

# Appendix 2 - Manchester Annual Adoption Report 2017-18

## 1 Introduction and Purpose of the Report

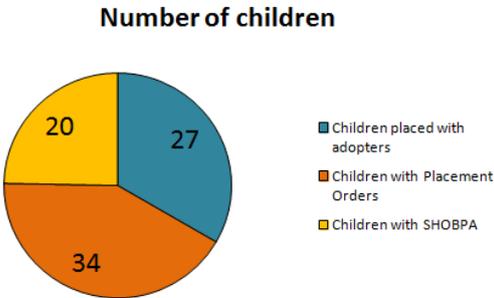
This is a report to Manchester City Council in relation to the performance of the Adoption Counts Service. Adoption Counts is the Regional Adoption Agency that manages Manchester's adoption service. Other local authorities involved in the partnership are Cheshire East, Salford, Stockport and Trafford. The agency went live in July 2017.

This report covers the operating period April 1st 2017 to March 31st 2018.

## 2 Number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and length of time waiting

As at the 31 March 2018 Manchester had 27 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted. As at the 31 March 2018 Manchester had 34 children waiting for adoption but not yet placed. There were a further 20 children with a 'should be placed for adoption' (SHOBPA) decision but no Placement Order as court proceedings had not concluded.

The chart below shows the numbers of children waiting by type;



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

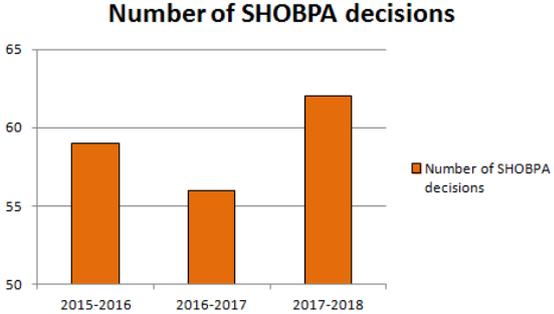
As at the 31 March 2018 Manchester had 20 children currently subject to SHOBPA but not at this stage the subject of legal orders to place for adoption.

### 2.2 Children on Placement Orders

As at the end of March 2018 there were 34 children who were the subject to Placement Orders and not placed.

**2.3 Number of Children who had a SHOBPA during the period**

Manchester had 62 children who were made subject to SHOBPA decisions in the 12 month period April 2017 to March 2018. This is up from the 56 made in the previous year 2016/17 and 59 in 2015/16.

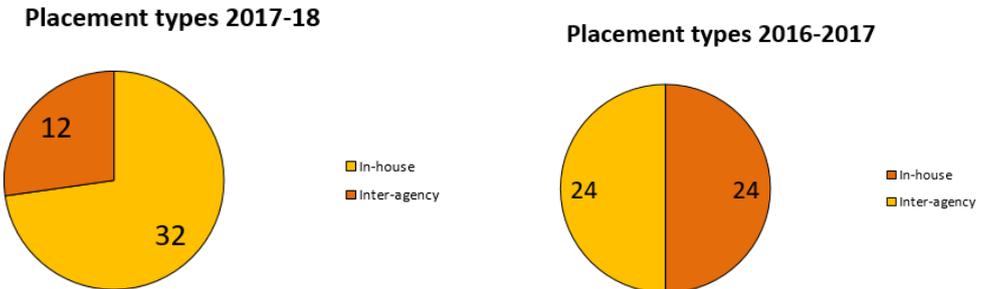


**2.4 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period**

In the year 2017/18 9 children had their plans reviewed by the agency decision maker and 5 children had their plans changed and SHOBPA rescinded. In the previous year, 2016/17 7 children had plans reviewed and out of these 5 had the plan changed.

**2.5 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during year.**

Manchester had 44 children placed for adoption between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. In the 3 month period April to June 2017 before Adoption Counts went live 11 children were placed. 6 of these were inter-agency placements and 5 were with Manchester approved adopters. In the period July 17 to March 2018 33 children have been placed. 27 of these were in house, as in Adoption Counts adopters, and 6 were inter-agency placements.

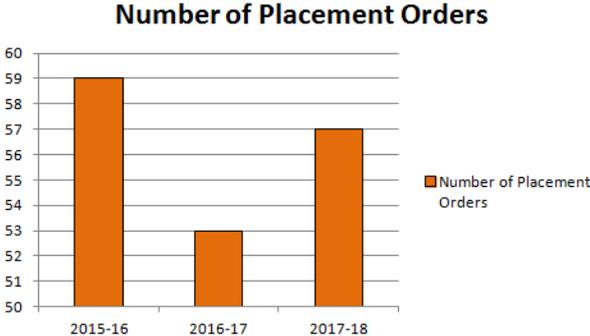


In the previous year 2016/2017, 48 children were placed for adoption, of whom 50% were placed in inter-agency placements. This reduction in children placed is due to two factors. A number of complex children waiting from previous years were successfully placed in 2016/17 and there has been a national reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders granted by the courts. Although this trend has now

reduced, with more Placement Orders being granted, it has continued to have an impact on numbers placed and adopted in the year 2017/18. The number of SHOBPA decisions has increased in the year 2017/18 so this may lead to an increase in numbers placed moving forwards.

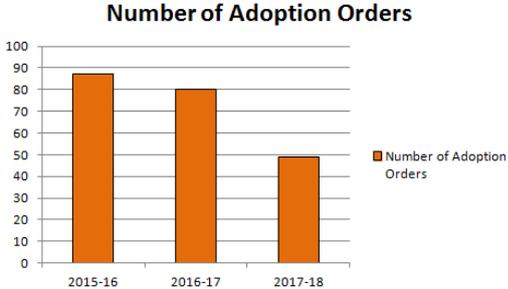
### 2.6 Number of Children Subject to Placement Orders in 2017/18

Placement Orders were granted for 57 children for this twelve month period. The year total for 2016/17 was 53 and 59 for 2015/16.



### 3 Number of Children Adopted

Manchester had 49 children adopted during the twelve month period. This is a significant reduction on the 80 adopted in 2016/17 and 87 in 2015/16. This reason for this is as per the information in section 2.5.

