



**Warwickshire People Group,
Children's Social Care
Safeguarding**

**Adoption Services and
Adoption Panel
Annual Report
2014-2015**



ADOPTION SERVICES TEAM ACTIVITY REPORT

April 1 2014 to March 31 2015

1. Introduction

1.1 This report will provide detail of the work of the Adoption Service, Adoption Panel and Adoption Support Service Annual Review for the period 2014- 2015. It will highlight positives in practice alongside areas that require ongoing development. The work of Warwickshire County Council as an adoption agency is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Statutory Guidance on adoption.

2. The Adoption Services Team

2.1 The Adoption Service Team currently has an establishment of 13 social workers and four Managers consisting of:

- 1 Operations Manager – full time post
- 3 part time Practice Leaders – 2 full time posts
- 6 full time social workers - 2 of these full time posts are temporary posts initially funded by the Adoption Support Grant, contracts ending in March 2016
- 5 part-time social workers.
- Within this a Practice Leader and 74.5 social work hours (3 part-time social workers) is ring fenced for adoption support work.
- The Service is supported by a clerical team including the Letterbox Coordinator.

2.2 The Adoption Services Team is based at Saltisford Office Park and works county-wide, working closely with frontline Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Teams. In addition the team is involved out of county/ interagency placement arrangements and where Warwickshire adopters have also been matched with children from outside of the county.

2.3 The core business of the Adoption Services Team is:

- An adoption duty service five days a week.
- Recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters.
- Completing non-agency private adoption reports and court attendances
- Overseas adoption assessments and post placement support
- Family finding for all children with an adoption plan
- Identification of children in other local authority areas for approved adopters who might be suitable for Warwickshire approved adopters
- Advice to social workers on the preparation of a child for adoption
- Placement matching and careful planning of the child's move to adopters
- Providing court reports for adoption applications
- Post-approval support through individual work, training groups, workshops and support groups
- Birth records counselling for adopted adults

- A Letterbox Scheme to facilitate exchanges of information between adoptive and birth families
- Advice to social workers and carers on adoption issues
- Ongoing development of the service to ensure that it reflects legal and regulatory guidelines and standards
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the service including gathering feedback from service users
- Development work in partnership with other agencies
- An independently chaired Adoption Panel to approve adopters, to agree placement matches and the approval of prospective adopters.
- The role of Adoption Agency Advisor is held within the service and supports the Agency Decision Maker to reach the adoption decision. This role has a strong quality assurance function.
- The provision of an Adoption Support Service for all adoptive parties affected By adoption in Warwickshire

3. Recruitment, Adoption Preparation and Assessment

- 3.1 In the period 2014-2015 the Service dealt with **191** telephone and web enquiries. These covered a wide spectrum of adoption issues. This was a slight decrease by 9 enquires from the previous year. From this initial contact **114** Adoption Information Packs were sent out, 18 fewer than the previous year.
- 3.2 **Information Meetings** for people interested in adoption are held monthly and feedback from these continues to be very positive. The Service held 7 sets of 3 day **Adoption Preparation Groups** in this 12 month period, involving **61** households. This was 14 fewer households than the previous year, a trend mirrored in surrounding local authorities.
- 3.3 Preparation groups are held on different days in order to provide as much flexibility as possible. Key facilitators assume responsibility for leading the preparation groups alongside a co-worker. The course is designed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) but has been adapted by the Adoption Service.
- 3.4 The course covers the following:
- Day one:** What the adopters have to offer
General discussion about adoption
Routes to permanency for children and looking at case studies to explore this further
Child development
The effect of trauma on development
How the attachment relationship effects development and relationships
- Day two:** Importance of names to our identity
Child abuse and the impact of this experience on a child's behaviour
How to parent a child who has previously experienced abusive parenting

Separation and loss, looking at own losses then the grief cycle and how it can affect children

The child's journey – the number of broken relationships a child can endure prior to adoption (demonstrated by a powerful 'string' exercise whereby relationships are severed and string cut)

Life story books

Letterbox contact

Day three: Post adoption and the services available in Warwickshire
 Learning from our work with adult adoptees, birth records counselling and the reasons for life story and letterbox contact
 Resilience and how to help children build resilience
 Matching and linking process in Warwickshire (this includes looking at photographs of Warwickshire currently looking for homes)
 Talks from approved adopters about their experiences

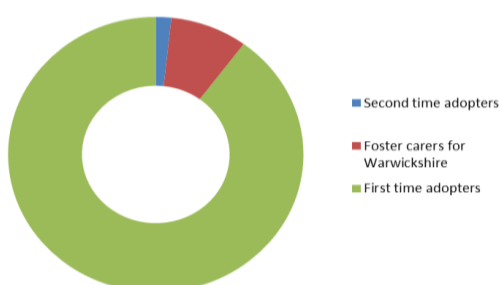
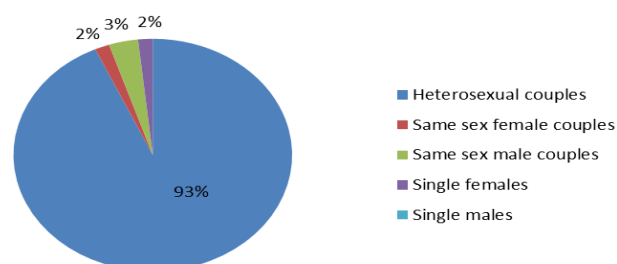
A comprehensive learning package is sent to applicants to complete prior to groups.

