

Cheshire East

Adoption Service – Annual Report 2018-2019

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Report

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. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2019. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point that this report is read.

2. Working with Cheshire East Council

Since going live, Adoption Counts has had responsibility to discharge Cheshire East’s responsibilities as an Adoption Agency. The working relationship between the LA and the RAA has been fundamental to the success so far of the partnership working and has been embedded at all levels.

The Director of Children’s Social Care sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Service Manager with a link to Adoption is invited to attend six weekly Operations Group meetings. These provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent managers from the other partner LAs and with the senior managers in the RAA. There is a shared ownership of the agenda and a range of issues are discussed with very positive communication and outcomes as a result. The group has identified the need for input from the RAA to ensure that staff in the LAs maintain their knowledge and benefit from updates to practice and research. There have been several learning events arranged over the past 12 months, these include:

- A master class providing information regarding SHOBPA consultation meetings / the ADM decision making process.
- A conference exploring practice developments in post adoption contact.

It has been identified that further events would be beneficial in 2019 / 2020 including workshops on “telling” exploring how to explain a child’s adoption story and early permanence.

The Operations Manager linked to Cheshire East meets bi monthly with the Service Manager linked to adoption to discuss performance over the period and any issues or themes that may be arising. This meeting is very much a two-way dialogue, with Cheshire East ensuring that the RAA is fulfilling its responsibilities as well as the RAA being able to offer feedback to the LA about any emerging themes or issues in care planning or working together.

The Service Manager linked to adoption attends the monthly Adoption Counts tracking meetings and is an active participant. The tracking meetings are an

opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Cheshire East children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that life story books and later life letters are received
- Children placed for adoption but not yet adopted to track the progress of placements and the timeliness of adoption order applications
- Children where a family has been identified to ensure that there is no avoidable delay in the shortlisting and matching process and throughout the planning of introductions and placement
- Children subject to a Placement Order where a family has not yet been identified. This cohort is rigorously discussed to ensure that the family finding strategy is being carried out effectively and is the forum for escalation of agreements regarding family finding within the RAA, other LAs or in the voluntary sector.
- Children in care proceedings where there may be a plan of adoption as their final care plan. These children are tracked closely both in the LA and the RAA to ensure that there is timely progression of the plan from Agency Decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption, through profiling and the identification of a family.
- Children under the Public Law Outline where there may be a plan of adoption should care proceedings be initiated.
- Children requiring legal revocation of placement orders and “Should be placed for adoption” rescinds.

There is no doubt that the efficacy of these meetings is improved when care planning representatives from the local authority (LA) attends as this ensures a robust joint approach.

The Operations Manager and Team Manager in the RAA linked to Cheshire East also attend the monthly tracking meetings and they, alongside the two dedicated Family Finders, regularly work in Cheshire East office bases alongside the social work teams, attend legal advice meetings and care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required. Links between Cheshire East and the RAA seem to be embedded well.

3. Performance

3.1 Children made Subject to Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions

Number of children made subject to SHOBPA decisions per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	1	3	2	3	3	6	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	6	4	2	0	0	0	30

During the period there have been four children which includes one sibling group of three where proceedings were delayed. These include:

A child where the SHOBPA decision was made on 5th September 2018. The original care plan was for a special guardianship order to a connected person, however, the connected person withdrew. Updated assessments of birth parents were requested and care plan subsequently changed to one of adoption.

A sibling group of three, SHOBPA decision was made on 12th July 2018, assessments have been completed of several extended family members including birth father, grandparents and uncle. A sibling assessment has also been completed during proceedings.

3.2 Children subject to Placement Orders

Number of children made subject to Placement Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	3	2	2	1	0	0	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	1	4	2	3	1	0	19

Out of the nineteen Placement Orders granted within the period of the last 12 months:

Five children have subsequently been placed for adoption. Two of these children were placed below the A2 threshold of 121 days.

Two of the children were placed within 6 months of Placement Order with measures of 176 days and 135 days. One of the children had been exposed to chronic parental alcohol misuse whilst in utero, the family finding strategy reflected the need to identify a family with potential to care for a child who could be on the foetal alcohol spectrum. A family was identified for the other child within timescales, it was assessed that for introductions and the move to a new family to be successful, these needed to take place outside of the summer holiday period due to the number of children in the foster placement.

One of the children was placed within 6 – 9 months, her measure was 207. Her family finding search had been complex as we were looking for a family who could care for a child with additional health needs and developmental delay.

There are fourteen children for whom a Placement Order has been granted within the last twelve months but are yet to be placed, out of these children:

There is a plan for two of the children to be adopted by their foster carers, a non-agency application has been made for one of the children and Adoption Counts are completing a prospective adopter assessment for the other.

Four of the children have been linked with prospective adopters, two are within the four month threshold and the remaining children within 6 months of Placement Order.