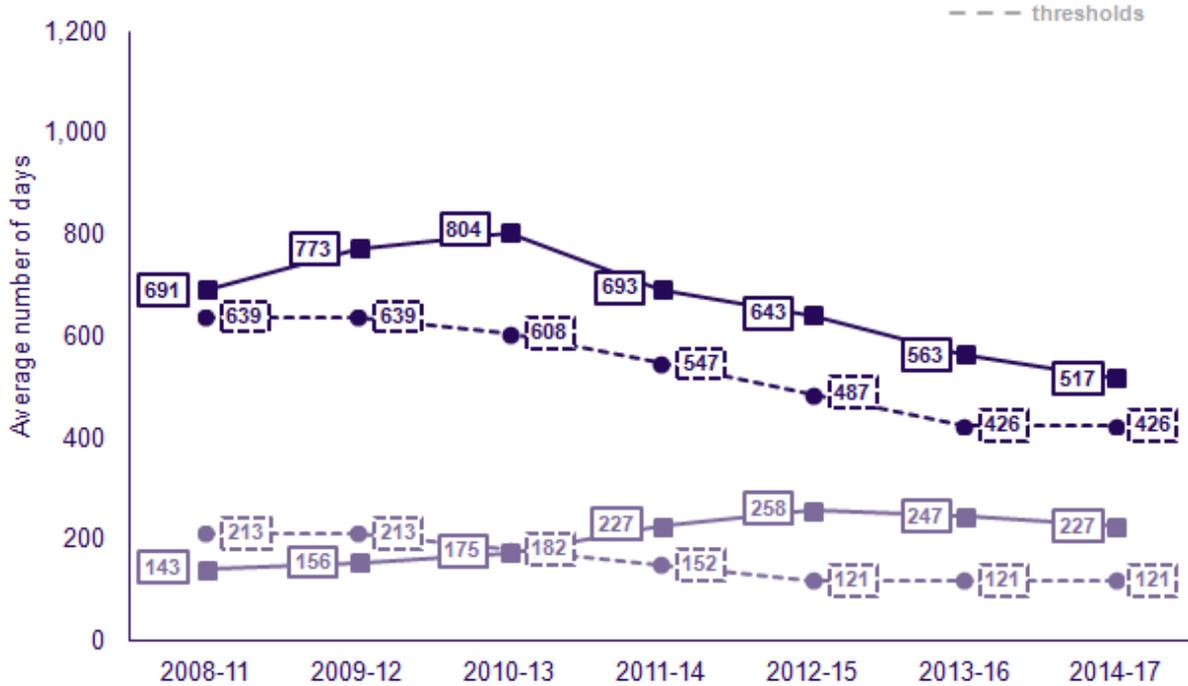


Using the data from the 49 children adopted these gives an average A1 of 294 days and an average A2 of 97 days. This means that both the A1 and A2 scores for the single year are within the national thresholds of 426 days and 121 days. The exception report contains individual information on the cases outside the A1 or A2 threshold.

The government is trying to reduce timescales in adoption so it has set targets which are measured via the adoption scorecard. These are calculated over rolling 3 year averages. The cohort each year consists of children adopted within the year, therefore the scorecards are measuring historical practice in relation to adoption activity. The latest scorecards were published in May 2018 and these cover the period 2013-16. The Manchester scorecard is shown below.

**A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family**

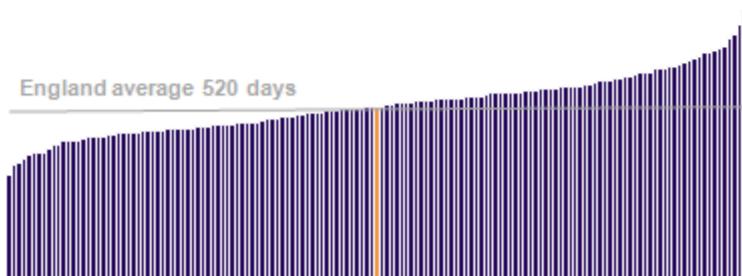
**A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family**



This shows that although the length of time between a child entering care and moving into the adoptive family (A1) has been reduced this past year, at 517 this is 91 days above the target. A low number represents good performance. With regard to the A2, this has continued to fall for the last three years, though at 227, this is 106 days above the target.

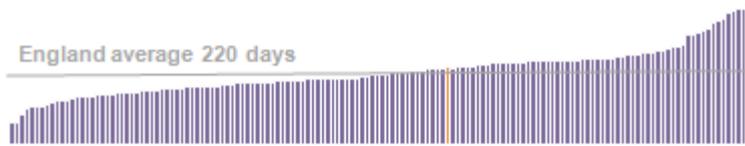
The chart below shows that Manchester is performing in line with the England average of 520 for the A1 measure (low is good).

**A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2014-17**



With regard to the A2 measure, Manchester's performance is only very slightly above the England average of 220 days.

**A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, 2014-17**



### **3.1 Early Permanency**

Out of the 44 children placed for adoption in 2017/18 7 were placed in Foster For Adopt placements. There were no Concurrent Planning placements in the year.

## **4 Recruitment of Adopters**

### **4.1 New Enquiries**

598 new enquiries have been made to Adoption Counts since the agency went live (July 2017-March 2018 inclusive). During the same period in the previous year, when enquiries were made to the five Local Authorities, this number was 600. This does not appear to be an increase, however, enquirers, pre Adoption Counts, often made an enquiry to more than one of our five Local Authorities, some maybe to all five. The figure of 600 will include many of the same family making an enquiry to more than one agency. This obviously does not happen in Adoption Counts as there is only one point of enquiry for all five agencies.

Many of the new enquiries are from families at the very early stage of thinking about adoption and some don't wish to attend an information event at this point. These families are always still offered a place at an information event and they are sent correspondence to confirm this. A follow-up contact is always made to those who do not book on an information event.

As 598 enquiries were made in the three quarters of the year the agency was live, the projected number for the year would be approx. 800. In order to increase the number of adopters being approved, it has been calculated that Adoption Counts will need approximately 1200 enquiries per year. A new Marketing Officer is being interviewed for May 2018, so increasing the number of enquiries will be their main priorities for the 2018/19 year.

## **4.2 Information Events**

Information events have continued to be held every fortnight and at three venues spread out across the agency region i.e. Salford, Stockport and Middlewich. The Middlewich venue continues to have the lowest number of attendees, however Adoption Counts do need to keep a presence in this area for accessibility to those enquirers living in the South of the area; some of them being as far south as Stoke.

216 families have attended an information event, since the agency went live (July 2017- March 2018 inclusive). Adoption Counts are being very inclusive in inviting families to information events, when not all of these are suitable to proceed to the next stage after that event, e.g. families about to move to a new house, not yet living in the area, had very recent IVF, etc. This opens the 'link' between Adoption Counts and the enquirer should they wish to proceed further when appropriate for them.

Taking this into account, approximately half of the families attending information events proceeded to have an initial visit. For the other half, many of those fall in to the category where they are not able to proceed at this point, with some others only attending the information event to understand about adoption. During this next period increased monitoring of why enquires are not proceeding will take place.

