



Torbay Council
Children's Specialist Services

Adoption Service
Annual Report
March 2017 – April 2018
(Draft for DCS approval)

Owner:	Amanda White
Authors:	Amanda White – Head of Service
Compiled by:	Amanda White
Version:	5
Date:	July 2018

Contents:

Section Number	Title	Page Number
1	Summary and looking forward	2
2	Service Development overview	4
3	Regional Adoption activity	6
4	Adoption performance	8
5	Adoption Panel	15
6	Adoption Support Service	16

1. Summary and Looking Forward

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of activity delivered by Torbay Children's Services Adoption Service for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. Following approval by the Children's Services and Corporate Leadership Teams, the report will be considered for approval by the Mayor's Executive as part of the Council's governance responsibilities for Children's Services.
- 1.2 There continues to be a sustained government focus upon adoption as part of permanence planning in order to secure better outcomes for children by increasing the choice of adopter, avoiding drift and delay and improving post adoption support.
- 1.3 Torbay has continued as an active member of Adopt South West (AdoptSW) The focus of the last year has been meeting the timescale of the transition to the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt SW, for the 'go live' of 1st October 2018.
- 1.4 Whilst maintaining the expected adoption activity within Torbay Adoption team/agency the Team Manager and Head of Service, as part of the operational and steering groups, have supported the development of processes and expectations of practice in the regional model.
- 1.5 The development of practitioner focused groups on alignment of good practice models and processes for the Regional Adoption Agency have continued with champions being established within the team to ensure Torbay's children and family's needs are central to planning.
- 1.3 During 2017/18 21 children were placed for adoption which is an increase from the previous year of 17 (2016/2017). It is also noted that year on year there has been a steady increase in the number of children being placed with special guardians. Performance in this later regard has improved and is now at levels seen in similar authorities.
- 1.4 Torbay Adoption team have continued to work with Adopt South West in ongoing recruitment activity as well as having Torbay focused events. A specific joint event 'Have a Heart' campaign saw adoption and fostering teams joining forces to run a competition for artwork from children and families. This art work was then used in recruitment and marketing events across Torbay schools and at the main hospital.
- 1.5 Despite this active recruitment we have seen a decrease in our enquiries and in our sufficiency and adopter numbers being approved. Whilst this active recruitment is maintained it should be noted that Torbay does not delay in matching and actively seek adopters through other adoption agencies, including Voluntary agencies to ensure children do not wait for permanence.
- 1.7 The government have continued to make available funds through the Adoption Support Fund and Torbay have continued to make successful applications on behalf of families they support and will continue to access the fund while the government funding is available.

1.8 Our priorities for 2018/2019 are:

Key Priority/Action	Timescale for Completion
Confirm the division of functions that will be retained by the Local Authority and those that will be delivered by the Regional Adoption Agency.	To be completed by end of July 2018
Working with RAA colleagues, develop and implement clear operational interface between the Local Authority and RAA to support the division of functions within the model.	To be completed by September 2018.
Continue to develop the RAA governance, strategic steering and operational meetings up to RAA go live in October 2018	RAA governance arrangements to be sufficiently robust to support initial operating capability by October 2018.
Develop and deliver a program of practitioner and manager briefings for Children's Services on the RAA, its functions and the actions underway to support IOC in October 2018.	To be completed by end of August 2018
Develop and deliver a program of training for Team Managers, Social Workers and IROs to ensure RAA effectiveness and ensure key competencies are in place.	To be completed by end of September 2018.
Working through the RAA continue to develop post adoption support for adopters.	Initial development work to be completed by December 2018.

2. Service Development Overview

- 2.1 Improving our adoption performance has been a key element in our improvement journey since the overall inadequate judgment January 2016 within which the Adoption judgement was one of requires improvement. This improvement activity has been supported by Hampshire as our improvement partner and informed by the learning from our Ofsted Monitoring visits.
- 2.2 The Adoption Team Manager has also had a direct link to an experienced Adoption Team Manager from Hampshire and has worked to improve our understanding of Adoption performance data and enhance management direction and oversight.

