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## **Annual report on the Adoption Service in York: April 2012 - March 2013**

### **1. Background**

1.1 The Adoption National Minimum Standard 25.6 requires that the Executive of the local authority receives written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months. This report sets out a summary of the work of the Adoption Service for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. The attached Appendices provide data on activity over this period. The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in January 2010 and was rated as good overall with outstanding prospects for 'Helping children make a positive contribution'

### **2. Summary of main issues**

2.1 The increase in the numbers of children with a plan for adoption in recent years, alongside the Government drive to increase the number of children adopted, has led to greater demands on the Service. In recognition of this, the recent restructure in Children's Social Care has increased management capacity in the service by establishing a separate post of Adoption Service Manager and increased the staff complement by 50% from 2.5 to 5 placement workers.

### **3. Purpose of this report**

3.1 The purpose of the report is to consider the activity of the Adoption 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 in adoption practice and how York can continue to meet the changing demands within adoption.

## **4. Overview**

4.1 Adoption work within the agency is located within two main areas; within child care teams who complete the necessary internal and legal processes when adoption is identified as a suitable option for a child; and within the family placement team where adoption social workers assess an individual's suitability to be approved as an adopter and help children's social workers identify a suitable adoptive family for a child.

4.2 City of York has always been a high performing adoption agency, and is ranked in the top local authorities nationally for its performance in respect of the percentage of children adopted from the looked after children's population. York performs well in respect of placing a high percentage of children with a prospective adoptive family within 12 months of the plan for adoption being agreed, and in having a low rate of these placements disrupting before an Adoption Order is made. These three indicators taken together are indicative of a concerted approach to the active planning for adoption, consistent support to prospective adopters and prompt completion of the process. National data on the performance of all 152 local authorities is gathered by government in the 'Adoption Scorecard'.

4.3 The most recently published scorecard in November 2012 (hyper-link in Appendices) rated City of York's performance (out of 152 local authorities) as:

- 19<sup>th</sup> for the percentage of Looked After Children (LAC) adopted during the year;
- 6<sup>th</sup> for the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family;
- 31<sup>st</sup> for the average time between a LA getting a Placement Order and matching a child and
- 19<sup>th</sup> for the percentage of LAC who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family.

## **5. National Picture**

5.1 The work of City of York Council as an adoption agency is regulated by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 [ACA 2002] which was fully implemented in December 2005. A full revision of the statutory adoption guidance was issued by the Department for Education in February 2011; part of the Statutory Guidance relating to prospective adopters has been revised again for implementation on 31st July 2013, and further revisions are expected later in

the year. Statutory guidance does not have the full force of statute but should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation. New Adoption National Minimum Standards were published at the end of March 2011 and together with the Adoption Regulations form the basis of the regulatory framework which governs the conduct of adoption agencies.

5.2 There has been considerable national focus on adoption activity as the government has raised concerns about the reduction nationally in children in care being placed for adoption, delay in placing children for adoption and the need to recruit more adopters. An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay published by the Department for Education (DoE) in March 2012 set out the changes to be made to speed up the adoption system in England, followed by revised Regulations and Statutory Guidance. All reforms requiring primary legislation are expected to be implemented from April 2014.

5.3 A National Gateway for Adoption has been set up, allowing those interested in adoption to learn more about what adoption means, in order to be better informed before they approach an adoption agency. They will also be able to gain advice and information about the local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies most appropriate for them.

5.4 A new, shorter two-stage training and assessment approval process for prospective adopters is introduced from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. The new process will comprise a two month initial training and preparation stage (Stage One) and a four month assessment stage (Stage Two). Stage One will commence when a prospective adopter registers his/her interest with an adoption agency, and will end with the agency's decision on whether the prospective adopter can proceed to Stage Two.

5.5 There will be a fast-track procedure for approved foster carers and previous adopters, who will receive a tailored assessment and, at the same time, any necessary additional training. A new process 'Fostering for Adoption' will allow approved prospective adopters to be approved rapidly as temporary foster carers so that they can foster a named child (with whom they have been matched to adopt) whilst a placement order is sought.

5.6 Steps have also been taken to reduce the length of court proceedings. The courts have introduced a new care monitoring system which indicates when cases come in, whether they are on the 26 week track, or "exceptional" track.

5.7 There is a new duty on local authorities to refer a child's details to the National Adoption Register as soon as possible and no later than three months from the decision that he/she should be placed for adoption (unless the agency is actively considering a match for the child with a particular prospective adopter) and to ensure that all the information about the child referred to the Register is kept up to date. Likewise all adoption agencies have to refer a prospective adopter's details (subject to their consent) to the Register no later than three months from approval (unless they are actively considering matching him/her with a particular child).

