



Appendix A

Central
Bedfordshire

great
prospects

Annual report

Adoption Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council

For the period:

1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017

A great place to live and work.



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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 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, 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 The Adoption Team

- 1.1.1 The Adoption Agency is co-located within the Corporate Parenting Service of Children's Services. This supports the close working relationship with the court teams to achieve early permanence for children.
- 1.1.2 The Adoption Agency has remained conveniently located to support the provision for providing the range of adoption services as specified within the current legislation. The Statutory Guidance underpinning adoption legislation prescribes all the services and process to be followed by an Adoption Agency and the qualifications required by Social Workers
- 1.1.3 The agency has experienced some staffing absences this year but largely retained a consistent staff group. Throughout the reduction in staff
- 1.1.4 During this period the Adoption Team Staffing has been:
- 1 x full time Practice Manager
 - 1 x Senior Practitioner (part time)
 - 5.5 x Social Workers
 - 1 x Social Work Assistant
 - 1 x Business Support Administrators
- 1.1.5 All employed staff are permanent and have a number of years post-qualifying experience.
- 1.1.6 All adoption social workers are qualified and registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and have three years post qualifying experience required by the 'Restriction of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005'.
- 1.1.7 The team carries out the full functions of an adoption agency, with social workers carrying a range of adoption work, including prospective adopter assessments, adoption support, family finding and work with adopted adults and birth relatives.
- 1.1.8 The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, a Training Coordinator, a Professional Panel Adviser and Panel Secretary who support and manage the Adoption Panel.

1.2 The Adoption Panel

- 1.2.1 The Adoption Panel continues to be a shared panel with Bedford Borough Council hosted by Central Bedfordshire. Panel usually meets every month of the year, with extraordinary panels as and when required.
- 1.2.2 Within this period the Adoption Panel met on 17 occasions and have primarily been full day panels considering a maximum of six cases per panel.
- 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 prospective adopters, making recommendations on any matters brought before them.
- 1.2.4 The Agency Decision Maker makes the decision in regard to whether a child should be placed for adoption without a recommendation from the Adoption Panel. The only exception is for a plan for adoption for a relinquished child.

1.3 Adoption Panel membership

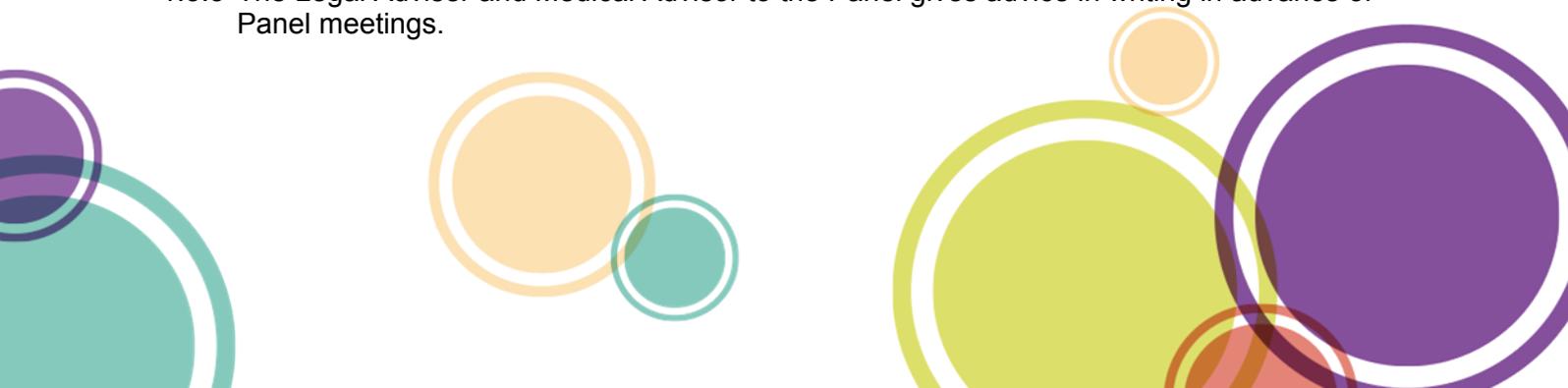
- 1.3.1 As at 31st March 2017 the Adoption Panel Central List was as follows:

