

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny

Date: 19th March 2019

Report of: Glynis Williams Acting Director of Safeguarding
Report Title

Trafford's Adoption Performance and the role of Adoption Counts, the Regional Adoption Agency for Trafford

Summary

The purpose of the report is to provide assurance for the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee regarding the performance within Trafford with regard to Adoption.

The report outlines the role of Adoption Counts, the regional adoption agency that hosts our arrangements for managing adoption work.

The adoption performance for Trafford is good, whilst numbers being adopted are low; we have timely and good outcomes for those children adopted within Trafford with good support plans in place.

An area for focus within Adoption Counts is to continue growth of Adopters and the offer of adoption support.

An area of focus for Trafford Children's Social Care is to continue ensuring we increase our children with legal permanency through adoption.

Recommendation(s)

To accept the content of the report.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Adoption Counts, Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)

1. Background

In May 2015, the Government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services by proposing that all adoption services would need to be delivered on a regional basis by 2020. The premise for this was to:

- Increase the number of children adopted
- Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted
- Improve post adoption support services to families who have adopted
- Reduce the number of adoption agencies thereby improving efficiency effectiveness

Stockport led the development of the regional adoption agency comprising of five LAs: Stockport; Salford; Trafford; Manchester and Cheshire East. The Department for Education made it clear that they wished to see Voluntary Adoption Agencies as integral partners in the regional agencies. Adoption Matters and Caritas Care were invited to join our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

The Transition Plan set out how the five partner local authorities would work together with the two Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA's) to set up the new RAA by April 2017. The objectives of the new Regional Adoption Agency were and are:

- a. To provide children with the right adopters at the right time, approving those equipped to meet the needs of children waiting.
- b. To minimise changes of plan away from adoption
- c. To reduce delay and improve timescales for matching and placement for all children –working with care planning processes in each Council to improve early identification / twin track planning and to achieve best practise and consistency across the region.
- d. To improve earlier permanency planning using:
 - i. Concurrent Planning
 - ii. Fostering for Adoption
- e. To take innovative approaches to placing 'hard to place' children
 - i. linking children with adopters from enquiry stage onwards where appropriate
 - ii. thoroughly preparing child and family for placement
- f. To reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown through timely and improved matching, preparation and adoption support.

In the longer term, it is anticipated that the new agency might:

- Support all permanence options for children including Special Guardianship Orders.
- Reduce the number of parents who have successive children placed for adoption

Adoption Counts became one of five demonstrator projects i.e. a project seen as having the most likely chance of success and early delivery and we have very much been at the forefront of national developments over the last 3 years.

The hub went live in June 2017 providing:

- A centralised marketing function
- A centralised team to receive recruitment enquiries

- A central register of children and carers
- A strategic plan for the delivery of Adoption Support across the region

Three 'spoke' offices covering the North, Centre and South of the region were then set up, delivering:

- Adopter preparation and approval
- Early identification of the children being looked after by each local authority and likely to require adoption.
- The capacity and skills to place children and support adopters
- Adoption Support services

Staff moved into the new spokes and newly configured teams in October 2017, working in 3 specialisms, recruitment, family finding and adoption support. Staff are seconded to Stockport who as host provides back office support services under an Service Level Agreement.

Adoption Counts has been a fully functioning regional agency since that point in time, providing all the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, family finding and adoption support to Trafford as well as the other four partner LAs. Clearly the LAs who are partners in the RAA are of differing sizes and populations which impacts on their numbers of children. Each LA has a named team manager who links to them and a named Operations Manager who links to a number of LAs in the partnership. Staff are allocated within the teams taking into account the numbers of children in the cohorts. This has recently been reviewed as the picture is ever changing to ensure fairness and parity. Following a period of major transition, the service is now well established, well-staffed and highly motivated to deliver high quality service provision.

2. Working with Trafford

Since going live, Adoption Counts has had responsibility to discharge Trafford'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 Acting Director - Safeguarding for Trafford sits as a member of the Adoption Counts Board. The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption attends the six weekly Operations Group meetings which provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared with equivalent manager 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. A multi-topic adoption summit approach will be used to provide a broad span of information. A date will be fixed in Trafford in the next few months.

