

# adoption counts



Salford City Council



## MANCHESTER

### Adoption Service – Annual Report

01.04.2021 – 31.03.2022

## **1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report**

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2022. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point that this report is read.

## **2. Working with Manchester Council**

Since going live in 2017, Adoption Counts has undertaken to discharge Manchester’s responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the local authority (LA) and the RAA (Regional Adoption Agency) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working. The established processes to maintain the good working relationships and the communication necessary. In addition, The Assistant Director of Children's Services sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Head of Service with a link to adoption is a member of the six weekly Operations Group meetings which provides an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent manager from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. Head of Service Permanence also meets regularly with the Operations Manager and Team Manager. This ensures a shared ownership of the agenda, and a range of issues are discussed with positive communication and outcomes as a result.

The RAA Head of Service and the Operations Manager linked to Manchester meet twice a year with the Assistant Director to discuss performance over the period and any issues or themes that may be arising. This meeting is very much a two-way dialogue, with Manchester ensuring that the RAA is fulfilling its responsibilities as well as the RAA being able to offer feedback to the LA about any emerging themes or issues in care planning or working together.

Adoption Counts feeds into Manchester’s permanence tracking of their children, from the information collated at Adoption Counts tracking meetings when requested. There is always the opportunity for Service Managers from Manchester to join the tracking meetings. Adoption Counts recognises the importance of maintaining positive working relationships within Manchester and continues in working with the senior management team offering advice, guidance, and support in relation to any adoption related issues.

The tracking meetings focus upon:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and through into the planning of introductions and placement

- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.

The RAA tracking meeting enables any children of concern to be escalated and discussed with Manchester managers. This can range from children adopted but with no life story work or later in life letter, to children waiting for care planning decisions to be implemented and is also used to provide updates about children for whom family finding has not been successful and these children wait longer for a permanent family.

We are currently tracking 221 children upon our tracker. There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning feedback is received from the LA verbally or on the recording system as this ensures a robust joint approach. We are continuing to track 25 children where later in life letters and/or life story books are outstanding. Workers have also been identified to complete this work.

The team manager in the RAA linked to Manchester attends the monthly tracking meetings and she, alongside the dedicated family finders, work in the Manchester office base alongside some of the social work teams, attend legal gateway meetings and final care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required.

Priorities for Manchester’s children over this reporting period were highlighted as CPR (Childs Permanence Report) quality to be improved, Later Life Letters followed up in a timely way, early permanence training package to be introduced to Manchester social workers. Also high on the agenda, Black Adopter Recruitment, Black Lives Matter Training and a Race and Ethnicity Group set up, Initial Visits Process reviewed.

### 3. Performance

#### 3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

| Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month |       |     |      |      |     |      |           |
|---|-------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-----------|
| Manchester  | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept |           |
|   | 7     | 7   | 0    | 2    | 2   | 0    |           |
|   | Oct   | Nov | Dec  | Jan  | Feb | Mar  | Total     |
|   | 6     | 2   | 4    | 0    | 1   | 3    | <b>34</b> |

All 34 children who had a SHOBPA (should be placed for adoption) decision agreed within this period were the subject of Court proceedings. The decision that adoption would be in the

child's best interest was made following the local authorities final care planning meeting with all other permanence options being ruled out.

Thirteen of these children are in a sibling group of two children and three in a sibling group of three (5 x 2 sibling groups and one sibling group of 3).

Three of these children were placed in a FFA (fostering for adoption) placement.

The number of SHOBPA decisions agreed as part of the children's care plan in this time period last year has fallen by approximately 25%.

### 3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders

| Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month |       |     |      |      |     |      |       |
|---|-------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-------|
| Manchester  | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept |       |
|   | 3     | 4   | 3    | 1    | 4   | 3    |       |
|   | Oct   | Nov | Dec  | Jan  | Feb | Mar  | Total |
|   | 3     | 1   | 4    | 1    | 0   | 4    | 31    |

Twenty three of the children who were granted Placement Orders (PO's) within the period have subsequently been placed with their adoptive families, including three sibling groups of two and a sibling group of three.

Twelve of these children were placed with families within the A2 threshold of 121 days, Placement Order to matching approved by the ADM.

Eleven children placed outside the A2 threshold:

| Child   | Placement Order | A2  | Comments   |
|---------|-----------------|-----|--|
| BH      | 20/05/2021      | 139 | PO granted May 2021, B placed with adoptive family 13 days above the threshold.  |
| MM & AP | 22/10/2021      | 143 | Final hearing heard in two parts. Birth Father applied to appeal the PO. Adoption Psychology were also involved in placement plan.<br><br>The A2 figure was 17 days above the threshold. |
| FN      | 16/08/2021      | 172 | FN transitioned to FFA carers ( as foster carer at end of life) 22 November 2021.<br><br>Matching Panel 22 Nov 2022.   |
| OS      | 20/01/2022      | 173 | Initial concerns of O. being diagnosed with FASD also needed adoptive family who would consider unborn sibling. These factors impacted on family finding.                                |
| LR      | 01/12/2021      | 177 | L. placed with Adopters who had adopted LR's half sibling. Updated assessment needed to be completed.  |

| Child   | Placement Order | A2  | Comments   |
|---------|-----------------|-----|--|
| IRH     | 30/04/2021      | 185 | IR has a heritage of WB and Black Caribbean and has a genetic medical condition. This does make IR a child who could potentially wait longer for a match with an adoptive family.<br><br>Two shortlisted family did not want to progress because of IR's genetic condition and impacted on family finding. Match for IR agreed October 2021. |
| RS      | 02/08/2021      | 202 | October 2021 adoptive family visited and progressing to match with R. then met with medical adviser and felt they could not continue.<br><br>January 2022 adopter identified (WB Male adopter) Matched February 2022.  |
| S-R R   | 13/05/2021      | 203 | PO granted May 2021. As a sibling group of three S D & D are children who could potentially wait longer for a family.<br><br>Adoptive family shortlisted 18 Oct 2021 and ADM agreed at Panel 25 Nov. 2021.   |
| D-M R-B | 13/05/2021      | 203 | <b>As above</b>  |
| D B     | 13/05/2021      | 203 | <b>As above</b>  |

There has been a slight decrease in the number of Placement Orders for Manchester children in comparison with the last two years:

- 31 PO's in 2020-2021
- 17 PO's in 2021-2022

### 3.3 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

There were 11 who had a change of care plan, five to long term foster care and six to SGO in this period.

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| SA & SA | Two siblings moved to long term foster care with their older siblings.  |
| BB      | One placed with maternal grandmother on SGO and with mum on a CIN basis.  |
| SMC     | Adoptive placement disrupted and returned to previous foster carer.   |
| RK & NK | Two siblings SGO granted to their foster carers.  |
| RS      | Adoption placement disruption, followed by change of foster home.   |
| KF & KF | Guardian disagreed with plan of adoption for two siblings and children placed with maternal grandmother on SGO. |
| ILT     | Judge did not agree PO and placed with paternal aunt on SGO.  |
| NKRG    | Final Hearing concluded with Care Order with a plan of long term foster care.                                   |

### 3.4 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period or who wait longer than 12 months

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| NZ & MF | Adopters withdrew following matching ADM due to ongoing proceedings. Awaiting de-Shobpa     |
| KM      | Birth family contested proceedings, foster carers fast-tracked for assessment               |
| TK      | Connected persons assessments of relatives abroad; foster carers assessed but not approved. |
| CO & JO | Protracted adoption allowance discussions for foster carer adoption                         |
| JB      | Protracted adoption allowance discussions for foster carer adoption                         |
| LP      | Awaiting revocation of Placement Order  |

Manchester and Adoption Counts are scheduled to complete a thematic review for those children who wait more than 12 months after Placement Order for an adoptive family. (Currently eleven children in Manchester have been waiting 12 months or more). This will report will be available in the next six-monthly report. Learning and actions from these children's journey will be focussed into early planning for children.

### 3.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during period.

| Number of children placed for adoption per month |       |     |      |      |     |      |           |
|--|-------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-----------|
| Manchester                                       | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept |           |
|  | 1     | 8   | 5    | 6    | 2   | 1    |           |
|  | Oct   | Nov | Dec  | Jan  | Feb | Mar  | Total     |
|  | 2     | 2   | 1    | 3    | 1   | 4    | <b>36</b> |

Thirty-two children were placed with Adoption Counts adopters and four children with interagency adopters.

This is an decrease of 8 children from 2020-2021. Seven children were placed with adopters approved outside Adoption Counts in this period.

The 36 children placed for adoption during this period, the average A1 measure is 547 days and the A2 is 150 days. This was impacted considerably by two children, LM and MB, who had an A1 figure of 1201 and 1043 days, and an A1 figure of 600 and 364 days respectively. LM required a therapeutic foster home prior to adoptive placement. MB had a previous disruption during introductions.

Twenty-four children were placed with adoptive parents were above the A1 threshold of 426 days. This included two sets of sibling groups of three, and a sibling pair.