Overview of achievement against 2016/2017 priorities:

To strengthen and improve our Foster for Adopt practice ensuring early permanence is considered for all children where it is appropriate within their plan

Support child care teams with the delivery of workshops on Early Permanence, Permanence Planning, Sibling Assessments and Quality requirements for the Child Permanence Report

- 2.3 In March 2017 we had a revised policy, practice guidance and a tool to support permanence planning for social workers. A Foster for Adopt checklist criteria was implemented to support child care social workers in identifying early in the process those children where early referrals should be made.
- 2.4 Workshops held for all child care social workers across teams and the IRO's assisted in supporting their learning and to promote early permanence. Confidence in this practice has grown however it is clear that the role of Torbay Panel, as well as, the child looked after review process will be key to bringing early permanence to the forefront in care planning.
- 2.5 Within this year the delivery of workshops has been hindered by the changes in child care teams of both social workers and team managers. The focus going forward remains for the workshop training to continue with a reframe later in the year to incorporate the processes and interface with the Regional Adoption Agency.

To broaden our recruitment strategy undertaking joint campaigns with the fostering service to increase opportunities to raise awareness of adoption.

- 2.6 Joint campaigns have been undertaken which have included a page within a health magazine which is distributed across all GP practice within Torbay.

- 2.6 As part of the run up to National Adoption week the Fostering and Adoption teams joined forces to run a competition for children adopted or in care to produce art work based on the theme of 'Have a Heart'.

The art work produced was then displayed as part of marketing and recruitment campaigns for adopters and foster carers within the main local hospital and within several schools across Torbay.

- 2.7 Whilst it is acknowledged that there has been no significant increase in recruitment of adopters within this year, the joint campaign raised the profile of adoption and also fostering in Torbay.

Further develop our expertise in making applications for children and families to the ASF in order to support outcomes in adoption and SGO placements where assessment identifies the need

- 2.8 Making applications for the Adoption Support Fund, to support children and families where assessment indicates a need, is embedded within the team and led by the Assistant Team Manager. Improvement has been made in our link to the national framework and this continues to strengthen our understanding of the criteria required, which in turn avoids delay in accessing funding to support families in need. Work has continued to extend this to Special Guardians.

Develop a clear audit tool for adoption cases to inform practice development

- 2.9 The development of an audit tool specifically tracking timeliness of the adoption planning in respect of adopters was developed and finalised in October 2017. The audits informed the team manager of the need to standardise practice expectations of case recordings to reflect each stage of the adopters journey.

Further develop data reports to inform service delivery and requirements for development

- 2.10 To support both professional and service development the Adoption Team Manager took opportunity to link with the Adoption Manager for Hampshire, and also with Somerset following their inspection by Ofsted, to consider the development required in Torbay. Management reporting from the PARIS system have been reviewed and improved to ensure that the manager has all the information to support tracking of KPI's. Monthly performance packs include the data against the KPI's which has improved understanding across services of the importance of early permanence decisions for children.

3. Regional Adoption Activity

- 3.1 Torbay has continued to be an active member of AdoptSW alongside Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council and Somerset County Council (joined in 2016).
- 3.2 The decision for the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency achieving a one-step approach to a single authority host was revisited in December 2017 by the Governance Board. This followed feedback from the DfE and Devon reinstating their position will be acting as the single authority host for the region 2018 – 2020.
- 3.3 All 4 Local Authorities further revised the timetable for 'go live' of the RAA with the date of 1st October 2018 being agreed. Cabinet sign off for all 4 Local Authorities are planned to be completed by mid-April 2018
- 3.4 The RAA has provided communication for all staff involved in Adoption as well as others in Children's Services. This is key in ensuring a successful transition and providing newsletters and specific communication updates to be cascaded within the 4 local authorities, overseen and agreed via the steering and governance group.
- 3.5 A staff learning event took place in February 2018 providing Adoption staff from all regions the opportunity for updated information, networking opportunities with other local authority staff.
- 3.6 One of the suggestions from the staff event in February was collaboration and sharing of research. The Dept. of Education have already put this in place along with other Regional Adoption Agencies, we will be participating in a national evaluation which the DfE have commissioned with Ecorys UK and the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies at Bristol. This work will explore how the new agencies are reaching their potential and help all involved address some of the challenges in the adoption system. Focus will be on the recruitment of adopters, matching the needs of waiting children and matching timeliness and the provision of adoption support services.
- 3.7 The next phase of joint panels is going live from 1st March 2018. The Panel Advisors, Panel Administrators and the RAA project team have worked closely together with the Adoption Panels of Plymouth, Devon, Somerset and Torbay and have now started to operate as "joint" panels. This means that applications and matches can be heard at any of the Adoption Panels across the Region using the same documentation. This will provide greater availability of panels with the aim of ensuring that there are no delays in decision making for children.