5.8 There has been consultation seeking views on whether the size of adoption and fostering panels should be restricted to a maximum of five members with a quorum of three; the outcome of this consultation is expected shortly.

5.9 The DoE published 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' in January 2013 which stated the intention of putting forward legislative proposals that would give the Secretary of State the power to require local authorities to outsource the recruitment and approval of adopters.. It was acknowledged that this was a radical proposal and local authorities were challenged to come up with alternative proposals that would increase the number of adoptive families available to avoid these services being taken away from them.

5.10 In February 2013, the DoE announced financial support for greater investment in adoption in the form of a one-off £150 million Adoption Reform Grant for 2013/14. This funding is to address the backlog in children awaiting adoption as well as supporting wider improvements in the functioning of adoption services. The grant is in two parts: Part A which is not ring fenced, for which City of York was awarded £279,193 and Part B, which is ring fenced, for which York received £160,880.

## **6. Regional picture**

6.1 York continues to be an active member of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium. Membership of the Consortium has worked to York's advantage in that, unlike most other local authorities in the region, York is too small geographically to place children from York with adopters in the City, without compromising the anonymity of a placement. York therefore places children across the region (and beyond, where necessary) and recruits adopters for use by other local authorities. City of York's use of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium is documented in the balance sheet of April 2013 (Appendix 3).

6.2 The Yorkshire Adoption Consortium has charged a fee for the placement of a child between agencies, at two-thirds (£8758), of the nationally set inter-agency fee (£13138). Thus a placement with a local authority in the Consortium has costs less than placing a child with a local authority outside of the Consortium, or with a family approved by a Voluntary Adoption Agency, where the fee is £27000. However the Government is equalising the nationally set inter-agency fee so that all placements between agencies will be charged at £27000 and expects the ring fenced element of the Adoption Reform Grant to be used by local authorities to cushion this upraise.

6.3 The Consortium has put together a response to 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' proposing a regional approach to increasing recruitment and approval of more adopters. Along with other local authorities in the Consortium, York has agreed additional funding for the Consortium in order to achieve this. It is proposed that members continue to pay two-thirds of the nationally set inter-agency fee, rather than the full fee. It remains to be seen whether the Consortium will be allowed to do so, or whether £27000 will have to be charged for all placements.

## **7. York's Adoption Service**

7.1 The Adoption Service has been managed by the Family Placement Service Manager, who also manages the Fostering Service. Following the recent restructure of Children's Social Care services, the Family Placement Service Manager role has been split into two posts: Adoption Service Manager and Fostering Service Manager, in line with most other local authorities. When a Fostering Service Manager comes into post in July 2013, the current Family Placement Service Manager will become the Adoption Service Manager.

7.2 The adoption section of the Family Placement Team currently consists of 3 full time posts, plus an Advanced Practitioner working term time only. The target for the number of adoptive families to be approved in 2013/14 is 18, a 50% increase on the previous years' targets. Additional social work posts have been created in the team, which should be operational by the autumn. In order to meet the new timeframes in the revised Statutory Guidance, the team will work with colleagues in North Yorkshire and East Riding to hold monthly information sessions for all those interested in adoption across the 3 local authorities.

7.3 Alongside the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adoptive families, the adoption social workers provide support to children's social workers seeking to identify a suitable adoptive family for a child, alongside seeking children to match with adopters approved by York. They also run the post box service, which facilitates indirect contact between adopted children and their birth families without compromising the anonymity of the adoptive family. They provide advice and support for prospective adopters; adoptive families; birth parents; social workers and colleagues. The Service Manager and Advanced Practitioner also play a key role in providing specialist advice to social workers in the Children's Safeguarding teams in relation to adoption work, and specialist advice to the Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.

7.4 The team provide adoption support to families living in the City; these can be families approved by York, or families approved by other adoption agencies, with children placed by other local authorities. Three years after the making of an adoption order, York becomes responsible for addressing any adoption support needs these families may have. The adoption social workers also run regular 'drop in' events for adoptive parents and children, which offers an opportunity for adopters to meet each other and build up support networks and for informal training and advice. In some instances adoptive families will need more intensive social work support and are therefore referred onto the long term social work teams.

7.5 There is a close working relationship with colleagues in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and with After Adoption Yorkshire. York has a Service Level Agreement with After Adoption Yorkshire (AAY), a voluntary sector adoption support agency, which provides independent advice and support to all those affected by adoption living in the City. This focuses mainly on work with birth relatives and providing specialist counselling and intermediary work for adopted adults.