Eighteen of the children were placed above the A2 threshold of 121 days.

| Child    | Placed in adoptive Placement | A1   | A2  | Comments   |
|----------|------------------------------|------|-----|--|
| JB       | 30/04/2021                   | 841  | 146 | J's maternal uncle requested ISW assessment during Court proceedings which was supported by J's Guardian and the Courts this was negative however, impacted on the A1 figure.<br>A2 figure above the threshold by 20 days.   |
| PF       | 04/05/2021                   | 431  | 63  | PF was placed in an adoptive placement which disrupted after nine months. Adopters later asked for adoption to go ahead however this was not supported by the LA..<br>Match with new adopters agreed at Panel August 2022.   |
| SMC      | 06/05/2021                   | 840  | 161 | S. has suffered significant trauma in her life and was separated from her two siblings on joining her adoptive family. (Adoptive placement later disrupted).<br>A2 40 days above the threshold.  |
| LM       | 11/05/2021                   | 1201 | 600 | Following the granting of a PO L. was cared for by a WRAP foster carer who then expressed her wish to adopt L. (financial support was agreed).<br>October 2020 foster carer no longer felt able to adopt L. therefore family finding commenced for an adoptive family.<br>Matching agreed in March 2021 for L. with her adoptive family with AC approved adopters. |
| HF       | 24/05/2021                   | 587  | 113 | Significant court delays in relation to FH.<br>Additional delays in confirming paternity as putative father was recalled to prison. Birth father requested a cultural and religious match which was considered during family finding.<br>A2 was below the threshold.   |
| RM & RMC | 25/05/2021                   | 859  | 215 | R&R are a sibling group boy and girl (twins) aged 3 of Black Caribbean/white British heritage, they were children who potentially waited longer for a family.  |
| BBG      | 03/06/2021                   | 720  | 145 | Court dates re-timetabled and adjourned 2020 as mother in hospital and a request for viability assessment on aunt. This had an impact on A1 figure.  |

| Child    | Placed in adoptive Placement | A1   | A2  | Comments   |
|----------|------------------------------|------|-----|--|
| EOA      | 04/06/2021                   | 567  | 328 | Cultural match was considered in family finding which impacted on timescales.<br><br>Early link identified however did not progress. Interagency placement made which was a cultural match for E.  |
| ONPV     | 10/06/2021                   | 496  | 171 | O. was a one year-old boy with a Vietnamese heritage, a nationwide search for a cultural match was undertaken for O. and achieved.   |
| AG       | 16/06/2021                   | 443  | 70  | A1 figure impacted by Finding of Fact in Court proceedings which impacted on FH.<br>A2 achieved below threshold.   |
| HS       | 21/06/2021                   | 363  | 139 | 1-year-old boy A2 139 18 days above the timescales. Initially adopters of older sibling considering H. however, decided not to proceed.  |
| CDW      | 11/07/2021                   | 607  | 84  | FH postponed due to delays in confirming paternity, and consent not provided for sickle cell testing. The final hearing was later adjourned and judgement delayed due to judge being off sick. Interagency adopters identified as geographic restrictions in family finding.   |
| FB<br>LH | 02/08/2021                   | 537  | 111 | At time of SHOBPA FB was 6 years and LH was 14 months old. FB had had three placement moves. There had been a number of connected persons assessments which were all negative. A FoF hearing took place. CAMHS, sibling and psychological assessments were made, and a final contested hearing was held 4 months after SHOBPA. |
| MB       | 18/10/2021                   | 1043 | 364 | Two placements with adoptive families disrupted. MB had to return to be cared for by different foster carers and needed to be allowed time to settle into new foster home prior to re-commencing family finding.<br><br>At this point in his life a further assessment of his needs took place due to trauma and change.       |
| BH       | 19/10/2021                   | 829  | 139 | Court timetabling rescheduled for BH as assessment of parents ordered.<br><br>PO granted May 2021.   |



| <b>Child</b>      | <b>Placed in adoptive Placement</b> | <b>A1</b> | <b>A2</b> | <b>Comments</b>   |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---|
| IRH               | 18/11/2021                          | 680       | 185       | <p>IR has a heritage of WB and Black Caribbean which does make her a child who could potentially wait longer for a match with adoptive parents.</p> <p>Cared for in a parent and baby home and PAMs assessment needed.</p> <p>IR needed genetic testing for Micro deletion<br/>Court delay escalated with legal December 2021.</p> <p>Two shortlisted family did not want to progress because of IR genetic condition and impacted on family finding. Match for IR agreed October 2021.</p>                                 |
| ERKB              | 13/12/2021                          | 707       | 244       | <p>EB has a heritage of Black African and his mother has enduring mental health needs which does make him a child who would potentially wait longer to be matched with an adoptive family.</p> <p>SGO with grandmother changed to a plan of adoption SHOBPA agreed February 2021<br/>IA funding agreed and identified adopters in London.</p> <p>June 2021 - Two shortlisting meetings and two prospective families withdrew.</p> <p>September 2021 further shortlisting meeting<br/>ER matched at Panel November 2021.</p> |
| S-RR<br>D-MR-B DB | 17/01/2022                          | 538       | 203       | <p>Court proceedings consolidated with youngest child DB. Birth parents allocated ISW assessment in care proceedings for their children.</p> <p>PO granted May 2021.</p> <p>Adoptive family shortlisted 18 Oct 2021 and ADM agreed at Panel 25 Nov. 2021.</p>   |
| FN                | 07/02/2022                          | 338       | 172       | <p>FN transitioned to FFA carers ( as foster carer at end of life) 22 November 2021.</p> <p>Matching Panel 22 Nov 2022.</p>   |

| Child | Placed in adoptive Placement | A1  | A2  | Comments   |
|-------|------------------------------|-----|-----|--|
| LA    | 28/03/2022                   | 435 | 73  | Birth father capacity assessment concluded he needed PAMS assessment.<br>L. had a comprehensive assessments of needs as part of care proceedings.<br>A1 figure 9 days above threshold.   |
| GB-B  | 28/03/2022                   | 525 | 83  | Court timetabling caused delays in achieving A1 timescales.<br>March 2022 SHOBPA<br>A2 figure below the threshold.   |
| RS    | 29/03/2022                   | 558 | 202 | R. is of Black African heritage and birth mother has severe and enduring mental health, also potential direct contact.<br>FH May 2021.<br>Visit with potential adoptive family in London<br>Matching panel booked 7 Dec 2021 however, prospective family met with MA and decided they could not continue with the match.<br>January 2022 visit family white British male adopter match agreed February 2022. |

Manchester and Adoption Counts will ensure opportunities to secure legal permanence for children via adoption are considered at the earliest opportunity by monitoring the A1 and A2 figures.

### 3.6 Number of children adopted

| Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month |       |     |      |      |     |      |           |
|--|-------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-----------|
| Manchester   | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept |           |
|  | 8     | 5   | 4    | 6    | 5   | 2    |           |
|  | Oct   | Nov | Dec  | Jan  | Feb | Mar  | Total     |
|  | 1     | 4   | 2    | 2    | 5   | 6    | <b>50</b> |

For the 50 children adopted, the average number of days for A1 503 which is 77 days above the threshold.

Twenty-two children were outside the threshold including LM and ZL with an A1 figure of 1201 and 1774 respectively.

The average A2 figure for these children is 147 which is 26 days above the threshold. Fifteen children were outside the threshold including LM and KJ whose A2 figures were 600 and 682 days respectively.

| Child  | Date Adoption Order Granted | A1 426 | A2 121 | Comments  |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|---|
| KJJR   | 23/04/2021                  | 574    | 29     | Additional connected carer assessments in care proceedings completed.<br>Consolidated Care Proceedings with D younger brother.  |
| KJ     | 11/05/2021                  | 814    | 682    | Relative adoption in America legalities took some time and contributed to delay for K..   |
| LB-B   | 19/05/2021                  | 618    | 275    | L. is of black African heritage and would be a child who potentially waits longer to be matched with an adoptive family.<br>Birth mother has severe and enduring mental health. Mothers support in care proceedings needed advocate which delayed IRH.<br>Geographical considerations also impacted on timescales in relation to risks highlighted with birth family.<br>One family withdrew prior to matching. |
| KC     | 28/06/2021                  | 461    | 92     | Full connected persons assessment case needed to take place, deferred twice at SHOBPA.<br>Adult brother then did not want to be assessed.   |
| C-RL-Q | 30/06/2021                  | 730    | 87     | Birth mother had positive PAMs assessment and C. returned home February 2019.<br>PWP did not succeed and an application for PO made.<br>CQ matched with adoptive family June 2021.  |
| EL-Q   | 30/06/2021                  | 730    | 87     | <b>As above</b>   |
| DK     | 05/07/2021                  | 678    | 78     | SHOBPA November 2019 then social worker sickness absence.<br>Court retime tabled.<br>Final contested hearing<br>24.01.2020 with ISW appointed. Concluded August 2020.   |

| <b>Child</b>    | <b>Date Adoption Order Granted</b> | <b>A1 426</b> | <b>A2 121</b> | <b>Comments</b>  |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|
| MJN-Mc<br>EN-Mc | 06/07/2021                         | 866           | 411           | Care plan for the siblings changed from brother and sisters to be placed together.<br><br>M. has features associated with FASD<br>Family launched a Facebook campaign therefore geographical considerations needed for an adoptive family outside GMC.<br><br>Family shortlisted November 2019 however withdrew due to birth family risk.<br><br>January 2021 family identified and Panel May 2021.<br><br>Children moved July 2020. Covid impacted on the timescales of transition. |
| LO              | 14/07/2021                         | 638           | 236           | L. has complex emotional needs and cerebral palsy with global development delay therefore a child who waits longer for a match with adoptive family.<br><br>Matched April 2020 moved in with adoptive family June 2020 due to covid restrictions.  |
| RLM             | 26/07/2021                         | 628           | 344           | R has complex emotional needs due to early trauma, cared for by therapeutic foster carers. R had two moves in foster homes, one a WRAP placement.<br><br>Adoption Psychology completed an assessment re: potential diagnosis of autism. Family finding on hold during this period.<br><br>PO granted January 2019.<br><br>Adoption Panel re: match with adoptive family November 2022.   |
| SO              | 17/08/2021                         | 538           | 182           | SHOBPA delayed re impact sibling assessment.<br><br>PO granted Sept 2019<br>Match to adoptive family Nov 2019.   |
| RRLC            | 25/08/2021                         | 500           | 147           | FH 26 May to 17 Jun 2020 as contested hearing. Further delayed for judgement therefore Court delay. PO granted 4 August 2020<br><br>Matching Panel December 2020.  |

