



Title: **Adoption Activity Report**

Public Agenda: **Yes**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **Council** On: **24 September 2015**

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report is to inform members of the Torbay Council Children's Services of the Torbay Adoption Agency activities for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.
- 1.2 There is a requirement that the Adoption Agency Activity is reported to the Executive annually.

2. Introduction/Service Update

- 2.1 The Adoption process in England and Wales has been subject to a series of Government led changes in recent years to address delay across the adoption process. This includes both for children waiting to be adopted and prospective adopters who wait to be assessed, approved and matched with children waiting for adoptive families. Torbay Adoption Service is small and has previously struggled to meet the timescales met. In the past three years there has been considerable improvement across all areas in relation to delay. These improvements have been maintained in this period and recognised nationally. It is hoped that the next Adoption score card results due later this year will reflect the achievements of the service in the past three years and show the improvements made.
- 2.2 This year the Adoption Service received recognition from the Department of Education for the changes made to the service and the positive impact this has made to the number of adopters recruited and children placed with permanent adoptive families. The service was rewarded with a page about the service in a commemorative book marking 750 years of Democracy and Parliament. Staff members were invited and attended a launch at Westminster Abbey in London.

- 2.3 Recruitment of adopters remains a key part of the Government agenda with a drive and encouragement for Adoption Agencies to work collaboratively with each other to improve the opportunities to recruit more adopters. Torbay Adoption Service has actively worked towards this with Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, Families for Children and Barnados developing a consortium. **Adopt South West** is a new partnership of councils and charities working together to make the adoption process quicker and simpler. It is aimed at encouraging people who have not considered adoption before to come forward and discover if adoption is right for them. A launch earlier this year with a positive television campaign has proved to be very successful.
- 2.4 The Adoption Team has been fully staffed throughout this period with a permanent manager, social workers and community care workers with vacant posts being quickly recruited to. One Community Care Worker had a period of six months sick leave before leaving the team. This has impacted on some work which has not been fully completed around life story work with children. In March the permanent practice manager moved up to the position of Head of Service and an interim manager is currently in place. Morale and confidence within the adoption service remains high.
- 2.5 Data shows that adoption activity has remained consistent with the numbers of children achieving adoption as part of their plans. Recruitment activity remains strong and feedback from adopters is positive about their experiences with the service. Changes and challenges within the legal environment have had a negative impact on some cases where adoption was delayed due to processes. Courts need to be satisfied that there is no alternative to adoption for the child before agreeing an Order and birth parents have opportunity to challenge through the Courts up to the point that an Adoption Order is granted. These factors have meant that for some children there has been delay before an Order was granted or waiting to be placed. The number of Torbay children who achieved adoption was slightly affected by these issues meaning some Adoption Orders were delayed into the next year.
- 2.6 The responsible Agency Decision Maker has changed to the Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding and is making decisions in line with the requirements and responsibilities of the role. Returning to this situation has improved the scrutiny and independence of the processes requiring an agency decision.
- 2.7 The adoption support fund which is a government based fund to provide therapeutic services post adoption to adoptive families and children. This has been implemented since May 2015 and Torbay adoption service have made a number of successful applications to the fund.

3. Plans for children

- 3.1 During the period of 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015 there were 19 children who the Agency Decision Maker recommended should be placed for adoption.
- 3.2 Following Court decisions 37 children were subject to a Placement Order as of 31st March 2015.

4. Placements

- 4.1 The adoption panel recommended approval of 27 matches for children with Adopters. These were all subsequently approved by the Agency Decision Maker and children were placed.
- 4.2 Geographically Torbay Council area means that it is not always appropriate to place our children with our approved adopters. Children are matched to prospective adopters from other Authorities. In this period 4 Torbay children were matched with Torbay adopters and 23 were matched and placed with adopters from other Adoption Agencies.
- 4.3 As of the 31st March 2015 there were 19 children in Adoptive placements awaiting an Adoption Order.
- 4.4 There have been 2 disruptions of placements during this period. One child with complex needs adoption broke down after the Order was granted. Another child's placement within the first day of placement when the adoptive parent felt she was unable to parent any child.