7.6 There is a high take up of this service, such that more availability is necessary to meet the need; part of the Adoption Reform Grant will be used to purchase additional provision in 2013/14. York also has a Service Level agreement with the Yorkshire Adoption Agency which provides advice and information to those interested in adopting a child from overseas.

## **8. Recommendation**

8.1 It is recommended that this report is received and noted by the Director for Adults, Children and Education and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Mary McKelvey

Service Manager

June 2013

## Appendix 1: Data

### CHILDREN

#### 1. Plan for Adoption Agreed

<b>2011/12</b> Number of children	<b>2012/13</b> Number of children
<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>

This is a 100% increase on the number of children who had a plan for adoption in the year 2011/12

#### Gender

Male	Female
19	5

#### Ethnicity

White British	22
White and Black Caribbean	1
White European.	1

#### Age at date plan agreed:

Less than 1 year	5
1-5 years	16
5 years plus	3

#### Single/siblings

Sibling group of 3	2 ( 6 children)
Sibling group of 2	4 ( 8 children)
Single children	10

2 of the children with plans for adoption had a learning disability. A number of other children had delayed development, attachment difficulties or face difficulties resulting from parental substance or alcohol misuse.



## 2. Placed for Adoption

<b>2011/12</b> Number of children	<b>2012/13</b> Number of children
<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>

This is an increase of 45% on the number of children placed for adoption in the previous year.

Family placed with.

	<b>2011/12</b> Number of children	<b>2012/13</b> Number of children
Family approved by a local authority in Consortium	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
Family approved by a local authority NOT in Consortium	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
Family approved by a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

A further 5 children were matched with families in this period, but not placed until after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

Gender

Male	Female
<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>

Age at placement:

Less than 1 year	<b>3</b>
1-5 years	<b>9</b>
5 years plus	<b>4</b>

Single/siblings

Sibling group of 2	<b>4 ( 8 children)</b>
Single children	<b>8</b>

None of the children placed had a diagnosed learning disability or a physical disability, though several had delayed development, attachment difficulties, and/or had been exposed to alcohol and/or other drugs in utero.

### 3. Placed but not yet Adopted at 31<sup>st</sup> March

2011/12 Number of children	2012/13 Number of children
10	12

Of the 12 children, 2 had been placed for 6 month; the remaining 10 for less than that.

### 4. Adoption Order made

2011/12 Number of children	2012/13 Number of children
13	14

Single/siblings

Sibling group of 2	3( 6 children)
Single children	8

The children placed or adopted during this period are not necessarily the same as those with plans were approved during the same period; a child's plan for adoption or placement may have been approved in a previous financial year.

### 5. Placement Disrupted

2011/12 Number of children	2012/13 Number of children
1	0

### 6. Children where plan of adoption has been withdrawn in period

2011/12 Number of children	2012/13 Number of children
6	4

Unfortunately for some children, due to their age and complex needs, it is not possible to find an adoptive family despite extensive searching and their plan has to be changed from adoption to long term fostering. All of the children whose plans changed in the year were aged over 5 years: 2 boys and 2 girls.

## 7. Awaiting Placement as at 31<sup>st</sup> March

	2011/12 Number	2012/13 Number
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>
Aged 2 years or younger	2	3
Aged 2 – 4 years	7	9
Aged 5 years and over	8	7
Sibling groups of 2	3	2
Sibling groups of 3	0	1
Boys	8	15
Girls	9	4
<b>Length of time waiting since plan approved</b>		
Less than 6 months	2	9
6 months –12 months	6	7
12- 18 months	9	1
Over 18 months	0	2

Of the 19 children awaiting placement on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 5 had a match agreed at Panel, but were not placed with their adoptive families until after 31<sup>st</sup> March. A further 5 were matched with families in May. Of the remaining 9 children: all are aged 4 years or over; 8 are boys; 2 have learning difficulties. The delays in these cases are related primarily to the age and gender of the children or their particular special needs and complexity.

### Adopters

<b>Approved Adopters</b>	2011/12 Number of households	2012/13 Number of households
Approved during year	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>
Matched during year	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With children from the Consortium</li> </ul>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With children outside the Consortium</li> </ul>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
With children placed at 31/3/12 but not yet adopted	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
Approved, awaiting match as of 31/3/12	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

During the year 1 approved adoptive family decided to no longer consider adoption and 1 family withdrew during assessment.

