

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**Report**

Committee/Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	4 February 2014
Title:	Hampshire Adoption Service Summary Annual Report 2012/13
Reference:	5610
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a summary report of the Adoption Service Annual Report and is compiled under the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 25.6) and the Care Standards Act 2000. The report is to inform the Children and Families Advisory Panel of the management and outcomes of the Adoption Agency over the twelve month period from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

2. Service Context

2.1 The County Adoption and Integrated Recruitment Service comprises a Service Manager who manages five team managers responsible for a range of adoption services; Integrated Recruitment, Integrated Assessment Team, So called as both teams manage the recruitment and assessment of both adoption and fostering, Panel Advisory Service, two Adoption Child Care Teams (East and West) and a County-wide Adoption Support Team.

2.2 The teams manage a range of services and resources to support prospective adopters, families who have adopted, children who need adoptive families and adults who have been adopted as a child.

3. Adoption Reform Agenda

3.1 Throughout this year, the Government has produced further guidance about expectations of both local authority and voluntary adoption agencies. The main changes relate to:-

- Introducing a new 2 stage assessment process for prospective adoptive parents to be completed in 6 months – to start from July 1 2013.
- A drive to recruit more adopters to meet national shortages
- The launch of the National Gateway for Adoption
- Promoting Fostering for Adoption and concurrent placements
- Planning to implement the Family Justice Review and the new 26 week court timetable
- Promoting early permanency planning for children
- The Adoption Passport – detailing entitlement to support for adoptive parents
- The Scorecard – targets to ensure local authorities reduce the time it takes for children to be placed for adoption from the time they first come in to care and from when a placement order is granted and the child is matched with adopters.

4. Children Looked After - placed for adoption and adopted

	Total Adoption Orders Made	Children Matched	Adoption Plans
1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012	50	43	82
1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013	62	76	95

4.1 During the year 2012-13, there has been a significant increase in all areas of adoption activity.

4.2 With regard to activity related to children, there have been 62 Adoption Orders made (in comparison with 50 last year a 24% increase), 76 children matched (in comparison with 43 last year a 77% increase) and 95 Adoption Plans agreed (in comparison with 82 last year a 16% increase)

5. Children Awaiting Adoptive Placements

2012-13

5.4 There are several different groups of children who can be described as 'waiting' for an adoptive placement. Some children have plans for adoption which have not yet been agreed in court; others have plans for adoption agreed in court but are not yet linked with specific adopters. A third group have been linked with adopters and not yet placed and the final group of children are those who have been placed with adopters but the adoption order has not yet been made.

5.5 Between April 2012 and March 2013 62 adoption orders were made. Of the 95 children who had adoption plans agreed during 2012-13, 25 of these children were matched with adopters during the same year, and 4 (of the 25) of these children were also adopted during 2012-13.

5.5 There are currently 67 children from 2012-13 with plans for adoption who have not yet been matched with adopters: over half of these are still in proceedings and therefore this matching process cannot take place. However, in order to reduce delay, where it may be more difficult to find adopters for children, profiles are prepared and any possible in- house matches are considered but cannot be acted on until the court agrees a Placement Order.

5.6 There are currently 30 + children needing to be placed for adoption. The Adoption Assessment Team currently had (at the end of March 2013) 18 assessments of prospective adopters that were on-going (note that some adopters want to adopt more than one child). This means that there is a small but on-going under supply of adopters in Hampshire to meet the needs of the children waiting. This will be addressed from April 2013 by senior managers via an Adoption Development Proposal and will be considered by the Children and Families Management Team. The development proposal will suggest ways of both meeting the growing in- house need for adopters and the scope to provide additional approved adopters who could be sold to other local authorities, or via the National Adoption Register, to generate income.

6. Other Local Authority Children Matched with Hampshire adopters during 2012-13

6.1 Five sets of Hampshire approved adopters were linked with 6 children from other agencies. Unfortunately one of the linkings disrupted prior to the child being placed but 5 children were placed with 4 sets of Hampshire adopters. Income from selling these adopters to other local authorities was used to offset the cost of purchasing adopters mostly from voluntary adoption agencies for Hampshire children.