- 3.5 The **Recruitment Strategy** for the service continues to be reviewed annually and is based on the profile of the children in the care of Warwickshire that need to be placed for adoption. Priority is given to applicants that are interested in sibling groups, older children and children with disabilities.
- 3.6 When the agency is unable to identify appropriate placements within Warwickshire, a family finder is appointed and details of children are referred to the West Midlands Family Finding Database and the National Adoption Register and Adoption Link. Adoption Link is a new national service that thus far has been successful in matching three-sibling groups and older children. The Adoption Service has attended 4 National Exchange Days facilitated by the National Adoption Register.
- 3.7 In partnership with Coventry, Solihull and BAAF, Warwickshire hosted their first **Adoption Activity Day**. Children waiting for an adoptive family and their social workers and foster carers were invited to a Disney themed fun day. Prospective adopters are also invited. The invitation was extended to other local authorities who are part of West Midlands Consortium of adoption agencies; they too identified potential children and adopters to be included in the event. Warwickshire featured 22 children and from this event 7 children were matched with adopters. 1 of the children matched was a 9 year old girl who had had a previous adoption disruption.
- 3.8 Warwickshire featured children at two further Activity Days, 8 children in Ludlow (6 being successfully matched) and 5 in Birmingham (with 2 successfully matched). Thus this new area of practice in matching children with approved adopters is proving to be effective.
- 3.9 The Adoption Service has continued to attend Children's Panels to ensure that they can track and identify children earlier in the planning process who are likely to need adoption.

4. Assessments

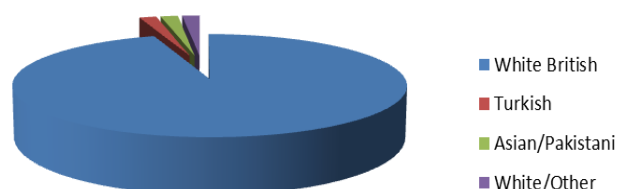
- 4.1 The Service introduced the revised 2 stage adopter assessment process from 1 July 2014 and has successfully reduced adopter approval timescales to 6 months for the majority of applicants. When there has been a delay in Stage 1 of the process this has been due to delays in DBS checks or medicals being completed.
- 4.2 Warwickshire County Council applies a rigorous and thorough assessment of adopters in order to safeguard and promote children's welfare. Priorities are set to ensure that the service recruits adopters for the types of children needing placement. Priority is given to prospective adopters who can meet the needs of children who are waiting.
- 4.3 **59** households were approved as potential adopters during April 2014 and March 2015, with 14 families choosing to withdraw from the assessment process. This represents a slight decrease of 6 from 2013-14. Of these 59 households:

55 were heterosexual couples
1 were same sex females
2 same sex males
1 were single female adopters
0 were single male adopters

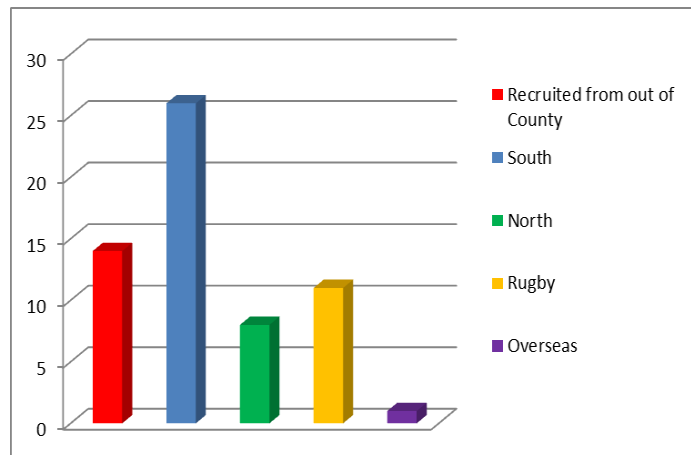


1 family were second time adopters
5 families were foster carers for Warwickshire Fostering Service seeking to adopt a child in their care

Of the 59 households their ethnicity was recorded as:
56 White / British
1 Asian / Pakistani
1 Turkish
1 White / Other



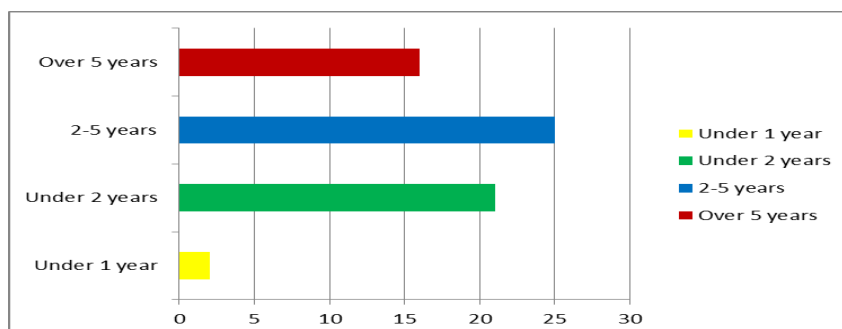
Of the 59 households approved:
 14 were recruited from outside of the county
 26 were households from the south of the county
 8 were from the north
 11 were from Rugby (East)
 1 was an overseas assessment