<b>Applicants</b>	<b>2011/12</b> Number of households	<b>2012/13</b> Number of households
Assessment in progress as of 31/3/12	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>
Applications awaiting allocation as of 31/3/12	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>

### **Consortium placements made between 1/4/12 to 31/3/13**

Agency	Families Placed	Children Placed
Barnsley	2	3
Bradford	1	1
Calderdale	6	6
Doncaster	5	7
East Riding	2	3
Hull	4	4
Kirklees	4	5
Leeds	3	4
NE Lincs	7	4
North Lincs	4	6
North Yorkshire	3	1
Sheffield	1	2
Wakefield	2	10
York	7	4
<b>Total Placements Made</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>

### **Appendix 2: Monitoring the quality of the adoption agency under NMS 25**

#### **1. What children and adopters say about the service and how they contribute to its development?**

1.1 We have recently invited young adopted people living in the City of York to assist us in writing a new guide to adoption for children and young people as we feel it is importance that this is written for children by children. The feedback we receive from families is that they are very positive about the support on offer and the children within the families particularly enjoy the opportunities of Adoption Parties and Trips out when they can be with other adopted children.

1.2 We hold a monthly drop in Service and a 3 monthly social event which are well attended. We send regular Newsletters and Feedback forms asking adopters and adopted children how we can improve our Service and understand from their perspective what does and does not work for them.

1.3 The feedback we receive from our adopters is positive. Most adopters have a positive experience and this is evidenced in the long term relationships that are established with individual social worker and the team as a whole. Some of our adopters have been attending our drop ins for many years and a network of adoptive families has emerged which continues to recruit new members.

1.4 We have a number of adopters who have been happy to co-facilitate our Information Evenings and Adoption Preparation courses and we intend for this to continue and to be opened to new adopters wishing to become involved

## **2. How we ensure that adoptive placements that will meet children's needs are provided**

2.1 In York we have a family finding process that starts at the point of a child's plan for adoption being approved by the ADM. This involves the social worker for the child, the adoption manager, the social worker's manager and the foster carers' supervising social worker. The purpose of this meeting is to gather information and discuss from differing perspectives how we can best meet a child's needs. It is also an opportunity to challenge "fixed" ideas about what a family should look like ensuring we retain the needs of the child at the centre of the process.

2.2 We recruit prospective adopters able to meet children's needs from within the City and make these families available to other local authorities in the local consortium. Due to York's geographical size we cannot usually place York children with York adopters. We pro-actively look for families for all our children with plans for adoption, using families from within the consortium or available through the Adoption Register. We profile our children at national Exchange days. There is regular monitoring of the progress of family finding activity for all individual children with senior managers. All suitable families are explored for a potential match, those approved by VAA or well as other local authority adopters.

### **3. How children progress in their health, learning and emotional and social development.**

3.1 We work with all agencies and services who are involved in the life of a child and provide advice and guidance about managing adoptive children with complex and challenging needs, as well as acting as advocates for children who would benefit from increased support (for example, statement of educational needs, CAMHS intervention). CAMHS provide input to foster carers preparing children to move to an adoptive placement. The children all have Life Story books to accompany them into their new families. There is close liaison with the prospective adopters' local authority to dovetail planning from placement through to adoption, to ensure that all services are in place to support the child. Adoption workers and the placing social worker offer ongoing support after placement. Adopters approved by York are supported to access services for the children placed with them.

### **4. How the adoption agency contributes to promoting good outcomes for children and young people.**

4.1 The family finding process for all City of York children is a shared responsibility of the social worker and the Adoption Team. There is a tiered level of support which is led by a family finding process to ensure newly qualified workers have a robust support system to guide them and support them in finding a suitable family for a child.

4.2 The family finding process involves a series of meetings which start as soon as a child's plan is booked to the ADM. This sets out a clear agenda about who will take a lead on family finding, what support a social worker needs, is there intervention support needed from other services such as CAMHS that can assist in guiding us about the right families. These meetings take place monthly to ensure there is no "drift" in the process and maximises all opportunities of promoting family finding opportunities for children such as attending National Adoption Exchange Events, Mail Shots to OLA's and VAA's, placing children's details Be My Parent.

4.3 The child's needs are carefully considered against identified prospective adopters to ensure the best possible match. A Life Appreciation Day is held to ensure that prospective adopters have all available information on a child before proceeding to Adoption Panel. The Panel closely scrutinise the proposed match to ensure that it is likely to meet the child's needs. There is close liaison with York based agencies to ensure good information gathering and effective transfer to key agencies in the prospective adopters' local authority.)

## **5 How recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of adopters promotes positive outcomes for children and young people.**

5.1 Our enquiries are dealt with via a duty system within the adoption team and all enquiries are dealt with every 5 working days (5 days ahead of the new recommendations in the revised Statutory Guidance). Information Evenings have been held every 2 months, and will move to monthly from July 2013, in collaboration with North Yorkshire and East Riding Councils.