The Head of the RAA and the Operations Manager linked to Trafford meet twice a year with the Strategic Lead for Children in Care, the Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption and the Team Leader for 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 Trafford 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 Trafford Team Leader for adoption attends the monthly Adoption Counts tracking and is an active participant. The tracking meetings are an opportunity for scrutiny and performance management following the whole cohort of Trafford children where there is or may be a plan of adoption including:

- Children now adopted to ensure that lifestory 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 through into 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.

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

The team manager in the RAA linked to Trafford also attends the LA Permanence Tracking meeting and she, and the two dedicated Family Finders, regular work in Trafford office bases alongside the Fostering and Adoption Team, attend legal gateway meetings and final care planning meetings to provide advice and a view where required. Links between Trafford and the RAA seem to be embedded well.

3. Performance

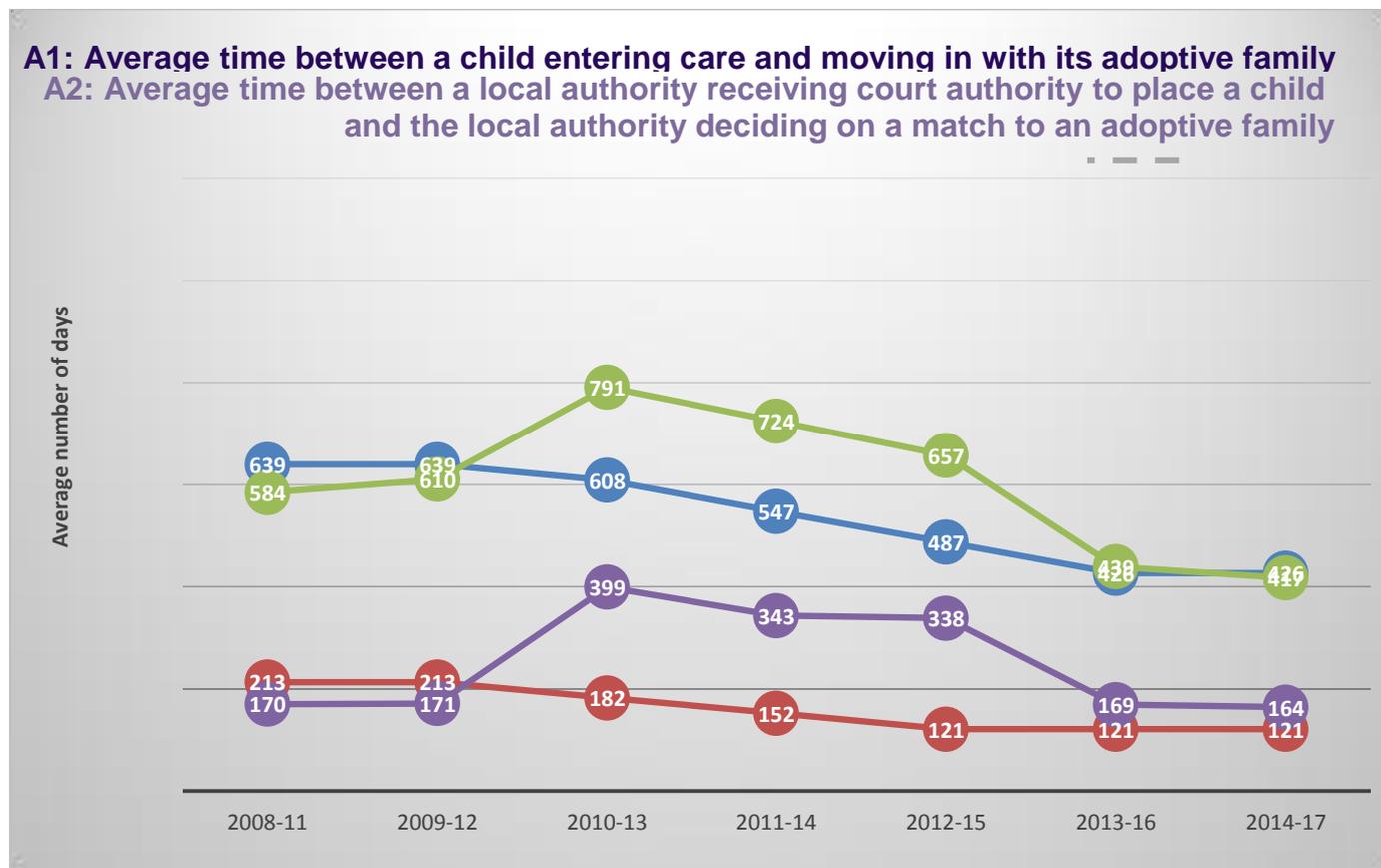
Adoption Scorecard Performance

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 in May 2018 for the period April 2014-March 2017. Trafford's performance is detailed below. Data for April 2015-March 2018 is expected to be published in Spring 2019.

