by ongoing social media messaging.

The recruitment team will be attending local and regional outreach events to increase awareness of the agency with local residents to raise the profile of the agency. In addition, this year the team will be attending larger events such as the Royal Lancashire and Cheshire Shows to compare the enquiries generated.

If these prove more fruitful the plan will be to move to fewer, bigger, better events that increase profile and ensure best use of staff time in 2020/21.

Target groups

Targeted recruitment activity will focus on two specific groups identified as being under-represented in our pool of adopters.

Asian communities and other ethnic minority groups will be targeted by continuing to advertise in publications such as the Asian Leader and hosting information events in line with local mosques and faith groups. The agency is also targeting the Muslim Lifestyle Expo taking place in Manchester in October as a new way of raising the profile of adoption to a younger demographic. The agency is utilising the knowledge of its Social Workers to make connections and find new ways to target these groups. For example, one Social Worker has links with African-Caribbean churches and several of our Social Workers can provide links and insight into our Asian communities. Messaging will encourage the community to consider the older children and sibling groups that our data shows to be coming through the system.

Research shows that 76% of LGBT adopters would consider adopting siblings and harder to place children, therefore recruitment activity is also being aimed at this group. The agency is a member of New Family Social and is promoting this with prospective adopters, encouraging use of their resources from peer groups, volunteering opportunities and family finding forums. Currently 55 Adoption Now adopters make use of New Family Social support. Specific marketing activity is undertaken during LGBT Adoption Week and the team are attending pride events in the region and are aiming for their first presence at Manchester Pride the biggest LGBTQ event in the North West, as well as advertising in targeted publications and broadcast stations namely Gay Times and Gaydio.

Storytelling as a recruitment aid

Hearing from adopters who have been through the process is key to engaging new prospective adopters within the process. The agency is keen on adopters helping with recruitment and is aiming to increase this over the 2019/20 period. Video case studies and interviews are being created and played to prospective adopters at information evenings and are available on our website and social media channels. Adopters currently help with preparation groups; sharing their experiences with those in Stage 1 of the process and we know that prospective adopters find this part of preparation training especially insightful and encouraging. Adopters also take part in radio interviews, articles and website case studies. A buddy system is also in operation within the agency. The team plans to host a recruitment event in partnership with the Lancashire Council of Mosques and with advice from the Muslim Welfare Institute which will include a 'talk to us' segment with Muslim adopters, this can be replicated with other target groups.

Several of the agency's staff members also have personal experience of adoption which can aid in recruitment, helping prospective adopters warm to them easily because they can relate to their situations.

Recruitment and marketing activity is being increased and more creative methods are being explored to meet the need for more families for children awaiting adoption and the agency's 2019/20 recruitment target of 100 approved adopters by the end of March 2020.

Focus Family finding

A recent innovation has been the development of our focus family finding programme for children who are waiting too long for placements. These children have tailored campaigns built around them, including videos and articles that are created and published on specific channels that mirror the interests of the child. Led by our marketing and recruitment officers, the focus is on developing an in-depth *feel* for the child to bring out their personality and hobbies with the aim of bringing them to life for potential adopters.

The target for this coming year is to approve 100 sets of adopters to move us closer to adopter sufficiency. This figure in conjunction with our commissioned placements with our Voluntary Adoption Agency partners brings us to 133 families for the 180 or so children we will place (some will be siblings so placed together). The recruitment campaigns are targeted so as to consider the needs of children we need to place as we realise that it isn't simply numbers of adopters being approved but that they are the right adopters for the children who need families.

Adoption Support for Adoption Now between the six Authorities

Team Structure:

1 Team Manager, 1 Deputy Team Manager, 0.5 Advanced Practitioner, 12 Social Workers (8 full-time and 4 part-time) and 2 family support workers (1.5 equivalent).

Staffing, Team building and transitions:

The adoption support service has been running for the latter part of the year with a full-time vacant post, a full-time worker requesting part-time hours and the retirement of a long-standing Family Support Worker. Additionally, there have been periods of significant sick leave within the team.

