



Central Bedfordshire Council  
and Bedford Borough Council  
working together

## Appendix **A**

# Adoption Agency

**Annual Report**

**For the period  
2012/2013**

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils' Adoption Agencies during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, noting their achievements, clarifying the remit and focus of their work and identifying recommendations for the development of the service.
- 1.0.2 This report is provided as part of the monitoring of the adoption agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011. This report will be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a six-monthly update report will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. A copy of this report is provided to Bedford Borough Council for presentation to Elected Members.

### 1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Adoption and Permanence Support Team is made up of the following staff as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013:
- 1 x full time Team Manager
  - 1 x full time Deputy Team Manager
  - 4 x Senior Practitioners (3 full time equivalent)
  - 8 x Social Workers (6.78 full time equivalent)
  - 4 x Social Work Assistants (2 full time equivalent)
  - 0.5 x Administrator for Letter-box contact
  - 1 x Lifestory Senior Practitioner
  - 2 x Administrators
- 1.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed this year, with staff seconded from within the service to cover a secondment and agency staff cover for maternity leave and one vacancy.
- 1.1.3 Most staff have a number of years post-qualifying experience, and a programme of additional support is in place for those newly-qualified or in the early years of their social work career.
- 1.1.4 The adoption agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering service area. These staff include a Business Support Officer with responsibility for adoption and special guardianship allowance payments, a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and Training Coordinator, and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the adoption panel.

## 1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required. There were three extra panels during 2012/2013 and the panel therefore met on 15 occasions.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes recommendations as to their approval. Prior to September 2012 the panel also considered whether adoption should be pursued as the plan for all children. Panel also considers the proposed match between all children with adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 amended Regulations determined that where a child's case was before the Court in respect of Court Proceedings, the adoption panel would no longer consider whether adoption should be the plan for the child, and this decision would instead be made by the Agency Decision Maker without a recommendation from the Adoption Panel.

## 1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 1.3.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the Adoption Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Independent	Adoptive Mother
Independent	Adoptive Father
Independent	Birth Parent of an Adopted Child
Social Work Member	Fostering Team Manager
Social Work Member	Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (BBC)
Educational Psychologist (Vice Chair)	Educational Psychologist (BBC)
Medical Adviser	Consultant Community Paediatrician
Elected Member	Central Bedfordshire Council
Independent (Vice Chair)	Adopted Person
Elected Member	Bedford Borough Council

- 1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are:

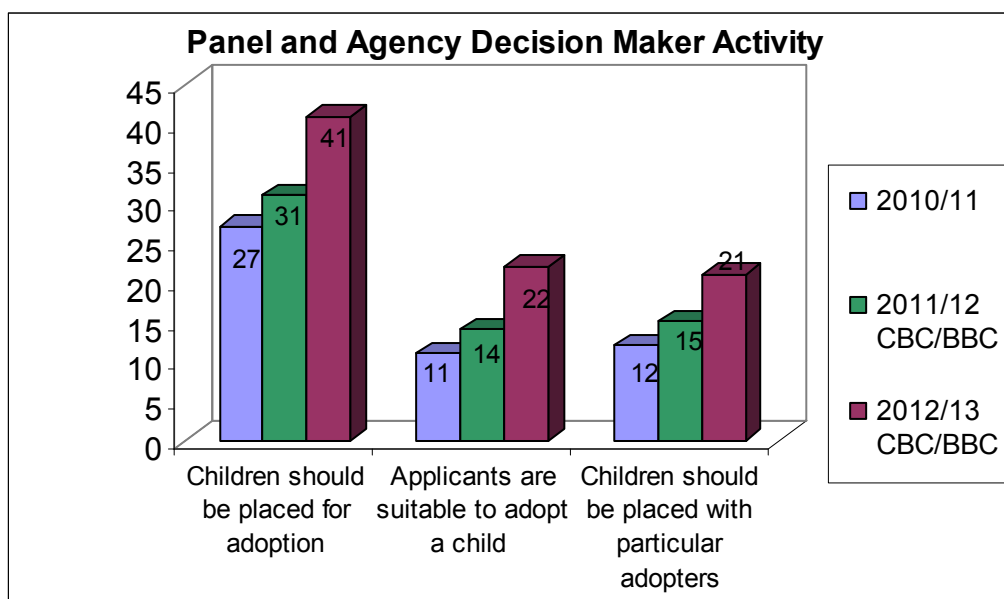
Professional Adviser	
Panel Secretary	

- 1.3.3 The Legal Adviser to the Panel gives advice in writing in advance of Panel meetings.