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.

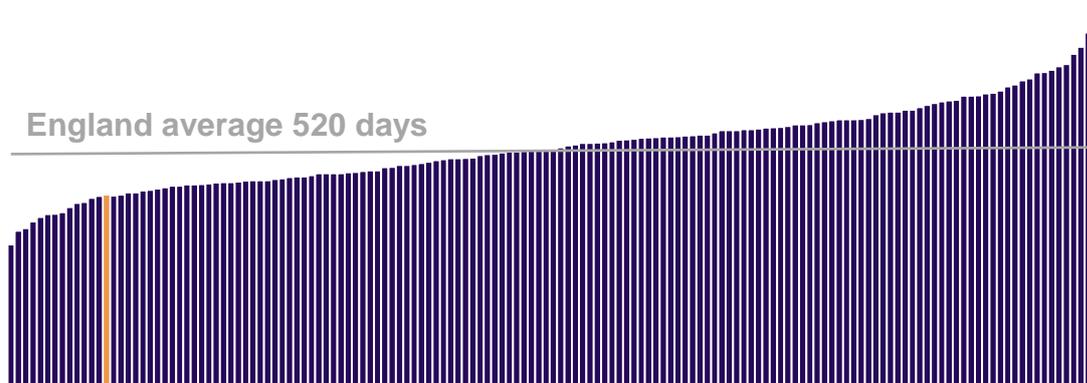
A2 – the number of days between receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and the Agency decision about a match to an adoptive family. The current threshold is 121 days.



This graph shows Trafford's performance for both A1 (in grey) and A2 (in yellow) indicators in days with the reducing thresholds also shown in blue and red.

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2014-17

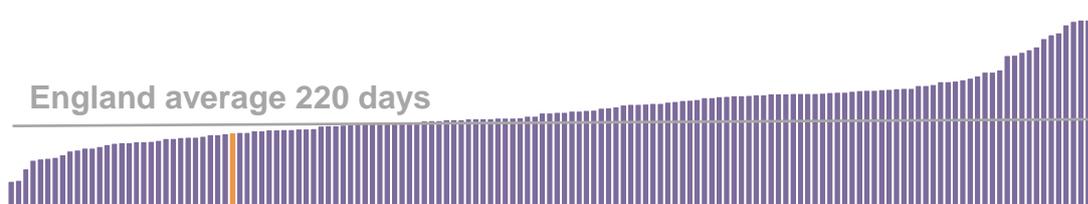
England average 520 days



This chart shows that Trafford's average performance for the A1 indicator is within the threshold and is at the higher end of performance compared with all 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, 2014-17

England average 220 days



This chart shows that, whilst Trafford's performance for the A2 indicator is above the threshold of 121 days at 164 days, it is still performing well in the context of other local authorities, being well below the England average of 220 days and again at the higher end of the performance spectrum.

2018/19 performance to date

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total to date
ADM decisions	3	4	8	15
Placement Orders granted	1	4	1	6
Matched with prospective adopters	3	4	0	7
Placed with prospective adopters	2	2	3	7
Adoption orders granted	2	1	1	4

Adoption Scorecard Performance Narrative for Q1-3 2018-19

Four Trafford children were made subject to Adoption Orders during this period.

Number of children made subject to adoption orders										
	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Trafford	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	4

Despite some delays for some children, it is important to recognise that excellent outcomes for these children have been achieved, and the authority has been ambitious in their planning.

4. Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters within Adoption Counts

There have been 69 families approved to date in 2018/19 within Adoption Counts with a further 22 planned to be at Panel for approval before the end of this financial year, which will take our total to 91 families approved in the year. This is an improvement of almost 100% on the previous year.

We were however predicting over 100 families to be approved and so are undertaking a piece of work to look at what has impacted i.e. where people have left or slowed down in the system. It seems to be a combination of some withdrawals and largely delay in stage 1 and 2 timescales. If this delay is in any way agency rather than adopter led the service needs to understand the causes and take preventive action in future.

