



| Appendix 1

# **Adoption Agency**

**Annual Report**

**For the period  
2014 - 2015**

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## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.0.1 This report describes the activity of Central Bedfordshire Council's Adoption Agency during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, 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.

## 1.1 STAFFING / SERVICE STRUCTURE

- 1.1.1 The Adoption Team of Central Bedfordshire Council is made up of the following staff:

- 1x full time Practice Manager
- 3x Senior Practitioners (2 full-time equivalent)
- 4x Social Workers (3.5 full time equivalent)
- 1x Social Work Assistant
- 1x Letter Box Co-ordinator
- 1x Administrator

- 1.1.2 The service has remained largely fully staffed this year.
- 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. The team carries out the full functions of an adoption agency, with social workers completing a range of adoption work, including adopters' assessments, family finding and work with adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- 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, Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Officer and the Panel Advisor and Secretaries who support the adoption panel. The adoption panel staff are shared with Bedford Borough Council.

## 1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel is provided by Central Bedfordshire Council but is a shared panel with Bedford Borough Council.
- 1.2.2 The Adoption Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required. During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the panel met on 22 occasions.
- 1.2.3 The Adoption Panel considers applications from prospective adopters and makes

recommendations as to their approval. Panel also considers the proposed match between children with adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them.

### **1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.3.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the Adoption Panel central list was comprised of 16 members. Each panel is made up of 6 members which include the Panel Chair, one or two social work representatives and independent members.
- 1.3.2 In attendance but non voting members are the Professional Adviser and 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 2014/2015 the Adoption Panel met 22 times and considered 3 plans for relinquished babies.
- 1.4.2 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 the Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 26 children. This compares to 48 in 2013/2014 and is a decrease compared to the previous four years.
- 1.4.3 In relation to approvals, the Panel recommended that 35 households were suitable to adopt a child. Of these 22 families were from Central Bedfordshire and 13 from Bedford Borough. This compares to a total of 29 households in 2013/2014. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.4 In terms of matching, the panel recommended that 50 children should be placed with particular adopters. Of these 29 were from Central Bedfordshire and 21 from Bedford Borough. This compares to 20 children in 2013/2014 from Central Bedfordshire Council.

### **1.5 PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 1.5.1 The Adoption Agency strives to ensure that there is a good level of training, appraisal and induction offered to Panel Members. In October 2014 an Adoption Panel training day was held which covered the following topics:
- Adoption reforms
  - Family finding
  - Teenage Adoption Panel
  - Highs and lows of placements – an overview
- 1.5.2 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal where their personal training needs were discussed and considered.

### **1.6 PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON ADOPTION**

- 1.6.1 Central Bedfordshire Council has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line. Following the Statutory Guidance on Adoption published in 2013, social workers from the team meet to share information with enquirers within 5 working days.
- 1.6.2 Information evenings are held by the Adoption 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. These are held monthly. 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 2014/2015, there were 26 children from Central Bedfordshire referred to the service for adoption.

### **2.1 - OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION**

- 2.1.0 Of the 26 children with plans for adoption in 2014/2015, the team are still family finding for 7 children, 18 children had been placed with prospective adopters by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, with a further 1 having been matched but not yet placed.
- 2.1.1 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. In view of this a total of 53 children have been referred during 2014/2015. 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.

### **2.2 – PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN**

- 2.2.1 Members of the Adoption Team were active in facilitating the placements of the 29 children from Central Bedfordshire placed for adoption in 2014/2015. The number of placements represents an increase from the previous year when 13 placements were made.
- 2.2.2 There were 6 sibling groups placed for adoption during 2014/2015.

### **2.3 – TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT**

- 2.3.1 Of the 29 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2014/2015, 15 were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Central Bedfordshire, 2 were placed with adopters recruited by Bedford Borough and the remaining 12 children were matched with adopters approved by other agencies. 28 of these children are now placed with their new families and one child is in the process of introductions.
- 2.3.2 No children were placed under the new 'Fostering to Adopt' regulations. The adoption team has guidelines in place to consider this as an option for children, however it is

recognised that this will only be an option for a small number of children in any one year.

## **2.4 – ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

2.4.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in the year 2014/2015, 18 were White British, 1 was of White/Asian ethnicity, 1 was Asian/Thai, 3 were White/Guyanese and 5 were of dual heritage.

## **2.5 – AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

2.5.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire in 2014/2015, 15 were aged 2 years or under, 8 were between 3-5 years and 5 were 5 and above.

## **2.6 – GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

2.6.1 Of the 28 children placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 11 were female and 17 were male.

## **2.7 – ADOPTION ORDERS**

2.2.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 3 of the 28 children placed during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. It is expected that a further 20 orders will be made during the forthcoming year.

## **SECTION 3 – ADOPTERS**

### **3.0 – THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION TEAM**

3.0.1 Every child looked after who may need a new permanent family has a social worker from the Adoption Team allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. The Family Finding Social Worker attends 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. The Family Finding Social Worker is active in identifying adoptive 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 children from Central Bedfordshire, and to meet the needs of children nationally requiring adoptive families, a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. This has included holding Drop-in sessions as well as monthly information evenings. Advertising in local newspapers and magazines was used to publicise events.

### **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 the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013.

3.2.2 88 enquiries from prospective adopters were received in 2014/2015. At 31<sup>st</sup> March Central Bedfordshire had 15 sets of adopters in Stage one of the process and 11 couples and one single adopter in Stage 2. In total 22 households were approved during the period.

