
Report of Director of Children's Services
Report to Executive Board**Date: 22nd June 2016****Subject: Adoption Agency Annual Report**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. It is a requirement of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 that the Executive side of the Council receives written reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption agency every 6 months. The annual report is presented to the Executive Board and this report provides the annual report of adoption service activity from April 2015 to March 2016, and the outcomes achieved by the service.
2. The last few years have seen significant changes in the government's adoption reform agenda and Leeds adoption service has responded well to these developments and continues to provide an effective and good service as judged by Ofsted in February 2015.
3. A further policy paper on Adoption by the government called "Adoption: a vision for change" was published on the 7th April 2016, setting out the government's vision for adoption services over the next four years. The proposals aim to: address the unexpected recent fall in the number of adoption decisions; improve the effectiveness of the system through the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs), with all local authorities (LAs) being part of an RAA by 2020; improve the professional skills and knowledge of the workforce through a new development programme and a new Specialist Knowledge and Skills statement setting out expectations on social workers; reduce the time children wait to be adopted; provide more

high quality adoption support; and introduce new measures to embed further strong performance management and accountability.

4. Leeds has been an active part of the wider Yorkshire and Humber adoption consortium and will continue to work closely with other Local Authorities and Voluntary adoption agencies working on the government's agenda and there will be significant changes for all Local Authorities in the transition to Regional Adoption Agencies. A paper regarding regionalisation is due to be presented at Executive Board in July to discuss this in more detail.

Recommendations

5. That the Executive Board receive this annual report and continues to support the work of the adoption service to ensure our adopted children receive the best possible outcomes and support.

1 Purpose of this report

This report details the work of Leeds City Council Adoption Service from April 2015 to March 2016 inclusive. The purpose of the report is to consider the activity of the service in relation to its compliance with the national minimum standards; the implementation and progression of children's care plans; the service offered to those seeking to adopt and the services offered to those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support.

It is also used to identify any significant trends within adoption and how Leeds can continue to meet the changing demands within the adoption service.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Adoption is one of the most important and significant decisions that can be made for a child. As part of its wider agenda and ambition to be a Child Friendly City, Leeds City Council wants all children and young people in Leeds to grow up in a stable, safe and loving family. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families adoption offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment throughout life.
- 2.2 The adoption service was last inspected by Ofsted as part of the single inspection of Children Social Work Services between 20th January 2015 and the 11th February 2015; the report was published on the 27th March 2015. Adoption services were subjected to robust scrutiny which resulted in some very positive and helpful feedback. The adoption service was judged to be good overall.

3 Main issues

National Picture

Political interest in adoption has continued during 2015/16 with the National Leadership Board monitoring and appraising the performance of adoption services and their delivery of the substantial reform agenda. The focus has moved on from speeding up adopter recruitment and assessment to eradicating delays in the matching process and adoption support services. The Adoption Support Fund was launched on 1st May 2015, offering the opportunity for adoptive families to source adoption support services that are not available as part of many adoption agencies' core offer. Leeds has been involved in the evaluation of the Adoption Support Fund and continues to make good use of this resource to support adoptive placements.

- 3.1.1 Leeds has continued to work with the National Adoption Gateway, with management representation from Leeds on this group.
- 3.1.2 In 2014 the government implemented new legislation placing a new duty upon local authorities to consider placing the child with local authority foster carers who are also approved prospective adopters when they are

considering adoption for a child. As a result of this Leeds has taken the lead and developed a model of Early Permanence Placements as part of the Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium, in conjunction with Barnados. This has been implemented by all the 15 Local Authority Adoption Agencies in the Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium. Leeds has successfully embedded this model of practice which is underpinned by restorative principles and received positive feedback regarding this as part of the 2015 Ofsted inspection.

- 3.1.3 The adoption landscape saw a significant shift in 2014 as a result of some very influential case law, re B (June 2013) and B-S (September 2013) which directly challenged the robust nature of adoption plans and decision making for children by the courts and all involved professionals. This resulted in a significant reduction in the numbers of plans for adoption being presented to the court and the number of placement orders made during 2014 and 2015.
- 3.1.4 The reduction of placement and adoption orders made nationally has been so dramatic that the President of the Family Division, Mr Justice Munby, redressed the balance by adding a statement to recent case law stating the importance of adoption for children. As a result during 2015/16, there has been a 25 per cent increase in children being presented to the agency decision maker with a plan for adoption, compared to the 2014/15 period.
- 3.1.5 The adoption service in Leeds has been required to respond to these changes very quickly with adopter recruitment focusing on adopters who are able to consider children with complex needs and uncertainty, children who are older and sibling groups. We also seek to recruit adopters who are able to consider early permanence as a route to adoption.