Family finding continues for the remaining eight children. In relation to identifying 'patterns' four of the children are sibling pairs, one child is an older child, one is of Polish ethnicity and two of the children have additional health / developmental needs.

3.3 The Numbers of Children who had a Change of Plan in the Period

There have been five children who have had a change of plan. One sibling pair aged 9 and 7 years had a change of plan to long term fostering. One sibling pair were placed with maternal grandparents on a Special Guardianship Order following a positive assessment. The remaining child was placed at home on a Care Order.

3.4 Number of Children Placed for Adoption during year.

Number of children placed for adoption per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	2	2	1	3	1	1	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	0	3	1	1	0	1	16

81% of the children placed for adoption were placed with prospective adopters approved by Adoption counts.

Two of the children placed for adoption this year were an older sibling pair, twins aged 7 years. Their Placement Order was made in March 2017, extensive family finding had taken place both in-house and nationally, the children were placed with an in-house family.

3.5 Number of children adopted

Number of children made subject to Adoption Orders per month							
Cheshire East	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	
	0	1	1	3	2	0	
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
	0	0	3	3	1	3	17

For this cohort, the average number of days for A1 is 338 days, which is well within the threshold of 426 days. The children who are outside of the threshold, are a sibling pair with a measure of 582 days. The children had complex needs as had experienced significant early years trauma, development delay alongside emotional and behavioural difficulties.

For A2, the average number of days for this cohort is 130 days which is just over the threshold of 121 days. Eleven of the children had a decision made about their match with their adoptive families within the threshold. The children outside of the threshold were:

A sibling pair with measures of 253. The children had complex needs as had experienced significant early years trauma, development delay alongside emotional and behavioural difficulties.

A child who was the younger sibling to a child who had been placed for adoption last year. The sibling already in placement was assessed as needing time to settle within her placement, prior to this child joining the family. A comprehensive plan of contact and introductions was therefore needed to ensure this transition was successful for both children. His measure was 240.

A child with a measure of 169. Prospective adopters were identified within timescales but later withdrew due to personal circumstances. Family finding therefore took longer than anticipated for this child.

A child with a measure of 156, this child had a diagnosed health condition and we were looking for a family who could accept the uncertainty in relation to this and meet his long-term health needs.

One of the children in this cohort was a relinquished baby and therefore the A2 measure does not apply.

Adoption scorecard performance

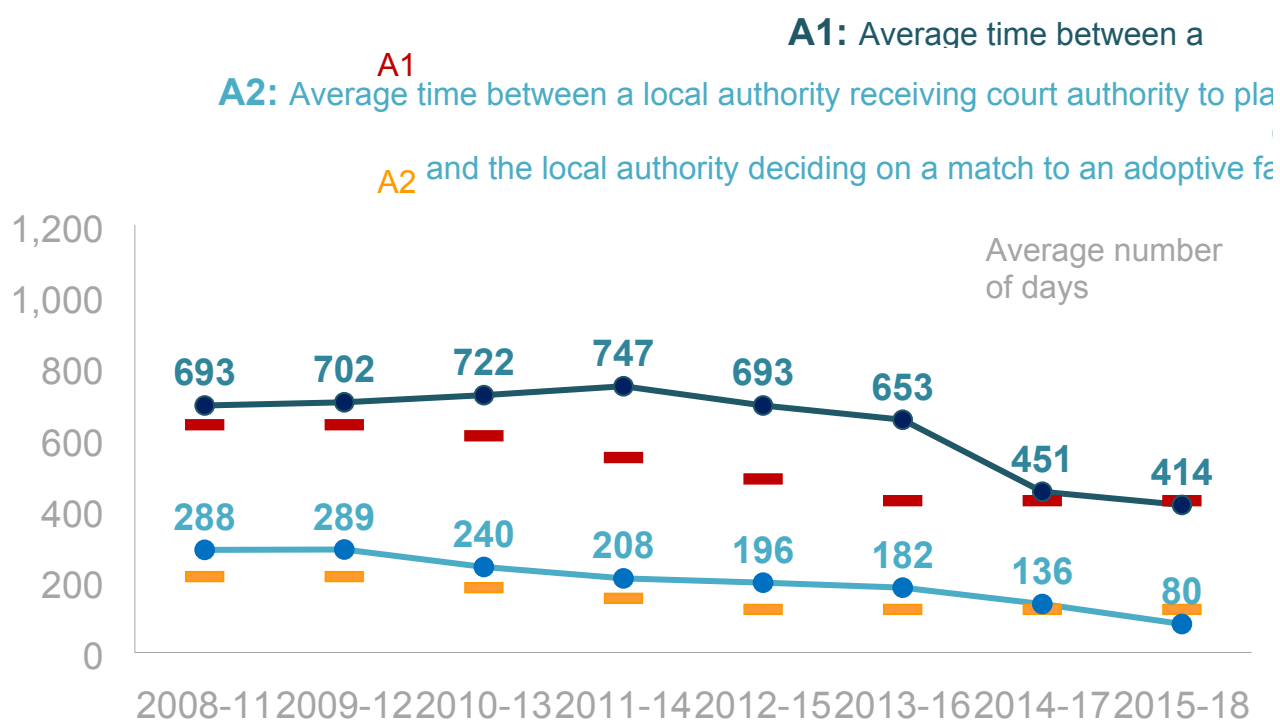
In 2014, as part of its Adoption Reform Agenda, the government introduced adoption scorecards to track local authority performance and to tackle delay in the adoption system. Scorecards are produced for a three-year rolling average with the latest data being published for the period April 2015 – March 2018. Cheshire East's performance is detailed below.