### **3.3 – ETHNICITY OF ADOPTERS**

3.3.1 Of the adopters approved 19 households were White British, 1 couple were Venezuelan, and one adoptive carer was Caribbean/Indian.

### **3.4 – POST APPROVAL SUPPORT**

3.4.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption 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 Team.

### **3.5 – TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS**

3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption team 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 period April 2014 to March 2015 a modular preparation training programme has been held. This runs monthly with adopters attending at least three foundation modules during the period of their assessment prior to presentation at adoption panel.

3.5.3 The training modules are:

- The Child
- Adoption For Life
- The Adoption Process

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.
- 4.0.2 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.
- 4.0.3 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, the team was working directly with 16 adopted children and their families who were in need of support. This includes one family where a social worker from the team trained in Theraplay delivered this intervention to assist the development of the child's relationship with her adoptive parents. This figure represents an increase from 2014/2015 when the team were working with a total of 12 families.
- 4.0.4 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. In view of this we have commissioned services from a psychologist and counsellor for certain children.
- 4.0.5 The team have a mailing list of adoptive families 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. Since the disaggregation with Bedford Borough we have continued to provide some of these events as a shared service to families living in Bedfordshire. Feedback from adopters and children about these events is extremely positive and it is clear that they all value the opportunity to meet together and to maintain contact with members of the Adoption Team.
- 4.0.6 The Adoption 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.
- 4.0.7 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 over 100 children 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.

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

- 4.1.1 Social Workers in the Adoption Team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted people seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Central Bedfordshire, a counselling service is offered and information is provided to other councils who are supporting people in their areas who were adopted through Central 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 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 the Adoption Team were providing support to 18 adult adoptees and birth relatives who were seeking access to records and support in tracing.

## **4.2 – DISRUPTED ADOPTIONS**

4.2.1 During the period 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 the placements of five children placed for adoption have disrupted. These were:

- Siblings aged 5 and 3 at the point of disruption. They were placed together in an inter-agency placement.
- Siblings aged 5 and 4 who were placed together with Bedford Borough adopters.
- One single child aged 6 who was placed with Central Bedfordshire adopters.

All of these placements ended less than a year after the children were placed and before the adoption order had been made. Disruption meetings have been held in respect of the single child and one of the sibling groups and we are currently arranging a disruption meeting for the other children. We are also examining the factors which might have led to the disruptions with a view to improving practice. This will be an ongoing process but key points that have so far emerged relate to the nature of the support provided to adopters during introductions, the need for closer monitoring of the introductory process and the need for rigorous evidencing and checking out of information during the assessment process. We shall be working with staff to ensure that these elements are addressed.

## **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 Central 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 Central Bedfordshire funds all of the initial counselling interviews.
- 5.0.4 During 2014/2015 PACT received 5 enquiries concerning inter-country adoption from residents of Central Bedfordshire and have been working with one family who have adopted a child in the Philippines.

## **5.1 – THE ADOPTION CONSORTIUM**

5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Agency, (until December 2013 alongside Bedford Borough) 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

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

5.2.1 Central Bedfordshire Council is a full member 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.

## **5.3 – 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 on 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 2014/2015 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 December 2014 showed that performance in relation to timeliness of placements was in the upper quartile of all councils and better than the national average. It indicated that the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted was 553 days. It has to be borne in mind that this figure is adversely affected by children who are adopted by their foster carers where they may have been in placement for sometime before the foster carers decided to apply to adopt and by placements whereby it is thought that owing to the children's behavioural difficulties it would be advisable to delay applying for the order so that we can complete ongoing work with the children and their family. These are nevertheless successful outcomes for the children and In general once the council has Court authority to place a child a family is identified within three months.

## **SECTION 6 - CONCLUSION**

- 6.0.1 There has been a continued increase in activity across all aspects of the service. The increase in looked after children in both councils over the last three years 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 Child Arrangement Orders.
- 6.0.2 In response, the service increased the number of assessments of prospective adopters, and focussed on placing the children waiting for placements in a timely manner. There are now only seven children waiting to be matched with families, of which two are part of a sibling group.
- 6.0.3 As a result of more placements with connected persons we expect to see fewer children referred for adoption in the coming year. We would nevertheless aim to recruit and approve 20 adoptive families in 2015/2016.
- 6.0.4 Post adoption support is becoming an increasing feature of the work of the Adoption Team. Over the past year we have seen a slight increase in referrals for post adoption support with members of the team currently working individually with 16 children and their families. In addition to this we provide support groups for adopted parents and activities for adopted children. These are open to all adoptive families living within Central Bedfordshire.
- 6.0.5 The Adoption Team are also involved in providing intermediary services for adopted adults who were either placed for adoption by other authorities and live within Central Bedfordshire or who now live elsewhere but were originally placed for adoption by this authority. The number of people accessing this service seems to have remained constant with social workers working with a total of approximately 18 people at any one time.
- 6.0.6 The Adoption Team relocated in March 2014 to Stephenson Court in Bedford to become part of the Corporate Parenting Service. This has resulted in the opportunity

for closer joint working with colleagues in the Looked After Children, Court and Leaving Care Teams and assists us in enhancing the quality of our service.

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This information can be made available in  
Large print and in other languages if required

Për Informacion

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