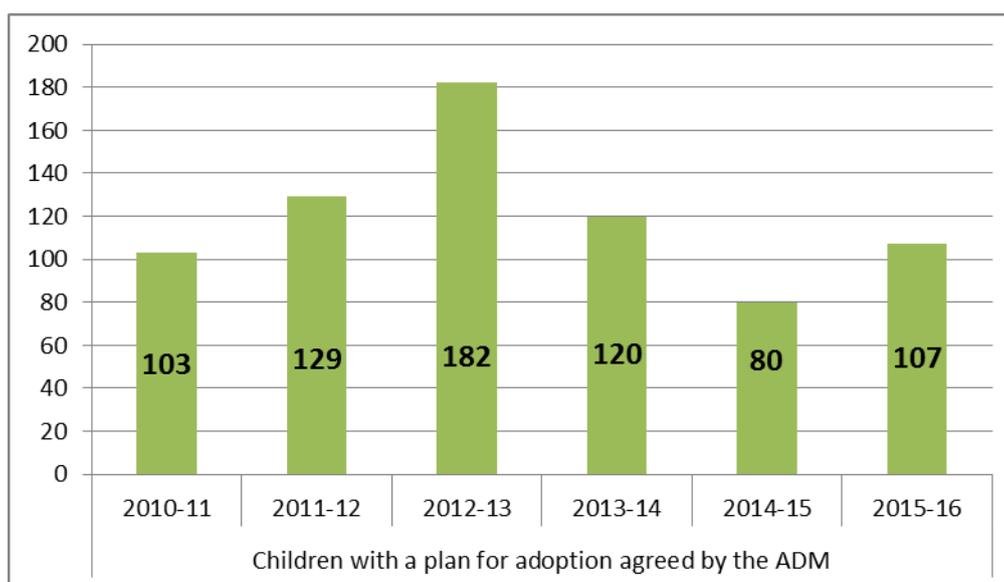
3.2 Adoption Service

- 3.2.1 The Adoption Service has seen some changes in its management team including the reduction of management hours and social workers to reflect the reduction of children requiring adoption. These changes have been well managed to ensure it continues to have an experienced and knowledgeable group of staff. There are now 3.5 full time equivalent team managers who take lead responsibility for different aspects of the work, namely adoption support, family finding, recruitment and advertising and assessment, procedure and process.
- 3.2.2 The teams are made up of experienced social workers, a qualified teacher and a small number of unqualified staff who mainly support adopters in the stage 1 of the adoption process. The teams provide a duty help line service for prospective adopters, adoptive families, birth parents, social workers and colleagues who require adoption advice and support. Team members take a lead role in providing other services such as family finding, adoption support work, letterbox contact and intermediary work. Inter-country adoption work is now undertaken as part of a regional consortium contract

by the Yorkshire Adoption Agency, based in Doncaster. This allows for a specialised approach to this intricate area of adoption practice.

- 3.2.4 Staff within the service provide consultation on all aspects of practice relating to adoption and permanence to the fieldwork social work teams. Training events are also provided for children's social workers and managers in relation to adoption and permanence planning issues, family finding and issues arising through adoption support.