Nationally the picture continues to show that the numbers of placement orders are surpassing adopter approvals although the picture is improving with the gap having narrowed slightly.

We currently have 32 families in Stage 1, 5 in between Stage 1 and 2 and 35 in Stage 2, which is a promising start for next year when we have an ambitious target of 120 families approved.

Specialist Training:

Now that the service is embedded, we are moving forward with a number of new developments to strengthen the basic preparation training for adoptive families including early permanence, taking siblings, lifestory work, attachment and play, the impact of in-utero experiences and medical issues and parenting children who have experienced trauma. Training for the family and friends of our families is now under way and the first groups for support network members have taken place with very positive feedback.

5. Family Finding developments

We held our first internal Activity Day in November, with successful outcomes. We are likely to place 6 children, including a sibling group of 3, all of whom had been waiting a significant length of time since Placement Order including one Trafford child. Unfortunately, the other local Regional Adoption Agencies were not able to send any adopters and we had only 4 families attend from voluntary agencies in the region. We will be running a further four Activity Days in 2019 and inviting a wider range of agencies to send their approved and stage 2 adopters.

Another key development has been a trial of bespoke family finding, involving two children, where we have used social media to profile both children to groups /forums containing people who are more likely to have an interest in adopting children with complex health needs. Agreement was given by the local authority to use information about these children and photographs in this targeted way. We anticipate using this approach for two Trafford children in the near future.

6. Adoption Support

The demand for adoption support remains very high with a current waiting list of 248 across the RAA. For Trafford there are 24 families awaiting a service. 80 Trafford families are receiving an adoption support service.

We are exploring a number of strategies to address this and have implemented a new duty/triage system.

The new Adoption Support First Response Team (Duty for short) went live on 15th January 2019. This means that all enquiries for Adoption Support will be screened and responded to by the team, to ensure a timely, consistent and reliable response. Families in need will then be offered a surgery appointment to complete an initial assessment, whilst others may benefit from advice and signposting and need no further immediate support.

Since October 2017, Adoption Counts has been funded by the Department for Education to develop a Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support (COE), one of only two in the country. The funding received was £521,564 over two years. This ends on 30th June 2019. Work has therefore taken place to identify how these services can continue in the context of uncertainty over future funding.

The grant manager from the DfE is seeking further funding for the COE for the financial year 2019-2020. Confirmation of this is not expected until the end of March 2019. However, if successful it is anticipated that the funding will continue from the 30th June 2019 until 31st March 2020 and the COE model will continue as is.

7. Continuous Professional and Service Development

North West Employers have recently delivered 1.5 days management training to the first line team managers. All staff across the agency are currently having half-day sessions on strength-based conversations. Based on a coaching model, this helps staff at all levels in the organisation improve the quality of their development conversations in order to maximise the potential and performance of staff and our partnerships, be it with other agencies, our partner LA's or adopters.

The adoption psychology team will deliver a full day conference on Trauma Informed Practise to all staff in the new financial year to ensure that the learning from available research is embedded across our recruitment and family finding services. Whole service training on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders is planned for the autumn. Recruitment and Assessment workers will all benefit from Making Good assessments training by CoramBAAF in June 2019. Staff have also had the opportunity to attend a number of external training opportunities and have returned to cascade their learning to colleagues.

The Regional Manager started a leadership programme run by Deloitte and funded by DFE in November and this is being supplemented by a series of masterclasses which can also be attended by an operations manager as part of their development.
A programme of personal development reviews is ongoing.

Having previously recognised the need to ensure learning continues to be shared within LA fieldwork teams, this is a standing agenda item at operation meetings and a number of lunchtime learning opportunities in our partner LAs have taken place with more being planned.

There are some exciting developments based on recent research from the University of East Anglia in relation to Contact after adoption and Transitions. This year has seen a significant move from embedding the basic principles and services without a dip in performance to looking at innovation and development.

8. Voice and Influence of adopted children and young people, parents and adopted adults on our services

With regard to the voice and influence of adoptive families, we are working with Adoption UK and their Adopter voice programme. They have recruited 'adoption champions', an adopter advisory group, and contribute to our Adoption Support sub board. We have just undertaken a large adopter survey and will be using the rich information gathered to inform service development.

Feedback from young people is largely gathered through their attendance at support events rather than any direct consultation and may be an area for future development.