4.4 On the 31st March 2015 there were 34 households approved and waiting for a placement.

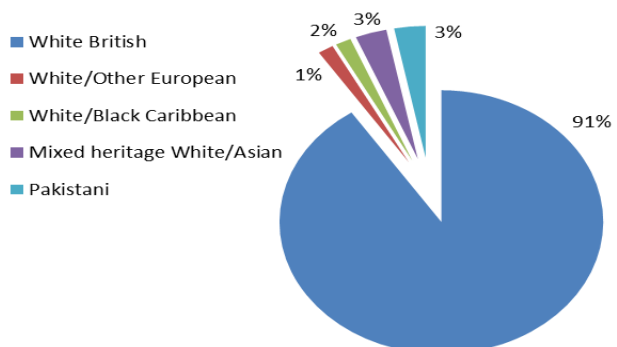
5. Family Finding

5.1 There were **64** Adoption Orders made in respect of Warwickshire children in the year April 2014 to March 2015, an increase of 8 from the previous year and 31 more than 2012/14. This represents **19.5%** of looked after children with the average number of children being adopted over the 3 year period rising from 13% to 16%. The national 3 year average for 2012, 2013 and 2014 was 14%. From this cohort 44 were single children and there were 10 sibling groups of two children. The ages of the children at the time the adoption order was granted were as follows:

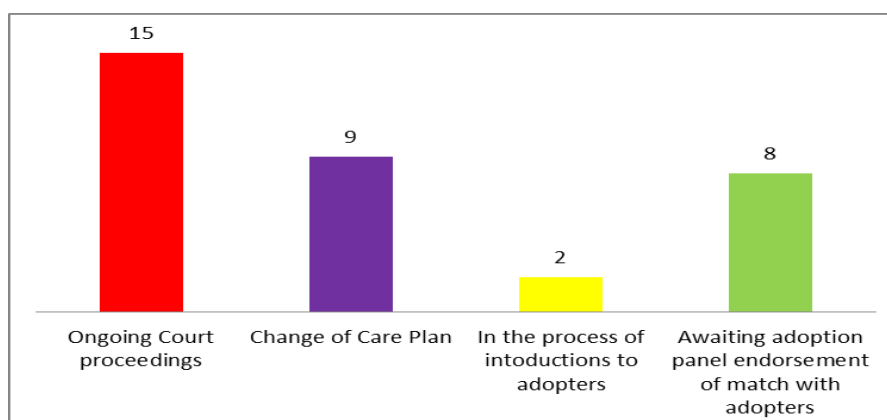


The ethnicity of the children is:

1 White/other European
 1 White/Black Caribbean
 2 White/Asian
 2 Pakistani
 58 White/British



- 5.2 The Service has seen an increase in the number of sibling groups being placed for adoption. However it continues to experience difficulties in recruiting adopters for children with disabilities and older children. The Adoption Recruitment Strategy continues to attempt to address this, with specific advertising in Be My Parent, Children Who Wait, attending National Exchange Days and commissioning professional photographs of children to be used for profiles. These are also sent to all Adoption Agencies at regular intervals.
- 5.3 The success in placing children in part is due to the adoption managers regularly attending Children's Panels enabling the Service to identify children's with a potential adoption plan at an early stage. Also social workers for the children regularly attend the Placement Allocation Group meetings with adoption social workers where information is shared about the children and families available. This allows for the early identification of prospective adopters for children or whether specific family finding will be required.
- 5.4 As on 31 March 2015 a further 47 children are placed in adoptive homes with an adoption application pending, and another 60 children had an approved plan of adoption. Some of these children were not yet placed in an adoptive home for the following reasons:



- 5.5 Where placements cannot be identified within Warwickshire's pool of approved adopters the next step is for social workers to refer their child to the West Midlands Consortium of Adoption Agencies (Adoptwestmids) and the National Adoption Register. A social worker from the Adoption Service will accompany the social worker for the child on all out of county visits to prospective adopters and will encourage the making of a DVD for prospective adopters to view.
- 5.6 If following these visits potential adopters are still not identified a 'family finder' is assigned from the Adoption Services to lead any advertising required. In addition to featuring children in national adoption publications such as Be My Parent or Children Who Wait, the Service produces a quarterly booklet featuring children and adopters who are awaiting placements. This is sent to all Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The Service has received several enquires and

successful matches from this including the placement and subsequent adoption of a sibling group of 3 children.

- 5.7 As part of the Preparation Groups children are featured who are waiting adoptive placement. Prospective adopters are “fast tracked” where they are considering adopting sibling groups.
- 5.8 Where potential adopters are identified out of county the adoption social worker remains involved in an advisory capacity until the adoption placement match is presented to the Adoption Panel. The Operations Manager of the Adoption Service has a quality assurance role for all out of county adoption placements, including pre and post placement support meetings. For older children a ‘Life Appreciation Day’ can be arranged whereby past and present professionals involved in a child’s life are invited to share information with prospective adopters to provide a sense of the child’s life story.
- 5.9 In the year 2014-2015 a total of **74** children were placed with prospective adopters. **57** were placed within Warwickshire and **17** children were placed with other Local Authority or voluntary adoption agency adopters. This included 3 sibling groups of two, one child of Pakistani ethnicity and 3 children of White/Black Caribbean decent. In turn 5 Warwickshire approved adopters were matched with 9 children from other Local Authorities.
- 5.10 The over-riding difficulty with out of county placements continues to be the provision of appropriate and timely support to adoptive families, particularly when Children and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are required. It is envisaged that the new Adoption Support Fund (ASF) initiative may alleviate some of the issues in accessing therapeutic support services.
- 5.11 In this year Warwickshire has placed two children in ‘fostering to adopt’ placements. This is a new area of practice whereby children are placed with their prospective adopters on a fostering basis prior to their plan of adoption being approved by the court. In the small percentage of cases where this is appropriate, usually there will have been significant Children’s Services involvement with the family. Fostering to adopt allows young children to be placed with their prospective adopters sooner and prevents placements moves for them.