For clarity, the indicators are:

A1 – number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

The current threshold is 426 days.

A2 – the number of days between receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the agency decision about a match to an adoptive family. The current threshold is 121 days.



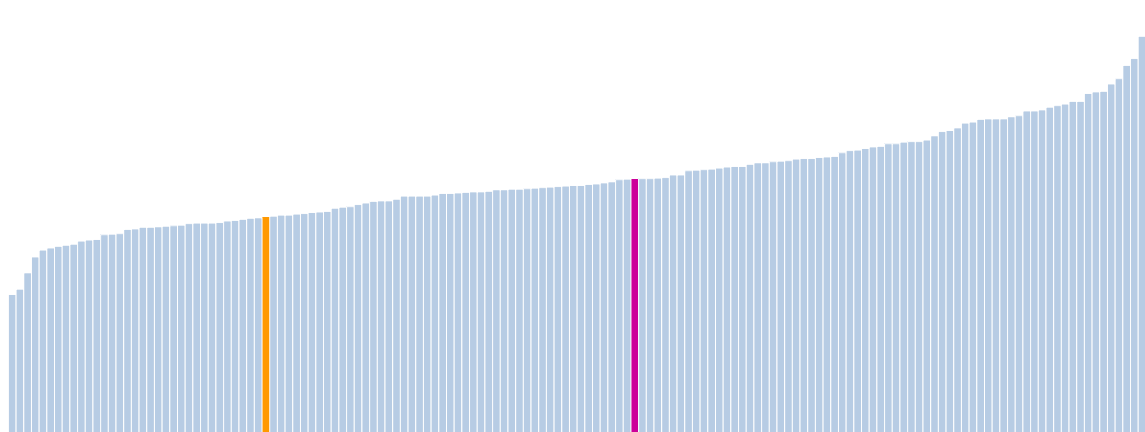
The graph above shows Cheshire East's performance for both A1 and A2 indicators.

The A1 average for the last three years is 414 with the A1 score for the past 12 months being 338.

The A2 average for the last three years is 80 with the A2 score for the past 12 months being 130. Whilst the A2 average has risen over the last 12 months, 69% of the children were placed within timescales. We have been family finding for a number of children with complex needs alongside a national picture where there are more children needing adoptive families than there are approved adopters. For the children who waited longer, robust family finding strategies were in place to ensure prospective adopters were identified with the relevant skill and knowledge base to meet the individual children's needs.

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2015-18

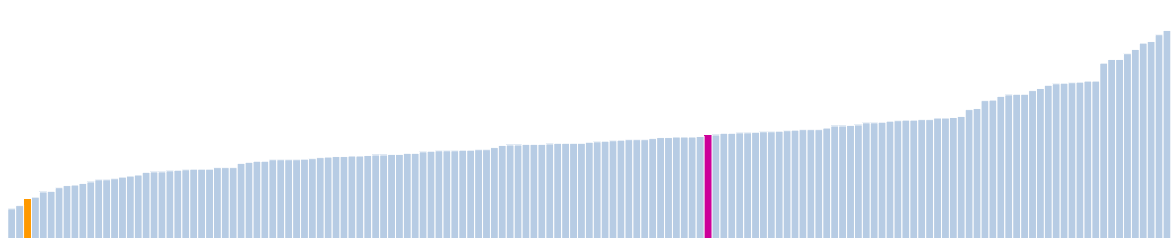
England average - 486 days



This chart shows that Cheshire East's average performance for the A1 indicator is below the England average at 486 days and is at the higher end of performance compared with other local authorities.

A2: 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, 2015-18

England average - 201 days



This chart shows that Cheshire East's average performance for the A2 indicator is well below the England average at 201 days and is again at the higher end of the performance spectrum.

3.6 Early Permanency

Two children have been placed in early permanence placements during this period. One child was placed in a concurrent planning placement on 8.8.18 through the contract with Caritas Care and Adoption Matters. This child was subsequently placed in a different adoptive family with the adopters of an older sibling.