Whilst it has been possible to meet the needs of our families during this time, it's not been without its challenges and the hard work of the whole team – the majority being significantly above capacity. During this time family have also been supported through the duty service where allocation has not been possible for a time.

That said, we are now approaching an exciting time for the team and the development of the adoption support service. All vacant posts have been recruited to with the new Family Support Worker having just started. The full-time vacancy has been accepted by an experienced therapeutic practitioner and trainer with both Theraplay and DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) up to level 2 – it is hoped that she will be part of the team by the summer of 2019.

The part-time vacancy resulting from an existing worker becoming part-time has also been successfully recruited to. This post is going to be shared by two experienced therapeutic practitioners.

In January 2019 the adoption support service was part of two reviews/audits carried out across Regional Adoption Agencies – one focused on the Adoption Support Fund, the purpose being to collate information for a wider review of the Adoption Support Fund. Whilst the outcome of this review will not be known until November 2019, it did confirm that we are a significant user of the fund (figures can be seen later in the report).

The second review/audit focused on the progress and development of adoption support within our RAA, together with our vision for the future. Whilst a report is due later in the year, the initial feedback was very positive.

Adoption Now contract with After Adoption to support birth families :

Sadly, After Adoption closed quite suddenly at the end of March 2019, and this has impacted on our service in several ways;

- Birth Ties – this was the service Adoption Now had commissioned to support our birth families which has now ceased.
- There are approximately 10 families where Adoption Now had commissioned After Adoption to provide therapeutic packages.
- We were in negotiation to commission After Adoption to deliver the Safebase parenting programme in June/July 2019 specifically for up to 12 Adoption Now families.

In terms of Birth Ties, there are ongoing discussions and exploration of how we might meet the needs of our birth families moving forward.

In terms of the families receiving therapeutic packages, we have been very fortunate that much of the work was coming to an end or a review point and we have managed to commission some of the therapy providers independently via the Adoption Support Fund to avoid any disruption to the families.

We have also been very fortunate in that the two therapeutic practitioners who will share the part-time vacancy were previously employed by After Adoption. The rationale for the post being shared is that they will continue to deliver any therapeutic packages started with After Adoption. The remaining hours will be used creatively to support the continued development of the adoption support service. The starting point being to develop and deliver a parenting programme in place of the Safebase programme we were looking to commission – a proposal/structure for this programme is currently underway and it is hoped that we will be able to provide this for our families not too far away from the original timescales – which is really good news as there are around 8-10 families identified as needing this intervention. Furthermore, as this will now be developed and delivered 'in-house' there is potential to deliver this more frequently as part of our model of support services.

Adoption Support Fund (ASF) :

The adoption support fund is DfE money that local authorities and RAAs can access to support adoptive families to receive a variety of therapeutic services.

We anticipate significant changes to the fund by March 2020 and are therefore currently in the last financial year of the fund in its current form. It is a very uncertain time ahead with us having no idea how the fund is to change or worst-case scenario being that the fund ceases and what the impact will be for our service and families. There is not likely to be any certainty with regards to the future of that fund until November 2019.

Total monies received 2018/2019

£560,323.66

For 207 children

Number of providers currently being commissioned by Adoption Now

66

Numbers of children receiving therapeutic services funded by ASF by local authority :-

Local Authority	No of children receiving funding for therapeutic services
Blackburn with Darwen	28
Bolton	26
Bury	29
Oldham	25
Rochdale	49
Tameside	42

Cases/workload:

Adoption Support

Regular audits of adoption support cases are undertaken to provide accurate data which is starting to illustrate more defined annual figures now that we have had our first full financial year in Adoption Now. The current open case total is 338 – this total reflects the number of children receiving adoption support. An overall breakdown of the current open cases in terms of when they came into Adoption Now is as follows:

Pre RAA cases – Year end 31.03.2018
2018/2019
2019/2020

158
170
10
Total 338

1.4.2018 – 31.03.2019
Receiving on-going Adoption Support Packages
Completed Assessments
Ongoing Assessments
Pre-order support
Financial Assessments
Cases closed

176
67
42
36
7
85
Total 413

There are almost 100 additional families receiving support than there were a year ago.