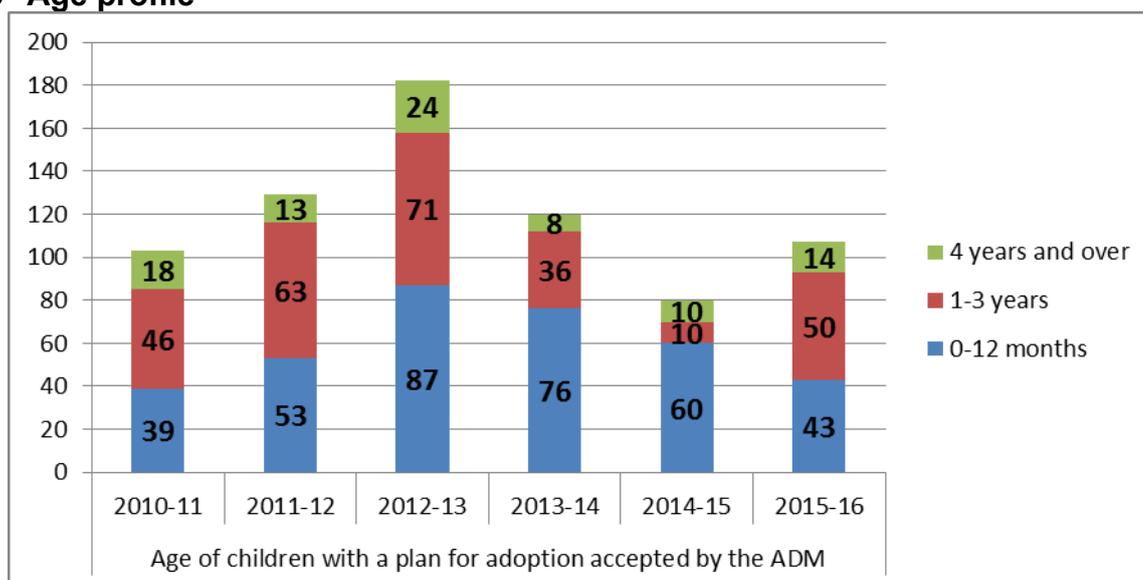
3.3 Number of Children approved in the year with a plan of adoption, April 2015 to March 2016



- 3.3.1 Between April 2015 and March 2016, 107 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. Of the 107 children with a plan for adoption, there were 56 female and 51 male children.

- 3.3.2 In total, this is a 25 per cent increase on the last year's full year figure of 80 children. As considered in the 2014/15 annual report, this increase is broadly in line with levels in 2010/11 and reflects that adoption remains an appropriate permanence plan for a number of children and that there has been a rise in care applications within the courts nationally.

3.3.5 Age profile



3.3.6 The age range of children requiring adoption has changed somewhat in the last twelve months, with an increase in the number of children requiring adoption who are aged between one and three years. Identifying adopters who are able to consider children who are older or children who have additional needs remains a challenge within adopter recruitment and some children with complex needs or who are older can wait longer to be placed for adoption.

3.3.7 Ethnicity

Of the 107 children with a plan for adoption this year, 88 children were from white British backgrounds and 19 children (17.7%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

3.4 Placement with Siblings

As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this cannot always be achieved. The agency recommends the use of sibling assessments to ensure good quality decision making and support plans when making sibling placements for adoption.

The numbers of children requiring adoption in sibling groups is 35, compared to 11 in the previous year. This year there are:

26 children in sibling groups of 2

9 children in sibling groups of 3

3.5 Children with an adoption plan, currently waiting

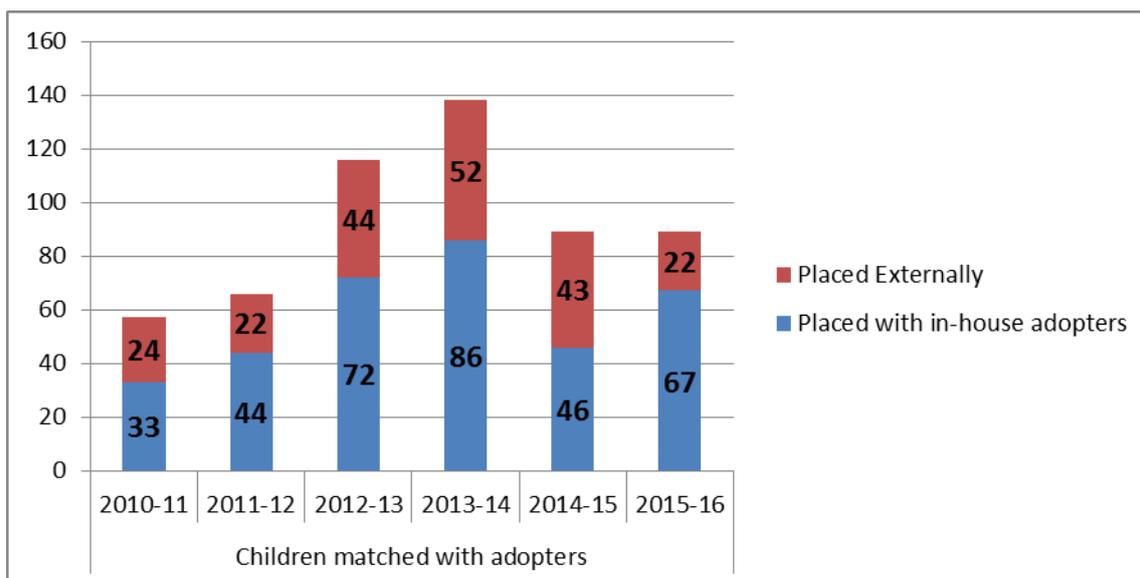
3.5.1 At the present time there are 51 Leeds children with a plan for adoption not currently placed and requiring adopters. This is a roughly similar number of