5.2 Preparation course are run every 3 months and offer training to prospective adopters that is current, accessible and pitched over a 4 week period to allow consolidation and reflection. We also have adoptive parents who co-facilitate both our Information Evenings and Preparation courses. We prepare adopters well and work collaboratively and supportively, planning work in advance with an emphasis on this being a “shared” process. The Prospective Adopters Report is written up following each visit together with analysis and all families are given a copy of this to ensure congruence and transparency within the relationship. This ensures any issues of concern are dealt with immediately with the emphasis on supporting and working through these wherever possible.

5.3 In the main we strive to complete assessments within 5 months of allocation, and work towards this being presented in panels either in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> month. We ensure that whilst we wish to work to a timely manner for adopters, that we structure the visits to meet the needs of the adopters’ taking into account understanding, ability, language and differing cultures.

## **6. How adopters are involved in matching and subsequent planning.**

6.1 If approved as a prospective adopter, work is undertaken to identify a child whose needs they are able to meet. Supervision and support is provided through the matching and placement process and on through to adoption order, and beyond. The positive working relationships established enable adopters to seek advice and support from the adoption team in parenting their children throughout their childhood.

6.2 Adopters are involved throughout the matching and linking process. The Adoption Team works with the consortium and the National Adoption register to identify potential matches and read and exchange reports. We keep adopters regularly up to date either via telephone or email. Adopters are invited to attend National Adoption Exchange events with the support of their worker to help them to gain further insight into the family finding process for themselves.

6.3 Once children's reports are shared with adopters we meet with them to discuss their thoughts. We then compile together questions we may have about a child. A linking visit then takes place and if the plan is to proceed, this is then booked to a matching panel. In York we hold Life Appreciation Days for all children. This usually takes place before panel and includes everyone who has ever been involved in a child's life, including the Paediatrician. This enables adopters to have a "fuller" picture of a child and an understanding from the differing perspectives of those who have worked with the child and/or their birth families. All Life Appreciation Days are minuted and these minutes are given to the prospective adopters. A copy is also placed in a sealed envelope for the child along with a letter from the Chair of the Life Appreciation Day who writes to the child to explain what a Life Appreciation Day is who attended and what people said. This is an opportunity to write anecdotal information about a child which is often not in the more formal reports. A copy of this is also given to the adopters

## **7. Management for the Adoption Service**

7.1 We regularly meet as a staff team and social workers are encouraged to take leads on various aspects of development. If someone in the team has attended training which would be beneficial for the team, they will feed this back into the team and we then look at whether our families would benefit from this and we then look at implementing this in the adoption preparation course, sharing at drop ins, or facilitating specific training to share this with adoptive families. All social workers in the team have 3 weekly planned supervision and an annual Professional Development Plan to ensure workers to take an active part in improving and enhancing the agency and thus the service delivery to our adoptive families.

7.2 The Assistant Director Children's Services acts as the Agency Decision Maker., along with the Heads of Service. The Agency Decision Maker has weekly appointments available to consider a child's plan for adoption, and will make his decision within a few days of receiving all the paperwork for the child; this ensures that there is no delay in the court process.

7.3 The Adoption Panels meets monthly to consider approval of adopters and matches for children. It also provides an oversight and quality assurance of the work presented to panel. Panel received regular feedback at each panel meeting regarding the progress of cases considered in the previous 6 and 12 months. The Agency Decision Maker receives the recommendations of the Panel and then makes the decision regarding agreeing (or not) approvals and matches. There are good operational links in place between the adoption



service and the Children in Need and Assessment Team, where requests for assessments for adoption support are received and also with the Safeguarding children's social work teams who complete any ongoing adoption support work with a family following an assessment.

## **8. Plans for improvement and development.**

8.1 We are currently developing a children's guide having written to all adoptive families and children to seek their views and ask if they would like to be involved. We are looking at the new Statutory Guidance and Regulations which come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> July to ensure the agency meets these new requirements. We are developing a training package to foster carers and children's social worker about the process of adoption, covering issues such as matching considerations, introductions, Life Appreciation days and direct work and creative ways of enabling children to understand adoption and moving to an adoptive family. We have worked with our adopters who have produced a training DVD which is utilised pre Introduction to a new family. This enables a child to see their new family, hear what they sound like and look at their new home. This has worked to very good effect and we now use this as training material on the preparation course for new prospective adoptive families.

8.2 We have increased our target for approving new families from 12 to 18 in the financial year 2013/14.

### **Appendix 3: Hyperlink to Scorecard**

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption/a00208817/adoption-scorecards>