

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

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| TO: | ADULT CHILDREN AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 4 July 2016 | AGENDA ITEM: | 16 |
| TITLE: | ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16 | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | CLLR JAN GAVIN | PORTFOLIO: | CHILDREN'S SERVICES |
| SERVICE: | CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is to give an update to the Adult Children and Education Committee on the progress of the Adoption Service in the last year in the form of the attached Adoption Service Annual Report 2015-16.
- 1.2 Members will note the adoption performance through 2015-16 and the positive family-finding efforts of the team to ensure that children have a permanent family. The benchmarked performance sets Reading Borough Council's Adoption Service in the top quartile in relation to the percentage of children who were adopted in the last year.
- 1.3 To demonstrate progress this year, we have used the benchmarking data for the children we have placed for adoption in 2015-16.
- 1.4 Whilst children whose Adoption Orders were granted in in 2015-16 waited longer than the timescales required by the Department for Education (696 days for those who were adopted in the year), we have improved the timescales for children currently in the system so that the majority of children were placed for adoption well under the 420 days requirement (343 days on average - see appendix 2).
- 1.5 In relation to indicator A2 (the average days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family), the average number of days reported in the Adoption Scorecard was 398 against a target of 121 (on the 3 year rolling average).

- 1.6 Using the benchmarking standard, this shows that those children who were placed in the last 12 months waited on average 117 days which included a particularly complex case. If this case were not included, the average number of days would have been 79.25 which is well below the 121 day target (see Appendix 3).
- 1.7 As the Adoption Scorecard is based on a 3 year rolling average, we know that performance will improve given our current statistics which is encouraging both for children who are waiting for permanent homes and for their prospective adopters.
- 1.8 In 2015-16 we also placed 13 children in sibling groups. There were 5 sets of 2 siblings and 1 set of 3 siblings. This demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that children are placed together wherever possible.
- 1.9 At the stage of Placement Orders being made by the courts, 10 of the 25 children were already 3 or more years of age. Of these 10, 6 were 5-8 years of age. Adoption for children aged over 3 is usually considered to be more difficult to achieve. All 10 children who were 3 or more years of age at the time of the Placement Order were also part of a sibling group to be placed together, making it more difficult to find placements for them and their 3 younger siblings.
- 1.10 Health uncertainties regarding health and development capacity of individual children, known behavioural issues / trauma and attachment needs for some of them, the impact of parental health issues and unique placement circumstances have all contributed to the timescales taken to achieve adoption.
- 1.11 14 sets of adopters have been approved in the last year. This is a slight decrease since last year. The service received an average of 7 new enquiries per month and has increased recruitment activity, including local advertising and the “Home for Good” project.
- 1.12 Reading recognises the complexities in placing our children and has joined a second adoption consortium in order to maximise access to a larger group of adopters and is proactive in achieving permanence for children.
- 1.13 This is a positive improvement in the last year, particularly for children and their ‘forever families’.

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| 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION |
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2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the progress made within the Adoption Service in the last year.

3. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

3.1 This report is in line with the overall direction of the Council by meeting two of the following Corporate Plan priorities:

1. Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
2. Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living.

3.2 The directorate's delivery of the Strategic Aim "To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all" will be monitored through the Quality Assurance Framework and through the oversight of the Children's Services Improvement Board including in relation to adoption performance.

3.3 Community Safety Implications - Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988, the Council must consider the following in the exercise of its duties and decision-making:

- crime and disorder
- anti-social behaviour
- behaviour adversely affecting the environment
- substance misuse reduction

4. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

4.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to the decision as a good overview of the quality of service delivery will address any inequalities and seek to remove them.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Whilst there are no legal implications in relation to this report, it is important to note that under Children's Services legislation, we are required under a general duty of the Children Act 2004 to address the quality of services and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This framework establishes a clear mechanism for doing so.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.



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**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ADOPTION AGENCY**

ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

1.1 This report outlines the work undertaken by the Adoption Service from 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016. The main objective of the service was to ensure that all children in Reading who require permanent placements through adoption are provided with an adoptive family who can meet their identified needs. The key priority is to ensure that children are placed in a timely fashion with families who will offer security and stability; families who are able to provide therapeutic re-parenting, enabling children to recover from early trauma and loss. The team also seeks to ensure that there are sufficient adopters available to meet the diverse needs of these children. This involves assessing potential adopters for both the children looked after by Reading Borough Council and other Local Authorities. In addition the team aims to offer a high standard of post - placement and post adoption support to ensure the ongoing stability and duration of the placement. This includes ensuring post adoption support plans are robust.