One child was placed in a fostering for adoption family on 24.5.18 who were temporarily approved by Cheshire East's Agency Decision Maker as foster carers under regulation 25A of the Care Planning Regulations.

4. Quality of Reports

Child permanence reports have been graded at panel for approximately the last 6 months.

Of those:

Four were graded as still requiring improvement but did not delay the match.

One was graded as good.

This suggests an ongoing piece of work is required by giving advice from SHOBPA stage onwards which will support practitioners and managers to ensure all CPR's reach a standard of "good" by matching panel. Moving forward it has been agreed that audits will now also be undertaken at SHOBPA stage. The benefit of this is evidenced as the CPR that was been graded as good at panel match was graded as requiring improvement at SHOBPA stage.

Adoption Support

Adoption Support figures are provided for the last 6 months of this period and so should be read in conjunction with the Six Monthly Report for Cheshire East for a full year picture.

Adoption Support remains integral to our delivery for adopted children, new adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing their life long journey. We remain committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement and when an adoption order is made. Thereafter we recognize that new challenges may emerge requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. We have based our service delivery on a graduated approach, with our Adoption Psychology Service forming the foundation of our delivery.

5. Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support

5.1 SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Adoption Psychology Team is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for Adopted Children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts. The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry and educational psychology. The information in this report relates to the CAMHS component of the service. The service is partly co-located with Children's Social Care which enables a co-ordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint working. It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments with some choice of venue. The service sits alongside other services that support the child's home, care planning, relationships, health, education and hobbies. The i-Thrive model shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together.

i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



5.2 AP Service outcomes

1. Adopted children have good mental health
2. Adopted children have healthy relationships
3. Adopted children have stable placements

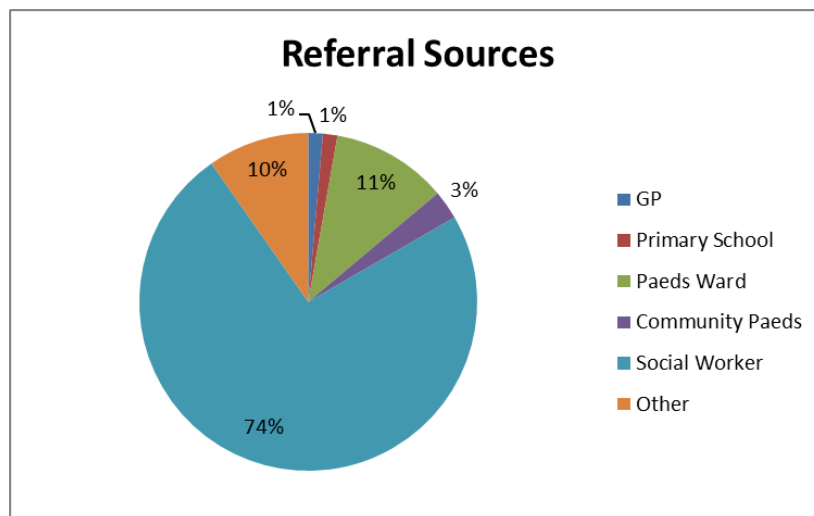
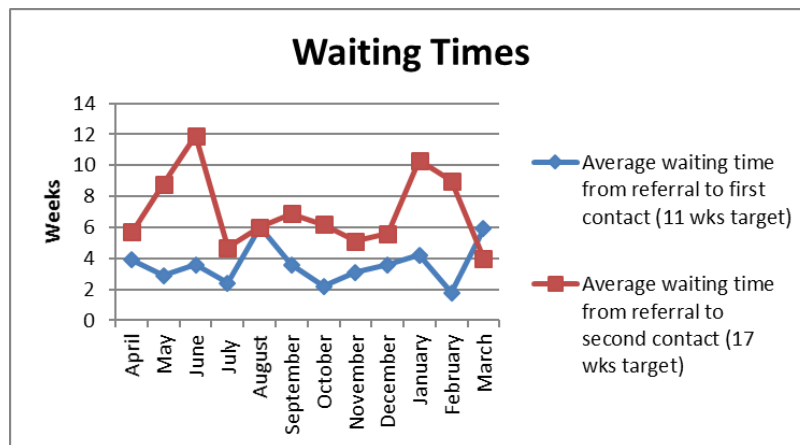
4. Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

5.3 Service Aims

- Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision-making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs.
- Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.
- Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.
- Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.
- Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.
- Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

SERVICE ACTIVITY

- **554** appointments were attended.
- Average waiting time for first appointment was **3.5** weeks (11 weeks target)
- **3%** DNA (did not attend) their first appointment and **2%** DNA their follow up appointment.
- **72** new referrals received.
- **28%** of the new referrals had assessment only
- **61** cases were discharged



GROUP WORK

The **Foundations for Attachment group** is a six-session programme to help adoptive parents to nurture attachments with their child. It is designed specifically for those caring for children whose capacity to emotionally connect has been compromised as a result of attachment problems, trauma, and loss or separation. Informed by attachment theory and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), it consists of three core modules:

- **Understanding the Challenges of Parenting**
- **Therapeutic Parenting**
- **Looking After Yourself**

Three training groups for parents to adopted children were delivered between:

- April - September 2018
- October - December 2018
- January - April 2019

Overall, **26** parents attended the groups, representing **21** families and **27** children.

