

6 MONTHLY REPORT ON ADOPTION AGENCY ACTIVITY
1st April 2015 to 30th September, 2015

Children with a plan for adoption

10 children were presented to the agency decision maker (ADM) for a decision that adoption should be their care plan, 7 were male and 3 female. Their ages ranged from 14 days to 3 years 7 months.

10 children were matched with prospective adopters and 9 of these have been placed; the remaining child has been matched to her current carers but we do not yet have permission to place her for adoption. The children's ages at placement for adoption ranged from 3 months 7 days to 11 years 8 months, though one baby was placed with her prospective adopters under a fostering to adopt placement when she was one day old. 6 were female and 4 were male.

6 children were made subject to Placement Orders and the parents of 2 children gave consent to their child being placed for adoption.

10 children were matched with prospective adopters:

- 7 children were matched with adopters approved by Herefordshire.
- 1 child was matched with her kinship
- 3 were matched with their foster carers.
- 6 children were female, 4 were male and all were White British
- 2 children were relinquished for adoption by their birth mothers.

Children with a plan for adoption – not yet matched (As at 30th September, 2015)

13 children with a plan for adoption have not yet been formally matched with adoptive families, this includes two sibling pairs. 5 have matches booked into panel. 6 had a plan for adoption decided within 6 months of coming into care.

Their ages range from 5 months to 6 years 5 months and all are White British.

5 are female and 8 are male.

8 children have been in care for more than 12 months.

Causes of delay:

- One child came into care when 3 days old and his plan for adoption was changed as a family member was identified, but this did not progress and the plan has now reverted to adoption. Further assessments of his developmental progress were required and his foster carers are now being assessed to adopt him.
- Two siblings were previously placed together for adoption, but the placement disrupted within 5 months and prior to an adoption application being made. The children have been receiving therapeutic support and have been referred to a specific project seeking placements for children who might otherwise not be found adoptive placements.

- Assessments are ongoing to assess whether one child might be placed with the adopters of a full sibling.
- We do not yet have permission to place two of these children therefore active family finding outside our own resources cannot progress.

Adoption Orders

12 children left the care system through adoption orders being granted.

16 children are placed for adoption but adoption orders have not yet been granted.

Change of care plan from adoption

2 children had their care plan changed from adoption as placement orders were not granted by the court. In one case the Judge did not want to sever the relationship the child (aged 1 year 5 months at ADM decision for adoption) had with his siblings and parents. It is likely that this child will remain in foster care. Kinship carers were assessed as able to meet the needs of the other child (aged 2 years 1 month at ADM decision for adoption) and they intend seeking a Special Guardianship order in the future.

Currently there are 11 looked after children subject to placement orders whose care plans were changed from adoption some years ago. All are in the process of revocation, but delayed by the court system.

Adoption disruption

No adoptive placements disrupted during this period.

Recruitment of prospective adopters

Adoption enquiries

20 initial enquiries were received from people interested in adopting, which included 2 sets of foster/kinship carers wishing to adopt children in their care and 2 families who had previously adopted through Herefordshire.

7 enquirers did not respond to a follow up approach.

12 initial visits were undertaken.

Adoptive applicants

It is intended that stage 1 (which includes statutory checks, references and medicals and information gathering by the prospective adopters) is completed within 2 months.

Stage 2 involves further training and the preparation of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) which should be presented to the adoption panel within 4 months.

Prospective adopters may choose to take a break between the two stages or may be advised to do so by the agency.

Registrations of interest were accepted from 4 prospective families for stage 1. 2 of these were not completed within the two month timescale due to prospective adopters not completing their self-assessments and further medical information being required.

7 stage 2 assessments were started.

6 prospective adoptive families are currently in stage 2 undergoing assessment.

8 adoptive households were approved in this period and 3 of these have been matched with children.

Adopters Matched

6 Herefordshire adoptive couples were matched with 7 Herefordshire children. No Herefordshire adopters were matched with children from other authorities.