## 1.4 PANEL AND AGENCY DECISION MAKER ACTIVITY

- 1.4.1 In 2012/2013 the Adoption Panel met 15 times and recommended that 8 children should be placed for adoption in the six months when this was still the remit of panel. Of these, 5 were from Central Bedfordshire and 3 from Bedford Borough. The Panel also recommended that Placement Orders should be sought in relation to all 8 children.

- 1.4.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the Agency Decision Makers decided that adoption should be the plan for 33 children. Of these 17 were from Central Bedfordshire and 16 were from Bedford Borough. This takes the overall number of decisions about adoption for children to 41. This compares to 31 in 2011/2012 and is an increase for the third year in succession.
- 1.4.3 In relation to approvals, the Panel recommended that 22 households were suitable to adopt a child. This compares to 14 households in 2011/2012. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.4 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 21 children should be placed with particular adopters. Of these 13 were from Central Bedfordshire and 8 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 15 children in 2011/2012.



## 1.5 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1.5.1 The annual panel training day took place in July 2012 which considered the themes outlined in the Government's Action Plan for Adoption.
- 1.5.2 A full day's training is planned in September 2013 looking at the national reforms to adopter recruitment and planning for children.

## 1.6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTION

- 1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils have a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. A regularly updated information pack outlining the services available and procedures for prospective adopters is sent within 24 hours to those expressing an interest in adoption.
- 1.6.2 Information Evenings are held by the Adoption and Permanence Support Team where current information on the needs of children requiring adoption and the process of assessment is given to those people who are interested in becoming prospective adopters. It is a legal

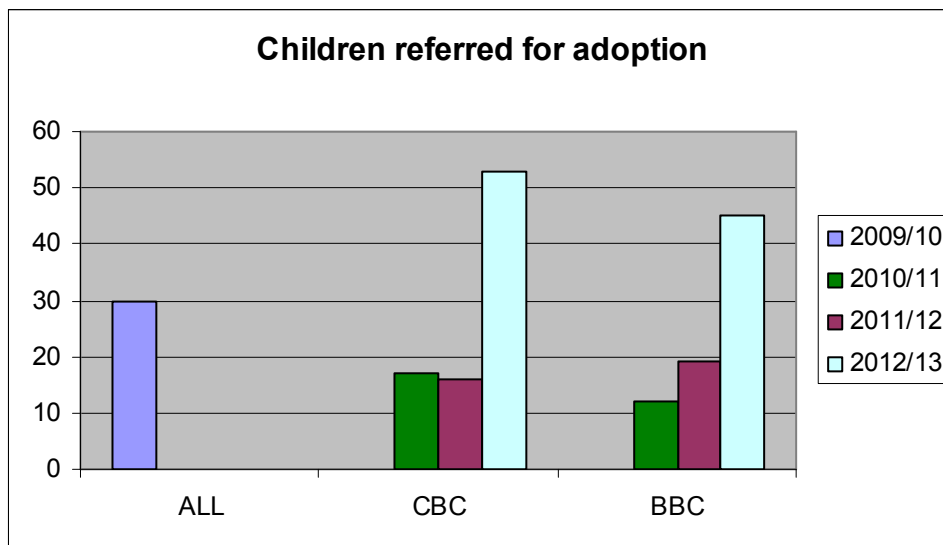
requirement for the agency to ensure that prospective adopters are offered the opportunity to attend an Information Evening within 8 weeks of their enquiry to the team. 7 such evenings were held in 2012/2013.

- 1.6.3 Preliminary counselling discussions in the form of an initial interview with prospective adopters are offered by Adoption Social Workers to enable enquirers to decide whether to pursue their enquiry. This counselling session also enables the Adoption Agency to decide whether to accept an application and whether this is an assessment which should be prioritised as a likely resource for children awaiting adoption.
- 1.6.4 Statistics in relation to enquiries received are included later in this report.

## SECTION 2 – CHILDREN AND ADOPTION

### 2.0 – CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

2.0.1 In 2012/2013, there were 98 children referred to the service for adoption. Of these, 53 were from Central Bedfordshire and 45 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 35 children in 2011/2012 (16 of whom were from Central Bedfordshire and 19 from Bedford Borough) and is an increase of 280%, reflecting the significant changes in the number and age of children becoming looked after in both councils.



