

ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE BRIEFING AND RECOVERY PLAN FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE CABINET COMMITTEE FOR PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

The following report outlines Lancashire performance against the Department for Education (DfE) Adoption Scorecards together with an outline of the improvement plan. Adoption is one of the means by which permanence can be achieved for children who require substitute families. In addition to the **109** children it is anticipated will have been placed for adoption during 2013/4 a further **50** children have achieved permanence via Residence Orders, (RO) **43** through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) with carers other than previous foster carers and **39** through an SGO with former foster carers.

Adoption Scorecard

The Adoption Scorecard was introduced in May 2012 by DfE Its intention was to create a simple series of indicators to compare all local authorities' adoption services in isolation from other Children's Social Care indicators.

The Scorecard focuses on 3 mains indicators:

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- A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)
- 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 (days)
- A3: Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (%)

The indicators work on a 3 year average, meaning that current good practice and improvements in performance, may not necessarily lead to an instant increase in performance on the scorecards. Likewise, poor performance will be hidden by previous year's performance, and will not show up on the scorecard.

The indicators chosen for the Adoption Scorecard do not present Lancashire in a particularly good light. Lancashire's performance is below target on all 3 measures however the reduction mirrors the national decline in performance against the 3 key indicators. The use of a 3 year average for the indicator presents a challenge for the authority to redress performance immediately.

How the North West is performing against England's regions.

During 2010-13 (the period reported upon in the most recent Scorecard) there were more adoption placements in the North West than any other region in England. The North West made 400 more adoption placements compared to the second highest region in England.

A1 indicator (Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) 2010-2013), only 5 local authorities in the North West (22%) have reached the new threshold set by central government (608 days). On the previous published scorecard (2009-2012) 7 out of the 23 North West local authorities meet the threshold (639 days). The North West is

the second worst performing region in England on A1 indicator and is significantly behind England's average. Out of the 18 local authorities that failed to meet the threshold on A1 for 2010/13; 4 have improved, 10 have not improved and 4 not recorded a direction of travel 2012/13.

A2 indicator (the average time between a local authority receiving a court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family), only 4 local authorities in the North West (17%) have reached the target threshold set by central government (182 days). This is a significant decline compared to the last year's performance.

10 local authorities meet the threshold of 213 days. The North West is the second worst performing region in England. Out of 19 local authorities that have failed to meet the target; 4 have improved, 11 have not improved and 4 not recorded a direction of travel (2012/13).

Only two local authorities in the North West have met both threshold the A1 and the A2 scorecard indicators (Cheshire West And Cheshire C and Halton).

A3 indicator (percentage of children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with the family), 11 out of 23 local authorities in the North West are above England's average.

Adoption Scorecard Context Indicators

The North West has the highest number of children awaiting adoption placement. For the average length of care proceedings, only 3 out of 23 local authorities in the North West have a shorter average time than England's average.

During 2010/13 the North West placed 460 children who are 5 years of age or older. This is 160 more placements than the 2nd highest region in England for placing children who are aged 5 or older.

The North West has the highest number of approved adopters and adopters awaiting a decision on being approved as adopters.

There are more adoption placements in the North West than any other English region (645 placements in 2012/13 and 1755 during 2010-13).

Lancashire's performance against the Adoption Scorecard Targets

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)

The scorecard shows that the average waiting time in Lancashire for 2010-13 lengthened by 88 days (12.6%) compared with the 2009-12 average. This was much greater than the national increase of 11 days (1.7%) and we have moved further away from the national average. Internal data for 2012/13 shows that in 75 adoptions completed in Lancashire, the average time from entering care to placement was 875 days.

The threshold for this indicator was set at 20 months or 608 days. Lancashire's performance in 2010-2013 is 178 days or 6 months away from the threshold. This does reflect a larger gap to the threshold than in both previous scorecards.

A2: Days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Days)

The time taken from receiving court authority to matching a child to an adoptive family lengthened in Lancashire by 19 days (8%) in the period from 2010 to 2013. A similar deterioration was seen nationally with the time taken increasing by 15 days (7.7%).

The threshold for this indicator is 6 months or 182 days. Lancashire's performance in 2010-2013 is 72 days or 2.5 months away from the threshold. This does reflect a larger gap to the threshold than in both previous scorecards.

A3: Children waiting less than a specified time between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

Previously it has looked at the proportion of children waiting less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This has been reduced to 20 months in 2010-2013. Based on the new measure, Lancashire's performance showed a decline in 2010-13 with the proportion of children moving in with adoptive families within the timescale declining by 1%, down to 43%. Performance nationally also decreased by 1%, meaning that Lancashire remains the same distance behind national performance, 12% less.

