

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	10 January 2023
Report Title:	Adoption Counts- Adoption Service Annual Report and Adoption Panel Chairs' six-monthly report
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock – Executive Director – Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** These reports outline the delivery of adoption services and outcomes for children. They relate to pledge 3 of the Corporate Parenting Strategy: 'We will work to achieve permanence and keep children safe'. The reports highlight that there have been positive outcomes and work in Cheshire East between April 2021– March 2022 for children with a plan of adoption. There are two reports:
- 1.2. The Adoption Counts Adoption Service Annual Report** – this report outlines the delivery of adoption services by the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) during the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority (LA).
- 1.3.** This report sets out the number of children made subject to:
- Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) Decisions
 - Placement Orders
 - change of plans
 - placed for adoption
 - adopted, during the period.
- The report also details the range of adoption support services provided.
- 1.4.** The report also provides detail on recruitment and marketing activity during the period as well as training delivery.

- 1.5. The Adoptions Panel Chairs' Six Monthly Report** – this report outlines the operation of the adoption panel over the period 1 October 2021 – 31 March 2022, including panel membership, panel member appraisal, annual panel training, cases considered and timescales, quality of reports and feedback from attendees.
- 1.6.** This report is written by the Independent Panel chairs and provides recommendations to improve the operation of panel and therefore outcomes for children and the experience of panel attendees.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** The Corporate Parenting Committee is recommended to:
- Note the contents of the Adoption Counts Adoption Service annual report, and the Adoption Panel Chairs' six monthly report.
 - Provide support and challenge in respect of the reports

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1.** The Corporate Parenting Committee is an advisory group to the Children and Families Committee and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers.
- 3.2.** The Corporate Parenting Committee needs to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people and care leavers.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** None, this is an update report.

5. Background

- 5.1.** Adoption Counts has responsibility to discharge Cheshire East's responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the local authority and the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels.
- 5.2.** The Adoption Service annual report highlights there have been positive outcomes for children and productive work in Cheshire East between April 2021– March 2022 for children with a plan of adoption.
- 5.3.** The performance data evidences that children have been matched, placed, and adopted in a timely manner with a number of children joining their permanent families within or under the recommended thresholds. 17 children were placed during the period with 9 children within the A2 threshold. The A2 measure is the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted. The average A2 measure for these 9 children is 89 days. This is an excellent outcome as a number of children

have been able to gain stability and permanence by joining a family who can meet their needs with minimum delay and at the earliest point possible. Research indicates that such early and decisive action is needed, as delays in the process can reduce children's chances of finding a permanent family and increase the chance of adoption breakdown.

- 5.4.** Robust systems are in place to identify the children who are likely to wait longer. We are aware from the performance data that children of black and ethnic minority heritage, large sibling groups and older children can wait longer to achieve permanence. In line with this we are focussing on recruiting black and ethnic minority adopters and providing a comprehensive training programme to prospective adopters to widen matching criteria. We also joined other regional adoption agencies in the northwest to hold a profiling event for children of black and ethnic minority heritage.
- 5.5.** The family finding progress of all children continues to be scrutinised at monthly tracking meetings with an established strategic matching process. This enables oversight of all potential matching decisions, time limited searches and decisions to ensure children who are likely to wait longer are prioritised and there is no drift.
- 5.6.** We continue to receive a high number of enquiries from prospective adopters and approved 87 families in total this year, compared with 104 last year. We consider this to be extremely positive within a national picture where there is an ongoing shortage of adopters. This has ensured we continue to have a greater pool of prospective adopters available, all of whom have been assessed as having the skills needed to meet the needs of vulnerable children requiring permanence. More children are placed in house with adopters approved by Adoption Counts. 100% of children were placed with in house adopters and are therefore placed within the Northwest with easily accessible adoption support.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.** The Adoptions Panel Chairs' six-monthly report outlines the feedback received from panel attendees on the operation of the panel. This has informed the recommendations.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1.** This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the "executive side" of the Local Authority (LA).

- 7.1.2. Legal advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1. Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that we are a council which empowers and cares about people. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy has a clear vision that our cared for children and care leavers are safe, happy, healthy and achieve their full potential.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1. Cared for children and care leavers can be a vulnerable group because of their experiences.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1. Changes to working arrangements as a result of the pandemic are outlined in the reports.

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors, including poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood; the Corporate Parenting Strategy prioritises these areas. Adoption Support services offers support to families to enable them to stay together.

7.7. Rural Communities

- 7.7.1. All communities are affected by the contents of this report and it is necessary to strategically plan the delivery of services to serve all communities.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 7.8.1. The contents of this report have implications for cared for children and care leavers, who are some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children, which are outlined fully in the reports.

7.9. Public Health

- 7.9.1. The impact of Covid-19 is well documented within this report.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. There are no climate change implications within the reports.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Adoption Counts Adoption Service Annual Report 2021-22 Adoption Panel Chairs' Six Monthly Report October 2021-March 2022
Background Papers:	None