6. Support

- 6.1 The Service expanded its support groups for adopters and children during this period and regular, well-attended support groups are now being facilitated in Rugby, Warwick and Bedworth. In addition the service hosts the annual Adoption Picnic (which 140 people attended) and an Adoption Fun day in conjunction with Coventry Adoption Service. This is open to anyone who has adopted, or is in the process of adopting.
- 6.2 The Service has continued a successful working relationship with “Inspired Foundations” who have facilitated several successful courses in respect of ‘Introductions and Early Days of Placement’ and ‘Managing Contact’. The course

facilitator is an experienced adoptive parent and the feedback from prospective adopters regarding this course has been very positive.

6.3 The following training has taken place:

- Talking to your child about adoption
- Producing and using a life story book
- Theraplay techniques to build attachment
- Filial therapy
- Supporting the adoptive family – a workshop for friends and family of prospective adopters

6.4 The duty service, in addition to dealing with enquiries and referrals provides telephone support and guidance to many adopters who are facing difficulties.

7. Training

7.1 Social workers within the Service attended some of following training in order to develop the skill base:

- Developmental Dyadic Psychotherapy (DDP) Level 2
- Kate Cairns – The Education of Looked After and Adopted children
- Adoption UK - Attachment in schools
- BAAF - Adoption Support Fund, Robust Analysis in Assessment, Offering an effective adoption support service
- NHS - The Coventry Grid autism /attachment
- Information Governance, Carefirst training, Electronic Social Care Record (ESCR) training
- Attachment and Therapeutic parenting
- Adoption workshop on Best Practice and a learning set on Matching and Linking
- Theraplay – Level 1
- Enabling Others – becoming Practice Educators to Social Workers in Training
- The Neuroscience of Adoption – Margot Sunderland
- Communicating effectively with children and young people - Self-protection in risky situations

8. Non- agency adoptions

8.1 **17** non-agency adoption assessments were allocated during 2014-15. These continue to be complex pieces of work, including step-parent assessments, surrogacy arrangements and same sex adoptions.

9. Summary

9.1 In the last year the service has seen an improvement in terms of

- An increase in the number of adopters approved
- A reduction in the timescales for applicants attending Information Groups

- A reduction in the timescales for applicants attending Preparation Groups
- Faster timescales in matching children following a their adoption decision being made
- An increase in the number of Adoption Orders granted
- An increase in training for adopters and prospective adopters
- The Birth Parent Support Service has been introduced following a successful pilot whereby 2 social workers are employed on a part time basis to provide a county wide service supporting birth parents and wider family members at earlier stages in the adoption process. Demand for this service has increased in the past year as is fully detailed in the Independent Birth Parent Support Service Annual Report.

9.2.1 Plans for the service include:

- To continue to recruit adopters for those children deemed harder to place i.e. older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities.
- To continue to develop and co facilitate relevant training with Coventry and Solihull Adoption Services, including half day workshops in respect of:
 - Life story work,
 - Adopting when you already have a child,
 - Managing contact
 - Social networking
 - Developing attachment through play.
- To continue to foster good working relationships with Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Teams to ensure that adoption plans are progressed in a timely fashion and supporting children's social workers in court where appropriate.
- To facilitate learning for all social workers and adoption panel members on adoption disruption.
- To continue to raise the profile of adoption as a permanency option for looked after children.
- To standardise best practice in adoption throughout the West Midlands through membership of the Adopt West Midlands Consortium.
- To ensure there are robust mechanisms for gathering and analysing feedback from service users.
- To ensure the voices of both children and birth parents are represented in adoption paperwork
- To embed 'fostering to adoption' procedures to ensure there is early planning for children for whom this is an appropriate plan and reducing the number of placement moves before adoption.

Jemma Fordham
Operations Manager – Adoption Services

Warwickshire Adoption Panel, Annual Review April 2014– March 2015

1. Membership

- 1.1 The Adoption Agencies Statutory Guidance (updated 2011) requires that each agency must maintain a list of persons whom it considers suitable to be a member of an adoption panel. The panel's business can only be conducted if at least 5 members are present, including the chair or vice chair and a social worker with at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience.
- 1.2 In summary, as of 31 March 2015, panel membership is constituted as follows: -
- **Eamon Moran:** Independent Chair, adoptive parent and foster carer
 - **Jo Davies:** Vice – Chair
 - **Peter Follett:** Independent Member, adoptive parent
 - **Dr Lucy Coker:** Medical Adviser to Panel and Community Paediatrician
 - **Maggie King:** Independent Member, previously an adoption social worker
 - **Chris Williams:** Elected County Councillor, adoptive parent
 - **Rob Rogers:** Independent Member, adoptive parent of two children
 - **Jemma Fordham:** Social work representative.

In addition to the core membership the agency has a pool of members who can be called upon on to cover sickness and annual leave.

Non-Voting Panel Advisers:

- **Sharon Shaw** Adoption Panel Advisor, Operations Manager (Adoption Services) deputised by Jo Smith – Adoption Practice Leader
 - **Rosalind Anscombe** Secretary to Panel
- 1.3 Panel continues to benefit from having members with personal adoption and fostering experience and in the near future it is hoped that an adopter person will become a member of the panel. All panel members demonstrate their strong commitment to supporting and helping to develop Adoption Services in Warwickshire.

