

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

23 November 2017

### ANNUAL ADOPTION REPORT 2016-2017

#### Report of the Director for People

Strategic Aim:	Reaching our Full Potential	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Mr R Foster, Portfolio Holder for Safeguarding Children and Young People	
Contact Officer(s):	Dr Tim O'Neill, Director for People and Deputy Chief Executive	01572 758402 toneill@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	N/A	

#### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel:

1. Notes the content of the report

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1. This is our Annual Activity Report 2016/17 with regards to Adoption.
- 1.2. This annual report provides information relating to adoptions in Leicestershire and Rutland during the period from April 2016 to March 2017.
- 1.3. We have below drawn information from the annual report which specifically relates to Rutland.

#### 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. As a small authority, it is not effective for the children we serve to provide an in-house adoption service for Rutland and as such we have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Leicestershire County Council's Adoption Agency.
- 2.2. Attached to this document is the report for the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Service (LRAS) which has been signed off in Leicestershire. The report includes data for Rutland children but does not provide a picture solely for Rutland Adoption to show our performance, processes, or what we are

achieving and where we need to improve. Therefore we have noted information specifically for Rutland below.

### 3. PERFORMANCE

3.1. The information from LRAS evidences that we are performing better than the England 3 year average in every performance measure, including the average time between:

- a) A child entering care and moving in with their adopters;
- b) The average time between a Placement Order being made by the court and deciding on a match to adopters;
- c) Children who wait less than 16 months to move in with their adopted family;
- d) Adopters waiting less time before being matched after approval.

3.2. The first three measures are particularly specific to Rutland. The measures are:

- a) Performance measure 31a- Leicestershire Adoption Agency's average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is 517 days. The England average is 558. However for Rutland the average for 2016/17 was 388 days which **significantly exceeds** the England average.
- b) Performance measure 31b - The average time between Leicestershire receiving court authority to place a child and Leicestershire Adoption Agency deciding upon a match to an adoptive family is 195 days. The England average is 226 days. Rutland's average for 2016/17 was 81 days, **significantly better** than the England average.
- c) Performance measure 31c - Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adopted family currently stands at 68%. This is significantly better than the England 3 year average of 55%. Rutland's children were all moved to their prospective adopters less than 16 months after becoming looked after so Rutland stands at 100%
- d) The fourth measure 31d, relating to adopters being matched after approval is not applicable to Rutland as all potential/approved adopters are considered to be Leicestershire adopters.

### 4. PROCESS CHANGES

4.1. Previously LRAS would take sole responsibility for Agency Decision Maker (ADM) ratification of adoptions which included agreement that a child should be placed for adoption, the approval of adopters and the match between the child and adopters. This changed within the reporting year with the Rutland ADM (the Head of Children's Social Care) working in partnership with the Leicestershire to ensure that all decisions involving Rutland children are

ratified by Rutland County Council. In practice, the Leicestershire ADM will ratify decision making for the Panel, but decisions relating to the plan for Rutland children and the match between Adopters and the child will be further ratified by the Rutland ADM. To support this, there has been an undertaking from the Leicestershire ADM that all decisions will be ratified and sent to the Rutland ADM within 5 working days to prevent delay in placing children with their prospective adopters.

- 4.2. Further process difficulties were identified when the new Head of Children's Social Care came into post in September 2016 and as such there are regular meetings between managers from the LRAS assessment and family finding teams and from Rutland County Council to ensure that issues can be resolved, processes can be adapted to make them as efficient as possible and review of the needs of each child are completed regularly and in a timely way to prevent delay. These meetings are working well and have been productive in improving the service offered to Rutland children.

## **5. PERMANENCE TEAM AT LRAS**

- 5.1. The role of the Permanence Team within LRAS is to undertake all family finding for children who need permanence via the adoption route. They also family find for adopters post approval and support adopters through the placing and support children through to the Adoption Order. This work also includes family finding for long term fostered children.
- 5.2. In addition to day to day operations, the team is very committed to ongoing developmental projects such as:
  - a) Life Appreciation Days
  - b) Permanence planning of children in long term foster care
  - c) Further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in their practice.
  - d) Increased involvement in the completion of sibling together or apart assessments
  - e) The use of Theraplay and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy principles to ensure that the Permanence Team can appropriately support adopters to understand the needs of our children and parent them therapeutically.
  - f) The introduction of an Adoption Support Worker who will offer regular contact with adopters post the final order for three years, to ensure the adoption support plan remains appropriate and to help adopters implement their training and link with support networks.
- 5.3. These services are available to Rutland children in the same way as for children in Leicestershire. Life appreciation days are now completed for every child from Rutland placed for adoption prior to placement and sibling assessments are also routinely considered and completed if appropriate, exploring what is best for each individual child as well as for the sibling group.