Adoption Performance

Torbay Adoption Team

- 4.1 The move to the establishment of a Regional Adoption agency has impacted upon the stability of staff in the Adoption team, however key core staff have remained in post which include;
- Permanent experienced Team Manager
 - Permanent experienced Assistant Team Manager
 - Permanent experienced family finding/child care social worker
 - Permanent experienced support staff including specialist letterbox co-coordinator

Experienced agency social workers have been employed to fill vacancies where there have been gaps in sufficiency to meet core adoption activity.

- 4.2 The team remain actively involved in Practice Improvement meetings as part of the Regionalisation project with the Team Manager leading for Torbay within the Operations group. The core business of the Adoption Team remains:
- marketing and recruitment of adopters
 - assessment of adopters, matching and placement support
 - step parent adoption assessment and court work
 - adoption support pre and post adoption order
 - family finding, matching and placement of children (including the child looked after social work role)
 - support for adopted adults

Marketing and Recruitment:

- 4.3 Recruitment of adopters has remained a challenge despite revising and rethinking marketing strategies and we have experienced a lower number of enquiries in this year compared to the last two years.
- 4.4 Recruitment of adopters has continued with local 'drop in' information events at local libraries, as well as, maintaining the more successful venue of Ivybridge. Marketing and recruitment has been undertaken through Adopt South West, alongside the other 3 Local Authorities.
- 4.5 Adopt South West has a comprehensive website with a link to Torbay's own revised and improved adopter focused web pages.

- 4.6 A revised marketing and recruitment strategy pooled resource and events with adoption and fostering teams in Torbay. These included local profile enhancing events such as shopping centre campaigns and having an advert within a health magazine which is distributed across all GP practice within Torbay.
- 4.7 As part of the run up to National Adoption week the Fostering and Adoption teams joined forces to run a competition for children adopted or in care to produce art work based on the theme of 'Have a Heart'. The art work produced was then displayed as part of a marketing and recruitment campaign based within the main local hospital and within several schools across Torbay.
- 4.8 Whilst it is acknowledged that there has been no significant increase in recruitment of adopters within this year, the joint campaign raised the profile of adoption and also fostering within Torbay.

Assessment/Approval of Adopters

Period	Initial Enquiries	Applications received	Adopters Approved
1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015	155	9	9
1st April 2015 – March 2016	74	10	7
1st April 2016 – March 2017	75	8	7
1 April 2017 – March 2018	40	12 (5 couples 2 singles)	6 (3 couples)

- 4.9 The national picture is outlined in quarter 3 by Adoption and Special Guardian Leadership Board. It is reported that there were 760 registrations to become an adopter in quarter 3; a decrease of 4% from quarter 2 when there were 790 registrations to become an adopter. The number of families approved for adoption had increased from 680 in quarter 2 to 740 in quarter 3; an increase of 9%.
- 4.10 As outlined within the annual review of 2016/2017 geographically the fact that Torbay is a small unitary authority between Devon, Plymouth and the voluntary agency Families for Children does impact adversely upon the number of adopters coming through. It is anticipated that the Regional Adoption Agency

will be of benefit to Torbay. In respect of efficiency of recruitment and approval of Adopters.

- 4.11 Whilst active recruitment is maintained it should be noted that Torbay does not delay in matching and actively seek adopters through other adoption agencies, including Voluntary agencies to ensure children do not wait for permanence. This is evidenced in the adoption scorecard data which shows continued improvement in timeliness of children moving onto adoption and securing permanence.