The information events have remained consistently presented and consist of a presentation from a member of staff, usually a Manager or Senior Social Worker, a Adoption Counts DVD is shown which features six adoptive families talking about their adoption experiences and two workers talking about family finding and adoption support. An adopter is usually also therefore in person to talk further about their journey and answer any questions. This is then followed by a short question and answers session. Each enquirer is given a leaflet entitled 'What Happens Next' so that they are fully aware of how to proceed further, should they wish to. The North spoke will trial a different format of presenting the events, and have had a family finding worker there for a Question and Answer session about the children/matching/etc. If this works well further monitoring of these will carry on with a view to possibly changing the other two areas to match.

## **4.3 Initial visits**

Social workers carried out 100 initial home visits since the agency went live (July 17- March 2018 inclusive). The majority of these families had attended an information event prior to the home visit, and had had a detailed telephone conversation with the Recruitment team. In cases where it was felt that an information event would not be necessary for a family to attend, e.g. second time adopters, enquirers who have had other agencies visit already, etc. then they have proceeded straight to an initial visit after the detailed telephone conversation in order to avoid delay or potentially loss of the family to a different agency.

Adoption Counts have a target to have all initial visits arranged and carried out within ten working days of the detailed telephone conversation. There is then a further five working days for a decision to be made about inviting the family forward, this includes time for the worker to write the report and for the manager to review/ consider the decision. Currently the 15 day target is not being met, the average since going live is 24 days. This is an area which is being addressed with managers and staff, as need to improve performance in this area.

If a family is not invited forward after an initial visit then the social worker/manager informs the family of this and confirms the decision in writing. If it is the case where a timescale has been given for the family to come back then the recruitment hub team will diary in order to make contact after a suitable period of time.

#### **4.4 Adopters Required**

When Adoption Counts was launched there was no need to actively recruit adopters for single children aged 0-2, White British unless they would consider Foster for Adoption, as the children coming through for adoption were not for this age group. During this period a strategic decision was made for the agency to take prospective adopters forward for the very young age range i.e. 0-2, as there are now a high number of younger children coming through the Local Authority's, with a increasing request for more Fostering for Adoption placements. Previously the majority of the children coming through were older children, sibling groups.

#### **4.5 Flexibility around Prospective Adopters**

The number of prospective adopters both locally and nationally has been reducing and it is increasingly difficult to recruit adopters. Therefore as an adoption agency Adoption Counts needs to be very competitive in recruiting what is a limited resource. This means that as an agency all prospective adopters are having their individual situation assessed and decisions made on their individual circumstances, rather than having strict eligibility criteria. This is against a backdrop now of increasing numbers of children requiring adoption and younger children becoming more available.

Below are the areas which there may be flexibility regarding taking an application forward;

#### **4.6 In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)**

Adoption Counts recommend a period of time of around six months after a family's last cycle before applying to adopt. However they are still invited to information events during those six months, to allow them to start their learning/thinking about the adoption process. Following analysis of why attendees of information evening do not proceed, IVF was noted to be the most cited reason. After discussions with other

adoption agencies (who appear to be more flexible regarding this) regarding practice in this area it has been agreed that Adoption Counts may be more flexible with this approach in certain cases such as where a family has previously in contact us and had numerous IVF attempts. As some families state they feel they knew their last attempt was not going to be successful. However, Adoption Counts would still wish for a thorough discussion with the family regarding their readiness and preparedness to move on to consider adoption.

#### **4.7 E-cigarettes**

During the first two quarters of being live Adoption Counts used the same guidance for E-cigarettes as those who smoked cigarettes. Therefore not been inviting smokers forward, for children under 5 years, until they had given up for 6 months before submitting their Registration of Interest. In the last quarter, for E-cigarette users, they have been advised must have stopped using E-cigarettes by the time they end Stage One of the process. This will be reviewed and changed if required as and when further research is produced around the effects of E-cigarette/vaping use around children and to the smoker's health.

#### **4.8 Moving house**

Adoption Counts maintains the request for those families wishing to move house in the near future to either move house before applying or not to move until a child is placed and fully settled within their new family. However, instead of delaying initial visits to those families, they have been arranged with a view to giving the family a decision as to whether we will be inviting them forward to application, subject to their new accommodation being suitable. This is so that the prospective adopter have a clear decision, and can address any areas requiring further work and so that the family have a link to the agency in order to come back to Adoption Counts for a visit once they have moved.

#### **4.9 Registrations of Interest**

59 Registrations of Interest were received since the agency went live (July 2017-March 2018 inclusive). Of these, nine applications were fast-tracked straight to Stage Two (2<sup>nd</sup> time adopters or foster carers). The remained all commenced Stage One.

#### **4.10 Current position**

At the end of the year 2017/18 (1 March 2017), there were 15 families in Stage One, 6 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 25 in Stage Two.

These numbers are new Registrations of Interest since Adoption Counts went live, so are in addition to the families who had already registered their interest to the five Local Authorities within the Regional Adoption Agency before 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017.

#### **4.11 Timescales in Stage 1**

Stage 1 has a timescale of 8 weeks; 56 days. Adoption Counts is currently averaging 85 days, which is approximately a month over timescale. Statutory checks are always commenced at the very start of Stage 1 so there is no delay with these being started. However, some of the delays are due to problems/delays with the applicants' medicals, or the applicants not prioritising some of the work they are requested to undertake. It is noted however that a much tighter control of this stage is required by the Team Managers and this has been raised with the group. Discretion can be used in a lot of cases where the majority of the Stage One matters have been completed and some can be carried in to Stage Two.

#### **4.12 Timescales In Stage 2**

Regrettably Adoption Counts are still experiencing issues with its data and can not accurately report on this information.

#### **4.13 Adopters Approved**

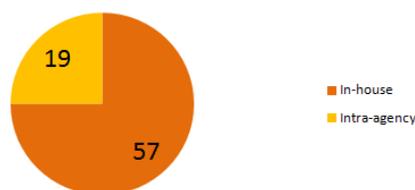
There were 45 adopters approved since Adoption Counts went live. Though a further 6 items were presented to panel and recommended for approval, the ADM did not sign these off in March, so these adopters will show in next years figures.

This figure is low however it represents what was in assessment with the Local Authorities at the point of transfer to Adoption Counts. The figures for quarter 1 and 2 in the next financial year look far more promising, however the numbers approved falls short of the number of adopters required to meet the needs of a growing population of children with adoption plans. Monthly sufficiency meetings with recruitment and marketing staff are continually monitoring the pipeline of adopters with a view to meeting future need.