1.2 The report updates the actions in relation to the National Minimum Standards for Adoption (Performance Indicators: *CF/C23 percentage of looked after children placed for adoption or with Special Guardianship Orders* and the key timescale that a proposed placement with a suitable prospective adopter should be identified and approved by the adoption panel *within 6 months of the decision that the 'child should be placed for adoption'*

1.3 The report also addresses two national targets established within Adoption Scorecards (namely:

- *A1: The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (for children who have been adopted). The performance threshold has been set at 426 days for 2013-2016.*
- *A2: The 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. The performance threshold has been set at 121 days for 2013-2016.*
- *A3: The percentage of children waiting less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family*

2. POLICY CONTEXT

- Adoption Service Regulations 2005
- Statutory guidance on Adoption 2013
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and 2013

- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Action Plan for Adoption 2012
- Family Justice Review 2011
- Education and Adoption Act March 2016

3. CHANGES WITHIN THE SERVICE

3.1 There have been a number of significant management changes to the service during the period of this report. The following is an outline of the staffing changes in the Adoption team:

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| Team Manager | <p>Full time Team Manager left on 30.11.2015. The Assistant Team Manager acted up into the Team Manager post from 01.12.2015. This arrangement continued until March 2016 when the Acting Team Manager commenced a period of sick leave.</p> <p>Current full time interim Team Manager (agency) started 18.4.16</p> |
| Assistant Team Manager | <p>Full time interim Assistant Team Manager (agency) was appointed 21.12.15. They remained in post until 4.3.16</p> <p>From 01.04.16 to date an experienced Higher Specialist has been appointed to act up as Assistant Team Manager (28 hours). This arrangement will continue until the substantive Assistant Team Manager returns to Assistant Team Manager post full time.</p> |
| Higher Specialist SW | <p>Currently acting up as Assistant Team Manager (28 hours per week) will continue until 1st July 2016 at the latest. From 1st July 2016 the post holder will commence a term time working arrangement.</p> |
| Family Finding (FF) Indep SW | <p>Recruited in March 2016 to cover Higher Specialist whilst the latter is acting as Assistant Team Manager</p> |
| Higher Specialist SW | <p>Full time - in post since August 2014</p> |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Assessment and FF SW | Full time - worker who had been in post since May 2013, left in April 2016 |
| Assessment and FF SW | Full Time - No change - in post since November 2014 |
| Assessment and FF SW | Full time - No change-in post since May 2014 |
| Post Adoption SW | Full time - No change-in post since October 2011 |
| Post Adoption SW | Full time - No change- in post since 2003 |

The staff changes in the adoption service since November 2015; particularly within the management structure has had some short term impact on the quality assurance in the team. However, the team have developed further knowledge and skills in relation to adoption assessments and family finding and this has led to robust plans being made for children and matches being made which best meet the needs of children.

It is testament to the high level of commitment, resilience and skill base in the team that robust family finding, assessment and adoption support services continued to be delivered .

4. LEGISLATION

- 4.1 The Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 came into effect on the 1st July 2013. The 2 stage adopter assessment process has been established within the service as a result. All adopter assessments now need to be completed within six months.

5. OFSTED INSPECTION

- 5.1 Ofsted carried out their last adoption inspection of Reading's adoption service in 2010. This was graded as 'good' in all outcomes with an overall rating of 'good'. All actions as recommended were undertaken and work continues to address these issues including;
- The adoption panel continues to offer advice in relation to contact for all children presented for matches with prospective adopters and with plans of adoption. This advice is clearly recorded in the panel minute extract and recorded on the child's file;
 - All recruitment documentation (including that for agency or independent workers) includes details of references and DBS checks having been taken up. Business Support for Family Placements now coordinate this aspect of recruitment activity relating to agency and independent workers to ensure consistency across the service.

5.2 The inspection of local authority adoption services is now integrated into a new Single Inspection Framework and covers all aspects of local authority Safeguarding and Looked After Children's services following the journey of the child. These inspections are unannounced.

6. ADOPTION PANEL

6.1 A separate report on the Adoption Panel is compiled by the Adoption Panel Adviser as part of her role within the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and Consortium. The Panel report provides an overview of adoption activity across the whole of Berkshire, recording the number of Panel Adviser/Panel presentations between 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016. The numbers reported there can be slightly different to those given for ADM decisions within the same timeframe e.g. some April 2015 agency decisions would have been dealt with by Panel in March and counted in the latter's previous year statistics.

6.2 Panel Adviser/Panel activity for Reading this year included the following:

Children: 21 individual children had a decision of 'adoption as the plan' processed. This is greater than in 2014-15 when the figure was 6 children.




Adopters: 13 sets of adopters had approvals recommended by Panel during the year. This is greater than the 11 sets of adopters recommended during 2014-15

Matches: There were 10 children who had matches recommended with adoptive families during the year. This is less than in 2014-15 when matches for 23 children were recommended.

7. STATISTICS - CHILDREN

7.1 Adoption Activity

The Percentage of looked after children placed for adoption or with a Special Guardianship Order - This is a cumulative figure, and the year-end figure stood at:

- 22/125 (17.6%) of children who ceased to be looked after by RBC in the last financial year became the subjects of Special Guardianship Orders. This exceeded performance in benchmarked Local Authorities. Using December 2015 data:
 -  South East Region averages were 9%
 -  Statistical Neighbour averages were 10.5%
 -  England averages were 11.00%
- 25/125 (20%) of the children who ceased to be looked after by RBC in the last financial year were adopted. 24 Adoption Orders were made as a result of agency adoptions and 1 via a private application by the foster

carers. This is an increase in the total number of adoptions from 19 in the previous year. Figures below will refer to the 25 adopted children, but where the Placement Order is used as a milestone the cohort is reduced to 24 as a result of 1 child being a “relinquished baby” accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act rather than as a result of care proceedings in court.