5. Adoption Orders

- 5.1 There have been 19 children who have been adopted in this 12 month period. This means that there are Adoption Orders made for each child and the children cease to be Looked After by the Local Authority.
- 5.2 The percentage of children adopted during the year is based on the total number of children looked after (for over 6 months) on 31st March 2015 and it is this percentage that is reported. However, almost two thirds of children Looked After are aged 10 and over and adoption is not likely to be a realistic option for these children.
- 5.3 The numbers of children being adopted in Torbay have risen considerably in the last three years and this has been maintained in this period.
- 5.4 The aim of Torbay Council is to consider adoption for all Looked After Children who cannot remain in or return to live with their birth families.

Table 1

Percentages of children adopted from care

Date	Total number of children looked after	Percentage of all children adopted from care	Children aged 0-9 years	Percentage of children aged 0-9 years adopted from care
31/3/12	195	2%	69	5.79%
31/3/13	221	4.98%	104	10.6%
31/3/14	249	5.59%	111	10.73%
31/3/15	305	6.22%	130	14.61%

6. Timeliness

- 6.1 Statistics for children adopted during the year 2014-2015, the time between the point the child became Looked After, to placement with adopters, and the time from Placement Order to matching is still below the national average. This has been affected by some wider issues which are being addressed. Torbay has successfully increased the number of older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs being adopted; the benefits of this are over shadowed by the length of time it takes to achieve the Adoption Order. There are also some children where adoption is no longer an appropriate plan or realistic option for them. As they are subject to a Placement Order they are considered in these numbers.
- 6.2 In this period there are 8 children who's Placement Order's have been rescinded. These include a sibling group of 3. There was one child who has had their plans returned to the Court and the Placement Order rescinded since the 31st March 2015. There are currently no children waiting to have their plans for adoption returned to the court.
- 6.3 Between April 2014 and March 2015, 27 children were matched and placed with adopters. This included:
- 6 sets of siblings (12 children)
 - 2 children aged over 5 at the time they were placed
 - 2 children who achieved an Adoption Order within 6 months of the Placement Order being granted

2 children who achieved an Adoption Order within 7 months of the Placement Order being granted

- 6.4 The Adoption Team still hold the responsibility for each child with a Placement Order up until the point of the Adoption Order. Early planning and matching is undertaken including the use of adoption activity days and close links with the local consortium to ensure early matches for children.
- 6.5 On 31st March 2015 there were no children with Placement Orders with over 12 months duration where the child hadn't been matched or placed with adopters. This is a significant improvement and reflects the cases that have had placement Orders rescinded.

7. Approved Adoptive Families

- 7.1 Torbay Adoption Service recruit, assess, and approve adopters via the Adoption panel and Agency Decision Maker. On 31st March 2015 11 adoptive families were approved. Of these:

7families were waiting to be matched with children
4families had had children placed with them but had not had a final Adoption Order made.

Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015:

13 Adoptive families were granted Adoption Orders
4 Adoptive families were matched to children
0 Adopters withdrew from being approved adopters
1 foster carer was approved to adopt the child they were fostering
1 approved adopter was deregistered as an adopter

8. Recruitment of Adopters

- 8.1 Recruitment of adopters has continued throughout the year with focused recruitment of adopters being undertaken during National Adoption Week. There has been development of the adoption website and other materials to improve our marketing. Changes to how the team respond to new prospective adopters have been introduced to ensure a swift and clear response. Ongoing marketing and recruitment activity is likely to sit predominantly with Adopt South West although once identified prospective adopter's progress with the team through the recruitment and assessment process.
- 8.2 Between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015:

81 initial enquiries to become adopters were received

15 applications from people wishing to adopt were received
13 applications progressed to stage two of the assessment process
0 applications were refused by the Agency Decision Maker

9. Timeliness of Adoption Matches

9.1 Between April 1st 2014 and the 31st March 2015 the four Torbay adoptive families who were matched in Torbay waited varying periods of time between approval as adopters and the date they were matched to a child or children. Of the adopters matched to children:

1 waited less than three months
1 waited between three and six months
2 waited between 9 and 12 months
0 waited between 12 and 18 months
0 waited 18 months or more

10. Work with Birth Relatives

10.1 The adoption service has started a birth relative or anyone affected by adoption group as a “drop in”. This has not been well attended and the last one had no one attend. Support for birth families continues to be offered to families affected by adoption.