## **6. PERMANENCE PROCESS**

- 6.1. Permanence within Rutland has not always followed a formal route; whilst the ADM always agreed the care plan for adoption, consideration of permanence was not routine for every child who became looked after.
- 6.2. Whilst creating a formal permanence process remains an ongoing piece of work, by the end of 2016/17 the embedding of the At Risk of Care/Child Looked After Panel was complete; the purpose of the Panel was and is to review the care plans for every child moving through Care and Proceedings to ensure all options are properly considered and to parallel plan for adoption wherever appropriate.
- 6.3. We also now have a Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager who is permanent in post; she attends the meeting and provides an independent view from the perspective of the child which is central to good decision making and robust planning. This allows for management scrutiny at every level, with multi-agency decision making as Health and Education colleagues attend.

## **7. EAST MIDLANDS ADOPTION CONSORTIUM (EMAC)**

- 7.1. Rutland Children's Social Care continues to be a member of EMAC. Central government is keen to see the success of such arrangements and so we have made a commitment to this group of 9 local authorities and 3 Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA). It is particularly vital that Rutland engage with this process because we are a small authority and we have been part of the Regionalisation Adoption Agency Programme which encourages good practice that is child centred and embedded in the future vision. To this end, the team manager for the Fostering, Adoption and Care Leaver Service continues to engage and contribute to RAA work stream programs and will be working with the Service Manager to make changes to align current practice to best practice identified within permanence and adoption.

## **8. THE REGIONALISATION OF ADOPTION**

- 8.1. As noted in the Business Case for Establishing the RAA (Regional Adoption Agency) Pilot in LLLR (Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland),
- 8.2. "It is a core proposition of the Department of Education's Regionalization Program that adoption services need to be delivered at greater scale through the creation of a single pool of children and adopters within each region". However, the East Midlands region covers an area of considerable size, and is very diverse, and services still need to be accessible to children and adopters within a reasonable distance. .. Learning from the development of the EMRAA (East Midland Regional Adoption Agency) project to date, and from other projects, indicates that there is a need to align services across local authorities prior to integration... Based on the outputs of the operational work streams, the Project Team will prepare a service description and a project plan for each of the following deliverables:
  - a) Adopter Assessment
  - b) Home finding and Matching
  - c) Childrens Permanence Teams

The project team will provide regular updates to the sub regional Project Governance Board (PGB) regarding progress against the project plan.”

- 8.3. Rutland is actively participating in the regional discussions about adoption, what the service might look like and how this will improve outcomes for our children. Currently it looks likely that the adoption service will cover Lincolnshire, Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Authorities, but the regional work continues.

## **9. OFSTED INSPECTION**

- 9.1. The Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Service (LRAS) was rated as Requires Improvement to be good by Ofsted in November 2016, and requires improvement for the adoption service. Ofsted raised concerns about Adoption in Rutland stating in the summary “*Adoption is considered as a permanence option for all children who cannot return home, but it is not achieved as quickly as it could be. Post-adoption support is poor. Life-story work is not undertaken consistently to enable children and young people to understand their histories or experiences.*” There are further references to a lack of consideration of all permanence options for children who have entered Care in Rutland.

## **10. PERMANENCE**

- 10.1. Since the Ofsted report Rutland has been working hard to address the concerns raised, with a focus on clear permanence planning at a much earlier stage. By the end of 2016/17 process (as described in the permanence section) was laid down to ensure that all appropriate care plan options now run parallel to planning for children to return to their parents when children are looked after. This will ensure a timely decision at conclusion of Proceedings. This also forms part of a wider piece of work with our longer term Children Looked After whose need for permanence was also being considered with a view to a plan for adoption if appropriate.
- 10.2. It is also observed that LRAS did not routinely seek permission to send out the referral for adoption at an early stage, meaning finding potential matched adopters took much longer after the Court agreed the care plan of adoption. This is an area we are working on now to ensure families are sought at the earliest stage.

## **11. POST ADOPTION SUPPORT**

- 11.1. Of Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Service, the Ofsted inspection during November 2016 identified that assessments of prospective adopters were of a good quality and our matches between adopters and children were timely and appropriate.
- 11.2. LRAS had already completed a self-assessment and had identified that the Post Adoption Support offer needed to be more robust and Ofsted echoed this finding.

- 11.3. In response to this a child care support worker has been appointed who provides practical and emotional support to adopters in the early stages of a child being placed, further support phone calls at 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, 30 months and 36 months.
- 11.4. LRAS also provides Post Adoption support through their social workers and applications to the Adoption Support Fund and sponsor a range of events to encourage adopters to talk to one another, share experiences and offer advice. A Christmas party was held for adopters and their children in December 2016. The team received positive responses to this and further events are planned for 2017/2018 including the development of a quarterly newsletter. In addition to this, the Agency will be contributing to a website to ensure that the Adoption Support Offer is accessible to all.