children as the same time last year, when there were 53 children with a plan for adoption but not yet placed.

- 3.5.2 16 children out of the 51 are 0-1yrs and 27 who are aged between 2 and 4 years. 16 children have potential “matches” identified and seven of these have a date booked at adoption panel for the “match” to be formally considered. In addition, there are seven children where their foster carers have expressed an interest in adopting them and this is being explored, and in three of these cases, assessment is ongoing.
- 3.5.3 From the children waiting for a placement there are 26 girls and 25 boys, and 21 per cent are children from BME backgrounds, with the remaining children coming from White British backgrounds. The plans for these children are actively reviewed with clear monitoring and tracking systems to understand the range of family finding activity going on for these children and whether adoption remains the right plan for each child. The delays for these children are related primarily to the needs of the children; the need to place siblings together, the age of the children or their particular special needs or complexity.
- 3.5.4 The search for prospective adopters regularly extends across the country using the National Adoption Register and at National Exchange days across the country. Some children are featured in adoption publications. One area of considerable success has been the use of Adoption Link, which is an online matching service where approved prospective adopters are able to log in securely and identify potential links. This has enabled the placement of some harder to place children, as well as positively engaging adopters in the matching process. Family finding work continues to be time consuming and social workers spend time travelling across the country to locate potential families once links have been made and to offer support post-placement.

3.6 Children matched in the year for adoption

- 3.6.1 Between April 2015 and March 2016, 89 children were matched with families at adoption panels; this the same figure as the period April 2014 to March 2015.
- 3.6.2 During April 2015 and March 2016, 15% of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Leeds continues to do very well nationally in this area of adoption practice. This is positive as children from BME communities often take longer to place for adoption.



67 of these children were matched within Leeds Local Authority

3 of these children were matched through local authority Adoption Agencies within the Yorkshire and Humber regional consortium.

3 of these children were matched through Voluntary Adoption Agencies inside the consortium

11 of these children were matched with outside consortium Local Authorities

5 of these children were matched through outside consortium Voluntary Adoption Agencies

3.6.3 More children this year have been placed within the surrounding area of Leeds which is encouraging. The need for effective and well-co-ordinated support is essential to ensure that the outcomes for children are positive and that disruptions in placement are minimised. Placing children locally affords more support to the adoptive placement from social work staff, as well as adoptive families being able to access the comprehensive adoption support services provided by Leeds.

3.7 Age Range, siblings, Early Permanency Placements and foster carer adoptions

- 26 of the children matched were babies and 1 was relinquished for adoption
- 49 children were of pre-school age
- 13 of the children matched were aged four years or older
- 22 children were placed in sibling groups and four children were placed with a sibling already in the placement
- 5 children were placed in an early permanency placement arrangement
- 4 children were matched with their foster carer

3.8 Disruptions

- 3.8.1 In the last year, one adoption placement has disrupted, affecting one child placed for adoption. This represents a continued decrease in disruptions of adoptive placements, but any disruption is distressing for all involved. In this case, the key factors related to the child's significant needs and ongoing adoption support.
- 3.8.2 Disruption is a cause for concern and in every case a disruption meeting takes place to ensure that a full understanding of the issues leading to the breakdown are fully understood to inform future planning for the child and the adoptive parents.
- 3.8.3 The recent Ofsted inspection commented positively about the low number of disruptions and stated that the agency seeks to undertake clear analysis and learning in relation to all disruptions which are shared with all adoption staff and panel members.

3.9 Adoption Scorecard statistics and Key Performance Indicators.

- 3.9.1 The DfE produce a range of comparative adoption statistics which are analysed for the purposes of scrutiny with regard to adoption performance in all adoption agencies across England. The introduction of the new strategy from the government suggests that the adoption scorecard in its current format will be phased out and replaced with a new scorecard that focuses on regional adoption agencies rather than local authorities over the next 18 months.