#### **4.14 Interagency**

The chart below shows the number of children placed were placed. It shows most were placed in-house with Adoption Counts adopters. Please note however that Adoption Counts have experienced difficulties with compiling this data and so this is still provisional data. The end of year Adoption leadership Board returns made by each local authority will be used to quality assure this figure when they are made available to us on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

#### Children placed in-house/interagency across Adoption Counts



#### 4.15 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Adoption Counts received 111 partner adoption enquiries since the agency went live (July 2017-March 2018 inclusive).

The Hub Recruitment Team take these enquiries and undertake a detailed telephone call to ascertain the family circumstances. Many of these enquiries are not taken further as adoption is deemed not to be the most suitable plan. Those that are felt potentially suitable to proceed are sent an information pack and enquiry form, and on receipt of the completed form a social worker is then allocated to speak further to the family.

After the meeting, the social worker/manager decide that adoption is the right plan, following which the Hub Recruitment Team will send the relevant application paperwork out and a social worker is allocated to carry out the assessment. Out of the 111 enquiries since we went live, 57 were allocated for a social worker conversation, and 14 applications were submitted.

### 5 Adoption Counts Marketing Report

#### 5.1 1st October 2017- 18th March 2018

#### 5.2 Objectives 2018/2019

- To increase enquiries by 10% (from 574 – 631)
- To approve 126 new adopters

#### 5.3 Results quarters 3 and 4

- 384 enquiries
- 97 households attended open meetings
- 63 720 visits to the website
- Busiest week for enquiries was week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017 with 27 enquiries (National Adoption Week)
- Busiest day for website visits was 21<sup>st</sup> October with 1 881 page views
- 973 Twitter followers

- 317 Facebook 'likes'

#### **5.4 End of Year Figures for Adoption Counts (3 July 2017-31 March 2018)**

- 598 enquiries (target 638)
- 45 approvals (estimated need - 126)

#### **5.5 Marketing Activity**

National Adoption Week media campaign

25<sup>th</sup> September – 30<sup>th</sup> October (NAW w/c 16<sup>th</sup> October)

- 125 enquiries
- 33, 376 web visits
- Billboards (w/c 9<sup>th</sup> October for 2 weeks)
- Bus shelter/roadside posters (w/c 25<sup>th</sup> September for 4 weeks)
- Bus rears (w/c 2<sup>nd</sup> October for 4 weeks)
- Train station digital posters (w/c 9<sup>th</sup> October for 2 weeks)
- Mobile advertising
- Facebook 'boost' posts
- Google adwords

Total spend: £24, 867

Cost per enquiry: £198.93

The inquiry cost was expensive given the poor outcome therefore future campaigns will focus on a more digital approach and less outdoor spend, which can be expensive in terms of cost per enquiry.

#### **5.6 Digital campaigns will include:**

- Google adwords: maximum spend £40 per day
- Facebook and Twitter 'boost' posts once per month (focussing on the need for people of a BME background to come forward and adopters for children who wait longer)
- Mobile and 'pop up' advertising

#### **5.7 Press releases**

- Sibling group case study – 11<sup>th</sup> October
- BME adopter appeal – 30<sup>th</sup> November

#### **5.8 Coverage**

- The Voice (BME newspaper) – 30<sup>th</sup> November
- Manchester Evening News – 5<sup>th</sup> December (BME appeal)

**5.9 New year, new start (Jan/Feb) and LGBT Week media campaign (March)**

- Admaxim mobile advertising campaign (BME) – 15<sup>th</sup> January – 12<sup>th</sup> February
- LGBT Week – Gaydio Advert – 8 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> March at 30 slots per week + interview with adopter on 8<sup>th</sup> March breakfast show
- 2 Facebook ‘boost’ posts – BME and LGBT audiences - January and March
- Press advertising - Manchester Weekly News, Macclesfield Express and Stockport Express – 4<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January
- Google adwords max £50 per day from 4<sup>th</sup> January
- Stalls at LGBT Manchester event and CAHN Women’s Day event 8<sup>th</sup> March

Total spend: £11,863.40  
 Cost per enquiry: £79

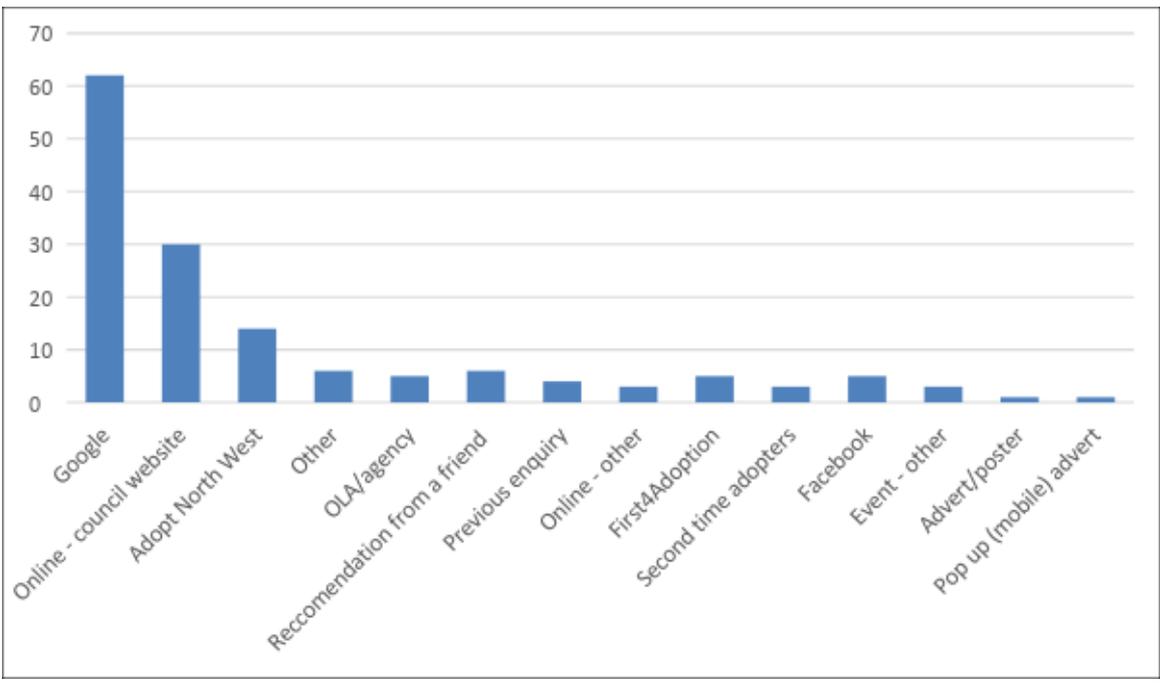
**Press releases**

- Siblings case study – w/c 4<sup>th</sup> January
- Same sex couple case study – w/c 1<sup>st</sup> March

**5.10 Coverage**

- Granada reports BME adoption – 12<sup>th</sup> January
- Trafford Messenger – 1<sup>st</sup> March

**5.11 Enquiry Sources**



Google continues to be the biggest source of enquiry (41% of enquiries from January to March).