| Child | Date Adoption Order Granted | A1<br>426 | A2<br>121 | Comments   |
|-------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|--|
| LB    | 06/09/2021                  | 558       | 181       | L has a micro deletion and developmental delay therefore would be a child who potentially waits longer to be matched with an adoptive family.<br><br>Matched in March 2021<br><br>and placed with family June 2021. Covid impacted on transition timescales.   |
| EOA   | 12/11/2021                  | 567       | 328       | Cultural match was considered in family finding which impacted on timescales.<br><br>Early link identified however did not progress. Interagency placement made which was a cultural match for E.  |
| ZL    | 22/11/2021                  | 1774      | 173       | Care proceedings concluded November 2016 with a CO and home with mother. PWP ended and Z. cared for by foster carers.<br><br>SHOBPA January 2020<br><br>An assessment of Z's needs took place re: autism diagnosis.  |
| HF    | 10/12/2021                  | 587       | 113       | Court re-timetable and as mother not able to attend assessment sessions.<br><br>SHOBPA 19 May 2020.<br><br>Birth father in prison and awaited release to be assessed.<br><br>IRH 21 September 2020 then Judge had no availability until 21 Feb 2021.<br>Manchester contested and hearing moved to Jan 2021 and PO granted. |
| SAM   | 28/01/2022                  | 607       | 62        | Birth family explored in Pakistan. SHOBPA 14 Jan 2020.<br><br>FH adjourned until screening of further family member.<br><br>FH May 2020 then father granted ISW assessment.<br><br>PO granted January 2021.  |

| <b>Child</b> | <b>Date Adoption Order Granted</b> | <b>A1 426</b> | <b>A2 121</b> | <b>Comments</b>   |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---|
| LM           | 09/02/2022                         | 1201          | 600           | <p>Proceedings delayed as identifying birth father and other family members.</p> <p>PO granted 2 August 2019.</p> <p>L. moved to another foster home. Further assessments as her foster carer wanted to apply non-agency.</p> <p>CAMHS assessment completed for L. re: therapeutic support.</p> <p>Foster carer change of circumstances therefore did not pursue adoption application.</p> <p>Active family finding commenced October 2020 and family identified Jan 2021.</p>  |
| CDW          | 22/02/2022                         | 607           | 84            | <p>C. of mixed heritage WB/Pakistani and diagnosed with sickle cell anaemia therefore, potentially a child who would wait longer to be matched with a family. During COVID C. needed to shield due to his condition.</p> <p>SHOBPA delayed re DNA testing of potential birth father, his paternity was confirmed and assessments completed on him and family members.</p> <p>FH November 2020 did not go ahead as prison could not accommodate father attending Court.</p> <p>Judgement 19 Feb 2021</p> <p>Delayed to judges availability.</p> <p>PO granted 25 March 2021.</p> |

| <b>Child</b> | <b>Date Adoption Order Granted</b> | <b>A1<br/>426</b> | <b>A2<br/>121</b> | <b>Comments</b>   |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| MM           | 15/03/2022                         | 970               | 446               | <p>M. in foster care with two older siblings however care plan to place separately.</p> <p>SHOBPA delayed due to sibling assessment and psychological assess of children's individual needs.</p> <p>Martin has global development delay and tested for Cerebral Palsy.</p> <p>Returned to ADM December 2020</p> <p>Plan of dual search foster care and adoptive family.</p> <p>Shortlisting re: matching 15 Jan 2021.</p> |
| KM           | 17/03/2022                         | 845               | 509               | <p>Full assessment of maternal grandfather who cares for older sibling therefore Court re-timetabled.</p> <p>SHOBPA 6 Oct 2020</p> <p>IRH 16 Nov 2020</p> <p>FH 22 Feb 2021,</p> <p>Maternal grandfather contested.</p> <p>PO granted 26 February 2021.</p> <p>Foster carer wished to be considered and progressed non-agency adoption.</p>   |

COVID-19 has continued to have an impact upon general court timetabling and care proceedings for a number of the children have taken longer. A number of hearings have been deferred, there was an increase in the number of birth parents applying for leave to contest the adoption placement and adoption orders, also family members coming forward to be assessed at a later stage in proceedings. This therefore has had an effect upon the overall timescales.

### 3.7 Early Permanency

Three children were placed in an early permanence placement during this period. The children were placed with carers temporarily approved by Manchester's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the Care Planning Regulations.

| Number of children placed in a Foster to Adopter placement |       |     |      |      |     |      |       |
|--|-------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-------|
| Manchester   | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept |       |
|  | 1     | 1   | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0    |       |
|  | Oct   | Nov | Dec  | Jan  | Feb | Mar  | Total |
|  | 0     | 1   | 0    | 0    | 0   | 0    | 3     |

### 4. Quality of Reports

CPRs (child permanence reports) are audited as routine by the relevant Adoption Counts Team Manager prior to SHOBPA consideration and then again by either the Team Manager, Family Finder or Senior Practitioner before matching panel. This is to ensure that CPRs are graded as being 'Good' as a minimum and that the final report is submitted to panel rather than reports still requiring amendments. The CPR is then graded by the panel considering the match.

Thirty-nine child permanence reports (CPR's) audits have been completed during this period. Of those:

| Rating | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | In Need of Improvement | Total |
|--------|-------------|------|--------------|------------------------|-------|
| SHOBPA | 1           | 9    | 0            | 29                     | 39    |
| Panel  | 5           | 30   | 3            | 1                      | 39    |

CPR reports presented to adoption panel consider gradings at the child's match, as opposed to the gradings prior to matching panel from the team Managers. This was due to, on occasion, there being a discrepancy between an auditor's grading compared to that of panel. The figures presented above are based on panel gradings, given their independence and impartiality.

Support and training is offered to support children's social workers in completing children's CPR's. This includes specific training that can be delivered to teams, one to one support with social workers and advice with a robust quality assurance system with the ADM and Panel Adviser to SHOBPA. As can be seen by the figures above, the improvement of children's CPR's from SHOBPA to Adoption Panel is significant, with increased focus on achieving good quality CPR's for SHOBPA should see these gradings improve over the next 6 months.



## Recruitment of Adopters

### 5.1 Approvals

There were 48 families approved as adopters during the first six months of this year (1.4.21 – 30.9.21) and 39 families approved as adopters during the last six months of this year (1.10.21 – 31.3.22) 87 families approved in total. This is a decrease of 17 families from the year before when 104 families were approved.

At the end of the period (31<sup>st</sup> March 2022) there were 40 families in Stage One, 11 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 35 in Stage Two; a total of 86 families in the assessment process. There were 88 families in the assessment process at the end of last year so this evidences the level of business is maintained at a relatively consistent level. This is positive and is a strong position from which to enter the new year.

Enquiry numbers have significantly increased with 593 in first 6 months of year and 835 during second half of the year, 1428 for the full year. This is 454 more than the previous year where there were 974 enquiries in total. This is the largest number of enquiries we have ever seen and is significantly higher than usual. From the feedback we have collated, the increase in enquiries seems to be due to our social media campaigns alongside the messages from the #YouCanAdopt campaigns. It is worth noting that a high percentage of the enquiries are just asking for information packs and not proceeding with an assessment, this could indicate that they are not yet ready to proceed but are exploring adoption earlier than they perhaps would have in the past.

| Source                                | Enquiries |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Online                                | 643       |
| Local Council referral / website      | 58        |
| Social Media                          | 67        |
| Recommendation from friend / relative | 11        |
| Other                                 | 11        |
| Outdoor Advertising                   | 3         |
| Event /info Stand                     | 1         |
| Radio                                 | 4         |
| Second Time Adopters                  | 7         |
| Previous Adoption Enquiry             | 30        |

Numbers of initial visits have decreased, with 96 taking place in the first 6 months of the year, 77 during the last six months, so 173 in total. This is a decrease of 41 from the previous year (2020 – 21) when 215 initial visits took place and 181 in the year 2019 – 20. This is a decrease of 41 from the previous year. In line with this, we undertook a consultation to restructure our recruitment and assessment service to assist in allocation of work within timescales at the enquiry stage. From February 2022 we have changed our structure to incorporate an initial visit team with identified social workers completing all initial visits. We will continue to review the effectiveness of this. It is also worth noting that as the number of applications in progress

at the end of year is very similar to that of previous year, the decrease in initial visits does not seem to have had a negative impact on the number of applications received since then.

Registrations of Interest received (the formal application to be assessed as prospective adopters) have also decreased, 59 in first 6 months, 64 in second part of the year, 123 in total from 150 the previous year (2020 – 21). It is possible this decrease could be influenced by the gradual lifting of the Covid restrictions i.e. people taking holidays, travelling, weddings, building work, IVF, etc.

Our performance should still be viewed in the context of an ongoing national shortage of adopters. It suggests that the strategies implemented through our Recruitment and Marketing plan continue to be effective in terms of our adopter sufficiency, although of course we are not complacent and continue to strive to increase our numbers further. We will continue to raise the profile of our agency to achieve adopter sufficiency for our children across our five local authorities, with a surplus to generate income and offset the cost of inter-agency placements for our children who need them.