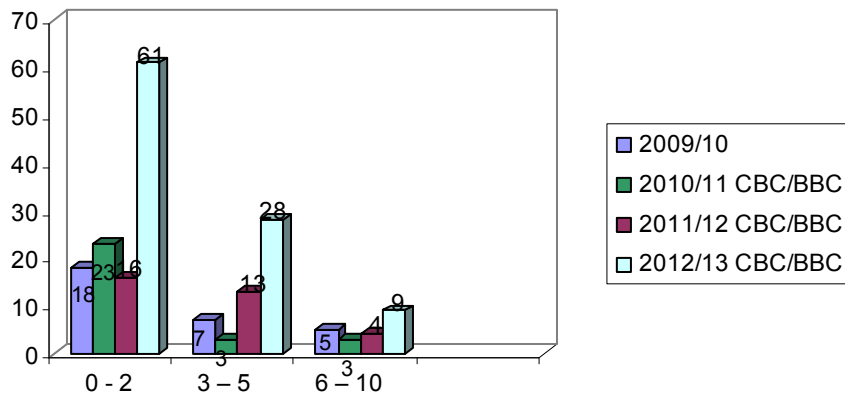
2.0.2 During 2012/2013 a further 56 looked after children were referred for permanence planning, where the primary plan was long-term fostering or permanency by way of a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order. 30 children were from Central Bedfordshire and 26 children were from Bedford Borough. This is a reduction from the 75 referrals in 2011/2012.

### 2.1 – AGE, GENDER AND ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION

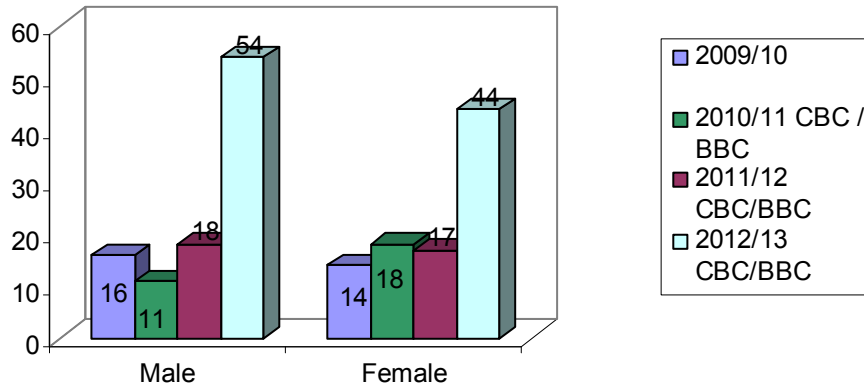
2.1.1 As can be seen from the figures below, the majority of children referred for adoption were under the age of 5 years. This has also been the case in previous years. More boys than girls were referred.

2.1.2 Of the 98 children referred for adoption 73 were from White British ethnicity, 4 were White other backgrounds, 5 were dual heritage White / Caribbean, 2 were dual heritage White/African, 8 were dual heritage White/Other, 5 were dual heritage White / Asian and 1 was African.

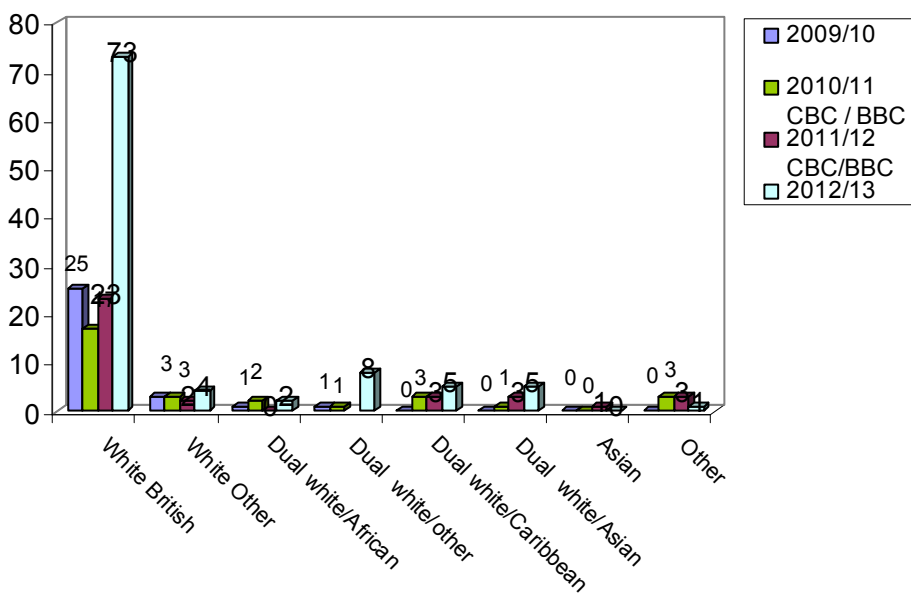
### Ages of children referred for adoption



### Gender of children referred for adoption



### Ethnicity of children referred for adoption





## **2.2 SIBLING GROUPS OF CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

2.2.1 The service received referrals for 25 sibling groups during the year 2012/2013. This compares to 8 sibling groups in 2011/2012. This included 4 sibling groups of three children.