7. Fostering for Adoption

7.1. As part of the recruitment and assessment process, all prospective adoptive parents are asked about fostering for adoption. Where it is appropriate prospective adopters can be approved as both adopters and foster carers. This happens at a dual purpose Panel, with the aim of being able to place children at a much earlier stage with their potential adopters. Where this is the case, training for dually approved adopters is being developed: both adoption and fostering regulations need to be met.

7.2 During 2012/13, 2 single children were matched with adopter/foster carers: in one case the child was placed straight from hospital after birth within 7 hours and

in the other case it enabled the child who was in proceedings to be placed in the adoptive family with his sibling at an earlier stage.

7.3 Also 3 single children joined siblings who had been previously placed/adopted. In total 5 children were placed with foster carers for adoption.

8. Family Finding

8.1 In order to assist with this process, during 2012/13, a family finding post was created, sitting within the Integrated Recruitment Team. The aim of the post is to form and maintain links with other local authorities, the independent sector and the National Adoption Register, in order to seek families for harder to place children. The post was created with monies made available from within Hampshire and in part from the Adoption Improvement Grant and will run as part of the 2 Year Investment Project.

8.2 During the year under report, Hampshire has run one profile event where children who had a plan for adoption and who were identified as being hard to place were featured via profiles and DVDs. Further profile events are planned throughout the coming year, as well as a Consortium 'Adoption Activity Day' where children awaiting adoptive families and approved adopters awaiting a placement are invited to participate in a fun activity day: This event will be run with assistance from the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) who have already piloted a number of successful events.

9. Adoption disruptions (post-placement and pre-adoption order)

9.1 Sadly, there have been 9 adoption placement disruptions within the year of this report, involving 9 children and 6 sets of Hampshire adopters. This is in comparison to only one disruption in the previous year. A disruption occurs when a child has been placed for adoption but the placement breaks down and the child comes back into the looked after system. A disruption can be during introductions of the child to the adopters or following placement in the new family but before the adoption order has been made. Review meetings have been held in each case to gain an understanding of the circumstances and of the lessons that can be learned for the service. In Hampshire, if an adoption placement was to disrupt soon after the adoption order is made a review would also be held.

9.2. Actions a result of these issues are:-

- Training has been provided to the assessment team about how adoptive families need to be able to fit around the child's needs
- A workshop for foster carers about the introduction of children to adoptive parents has been developed
- Where a change of social worker during introductions is unavoidable, the supervisor will help to create a better link with the new worker

- Training will be provided to the children's adoption teams in 2013 about the impact of early loss and trauma and what this can mean for children placed for adoption.

10. Appendix 1- attached shows figures for adoption panel activity within Hampshire for last 5 years (Table 1) and the age range of children whose plans for adoption were agreed during 2012-2013 (Table 2) and for the previous two years.

11. Adoption Scorecard (3 year average: 2010, 2011 and 2012)

11.1 The second scorecard was produced by the Department for Education in December 2012. At this time the Adoption Service was judged as successfully meeting all three main targets in relation to the national average and targets set. The next score card is due in the Autumn 2013: given that we have over the last year deliberately targeted the more hard to place children, including large sibling groups it is likely that the next score card will show increased activity but slower timescales.

	Hampshire	England
1. Percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care & moving in with their adoptive family	60	56
2. Average time between a LA Receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	175	195
3. Average time between child entering care and moving in with adoptive family (for children who have been adopted) (days)	566	635

12. Children with a potential plan for adoption

12.1 The Adoption Service is tracking over 90 children where adoption may be the plan for these children in the future but where care plans have not been finalised

13. Prospective Adopters

13.1 During the year of this report, 234 enquiries were received from members of the public interested in adoption (in comparison with 354 for the previous year): this resulted in 34 cases being forwarded for assessment by the Integrated Recruitment Team to the Assessment Team. This reduction is because of the decision to prioritise applications only from enquirers who would meet the needs of the children waiting for adoptive families. Previously, in March 2012, the service was overwhelmed with high numbers of possible prospective adopters, but for whom the children that we have available would not have met their expressed wishes, and could not allocate either preparation training or social workers to undertake assessments for the entire waiting group of prospective adopters. Therefore only those potential adopters who could meet the needs of the more complex children were able to be assessed. From November 2012 the service started fully recruiting adopters again but the capacity to assess adopters, due to the rise in the numbers of children, was not, at that stage enough to meet the needs of the numbers of children waiting in Hampshire, see plans outlined above.