Monthly Adopter Sufficiency meetings continue with the Head of Service, the Operations Managers, the Recruitment and Enquiries Manager and the Marketing Officer meeting to plan and review our progress.

## 5.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

## 5.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Our Recruitment Team received 43 partner / step-parent adoption enquiries in the first six months of the year and 47 in the second half of the year, 90 enquiries in total. This is a significantly higher number than the previous year when 48 enquiries were received in total.

Whilst this may seem a big increase, pre-covid, 43 enquiries would have been an average number of enquiries for a 6 month period. It is likely the figures decreased last year due to the pandemic and national lockdown.

|               | 1.4.21 – 30.9.21 |             | 1.10.21 – 31.3.22 |             |
|---------------|------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| LA            | Number           | Percentage  | Number            | Percentage  |
| Cheshire East | 13               | 30%         | 12                | 25%         |
| Manchester    | 4                | 9%          | 8                 | 17%         |
| Manchester    | 10               | 23%         | 4                 | 9%          |
| Stockport     | 2                | 5%          | 5                 | 11%         |
| Manchester    | 6                | 14%         | 2                 | 4%          |
| Unknown/other | 8                | 19%         | 16                | 34%         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>43</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>47</b>         | <b>100%</b> |

Thirteen enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place with a social worker, for information gathering and advice, in the first six months of the year. Fifteen enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place in the second half of the year. 28 office meetings took place in total. This is more than double the amount during the previous year (12), again following the same pattern as noted with the enquiries due to the pandemic and lockdown.

|                      | <b>1.4.21 – 30.9.21</b> |                   | <b>1.10.21 – 31.3.22</b> |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>LA</b>            | <b>Number</b>           | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Number</b>            | <b>Percentage</b> |
| <b>Cheshire East</b> | 3                       | 23%               | 4                        | 27%               |
| <b>Manchester</b>    | 3                       | 23%               | 4                        | 27%               |
| <b>Manchester</b>    | 2                       | 15%               | 4                        | 27%               |
| <b>Stockport</b>     | 4                       | 31%               | 1                        | 6%                |
| <b>Manchester</b>    | 1                       | 8%                | 2                        | 13%               |
| <b>Total</b>         | 13                      | 100%              | 15                       | 100%              |

Three applications were accepted during the first six months of the year, nine in the second six months, twelve in total.

|                      | <b>1.4.21 – 30.9.21</b> |                   | <b>1.10.21 – 31.3.22</b> |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>LA</b>            | <b>Number</b>           | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Number</b>            | <b>Percentage</b> |
| <b>Cheshire East</b> | 1                       | 33.3%             | 3                        | 34%               |
| <b>Manchester</b>    | 1                       | 33.3%             | 2                        | 22%               |
| <b>Manchester</b>    |                         |                   | 1                        | 11%               |
| <b>Stockport</b>     | 1                       | 33.3%             | 2                        | 22%               |
| <b>Manchester</b>    |                         |                   | 1                        | 11%               |
| <b>Total</b>         | 3                       | 100%              | 9                        | 100%              |

#### **5.4 Information events**

Before the pandemic, these were held on a fortnightly basis at locations around the region. Since then, these events have been held 'virtually' on a weekly basis, where potential adopters watch from their own homes, without the need to be in close proximity of other people, and without the need to travel.

These have continued to be very successful indeed and we have continued to run these virtually with the potential for one a month in a venue for those families who would prefer that face to face connection.

#### **5.5 Training groups**

During the last 12 months, 3 day 'virtual' adopter preparation training groups have been held on a monthly basis, with additional tasks/modules being given to applicants to do in the evenings.

114 families attended these groups during this period, with 57 attending the first half of the year and the same number 57, in the second half of the year.

It is difficult to compare this to the previous year, due to the training during those periods being delivered by separate modules which the applicants did in their own time, then discussed with their social worker. In the year prior to that though (2019-20) 115 families attended.

Regular reviews of how the training is delivered have taken place and in line with the ending of covid19 restrictions a decision has been taken to re-start face-to-face preparation training in April 2022.

## **5.6 Marketing and Recruitment Campaigns**

Our marketing activity increased during this period, compared with the previous year, in line with some lockdown and pandemic restrictions being eased. We continued with a high presence of digital and social media advertising, and also re-commenced our outdoor advertising (billboards, etc.), the Taxi skin, radio advertising, magazines specifically for certain communities/locations, leaflet drops, etc.

We also commissioned the Manchester Evening News. This has been very successful as not only was there targeted Facebook advertising, but there was also a high additional digital presence, adverts in the print editions of the paper, and we have two advertorials to use, hopefully using case studies of our own adopters.

The aim of the targeted Facebook advertising was to specifically reach out for members of the Black Community to come forward and think about adoption. This led to a noticeable increase in enquiries, as mentioned earlier. It did not result in an increase in people attending the information events, as many of those enquiries were at the very early stages of thinking about adoption, but it is hoped those enquirers will come back to us due to them now having our information.

The national #YouCanAdopt 'Black Adopters Campaign' took place this Summer, and the website and social media hashtag #YouCanAdopt was used widely. The aim was to raise awareness of adoption and bust myths around who is eligible to adopt; ultimately to increase the number of possible parents from the Black Community registering their interest in adoption. As we know, Black children traditionally wait longer to be matched with a new adoptive family, as well as older children, sibling groups, and those with complex health needs or disabilities.

Part of this campaign was the commission of Street Ambassadors; who went out in the community to raise awareness, address concerns and bust myths.

Additional marketing was booked for National Adoption Week, which took place for 12th – 18th October 2021. We ran our own advertising during the entire campaign period, to go alongside the national campaign, using the same message, content and useful podcasts, aiming to make Adoption Counts stand out amongst our competitors and drive applicants to our website.

## 5. Compliments, comments and complaints

| <b>Description – compliments</b>  |
|---|
| Feedback from an adopter who said how supportive and professional her supervising social worker had been. The adopter wanted to thank the supervising social worker for all her support, help, advice and friendliness throughout their adoption journey.   |
| Feedback given by a prospective adopter who had contacted the agency to enquire about adoption. The prospective adopter said how the member of staff from the recruitment team had put them at ease and they appreciated her sensitivity when discussing difficult subjects.  |
| Feedback given by an adopter regarding a family support worker in our adoption support service. The adopter stated: adoption is quite a journey and having people like yourself along the way make it so much easier.<br>You have been the only constant contact in the whole process for us from start to finish and that has meant so much to us. |
| Feedback from an adopter regarding the letterbox support they had received. They advised this had been excellent and throughout the years the indirect contacts with their daughter's birth family have always been sensitively dealt with in a timely and insightful way.  |
| Feedback given by an adopter regarding their supervising social worker. They stated their social worker has shared her knowledge and insight at every step, had been professional and yet caring and honest when necessary.   |
| <b>Description – complaints</b>   |
| A complaint from an adopter who had experienced an adoption disruption. The adopter expressed unhappiness regarding the levels of support and contact from the agency following the disruption. The complaint was not upheld.   |
| A complaint from an adopter following a recommendation from the agency that the adopter was no longer suitable to adopt. The adopter raised concerns about the annual review process followed by the agency and the levels of contact maintained. The complaint was partially upheld.   |
| A complaint from an adopter who wanted to know why the letterbox service for her daughter had not been reviewed. The complaint was not upheld.  |
| A query was received from a enquirer's MP regarding the housing circumstances of an enquirer wishing to proceed with an adoption application. The query was answered and an initial visit completed.  |
| A complaint from a birth parent who stated she was not receiving letters from her children. The complaint was not upheld.   |

## 6. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts

### 7.1 Family Finding

In order to support the priority of achieving permanence in a timely way for our children of black ethnicity we have worked in partnership with other regional adoption agencies across England and have taken part within a national Family Finding Profiling Event held over the weekend 22-25 October 2021. We profiled children of Black African/Caribbean heritage and mixed Black African/Caribbean heritage at this event.

Following feedback from our partner LA's, we have also formed a working group who have developed an early permanence training package which will be delivered to our LA colleagues to enhance awareness and understanding regarding early permanence options for children. This has now been finalised and training is available to all colleagues as required. General adoption training alongside early permanence training has been delivered to teams in Manchester.

We have continued to hold adoption picnics and have profiled children using a range of video clips. Adopters can access these video clips of children for a limited period via a secure Adoption Counts website on our SharePoint site. During this period we have held three picnics, 35 children were featured with 86 households attending resulting in 41 expressions of interest. Three matches resulted from these events for a sibling pair, a sibling group of three and a six year old. All children are now placed.

## **7.2 Recruitment and Assessment**

We have six staff who are currently taking part in Adult Attachment style interview (ASI) training. One is an Operations Manager one Team Manager and four social workers. We aim to have the social workers accredited in the training and begin to offer ASI interviews for some of our families in assessment from July / August 2022. The attachment style interviews is a model of practice that offers a conversational style interview which questions adoptive applicants about their current relationships with their partner (if a couple), family of origin and with two adults close to the applicants. The interview looks at general styles of relating to other adults in terms of self-reliance and how easy it will be for them to get close and be at ease in accessing help. This will be a clear indicator of how as adoptive parents they will reach out for support during the parenting of a child or young person through adoption.