Access to Records

A further audit is currently ongoing, focused on access to records requests. However, overall figures are displayed below;

2018/2019
2019/2020

48 completed and closed
57 on going at this time

In addition to referrals for adoption support and access to records requests, the service has taken 666 enquiries between 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019. These enquires include step parent adoption; letterbox enquiries; requests from professionals to access files, intermediary requests/sign posting requests, access to records advice and enquires from birth families.

IT: Issues with IT have significantly reduced – the team can experience issues logging on remotely but with the Wyse terminals installed here at the hub, such issues are much less frequent.

The Liquid Logic 'super user group' continues to work closely with Liquid Logic to help navigate the system and is a means of communicating any ongoing issues and working towards any possible resolutions.

Adoption support process development and continued work with Liquid Logic has been slow since the last review report – we have not yet defined the adoption support pathway or commenced the training sessions. This has been due to vacancies in the Liquid Logic team – whilst they have continued to be on hand to address any issues in the moment, we have not been able to progress with the pathway development. Whilst we are still unable to accurately measure enquiries and referrals from Liquid Logic alone, the audits continue to enable us to maintain spreadsheets to run alongside Liquid Logic to ensure we have clear, accurate data in the meantime.

All the migrated/existing cases are now on the system and all new enquiries/referrals are entered onto the system as they come in.

Appointments have now been made in the Liquid Logic team and new training dates will be arranged as soon as possible. We have created some user guides for the training sessions to be held in the IT suites and as reported previously, the first session will focus on recording adoption support cases from first contact through to case closure and the second will focus on access to records cases from first contact to case closure.

Developing the service:

As stated, the team is just coming through a period of staff vacancies and sickness. It has also been a busy time for development since the last review with the whole team taking part in a variety of training;

- Therapeutic Life Story (Richard Rose)
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) at level 1
- Non Violent Resistance (NVR) – at foundation level

The therapeutic life story training is already being put in to practice throughout the team, from individual case work to enhancing our life story workshops. We are also working on a life story week – whereby we will hold a series of events over a week for adopters, our Adoption Now colleagues and our colleagues within our 6 LAs.

The DDP and NVR training have both been quite recent and have been significant opportunities and such valuable training for the whole team. The focus now will be to bring what we have learnt to our reflective practice/peer supervision groups to explore ways in which the approaches can be used in case work and to further develop the service. This is an area that that will benefit from the 3 additional therapeutic practitioners joining the team.

We have one of our existing therapeutic practitioners attending Kim Goulding's 'Training the Trainer' course next month which will further enhance our potential for developing and delivering a tiered model of services, enabling us to become more self-sufficient and in preparation for the changes in the ASF.

Peer mentoring for adopters is being explored too as adopters have consistently requested this sort of a service with adopters supporting other adopters.

Local Authority Surgeries: The surgeries remain an effective aspect of our regional adoption support service with the busier surgeries still being Tameside, Bolton and Rochdale. These three surgeries also appear to be the most attended by adoptive families, with Bury and Oldham being most attended by birth families.

We have developed working relationships with letterbox co-ordinators in post with letterbox being a significant aspect of adoption support.

Both Rochdale and Blackburn with Darwen remain without an appointed Letterbox Co-ordinator, which significantly impacts on these two surgeries, which are both heavily supporting the day-to-day management of the letterbox service at present. Oldham and Bury both have full time, established letterbox co-ordinators in post, who hold positive working relationships with many of our regular birth parents needing support. Bolton previously had a part-time experienced letterbox co-ordinator; however, this has since changed and has seen an increase in the support needed from the surgery with occasions whereby two workers have been needed.