## **5.12 Ethnicity**

- Out of 99 people who disclosed their ethnicity, 6 had stated they were of a Black African or Caribbean background.
- Of these 6, enquiry sources included google searches, social media and a recommendation from someone who works for MCC.
- 2 out of the 6 enquiries had been invited to an open meeting.

## **5.13 Strategy 2018-2019**

- Continue to utilise google adwords at £50 per day
- One year anniversary summer campaign/event
- Monthly Facebook 'boost' posts and regular tweets
- Biannual press releases particularly on family finding case studies
- Regular profiles added to website
- Campaign for sibling groups of 2 or more

## **6 Requirements On the Preparation of Adoption Report Regulations:**

### **6.1 Complaints**

During the period one complaint was received in respect of an adoption allowance payable by Manchester city Council. There were two complaints relating to Adoption Counts, one was from an adopter and the other from a local authority social worker.

### **6.2 Staffing**

Adoption Counts has continued to actively recruit for a number of posts during this period. The first line management group was fully staffed from April 2018. This will be the first time since the start of Adoption Counts nine months ago, that there will be a full management team. However one of the Operations Managers, Karen Barker will be leaving Adoption Counts in July 2018. Interviews have taken place for this post and it has been offered to an external Candidate Cathy Sowden, expected to be in post in July.

A number of adverts have gone out for the following vacancies. It is expected that interviews will take place in May 2018.

- 2 FTE family finders
- 2 FTE recruitment and assessment workers
- 2 adoption support social workers.
- 0.5 marketing officer
- 0.5 family support worker (letterbox)

As a temporary solution to vacancy management a number of agency/casual staff have been recruited. Though Adoption Counts continues to actively recruit, some staff are resigning from the organisation. The staffing situation in the Cheshire East is currently challenging. The authority has been asked to recruit to cover a maternity leave which is imminent, whilst there will be newly vacant 5 recruitment post. A further member of staff currently employed by Cheshire east and based in Middlewich undertaking a family finding role plans to resign. There were also 4 members of staff on long term sick during this period.

Work to be undertaken during the next six months includes a review of the advanced/senior practitioners role. The agency has a high number of staff paid at advanced or senior practitioner level, but there is no clarity of the role or the additionality these practitioners could offer. The management team are therefore undertaking a piece of work to explore this. This will include reviewing the allocation of Advanced Practitioners across the region, with liaison with Human Resources in each local authority and with finance.

### **6.3 Business Support**

Business support is now fully staffed.

### **6.4 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**

Adoption Counts had no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism during the period.

## **7 Development of Adoption Counts (Regional Adoption Agency)**

### **7.1 Practice**

Staff meet within their teams on a spoke basis monthly, whilst they also come together in their specialism-adoption support, family finding or recruitment and assessment. Adoption Support function as a single team across the region. All specialisms regularly review their practise. In April events will be held for recruitment and assessment workers, and for family finders, reviewing policy, practise development and performance. These development/practise sessions will be held in future bi-monthly.

### **7.2 Recruitment and Assessment**

There is a national shortage of adopters which instigated the recent letter from the children's minister asking for recruitment estimates to 2020. Approvals in 17/18 in Adoption counts were low, with 45 in total. This reflects the low numbers of prospective adopters in the process of Adoption Counts going live being assessed by the Local Authorities. Figures for the first 2 quarters of 18/19 look better however the agency will need to continue to attract a high number of enquiries and improve conversion rates in order to continue to meet this years and next year's targets.

Monthly sufficiency meetings with marketing, the Enquiry Manager and Operations Manager leading on recruitment will closely monitor the pipeline of adopters from enquiry to approval, with enhanced follow up of those who attend an open evening, who do not go on to make an application. Conversion rates from enquiries to Registrations Of Interests are likely to improve given that recruitment is now less targeted, and the agency is taking applicants forward for very young children.

### **7.3 Family Finding Activity**

Following discussions with all the operational Regional Adoption Agencies, it has become clear that in a larger organisation, ensuring the visibility of all approved adopters and all children requiring placement has its challenges. Given the national shortage of adopters it is important to move from a “first come first served” basis to a system which has a greater strategic overview, and which maximises in house capacity of those adopters approved. Monthly matching meetings where staff share profiles of children and adopters, and the use of link maker as our register, is to be now supplemented with a monthly management meeting to review priority children. Adoption Counts will also working with Coram BAAF to trial their collaborative matching project.

### **7.4 Information Technology**

Following the IT consultant resigning in March, the work has been successfully mainstreamed with Stockport IT, who as the host agency is now providing project manager capacity and technical support to Adoption Counts by a member of staff being seconded Wythenshawe.

Stockport IT is currently overseeing the following;

- access to case management systems
- office 365 to enable shared diaries, secure email and data sharing etc.
- paperless panels.

Access to all case management systems is now in theory available to those who require it-albeit with some IT testing still required. This means that those staff who require access to Cheshire East and Trafford systems have to work on laptops provided by those authorities. It is envisaged that this is a short-term solution which will be replaced by remote access on other devices.

The implementation of Charms remains problematic. Children, adoption support and adopter’s data is now in the system although running performance reports remains challenging. Given the difficulties encountered thus far it has been agreed that any migration of the letterbox system will remain on hold-given the highly sensitive nature of the service and the risk posed by any data breaches.

Adoption Counts is working closely with the four local authorities looking to fully implement Liquid Logic, in order to ensure that work flow processes are fit for

purpose. This means that Salford City Council will be the only authority not on Liquid Logic. It may be that Liquid Logic could offer an alternative to CHARMS in the future.

## **7.5 Duty**

A full day duty system operates across the service. This is particularly critical given that there are some unallocated Cheshire East adoption support cases. To supplement this, the Adoption Support Team is now running triage clinics for adoption support referrals in order to deal with very high levels of demand and backlogs caused by staffing vacancies. It is envisaged that during the next six month period that Adoption Support will implement its own duty, with the duty arrangements for the rest of the service being reviewed.