As an organisation Adoption Counts are committed to embedding the Black Lives Matters ethos and challenge to ourselves within our work in the Recruitment and Assessment of adopters who can truly meet and understand the needs of children who are from a black or minority ethnic heritage. The black lives matters training has been accessed by all our staff and Adoption Panel members. This is shaping our delivery of service with prospective adopters and the matching of children as service Social workers are showing more confidence in evidencing the learning in the curious and open questions in the PARs (Prospective Adopters Reports) in the assessment and analysis of adopters being able to thoroughly explore their true understanding of diversity and the impact in parenting their child or children.

We are as a service developing Interactive Profiles for approved adopters as we are doing with children, which will allow the adopters to talk about their skills and abilities in offering a child permanence through adoption, what they can offer as a family.

The Preparation Training is delivered face to face by our social workers within the Recruitment and Assessment teams. We are currently reviewing the content of the training to cover all aspects of the adoption journey for the child, birth parents and adopters including adoption support as a priority for ongoing support throughout the years.

We have re-organised the teams in the Recruitment and Assessment to focus on Initial visits. This piece of work was undertaken in relation to addressing allocation timescales and meeting the needs of prospective adopters in:

We will monitor closely timescales on Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments if by separating out initial visits.

In relation to contact in adoption we focus on 'open' adoptions as a starting point for children with their birth family. Messages from research tell us how we can weave in the prospect for children being able to retain contact with their families if in their best interest.

At present as a management team we are looking to develop a first stage system in relation to matching children to adopters who can meet their needs at an early stage by the use of data held on the system by using the children's matching criteria in relation to their individual needs against adopters skills and abilities.

## **7. Adoption Panels**

Information about panel will be covered in full in the Chairs reports. Adoption Counts are in the process of interviewing and appointing two panel chairs as we have one vacancy and one chair leaving.

## **8. Priorities**

- More rigorous challenge around children's family members being ruled out as potential carers for a child at an earlier stage in care proceedings.
- Early Permanence Planning for children and unborn children to be supported with regular and updated training.
- Life Story Books and Later in Life Letters backlog to be addressed.
- Focus on recruitment within the Sufficiency Plan of adopters for children from a Black or mixed ethnicity background for children who wait longer in Manchester for an adoptive family.
- Ensure the diversity of the Agency's Panel Central List members is more representative of the children being matched.
- Quality of CPR's to be incrementally improved with support prior to SHOBPA.
- Thematic review of those children who wait over 12 months for an adoptive family.

**Sheila Davies**

Operations Manager

19.08.2022

Adoption Support  
Adoption Service – 6 monthly & Annual  
Report  
01.04.2021 – 31.03.2022



## **Adoption Support**

Adoption Support remains integral to our delivery for adopted children, new adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing the life-long journey of adoption. We remain committed to supporting children and their new families from the early transition stages of a placement through to the making of an Adoption Order. Thereafter we recognize that new challenges may emerge requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. We have based our service delivery on a graduated approach, with our Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery.

In this past six months we have continued to deliver Adoption Support on a hybrid model, using virtual meetings and offering in-person visits and meeting as required. There has been some impact on the team from Covid-19 with periods of staff sickness.

## **Adoption Psychology Service**

### **SERVICE OVERVIEW**

The short-term funding for this service has been agreed by the board until March 2023, with negotiations with Clinical Commissioners to secure longer term funding on a joint basis moving forward. This process continues to be underway with our Greater Manchester and Cheshire East NHS commissioning colleagues.

This service was initially funded by the Centre of Excellence funding, which has since ended. The APS service has been mentioned in the Government publication *Adoption Strategy Achieving Excellence Everywhere (July 2021)* as an example of best practice.

The long-term ambition would be to increase the service delivery so that all children, not just those under the age of 12, can receive a service from this specialist team. A new element of funding has been announced by central government for all RAA's to bid to develop their own Multi-Agency Partnerships so we will seek clarity on whether this is relevant to our development plans.

**1.1 The Adoption Psychology Team** is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for adopted children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts. The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry, Occupational Therapy and educational psychology. The information in this report relates to the CAMHS component of the service. The service is partly co-located with Children's Social Care which enables a co-ordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint working. It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments, currently mainly delivered virtually but with in-person observations and visits to children. The service sits alongside other services that support the child's home, care planning, relationships, health, education and hobbies. The iThrive model shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together.

## i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



### 1.2 AP Service outcomes

1. Adopted children have good mental health
2. Adopted children have healthy relationships
3. Adopted children have stable placements
4. Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

### 1.3 Service Aims

- Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs.
- Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.
- Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.
- Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.
- Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.
- Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

In October 21 to March 22, the Adoption Psychology team delivered:

- Evening workshop for parents about school transitions and education advice, and parenting understanding the neuro-sequential model

- Foundations for Attachment group – one (virtually) and another planned for January was rescheduled to take place in April. The course reached 10 parents, 8 children
- Theraplay informed parenting group – four groups took place, offering parent sessions followed by sessions jointly with children and their parents, in person reaching 28 children
- Training (CPD) for Adoption Counts social workers
- Consultations for transitions (21) and long-term work for professionals (46)
- 9 specialist assessments and 11 psychiatric assessments
- 39 direct referrals for support for children and their families

Further figures for the number of children receiving services, breakdown of LA, gender, school needs and so on are provided within the Adoption Psychology annual report, 2021-22. This can be read alongside this report to provide more detail.

**Specialist Assessments** were for children whose needs were highly complex, with a multi-agency approach using Education Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Psychiatry, and specialist OT services to assess and recommend the relevant support for children and their parents. This is a very limited service due to the available time, so we have targeted children whose complex needs are not likely to be met within an assessment delivered by an external provider. Costs for this work were claimed through the ASF, along with costs for sensory attachment packages of support.

**Consultations** continue to be a central part of the APS offer. Consultations are offered on a fortnightly basis for social workers, for Adoption Support, Family Finding and Recruitment and Assessment, and can include the LA social worker responsible for the child. These consultations offer advice on transitions into adoptive placements for children, especially those likely to have higher need, such as sibling groups, later placed children, or those with more significant trauma history. The transitions screening tool and supporting documents have been well received and used by workers. There has also been offered a telephone line to consider more urgent or quicker queries which can be swiftly discussed with the APS team.

The **Multi Agency Resource Panel**, continues to consider complex cases that require Adoption Support Fund (ASF) match funding from the Local Authority. This has enabled more consistent and transparent decision making across the region. The panel consists of representative multi-agency representatives from education, health and CAMHS backgrounds, which enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency.

#### **1.4 Adoption Support Fund Applications**

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families using the Adoption Counts portal, this has enabled families to receive specialist support that we would not have been able to provide in house or access from other universal services. There were 329 applications to the ASF in the 6 months between October and March 2022. The total value of the claims were £740,249, of which £65,216 was for specialist assessments.

LA's contributes £16,756 matched funding to "top up" the ASF fair access limit of £5000 per child.

| <b>LA</b>         | <b>Number of applications</b> | <b>Amount</b>   | <b>Applications with Match Funding</b> | <b>Amount of matched funding</b> |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Cheshire East     | 68                            | £220,615        | 3                                      | £2,716                           |
| Manchester        | 57                            | £189,189        | 3                                      | £7,154                           |
| Salford           | 15                            | £43,217         | 0                                      |                                  |
| Stockport         | 54                            | £170,064        | 3                                      | £6,886                           |
| Trafford          | 32                            | £88,574         | 0                                      |                                  |
| Group Application | 4                             | £28,590         | 0                                      |                                  |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>230</b>                    | <b>£740,250</b> | <b>9</b>                               | <b>£16,756</b>                   |

The Adoption Support Fund was renewed in February 2022. The delay in announcing this so late caused concern among providers and families, who were awaiting the opportunity to continue therapy. This has also caused a considerable increase in applications coming in between March-April and resulting in processing delays, in both our social work and business support teams, with workers completing an increased number of applications during this short period.

Comparison to previous 6 months and annual overview:

| <b>LA</b>                | <b>Number of applications</b> | <b>Amount</b> | <b>Applications with Match Funding</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Cheshire East</b>     | 83                            | £286,203.51   | 1 for £3014.38                         |
| <b>Manchester</b>        | 56                            | £179,253.33   | 0                                      |
| <b>Salford</b>           | 23                            | £85,061.25    | 2 totalling £3890.50                   |
| <b>Stockport</b>         | 50                            | £168,690.00   | 3 totalling £11,215.34                 |
| <b>Trafford</b>          | 43                            | £202,069.00   | 3 totalling £28,460.00                 |
| <b>Group Application</b> | 1                             | £10,860.00    | 0                                      |
| <b>Totals</b>            | 256                           | £932,137.09   | £46,580.22                             |

Total 456 applications in April 2021- March 2022, drawing down a total of £1,672,387.09 to support adoptive families in our region, and those we support who live across England.

### **1.5 Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support**

The team currently hold 853 open cases. This is reduced from 960, with 34 of those closed being Access to Records.

These cases are:

465 (previous measure 553) adopted children with an allocated long-term social worker

185 (previous measure was 181) adopted children with an allocated First Response social worker

203 (previous quarter was 226) adults being supported to access their adoption records

Within these numbers:

72 (previous measure 38) children (some pre-adoption) have a Therapeutic Social Worker, this increase is reflected in the secondment to the post of a second therapeutic social worker, thereby doubling capacity

39 children (previous measure 40 children) allocated to our Education Advisor.

|                             | <b>Adoption Support</b> | <b>First Response</b> | <b>Access to Records</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Cheshire East</b>        | 118                     | 52                    | 29                       | <b>199</b>   |
| <b>Manchester</b>           | 91                      | 44                    | 88                       | <b>223</b>   |
| <b>Salford</b>              | 45                      | 12                    | 23                       | <b>80</b>    |
| <b>Stockport</b>            | 84                      | 39                    | 34                       | <b>157</b>   |
| <b>Trafford</b>             | 92                      | 30                    | 12                       | <b>134</b>   |
| <b>Unallocated to an LA</b> | 35                      | 8                     | 17                       | <b>60</b>    |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>465</b>              | <b>185</b>            | <b>203</b>               | <b>853</b>   |

#### Active Adoption Support Caseloads by Local Authority

There has been a slight decrease in the number of families allocated to a social worker within Adoption Support. We have continued with our drive to close cases when possible and move families on to access universal services, and this has been a welcome change after the rising demand in the last two years. There will always be a core of families who require more long-term support, and these numbers continue to be steady.