Performance Headlines – Adoption Service 2013/14

Despite poor performance against the Adoption Scorecard objectives the Adoption Service in Lancashire has achieved significant success during the year 2013/14 in relation to all three objectives despite the number of children looked after and the proportion of that cohort with a care plan of adoption having increased.

In December 2012 the CLA population in Lancashire was **1,451**. In December 2013 the CLA population was **1,563** an increase of **7.7%**. As of December 2013, **253** children were awaiting adoption compared to **233** in December 2012. At the end of Quarter 2 (September 2013) **245** children were awaiting adoption.

Assisted in part by the development of the Central Care Proceedings Team more children have been placed for adoption than in any previous year. At the end of December **85** children had been placed for adoption. An additional **26** children were in the process of introduction and linking. There are an additional **26** children with a potential link identified. The anticipated total for the year 2013/14 is **109** compared to **73** in 2010/11 and **68** in 2011/12.

The timescales for placement are improving. Based on data at 1 April 2013 to end of December 2013 66% of children (**56** out of **85** children) have been placed within the old timescale of 21 months. This compares to only 16% of children (11 out of 68) for the same period in 2012.

There are occasions where timescales have been sacrificed however in the interest of placing older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs. For instance of the **85** children placed in 2013 **11** were sibling groups of 2 and **1** of 3 children placed together. Of the children placed **6** were BME.

During 2013 the number of adoption orders granted in Lancashire is higher than in any previous year. During the period April to December 2013 62 children were adopted whereas in 2012 this was 48 and 51 children in 2011.

The duration of court proceedings has reduced from **54** weeks to **38** weeks.

The Adoption Service has recruited more adopters in 2013/14 than in any previous year. Between April and December 2013 the service received **436 adoption enquiries, compared to 351 in the previous year**. The target for the year has been exceeded. The expectation is that **75** new adopter households will be approved at the end of the year 2013/14. This compares to a total of **59** during the year 2012/13 and **46** in 2011/12.

Performance Indicator Recovery Plan

In response to performance against the Adoption Scorecard targets the following actions have been/are being taken:

- The resources in the Adoption Service are currently under review as part of the wider service redesign.
- A piece of work is being undertaken to forecast current and anticipated caseloads within the service to determine the appropriate level of capacity to deliver effectively.
- The Adoption Reform Grant has been used to facilitate additional capacity within Childrens Social Care and the Adoption Service and to support a number of new initiatives.
- A family finding strategy has been developed to maximise potential for timely and effective linking of children to available adopters.
- Adopter recruitment is targeted effectively to meet the needs of Children looked after in Lancashire with a proposed care plan of adoption.
- The service has prepared a tendering specification to secure the assessment of additional adopter households in the event that it is required in line with the enhanced level of marketing activity.
- The service is reviewing commissioning arrangements in order to maximise effective partnerships with Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This will extend to consideration of different ways of developing effective partnership and consortia arrangements.
- The Service is participating in regional recruitment and marketing activity with neighbouring authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to address the national shortfall of adopters.
- The service has ensured assessments of adopters are undertaken within the revised timescale of 6 months and introduced the 2 stage process on 1st July 2013.
- The service has developed a "Fostering for Adoption" protocol and developed a successful Concurrent placement project which is on target to recruit a total of 15 households by 2014/15.

- A Central Care Proceedings team has been introduced to achieve effective and timely care planning for adoption and inform recruitment activity, particularly for those children it can be anticipated may be hard to place.
- The Adoption Service has participated in the multi-agency Adoption Round Table Forum and works collaboratively with colleagues to ensure a multi agency approach to the care planning and adoption process; improvement is reliant upon a collective response.

Anticipated performance against future Adoption Scorecards

The most recent Adoption Scorecard published by the DfE in January 2014 reported on performance against the scorecard targets for the period 2010 – 13. As had been forecasted Lancashire's performance against the targets had deteriorated. Since April 2013 performance against the scorecard targets has improved significantly. Given the three year retrospective nature of the scorecard Lancashire's improvement will only be evidenced in the scorecards published in 2016. Based upon the assumption that the already achieved improvements will be sustained Lancashire's performance against the scorecard objectives should be transformed.

In conclusion improvement is reliant upon the Adoption Service, Childrens Social Care and the courts improving the processes and practice in their respective services if the collective response is to be effective. In order to progress this line management responsibility for the Adoption Service will be aligned more closely with the Fostering Service and Children's Social Care under the leadership of the Director for Targeted and Assessment Service.

A whole system review of commissioning arrangements is to be undertaken to maximise outcomes for children requiring adoptive families alongside a comprehensive improvement plan utilizing the Adoption Reform Grant.

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