Appendix 1 evidences Reading Borough Council’s (RBC) strong record in adopting a comparatively high percentage of its looked after children population. It has been long standing practice in the authority to pursue adoption plans for a high proportion of its looked after children, including those who are harder to place due to being older, part of a sibling group, their own health issues, parental health issues, cultural background or a combination of the above. This does impact negatively on RBC timescales. Using December 2015:

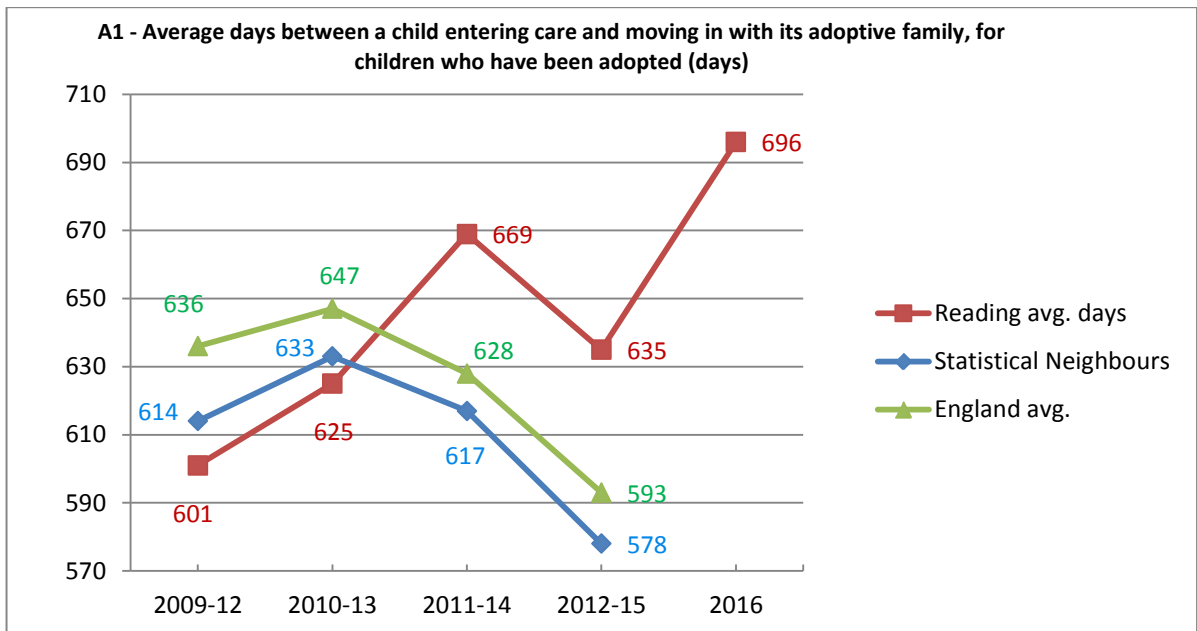
- ✚ the Reading Borough Council adoption agency had adopted 22% of its looked after population
- ✚ South East Region adopted 18%
- ✚ Statistical Neighbour averages were 16.8%
- ✚ England average was 17%

| Year | No’s of Children Adopted in Reading |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| 2012-13 | 18 |
| 2013-14 | 26 |
| 2014-15 | 19 |
| 2015-16 | 25 |

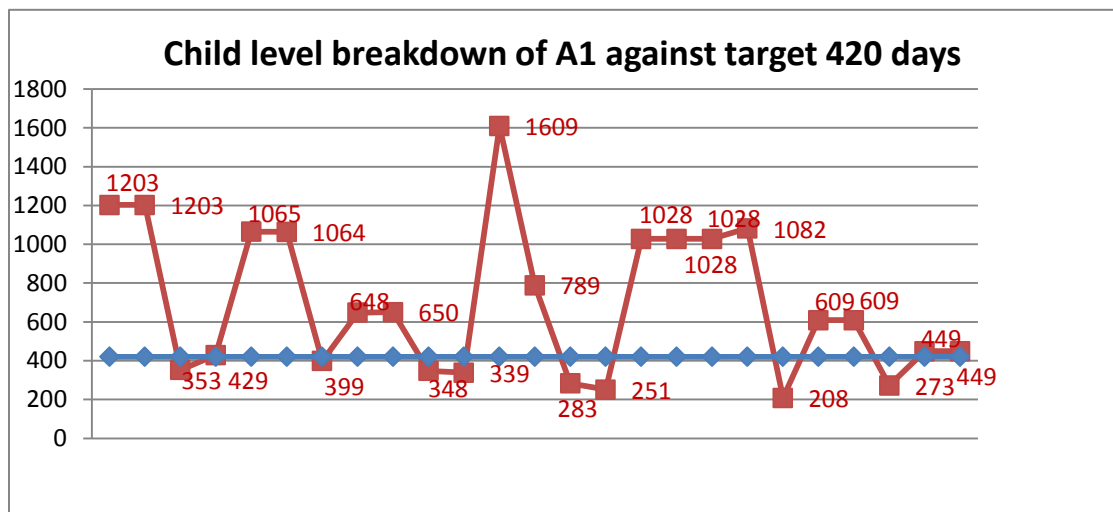
7.2 National Key Performance Indicators (the Adoption Scorecard)

The Government has set three increasingly challenging year on year targets (A1, A2 and A3).