2. Summary of Adoption Panel Activity

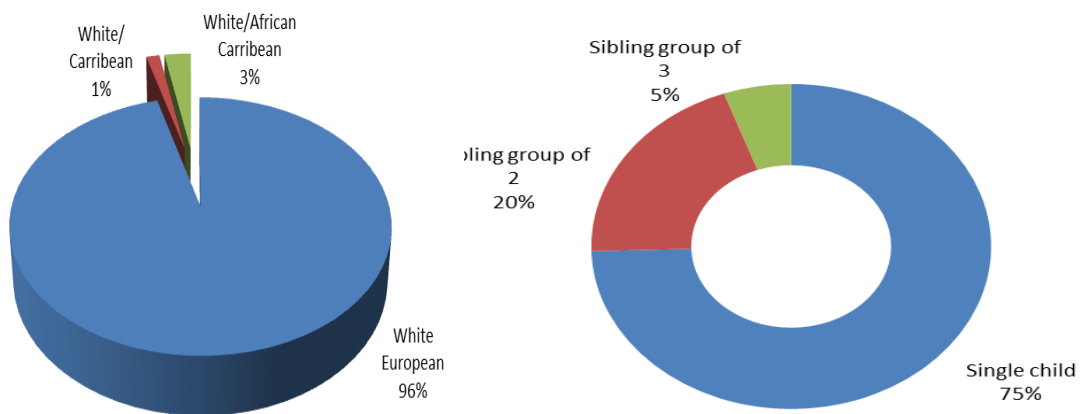
- 2.1 The Adoption Panel met on **22** occasions and considered:
- **61** recommendations for children to be matched with prospective adopters (involving 76 children).
 - **59** recommendations for approval of adoptive parents.
 - There were no change of plans or disruptions for children considered, nor resignations of approved adopters or changes in their approval categories

Adoption Panel activities and trends are summarised below

Year	Number of children approved for adoption	Number matches of	Number of families approved to adopt
2005 – 6	39	23	35
2006 – 7	33	30	23
2007 – 8	38	26	29
2008 - 9	33	19	31 + 1 overseas
2009-10	34	22	24 + 1 overseas
2010-11	36	21	28
2011-12	62	30	35 + 2 overseas
2012-13	64	37	48 + 1 overseas
2013-14	93	53	65
2014-15	68 (4 relinquished babies)	61	59

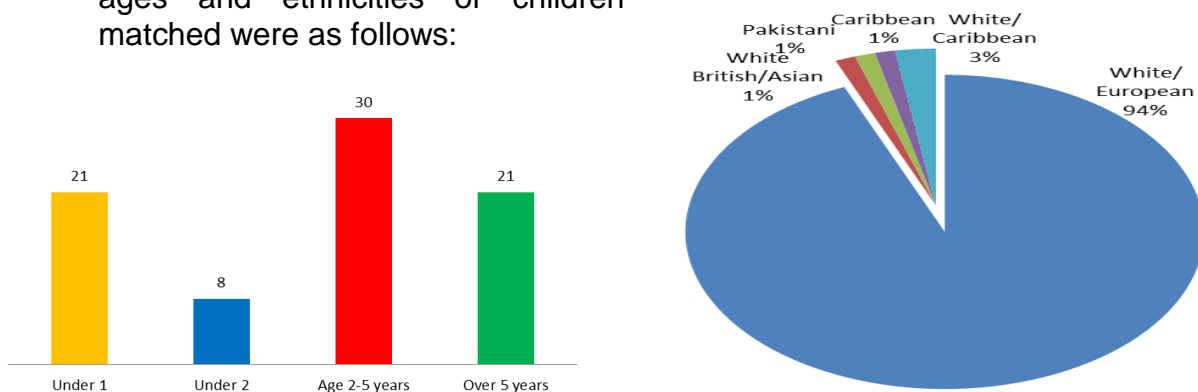
3. Children Approved for Adoption

- 3.1 72 children had an adoption plan approved during this period, exactly half male and female:



4. Children matched with Adopters

- 4.1 The Adoption Panel considered **63** adoption matches concerning 80 children. Of these matches, 12 involved out of county placements, including 5 sibling groups of 2. Five children were matched with foster carers and three with single carers. The ages and ethnicities of children matched were as follows:



- 4.2 In terms of placing children from sibling groups the panel approved for 15 sibling groups of 2 children being placed together (one disrupted) and one sibling group of 3 children (the eldest child, aged 11, returned to foster care but the remaining siblings remained in the adoptive home).

5. Training and Development Events

- 5.1 During the year panel welcomed a number of social workers and social work student observers. The chair and advisor provide an opportunity for informal discussions and feedback at the end of the meeting. All feedback received from these observers confirms that these opportunities are invaluable and rewarding learning experiences.
- 5.2 The panel continues to benefit from opportunities at the end of meetings to reflect on emerging areas for procedure and/or practice development, updating on new research and policy developments. The panel also receives progress reports on children who have been placed.
- 5.3 More formally, panel members attended a training session centred on the changes in procedures, the matching paperwork presented to panel and benchmarking information. A manager from a Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Team also presented a workshop on the 'Journey of the child to adoption'. Panel members met with adoption social workers for feedback on cases. Future training in the planning stage includes, through the West Midlands Consortium, 'Fostering to Adopt Conference' planned for autumn 2015.
- 5.4 During the past year the chair shadowed Gloucestershire Adoption Panel and gained useful insight into how they operate. Opportunities for other panel members to learn from other adoption panels are being explored for the forthcoming year.