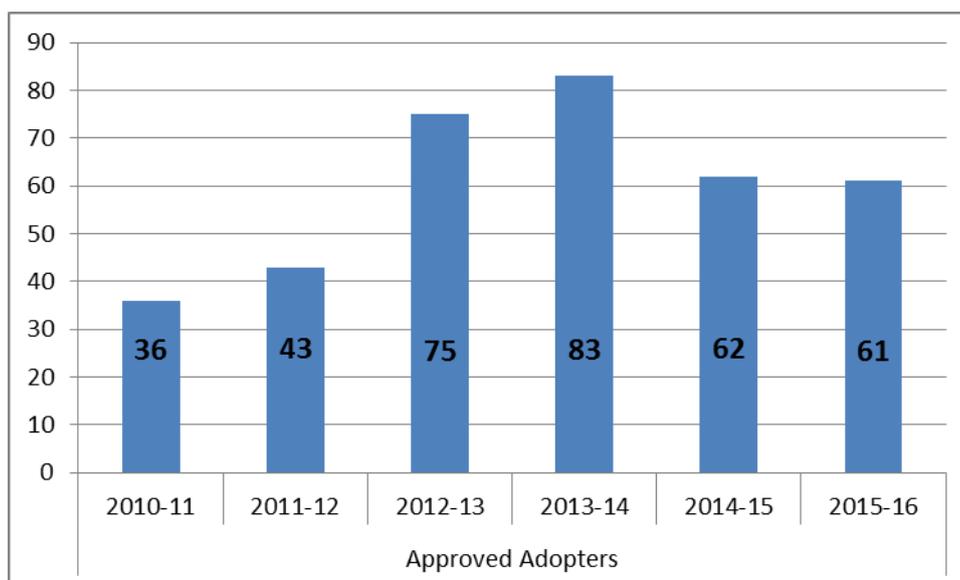
Leeds does not achieve the government-set, ever-decreasing thresholds for the two main adoption indicators. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for Leeds children who were adopted was 536 days (2012-15 average), which is Leeds' best performance since the adoption scorecards started, 11 days less than the previous year's average. Despite this figure being 49 days above the government-set threshold, it is 57 days less than the England average, and better than all comparator averages.

Indicator A2 reports 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. At 238 days (2012-15 average), performance in Leeds was the same as the previous year, 117 days above the threshold set by the government, and 15 days above the England average. Leeds' performance is, however, better than the Yorkshire and The Humber and statistical neighbour averages. The government threshold is 121 days and no local authorities met this threshold and the England average is 223 days.

3.10 Profile of adopters

- 3.10.1 Between April 2015 and March 2016, 61 adoptive households were approved. slightly below our target of recruiting 65 adopters in the 2015/16 period.

3.10.2 Due to the reduction of children with a plan for adoption over the 2013 to 2015 period, and a number of adopters waiting for placements the adoption team changed the recruitment strategy undertaking a targeted recruitment approach for specific children and sibling groups. The agency continues to adapt the marketing and recruitment strategy to respond to the changing needs of children needing adoption.



3.10.3 20 households stated a preference for a child under 2 years of age. The remaining 34 households wished to adopt a child aged up to eight years, with 13 households wishing to adopt a child aged 0 to 3 years and 12 households wishing to adopt a child aged 0 to 4 years. Two households wished to consider children aged 18 months to 4 years.

3.10. There has been an increase in adopters able to consider children aged over two years. This is a positive move considering the number of children waiting for adoption aged over four years and shows the benefits of the agency's targeted recruitment strategy.

45 families wanted one child

15 families wanted 2 children

1 family wanted 3 children

16 households approved in the 2015/16 period stated a preference to consider early permanence as a route to adoption.

3.10.6 There was a significant increase in the number of households wanting to adopt sibling groups of two children, from 3 in the 2014/15 period to 15 in this period, which also illustrates the benefits of the agency's targeted recruitment. This is an area of continued focus for the agency given the children with a current plan for adoption.

10 applications were from foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care. This is a slight increase on the 2014/15 figure of six foster carers.