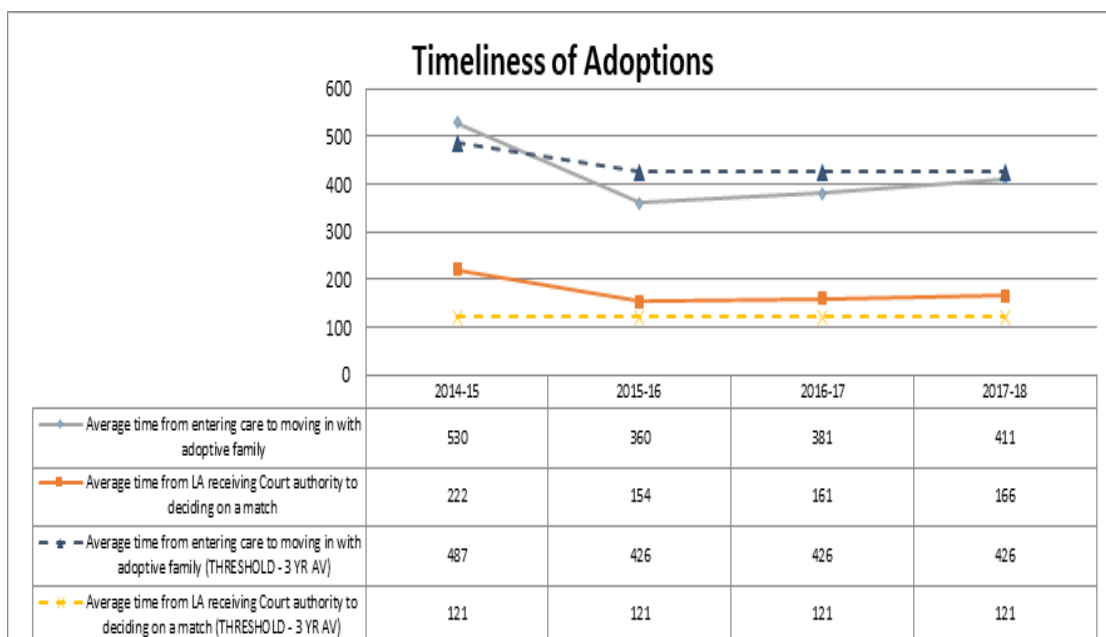
Step Parent Adoptions:

- 4.12 Torbay Adoption Team continue the function of accepting referrals from families where a 'step-parent' wishes to adopt their partner's child/ren. During 2018/19, Torbay received 11 enquiries for step parent adoptions down slightly from the 13 received in the previous year.
- 4.13 The function of providing this service will need to be reviewed in line with the Regionalisation model, as well as, in light of the trajectory being seen that is an increase in numbers of these adoption referrals and its impact upon capacity.

Inter-country Adoptions:

- 4.14 There were 2 enquiries for inter country adoptions to be considered within this period.
Going forward from October 2018 this service function will be within the RAA.

Timeliness of Children's Adoption Plans



- 4.15 The table above details information collated as part of what is termed the Adoption Score Card. Of which there are 2 key national measures. The first is the time taken between entering care and being placed. The second relates to the time taken between the placement order and the decision on a match. Whilst the table above shows the annual position which did see timeliness decrease slightly across both measures Torbay is judged based on a 3 yearly average. When published in early 2019, Torbay's 2015-2018 performance will show Torbay to have continued to improve and potentially be at a level that is out performing our statistical neighbours and the national position. The table below shows the future national scorecard results for Torbay:

Indicator	Torbay 2013-16	Torbay 2014-17	Torbay 2015 -18	National Average 2014 -17	Statistical Neighbour Average 2014 -17
A1: (3yr) Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)	511	418	382	520 Threshold 426	446

A2: (3 yr) 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 (days)	206	172	160	220 Threshold 121	197
--	-----	-----	-----	-------------------------	-----

