



Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Adoption Agency Activity Report**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **Council** On: 25th September 2014

Contact Officer: **Caroline Hobson**

☎ Telephone: **7874**

✉ E.mail: **caroline.hobson@torbay.gov.uk**

1. Purpose and Introduction

- 1.1 This report is to inform members of the Torbay Children's Services Adoption Agency activities for the period **1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**.
- 1.2 The Adoption process in England and Wales is subject to a series of Government led changes to address delay, both for children who are waiting to be adopted and prospective adopters who wait to be assessed, approved and matched with the children who wait. Torbay Adoption Service is small and has previously struggled to meet the timescales set. However, the service has made considerable progress over the past year. We have achieved the highest number of adoptions ever. We have received recognition from the Department of Education for the changes we have made to numbers of children adopted and timescales and will receive award in 2015 marking 750 Years of democracy from the Queen.
- 1.3 The team is fully staffed with permanent managers, social workers and community care workers. The permanent Service Manager, Practice Manager and Senior Social Worker have continued in post providing continuity and leadership. Vacancy rates are nil. Morale is positive and confidence continues to improve. Data shows that more children are being identified for whom adoption is the plan or a concurrent plan, more children are matched for adoption and more children are placed for adoption. The number of approved adopters is increasing but at a slower pace than the children for whom adoption is the plan.
- 1.4 Work with neighbouring Local Authorities throughout the year has focussed upon shared systems of recruitment, advertising, matching and training. This has led to better co-operation, increased knowledge and improved systems.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 There is a requirement that Adoption Agency activity is reported to the Executive annually.
- 2.2 The Service Manager for Specialist Services is currently the Agency Decision

Maker who makes the decisions about adoption cases following the recommendation of the Adoption Panel. There has been one case where the decision has differed from that recommended by the Panel. This involved approval of prospective adopters. The panel recommended that the couple were not approved. After considerable discussion and advice this was overturned by the agency decision maker. The couple are now approved to adopt one special needs child. The Agency Decision Maker role will be taken up by the newly appointed assistant Director for Children's Services in September.

- 2.3 The plan for a child will come before the Agency Decision Maker on two occasions – firstly for approval of an adoption plan for the child and second to approve the match that the Adoption Panel recommends in relation to particular prospective adoptive parents for a child (approval of match).
- 2.4 Panel also recommends the approval of prospective adopters following assessment. Applicants are invited to attend the Panel when their approval is considered and when a match is proposed. As part of legislation the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) has been set up, where adopters may have their applications reconsidered when the Panel has not recommended their approval and the Agency Decision Maker confirms the recommendation to turn down the application. The recommendation from this Panel then goes back to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision.
- 2.5 Under the legislation, the Adoption Panel can also consider a brief assessment report, where it is felt that the assessment of prospective adopters should not continue. Applicants can also apply to the IRM if the Agency Decision Maker is minded to turn down an application in these circumstances. Applicants have forty working days to make this decision. There were no applications to the IRM during the period.

3.0 Plans for children

- 3.1 There were 38 children who were subject to an adoption plan at 31 March 2014.

4.0 Placements

- 4.1 Panel approved 18 placements during this period 1 April 13 – 31 March 14.
- 4.2 Torbay does not have enough adopters to offer placement choice for Torbay children needing placements. Adopters who live within Torbay are often not appropriate for Torbay children. Therefore Torbay Adoption Team are also recruiting from neighbouring areas.
- 4.3 In addition, children are placed via the South West Consortium, a group of Local Authority and voluntary adoption agencies. Hard to place children, for example those in sibling groups, with special needs or older children, are referred to the National Register.