## **2.3 – CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

2.3.1 The service received 2 referrals for children with a disability during 2012/2013. It is of note that a number of children, although not having a diagnosed disability, will face uncertain futures due to substance misuse by parents in the ante-natal period.

## **2.4 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

2.4.1 Of the 98 children referred for possible adoption in 2012/2013, 2 had been matched with adopters by March 2013. In the case of 15 children the Adoption Agency Decision Maker had considered their case and a decision made that adoption should be the plan. For 16 children planning had enabled them to remain with relatives either under fostering arrangements or as a result of granting of a Special Guardianship Order. The remaining children were still subject to care proceedings as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. Permanence planning was in place with potential adopters beginning to be identified in order to expedite placements once Placement Orders were granted.

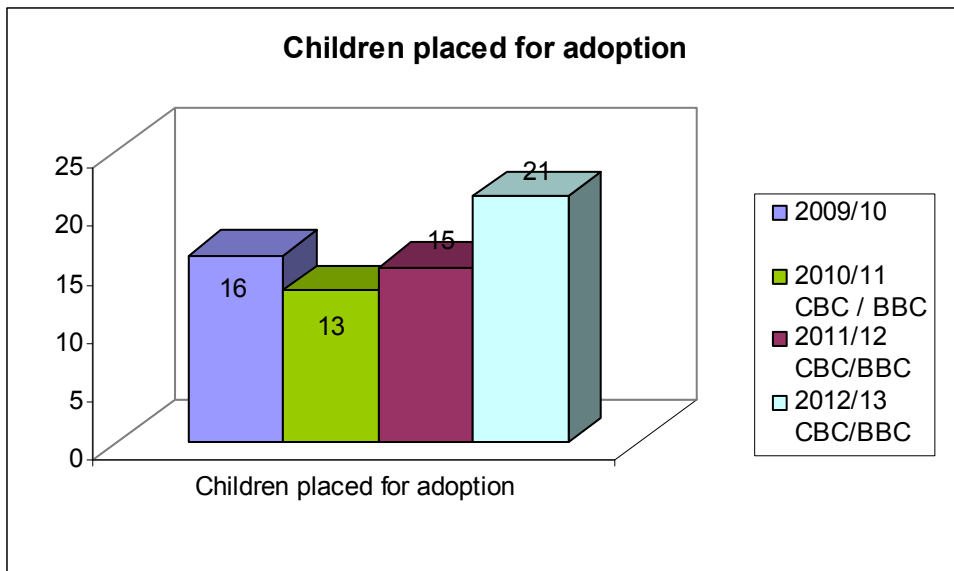
2.4.2 In order to avoid case drift for children, social workers are asked to refer children for family finding when adoption is a possible outcome for that child. This does not mean that all children referred will subsequently be adopted, but ensures that robust planning is considered as part of a child's care plan. In many cases, children safely return to their families or are placed with extended family members under other Orders, such as Special Guardianship.

2.4.3 In the year 2012/2013 we have continued to see some cases where Care Proceedings have taken much longer than expected, often due to viability assessments of family members taking place consecutively. However, reforms to the Family Justice system are beginning to take effect with the average timescale for care proceedings to conclude showing a reduction in the last quarter of 2012/2013.

## **2.5 – PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN**

2.5.1 Members of the Adoption Team were active in facilitating the placements of the 21 children placed for adoption in 2012/2013. This compares to the placement of 15 children in the previous year.