## **12. LIFE STORY WORK**

- 12.1. The expectation is that every child who is placed for adoption will receive an age appropriate life story book setting out their life and how they came to be adopted, to help children to understand why they are with a new forever family, what happened with mummy and daddy and what they were like as babies/young children.
- 12.2. Social Workers also provide a later life letter to a child, which is to be held until they are teenagers, starting to question who they are and how they fit within their world, the community and society. The later life letter gives a full and frank account of why they came to be adopted, as well as giving more detailed information about their birth parents.
- 12.3. Both pieces of work are vital for children who have been adopted, to enable them to develop emotional resilience, self-esteem and a positive identity as they become young adults. Rutland's approach to life story work was highlighted to be inconsistent and needed to change.
- 12.4. We have now developed our supervised contact service to have two full time Child in Care workers who are able to document the children's lives through contact with their birth parents and to complete the life story book in timescale (2 weeks after the adoption order is made). This in turn allows the social workers to focus their time on the later life letter to ensure that is also ready on time and of sufficient quality.
- 12.5. Further to this, we run fortnightly practice workshops where issues such as life story work and the purpose for the children are covered, with reflective discussion then feeding into group supervision about the child. Quality began to improve prior to the end of March 2017 and the work on this continues to progress.

## **13. OVERSIGHT OF SERVICE**

- 13.1. Prior to Ofsted the Fostering and Adoption service did not have a permanent manager for a long period causing the team to lose focus and drive. Following Ofsted we diverted an experienced team manager to the team to provide some much needed support and guidance and we appointed a

permanent team manager who is very experienced in permanence work. This has allowed for the positive communication between the LRAS and Rutland which is supported by a permanent Service Manager who came into post in February 2017 and by the new Head of Children's Social Care, who came into post just prior to the Ofsted inspection.

- 13.2. The permanent Team Manager is Shirley Bowron, who is line managed by Kate Dexter, Service Manager for Children's Social Care. Rebecca Wilshire, the Head of Children's Social Care, oversees the service and ensures robust scrutiny of services provided.

#### **14. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1. Within 2016/17 Rutland has achieved timely outcomes for the children in our care when compared with the England 3 year average.
- 14.2. However, as Ofsted rightly observed, with the small number of children we look after, decisions and planning could be timelier.
- 14.3. There has been a great deal of work completed over the past few months, particularly with the arrival of the new Head of Social Care, with improved working relationship between Rutland and LRAS further driving forward progress within the service.
- 14.4. The work on permanence within Rutland is not yet complete, but there is now clear oversight and scrutiny of care plans and of decision making which means that decisions and planning take place at an earlier stage, all options for permanence as considered and the ADM is aware of and in agreement with care plans for children.
- 14.5. Further to this, the ongoing training and development of staff enables better quality assessments on which to base decisions, with life story work now a high priority within the authority.
- 14.6. One area not mentioned within the LRAS report is the need for foster to adopt placements, particularly for new born babies, as this can prevent the need to ever move a baby to a second or subsequent placement. Whilst foster to adopt placements require skilled adopters who can also understand that they may only be able to foster a child for a short period, research has shown the significant benefits of foster to adopt placements.
- 14.7. Rutland plans to explore this further with LRAS and other LAs if need be to ensure we have the capacity to offer a foster to adopt placement if this is the best plan for a child.
- 14.8. With the regional work being undertaken around adoption, we will hope to move towards a more collaborative approach during 2017/18 and see outcomes for our children improve even further.

#### **15. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1. Whilst much has been achieved, there is still a lot to do to ensure that good

practice and positive, timely outcomes are achieved for children within Rutland. The recommended next steps are:

- a) Complete and embed more detailed life story work training with all workers in Children's Social Care
- b) Embed the Permanence Process within Rutland so all care planning decisions for long term care of a child are made 2 months prior to the outcome of Proceedings
- c) Retrospective permanence planning for children who have remained Looked After to ensure this is the right care plan and they are with the right carers
- d) Work with LRAS to continue to provide appropriate Post Adoption Support
- e) Continue the work with the Regional group exploring good practice and the need for a regional adoption agency
- f) Continue to work on timescales for placement for adoption when this is the care plan for a child
- g) Explore concurrent (foster to adopt) placements for Rutland children where appropriate
- h) Work with LRAS regarding foster to adopt placements, commissioning from local LAs if we know a concurrent placement may be needed
- i) Work with LRAS to ensure referrals for adoption go out at the earliest stage, seeking permission from the court to send out a redacted referral even before the placement order is granted.

## **16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1. No Background Papers

## **17. APPENDICES**

17.1. Appendix A Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

17.2. Appendix B Leicestershire and Rutland Annual Adoption Report

**A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.**