## **7.6 Adoption Panels**

During this period, two new panel chairs started to work for Adoption Counts. This means that there are now four independent panel chairs. A development day took place with the panel chairs on the 7 November 2017. Further meetings have been arranged on a quarterly basis. The last meeting in February 2018, looked at consistency of practice across the panel and quality assurance. A temporary appointment to a panel advisor role (12 months) is being considered to assist with the Quality Assurance of panel papers and enable team managers to fully embed a performance culture

There is at least one panel per week across the region, with each panel hearing a mixture of adopter approvals and matches. Robust auditing has been introduced during this period with a Child Permanence Report audit tool being used to measure quality at SHOBPA and then again at match. A Prospective Adopters Report audit tool is in the process of being implemented. During this period the Agency decision maker (ADM) for adopter approvals deferred two items for further investigation, with panel chairs deferring a further 2 items. Two matches have been deferred by the responsible local authority ADM although this was not in relation to a Stockport child. Learning from these cases has been fed back to chairs and is fed back into the organisation via management meetings, individual supervision, team discussion and learning circles where appropriate. The issues raised will also feed into a panel development day agenda scheduled for June.

A key objective in continuing to develop the panel system within the service is to further embed an auditing/quality assurance system and share learning across the local authorities. This is expected to further assist in improving the quality of Child Permanence Reports and the process will be improved by having a temporary full time panel advisor in post as opposed to a rota of team managers undertaking this role.

Continued work with the panel chairs will focus on ensuring that every opportunity is taken to ensure that adoption panels effectively challenge social work practice and continue to make a positive contribution to outcomes for children in need of adoption.

### **7.7 Establishing Culture**

It was always going to be difficult to establish an Adoption Counts culture, following staff moving from individual local authorities. Despite the number of vacancies and ongoing recruitment, staff morale has improved over the last few months, with the organisation bonding together, reviewing and refining guidance/practice. Each team has had a team day and there have been a number of opportunities for staff to come together in their functional roles, to embed consistency and share learning. Staff report that these development meetings are increasing their sense of belonging and identity to Adoption Counts. Further work to embed a culture of robust quality assurance at all levels has been undertaken, to ensure the agency is producing work of the highest quality.

### **7.8 Voice and Influence of adopted children and young people, parents and adopted adults**

Adoption Counts have commissioned Adoption UK to help gain adopters views. Two adopter voice sessions were run in the region by Adoption UK in February. While not particularly well attended, turnout was higher than at sessions held by Adoption Counts. Feedback was welcomed and points to the need to focus more clearly on communication with adopters. Improvements to the website are being made as a result of this feedback. Problems seem to have been around developing and maintaining an up to date database as a forum for communication. In addition, staff vacancies have affected ability to deliver the full programme of activities across the region. A range of seminars, training, support and holiday events are now underway and have been well received. Plans are being made to record training sessions so that they can go on the website for adopters to review at their leisure.

### **7.9 Partnership Working**

Adoption Counts continues to work closely with Adoption Matters and Caritas on the Flag initiative, a Performance Improvement Fund initiative secured by our partners to develop an early identification tool for children with complex needs. Our partners are also working with Adoption Counts on the centre of excellence developments.

After Adoption were awarded the contract for provision of Independent Support to Birth parents, with this contract reviewed through quarterly monitoring meetings.

Adoption Counts has a contract with Adoption Matters and Caritas for early placements via concurrency. The service also works closely with voluntary sector partners when seeking inter-agency placements for children who wait longer and include them in children who wait family finding meetings. Their expertise in bespoke

family finding will be commissioned as appropriate in consultation with Children’s services.

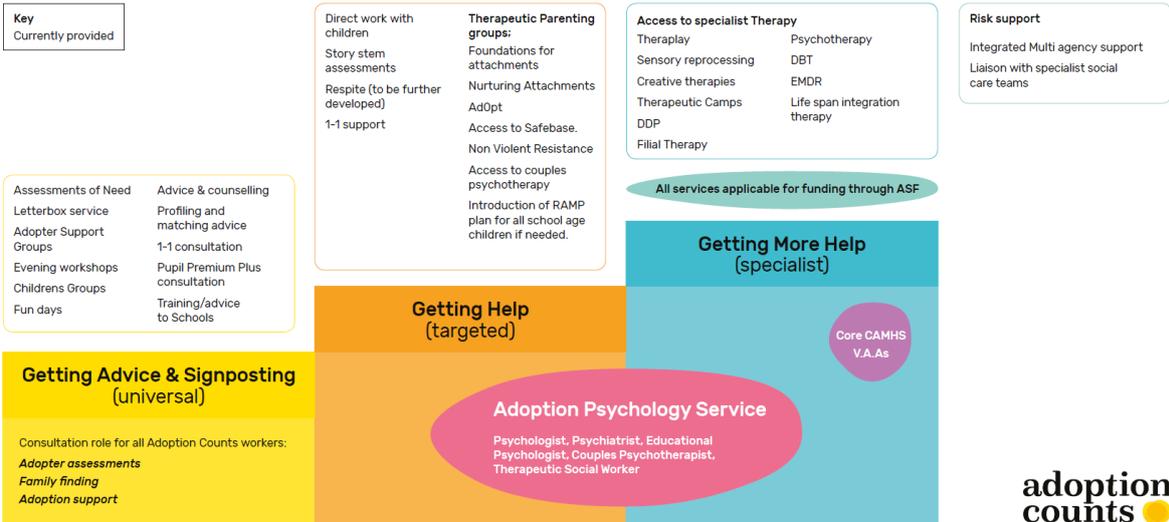
Adoption Counts are working with Coram BAAF to trial their collaborative matching project.

## 8 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. We remain committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement and when an adoption order is made. 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 the new Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery.

### 8.1

#### Adoption Support Service - Graduated Approach



### 8.2 Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support

The successful Practice Improvement Fund (PIF) bid, to develop a Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support has enabled us to expand the Adoption Psychology Service delivery model used in both Manchester and Salford Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Adoption Psychology Service managed within Manchester Foundation Trust (MFT) is a dedicated assessment, therapeutic and consultation service for adopted children, those with a plan for adoption, those who may be harder to place, their parents and professionals.

The service does not replace local CAMHS provision but provides a targeted service for this population, in addition to the service children and young people can receive in their local area.

The team comprises a multi-disciplinary service of Clinical Psychologists, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists, Educational Psychologists, Psychotherapists and Therapeutic Social Workers (employed by Adoption Counts). The team offer a full clinical service, to children under 12 and their families, and a consultation service for young people over 12 years of age and their families.