2.5.2 There were 5 sibling groups placed for adoption during 2012/2013.



## 2.6 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT

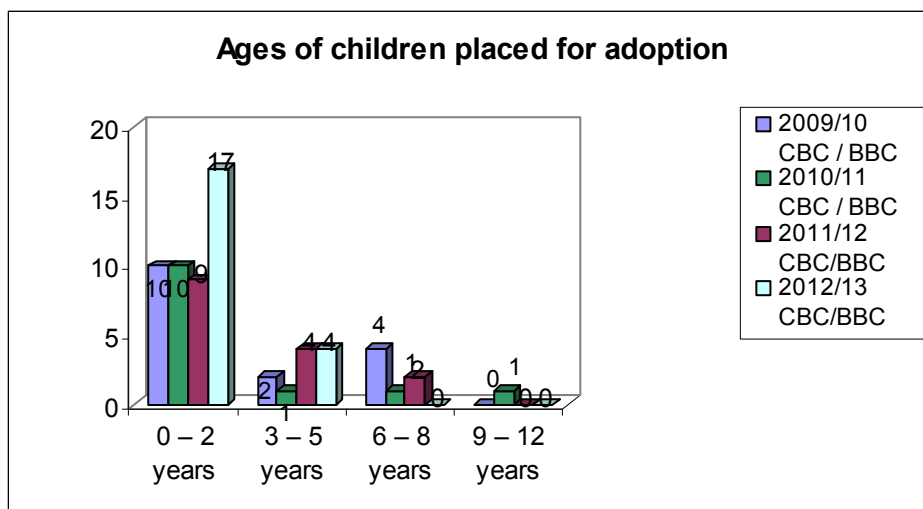
2.6.1 Of the 21 children placed for adoption in 2012/2013, 17 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Bedfordshire. 1 sibling group was placed with adopters recruited by another local authority, and a second sibling group was placed with inter-country adopters assessed in their country of origin.

## 2.7 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.7.1 Of the 21 children placed for adoption in the year 2012/2013, 15 were White British, 3 were of White Other heritage, 2 children were of dual White/Black Caribbean heritage and one child's ethnicity was unknown.

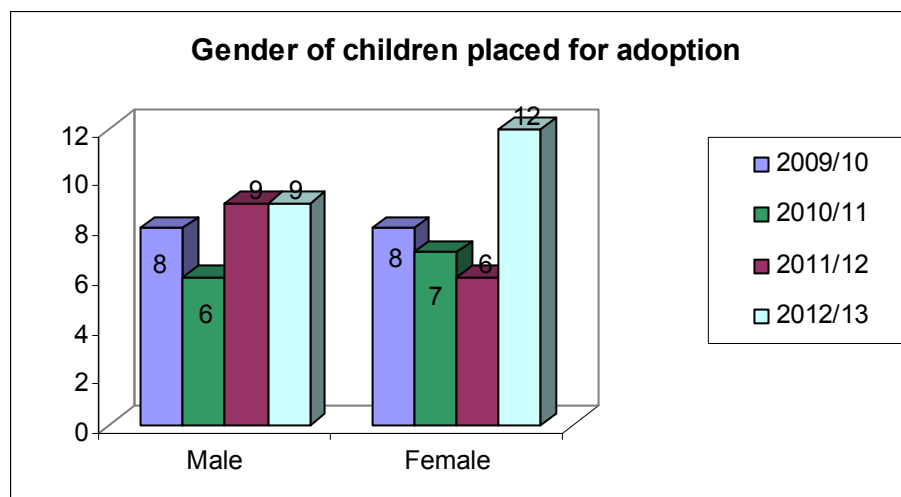
## 2.8 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

1.4.2 Of the 21 children placed for adoption in 2012/2013, 4 were aged three and above and 17 of were aged 2 years or under.



## 2.9 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION

2.9.1 Of the 21 children placed for adoption, 12 were female and 9 were male. Of these, in Central Bedfordshire there were 9 females and 4 males placed for adoption, and in Bedford Borough, there were 3 females and 5 males.



## 2.10 – ADOPTION ORDERS / SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

2.10.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 12 children during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. Of these 6 were for children from Central Bedfordshire and 6 from Bedford Borough. This is the same number of orders as made in 2011/2012.

2.10.2 Special Guardianship Orders were made in respect of 22 children. Of these 12 were from Central Bedfordshire and 10 were from Bedford Borough. This is an increase in the total number from 12 Special Guardianship Orders last year.

## **SECTION 3 - ADOPTERS**

### **3.0 – THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SUPPORT TEAM**

- 3.0.1 Every child looked after who may need a new permanent family has a social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. Family Finding Social Workers attend regular permanence planning meetings with other professionals involved with the child. For those children for whom a return to the care of his / her parents or a member of the extended family is not possible, adoption or long term fostering will be the plan. Family Finding Social Workers are active in identifying not just adoptive families, but also foster families, as appropriate to the needs of the child. This helps ensure that permanence is achieved for all children in a timely manner.

### **3.1 – RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS**

- 3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for both Bedfordshire children and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families a range of recruitment activity has taken place this year. Drop-in sessions were held in July 2012 and February 2013, as well as specific drop-in events during National Adoption Week in November 2012. A social media campaign using twitter and email alerts was tried for the first time this year. In addition the Adoption and Fostering service had stalls at Bedford Market, Picnic in the Park and Linslade Canal Festival and Bedfordshire Young Farmers Event during 2011. Advertising in local newspapers and magazines was used to publicise events, and a national advert recruiting for specific children was placed in March 2013.