We have again been able to reduce the number of open Access to Records cases (by 24), as the team are now dealing with applications faster than they are coming in. This reflects the positive investment in this team to 1 FTE post.

During October 2021-March 2022 the First Response team completed 55 adoption support assessments for families approaching the service for the first time. All families who have sought support have been assessed within 4-10 weeks of them approaching the agency, the time period has increased slightly since the last report, but with priority given to families who need more urgent assessments. This assessment identified the support families may require, and sources and puts in place relevant support, often accessing the ASF to fund this.

In the year we have completed 126 adoption support assessments for new families approaching the service for support. All families who are already allocated a social worker have the assessment reviewed every 6 months at minimum, although often this is more frequently given changing needs.

We have adjusted our process which is now that all social workers across Adoption Support complete initial "surgeries" for Adoption Support Assessments. This has reduced the pressure

within First Response and allowed families to start building relationships with their social worker from their early contact with the agency. This began in February 2022.

Social workers continue to support families whose needs range from support with therapeutic parenting, sensory and attachment needs, ranging through to those who have highly complex needs, who are at risk of CSE, missing from home, violence towards parents, and with complex mental health needs and disabilities. Very sadly we also have young people who are on the edge of care, or can no longer live with their adoptive parents and return to LA care. Liaison with LA services continues to be a challenge at times, with high thresholds for referrals. We are working on this area by liaising with local services and planning ways to improve communication and understanding between the LA intake workers, and Adoption Counts. Examples of this practice are the joint supervision offered within Stockport, and the forum within Cheshire East. Both of these are newly-instigated and should they prove beneficial we will offer these to our other LA partners.

The Letterbox team holds all letterbox referrals; the last count has increased substantially to 1,298 cases (cf. 1053 2020/21). This may reflect the increased focus on good practice within LA's and social work teams to encourage meaningful contact post-adoption for more children. The number of cases does not reflect the number of exchanges (for example, one family may write to several birth family members who write back, exchanging four or five letters twice a year).

We have chosen to be part of the pilot project called Letter Swap, which will create a digital platform for exchange of information from adoptive and birth families. This was planned for trial in the Spring but this has been delayed until later in 2022.

### Adopted Adults

Our service to Adopted Adults is seeing improvement in waiting times for those who wish to access their adoption records. We created capacity by using hours available from other roles, to enable the 1 FTE equivalent (4 workers) who deliver this service across the 5 Local Authority areas. We intend to keep this capacity until a further reduction in wait times is seen.

We have again been able to reduce the number of open Access to Records cases by 34. This reflects a steady demand of new cases.

|                      | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Year total |
|----------------------|----|----|----|----|------------|
| <b>Cheshire East</b> | 10 | 1  | 2  | 4  | 17         |
| <b>Manchester</b>    | 17 | 10 | 11 | 9  | 47         |
| <b>Salford</b>       | 1  | 7  | 5  | 4  | 17         |
| <b>Stockport</b>     | 7  | 9  | 1  | 4  | 21         |
| <b>Trafford</b>      | 3  | 2  | 1  | 0  | 6          |
| <b>General</b>       | 2  | 6  | 5  | 7  | 20         |
| <b>Total</b>         | 40 | 35 | 25 | 28 | 128        |

New Access to Records cases by Local Authority and quarter. Not reflecting older open cases, only new cases opened in each quarter.

### New referrals for support

During the period we received 196 new referrals into the Adoption Support Service. These mainly come directly from families but some from schools and other social workers. We also

receive referrals from families moving into our area and those becoming our responsibility due to the three year rule.

|                             | Q1        | Q2        | Q3        | Q4        | Year total |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Cheshire East</b>        | 10        | 13        | 9         | 19        | 51         |
| <b>Manchester</b>           | 12        | 11        | 13        | 9         | 45         |
| <b>Salford</b>              | 1         | 3         | 7         | 8         | 19         |
| <b>Stockport</b>            | 14        | 11        | 16        | 6         | 47         |
| <b>Trafford</b>             | 7         | 6         | 5         | 2         | 20         |
| <b>Unallocated to an LA</b> | 2         | 4         | 1         | 7         | 14         |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>46</b> | <b>48</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>196</b> |

New Adoption Support cases by Local Authority and quarter. Not reflecting older open cases, only new cases opened in each quarter.

### Analysis

We have received 196 new referrals into the Adoption Support Service (compared to 183 in the previous period) showing a steady demand. There has been an increased number of Access to Records requests which has been met by the ATR team.

We are currently working with 467 allocated cases (excluding letterbox) which is a reduction from 553 from the previous six months. This is a result of the drive to close “dormant” cases where the worker was not actively involved plus reflecting the ability now for families to accept ending of work, now the pressure of the pandemic is reduced.

This reduction has enabled us to manage several additional areas of work:

- The renewal of the ASF fund, which resulted in high numbers of ASF applications processed by social workers and business support
- The restarting of evening workshops

The steady numbers of cases held within First Response demonstrates continued demand but there is a challenge in moving cases on to the long term team when the family requires higher levels of support and intervention. This is why we have changed the process to have all social workers across the Adoption Support team offer “surgeries”.

The Adoption Psychology team show a steady demand for their service and increased use of the transitions consultations. Letterbox demand remains steady and consistent across all areas, in numbers of cases, with a rising number of requests for support where there has been unplanned contact between adopted young people and their birth families. There has also been increased requests for support with planned direct contact, which reflects the drive within Adoption Counts to implement good practice and research around the benefits of contact for adopted young people.

Adoption Support Social Workers continue to hold high caseloads, with an average of 45 cases per FTE. The high level of need could be for a number of reasons, including;

- Families seeking support earlier
- Greater knowledge among adoptive families about the support available, promoted within the preparation groups
- Families requiring interventions that take longer and are multi-part, with perhaps two or more interventions identified

- Greater understanding of early trauma from workers and families, which takes a long time to support and heal

The team are a resilient and committed group of workers, who have worked hard to meet the needs of all adopted children in this period. At the last Board meeting an additional 2.5 workers were agreed (for one year) to enhance the adoption support offer and these are being recruited to currently, although we have not been able to identify candidates on our first round of recruitment.

The Operations and Adoption Support managers are focussing on how to support workers and how to reduce demand on staff who report feeling under stress, especially within First Response and the letterbox service.

### **Process**

The first response model remains in place , to encourage better screening of calls and redirecting to universal services where appropriate . If a call is clearly adoption specific then advice ,support and counselling can be offered via telephone and may be all that is required.

If it becomes clear from discussion that there is a need to gather more detailed information then the family will be invited into a surgery appointment to conduct an Adoption Support Assessment. This could also be offered when a family requests a financial assessment or renewal of an adoption support allowance.

Of the referrals into the service for both Adoptive families 100% of adoptive families requiring an assessment / interview have been offered a surgery appointment within a 4-10 week timeframe. Some are prioritised if required (for example, edge of care, risk of exclusion, high stress in household).

All families can contact the First Response team and speak to a social worker on duty. This is available every day, during working hours so they have access to a skilled social worker to respond to queries and offer support.

Since boosting the Access to Records service, we now have FTE 1 worker (0.2 of which is through an agency worker) supporting adults within all five Local Authority areas.

This has since proved very beneficial, with adopted adults being able to access their records and waiting list being worked through. We now offer a reduced waiting time for those who approach the service, at 6-9 months wait and often adults are seen more swiftly (recently example of a service offered within 3 months, which includes period of time seeking the records and processing the information for the adult to receive).



The **Adoption Support team staffing establishment** is as follows -

|                             |         |  |
|-----------------------------|---------|--|
| <b>Team Managers</b>        | 2.3 FTE | 3 staff  |
| <b>Adoption Support SWs</b> | 12 FTE  | First Response 4.2 (agency 0.4)<br>ATR 1 (agency 0.2)<br>Long Term 7.2 FTE |
| <b>FSWs</b>                 | 3.7 FTE | FSW's 2.9 FTE<br>Senior practitioner 0.8 FTE                               |
| <b>Therapeutic SW</b>       | 2 FTE   | 2 FTE<br>1 seconded for 1 year   |

### Universal services

The Adoption Support Team continue to offer access to Adopter Hub and some events as part of the “universal services” iThrive model. Adopter Voice have fed back how beneficial the Adopter Hub service has been to enable adoptive parents to access high quality, reliable information at a time that suits them. We have offered all adopters at every stage access to this resource and will continue to promote this at Stage One and onwards.

The first virtual evening workshop, on supporting children in education, took place in September, and was well received by parents and continued through October to March on topics such as life story, contact, and the neuro-sequential model (understanding trauma). A further training programme for parents is being created for the year ahead, some in person and others virtual events.

Adopter Voice has continued to offer a contact point for adopters who can connect with one another, and feed back to the agency about areas of practice, join training events, and participate in activities across Adoption Counts. This has offered in person events for new parents. Three consultation sessions have taken place seeking feedback for the organisation about the child’s voice, and life story work and letterbox. Information from these sessions was used to create the evening workshops.