6. Appraisals and Feedback

- 6.1 During 2014/15 the chair and advisor conducted annual appraisals with each panel member. The agency decision maker and panel advisor also completed the panel chair's annual appraisal, which included drawing on feedback from panel members. This provided the opportunity for panel members to receive feedback about their contributions in panel, but also for the chair and advisor to look at the functioning of the panel as a whole and to identify ongoing development opportunities.
- 6.2 Arrangements are also in place to ensure on-going feedback from professionals and prospective adopters to panel. Everyone who attends panel is provided with an evaluation form. If there are comments on the form about a particular panel member's contribution, this will be followed up by the panel advisor. Comments received this year have again been extremely positive. Panel in turn provides feedback to adoption social workers and foster carers on the quality of their reports which inform the matching process.

7. Practice developments during the year

- 7.1 The number of adoption panel meetings has increased during the year, to meet the increased demand for panel time. Warwickshire have panel members who are committed to attending panel, and always come particularly well prepared. It has been necessary to increase panels from once a month to twice a month and on occasions even 3 times a month to manage the work demands and this has been managed by developing a pool of panel members who can support the core group of panel members. It is acknowledged that panel attendance continues to require a huge commitment from its members.
- 7.2 Panel continues to find ways of emphasising its commitment to ensuring that children's own feelings and views are represented and heard. Panel does this through regular challenges to social workers and panel itself around practice and expectations. Panel has observed a number of times that social workers attending often share much more about children's feelings and wishes and preparation than appears in their written reports. Further training is to be offered to social workers on this.
- 7.3 Adopters continue to attend panel for both approval and matching, and this attendance generally proves invaluable in helping panel members to really understand the match as well as see for themselves the adopter's commitment, insight and knowledge of the children they are hoping to adopt. Panel minutes continue to record any actions requested regarding amendments, or additions to the paperwork. This is extremely helpful when adopters return to panel for matching. Panel members are keen to keep abreast of on-going developments across adoption practice. Articles from BAAF, newspapers etc. are shared with panel members and if time allows they are discussed. Adoption panel members were invited on BAAF training with social workers.
- 7.4 All panel members, including independent members, now have access to the egress secure email application and have received training in its use from IT services. The system is now used for all exchange of sensitive information to and from panel members and has greatly enhanced our Infosec standards. All panel members have also been allocated a lockable, secure storage box in which to keep their papers during reading time at home.

8. Future Developments

- Panel members are keen to develop their skills and knowledge alongside wider social work staff and stakeholders. This is recognised as important given the many changes and challenges the adoption service continues to face.
- Panel members will need to work with the panel advisor to ensure that the new regulations and guidance are implemented, in particular the changes in respect of adoption support and fostering to adopt.
- To review the practice of panel regarding the weighing up of information presented to panel when considering a match and evidencing decision-making processes.
- To provide quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of the reports presented to panel.

- To work closely with neighbouring local authorities to introduce a 'paperless' streamlined adoption panel, delivering savings in terms of cost, time and the environment.

Eamon Moran - Independent Chair

Jemma Fordham - Operations Manager, Adoption Services

Adoption Support Annual Review April 2014 – March 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is to review the adoption support work undertaken during April 2014 – March 2015 and is to be read in conjunction with the main Adoption Services Annual Report 2014-15
- 1.2 The staffing hours until the 1 March 2015 remained the same with 30 hours practice leader /ASSA and 45 hours ring fenced for adoption support divided between 3 part time social workers. On the 1 March 2015 an additional 18.5 hours were funded (total 73.5 hours). The work continues to be undertaken by 3 part time social workers and the Letterbox Coordinator works 18 hours a week.
- 1.3 Other members of the Adoption Service assist with some of the post adoption activities and training.
- 1.4 As a small part of the overall Adoption Service the team works creatively in meeting the needs of the adoptive families. There is not always the capacity to undertake individual work with families and therefore a range of courses and support groups are offered. For example the Attachment Course has enabled many adoptive families to have a good understanding of their children's attachment needs and provides an opportunity to validate and share their experience. The course is based on Kim Golding and Dan Hughes work with an emphasis on PACE - (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and parenting strategies

2. Adoption Support Service Advisor – (ASSA)

- 2.1 The ASSA attends the quarterly West Midlands Consortium meetings and is the co- chair. The meetings provide an opportunity to keep abreast of new legislation and practice issues within adoptions support.

3. Notifications

- 3.1 The ASSA is notified when children from outside Warwickshire are placed with prospective adoptive parents within Warwickshire. 10 children have been placed in Warwickshire of which 5 were placed with adoptive families approved by other local authorities or agencies. Although the placing authority are responsible for the child three years after the adoption order has been granted, authorities and or adopters quickly want to access local support services. Where there is no cost implication, Warwickshire Adoption Services welcomes them to support groups and activities. The team are mindful of building positive relationships with families before they experience any difficulties in the future. At present the post adoption support offered to families is dominated by families and children who were not approved by or placed by Warwickshire.

4. Adoption Support

- 4.1 The following is a summary of the workload for the period 2014-2015 The majority of referrals are received from adoptive parents and CAF officers.
 - 96 referral were received
 - 79 requests for adoption support assessments

- 46 cases allocated for direct work/intervention
 - 4 requests for life story
- 4.2 18 adoptive parents attended the attachment groups – an additional 4 adopters to those who were already allocated to attend.
- 4.3 The main themes coming from referrals relate to the child's behaviour- i.e. attachment, self-harming, low self-esteem, physical and verbal abuse to parents and siblings, sleeping and eating issues. Parents also phone expressing concern that they are on an edge of a breakdown. Mental health and mental well-being concerns also feature and some have received a service in conjunction with Journey's and/or Phoenix Psychological Services
- 4.4 School and educational issues have also been raised relating to children's behaviour in school and how the school are responding to this. Adoption social workers have worked with families and schools, attended CAFS, and distributed training materials in order to move improve levels of understanding amongst educational staff.
- 4.5 Where life story books feature, children are struggling to understand their early childhood experiences and adopters require support in re-formatting the existing life story books. A child making unauthorised indirect or direct contact with their birth parent/family via social networking sites is a further issue. The Adoption Service through the Family Group Conferencing Team and the Independent Birth parent Support Service and have used FGC's to address future contacts with birth family members.