5.0 Adoption Orders

- 5.1 During the period 2013-14, 27 children were adopted. This means the Adoption

order was made to the adopters and the children ceased 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 six months) on the 31 March and it is this percentage that is reported. However, almost two thirds of these children are in the ten to eighteen age range and adoption is not likely to be a realistic option for these children, who have close attachments to their birth families.
- 5.3 The numbers of children adopted in recent years, other than the year ending 31 March 2004 which was exceptionally high at seventeen, has remained between ten and thirteen per year. The number and proportion of children adopted for the year 2013-2014 continues to show significant improvement.
- 5.4 The aim of Torbay Council is to consider adoption for all children who cannot remain in or return to their birth families

Table 2

Percentages of children adopted from care

Date	Total number of children looked after for over 6 months	Percentage of all children adopted	Children aged 0-9 years looked after over 6 months	Percentage of children aged 0-9 years adopted
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%

6.0 Timeliness

6.1 For children adopted during the year 2013-14, 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. There are children who have a plan for adoption where this is no longer realistic or achievable. These children have been reviewed by the Permanency Panel and 6 have been returned to Court to change the plan to long term fostering, with a plan for a further 6 to be returned to court by end of August 2014. Progress is now being made to improve the timescales for children being adopted:

- Between **April 2013 and March 2014**, **27** Adoption Orders were made
- Since April 2014, 8 Adoption Orders have been made.
- Currently there are 16 children placed with adopters, of whom 6 Adoption Orders are predicted by August 2014.

6.2 We predict that we will be able to meet the same figures in 2014-15 as this current year. as part of the work with other local authorities and utilising the Adoption

Reform Grant, 2 Activity day have taken place where children and prospective adopters can meet in an informal setting. These have led to 3 matches to date. A further Activity day is planned for autumn 14. DVD evenings, where approved adopters can view DVD's of children are now regularly held and have proved successful.

6.3 Between April 2013 – March 2014, 18 children were matched and placed with adopters. These included:

- 4 sets of sibling groups
- 4 children matched and placed aged 5 years and above
- 1 child matched, placed and adoption order within 4 months of the Placement Order

6.4 The Introduction of an Adoption Social Worker early in cases where permanence is identified has assisted in earlier matching and placing thus improving timeliness. In addition, work with the Shadow Consortium Sub Regional Group (Plymouth, Devon and Torbay) has led to early sharing of information about children needing placements and adopters waiting for children. This is a significant move from linear planning to embrace all potential matches at the earliest stage. We have used part of the Adoption Reform Grant to employ an additional staff member to create a framework to support family finding, thus addressing again timeliness in matching children with adopters.

6.5 The remedial actions taken to progress existing cases continues to have an impact upon Torbay's performance against the national thresholds, as we continue to address cases already outside the timescales.

6.6 Up to 31 March 2014, there have been 8 children where the adoption plans are over 12 months duration without placement with adopters which include:

- 5 children, sibling group of 2 and sibling group of 3 whose plans are due before the court to change to long term fostering
- A sibling group of a boy (age 6) and girl (age 5), Placement Orders made in court April 2014. The relationships between the siblings is strong and they need to stay together. Both children have some additional needs, the little boy have some development delay, the little girl currently requiring therapeutic direct work as a result of early life trauma.
- A little boy age 6 years, with developmental delay.

7.0 Approved Adoptive Families

7.1 Torbay's Adoption Service recruit, assess and via the panel, approve adopters. At 31 March 2014, 14 families were approved. Of these:

- 4 families were waiting to be matched to children
- 10 had children in placement but final adoption order not been issued

7.2 Between 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014:

- 7 families were granted a final Adoption Order
- 3 families were matched to a child or children
- 1 family withdrew prior to a placement being made
- 0 families withdrew following a placement being made
- 3 foster carers were approved to adopt the child they were fostering

Total 14 families approved.

8.0 Recruitment of Adopters

8.1 Part of the Adoption Grant has been used to refocus the advertising campaign, to target carers who might adopt, foster to adopt, or foster. In addition,

8.2 Between 31 March 2013 – 1 April 2014:

- 75 initial enquiries to become adopters were received
- 20 applications from people wishing to adopt were received.
- 8 applications were approved
- 2 single female
- 2 couples are still in assessment process
- 1 application was withdrawn
- 0 applications were refused by the Agency decision maker.