- 3.10.7 11% adopters are from BME backgrounds. We need to monitor our percentage of BME carers and keep a focus on ensuring that we approve a full range of adoptive families to meet the range of children requiring placement, while at the same time not relying on matching children with regard to ethnic identity as an overriding factor. An updated equality impact assessment is near completion and recommendations will be made in relation to ensuring we continue to focus on recruiting a diverse range of adopters.
- 3.10.8 As of 17th March 2016, there are 26 approved adoptive households. 14 are available to consider placements. Six have a panel date booked for a match and three are considering potential matches. There are three households who are not currently active for family finding for various reasons.
- 3.10.9 The stage 1 and stage 2 adoption assessment processes are now fully embedded into our practice in Leeds, and the service has robust systems for both the administration of the process and ensuring timely social work assessment and intervention. In the 2015/16 period, 57 per cent of households met the timescale for stage one and 80 per cent of households met the timescale for stage two. Delays in stage 1 are generally due to delays in statutory checks being returned and adopters asking for more time before progressing to Stage 2.

3.11 Non agency adoptions

- 3.11.1 The local authority is responsible for assessing adopters who apply to the courts for a non-agency adoption. 49 applications have been made this year relating to Partner adoptions (previously known as step parent adoptions), which is a steady figure from the previous year. This work is undertaken by the social work teams in the areas

3.13 Recruitment & Preparation

- 3.13.1 Adoption advertising has continued using a range of media including radio, bus backs, advertising boards, social media and google ad-works. Social media in particular has been increased as a positive way of reaching a large number of people. In addition we have run a targeted campaign leading to a city centre drop in event in Leeds Trinity Centre on a busy shopping Saturday at the end of National Adoption Week. The Adopt4Leeds website, advertising and adopter recruitment received positive comment in the 2015 Ofsted inspection, being referred to as effective, innovative and broad in scope.
- 3.13.2 We continue to take part in work place visits to increase awareness of adoption and promote flexible working for adoptive and foster parents. These have been well received by employers, including Yorkshire Bank, the Royal Armouries, British Gas and Aviva. These visits form part of recruitment and Leeds Businesses Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.

Example of advertising:



3.13.4 The service continues to provide information meetings and have increased these from monthly to every 3 weeks; these evenings have seen a decrease in the number of people attending, with 315 people attending during 2015/16. In the previous full year, 462 people attended, and this decrease may reflect awareness in the adopter community of a reduced number of children available for adoption nationally. Leeds has also held targeted recruitment events for LGBT adopters and single adopters. In addition to the regular information evenings and the National Adoption Week event at the Trinity Centre, the agency also held a Saturday morning event at the Town Hall, which was well received. The information meetings continue to be held in alternating venues in the North and East of the city with the hope of increasing accessibility for prospective adoptive families.

3.14 Inter country adoption

3.14.1 The Yorkshire Adoption Agency provides expert inter-country services to all adopters on behalf of the Local Authority consortium agencies. This value for money contract saves Leeds time and money as inter-country work is very specialist, complex and time consuming. Post-order report visits to the child's country of origin following the placement remain the responsibility of our service and these extend up to five years post placement when adopting from some countries.

3.15 Adoption Support Services

- 3.15.1 Adoption Support continues to remain an area of considerable growth and considerable need within the service. As more children have been placed for adoption in the past four years, the corresponding need for adoption support services rises.
- 3.15.2 The nature of support requested varies, but frequently includes requests from adoptive parents for advice on strategies for integrating children into families, managing challenging behaviour and support with telling difficult life story information, as well as requests for professional advice and help for children in school where early developmental trauma has led to attachment difficulties. There have been 264 referrals for adoption support into the team this year, including new families and families who have previously received services.
- 3.15.3 The service continues to have contracts with Adoption UK and PAC/UK for family support services. The Adoption UK buddy support scheme has ceased in February 2016.

3.16 Support groups

- 3.16.1 There is currently one evening support group for adoptive parents per month for adoptive parents with children of all ages. In addition, there are two monthly parent and child stay and play support groups in the east and west of the city. An experienced adoptive parent volunteers at each session. Some of these families may be invited to attend a six weekly parent and child play social group, based on theraplay techniques, which enhance attachment and bonding through play based and sensory activities.
- 3.16.2 An adolescent's social group, Cooking Crew, has continued during 2015/16 and has a consistent attendance and positive impact. The agency also facilitates an activity group for adopted teenagers approximately four times per year, which is also well attended. One of Leeds adoption support staff continues to have a role in facilitating the regional young person's support group and had a role in developing the young person's consortium website. Leeds remains committed to supporting this programme of work.
- 3.16.3 A newsletter is produced twice yearly by the adoption support team in conjunction with colleagues in Communications. This publication in spring and autumn lists all the groups and development occurring in Leeds adoption support services for adoptive parents, colleagues and partner agencies.