- 4.16 A third key timeliness measure relates to children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. During 2017/18 this declined to 60% from 71% in the previous year, however nationally this information is calculated on a 3 yearly average. In 2019 when the data is published it will show Torbay's performance for the period 20/18 to be 69%, which compares favourably to the latest national performance at 53% and that for comparator authorities at 62%.
- 4.17 After 8 years of continued progress Torbay will, by 2017/18, continue to have exceeded the national threshold for the average time taken between entering care and the child moving in to their adoptive placement. Compared to the position as at 2010-13 (715 days) to the position as at 2015-18 (382 days) children are, on average, waiting 333 days less on this measure. Over the same period Torbay has also reduced by 174 days the average time taken between receiving the court authority to place and the finding of a match (information based on the 3 yearly average 2010-13 (334 days) to 2015-18 (160 days)).
- 4.18 Torbay Adoption Service improvements on timeliness also needs to be considered against the national picture for adoption where there is a decline in adopters being approved. Of particular significance is the fact the Torbay has enabled the adoption together of multiple sibling groups (2 siblings groups of 3 children and 2 sibling groups of 2).
- 4.19 This year Torbay managed to secure 20 adoptions which is up on last year. A key focus within adoption placement matching is enabling siblings to remain together and where this is not possible, placing as close as possible geographically to afford best outcomes for contact as appropriate. This cohort of children included sibling groups where matching to adopters required time and careful consideration; children who had remained at home up to the final hearing upon which separation was granted with Placement Orders being made; finding of fact hearings delaying the 26 week process within the court arena which therefore created delay in affirming permanence plans. Going

forward we see that timescales for matching will also be affected adversely by the significant medical needs of children with care plans for adoption.

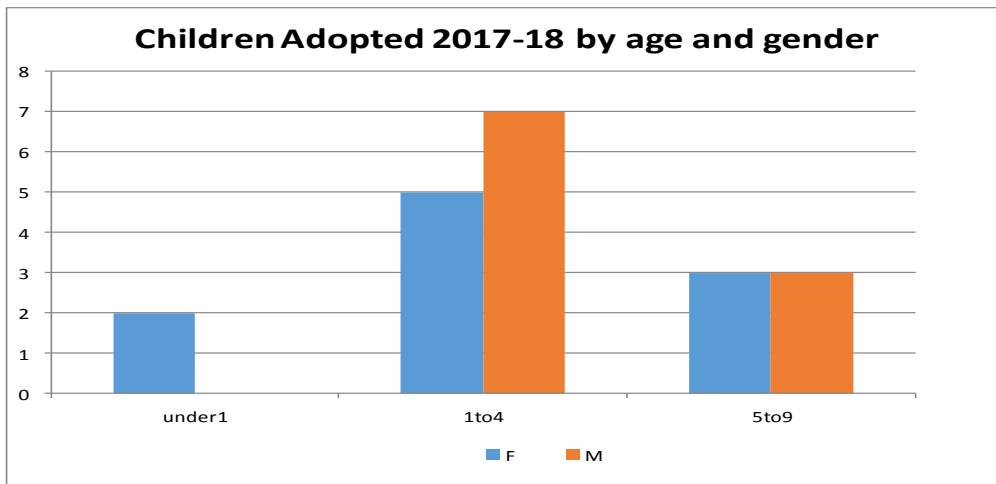
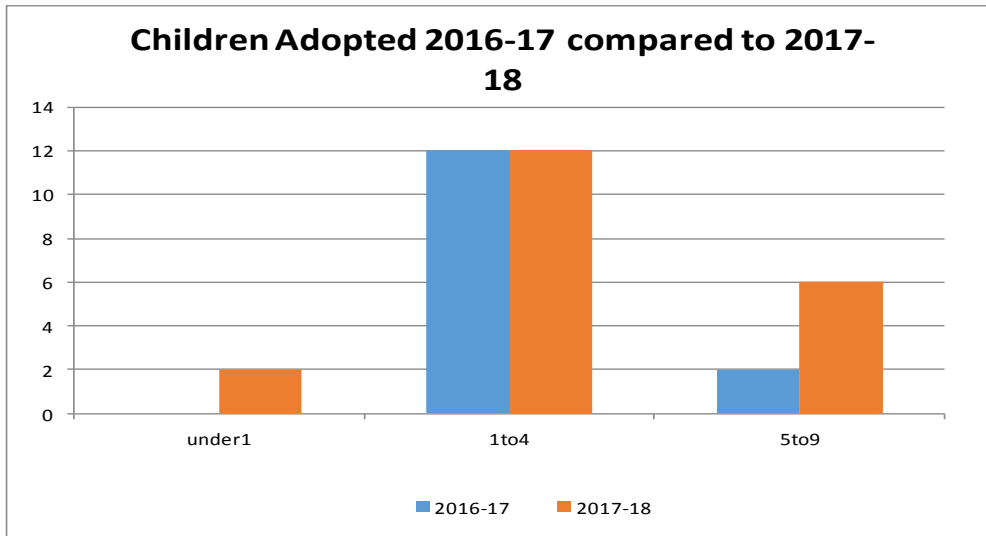
Percentages of children adopted from care