### **3.2 – THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS**

- 3.2.1 All assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and their Statutory and Practice Guidance. All prospective adopters are required to undertake a training programme as part of the preparation and assessment process and have a review of their assessment conducted by a Manager or Senior Practitioner of the Adoption and Permanence Support Team.
- 3.2.2 89 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in 2012/2013 which was slightly fewer than the 104 enquiries in 2011/2012. All enquirers were invited to attend information evenings and sent information packs. 80 households attended. Applications were accepted from 25 households following an in-depth interview. 22 adoptive households were approved in 2012/2013, an increase from 14 in 2011/2012

### **3.3 – ETHNICITY OF ADOPTERS**

- 3.3.1 Of those attending an information evening, 50 households described themselves as White British. 12 households described themselves as of a White British and other heritage. 3 households described themselves as of Asian heritage. 15 households did not state their background.

3.3.2 Of the adopters approved 17 households were White / British. In other cases the household was of White European heritage, or were of dual heritage where one partner was of White heritage and the other or either white non-British heritage, or Black African heritage.

### **3.4 – POST APPROVAL SUPPORT**

3.4.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption and Permanence Support Team from approval, through the process of placement of children, to the making of an Adoption Order.

3.4.2 Once an Adoption Order has been made, adopters can continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs through the Adoption and Permanence Support Team.

### **3.5 – TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS**

3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption and Fostering Service provide the preparation training for adopters. Adopters also have access to the full training programme offered to the Agency's foster carers and adopters. This ongoing training is available to both approved adopters as well as to adoptive parents at any point after an Adoption Order has been granted.

3.5.2 During the year April 2012 to March 2013 a four day preparation training programme was held on three occasions and was attended by 22 households, compared to 19 households during 2011/2012.

3.5.3 The training covered a variety of topics and experiential exercises including:

- The Adoption Process
- Agency Policy / Legislation
- Valuing Diversity
- Disability Awareness
- Child Development
- Attachment and Resilience
- Health and Education
- Abuse
- Memories, Loss and Separation
- Lifestory work
- Adoption Support including contact
- Matching

3.5.4 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme, and again when prospective adopters attend Adoption Panel. The feedback to Panel during the past 12 months has been universally positive.

## **SECTION 4 – ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

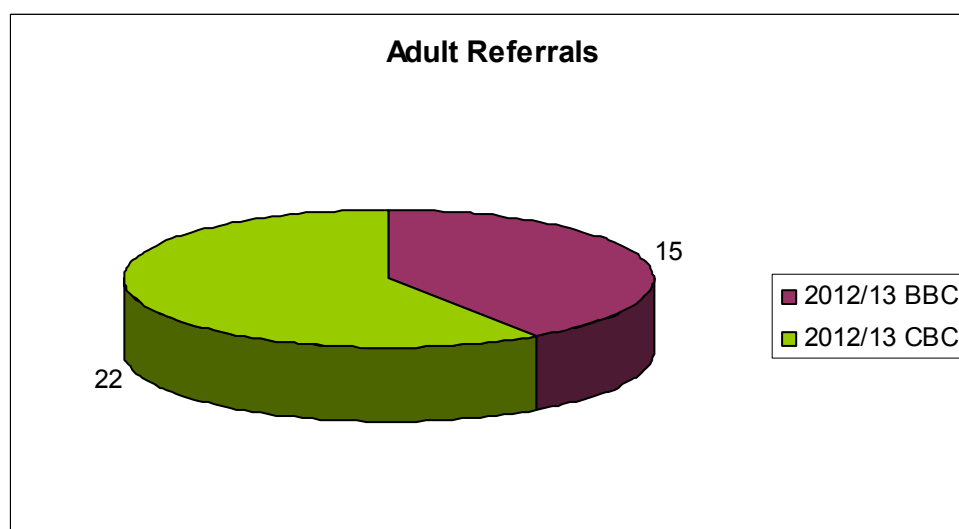
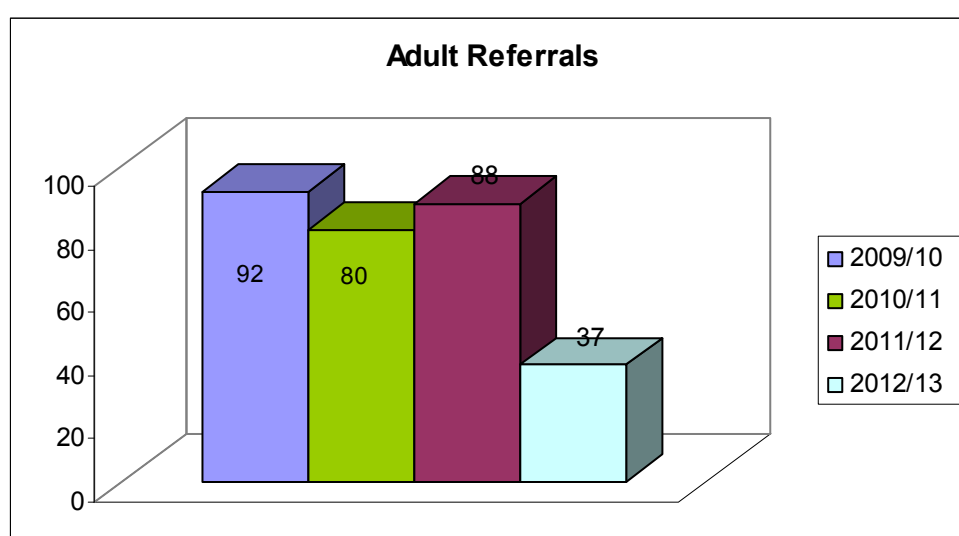
### **4.0 – POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES**