9.0 Timeliness of Adoption Matches

9.1 Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 the 10 Torbay adoptive families who were matched in Torbay waited between the date of approval and the date they were matched to children:

- 0 less than 3 months
- 3 3 to 6 months
- 2 6 to 9 months
- 5 9 to 12 months
- 0 12 to 18 months
- 0 18 months or more

10.0 Work with Birth Relatives

10.1 The National Adoption Standards require that birth parents have access to support when adoption is planned and for support both pre and post adoption. An Adoption Support Worker is part of the Adoption team.

10.2 A Social Worker trained in therapeutic techniques works directly with a number of children and adoptive families, which has been beneficial in helping placement stability and preparation for moving on to adoption.

11.0 Adoption Panel

11.1 The Panel has been in post for over a year. The Panel Chair is independent of the Local Authority. Panel offers a quality assurance process, as well as considering the assessment and approval of adopters and matches.

11.2 The panel meets at least monthly.

12.0 Service Development

12.1 In response to government initiatives, work continues across the South West Peninsular to consider more formal arrangements for the development of a Peninsular Adoption Service. This has involved monthly meetings of representatives from Devon, Plymouth, Torbay and Cornwall Local Authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. The group have considered joining together in various formats including a hard federation or mutual organisation. After reflection this approach has not been progressed by the local authorities, but instead a sharing of recruitment, assessment, training and matching processes is being implemented. A Shadow Consortium board is being set up consisting of Plymouth, Devon and Torbay local authorities, Adopter recruitment, matching and adoption support has task groups and a conference is planned for early 2015.

SUMMARY of REGIONAL ADOPTION ACTION PLAN 2014/5										
TASK Tasks achieved in green	1/ SET UP ADOPTION CONSORTIUM	Target and timescale	2/ ADOPTER RECRUITMENT	Target and timescale	3/ IMPROVED MATCHING (Cornwall also invited)	Target and timescale	4/ CONFERENCE	Target and timescale	5/ ADOPTER SUPPORT (Cornwall also invited)	Target and timescale
	Sun regional group started to meet Nov 2013 Consortium now agreed in principle	June 2014	Communications task and finish group set up[May 2014	Sub regional matching group set up	May 2014	10th March 2015 date agreed University have agreed to partner and offer free venue	Aug 2014	Support task and finish group set up	Aug 2014
	Joint funding agreement drafted Shadow consortium board set up	July 2014	Action plan drafted and signed off by consortium board	By Sept 2014	Procedures agreed and documented	By end Sept 2014	Programme agreed	By Sept 2014	Action plan agreed	Oct 2014
	Full board set up	By Oct 2014	Marketing strategy drafted and agreed	By Sept 2014			Invites sent out	Jan 2014		
			Brief for 24/7 telephone line agreed and tendered Recruitment enquiry hub set up	By Dec 2014			Conference held	March 2015		
			Brief for campaign	By April						

			agreed and tendered	2015						
Staff identified	Anne Osborne Ply Chair Fiona Fitz Patrick Dev Caroline Hobson Tor FFC? Barnardos?		Michael Richard Ply Joanne Penhaligon Tor Mairi Hamilton Dev Temp Chair Rachel Carter Ply		Anne Osborne Plym Chair Alison Barker Plym Rachel Gillott Devon Amanda Douglas Torb Caroline Davies FFC Alison Waters Cornwall		Caroline Hobson Tor NB Staff to be nominated by Devon and Plymouth City Council		Cornwall Nicki Carter Devon Nak Urwin Plymouth Richard Woodleigh Torbay Amanda Douglas	

13.0 Work with Adoptive Families

- 13.1 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.
- 13.2 Social groups for adopters continue to be held three times a year. Adopters are also offered training on a variety of topics, which includes trauma and loss in the adoption process, life story books and the family finding and matching process.

14.0 Recommendations

- 14.1 Accept the information in this report.