Panel Chair	Independent
Independent	Adoptive Mother
Independent	Adoptive Father
Independent	Birth Parent of an Adopted Child
Independent	Gypsy and Traveller Educational Consultant
Independent	Adopted Person,
Social Work Member	Social Worker
Social Work Member	Social Worker
Social Work Member	Independent Social Worker
Social Work Member	Social Worker, Adoption Team CBC
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	Central Bedfordshire Council
Panel Secretary	Central Bedfordshire Council

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



1.4.1 Panel and Agency Decision Maker activity

- 1.4.2 In this period the Adoption Panel met on 17 occasions.
- 1.4.3 The Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 18 children. This compares to 30 in 2015/2016 which shows a significant decrease reflective of the National Adoption activity.
- 1.4.4 In addition the Agency Decision Maker decided that 5 plans for adoption should be rescinded. 2 were plans for children made in a previous year and 3 were due to a change in the children's Care Plan.
- 1.4.5 In relation to approvals of Prospective Adopters, 17 households were recommended for approval by Adoption Panel and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker as suitable to adopt. All applicants attended the panel.
- 1.4.6 This was 3 households less than the set target however is a reflection of the reduction in adoption plans for children within this period.
- 1.4.7 The panel considered matches for 15 children with identified prospective adopters. This compares to 22 in 2016/2017 and 29 children in 2014/2015 again reflecting the National decline in children with a plan for adoption.

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.
- 1.5.2 An annual training day was held on 24th October 2016 covering the following subject matters:
- Review of the Legal Framework.
 - The Impact of Mental Health on Parenting
 - Travellers of the United Kingdom – their ethnicity and origins
 - Central Bedfordshire Performance Update
- 1.5.3 All Panel Members had an annual appraisal completed by the Agency Panel Advisor and Panel Chairperson where their personal training needs are discussed and considered.
- 1.5.4 In addition the Panel Chair attends the CoramBaaf panel chairs meeting to support learning, good practice development and updates to legislation. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair also attended practice meetings with the Central East Regional Adoption Agency partnership to share good practice.
- 1.5.5 Panel members can also access the annual training programme to attend any training needs identified from their annual appraisal.

- 1.5.6 The Panel Chair is also invited to attend adoption disruption meetings to learn from practice.

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. Enquiries can also be made via the council website where information on adoption is readily available and directly to an adoption email address. Enquirers are provided with further information about the needs of children placed for adoption and the assessment process and are invited to attend an information evening. In addition they are offered a meeting with an adoption Social worker to provide further information and discuss their personal circumstances to enable them to consider whether they want to progress an application as prospective adopters.
- 1.6.2 Information Evenings are held monthly 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. 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 this period 33 children were referred to the service for parallel planning where adoption would be the alternative plan if no other options were available. This was a slight decrease from the previous year of 38.
- 2.0.2 In order to avoid case drift or delay 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.
- 2.0.3 Early Permanence has remained a focus including the provision of Foster for Adoption placements for children. Such placements will only be progressed when there is clear evidence that adoption is a likely Care Plan for that child. This usually means that there is evidence from recent Care proceedings of a parents previous children who have been placed for adoption and there has been no positive changes to the current circumstances.

2.1 Outcomes for children with plans for adoption

- 2.1.0 Of the 18 children with plans for adoption in this period (1.4.2) 4 children had been placed with prospective adopters by 31st March 2017, with a further 2 having been matched but not yet placed. 2 have been linked with prospective adopters pending the match being presented to adoption panel, 3 have had the adoption decision rescinded due to a change to the Care Plan and a further 6 are due to have the decision rescinded following conclusion of the court proceedings as Placement orders were not granted.

2.1.1 In this period a total of 15 children have been matched with prospective adopters.

2.1.1 As of 31st March 2017 there are 2 children subject to Placement Orders with a Care Plan for adoption. 1 child is linked with prospective adopters pending assessment and 1 child where family finding is active as a link has yet to be identified.

2.2 Placements of children

2.2.2 There were 2 sibling groups placed for adoption during this period.

2.2.3 1 child placed had significant health needs.