Date	Total number of children looked after	Percentage of all children who left care who were adopted	Statistical Neighbour Average	National Average
31/3/12	195	5%	17%	13%
31/3/13	221	11%	19%	14%
31/3/14	249	17%	20%	17%
31/3/15	305	15%	23%	17%
31/3/16	279	23%	19%	15%
31/3/17	273	13%	19%	14%
31/3/18	327	20%		

4.20 In 2017/18 of the 102 children that left care 20 children (20%) left due to an adoption order being granted which was a increase on the previous year. Within the previous year's Annual report it was projected that new ADM decisions and Placement Orders would potentially plateau with the likelihood that we would not see the same high numbers of children adopted from care.

4.21 Within 2017/18 21 children were placed for adoption compared to 17 the previous year.

Profile of Children Adopted 2017/2018



- 4.22 Adoption Orders were made for 20 children in the period of 2017/2018 of these there were 2 sets of 3 siblings and 1 sibling group of two, the rest of the adopted children were singleton placements.
- 4.23 There has been a conscious effort that adoption planning has been considered for all children regardless of their age.
- 4.24 13 children were placed for adoption within 2017/2018, 11 were singleton placements and there was 1 set of 2 siblings.
- 4.25 Torbay have continued year on year to successfully place sibling groups together and for the year 2017/2018 we have not experienced any adoption disruptions whether this be prior to or post placement/adoption order.

Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Decisions:

- 4.26 There is a requirement of the Adoption Agency to ensure that any plan of adoption for a child is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.27 The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board Quarterly data suggests that the number of new decisions has continued to fall nationally from 1160 in quarter 2 2017/18 to 1140 in quarter 3 2017/18; a decrease of 2%.
- 4.28 In contrast to the national trend of decrease in ADM decisions there were 28 made in this year, there having been 15 in 2016/2017.

Placement Orders:

- 4.29 The number of placement orders made by the court in 2017/2018 stayed the same as 2016/2017 (22). This was in line with the projection of the national picture that Placement Order numbers would decline during the period.

Fostering For Adoption:

- 4.30 Since May 2017 Torbay has progressed 10 children into foster for adopt placements.

Looking Ahead:

- 4.31 Our adoption activity data is evidencing continued increase in adoption plans and placements moving forward into 2017/2018.
- 4.32 We have been successful in increasing our achievement of Foster for Adopt placements for children with four children being placed.

5. Adoption Panel

- 5.1 There has been a successful transition to stage 1 of joining panels with a virtual panel system. Torbay fostering and adoption panel central list has been a success and there have been three new members recruited.
- 5.2 The Independent Panel Chair Rachel Cook, has continued in the role, allowing for consistency in the function of the panel. The Panel Chair has fulfilled the requirement of providing an annual report of adoption activity.
- 5.3 As we have move towards a Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt SouthWest), joint Panels were implemented with effect from March 2018. A joint panel requires quoracy of 6 members (as opposed to 5 not a non-joint panel).
- 5.4 A joint panel can make recommendations in relation to Torbay cases and cases from the other local authorities who comprise Adopt SouthWest (Devon, Somerset and Plymouth) in relation to;
- *approval of applicant adopters*
 - *matches of children with approved adopters*
 - *relinquished babies*
- 5.5 Torbay was the first local authority to take a match of a Torbay child to a 'different' local authority joint adoption panel within Adopt South West. On 28 March 2018 Torbay presented a match to the Devon joint panel. By taking the match to the Devon joint panel, Torbay avoided delay for the child as Torbay's adoption panel meets monthly. Devon joint panel meets twice a month.
- 5.6 The panel remain comfortable with providing robust scrutiny and challenge to the Adoption Service. 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).
- 5.8 Rachel Cook, Panel Chair, along with some panel members have been involved in practice based workshops to consider realignment of process and panel practice which has supported the successful implementation of regional panels.