3.17 Training

- 3.17.1 A rolling programme of training and workshops for adoptive parents is provided including topics such as theraplay, play for grown-ups, nursery and early years education, anger and non-violent resistance, and internet safety.

3.17.2 Safe Base training for adoptive parents both pre and post adoption order continues. The team have been piloting a new evidence based parenting programme, AdOpt, funded by the DfE. The outcomes from this are extremely positive to date. The service has also commenced a 12 week parenting course based around the principles of Non-Violent Resistance targeted at families experiencing a high level of child to parent violence.

Adoption Support Fund

3.17.3 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) opened for business nationally on the 1st May 2015 with £19.3 million available for agencies to apply for on behalf of their adoptive families. The fund has been set up to reduce the gap between adoptive children needing therapeutic services and receiving them, ultimately to improve outcomes for young people and families. Between April 2015 and March 2016 Leeds received £187k from the adoption support fund in order to support to adoptive families.

3.17.5 Applications opened from 1st May 2015 and it has recently been announced that the fund will continue for four years from this date. All adoption staff have received training around the completion of adoption support assessments, available therapies and adoption support fund applications to ensure the service is able to make good use of this resource.

3.17.6 The administration of the adoption support fund is time consuming yet essential to ensure that funds can be secured to provide services.

3.18 Post Adoption Contact

3.18.1 The adoption archivist manages over 1000 'letterbox' contacts where there is an exchange of letters and/or photos between the adoptive family and the birth family, with 805 letter box exchanges actively taking place in 2015 and 2016.

3.18.2 The impact of social networking in adoption is far reaching and is extremely difficult to support. There are safeguarding concerns as young people often do not recognise the issues that originally necessitated the plan of adoption. It is very hard to intervene when a young person has made unregulated contact with birth family members and this is sometimes impossible for adoptive parents to manage without professional support.

3.19 Work with birth families

3.19.1 The adoption service has a contract with PAC UK (previously known as After Adoption Yorkshire) to provide an independent support service to birth parents and support to adopted adults.

3.19.2 A birth parent group is currently being co-led by a PAC-UK worker along with a contemporary birth parent. This group has had some very positive feedback

from birth parents and is able to offer some helpful advice to social workers in engaging birth parents. The group has been consulted previously in relation to a leaflet created by the adoption support team for practical advice to birth parents on letter writing and contact arrangements and in relation to the Consortium's Early Permanence Project.

3.20 Birth Records Counselling

3.20.1 The local authority has a legal responsibility to provide a birth record counselling service (known as Schedule II) and this service has continued to receive regular requests for birth records counselling. There are an increasing number of enquiries from younger adopted people, whose histories can be more complex, coming as many do from a background of abuse and neglect. This work is extremely complex, requires skilled adoption social work and can be very time consuming. The service recognises that service users may wish to seek support from an independent organisation and so PAC-UK is contracted to supply this too, if required.

3.20.2 There is regular consultation with service users and evaluation forms have been very positive with all saying that they would seek support again and would recommend the service to others.

3.21 Adoption Panel

3.21.1 There has been a reduction in adoption panels undertaken each month from four to three due to the less demand. The Adoption and Fostering Panel Manager role continues to work well offering a central contact point and coordinating the smooth running of panel business. Positive feedback is also received regarding the role of panel advisors in panel. The quality and timeliness of minutes is taken seriously by panel chairs and significant efforts are made by panel chairs, panel members, administrators and panel advisors to ensure the minutes reach the agency decision maker in a timely manner.

3.21.2 The quality of adoption work presented to panel remains good in Leeds. Panel members and the Agency continue to work together in order to manage the ongoing changes and improvements in practice and expectations on performance. Quality Assurance is taken seriously and the feedback forms were revised in April 2015 to provide more detailed feedback to social workers with the aim of continuing to raise performance.

3.21.3 Six monthly meetings continue to be held between the agency and panel chairs with the aim of ensuring good communication regarding the development of the service. Panel chairs are encouraged to raise any issues as they arise and panel chairs also have the opportunity of an annual appraisal with the agency decision maker.