2.2.4 No placements experienced a disruption pre adoption order

2.2.5 3 children have been placed in Foster for Adoption placements enabling early permanence.

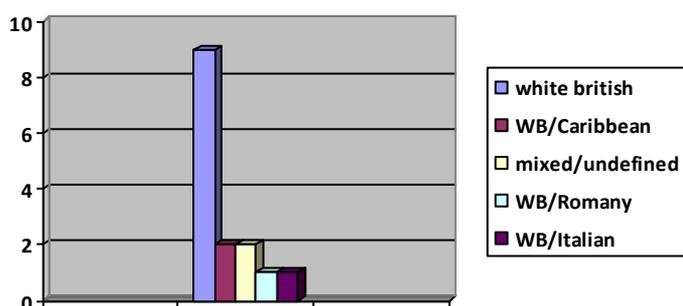
2.3 Type of adoption placement

2.3.1 Of the 15 children matched in this period, 9 were matched with prospective adopters approved by Central Bedfordshire. 6 were matched with prospective adopters approved by other agencies.

2.3.2 2 children were placed in Fostering for Adoption placements approved by Central Bedfordshire. 1 child was placed in a placement provided by another Local Authority to enable a placement with a sibling.

2.4 Ethnicity of children placed for adoption

2.4.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption, 9 were White British, 3 were of dual ethnicity, 2 were of mixed ethnicity and 1 was White British/Romany.



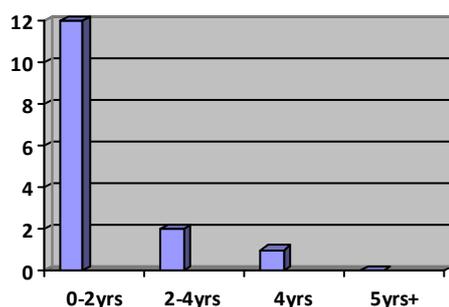
2.4.2 Central Bedfordshire practice is to recruit adopters who can support and promote a child's ethnic and cultural heritage

2.4.3 Central Bedfordshire works within the statutory guidance regarding the placement of minority ethnic children to avoid any delay in matching due to a child's ethnicity. Children are matched within families who are able to meet the majority of a child's identified needs.

2.5 Ages of children placed for adoption

2.5.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 12 were aged 2 years or under, 2 were between 2-4 years and 1 child was 4yrs +.

All children placed in Foster for adoption placements were under 1 year old.



2.6 Gender of children placed for adoption

2.6.1 Of the 15 children matched for adoption by Central Bedfordshire, 7 were male and 8 were female.

2.7 Adoption Orders

2.2.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 27 children during the period. Reflecting a significant increase from 17 in the previous year.

2.2.2 As of 31st March 2017 6 looked after children are placed for adoption pending the adoption order. These are likely to be granted within the year period 2017/18.

Section 3:

Adopters

3.0 The work of the Adoption Team

3.0.1 A core objective is to recruit and assess a diverse range of adoptive families who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption decision. This includes the recruitment of adopters able to offer foster for adoption placements, placements for siblings and children with significant needs.

3.0.2 Placing children with adoptive families who can meet most of the child's identified needs including, ethnicity, culture and religion where possible.

However each may be reconsidered if there is a delay in identifying a suitable match in which case a match with adopters who are able to meet most of the identified needs will be considered.

- 3.0.3 Central Bedfordshire provide a responsive adoption support service that is available to adopted children, adoptive families, birth families and prescribed persons and adopted adults. Children and families are provided with a leaflet explaining adoption support which is available on the council website.
- 3.0.4 Central Bedfordshire offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption or affected by adoption

3.1 Recruitment of adopters

- 3.1.1 In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for 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.
- 3.1.2 This has included information stands throughout the year with the community 'Just Ask' bus manned by staff throughout the county at various events such as Gala Days and local Markets. Communications via e bulletin during National Adoption Week and use of social media campaigns. In addition national advertising in the media has taken place in partnership with First4Adoption to identify a match for a specific child.
- 3.1.3 The recruitment strategy has become more targeted to provide placements that can consider:
 - Foster for Adoption – to provide early permanence for children where this type of placement is appropriate
 - Sibling groups – if appropriate we strive to place siblings together in the same family.
 - Children with additional needs – children with a disability, children exposed to drugs and alcohol during pregnancy or children with social, educational and/or emotional needs.
- 3.1.4 The target for approval of adopters during 2016/17 was 20. This reflected what had been anticipated in demand from children subject to placement orders and the number of adopters already approved and waiting.