Manchester Foundation Trust have recruited to additional posts to enable the implementation of the model, as follows;

<b>Manchester</b>	<b>Trafford &amp; Salford</b>	<b>Stockport &amp; Cheshire East</b>
Kate Bonser, Consultant Clinical Psychologist	Katie Niemz, Clinical Psychologist	Lin Yool, Senior Clinical Psychologist
Sarah McIntosh, Educational Psychologist	Janine Ben–Ali, Educational Psychologist	Nadia Ezzamel, Educational Psychologist
Katy Peacock, Therapeutic SW	Joanne Lomas, Therapeutic SW	Vacant post TSW
Mary Kelsall – Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist Anne Shortall Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist Katie Kay, Trainee Clinical Psychologist Simon Cregeen, Couples Psychotherapist		

The Adoption Psychology Service offer;

- A consultation service for staff every 2 weeks, in 2 locations. This offers specialist advice across recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support.
- Acceptance of referrals of children/young people and carers for psychological assessment and specialist interventions or carer consultation as appropriate.
- Assessment of emotional and behavioural functioning including mental health assessments of children in adoptive placements and children in foster placements with additional needs.
- Input to family finding and matching processes (including the Adoption Support Plan). The prime focus will be children who may traditionally wait longer to place, such as older children, sibling groups and those with additional needs.
- Participation in multi-agency professionals meetings, case discussions, care planning or safeguarding meetings as appropriate.

- Group interventions to carers/parents e.g. attachment focused care giving.
- Consultation and training to parents to enable them to provide quality parenting and care in order to promote the emotional wellbeing of children and young people. This includes the provision of parenting groups and input into preparation groups.
- Contribution to the Adoption Counts training programme.

The Adoption Support Team have undertaken a Training Workshop delivered by the Educational Psychologists regarding;

1. Working with schools and understanding education: understanding Special Educational Needs (SEN) processes and Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP); queries about school admissions, exclusions, accountability, pupil premium funding, support available etc; and questions to ask a school.
2. Adoption Friendly Schools: consider strategies and interventions that might be reasonable to expect from a school..
3. Positive problem solving with schools: a model that can be used to facilitate difficult meetings in schools that fosters positive group problem solving.
4. RAMP and functional analysis of behaviour – How to engage schools in a reducing anxiety management plan (RAMP) - a framework for gathering information which helps us understand what is driving the behaviour and consequently plan appropriate next steps and strategies.

As part of the Greater Manchester Initiative, the services developed in partnership with Adoption Counts and the Adoption Psychology service are based on the i thrive model.

## 8.3

### i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



This means that our services for Adoption Support continue to reflect the different aspects of support needed at different times in the family’s journey.

As part of the Centre for excellence we are developing evaluation tools to assist in evidencing positive outcomes for our families. This will involve 3 key areas;

- 1. Measures of clinical and educational improvement.
- 2. Measurements of adopter and children’s perception of progress
- 3. Reviews of practice, service quality and case information

We have recently recruited to a research assistant post with the Adoption Psychology service that will assist with evidencing impact for our families.

The consultation sessions that are delivered through the psychology team provide us with valuable information about the needs of our adoptive families. This is then fed into the multi agency resource panel to assist with our in house service development and commissioning model. For example there has been an increase in referrals raising issues about child on parent violence, so we commissioned 3 Non Violent Resistance programmes to be delivered across the RAA over the next year.

**8.4 Multi Agency Resource Panel**

The 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 from CAMHS, Virtual Schools, Social Care and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA,s)which enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency.

In this period the panel have considered 3 requests for match funding.

<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>
<b>Manchester</b> – recommende d match funding in part	Review of previous case	<b>Manchester</b> – recommended match funding	<b>Trafford</b> – Recommended match funding	None	None

The multi-agency nature of the panel has enabled advice to be given about other services that can be delivered to the family as a wider package of support rather than families solely relying on therapeutic input.

## 8.5 Regionalising the Adoption Support Fund

Adoption Counts continue to pilot the regionalisation of the Adoption Support Fund with the support of Mott Macdonald, who are developing a single portal for Adoption Counts Adoption Support Fund (ASF) applications, with access to each Local Authorities legacy data for historic applications.

Our new internal system for processing ASF applications, with administrative support, is in place, using the Flexible Purchasing System (FPS) to ensure a more transparent way of securing providers to deliver the therapy.

We now have 34 providers registered on the Chest to deliver Adoption Support Services. This means that when an adoption support assessment identifies the need to secure a therapeutic intervention, the social worker creates a mini competition for providers to bid for the work. Early indications show that this is providing better value for money and a safer recruitment practice.

The system will eventually enable a smoother payment system for providers, but we are currently dealing with the challenges that the transition from 5 Local Authority invoice systems to a central Adoption Counts system brings.

Using the FPS system, we have been able to block purchase the delivery of targeted groups. We have commissioned the delivery of a 16-week Therapeutic Parenting programme – Nurturing Attachments, to be delivered in the south spoke – Cheshire East area and the delivery of 3 Non Violent Resistance training to be run in each spoke over the next year.

## 8.6 Adoption Support Fund Applications

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families using the current individual Local Authority portals.

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.

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of ASF Applications</b> October 2017-March 2018	
Stockport	<b>24</b>	£39,890.46
Manchester	<b>44</b>	£104,887.12
Trafford	<b>21</b>	£42,984.39
Salford	<b>4</b>	£8,286.57
Cheshire East	<b>32</b>	£82,917.17

## 8.7 Referrals/Enquiries for Adoption Support

In January 2018, Adoption Counts began to use a single system, CHARMS (Social Care Network Solutions Ltd), for recording Adoption Support Referrals and casework. The transition of casework from each local authorities childcare recording system to using CHARMS has been fraught with challenges requiring ongoing quality assurance. This should be taken into consideration when examining the information below as currently provided by the system.

We are currently working with **456** open cases (excluding Letterbox)

We have a further **131** cases awaiting allocation, **88** for Adoption Support Assessments, **19** for Access to records and a further **24** unspecified (this means that the person taking the call did not feel able to categorise the referral into either category)

During the period October 2017 – March 2018 we received **378** new referrals into the Adoption Support Service, the number of requests are defined below;

(Please note; This does not include the Letterbox service, which is recorded separately.)

Local Authority	Adopted Adult	Adoptive Family	Birth Family	Signposting
STOCKPORT	13	40	6	-
MANCHESTER	35	30	2	1
SALFORD	10	8	3	1
CHESHIRE EAST	27	36	1	1
TRAFFORD	5	32	2	-
UNDEFINED	17	87	5	7
OTHER LA	-	7	-	1
	<b>107</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>

We are currently positively managing the waiting list by introducing an Adoption Support Surgery. This enables us to offer appointments to families in response to their request, so we can begin their assessment of need and start to formulate recommendations, rather than wait until allocation.