3.22 Quality Assurance

3.22.1 The adoption service has a clear quality assurance framework. This includes service user feedback, feedback from adoption panels and case file audits.

Case file audits have been carried out regularly in 2015/16 and the quality of work undertaken is consistently very good. The feedback from adoption panels on the quality of reports being presented is generally of a high quality. Of the Prospective Adopters Reports presented to panel in the full year, 91% were graded as being good or above and 88% of adoption placement reports were graded as being of a good standard or above. 68% of Child Permanence Reports presented to the agency decision maker were graded as being excellent, very good or good in nature, with 30 per cent being satisfactory. A significant effort goes into the feedback to workers in order to maintain and raise standards in a clear and supportive manner. Training, support and development will continue to be provided in this area and the adoption training offer to social work staff is due to be reviewed with the Training and Development Manager in April 2016.

3.22.2 With regard to feedback from service users at adoption panel, the majority of adopters indicated a high level of overall satisfaction following their attendance at panel, with only one instance of a low level of satisfaction, which was followed up with the attendee to better understand their feedback and ways to improve the panel experience. Most attendees found the panel chair and panel members to be welcoming and supportive in the discussions held.

3.22.3 There were eight complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during the year. The Service Manager maintains an oversight of all complaints and disseminates any learning to the management and social work teams as appropriate.

3.23 Strategic issues and forward plans

3.23.1 It is our overarching objective to deliver good outcomes for children and the adoption service ensures that it works closely with all parts of children's social work services in order to improve and promote early permanency planning for children.

3.23.2 Leeds Adoption Service will need to continue with its targeted adopter recruitment strategy and will aim to recruit adopters who can parent the more challenging harder to place children and who are able to adopt a child through the Early Permanency route to adoption. Recruiting and supporting the Early Permanence adopters (who are, in effect, foster carers for a short time as well) is challenging and time consuming but the rewards and benefits for the child are significant.

3.23.6 It is essential that Leeds delivers with regard to the implementation of the Adoption Support Fund and that we are in the best possible position to make the most of the money currently being made available by the DfE on behalf of our adoptive families. All adoption support referrals, excepting soft play and evening support groups, start with an outcomes based adoption support assessment and the development of services continues to be driven by the needs of adoptive families and the desire to improve outcomes for children growing up in adoptive families.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The adoption service has well established mechanisms in place to consult and engage with adoptive and prospective adoptive parents. These include the use of feedback forms and regular meetings with adoptive parents. The service also has good regional and national links which supports it in obtaining feedback on issues for adopters. The content of this report takes into account these local and national issues.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 This is discussed throughout the report. The number of children from a Black and Minority Ethnic Group in need of adoption in the 2015/16 period is 17.7%. Nationally children from a Black and Minority Ethnic background tend to wait longer for a placement due to a shortage of adoptive parents to meet their needs. The challenge is to recruit a more diverse range of adoptive families from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities. This is reflected in our recruitment strategy and specific statements in relation to this can be seen on our adoption recruitment website and in our statement of purpose. An updated equality impact assessment is near completion and recommendations will be made in relation to ensuring we continue to focus on recruiting a diverse range of adopters.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 The activities in this report contribute to the Best Council Plan outcome for everyone in Leeds to 'be safe and feel safe' with specific priorities for 2016-17 to 'keep people safe from harm' and 'support children to have the best start in life'. In addition, the supporting Children and Young People's Plan identifies Looked after Children as one of three priority 'obsessions'. The adoption service is integral to our plan to safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of Children Looked After through ensuring all our children are placed in a permanent family outside the care system as soon as possible.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The changes in the demand for adoptive placements has somewhat levelled this year, although it remains significantly lower than the peak in 2012/13, and as a result, staffing resources have been reduced and deployed elsewhere to ensure the service is value for money.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 This report is subject to Call In.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 It is a regulatory requirement on the Local Authority that this report is prepared and presented to the Executive Board of the Council.

5 Conclusions

- 6 The landscape in adoption continues to change rapidly and the need to respond to these changes has been an ongoing challenge over the last few years for the service. Despite these changes Leeds adoption service has continues to provide an effective service. The 2015 Ofsted inspection provides evidence of the good service provided.

7 Recommendations

- 6.1 That the Executive Board receives this report and continues to support the work of the Adoption Team to ensure our adopted children receive the best possible support.

8 Background documents¹

- 8.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.