- 4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. These families either self-refer or come to the attention of the department via another agency. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.
- 4.0.2 As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, the team were working directly with 32 adopted children and their families who were in need of support. Of these 19 were from Central Bedfordshire and 13 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 25 children and their families in March 2012. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the team received a total of 13 new referrals for adoption support, 6 from Central Bedfordshire and 7 from Bedford Borough. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the team was also supporting 26 children and families subject to a special guardianship order (14 from Central Bedfordshire and 12 from Bedford Borough.)
- 4.0.3 A number of adopted children and their families were assessed as being in need of therapeutic support. It is expected that this is provided by community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). In a small number of cases this year CAMHS did not have the resources to meet the identified needs of children or deemed that children did not meet their referral criteria.
- 4.0.4 The team have a mailing list of adoptive families from Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days, some of which are provided by the service and some by Adoption UK. They are also sent information about training events provided by the Adoption and Fostering Service.
- 4.0.5 All new adoption support referrals are offered an Adoption UK Buddy and access to the above services. The Adoption & Permanence team also provide groups for adopted children and their families, including Talking About Adoption workshops. All adoption support referrals have an assessment of need and adoption support plan upon request.
- 4.0.6 Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of 190 children (an identical number to 2011/2012), many of which have required direct intervention to support all the parties involved in the contact arrangements, i.e. adopted children and young people, their adoptive parents and their birth families. In addition the service currently manages contact plans in Special Guardianship cases on behalf of 21 children. In total the service supports letterbox contact in 116 Bedford Borough cases, and 95 Central Bedfordshire cases.

### **4.1 – SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES**

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Support Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted people seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Bedfordshire, a counselling service is offered and information is provided to other councils who are supporting people in their areas who were adopted through Bedfordshire. Specific leaflets outlining this service are available to enquirers through the Adoption Duty Desk.

- 4.1.2 Not only is an initial counselling interview offered to those seeking birth records, but work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- 4.1.3 Birth relatives seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service. In the case of birth relatives, they are not given any identifying information about the adopted person.
- 4.1.4 In the period 2012/2013 there were 37 referrals from adult adoptees and their birth relatives who were seeking Post Adoption counselling support. This was a significant decrease on the 88 referrals received in 2011/12 and may be indicative of the increase in use of the internet by individuals wishing to trace their heritage and find birth relatives
- 4.1.5 Of the adult referrals received during 2012/2013, 22 came from Central Bedfordshire and 15 were from Bedford Borough. .



## 4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS

- 4.2.1 Nationally the disruption rate pre Adoption Order is considered to be in the region of 20%. There was one disruption in 2012/13 of children placed by the two councils, meaning that there had only been two disruptions in the last 4 years. This low figure reflects the care given to the matching process between children and adoptive families, the resilience and commitment of adoptive parents and the support given to them and the children in the critical early months of placements.