3.2 The assessment process; enquiries, assessments and approvals

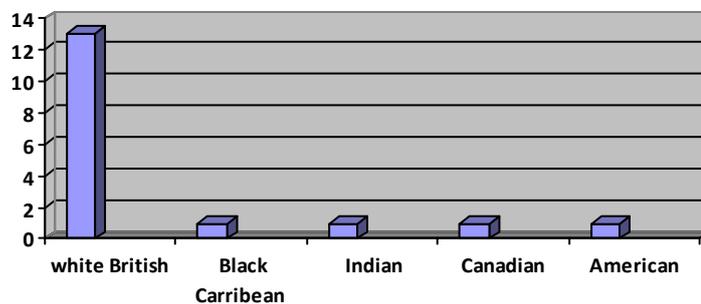
- 3.2.1 Prospective Adopter assessments are carried out in accordance with the 2011 National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Statutory Guidance for Adoption published in July 2013. The two stage process for adopters, which was introduced as part of the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda, remains to be implemented.
- 3.2.2 100 enquiries were received in this period.
- 3.2.3 17 were presented to panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

At 31st March 2017 Central Bedfordshire had 6 prospective adopter households in Stage one of the process and 8 in Stage two.

- 3.2.4 As of 31st March 2017 Central Bedfordshire have 9 approved prospective adoptive families waiting to be linked with a child. Many of these are available for children who are waiting nationally.
- 3.2.5 8 Central Bedfordshire approved adoptive families have provided placements for 12 children from other Local Authorities within this period.

3.3 Ethnicity of adopters

- 3.3.1 13 approved households were White British. 1 was Black Caribbean and 3 were couples of mixed ethnicity including White British and Indian, White British and Canadian and White British and American.



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 granted, adopters can continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs via the Adoption Team.
- 3.4.3 As of 31st March 2017 there were 9 approved prospective adopters who had yet to have a link with a child identified.
- 3.4.4 Approved prospective adopters must be reviewed annually if not matched or linked with a child. There is no requirement for the review to be presented to the Adoption Panel unless the agency consider that approval is no longer appropriate. 3 Annual Reviews were completed within this period with approval continuing to be appropriate.

3.5 Training for adopters

- 3.5.1 Social Workers from the Adoption team provide the preparation training for prospective adopters. Up until January 2017 this training was held jointly with Bedford Borough.

3.5.2 Training is accessed by prospective adopters in Stage one and is provided in three modules:

- **The Process** – information about the assessment process and matching.
- **The Child** – Explores the experiences and trauma of children placed for adoption
- **Adoption for Life** – Explores a child's life story and Adoption Support

3.5.3 Foster for Adoption training is also available for applicants wanting to consider providing this type of placement. A Foster for Adoption placement will only be progressed when there is clear evidence that adoption is a likely Care Plan for that child.

3.5.4 Adopters also have access to the full annual training programme offered by Central Bedfordshire. This annual programme is available to both prospective adopters and adoptive parents after an Adoption Order has been granted.

3.5.5 Training is evaluated at the end of each programme. The feedback during the past 12 months has been positive.

Section 4:

Adoption support services

4.0 Post adoption support to families

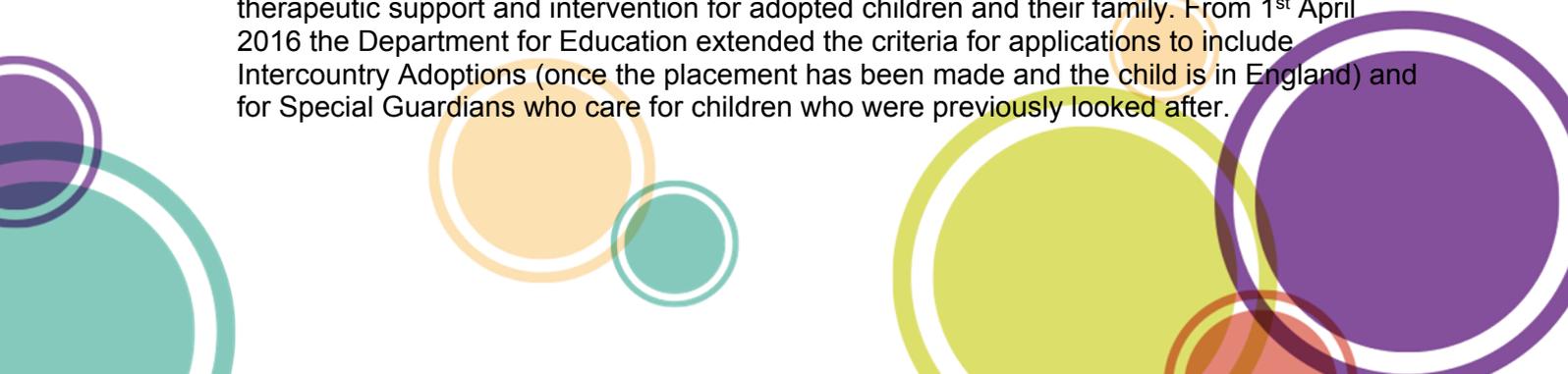
4.0.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. To inform people about support available we have a booklet called 'Adoption Support Services in Central Bedfordshire'. Also available is a 'Children's Guide to Adoption Support'. Both can be downloaded from the Council website.

4.0.2 In this period the service has completed 13 adoption support assessments, each either requiring advice and support only, signposting to universal services or a prescribed service such as therapy or counselling.

4.0.3 The family's either self-refer or are referred via other agencies such as school or health services. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.

4.0.4 As of 31st March 2015, the team was working directly with 36 adopted children providing adoption support. This is an increase of 4 from the same time in the previous period.

4.0.5 The Adoption Support Fund has remained available throughout this year to provide therapeutic support and intervention for adopted children and their family. From 1st April 2016 the Department for Education extended the criteria for applications to include Intercountry Adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in England) and for Special Guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.



- 4.0.6 In October 2016, following a budget review of the fund the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families advised of changes to the funds available for families. The letter advised that in 2015/16 the £19 million pound fund was accessed by 3500 families. In 2016/17 the available funding was increased to £21 million and a further £2 million increase was introduced in October 2016. However demand for support was twice the level forecast and in October 2016 the fund had already been accessed by more families than the total in the previous year.
- 4.0.7 Following discussions with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Adoption Leadership Board, an interim measure was introduced with immediate effect. This measure was the introduction of a £5000.00 'Fair Access Limit' which meant a maximum amount of funding was available per child for the remainder of the year.
- 4.0.8 The review recognised that a small number of children may require an exemption to the Fair Access Limit and advised that funding will be available for such children in exceptional circumstances. In such cases funding would be available but only where the Local Authority agree to 'match' funding.
- 4.0.9 The scope for access to the fund has remained unchanged.
- 4.10 The Agency maintains a mailing list of adoptive families to send newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days and the annual training programme.
- 4.11 Each child placed for adoption has a contact plan in relation to post adoption contact with their birth family. Birth family includes birth parents, siblings, grandparents and any other significant family member. The service currently manages contact plans on behalf of 120 children.

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 adults seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Central Bedfordshire an access to records counselling service is offered. Information is also provided to other councils who are supporting adopted adults living in their area who were adopted through Bedfordshire.
- 4.1.2 Initial counselling interview is offered to those seeking birth records and 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 or those with a prescribed relationship, seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service where appropriate. In the case of birth relatives, they are not provided with any identifying information about the adopted person but the Agency acts as the intermediary.

- 4.1.4 At 31st March 2017 the Adoption Team were providing support to 4 adult adoptees accessing their adoption records.

4.2 Disrupted adoptions

- 4.2.1 There was one adoption placement for two siblings that experienced a disruption pre the granting of an adoption order. Both children were placed in 2014.

Section 5:

Other activities

5.0 Inter-Country and non agency adoption

5.0.1 Intercountry Adoption

During this period we did not receive any enquiries regarding intercountry adoption.