The Adoption Support team current staffing is;

7.15 FTE Social Work roles  
2 FTE Therapeutic SW roles  
3.6 FTE Letterbox Family Support Workers  
0.8 FTE Senior Letterbox SW

## **8.8 Letterbox Service**

As part of developing the Adoption Support Service we have created a new staffing structure that allows for all letterbox workers to be supervised by the same practitioner. This has created a discreet team of workers who have developed consistent practice and systems for use across the region. This allows Adoption Counts to support birth families and adopters to provide the best they can for the child to promote their identity.

We are currently operating over 1,300 letterbox agreements which means over 3,000 exchanges in a year. The new process will work towards reducing potential data breaches.

The team meet every 6 weeks to moderate practice and link with After Adoption, who provide the independent counselling to birth parents in relation to their child being placed for adoption.

## **8.9 Group work**

Adoption Counts continues to recognise the importance of supporting adopters through the use of group work, to enable families to access professional guidance whilst building support networks with other adopters. We have continued to hold coffee drop-ins for informal support in the South spoke and plan to expand this delivery model across the region.

We have further developed this approach to include open access topic based workshops, to enable adopters to access monthly support with clear advice and guidance to enable them in their therapeutic parenting role. These are delivered alternately in the North and South spoke to maximise attendance across our Region.

These began in March 2018 with the delivery of the workshop By Dr Katie Niemz - **Working with attachment/early brain development** and was attended by 34 adopters.

Future topics include;

- An Introduction to Therapeutic Parenting,
- Helping your child with change – supporting transitions in school & nursery
- When to tell, what to tell – helping your child understand their story.

We have also held a successful **Easter Egg Hunt – family Fun day** attended by 67 parents & children. Feedback from families was very positive.

*'Fantastic Friendly event amongst like minded people – excellent.'*

*'Very valuable for my daughter and I to maintain relationships with children from her past whom she only sees at this event. Thank you'*

*'Good event, well organised and great fun for the children.'*

We have also continued to deliver the following groups –

- Foundations to Attachment
- Nurturing Attachments programme
- access to Safebase training
- access to Therapeutic camps for children
- Non Violent Resistance, for families experiencing child to parent violence.

## **9 Focus On Outcomes for Children**

### **9.1 How do you involve adopters in matching, linking and subsequent planning?**

The matching process within the Adoption Counts Family Finding policy requires full information about the child to be shared with adopters after short listing has taken place. Adopters will meet the key professionals for the child as well as their foster care and have the option of meeting the placing agencies medical advisor. Life Appreciation Days are held wherever possible to promote best practice in sharing the full history of the child with adoptive parents. There is also an opportunity to meet the child through 'Bump into Meetings.'

Adopter led family finding is undertaken via Link Maker and activity days.

### **9.2 How do you involve adopters in the development of your agency?**

Consultation events have taken place as part of the process of developing policies and procedures. Adopters from all 5 local authorities were invited to be part of these events. The adopters who have attended have had involvement in shaping aspects of enquiry process and specifically influenced practice with a view to not having early conversations with adopters about personal issues such as infertility, acknowledging the need for professionals to build rapport before discussing such sensitive issues. The feedback at these events also confirmed the benefits of having experienced adopters as presenters at information events. Further feedback was given about the adoption support process and specifically the need for quick and easy access to low level interventions along with the need for priority to be given to working with schools addressing the needs of adopted children in the school environment. As a consequence the PIF bid and development of the Centre of Excellence for Adoption

Support is specifically looking at how the service will work in partnership with education services.

As mentioned above Adoption Counts have also commissioned Adoption UK to assist in gaining adopters views.

Adoption Counts takes feedback from prospective adopters at the mid point in Stage 2 and after panel for both match and approval. The feedback is then collated and fed into practice.

### **9.3 How do you involve staff in the development of your agency?**

During the project phase staff were kept informed via a quarterly newsletter as well as consultation events in each local authority. Staffs from all 5 local authorities were involved in practice development work streams for eighteen months prior to the service going live in July 2017. This work ensured that the policies and procedures in the new agency were informed by the existing good practice within the services. In addition staff information and consultation events for all staff have been held on two occasions prior to going live as well as specific conference events where the focus has been on either recruitment or adopters or family finding for children. The newly created Adoption Support Team set up monthly team meetings prior to the 'go live' date, to cement the team identity and enable open discussion during the transitional period. The teams were instrumental in planning their team building day to reflect their shared needs. This facilitated a sense of trust, security and belonging which enabled workers to take responsibility for managing the transitions into a Regional Adoption Agency.

Following the go live date in July 2017 2 "have your say events" have been held to enable staff to feedback to senior managers about their experiences of working within the new agency. Staff continue to contribute through team meetings, training and supervision.

Since the start of Adoption Counts, there have been development workshops for the Adoption Panel Chairs, Family Finders, Recruitment and Assessment and Adoption Support Workers. These will continue on a regular basis into the future to ensure consistency of practice, review service performance and allow feedback from workers to develop practice.

## **10 Learning from Disruptions**

There were no disruptions regarding Manchester children during 2017/18 and there was 1 disruption of a placement of 2 siblings placed by another local authority in the Adoption Counts partnership. A disruption meeting relating to this case identified learning that focused on the need for effective communication and information sharing between professionals with a view to ensuring that child permanence reports contain all relevant information about the child and their history so that this is shared

with adoptive parents prior to placement. The particular importance of foster carer's records being read by the placing social worker was highlighted.

Regular learning events are held within AC in order to disseminate learning from disruption meetings, case reviews, learning circles and formal training events.

## **11 Quality of Reports**

There has been a key focus on developing effective systems to ensure reports about children and adoptive parents are quality assured at key points in the process. A quality assurance template has been implemented for team managers and agency advisors to use in auditing and checking Child Permanence Reports at the point of the SHOBPA decision and again prior to matching panel. This two stage process will ensure that the CPR tells the story of the child accurately and that changes and improvements identified at SHOBPA are implemented prior to matching panel. Whilst there is an emphasis on ensuring that first line managers in social work teams undertaken initial quality checks, Adoption Counts managers have a responsibility to ensure all reports regarding children and adopters that are presented to the ADM and to matching panel are robust, up to date and accurate.

A Prospective Adopters Report audit tool will be introduced 2018/2018 to ensure that the quality of reports produced within Adoption Counts are also of a good standard.

## **12 Accountability**

The Regional Manager reports on a regular basis to Adoption Counts management board, attended by directors of children's services from the 5 local authorities, or their deputies, voluntary sector representatives and 2 adoptive parents. The board has strategic responsibility for overseeing the work of the agency in relation to the following key areas

- Sufficiency of adopters
- Timeliness for children
- Adoption support
- Management oversight of quality and performance
- Partnership working
- Use of resources
- Professional development