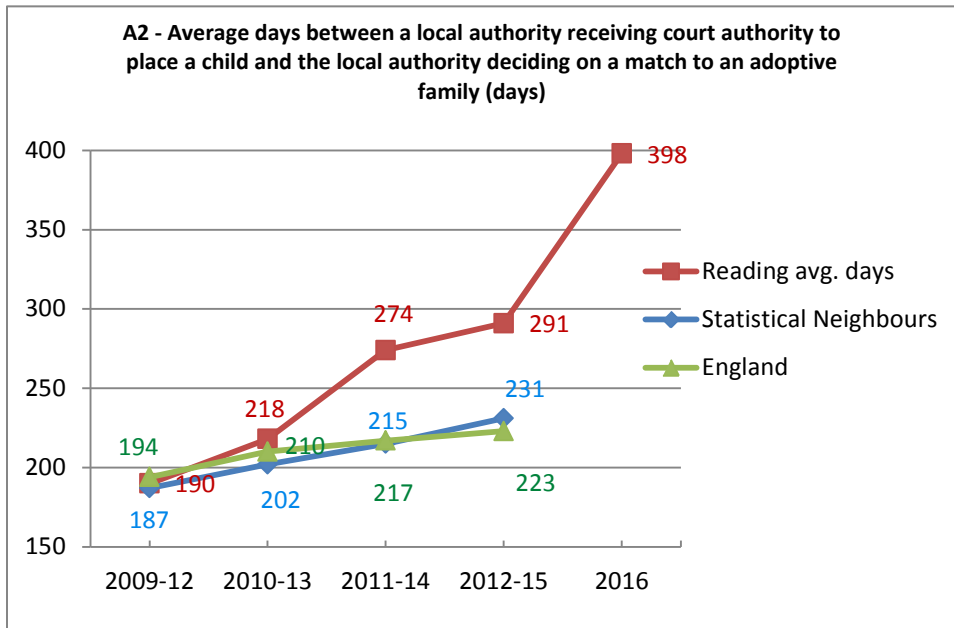
A1: the national target of 420 days.



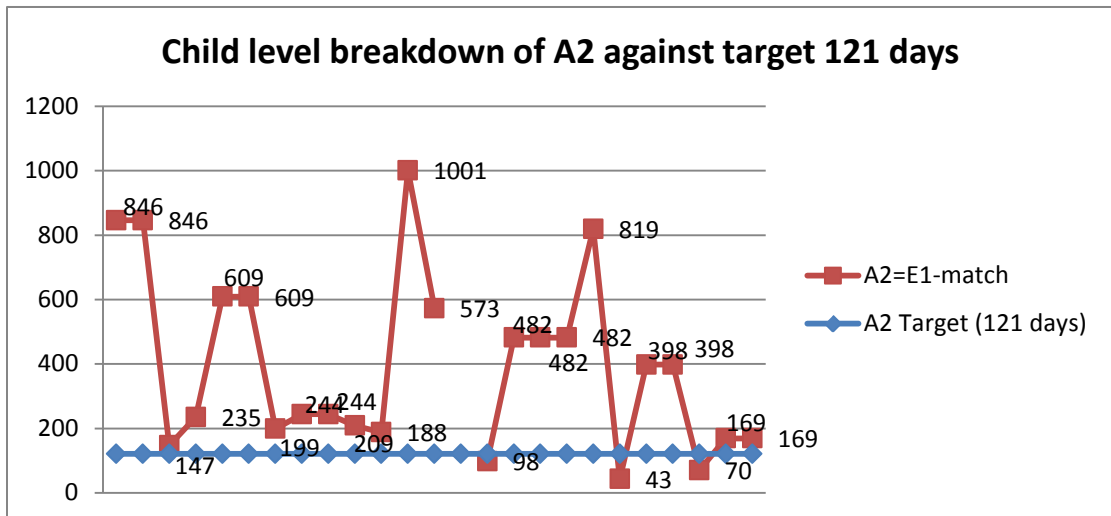
The analysis of performance for each of the 25 adopted Reading children against this target is shown in the graph below



A2: the national target of 121 days



The analysis of performance for each of the 25 adopted Reading children against this target is shown in the graph below



A3 The percentage of children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

| A3 - The percentage of children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|---------|------------|
| Year | Wait duration | RBC % of children | Statistical Neighbours | England | South East |
| 2009-12 | 21 months(639 days) | 68% | 58% | 56% | |
| 2010-13 | 20 months(608 days) | 46% | 54% | 55% | |
| 2011-14 | 20 months (608 days) until 2011-13, 18 months(547 days) for 2014 | 41% | 47% | 51% | |
| 2012-15 | 16 months | 30% | 45% | 47% | 46% |
| 2016 | 16 months | 44% | | | |

These tables show that at 31.3.16 Reading's performance for:

A1 was an average of 696 days against a target of 420

A2 was an average of 398 days against a target of 121

A3 was 44% compared to 45% as last year's average for statistical neighbours.

For all three indicators therefore average timescales achieved for adopted children in Reading fell short of targets.

Factors Which Negatively Impacted On Timescales for Adoption:

There are a number of factors which have a significant effect on timescales for adoption and usually more than one of these factors would impact on outcomes for individual children in this cohort of 25.