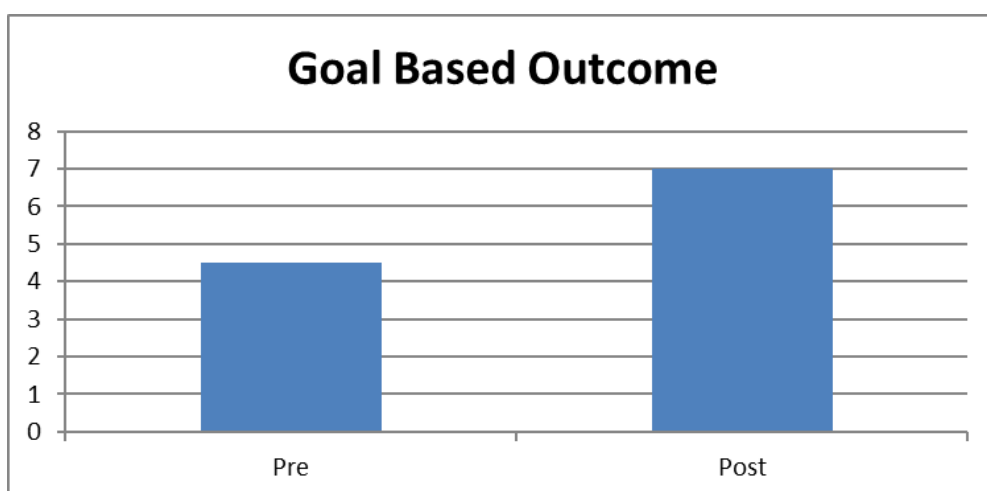
Goals

The parents were asked to identify 2 skills in relation to parenting and/or relationship building that they hope to improve on through attending this group, followed by rating their current ability to perform these skills on a scale of 1 (*not very well, not confident*) – 10 (*very well, confident*), the rating was completed at the first (pre) and last (post) session.

The goals included:

<i>"Support ways to increase attachment"</i>	<i>"Aim to manage escalating chaos"</i>
<i>'Support his emotional regulation'</i>	<i>'Setting foundations for future and manage own expectations'</i>
<i>'Putting into practice therapeutic ideas'</i>	<i>Develop Strategies/ go to phrases to manage shame '</i>
<i>"Support/learn to identify and understand behaviours"</i>	<i>"Support emotional development"</i>
<i>'Help K identify his feelings and manage shame/ anxiety'</i>	<i>'Support and ideas to help with anger/emotions. Understanding about attachment and anxiety"</i>
<i>"Understanding ways to build attachment"</i>	<i>"Managing jealousy and controlling behaviours'</i>

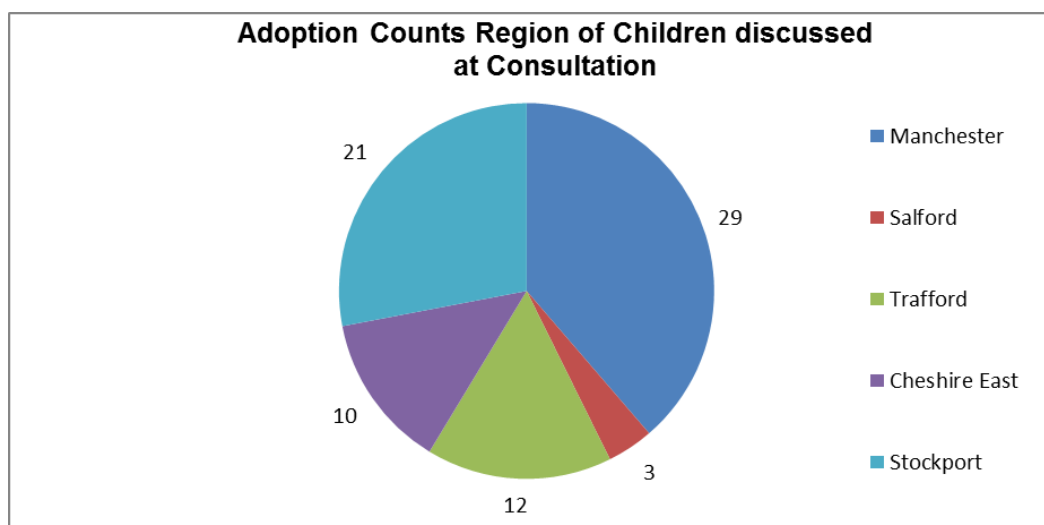
The result indicated that all the parents rated their performance skills higher at the end of the intervention, demonstrating that they felt that they were performing better/feeling more confident at the end of the group intervention (average score for pre = 4.5, post = 7).