Birth parent support continues to be commissioned through PAC-UK who offer support to those whose children have been removed through adoption, within the first two years. A group for birth parents has been developed in our region for parents who have lost children through adoption, with the aim of offering mutual support and ultimately supporting adopted children with positive contact arrangements.

### **1.6 Letterbox Service**

The Letterbox team are holding all letterbox referrals; at the last count this was 1298 families.

We were invited to learn about a pilot project run by Linkmaker, who are developing an online letterbox service, which will enable families to upload letters and share these securely within the online system, having first been screened by Family Support Workers in Adoption Counts. This was going to start in Spring 2022 but the start has been delayed to allow for more preparation time nationally.

The Family Support Workers also undertake short pieces of work to assist families with adoption related issues, reducing the pressures of SW allocations, and this has started to support families awaiting therapeutic input.

Current number of Letterbox agreements per LA (in brackets are previous number)

| <b>Manchester</b> | <b>Salford</b> | <b>Stockport</b> | <b>Cheshire East</b> | <b>Trafford</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 392 (305)         | 342 (277)      | 264 (250)        | 147 (186)            | 145 (120)       |

### **1.7 Birth families**

First Family delivered through PAC-UK are our current provider of support to birth families following a decision for their child to be adopted .

The clear and easy referral process is increasing the number of families who access the service. PAC-UK provide the annual figures from 2020-21 was 51 parents offered support. We are awaiting feedback from this last period.

**Further detailed information is available in the PAC – UK annual report, which can be shared on request.**

## **2. Practice Developments in Adoption Counts**

### **Adoption Support**

Adoption Psychology have delivered some on-line training and support for families, and recently have returned to a partial face to face group to deliver Theraplay informed support to newly placed families with their children. We are awaiting feedback from this. We have also returned to evening workshops, with the first being delivered in September 2021. This was well received by families and good feedback given about the benefit of the session.

Transitions work has been a focus and documents supporting good transitions, and a training event was delivered for the Family Finders and Recruitment and Assessment workers. This will support earlier intervention when a child is moving into an adoptive placement and has higher support needs or a likely need for more specialist support with (for example) relationships and behaviour during the transition.

A review of the MARP process has sought Local Authority decision makers' agreement to move to a process to enable more timely decision making when a child or family require more than the ASF £5,000 limit of therapy.

## **Adoption Psychology**

During this period the Adoption Psychology team have maintained their connections with the team and families, delivering specialist assessments, consultations, therapeutic input for families and training for staff.

Training has taken place for the Adoption Support team, including education and transition, use of therapeutic support, and specialist input from a FASD service. Training and reflective sessions were also provided by our Educational Psychology service with a focus on school support and workers have reported a high level of satisfaction with the specialist training offered in the service, offering good CPD and encouraging staff retention who feel valued by investment in their skills and knowledge.

Transitions support continues for children moving from their foster care to prospective adoptive home. We have created a format to claim for some of this work from the Adoption Support Fund.

Systemic Peer Support sessions have been created by the Adoption Support Team managers, and therapeutic social worker, and these have been beneficial for workers to receive peer support with complex cases and consider alternative hypotheses around intervention and support. These were paused in February and March to enable the focus to be on the ASF renewals but will be reinstated for the team. A new workers support group has been beneficial in enabling several new team members to be mentored by those who have been more established, and again this increases confidence and team cohesion as well as staff retention.

Further details available in the Adoption Psychology annual report.

**Kristen Roberts**

**Operations Manager, Adoption Support**

Adoption Counts Adoption Panel  
Adoption Panel Chairs 6 monthly report  
(October 2021 to March 2022)

## **1. Introduction**

This report is a biennial report completed in rotation by the Independent Panel Chairs for Adoption Counts. The statistics used in the report and the quotations from the Panel feedback process are supplied by the Admin Team and Panel Advisor for Adoption Counts. Thanks is expressed for their hard work in bringing the information together.

## **2. Overview of panels**

The temporary arrangements for Panels brought about by the Co-Vid situation continues and Panels are still being held virtually. They are held every two weeks on Fridays; every three weeks on Thursdays; every six weeks on Wednesdays; every six weeks on Tuesdays. This pattern of timings is consistent with arrangements pre Co-Vid and the usual locations of Panels are used as a reference.

The various locations originally used reflect the geographical areas of the Local Authority partners in the adoption work we do and were intended to make for easy attendance of the adoptive applicants and the social workers. Although these issues became moot during Lockdown arrangements there remains an argument that locally delivered services are still important.

There are discussions about moving to a Hybrid arrangement with actual attendance for some Panel members with other participants still joining virtually. This will depend on the availability of rooms large enough to maintain a level of safe social distancing at the various sites previously used for Panels.

Panels are usually scheduled for mornings. The ideal is for 3 items per Panel although a maximum of 5 cases can be listed. However, because of the additional time taken to deal with certain cases care is taken to not list too many items such as Matching cases.

The frequency of panels supports the timeliness of approvals and matches. The timetabling of panel items is based on need, and therefore panel will be convened even if there is only one item to be presented. There remains the option to arrange additional Panels should it be required.

## **3. Panel membership**

At the end of the reporting period at the end of March 2022 there were 53 panel members on the Central List. The make up is as follows:

3 Panel Chairs, 1 Vice Chair, 18 Local Authority and/or Adoption Counts Social Worker representatives, 21 Independent members, 4 Medical Advisors, 2 Elected Members, 2 Local Authority members [other than Social Workers] and 2 NHS members.

The 18 Social Workers are ; 11 from Adoption Counts, 2 from Manchester, 4 from Salford and 1 from Stockport. Neither Trafford or Cheshire East have Social Worker representation as Panel Members.

There are an additional 5 individuals in the process of being considered as new panel members.

Adoption Counts panels strive to have panel members from varied backgrounds, life and personal experiences and, whilst we have several adoptive parents and adult adopted people, it is recognised that it would be very helpful to have a birth parent who has had a child adopted.

The attendance and/or availability of Medical Advisors remains an issue on some occasions when there are serious or unusual medical conditions to be understood. If there was an issue whereby the Medical Advisor's input would be valued, queries can be sent to them prior to panel for advice. On occasion a Medical Advisor can attend at the beginning of Panel to give a summary of all cases scheduled that day. This is seen as an acceptable compromise

It has become increasingly difficult to recruit social workers from our 5 Local Authorities and we continue to push recruitment in these authorities. It is of particular concern that we don't have any representation from 2 of our partner Local Authorities.

### **Panel member appraisal**

The appraisal process is currently underway. Appraisals will be completed via an electronic system, with a third of Panel members invited in for a face to face discussion. The face to face meetings may still be completed virtually due to Covid-19. All Panel members are given the option to attend their appraisal in via a Teams meeting or to complete them electronically. This has been done to ease the pressure on the Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs as previous appraisal became very lengthy and protracted given the number of panel members and their varied availability for an additional meeting outside of panel times. The next appraisal period will begin in September 2022.

### **Annual panel training**

Panel members have opportunities to attend regular training sessions

Panel developmental days are January and June. The rationale for this is to avoid Easter holidays and a busy time for the agency, staff and panel members as schools return post long summer break in September

Panel Chairs also meet frequently to look at matters of consistency and common developmental issues

Adoption Counts have delivered training sessions on the topic of Black Lives Matters and the associated issues. There was an expectation that all panel members would attend this. Not all Panel Members accessed this training but will be offered the opportunity to attend future events as the Black Lives Matter training is continuously being embedded into practice within Adoption Counts and will be essential for everyone to attend.

The Panel Member Learning Library is still active and available to all panel members via SharePoint. This resource contains a wide variety of learning material such as policy and procedure documents, information leaflets, training slides, information re: adoption support; recruitment and assessment; and family finding. Panel members are required to keep a record of their reading and research which is to be reflected on and discussed during their appraisals to ensure continued professional development.

#### 4. Panel Business

Cases considered by panels (October 2021 – March 2022)

|                     |      |                        |                          |
|---------------------|------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Total No. of Panels | 24   | No. of Approvals       | 36                       |
| No. of Matches      | 38 # | No of children matched | 43/45 ##                 |
| Breakdown by type:  |      | Single children        | 32                       |
|                     |      | Sib group of 2         | 4 [5 if double counting] |
|                     |      | Sib group of 3         | 1                        |

# 2 children were matched twice at Panel [K children]. So actually appeared at 38 Panels only 43 matched in reality.

#### Data

#### CPR / PAR

For the above period, 46 CPRs were presented to panel (this included 5 sibling groups of 2 and 1 sibling group of 3 and also includes SHOBPA) and 36 PARs

| RAA data of quality of reports at final audit. All agencies |    |        |                        |    |        |
|---|----|--------|------------------------|----|--------|
| Matches (and SHOBPA), 46 CPRs                               |    |        | Approvals, 36 PARs     |    |        |
| Outstanding   | 3  | 6.52%  | Outstanding            | 1  | 2.77%  |
| Good  | 29 | 63.04% | Good                   | 33 | 91.66% |
| Satisfactory  | 6  | 13.04% | Satisfactory           | 0  | 0%     |
| In need of improvement                                      | 8  | 17.39% | In need of improvement | 2  | 5.55%  |