- Delay at an early stage of the children's looked after journey For 8/24 adopted children it took 12 months or more from the point of entering care to a Placement Order being made. 7 of these were adopted as sibling groups and the 8th had a sibling placed with them subsequently. These were all

“historic” cases where children entered care and had Placement Orders made between 2010-2013.

In order to improve early planning, a new tracking tool was implemented in May 2015 and in addition to attending the Permanency Tracking Meetings, the Adoption Team Manager also started to attend the Legal Tracking Meetings in order to promote early parallel planning activity including Foster To Adopt placements.

- Sibling Groups

In total during the period 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016 RBC adopted 13 children in sibling groups

These are positive outcomes for the children, but sibling placements have taken longer to find.

- Age:

At the stage of Placement Orders being made by the courts (giving permission to place for adoption), 10 of the 25 adopted children were already 3 or more years of age. This is the age in reality when it starts becoming more difficult to find adoptive parents. Of these 10, 6 children were between 5-8 years of age.

All 10 children who were 3 or more years of age at the time of the Placement Order were also part of a sibling group to be placed together, making it more difficult to find placements for them and their 3 younger siblings.

In addition to the above issues, other factors such as uncertainties regarding the health and development capacity of individual children, known behavioural issues/trauma and attachment needs for some of them, the impact of parental health issues and unique placement circumstances have all contributed to the timescales taken to achieve adoption. These factors for example can be seen for 11 of the 13 children placed as siblings groups. Strategies to try to address such issues are discussed in meetings such as the Permanency Tracking Meetings.

In order to address these challenges Reading joined a second adoption consortium in order to maximise access to the largest group of prospective adopters at as early a stage as possible (described below). Practice also changed from advertising in adoption periodicals (with long advertising and response delays) and reliance on the national Adoption Register to standardising the use of Link Maker (formerly Adoption Link) as a way of reaching more adopters quickly. The latter also facilitates adopter-led matches.

7.3 More Recent Placement Performance

The national Performance Indicators reported above using the prescribed formula do not capture sustained improvement in performance made during the last year in for Reading children as they record timescales for those who were adopted in the year. If we look at the 2015-16 performance for children earlier in their adoptive journey i.e. children placed during the year, the performance against these same indicators was significantly better:

- ✚ For A1 an average of 350.8 days against the 420 day target was achieved. This average would have been even better but it was significantly increased by the circumstances of one child for whom the timescale was 789 days (the next highest being 497; the lowest for 2 children being 188). This improvement should be represented in next year's PI.
- ✚ For A2 an average of 127 days against the 121 days target was achieved. Again performance would have been even better but this average was significantly increased by the same statistical outlier as in A1 for whom the timescale was 573 (the next highest being 169 days; the lowest for 2 children being 13 days). This improvement should be represented in next year's PI too.

Appendices 2 + 3 show the timescales achieved for each of the 13 children placed in 2015-16. In addition to this improved performance in making timely adoptive placements, 4 Foster To Adopt placements were made in this time period as a result of early joint work between the Children's Social Work Team and the Adoption Team.

7.4 Other Areas of Activity Undertaken By The Adoption Team

The Adoption Team was also supporting the placements for 7 children placed with adoptive parents awaiting adoption orders at 31st March 2016. Their age range and ethnicity has been broken down for the purpose of performance monitoring but is not reported in a publically available document as the low numbers may make individuals identifiable.

These adoptive placements are subject to monthly monitoring in the Permanency Tracking Meeting which addresses reasons for any delay in applications to adopt.

Of the 21 Agency Decision Maker decisions that adoption should be the plan for a child, by the 31st March 2016, 5 children were waiting for their Placement Order. The earliest of these had a decision made on 22.2.16. Progress is monitored by the Adoption Team and preliminary consideration is given to potential links (as far as is possible at this stage)

As of March 2016 the full range of family finding activity was required for 7 children who had Placement Orders but no identified link to prospective adopters. This represents a year on year decrease from:

- 11 in 2014-15
- 30 in 2013-14

An increase in the numbers of children placed with extended family members and connected persons within care proceedings under Residence and Special Guardianship Orders has been indicated as one of the reasons for this. This has been counter-balanced to some degree by the increase in earlier parallel planning activity (pre-Placement Order) and has not to date translated into lower total numbers of adoptions made in the year.

In July 2015 an Adoption Activity Day event was held whereby prospective adopters met children requiring families whilst participating in child friendly activities. From this event four children were linked and have been subsequently placed with their adoptive families.

7.5 Monitoring

In addition to the Permanency Tracking and Legal Tracking Meetings which scrutinise progress for individual children, a monthly, service-wide Performance Board monitors holistic performance outcomes.

8. STATISTICS - ADOPTERS

8.1 Overall Picture

14 sets of adopters have been approved this year. This has been a slight decrease since last year. Two prospective adopters were recommended for approval in March and were ratified in April 2015. One case had been deferred from the adoption panel. Three applications were not suitable to progress to stage 2. The draft sufficiency suggests that 22 adopters should be recruited annually.

5 of the 13 children placed in 2015-16 were placed with adopters assessed by Reading Borough Council (includes Foster To Adopt placements). This is a reduction compared to the percentage placed in 2014/15. As more adopters living in Reading are now being assessed this is creating more of an inter-dependency with other adoption agencies, particularly prospective members of the new Adoption Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency.