5. Life Story Books

- 5.1 The format of life story books was changed in October 2013 and is based on the Joy Rees model. The life story book is a tool for adopters to discuss the child's birth history with their child. Training continues to be offered to social workers and adopters. All parties are provided with the training material which includes a template on how to complete a life story book. Over 80 adopters and social workers have accessed the training.

5.2 Feedback from the training:

Adopters' feedback –

Gave me the confidence to re-do C's. Staff were very friendly and approachable

Very enlightening, I wasn't convinced about starting with the present but having seen the example it makes a lot of sense. Think I have a lot of work to do.

Really good to be on training that really focusses on the child's needs

Would have been helpful to seen an actual book

Re-emphasised earlier lessons on attachment which was useful

Social workers' feedback

Very informative training, made me see how important these stories are for the children to have, to use throughout their lives. Delivered well and easy to understand

The writing of the book was very well explained and illustrated. I particularly valued the explanation about attachment. This was clearly and concisely put.

The delivery was well pitched and gave me a clearer understanding of why parts need to be included and how.

Really interesting and can see how valuable the life story books can support the child's adoption and help their transition

5.3 To support the introduction of the new model, the Adoption Service were required to quality assure the life story books produced by the social workers and social care workers. The quality of some books continues to be of a mixed standard. The main areas of concern are:

- Some books are not written bearing in mind that it is for a child to read, the terminology and language is not age appropriate. It doesn't tell the story or explain why the child could not remain with their birth parents
- Too much/too little clip art or photos
- Staff have kept so much to the template that the book could be for any child
- Staff are not given adequate time to undertake this piece of work because other areas of work are given priority. Information cannot just be lifted from court reports and child permanence reports. Meetings with social workers, sessional workers, foster carers and birth parents may be required to access soft information that would be beneficial to the child/adopter in the future
- This task has been commissioned out to other members of staff across the county in order to address the backlog but the issues of quality and information remain the same.

5.4 The Adoption Service has not been able to keep up with the demand to quality assure the life story books as each book has needed a lot of advice, guidance and additional training for some staff. There is currently a waiting list for proof reading and therefore further delays in forwarding the books onto adoptive parents. It is planned from 1 June 2015 – Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Teams will be responsible for the quality assurance function and whether experienced social workers within these teams can take a lead on this work.

6. Adoptive Parents Attachment Group

6.1 This course continues to be highly effective and a valued course. It is based on Kim Golding and Dan Hughes work on attachment and covers brain development, the impact of early childhood experiences and trauma, PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) and parenting strategies.

6.2 The course was held in June/July 2014, and March 2015 it is a 3x3 hour day/evening training event. 22 adopters attended the training.

Feedback from adopters

How useful 1- 5 most useful

5, 5, 5, 4, 5, 5

What did you find most interesting?

Reminded me of the preparation groups training on attachment that I had forgotten, brilliant strategies to help.

PACE and consequences

Using if-then and when - then model

Will try to put it in to practice!! A lot to take in

As things went very well we adopted the children, not given enough attention to how they have developed beforehand and how their behaviour now is related to the past.

Least useful?

N/A, none, nothing found it all really useful

How will you use the training in your parenting?

PACE already helping. I have written up the phrases that I want to use and put them around the house.

Being more aware of implementing PACE during the day

Yes I will and I'm already working on it.

Try to apply PACE and regulate own temper

To have a deeper understanding of attachment issues and the way we need to change parenting skills to reflect that.

- 6.3 The Adoption Support Fund will pay for therapeutic parenting attachment training and this is a service that can be provided by adoption support social workers. To date 2 applications have been successfully approved for this training by the ASF and £2,000 has been granted to WCC.

7. Attachment Support Groups

- 7.1 The attachment support groups continue to be offered to adopters who have attended the attachment training courses. There are two attachment support groups which are run once a month and provide support to 17 adoptive parents and 22 children. The group provides an opportunity for adopters to meet without their children and discuss the presenting issues of parenting an adopted child. The main issue raised relate to their child's behaviour, aggression and violence towards them as parents (particularly the woman), attachment, issues within in school, building/maintaining a relationship with the child, parenting strategies and potential adoption support services.

- 7.2 Two social workers attend the support groups and often additional work is generated from the group members. An evaluation sheet to be sent to all participants.

8. Letterbox

- 8.1 The Letterbox Scheme continues to manage over 1300 exchanges a year and will increase in numbers due to the volume of children being placed for adoption.
- 8.2 The letterbox coordinator follows up outstanding agreements from social workers. Equally this service has built an effective relationship with the Independent Birth Parent Service Team, which has prompted birth parent to re-engage with the service and send appropriate letters.