6. Adoption Support Services

- 6.1 The team provide a range of adoption support to families, birth families affected by adoption, families living in Torbay who have adopted children and also to adoptive families outside of the area with whom we have placed Torbay children. (Up to 3 years post adoption order as identified in the Adoption Support Plan).
- 6.2 The Adoption Service provides birth relative counselling service and offer a 'drop in' support group. It is noted that engagement is low with both services and there is a requirement to continually follow up on referrals being made. The RAA will pose opportunity for some further independence in the birth parent counselling service.
- 6.3 The Adoption Team provide a service for birth 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 a specialist community care worker.
- 6.4 The Adoption Service has a total of 242 children on the letterbox database; there are 1623 contacts set up, of which 1102 are active. The differential could be due to some young people having reached 18 years of age and the letterbox being closed. this could be they have reached 18 years. Currently we are supervising and facilitating 8 direct contacts with birth relatives and adopters and children.
- 6.5 There were 26 referrals for an Adoption Assessment of Need during 2017 - 2018 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 67 adoptive families living in Torbay.
- 6.6 As had been noted in the report of 2015/2016 we have reviewed our support groups taking into consideration engagement and viability to maintain a service.
- 6.7 Being a small unitary local authority continually poses the challenge of efficiency versus the requirements of the adoption regulations for adoption support provision. We work in collaboration as part of Adopt South West to ensure opportunities to share resources and support functions are maximised. The RAA will go further in offering a wider range of support opportunities across the region to ensure appropriate interventions are available at the time a family require.
- 6.8 The adoption support service currently run three adopters social groups a year that are well attended. Additionally there are three adopted young person's groups which have a varied age group attending. An adopter led support group has been set up with the first one being facilitated by Torbay Adoption Support Team, with the plan for these to become adopter led.

- 6.9 Adopters are offered training opportunities on a variety of topics. This year there has been one therapeutic parenting course followed by a support group and a 90 minutes consultation opportunity for adopters who have attended.
- 6.10 The Adoption Team provides a service for adopted adults to access their adoption records as well as counselling in relation to these where required 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. In this period 5 adults were supported with access to records.

Therapeutic Support

- 6.11 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 by community care workers within the adoption support team. These take a significant proportion of the adoption support time.
- 6.12 The Adoption Team has a part time play therapist. There is provision for six children to receive direct play therapy, alongside a consultation service and Sensory Integration Assessments. This service is well used within the Adoption service and also within the CLA permanence team. The Play Therapist facilitates the therapeutic Parenting Course for Torbay.
- 6.13 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 specific intervention for the family.
- 6.14 The Adoption Team have successfully developed, a Therapeutic Parenting course with input from the Play Therapist who has led the course. This is well subscribed to by adopters but is also open to foster carers for Torbay who are bridging to adoption or supporting children with complex needs. This would have been an area which would be priority to further develop within the adoption service however this is will now be considered within the development of the RAA.

Adoption Support Fund

- 6.14 The government have continued to make available funds through the Adoption Support Fund aimed at further supporting adopters with accessing therapeutic support for their adopted children.
- 6.15 Torbay have continued to make successful applications on behalf of families they support and will continue to access the fund while the government funding is available. In the period of 2017/18 36 applications were made and were successful in receiving funding of £76,000 in this financial year.
- 6.16 From 1st April 2016 the ASF was extended to include therapeutic support for

children placed with special guardians where the child has been looked after immediately prior to the Special Guardianship Order being made. Torbay have supported 3 special guardianship families within this financial year.