There were 13 children placed with adopters in the last financial year. These sets of prospective adopters were approved by:

- Reading Borough Council (including Fostering to Adopt placements)
- Other non-consortia Local Authorities
- Other Berkshire consortium Local Authorities (including Fostering To Adopt placements)
- Adoption South Central consortium (ASC)
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies

8.2 Recruitment

There was consistent effort to ensure that the service continued to directly recruit adopters to meet the needs of the children we are currently family finding for. As Reading is a geographically compact unitary authority, placements will always be required primarily outside of the RBC boundary. The Sufficiency Strategy for 2015-17 therefore proposes continuation of adopter recruitment within the Reading area as well as further development of the arrangements with other local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

There were 78 initial enquiries between 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016 from people interested in adopting.

The service received on average 7 new enquiries per month. All of these were invited to attend Information Days and/ or offered initial home visits.

- There was again a recruitment campaign for Black History month in October and Adoption Week in November. The Adoption and Fostering Teams also attended the Royal Berkshire show. In addition there was some advertising in the local papers in other Local Authorities targeted for their ethnically diverse populations. Although there was some initial interest from this initiative, the numbers of responses were small. All

initial enquirers are asked where they heard about adoption in order to obtain feedback regarding the effectiveness of different recruitment strategy. The RBC Recruitment and Assessment workers, who recruit foster carers and adopters began focusing on using targeted social media and developing the RBC website as part of a recruitment project plan.

RBC also launched the “Home For Good” project in partnership with the Reading Church Network in November 2014 in order to improve access to this community of prospective carers. Funding for a part time worker for 2 further years was committed in 2015. In 2015-16 this worker has:

- Facilitated 2 information events, both of which resulted in enquiries being made to Reading Borough Council.
- Regularly attended church meetings and services in more than 25 churches with a specific focus on recruiting adopters and foster carers.
- Supported a local adoptive family running two breakfast play events for adoptive and foster families (informal events for families to meet, offer and receive support and exchange experiences
- Worked with a specific church which is keen to set up a support group for adopters and foster carers in the holidays and would offer child care/ youth work for the children.
- Planned further links with C of E schools and nurseries with the view to increase the pool of enquirers of adopters and foster carers.
- Planned further links with other faith groups and also in connecting with denominations which are not linked in with RCN, such as Catholic churches, and Seventh Day Adventists.

8.3 Assessments

The Adoption Service continued to undertake rigorous and thorough assessments of adopters in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

As of 31 March 2016 there were 2 assessments in Stage 1 (adopter led self learning) and 6 were in Stage 2 (Social Worker led adopter assessment). In common with all the other Local Authorities in the South England BAAF regional group, difficulties have been experienced in completing Stage 1 within 2 months as outlined in the 2013 Regulations. Changes have been made in practice to ensure that inter-agency checks and also reference checks are started right at the very beginning of the process (as of the carer’s formal application). An electronic system for obtaining DBS (police checks regarding

any criminal convictions) was commissioned and implemented during this year. As a result these checks are typically returned in 3 months for prospective adopters (compared to 7 months which these could take previously. However this remains a challenging area. Completing the Stage 2 assessments, getting them to Panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker within the four month specified timescale has also remained a challenge.

In order to make progress with these timescales, the Recruitment and Assessment workers have begun working with RBC colleagues to improve the interactivity of the website and to develop secure sites for individual prospective adopters to store the work they are progressing within the Stage 1 assessments. In this way workers can see who requiring assistance with completing the paperwork is. In September 2015 RBC commissioned Cornerstone (an adopter-led social enterprise which has obtained DfE funding for piloted work in providing adopter-led mentoring and training for adopters) to provide specific training and assistance to adopters.

8.4 Ethnicity of adopters

The ethnicity of approved available RBC adopters on 31 March 2016 included

- White British couples
- Mixed ethnicity relationships
- Several other ethnicities

There is clearly more development required in increasing the number of adopters from different ethnic backgrounds.

8.5 Location

Of the approved, available adopters on 31 March 2016, 3 of the 12 sets of adopters would not use Reading as their nearest town. The majority lived within the RBC boundary.

8.6 Monitoring

The recruitment, assessment and linking of children to approved RBC adopters is monitored monthly in specific adoption performance meetings. This forms part of the information fed into a service-wide Performance Board.

9. DISRUPTIONS

There have been no known disruptions of adoption placements for Reading children in 2015-16. Equally there were none in 2014-15.

10. POST ADOPTION SUPPORT

A combination of significant managerial changes and absence due to sickness and annual leave presented particular challenges in collating data at the specific time when the Adoption Leadership Board return was required. As a result some of the data in this section of the report is different to the ALB data. A system has therefore been devised to capture this information routinely on an ongoing basis.

The post-adoption work continues to expand with the increased numbers of referrals, particularly in relation to birth relative counselling. The work is covered by 1.5 Post Adoption Workers and its partnership with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service.

There are five distinct legislative areas of work to address:

- Contact arrangements
- Counselling of adopted adults
- Work with birth parents
- Post adoption support assessments and provision
- Mediation Service (BRIC)

Reading, along with the other Berkshire Unitary Authorities, continues to work in partnership with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service to administer the Adoption Panel and carry out much of the post adoption work such as Letter Box and Direct Contact, and work with birth parents. Other activities and groups are run jointly with the local authorities within the Berkshire Consortium. The Berkshire Adoption Advisory service provides a separate annual report on their activities.