Adoption orders have been granted to 11 Herefordshire adoptive households in respect of 8 Herefordshire children and 3 children from other local authorities. 10 were joint applications and 1 single.

Non agency adoptions

5 assessments and court reports were completed for adoption applications made by step parents directly to the court.

Comparison of activity	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16 6 mths
Children presented to ADM for plan of adoption	23	28	22	11*
Children matched with adoptive families	14	22	26	10
Adopters approved	17	19	16	8

Celebrations and challenges

Adoption support fund (ASF)

The fund went live on May 1st 2015 and will be entirely funded by the Department for Education for the first year; thereafter it will be jointly funded by local authorities and government. The purpose is to extend access to specialist therapeutic support for adoptive families.

The fund is available to children adopted from care in England, or from Wales but now living in England. The ASF will not fund services that local authorities are required to provide under statutory regulation.

We made our first application on May 1st and have successfully secured funding for seven families in this period, amounting to approximately £46,500.

The national picture

The number of looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March, which rose from 2011 to 2014, has decreased by 15% in 2015. This is consistent with the decrease in the number of looked after children with a placement order in place at 31 March which has dropped by 24% from 2014. The national Adoption Leadership Board has linked decreases in placement orders to the impact of two relevant court judgments, known as Re B and Re B-S. 24% of reversals of the decision to place a child for adoption were due to courts not granting placement orders, a rise of 8% from 2013/14.

The use of special guardianship orders to secure permanence for children under a year old increased by 64% from 2013 to 2014. The appropriateness of their use is now being considered under a Government consultation as a result of concerns that the original intention of SGOs was to secure established relationships for older children and about the rigour of assessments and support provided to special guardians when compared to that for adopters and foster carers whose children have similar needs.

Nationally the time taken to place children for adoption has improved with 36% placed within a year of entering the care system.

5,330 looked after children were adopted during the year ending 31 March 2015. Whilst numbers continue to increase, the rate of increase in 2015 is lower than in previous years: there was an increase of 5% between 2014 and 2015, compared with an increase of 26% between 2013 and 2014.

Of all looked after children adopted in 2015 the majority (76%) were aged between 1 and 4 years. The average age at adoption was 3 years and 3 months, two months younger than in 2014 and seven months younger than in 2011.

Nationally the number of people approved to adopt has increased and there are now more adopters than children waiting to be matched. The timeliness of approvals for prospective adopters has declined from 50% to 28% being approved within 6 months. Timeliness of matches with children for approved adopters has declined from 80% to 58% within 6 months of approval.

Sources: ALB headline data Q4 2014/15. Department for Education statistics for looked after children, 1st October 2015.

Regionalising adoption

In June 2015 the government outlined their intention that all local authorities would become part of regional adoption agencies by the end of this parliament. They believe that this will speed up matching and hence improve the life chances of children; improve adopter recruitment and adoption support; and reduce costs.

Adoption agencies were encouraged to come up with new delivery models to cover all adopter recruitment, matching and support functions and they anticipated models that could deal with around 200 children per year.

Expressions of interest from regions were to be submitted by early September to attract monies to cover project planning and 14 have been successful in the first round.

Herefordshire and Worcestershire have jointly agreed to continue to build on their established partnership arrangements but are aware that more ambitious plans will be required to meet the government's expectations.

Lifestory project

The project set up under the auspices of Early Years and Family Support to clear the backlog of outstanding lifestory books for children placed for adoption has now concluded. There has been positive feedback from adoptive parents on the quality of work produced.

The responsibility for the timely production of lifestory books will now rest with the social work teams.

Reorganisation of social work teams

Planning for adoption and managing the court process, choice of adoptive family and support post placement has been undertaken by the LAC court hub in this period. From October 2015 this work will initially be undertaken in the child in need teams and then transferred to the LAC team when a placement order is granted. Training and familiarisation with the adoption process will be required.

**Hilary Hale adoption service manager
October 2015**