- 5.0.2 A Service Level Agreement is being explored with the Intercountry Adoption Centre to manage this aspect of the agency responsibility.

5.0.3 Non Agency Adoption

In this period 8 enquiries regarding Step Parent Adoption were received and 1 progressed to a notification of intention to adopt.

5.1 Regional Adoption Agency

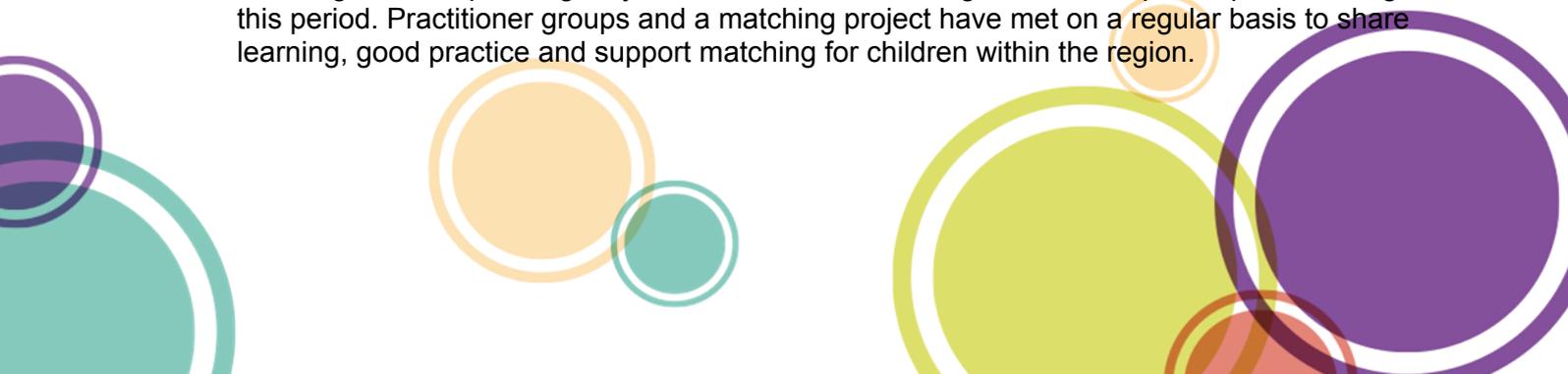
- 5.1.1 Central Bedfordshire are members of the Central East Partnership with other Local Authorities:

- Northamptonshire Council
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Cambridge Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Norfolk Council
- Milton Keynes Council

In addition the partnership includes two Voluntary Adoption Agencies:

- AdoptionPlus
- St. Francis Children's Society

- 5.1.2 The Regional Adoption Agency has remained in the design and development phase during this period. Practitioner groups and a matching project have met on a regular basis to share learning, good practice and support matching for children within the region.