The RBC Adoption team:

- received 27 new referrals for counselling for adopted adults (*Schedule 2 - Adoption and Children Act, 2002*); the Post Adoption Worker has facilitated 3 reunions this year.
- received and processed 8 letterbox/life story queries
- undertook intermediary work between 3 adopted adults and birth families - 1 progressed.
- directly provided post-placement support to 3 children placed out of the area (in line with the placing authority's responsibility for 3 years following the Adoption Order). This was generally fulfilled by commissioning services local to adopters in 2015-16.

- has organised an annual adopter's picnic. This has enabled workers to get feedback from attendees (adults and children) and has provided peer support for adopters.
- facilitated a bi-monthly support group for adopters. Demand for support for people affected by adoption is increasing. Between 2 to 9 adopters attend the support group. The group has provided the opportunity for peer support and also opportunity to focus on topics identified by adopters. These topics have included:
 - ✚ information on the Adoption Support Fund. Feedback: the attendee's found the information and subsequent discussion useful.
 - ✚ early brain development/attachment and school issues. Feedback: appreciation of the opportunity for open discussion
 - ✚ attachment and caring for teenagers. Feedback: positive, good, helpful presentation with good opportunity to ask questions and hear of practical strategies.
 - ✚ trauma/nurture time lines and attachment styles of children.

Overall the feedback from adopters attending the support group was very positive. Informal networks of support were also being developed between adopters.

Generally the Post-Adoption Workers liaise with CAMHS and schools as required, along with an RBC representative from the virtual school for Looked After Children. The Post Adoption Worker's role in relation to schools is to support teachers and staff to appreciate the significance of trauma histories, implications for attachment and the impact for adopted children. The workers supported 6 families with meeting at schools and attended ongoing Team Around The Child meetings in relation to 2 families. They referred 1 family for post-adoption advice and support to the Options therapeutic team which is based in RBC's fostering service. They also supported 1 family in the process of obtaining input from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

There were 10 requests from adoptive families for formal adoption support assessments. 5 resulted in the provision of continued post adoption support.

From May 2015 the Department for Education introduced the new Adoption Support Fund to provide a wide range of therapeutic support for adopters.

Reading has made 12 referrals for Adoption Support Fund packages (including 2 in progress)

11. PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION

Reading Adoption Agency provides full information for members of the public and users of the service, including leaflets and a Statement of Purpose, all of which can be accessed on Reading Borough Council's website or in hard copy.

The Adoption Service routinely obtains feedback from service users at various stages of the adoption process, and incorporates this within service development. These include:

- feedback after presentations to the Adoption Panel
- post adoption - support group
- the annual adopter's picnic
- information from Independent Reviewing Officers who see children in adoptive placements on their own.

Specifically Cornerstone (as an adopter-led independent organisation) was commissioned at the end of March to undertake an exercise in seeking adopter feedback regarding the services and support offered to them. This was actually undertaken in May and the results are being collated at the time of writing this report. The need to increase stakeholder engagement in participation generally has been recognised as one of the Adoption Team's service development priorities.

Working Arrangements With Other Adoption Agencies.

2015-16 saw the progress of the Education and Adoption Bill with it finally becoming an Act in March 2016. This has triggered the move away from consortia working arrangements and the work instead to create new Regional Adoption Agencies. Reading is working with partner organisations to create the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency

Consortia Membership

Reading Borough Council's Adoption Service had been an active member of the Adoption South Central Consortium (ASC) since the latter was launched in November 2014. This was comprised of 10 (which subsequently became 11) Local Authorities and 2 Voluntary agencies. The mutual benefits were the increased size of the pool of available adopters for children, reducing the cost of monitoring and supporting very long distance adoptive placements, increased confidence in the quality of locally delivered adoption support services, developing standardised tools service initiatives and finally the ability to joint fund specific initiatives such as adopter conferences. However in line government requirement to create new Regional Adoption Agencies, this consortium has been disbanded.

In addition to membership ASC Reading continued to contribute to the pan-Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and the associated consortium

arrangements. This included holding joint preparation groups, information sessions and profile sharing events as well as undertaking joint staff training.

Regionalisation

It is fitting that the report ends with the section relating to the creation of the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency as this is the future for Adoption service. In 2015-16 Reading has been working with the respective partners to create this organisation which is now likely to be comprised of:

- 8 Local Authorities - Reading; West Berkshire; Wokingham; Bracknell; Windsor and Maidenhead; Oxfordshire; Swindon + Milton Keynes.
- 1 Trust - Slough
- 1 (or possibly 2) Voluntary Adoption Agency - PACT (and possibly Barnardos)
- 1 Social Enterprise - Cornerstone

A project plan is being implemented with the assistance of a DfE allocated Coach. A Project Lead and Project Worker have been commissioned to work with the organisations involved in order to progress this work. A Project Team and Project Board have been active and it is hoped that a paper will be taken to council committees in October 2016 to decide on the particular model to be adopted.