10.2 The adoption service provides a birth relative counselling service. In the period April 1st 2014 to 31st March 2015 the service received 31 referrals from the Childs social worker to offer support and counselling.

11. Adoption Contact/Letter Box Service

11.1 The Adoption Team provide a service for families with regard to post adoption contact. This contact can be indirect through the letter box service and may be between birth and adoptive families only or may be with the child or siblings. Some direct contact takes place between adopted children and family members. This is a busy service and is managed on a day to day basis by one of the community care workers.

11.2 The Adoption Service have a total of 1204 letter box contacts of which 894 are active, some of the inactive ones are either the birth relative or adopters that have not engaged or the children are over 18/21; we have approximately 191 children on the database. Currently we are supervising and facilitating 14 direct contacts with birth relatives and adopters and children.

12. Work with Adoptive Families

- 12.1 Work with families following a post adoption assessment of need has increased. The majority of these referrals relate to children and young people who require direct work and support with life story work. Currently the service provides support to 32 adoptive families living in Torbay.
- 12.2 The adoption support service currently run three adopters social groups a year which are well attended. Additionally there are three adopted young person's groups which have a varied age group attending. An adopter led support group is being developed for later this year facilitated by the Adoption Support Team.
- 12.3 Adopters are offered training opportunities on a variety of topics. This year there have been two therapeutic parenting courses followed by a support group and a 90 minute consultation opportunity for adopters who have attended.
- 12.4 With the introduction of the adoption support fund and adoption passport the adoption team led two consultation events to seek the views of adopters with regard to adoption support services across the area.
- 12.5 The adoption team provides a service to adopted adults to access their adoption records and advice on tracing birth relatives. Recent changes in legislation have meant that relatives of the adopted person can also request access to the adoption records of an adopted adult. For adoptions pre 1975 there is a statutory responsibility to provide counselling prior to accessing the adoption records.
- 12.6 Every child that is adopted has life story work undertaken and there is a statutory requirement to provide the life story book. These are completed the community care workers within the adoption support team. This is large amount of the work for the adoption support time.

13. Therapeutic Service

- 13.1 The Adoption service have a part time play therapist. There is provision for six children to receive play therapy. This service is well used within the adoption service.
- 13.2 The adoption service provides Theraplay which is an attachment based model of working directly with children and adopters to build and develop the attachment between the child and their adoptive parent. An assessment is undertaken to assess the attachment relationship within the adoptive family and provide a specific intervention for the family.

- 13.3 The adoption team are developing a service to provide a therapeutic counselling service to adopters with a BACP registered therapist and will be developing this further.
- 13.4 Torbay have developed the THRIVE model of working with children which promotes an early identification of emotional developmental need so that differentiated provision can be put in place for the individual child. The service is providing this to the adoptive families who are assessed resulting in a plan of activity with the child which is implemented by the adopters or other appropriate adult in the child's life.

14. Adoption Panel

- 14.1 The Adoption Panel has continued to meet and function within guidance and regulation to a good standard. The panel are comfortable with providing robust scrutiny and challenge to the Adoption Service. This is a meaningful process which meets all the expectations of the service. The long term permanent panel chair has resigned from post this year and has been replaced with another experienced permanent chair. There have also been some changes to panel membership. There have been no recommendations made by the panel and/ or decisions by the Agency Decision maker that have resulted in a referral to the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent review Mechanism is an independent body which can review the decision of the Agency Decision Maker if challenged by the individual.

15. Inter-country adoptions

- 15.1 There have been no inter-country adoptions within this service in this year. Should there be a need then this would be commissioned outside the service.

16. Service Development

- 16.1 Development within the service continues across all areas. Work with the South West Adoption consortium (SWAC) also continues at this time with close liaison with regard to matching children with adopter's, adoption exchanges and adoption activity days. This consortium is likely to change in the future with the development of the Adopt South West partnership. Adopt South West in addition to the recruitment arrangements have also held a very well attended conference in early April. In response to further government plans for encouraging agencies to form alliances and develop single services Adopt South West have expressed an interest and are in discussion with other Authorities locally to join the partnership.

17. Recommendations

17.1 That the contents of the submitted report be noted.