CONSULTATIONS

The Adoption Psychology Team offer fortnightly Consultation Clinic for Adoption Counts Social Workers. From April 1st 2018 - March 31st 2019, Adoption Psychology Service delivered 81 consultation sessions, meeting with 106 consultees, which covered 100 children.

- Number of consultations: **81**
- Number of children discussed at consultation: **100**
- Number of consultees: **106** (these include children's social workers, adoption support social workers, family finders and assessing social workers)



5.4 The **Multi Agency Resource Panel**, continues to consider complex cases that require Adoption Support Fund (ASF) match funding from the Local Authority. This has enabled more consistent and transparent decision making across the region. The panel consists of representative from CAMHS, Virtual Schools, Social Care and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) which enables professional challenge and support to make the best use of resources in our agency. In the last six months;

Authority	Decision
Manchester	2 recommended (with amendments)
Stockport	1 recommended
Trafford	3 recommended

5.5 Adoption Support Fund Applications

We have continued to access the ASF to provide additional therapy for adoptive families using the Adoption Counts portal, this has enabled families to receive specialist support that we would not have been able to provide in house or access from other universal services.

There has been 271 applications to the ASF in this year. For Cheshire East there have been 36 applications for a total of £ 98,095.47 in the latter half of the year.

Local Authority	Number of Applications	ASF
	October 2018 – March 2019	
Stockport	22	£51,071.03
Manchester	27	£75,599.77
Trafford	22	£57,457.11
Salford	8	£30,016.20
Cheshire East	36	£98,095.47

5.6 Referrals / Enquiries for Adoption Support

We are currently working with **462** open cases (excluding Letterbox) We have a further 272 cases awaiting allocation, **199** children for Adoption Support, **73** adults for Access to records. All of these cases have received initial advice and guidance and a surgery appointment where required.

During the period 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019 we received 797 new referrals into the Adoption Support Service. In the last 6 months of this year, the number of requests are identified below:

(Please note; This does not include the Letterbox service, which is recorded separately.)

Local Authority	Adopted Adult	Adoptive Family	Birth Family	Advice & Signposting	
STOCKPORT	9	27	0	5	41
MANCHESTER	30	27	1	18	76
SALFORD	6	22	2	4	34
CHESHIRE EAST	21	30	1	13	65
TRAFFORD	12	11	0	2	25
UNDEFINED	0	14	4	15	33
OTHER LA	0	7	0	14	21
	78	138	8	71	295

In January 2019 we introduced an Adoption Support Duty Team (First response), comprising of administrative support and 2 dedicated Adoption Support social workers, with the addition of a part time team manager for a fixed term to develop and implement the new system.

The first response model has been developed, to encourage better screening of calls and redirecting to universal services where appropriate. If a call is clearly adoption

specific then advice, support and counselling can be offered via telephone and may be all that is required.

If it becomes clear from discussion that there is a need to gather more detailed information then the family will be invited into a surgery appointment to conduct an initial assessment.

This assessment will then indicate if a full assessment of need is required.

The early figures indicate an increase in the number of referrals receiving advice and signposting.

Since January 2019 100% of adoptive families requiring an initial assessment have been offered a surgery appointment within a 4-6 week timeframe.

5.7 Letterbox Service

The FSW letterbox workers continue to be supervised by the same senior practitioner as a discrete team of workers within Adoption Support. This allows Adoption Counts to support birth families and adopters to provide the best they can for the child to promote their identity.

We are currently facilitating over 1,000 letterbox agreements which means over 2,000 exchanges in a year. We have additional administrative support to facilitate this more smoothly, and to ensure the confidential information is handled sensitively

Manchester	Salford	Stockport	Cheshire East	Trafford
305	229	227	172	111

The team continue to meet every 6 weeks to moderate practice and have linked with After Adoption, who provided the independent counselling to birth parents in relation to their child being placed for adoption.

The Family Support Workers role will be considered within the wider pressures of allocations in adoption support. This means we will look at FSWs undertaking short pieces of work to assist families with adoption related issues, reducing the pressures of SW allocations.

5.8 Group work

Adoption Counts continues to recognise the importance of supporting adopters through the use of group work, to enable families to access professional guidance whilst building support networks with other adopters. We have continued to hold coffee drop-ins for informal support.