## SECTION 5 – OTHER ACTIVITIES

### 5.0 – INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

- 5.0.1 Inter-Country adoption has become increasingly more complex in terms of the legal requirements of those countries that permit children to be placed for adoption outside of their country of origin. In recognition of this and given the specialist knowledge and expertise which this work demands, the Adoption Agency has a Service Level Agreement with a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, Parents and Children Together (PACT), which is recognised as being a leading agency in this area of work, to provide this service on its behalf.
- 5.0.2 Families who are normally resident in Bedfordshire wishing to adopt children from overseas are referred to PACT who will provide information and preparation training and will assess and approve families wishing to adopt children from overseas.
- 5.0.3 Families are required to pay for their assessment in accordance with Regulations but Bedfordshire funds all of the initial counselling interviews.
- 5.0.4 During 2012/2013 PACT received 8 enquiries concerning inter-country adoption from residents of Central Bedfordshire or Bedford Borough. No enquirers followed up their enquiry with a request for an initial interview. For the second year running this is a decrease in activity in respect of inter-country adoption.

### 5.1 – THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

- 5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency is a member of the local adoption consortium whose aim is to work in partnership to share information about children and approved adopters to make local matches and to share good practice. The other full members are:
- Buckinghamshire County Council
  - Hertfordshire County Council
  - Luton Borough Council
  - Milton Keynes Council
- Associate member: St Francis Children's Society
- 5.1.2 We are pleased to be able to assist other consortium members and in the year 2012/2013 3 children from within the consortium were placed with adopters trained, assessed and approved by Bedfordshire.



## **5.2 – BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTERING (BAAF)**

- 5.2.1 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agencies are full members of BAAF which is a leading national voluntary organisation working to promote best practice for children separated from their birth families. It is the leading organisation representing local authority and voluntary adoption agencies and provides training courses, practice guidance, research material, and a consultation and advice service to all its members.
- 5.2.2 Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency is also a member of the BAAF Eastern Region, a group which meets quarterly to discuss and exchange best practice in the East Anglia region. Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough are represented by the Agency Adviser, Adoption and Fostering.
- 5.2.3 During the last 12 months the agency has continued its membership of New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies.

## **5.3 – INDEPENDENT BIRTH FAMILY COUNSELLING**

- 5.3.1 The agency provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling and support service. This service is provided by Adoption Plus Limited on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency. Adoption Plus is an independent adoption support agency.
- 5.3.2 The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be adopted an opportunity to talk about their feelings. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members and the counselling will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
- 5.3.3 The contract with Adoption Plus was renewed in 2012/2013 with ongoing contract reviews to ensure there is maximum support for those accessing the service and to ensure optimum take up by birth parents.

## **5.4 – THE ADOPTION SCORECARD**

- 5.4.1 In 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan For Adoption: Tackling Delay' in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions.
- 5.4.2 The scorecard details the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving in with their adoptive family and the length of time between the council having court authority to place a child and them moving in with their adoptive family.
- 5.4.3 The scorecards published in November 2012 for both councils showed that performance in relation to timeliness of placements was in the upper quartile of all councils and better than the targets set by government.

## SECTION 6 CONCLUSION

- 6.0.1 2012/13 has been the fourth year of the shared service for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. This has again been a successful year for the service and one in which we have continued to develop our practice and meet the challenges of increased demand, a national spotlight on adoption challenges of offering creative and quality services that are cost effective.
- 6.0.2 There has been a continued increase in activity across all aspects of the service. The increase in looked after children in both councils during 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 has resulted in a hugely increased number of referrals for permanence planning, both for adoption and for long-term fostering or for other legal alternative permanent options, such as Special Guardianship or Residence Orders.
- 6.0.3 In response, the service has increased the number of assessments of prospective adopters, resulting in increased numbers of approvals and adoption orders granted. In order to meet continued demand a recruitment target for adopters has been set again for 2013/2014, based on known and likely numbers and needs of children requiring adoption. The target has been set at 40 new approvals in 2013/2014.
- 6.0.4 The Government's national reform of adoption has continued during 2012/2013. In March 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' which outlines measures planned to monitor and improve performance. This was followed up by 'Further action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' which was published in January 2013. This document outlined major changes to the adopter recruitment process, including a national recruitment gateway and improvements to adoption support. It also set out government plans to give the Minister reserve powers to take adopter recruitment away from local authorities if they were not able to rise to the challenge to recruit more adopters. The Adoption Service remains in a strong position to rise to the challenges outlined, having robust performance monitoring and good practices in place in regard to planning for adoption and adopter recruitment.
- 6.0.5 In March 2012 following the annual review of the Shared Service Level Agreement it was decided to end the Shared Service Arrangement. This decision was subsequently reviewed in detail in Autumn 2012 with the decision being made for the disaggregation of the service to be effective from 1 January 2014. A project board comprising staff in both councils has been established to plan the arrangements for January 2014 and beyond. This planning process will involve consultation with key stakeholders and staff to ensure that an effective adoption service that meets the needs of children can be maintained and developed

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