#### **SHOBPA:**

| CPR Agency specific data per Local Authority- SHOBPA |             |      |                        |            |
|--|-------------|------|------------------------|------------|
| Agency   | Outstanding | Good | In need of improvement | Inadequate |
| Trafford   | 0           | 0    | 2                      | 0          |
| Stockport  | 0           | 5    | 6                      | 0          |
| Salford  | 0           | 3    | 7                      | 0          |
| Manchester   | 0           | 5    | 9                      | 0          |
| Cheshire East  | 1           | 4    | 4                      | 0          |

| CPR Agency specific data per Local Authority – as a % out of total of reports |             |            |              |                        |
|---|-------------|------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Agency  | Outstanding | Good       | Satisfactory | In need of improvement |
| Trafford (2)  | 0           | 0          | 0            | 2 (4.35%)              |
| Stockport (11)  | 0           | 5 (10.87%) | 0            | 6 (13%)                |
| Salford (10)  | 0           | 3 (6.52%)  | 0            | 7 (15.2%)              |
| Manchester (14)   | 0           | 5 (10.87%) | 0            | 9 (19.7%)              |
| Cheshire East (9)   | 1 (2.17 %)  | 4 (8.7%)   | 0            | 4 (8.7%)               |

## 5. Panel scrutiny – timescales

### Matches

|            |          |     |
|------------|----------|-----|
| A1 met     | 16 cases | 37% |
| A1 not met | 27 cases | 63% |
| A2 met     | 28 cases | 65% |
| A2 not met | 15 cases | 35% |

### Breakdown by LA

| LA            | No of children | A1 met  | A1 not met | A2 met   | A2 not met |
|---------------|----------------|---------|------------|----------|------------|
| Cheshire East | 9              | 2 [22%] | 7 [78%]    | 7 [78%]  | 2 [22%]    |
| Manchester    | 14             | 4 [29%] | 10 [71%]   | 4 [29%]  | 10 [71%]   |
| Salford       | 9              | 3 [33%] | 6 [67%]    | 7 [78%]  | 2 [22%]    |
| Stockport     | 9              | 6 [67%] | 3 [33%]    | 8 [89%]  | 1 [11%]    |
| Trafford      | 2              | 1 [50%] | 1 [50%]    | 2 [100%] |            |

### Approvals

Of the 78 Adoptive families that were in S1 in the six months (this excludes those that left the process during S1 in the period):

- 5 were completed within 8 weeks (12.5%); 35 were completed of timescales (87.5%).
- For those that were ongoing at the end of the period, 12 were still within timescales (32%) while a further 26 (68%) were already out of timescales.

Of the 73 Adoptive families that were in S2 in the six months (this excludes those that left the process during S2 in the period):

- 12 were completed within 16 weeks (32%); 26 were completed of timescales (68%).
- For those that were ongoing at the end of the period, 27 were still within timescales (77%) while a further 8 (23%) were already out of timescales.

### Comment

The statistics model used for A1 and A2 performance give only an average performance indication based on local and National trends. As such it needs to be used cautiously. However, there are 2 main conclusions to consider.

A1 performance is very much affected by Court timetables and the extent to which a case is being disputed. The LA and Adoption Agency cannot be in full control of this waiting period for children. A2 is when the Local Authority has got the go ahead to progress a plan for adoption via a Placement Order. In these cases performance is usually better.

A1 in this period is similar to the last reporting period [37% against 39% in the previous 6 months]. A2 performance is improved [65% against 57% in the previous 6 months]

The quality assurance process is thorough and CPRs are audited by the relevant Adoption Counts Team Manager prior to SHOBPA consideration and then again by either the Team Manager, Family Finder or Senior Practitioner before matching panel. This is to ensure that CPRs are graded as being 'Good' as a minimum and that the final report is submitted to panel rather than reports still requiring amendments.



There continues to be a small number of CPRs still requiring some additional work following submission as identified by the Panel Advisor and/or Chair. The bulk of these cases have had the suggested amendments completed in a timely manner allowing the case to be heard as per the schedule. Even these CPRs have told and explained the child's journey, but needed additional work to enable them to be appropriate for the adopters and adoptee to have as life time documents.

## 6. Attendee feedback

Both the social workers and adopters attending Panel are asked the following questions:, which are then graded from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)

### Feedback from evaluations

12 evaluations were completed for this half year.

| Adopters | Adoption social workers | Children's social workers | Family Finders |
|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 0        | 7                       | 0                         | 5              |

| Question  | Percentage | Number | Score |
|---|------------|--------|-------|
| Before attending panel were you clear about panel's function?               | 100%       | 12     | 5     |
| Were you given sufficient notice about the date and time of panel?          | 100%       | 12     | 5     |
| Were panels members introduced to you?                                      | 92%        | 11     | 5     |
|   | 8%         | 1      | 4     |
| Did panel members treat you with courtesy and respect?                      | 100%       | 12     | 5     |
| Did panel members seem familiar with your case?                             | 75%        | 9      | 5     |
|   | 25%        | 3      | 4     |
| Were panel member's questions relevant to the issues they were considering? | 100%       | 12     | 5     |
| Were you given the opportunity to clarify points raised?                    | 100%       | 12     | 5     |
| Were the recommendations made by the Panel Chair clear?                     | 83%        | 10     | 5     |
|   | 17%        | 2      | 4     |
| Overall gradings  | 42%        | 5      | 5     |
|   | 33%        | 4      | 4     |
|   | 25%        | 3      | 3     |

Additional comments made were as follows:

*The Chair usually reminds prospective adopters that panel provides a recommendation and that the ADM will make a decision within 10 days, but forgot to do so on this occasion.*

*However, I'm conscious that we were the last item on the agenda, and I reminded the couple of this after panel.*

*I also felt that the couple had a lot of questions to answer, some of which were bordering on assessment questions. I'm not sure this would have been as obvious if they had received fewer questions, but I thought they got a pretty tough grilling. B also mentioned that she was surprised to receive 'two rounds' of questions; a reference to the fact that some panel members had two opportunities to ask them questions.*

*I was surprised to hear that some Panel members were not impressed with adopter's presentation. I thought they presented well and answered the questions that were asked of them succinctly and with feeling. I understand that other couples had been very animated earlier in the day, and panel did make it clear that adopters presentation would not effect their recommendation. However, I do not think it is necessary to comment on prospective adopters' presentation, particularly not in a negative way, as it has no bearing on the recommendation.*

*Everything in this case has gone smoothly so far. We were notified a week before about the time of panel and panel was on time. Thank you making probably my last panel such positive experience*

*This was my first Adoption Counts panel and it was a positive experience.*

*I was made to feel at ease, particularly after having a difficult start with my laptop volume.*

*I felt the PAR had been read fully and considered by each panel member.*

### **Adopter feedback**

It is disappointing that we received no evaluations from adopters, and needs further attention paid as to whether virtual panels have impacted on this. The plans to move to a hybrid Panel system should consider this. Prior to virtual panel, chairs would personally hand the evaluation form to the applicants, but it is worth further exploration about how as chairs we can encourage feedback in the virtual world, as this is an important part of our learning

### **Comment**

Generally feedback panel received was positive.

However, the written feedback does not always corroborate with the scoring.

Feedback from some workers is that panel asks questions that are already covered in the paperwork. On occasion this may be to request an update on a report written some time ago. However it is a point to be looked at. It may be a particular issue when considering a Matching where there are a large number of reports written by several different social workers.

Some questions are posed from a genuine interest in the lives of the adopters and children but may not be essential for the purposes of the task of Panel on the day. This can also mean that Panels become seen as a quasi-management function. However, Panel are also charged with taking an overview of the performance of the Agency. Getting the balance right is challenging and should continue to be a focus of Panel Development sessions.

Consideration may be needed in asking the social workers more for clarification; rather than the adopters. Bearing in mind that adopters do not have to attend Panel and the guidance is clear that no negative conclusions should be made should they choose to not attend

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This has again been a busy and productive half year for Adoption Counts and for its children and families. The Agency has continued to deliver a high standard of service in the face of a global pandemic and the strains this has created for administrative and IT connectivity.

There has been some impact such as increased timescales for approvals, but this is down to a number of factors outside the agencies control, eg adopters taking breaks, families being impacted by Covid, uncertainty in relation to Furlough arrangements etc. However, as “covid recovery “continues, so timeliness will improve.

The agency needs to be congratulated on its continuing focus driving up quality to ensure that the services it delivers would be “good enough for my child.”

There are number of areas that have been identified that over the next half year will receive further attention and work :-

Embedding the learning of the Black lives matters training and implications for the families we approve and the children we place,

Ensuring that workers and panel are consistently exploring the lifelong implications of adoption, including more reflection on proposed contact arrangements and applicants’ openness to direct contact with birth parents.

- Driving forward more consistency in assessment as well as improving the quality
- Working with the partner agencies to improve both quality and style of CPRs
- Developing hybrid panels – bearing in mind comments earlier in the report
- Ensuring that all panel members share in the learning lessons from any disruptions. It may also be worth sharing with Panel members details of the learning from introductions which do not proceed as planned i.e. not formal disruptions as the child was never actually placed
- Further work with assessing social workers in relation to expectations of panel and to learn from them what would support them to improve quality of reports
- There is difference in timescales for children across the 5 authorities, and it would be helpful for Panel to have some understanding of this
- A more concerted effort to acquire feedback from prospective adopters. This could be achieved if a member of staff (not their assessing SW), made contact and gave them the opportunity to provide full feedback.

Finally, the current timescales around issuing papers to Panel members and the cutoff date for them to raise any concerns might be worth revisiting. The cut off of lunchtime on the day before a Panel gives little opportunity to involve presenting social worker with the opportunity to add to or amend reports. A consequence of this can be lengthy questions at Panel and an increased risk of needed to defer an item.

**Martin Sadler**  
**Independent Panel Chair**