

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES CABINET PANEL
WEDNESDAY, 20 JUNE 2018 AT 9.30AM**

ADOPTION AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

Report of the Director of Children's Services

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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report considers the performance of the Hertfordshire Adoption Service during 2017/18. The Full Adoption Agency Report for 2017 -18 is attached as Appendix A to the report. The report also updates progress towards the regionalisation of adoption, the proposed arrangements to provide adoption services for Luton Borough Council and other development plans for 2018/19.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report, in line with statutory requirements, provides summary information relating to the Adoption Service activity 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018.
- 2.2 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 ("the Act") is the principal piece of legislation governing adoption in England and Wales. It has been in force since 30 December 2005,

The Act provides the framework for implementing plans for adoption. In addition much of the detail of the adoption system is set out in regulations, Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards and imposes a duty on the County Council to prepare an Annual Report.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Panel is asked to note, comment upon and support the content of this Report.

4. Background

4.1 Performance Summary at 31 March 2018

4.1.1 Hertfordshire continues to manage a significant number of children with a plan for adoption, although the cohort of children with an adoption plan is reducing in line with national performance.

4.1.2 Hertfordshire is making improvement on timeliness in matching on a rolling 12 month.

- 53 adopters were approved (15 dually approved)
- 50 children were matched with adopters
- 53 children were placed for adoption, 6 in early permanence arrangements (*foster to adopt*)
- 58 adoption plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker, 70 in 2016/17
- 46 children received a court approved plan for adoption during this period, 60 in 2016/17
- 57 adoption orders were granted, 99 2016/17

13% of children leaving care in Hertfordshire were adopted, which is the average for the Eastern Region, but below the national average (14.9%). This is a reflection on the reducing cohort of children with a plan for adoption and the use of Special Guardianship Orders as an alternative permanence arrangement for children exiting care.

4.1.3 During the rolling year 2017/18, 81% of children adopted spent less than 12 months from Agency Decision Maker decision to placement. This is a significant improvement on 2016/17 at 61.6%. Hertfordshire is also performing above the Eastern Region average of 79.9%

4.2. **Adoption Leadership Board Summary at 31 March 2018**, attached as Appendix B to the report.

- Of the cohort of children with court approved plans for adoption, 37% were awaiting a match, slightly higher than the performance in 2016/17 at 34%, but an improvement on 2014/2015 where 44% were awaiting a match. Of the children awaiting a match, 10 were linked with adopters awaiting a panel date.
- A1 - the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family; timeliness (rolling 12 months) in 2017/8 is 448 days, an improving picture on 2016/17 performance at 523 days.
- A2 - the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to

an adoptive family; timeliness (rolling 12 months) in 2017/18 is 183 days, a significant improvement on the 2016/17 reported figure of 265 days.

- Only 7 children [8% of the cohort with court approved plans] had an adoption plan changed by the Agency Decision Maker due to changing needs. This is very similar performance to 2016/17 and continues to indicate the progress made to identify families to meet the needs of children most likely to wait for a match.

4.3 **Adoption Score Card Summary 2014/17** attached as Appendix C to the report

- A1 – At 533 days, Hertfordshire is 107 days from the target performance (426 days). This performance represents an improvement. There are significant improvements in the timeliness of this activity which has been achieved by proactive planning by children’s services and reducing court timescales. The 3-year average is shorter than that in 2013/16 and is just above the England average [520 days].
- A2 – At 247 days, Hertfordshire is 126 days from the target (121 days). The 3-year average between court agreeing adoption and LA approving a match is longer than in 2013-2016 and is below the England average [220 days]. This performance has been anticipated due to a cohort of 18 children, the majority aged between 4-11 with a complex profile, who waited a considerable period for a match. 9 of these children were adopted by their foster carers and 8 children were in sibling groups. Hertfordshire performs just above the England average with 6% of children 5 or over leaving care who are adopted. The timeliness of matching some of these children for adoption will remain a feature of this performance indicator until 2019/20.
- A3 – 50% of Hertfordshire children with a placement order are waiting less than 14 months from entering care to placement, this is an improvement on 2013/16 figure. Hertfordshire is slightly under performing in relation to the local authority average [53%].

4.4 **Adoption Support Fund**

- 4.4.1 There remains a high demand for therapeutic provision for adoptive families in Hertfordshire, through use of the Adoption Support Fund. At the end of March 2018, 239 applications were made to the Adoption Support Fund, with a total of £445.058 being received for a range of specialist provision and assessment, including sensory integration therapy and therapeutic play therapy. New arrangements require Hertfordshire to match fund packages of support over the fair access limits. Match funding was received for 4 packages of support with total spend on £7.674.05.

5. Finance

- 5.1 Financial support for adopters [adoption allowances] continues to be available to meet the needs of children and ensure the stability of the adoption arrangement. Further discretionary payments for support are available, where resource is not covered by allowances or the Adoption Support Fund.
- 5.2 The year-end spend of £2,402,551 [adoption allowances] was fully aligned to resource availability of £2,686,616

Inter-Agency Arrangements

- 5.3 During 2017-18, 13 Hertfordshire children were placed in inter-agency arrangements. Hertfordshire adopters provided 21 placements for children from other Local Authorities generating an income of £346,145 from inter-agency fees.

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.
- 6.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public-Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.
- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 6.4 The Adoption Service works with the statutory guidance issued with regard to the placement of black and minority ethnic (BME) children to avoid any delay in matching on the grounds of ethnicity. During 2017/18, the Adoption Service worked effectively through timely family finding activity to ensure that children from a BME background did not experience any undue delay in matching due to ethnicity, or any other background factors.
- 6.5 No EqIA was undertaken in relation to this report.

Background Papers

- Adoption Service Annual Report – *Appendix A*
- Adoption Leadership Board Data – *Appendix B*
- Hertfordshire Adoption Scorecard – *Appendix C*