We have continued to deliver open access topic based workshops, to enable adopters to access monthly support with clear advice and guidance to enable them in their therapeutic parenting role. The workshops delivered have been -

- Looking after Yourself (a guide to mental well-being)
- Contact through letterbox
- Brain Development – impact of early trauma.

The feedback is very positive and there is representation from each LA area.

We have also held successful **Family Fun days** - Arts, dance and drumming activities at Zed Arts, Manchester and The Easter Egg Hunt in Cheshire East. These are always well attended and appreciated by families as an opportunity to meet families in the same situation, who offer understanding and acceptance. This is also a really valuable way of families meeting staff in a relaxed and engaging environment.

We have also continued to support 27 families to attend the Child on Parent Violence / Non Violent Resistance programme commissioned through PAC-UK.

6. Recruitment of Adopters

6.1 Approvals

There have been 85 families approved as adopters during this period, which was less than the targeted figure, but an increase to the number approved the previous year (48). Strategies have been discussed as to how this number can be increased further during 2019/20 and figures look to have improved by a further 80%. At the end of the period (31st March 2019) there were 31 families in Stage One, 6 in between Stage One and Stage Two, and 37 in Stage Two. This is just over double the amount of families who were in the process at the same time in 2018.

6.2 Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

No referrals were made to the IRM during this period.

6.3 Partner/step-parent adoption enquiries

Our Recruitment Team received 102 partner/step-parent adoption enquiries during 2018/19. This number is the total from across all five of our local authorities.

Forty-three enquiries resulted in an office meeting taking place with a social worker, for information gathering and advice.

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	12	27.5%
Manchester	8	19%
Salford	8	19%
Stockport	12	27.5%
Trafford	3	7%
Total	43	100%

Seventeen applications were received during this period;

LA	Number	Percentage
Cheshire East	4	23.5%
Manchester	3	18%
Salford	5	29%
Stockport	4	23.5%
Trafford	1	6%
Total	17	100%

7. Compliments, comments and complaints

Two complaints have been received in the second half of this year (with earlier complaints reported in the last 6 month report)

- From a couple who had relinquished a child and felt concerned about the service they received across Children's services and Adoption counts. The head of service is working with them in an ongoing capacity to embed lessons learnt into practise across the teams. Complaint was upheld.
- In relation to support given to one partner in relation to contact – not upheld.

Several compliments have been received by the Agency about staff in Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finders and Adoption Support. They are collated by Stockport CSS as our host agency.

8. Disruptions

There have been no disruptions within this period.

9 Developments in Adoption Counts

Recruitment and Assessment

Development days for Recruitment & Assessment workers have taken place on a bi-monthly basis in the latter part of this year. They have been very useful in embedding relationships, improving practice and ensuring consistency across the service as well as providing an opportunity for training including input from our Adoption Psychology Service around Theraplay and how we might help use the principles to better prepare our adopters and help them to start parenting from the beginning in a therapeutic way which will encourage attachments to form.

Training for our adopters has been expanded and further strengthened with a review of preparation materials and the introduction of sessions for family, friends and support network members which monthly. Sessions on fostering for adoption are also running each month with the expectation that all of our families who are considering a child under the age of 2 will attend so that they can make an informed decision regarding this child centred but challenging route. We have also run the first of our quarterly sessions on Taking Siblings, which had over twenty people attend and explore the benefits as well as the challenges of taking more than one child into their family. In addition, a rolling 6 month programme of top up training has been introduced covering;

- Talking to your child about adoption,
- Contact after adoption
- Linking and matching
- Attachment, play and parenting styles
- Medical issues in adoption
- Parenting children who have experienced trauma

Family finding

Family finding development days also continue to be beneficial in addressing and standardising practice issues which arise. Staff have had further input on developing excellence in writing child permanence reports, so that their mentoring role with fieldwork staff is enhanced. Adoption Counts has successfully trialled bespoke, targeted family finding for individual children on a small scale and hope to widen this development as we move through 2019/20.

Strategic Matching Meetings have brought some management oversight to priority children for matching with available adopters – to ensure we are maximising our resources and that all of the children across the region have the same equality of access to our families. For any adopters approved for two children, authorisation from the Head of the RAA is required before they can be considered for a single child.

Adoption panels

Information about panel will be covered in full in the Chairs reports. Panel business has increased significantly however with both increasing approvals and matches this year. We have increased the number of items a panel will hear from 5 items to 6 as a short term measure but we may need to consider increasing capacity in order to avoid any delay should this level of business continue.

Research

The service is driving forward findings of research published by the University of East Anglia in relation to both Contact after adoption and Transitions and introductions to an adoptive placement. In relation to contact, we are working with fieldwork services around what has often become a risk averse and formulaic approach, and working with our own staff to ensure our adopters are more open to innovative means by which to help children with identity, particularly where separated siblings are concerned.