Adopted adults largely interface with the service in relation to access to records. We will seek to enhance the feedback from this service in order to build influence into service development.

9. Budget

The current forecast outturn position reported against this budget is a **surplus of £0.048m**. Following a 50% release of 2017/18 outturn surplus agreed at the Board of 11th May 2018, brought forward reserves were £153,588. Based on the current forecast above the closing reserves for 2018/19 will increase by £47,577 to £201,165.

In setting the operational budget for 2019/20, based on the agreed funding formula, the Board committed £100,000 of reserves for smoothing the change in partner contribution rates in transition to the new funding formula. After deducting this £100,000 the remaining reserves from 1st April will be £101,165.

Sue Westwood, Regional Adoption Manager, Adoption Counts
Cathy Sowden, Operations Manager (linked to Trafford), Adoption Counts

Appendix 1 - Quarter 3 performance data;

Table A1 Timeliness and numbers of children who are adopted for the quarter (01/10/2018 to 31/12/2018). The other table looks at the scorecard indicators A1 and A2 for the previous years with the Adoption Counts quarter 1 recorded.

Quarter 3	Average days between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family	Average days between Placement Order and deciding on a match	Children and young people adopted
Trafford	1267	468	1
Adoption Counts	448	132	26

	Average days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (single-year data) Scorecard Indicator A1				Average days between Placement Order and deciding on a match (single-year data) Scorecard Indicator A2			
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Trafford	X	X	X	436	X	X	X	147

Table A2 Timeliness of children **matched** during the quarter (01/10/2018 to 31/12/2018)

Children Matched		
Quarter 3	Average days between Placement and deciding on a match	% of Children matched in period who were matched within 121 days of placement order
Trafford	N/A	N/A
Adoption Counts	145	60%

Table A3 Timeliness of children **placed** during the quarter (01/10/2018 to 31/12/2018)

Children Placed				
Authority	Average days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	% of placed children who were placed within 426 days of entering care	Average days between Placement Order and deciding on a match	% of placed children who were matched within 121 days of placement order
Trafford	426	67%	130	33%
Adoption Counts	464	61%	137	61%

Table A4 Provision of Placements within the quarter (01/10/2018 to 31/12/2018)

Placements within quarter				
Authority	Children placed in period, within RAA	Children placed in period, Inter-agency (LA)	Children placed in period, Inter-agency (VAA)	Children placed in period, Total Inter-agency
Trafford	3	0	0	0%
Adoption Counts	23	3	2	18%

Authority	Percentage In House	Percentage Inter-Agency
Trafford	100%	0%
Adoption Counts	82%	18%

Table A5: children progressing through the stages of the adoption process for the quarters (01/10/2018 to 31/12/2018)

Authority	ADM decisions	Number of Placement Orders granted	Matched	Placed in period - incl FFA with a ADM Match
Trafford	8	1	0	3
Adoption Counts	40	28	25	28

Table A6: characteristics of children waiting (with a placement order waiting to be placed)

Authority	Aged 0-2 years old	Aged 3-5 years old	Aged 5 years old and over	Female	Male
Trafford	2	4	0	0	6
Adoption Counts	51	24	9	41	43

Table A7: snapshot numbers of children within the adoption process (1)

Authority	With a decision not yet placed	With a placement order not yet matched	With a placement order not yet placed (18 months or more since entering care)
Trafford	15	8	4
Adoption Counts	143	84	42

Authority	Average length of time spent waiting (since entering care) for those with a placement order not yet placed (days)	Average length of time spent waiting (since placement order granted) for those not yet placed (days)
Trafford	542	273
Adoption Counts	465	208

Appendix two

This appendix contains a range of measures related to prospective adopters progressing through the approval and adoption process.

Table A9: individuals and families progressing through the approval and adoption processes within Adoption Counts

	Started Stage 1	Started Stage 2	Approved	Matched	Placed	Adopted
Individuals	2	1	2	3	2	2
Families	21	22	20	19	16	14
Total	23	23	22	22	18	16

Table A10: snapshot numbers of prospective adopters at different stages of the approval process

	Prospective Adopters				Approved adoptive families waiting		
	Prospective adopters not yet approved	In Stage 1	In Stage 2	On hold	Approved adoptive families waiting to be matched	Approved adoptive families waiting to be matched for more than 6 months	Average time since approval (months)
As at 31/12/2018	67	35	32	6	40	14	11