9. Birth records counselling

- 9.1 153 enquires were made for birth records counselling, access to records and intermediary services. 44 have received birth records counselling/access to records.
- 9.2 Prior to meeting the adopted adult, files are located and summary reports are prepared. Time is provided to the adopted adult to share their adoption experience, to have an understanding of their early childhood experience and to make sense of their adoption. This can be a highly emotional meeting and is dealt with in a professional and sensitive manner.
- 9.3 Adopted adults are provided with information relating to vetoes, information / photos of identified nursing homes, how to search, after adoption services and the contact register.
- 9.4 32 referrals have been received from other local authorities or agencies requesting adoption files. As the adoption agency for Warwickshire adoptions, Warwickshire's Adoption Services have authority to determine what information is shared with the adopted person. Files are prepared alongside a summary report are then forwarded to the requesting authority
- 9.5 Warwickshire Adoption Services continue to coordinate a quarterly Birth Records Meeting with colleagues from other local authorities and agencies who undertake this work. It provides a forum to share practice and procedural issues.

9.6 Feedback from Adopted Adults

Very accommodating with trying to arrange an appointment

Service was above and beyond than I had expected

Very prompt service

Warwickshire Adoption Team were EXEMPLARY – no issues with the service received

10. Support Groups and Family Days

- 10.1 Support Groups continue to be held in Rugby, Nuneaton and Leamington and are attended by adopters and their children.
- 10.2 The annual Coombe Abbey picnic in August is well attended with other 120 people attending. In partnership with Coventry Adoption Team the annual fun day was held in November 2014 at Tile Hill Wood School. Over 250 people joined in the various activities, i.e. face painting, biscuit decorating and planting bulbs.

11. Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull joint training

- 11.1 The following training was delivered
 - Life in the classroom – limited to 10 places per authority. A commissioned piece of training provided by Adoption UK.
 - Supporting the Adoptive family – training for friends and family of prospective adopters – limited to 10 places per authority. Training provided by adoption social workers
 - PACE training- provided by adoption social worker. Limited to 10 places per authority

12. Mentoring

- 12.1 The Mentoring Scheme provides a low level telephone support service to newly matched adoptive parents. The 9 mentors are experienced adopters who have undertaken a 4 day training course, have two years post adoption experience and have the capacity to offer a “listening ear” to new adopters.
- 12.2 20 newly matched adopters have accessed the service for the past year. The frequency of the contact is determined by the mentee. Issues raised by the mentee’s relate to bonding with their child, parenting strategies, writing the first letter for the exchange, managing/accepting the changes due to becoming a parent. When the mentee feels that they no longer require the service, the mentor will contact the mentee two months later and then following a further two months. On occasions times the mentee has requested further support, finding this easier than making direct contact to the social worker.
- 12.3 The mentors receive 6 weekly supervision with an adoption practice leader and a trained counsellor/mentor trainer. The counsellor can also provide sessions to couples or individual who are experiencing personal difficulties, either within their marriage or past events which have been reignited following the placement of the child. The Adoption Service will fund four counselling sessions.

13. Adoption Support Fund

- 13.1 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was launched in May 2015. At the time of writing this report, within the first 6 weeks there has been an increase in demand for an assessment of need which has been undertaken by the Adoption Service. In response some adoption social workers have completed a range of therapeutic training courses i.e. DDP and theraplay but are not in a position to fully deliver their skills without clinical supervision.

- 13.2 The ASSA is responsible for the applications to the ASF. Time is allotted weekly to review and submit new applications.

14. Summary

- 14.1 The Adoption Service is flexible and creative in its approach to meeting the adoption support needs of the adopters and their families. The additional “proof reading” of life story books has dominated the workload of some staff, and the standard of some books highlights an ongoing need for training in this area. A related concern is the delay in forwarding the completed books to adoptive parents. The attachment training continues to enable adoptive parents to have an understanding of how a child’s formative relationships and experiences can have an impact on their later relationships and how they can bring this experience with them into the adoptive family. Parents have an opportunity to learn techniques to help them deal with some of the presenting behaviours. The feedback from adopters continues confirms the training to be of a high standard and is valued.
- 14.2 The Letterbox Scheme provides a service for over 1300 exchanges a year. The coordinator has been proactive in building relationships with social workers, the Independent Adoption Birth Parent Service, adopters and birth parents.
- 14.3 The Mentoring Scheme is welcomed by newly matched adopters. The 9 mentors have provided a “listening ear” and sign post adopters to support services. In addition, 20 hours of counselling has been provided to newly matched couples regarding their relationship and or past life events
- 14.4 Support groups and fun days are well attended. Working in partnership with other authorities has enabled a range of training events to be delivered cost effectively.
- 14.5 The Adoption Support Fund has been recently launched and already there has been an increase in demand for an assessment of need and additional workload for the adoption social workers specialising in this area. Clinical supervision needs to be put into place for those social workers have been trained in DPP and Theraplay. This would enable additional applications to be made to the Fund.

15. Action Plan for 2015-2016

1. To review the staffing of adoption service in view of the increase workload in respect of adoption support – to determine the most appropriate model for completing the adoption support assessments and for receiving the services
2. To provide training for social workers/care workers on life story books.
3. To continue to deliver the attachment training (June and October 2015).
4. To more accurately record and monitor workload arising from the support groups
5. To review the Letterbox Toolkit
6. To deliver training in (i) Non-violent resistance (ii) Social networking
7. To increase the number of adopter/mentor through recruitment activity in September/October 2015
8. To develop the range of therapeutic service available under the Adoption Support Fund through commissioning activity.

9. To deliver training to Children's' Social Care and Safeguarding Teams on the Adoption Support Fund and how services can be interlinked across teams.

Louise Hathaway
Adoption Practice Leader/ASSA
June 2015