We have delivered at two national conferences hosted by CoramBaaf such is the level of interest in our creative approach. Staff in (LA) had the opportunity to attend a conference hosted by Stockport to hear about the research directly and we hope that our other LA partners will be offering this conference later in the year.

Marketing and Recruitment

We are formulating a comprehensive strategy for 2019 - 2020 based on our learning about what has worked over this period. The majority of enquiries come with Google stated as their source and so we are investing in professional support for our Google Ad-words campaign to maximise and adjust the targets on a weekly basis. The series of campaigns throughout the year will be focusing on targeted recruitment for sibling groups, children from BME backgrounds, and children with complex needs as these are the groups most frequently being placed with other agencies and at a distance from our geographical area.

10 Partnership Working

Adoption Counts has a partnership with Caritas Care regarding the concurrency project and have made 7 placements this year.

The delivery of the independent support to birth parents ended with the administration of After Adoption. Negotiations are underway with an alternative provider who should be able to pick the contract up from 1st July.

Representatives from partner agencies Adoption matters and Caritas Care continue to sit on the management board. Adoption Counts continues to work closely with those agencies as development partner for their “Flag” DFE funded initiative.

11 How do we involve adopters in matching, linking and subsequent planning?

The matching process within the Adoption Counts Family Finding policy requires full information about the child to be shared with adopters after short listing has taken place. Adopters will meet the key professionals for the child as well as their foster carer and have the option of meeting the placing agency’s medical advisor. Life Appreciation Days are held wherever possible to promote best practice in sharing the

full history of the child with adoptive parents. There is also sometimes an opportunity to meet the child through 'Bump into Meetings.'

Adopter led family finding is undertaken via Link Maker and through our Adoption Picnics which provide an opportunity for adopters to meet our children in a relaxed environment. The service held the first of these days in November, which successfully resulted in a number of matches for some of our children who wait longer. A second day is due to take place early in the new financial year with an event each quarter planned moving forwards.

12 How do we involve adopters in the development of the agency?

We are working closely with Adoption UK who run our adopter voice programme, ensuring that adopters are consulted about services and developments.

For example - the updated preparation programme, which follows the journey of the child, has been shared recently with our Adoption Champions, via our adopter advisory board. The Board are a valuable resource to us in developing and improving our services and we are grateful for their time and sharing of experiences. Learning from any complaints from adopters is embedded into practise, as part of a commitment to continuous development.

We also undertook a large adopter survey this year and are analysing responses to assist us across all areas of the service. Many comments related to adoption support but family finding and preparation were also addressed.

13 How do we involve staff in the development of the agency?

Staff have regular team meetings, development days, training events and bi annual whole service days - all of which allow for an inclusive and restorative approach to staff engagement. Staff have opportunities to engage in a variety of task and finish groups – looking at areas of practise such as contact, transitions, and adopter training. Staff report that they feel fully engaged within the agency.

14 Accountability

The Regional Manager reports on a regular basis to Adoption Counts Management Board, attended by directors of children's services from the 5 local authorities, or their deputies, voluntary sector representatives and 2 adoptive parents. The board has strategic responsibility for overseeing the work of the agency in relation to the following key areas.

- Sufficiency of adopters
- Timeliness for children
- Adoption support
- Management oversight of quality and performance
- Partnership working

- Use of resources
- Professional development

An independent audit was undertaken by Stockport in September 2018 – the findings of which involved only 1 recommendation and confirming that management and accountability systems and processes were robust. The recommendation related to performance data – which was going to the Head of service without robust quality assurance for accuracy. This is now being addressed.

15 Summary

2018 / 2019 has been a good year for adoption outcomes and work in Cheshire East. The performance data evidences that children with a plan of adoption have been matched / placed / adopted in a timely manner, with a number of children joining their permanent families within / under the recommended thresholds. This is an excellent outcome as it maximises the opportunity for children, many of whom have experienced early years trauma, 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. Approvals of adopters have doubled over the past year, this again is an excellent outcome as a greater pool of prospective adopters is available, all of whom have been assessed as having the skills needed to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

Our identified priorities for 2019 / 2020 are as follows:

- To improve the quality of Child Permanence reports, our goal would be for all CPR's to be graded as good by the point of matching panel. As part of this aim we are in the process of developing a CPR template which can be a point of reference for our colleagues to use / refer to when compiling a CPR.
- We would like to increase the use of early permanence placements. As part of this strategy we have begun to provide mandatory fostering for adoption training for all prospective adopters considering a child under the age of 2.
- To further increase adopter sufficiency.
- There is a high level of demand for adoption support services within Cheshire East, further consideration will be given re: the ways we can support our families with adoption related issues.

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Role	Operations Manager (linking to Cheshire East)
Date	2.7.19