5.2 Membership

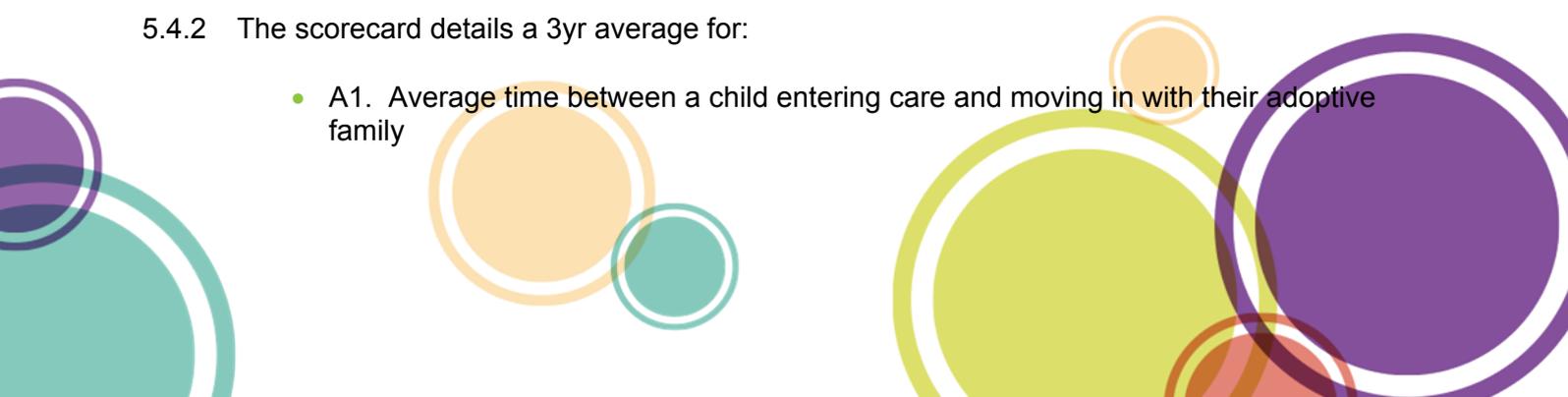
- 5.2.1 The agency has continued its membership of New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies.
- 5.2.2 Membership with Adoption UK has continued which provides:
- The ability to Feature children within a family finding resource – Children Who Wait which has an online and printed facility.
 - Attend training workshops on a wide range of current adoption issues and practices, or purchase courses for families.
 - Get promoted on our online database of agencies.
 - Receive up to four free memberships to give to families for their adoption journey.
 - Connect with experienced staff through the helpline.
 - Access to over 900 books and CDs for professionals and families.
 - Receive up to six free copies of Adoption Today magazine to keep up to date with the latest news and expert advice.
 - Access information for families; from articles about the process, to factsheets and recommended reading lists.
 - Receive discounts on the latest publications, guides, and practical handbooks

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. 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/are adopted an opportunity for independent counselling support. Although the agency are involved in commissioning this service, Adoption Plus will undertake all counselling work with the birth family members which will be confidential unless concerns arise about the safety or welfare of a child.
- 5.3.3 Ongoing contract reviews are held each quarter of the year to ensure there is maximum support available 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 a 3yr average for:

- A1. Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family
- 

- A2. Average time between the council receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- A3. Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)

5.4.3 Central Bedfordshire performance is:

A1. 3 year average (2013-2016) for time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days) was 507 days. Showing a reduction of 31 days from the previous performance.

This is lower than the England/National average for the same period which was 558 days. (Nationally, the lowest rate was 325 days and the highest was 872 days)

The scorecard of the period 2012-15 was 538 days showing that performance has improved to reduce the number of days.

A2. 3 year 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 was 150 days. Showing an increase of 8 days from the previous performance.

This is lower than the reported England/National figure of 226 days for the same period. (Nationally, the lowest rate was 62 days and the highest was 413 days)

A3. 60% of Central Bedfordshire Children with a placement order wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The England/National average of 55% shows that Central Bedfordshire is performing slightly better than the England average.

5.4.4 Average length of care proceedings locally during 2013-16 (weeks) at 28 weeks was lower than the reported England/National average of 30 weeks. Showing a significant improvement from the previous performance of 40 weeks.

Section 6:

Conclusion and performance objectives

- 6.0.1 Recruit a target of 20 adopters within 2017/18 and continue to work in partnership with regional partners to widen the pool and placement choice to meet the needs of all children with a plan for adoption.
- 6.0.2 To continue to focus on Early Permanence for children by maintaining a robust parallel planning process within the authority to improve on reducing the number of days a of a child entering care to be placed in an adoptive family.
- 6.0.3 Target performance has improved from the previous year scorecard and has been a service approach in a combination of improving the length of care proceedings and the focus on Early permanence.
- 6.0.4 Post Adoption support continues to be an increasing feature of the work of the Adoption team. Adoptive parents have access to the annual training programme and can request an assessment of adoption support needs until their child is 18 years old. Central Bedfordshire

will continue to make the best use of the Adoption Support Fund to provide therapeutic adoption support for families.

- 6.0.5 Development of the Teenage Adoption Panel has been slow due to staffing capacity but will be progressed in 2017/18.
- 6.0.6 Preparation training for prospective adopters has been reviewed and re designed for implementation in 2017/18.
- 6.0.7 Continue to work in partnership with regional partners to develop the Regional Adoption Agency.

Report written by:

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Telephone: 0300 300 8090

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

Për Informacion

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برای اطلاع

Per Informazione

معلومات کے لئی

Informacja

Za Informacije

তথ্যের জন্য

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