Jean Ash

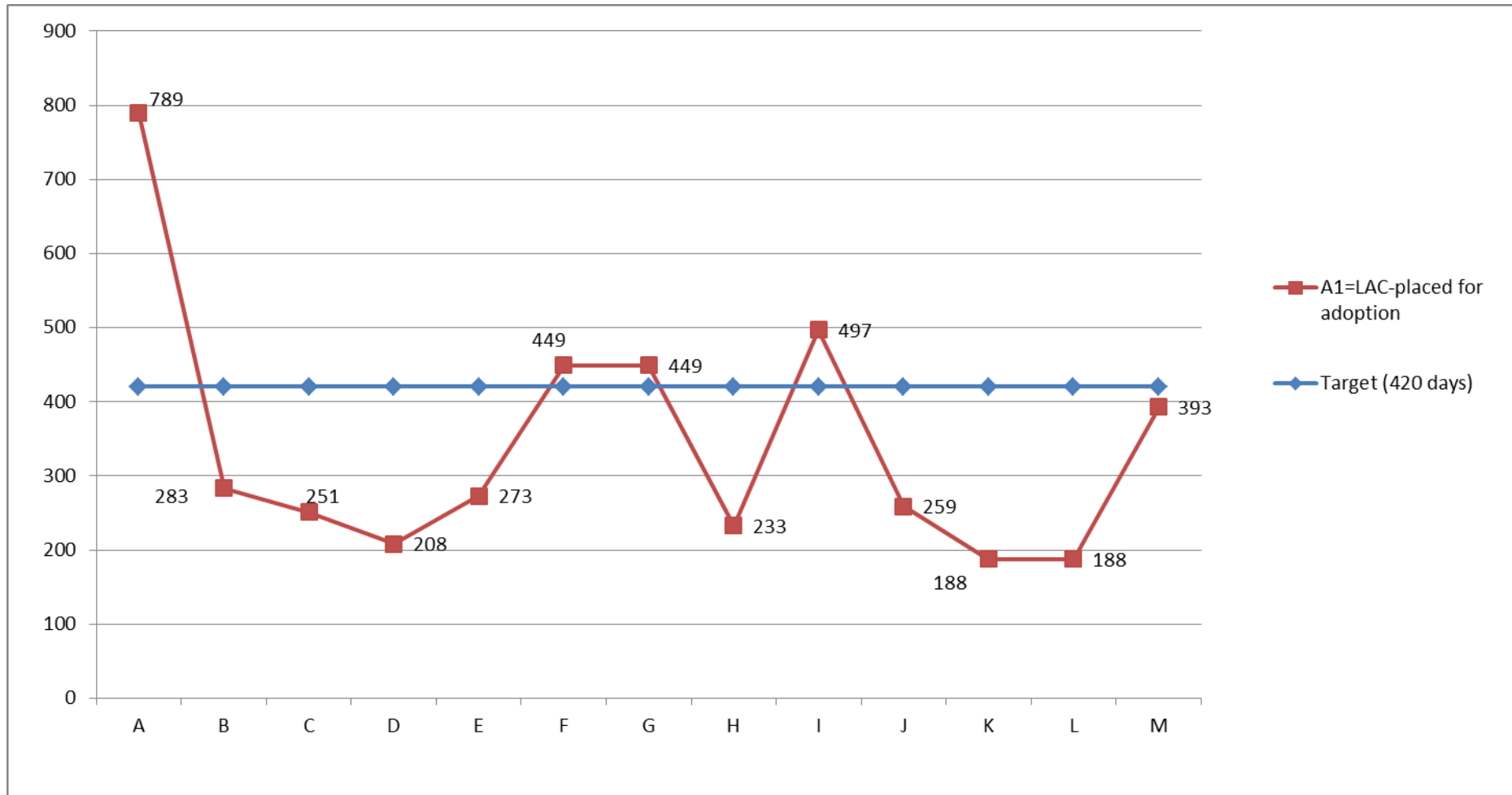
Service Manager

Appendix 1 Benchmarked Performance Re Adoption In The Year As A Percentage Of Children Leaving Care Population

| Local Authority, Region and England | | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | Change from previous year |
|--|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------------------|
| 870 | Reading | 18.00 | 12.00 | 18.00 | 10.00 | 17.00 | 12.00 | 20.00 | 19.00 | 27.00 | 22.00 | -5.00 |
| 989 | South East | 13.00 | 13.00 | 14.00 | 11.00 | 13.00 | 10.00 | 11.00 | 14.00 | 17.00 | 18.00 | 1.00 |
| | Statistical | 13.56 | 12.88 | 15.11 | 15.56 | 14.90 | 12.10 | 12.50 | 13.80 | 16.30 | 16.80 | 0.50 |
| 970 | England | 14.00 | 13.00 | 13.00 | 13.00 | 13.00 | 11.00 | 13.00 | 14.00 | 17.00 | 17.00 | 0.00 |

| | | Quartile bands | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| Local Authority, Region and England | Trend | Change from previous year | Latest National Rank | Quartile Banding | Up to and | Up to and | Up to and | Up to and | |
| | | | | | including | including | including | including | |
| 870 | Reading | ↓ | -5.00 | 28 | A | 12.75 | 17.00 | 21.00 | 37.00 |

Appendix 2. RBC Performance For Each Child Placed 1.4.15-31.3.16 Using Performance Indicator A1



Appendix 3 RBC Performance For Each Child Placed 1.4.15-31.3.16 Using Performance Indicator A2