Support groups/Events:

We have a full calendar of events for 2019, including support groups, training workshops and events and our steering groups remain in place to further develop this core offer of services.

- **Training Events** - (monthly throughout the year with occasional guest trainers/speakers)
- **Annual Events and Parent Support Groups** - (summer picnic, coffee/drop in events etc.)
- **0-11 Years Support Groups/Events** – (3 x Nurture/Toddler group, Club awesome and activity-based events).
- **Teen Events** – (targeted support groups and activity-based events).

The toddler groups remain very popular and well attended by families and in February 2019 we held a teen group – this was our first event and was low key to start and based at children's centre to support teenagers coming together for the first time. Whilst this was a small number of teens it proved very positive and enabled parents to come together too. The teens involved in this group are continually involved with this steering group and participate in the planning of future events.

Adoption Panels for Adoption Now across the six Local Authorities

Adoption panels continue to operate four times per month with an option to run a fifth panel if required. An annual panel chairs' report exists which summarises the work of the panels.

They continue to be busy and two new panel chairs have been recruited which means there are now 4 panel chairs available.

The panels quality assure all paperwork being presented and it is evident that there is continued improvement in the quality and standard of both matching paperwork and adopter assessment paperwork. The annual panel report contains further details.

Inter-country adoption

Inter-country adoption services are rarely requested in Blackburn with Darwen but the Local Authority has a statutory obligation to provide or commission a service. The Borough remains part of a regional commission for inter-country adoption services provided by the Inter Country Adoption Centre until the end April 2019 at which time this service will be recommissioned.

Participation of Young People

During the last six months, Adoption Now has consulted with a large group of children and young people at its launch event in May. Services being designed are in line with their expressed wishes. Creative ways continue to be used to encourage participation from children who access post adoption support as well as those children who are awaiting adoption, especially, but not exclusively, those who are verbal.

A survey is planned as we approach the 1 year anniversary of Adoption Now and smaller groups have run to continue to ascertain the views of adopters and young people.

Complaints

Adoption Now has received one complaint in relation to Blackburn with Darwen children or families, this was following an adoption disruption and was followed up accordingly.

Allegations

There have been no allegations in the last six months.

Staffing

Over the last year the service has operated with a core team of 8 (full time equivalent) social workers, a deputy team manager and a team manager from Blackburn. These staff are now seconded to Adoption Now and support a much larger service.

The service has one part time maternity leave vacancy at present in the adoption support team.

Budget

The total spent by the local authority on inter-agency adoption fees for the year 2018/19 was £120,552 against a budget of £254,400. Income from placements made using Blackburn with Darwen adopters no longer comes directly into the authority and is retained directly within Adoption Now.

The operational budgets supporting the BwD adoption service were transferred to Adoption Now and combined with the budgets from the other five local authorities for an overall joint budget. The adoption service as a whole showed an overspend for Blackburn with Darwen in 2018/19 of £43,509 compared to an overspend of £231,947 in 2017/18.

New Adoption Support fund applications have transferred to Adoption Now.

Team Development

Adoption Now hold fortnightly team meetings where staff learn together and develop practise. In addition there has been team building training in each of the work streams. In the last six months there has been a two day course on therapeutic life story work run by Richard Rose, panel annual training and training in GDPR. Further training is planned for the coming six months for example, Attachment Based Assessments and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. This is a benefit of the new regionalised approach in that pooled budgets allow for staff to be better equipped to manage children and families coping with transition and trauma. A decision was made to reserve some 'set up' budget in order to skill staff up to meet the needs of families requiring support. This should prevent escalation of difficulties and enable staff to have a better understanding of the issues facing families to ensure the correct support is offered at the correct time.

An annual development plan exists within Adoption Now to ensure continuous improvements are made to the service, and this is reviewed by the six Local Authorities at Operational Group Meetings and by the Board.

Report by
Karen Barrick, Head of Adoption Now RAA

Pamela Price – Blackburn with Darwen Service Lead, Placements