13.2 During 2012-13 the number of completed assessments of prospective adopters from the Integrated Assessment Team presented to the Adoption Panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker was 52 (in comparison with 42 the previous year).

14. Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

14.1 The IRM came into being in April 2004. It provides adoptive applicants in England with the option of applying to an independent body to review the adoption agency's determination not to approve them as adopters or to withdraw their approval. The service has had no cases referred to the IRM within this year.

15. Panel Advisory Service

15.1 The Adoption Panel Service has been busy during 2012/13 with 50 adoption panels held throughout the year. Panel dates are set for the year ahead, although there needed to be flexibility with regard to dates to meet demand at particular times during the year and to avoid delay in progressing children's plans for placement.

15.2 On 1 September 2012, new regulations came into force that removed the function of children's plans for adoption being presented to Adoption Panel, where a Placement Order is necessary to enable a child to be placed for adoption (these are now referred directly to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker). Whilst this created extra space on the panel agendas, the panels continued to be busy due to the increased number of adopter assessments and linkings.

16. Adoption Support Team

16.1 The team was supporting 159 children and families during the year 2012-13 which was an increase of 5 compared to last year, and have also carried out joint work with children's adoption social workers on four pre-adoption cases. 94 cases were open at the end of March 2013, which is an increase of 14 cases from last year.

16.2 During 2012/13, the number of actual indirect contact arrangements, involving all parties, have risen to 2932 (an increase of 160 on the previous year).

16.3 The team has supported 254 adults over the year, an increase of 25 compared to last year

16.4 The Adoption Service has a number of contracts with other agencies to assist with the provision of its support services following a tendering process. These contracts are being reviewed for 2014/15 as part of the overall review of the service.

16.5 The Adoption Support Service continues to provide workshops throughout the year and funding from the Short Breaks scheme has enabled the provision of activity based respite for adoptive families.

17. Adoption Consortium

17.1 Hampshire remains a member of an adoption consortium with Surrey and Oxfordshire County Councils and Parents and Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption and fostering agency based in Reading.

17.2 Hampshire placed 7 children with approved adopters from other agencies during 2012-13 (5 single children and a sibling pair). Two of these children were placed within the adoption consortium with a family from PACT.

18. Step Parent Adoptions

18.1 There are a high number of enquiries in respect of step-parent adoption: during 2012/13 there were 42 enquiries. Step parent work was transferred from the Integrated Recruitment Team into the Adoption Assessment during this year. Since 1 April 2012, 17 step parent orders have been made.

19. Inter Country Adoptions

23.1 All inter country adoption assessments are carried out within a Service Level Agreement with Parents and Children Together (PACT), Reading

20. Key activities for 2013/14

20.1 The main challenge during 2013/14 is to address the shortfall in adopters and review resources in the service in order to increase the number of approved adopters available.

20.2 The service is preparing to implement the government's adoption reform agenda which begins on 1 July 2013 with the introduction of a new two stage assessment process for prospective adopters

20.3 Discussions are beginning with regard to the possibility of widening the adoption consortium to which Hampshire belongs by merging with the South Coast Consortium. There would be advantages in terms of sharing of resources and shared training of prospective adopters.

20.4 External contracts within the service are to be reviewed with regard to whether they are giving value for money and whether it is more effective for some of these to be provided internally.

20.5 As from July 2013, Hampshire will be responsible for the Isle of Wight's Children's Services for a period of 5 years: this will include the Adoption Service.

20.6 It is possible that the Adoption Support Team will take on the support of families with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

20.7 A review the Adoption Support Team and work to develop a multi-agency therapeutic service for adoptive families will be undertaken.

20.8 Opportunities for sold services for adoption will be explored including a plan to generate income by over providing approved adoptive parents to other local authorities.

RECOMMENDATION

That this report is noted and approved by the Children and Families Advisory Panel

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes/no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Other Significant Links**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1. This will improve the life chances of children needing to be placed for adoption in Hampshire

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. None

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption? N/A

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts? N/A