Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

5 January 2021

Subject:	**Wiltshire Council Adoption Service: 2020/21 Q1-2, 6 Month Report**
Cabinet Member:	**Cllr Laura Mayes Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills**
Key Decision:	**Non Key**

Executive Summary

It is a statutory requirement that the Families and Children's Service provides regular assurance reports to the Council regarding its responsibility for the adoption of children. The main mechanism is the provision of the annual year-end report which is supported by a brief six-month update report relating to Quarters 1 and 2 of the financial year.

For this reporting period, the main area of focus is in relation to the Service and outcomes for Wiltshire's children who need to be adopted, ensuring that appropriate matches are made and that children move to live with their adoptive families in a timely way. In doing this, it is necessary to consider the effectiveness of Adoption West, the partnership organisation that has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and approving adopters for our children.

As indicated in the Annual Report for the year 2019/20, 22 adoption orders were granted, and 21 families living in Wiltshire were approved as suitable to adopt, 85 in the overall Adoption West area. In Quarters 1-2 of 2020/21, 12 adoption orders were granted, 9 Wiltshire children were placed for adoption and overall 12 families were approved as suitable to adopt. A further 2 children have been matched at matching panel in October and November.

Wiltshire Council remains committed to achieving best outcomes for children in care, including those for whom adoption is considered to be in their best interest. There is a close working relationship with Adoption West, the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) that was launched on 1st March 2019. Adoption West is a partnership organisation working with six local authorities.

Annual comparative performance is measured using the Adoption Scorecard which, for Wiltshire Council, shows overall continued improvement and is included within this report for information.

The 2019/20 Annual Report described continuing good progress in developing the collaborative arrangements to ensure effective adoption practice and to improve overall adoption performance.

The Ofsted inspection of Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Services carried out in June 2019, graded as Good in all domains, said:

"The arrangements for finding children adoptive parents are a strength. The new relationship with Adoption West….is working well and has been seamless for both children and carers. Children in Wiltshire are waiting less time than ever to move in with their adoptive family. The scrutiny of the performance of the RAA [Regional Adoption Agency] is thorough and challenging."

Cabinet has previously received detailed information regarding Adoption West and the role, responsibility and accountability arrangements that are in place.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

Reason for Proposal(s)

Wiltshire Council is an Adoption Agency registered with Ofsted. The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards (25.6) and 2013 Statutory Guidance (3.93 and 5.39) describe the information that is required to be regularly reported to the executive side of the local authority to provide assurance that the adoption agency is complying with the conditions of registration whilst being effective and achieving good outcomes for children and service users.

Chief Executive
Terence Herbert

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

5 January 2021

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Cabinet Member:	**Cllr Laura Mayes Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills**
Key Decision:	**Non Key**

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an interim six-month report to Cabinet regarding adoption performance within the Families and Children's Service of Wiltshire Council. It is a requirement of the condition of registration as described in 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards and 2013 Statutory Guidance that Cabinet is satisfied that the Service complies with the conditions of registration, is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children.

2. Cabinet received the Annual Report for 2019-20 in July 2020, covering the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

3. For this interim reporting period, the main area of focus is in relation to the Service and outcomes for Wiltshire's children who need to be adopted, ensuring that appropriate matches are made and that children move to live with their adoptive families in a timely way. In doing this, it is necessary to consider the effectiveness of Adoption West, the partnership organisation that has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and approving adopters for our children.

4. This report includes brief information regarding the management of the Service, children who require adoptive placements and those who are placed, the recruitment and approval of adopters, the disruption of placements, children where the plan for adoption changes and the work of the Adoption Panel. This includes information about the effectiveness of Adoption West.

5. It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

6. The adoption work of Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Service supports a central priority of the Wiltshire Council Business Plan, to protect those who are most vulnerable. Two specific actions are:

- To develop an outstanding Adoption Service for all children for whom adoption is in their best interest, and

- To work with voluntary sector partners to ensure that we offer and deliver a comprehensive array of adoption support services.

7. Adoption West became an Ofsted registered Adoption Agency in October 2018 and become fully operational in March 2019. The responsibility for care planning and casework for the child remains with the local authority. All activity relating to the recruitment, assessment and approval of adoptive parents is with Adoption West. The matching of children with adopters happens at Adoption West Adoption panels with reporting and attendance required of Wiltshire Council children's social workers. The Wiltshire Agency Decision maker has the final say for children's matches.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. The main consideration for the Council is to be assured about statutory compliance and the effectiveness of the Service. In 2019/20 22 children were adopted (it was 33 in the previous year and 22 in the year before that). Of these, 6 (27%) were placed within 12 months of the decision that adoption was in their best interest being made. In 2019/20 84 families were approved as suitable to adopt by Adoption West. A focus is maintained on ensuring a sufficiency of adopters to meet the needs of Wiltshire's children with any Adoption West approved family being potentially available to be considered.

9. In Quarters 1-2, 12 children were adopted, of whom (83%) were placed within 12 months of the decision being made that adoption was in their best interest. In this time, 12 families were approved as suitable to adopt. On average, 25 children have been adopted each year over the past 3 years and so on this basis, that average will be met again in 2020/21. The current score card shows Wiltshire is at the lower end of the statistical neighbour range.

10. Wiltshire's current Adoption Scorecard, published in 2020, is available on-line. The key measure indicating timely outcomes for children being adopted are:

A1: the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted:

- The local authority three-year average for 2016-19 is **314** days (2015-18 was **397** days). This is significantly shorter than the England three-year average for 2016-19 of **376** days. The Scorecard shows steady improvement over time.
- The local authority figure for 2019 is **289** days, down from **342** days in the previous year.
- The Statistical Neighbour three-year average is **348** days and the 2019 average is **289** days.
- Local monitoring indicates that this performance measure has declined in 2020-21 and now stands at **423** for the year to date and **366** for the period 2018-21.

A2: the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:

- The local authority three-year average for 2016-19 is **154** days (2015-18 was **173** days). This is less than the England three-year average for 2016-19 of **178** days. The Scorecard shows steady improvement over time.
- The local authority one-year figure for 2019 is **100** days, the same as in 2018-19. In 2017-18 the figure was **132** days.
- The Statistical Neighbour three-year average is **173** days and the 2019 average is **176** days.
- Local monitoring indicates that performance has remained stable in 2020-21 and now stands at **156** for the year to date and **123** for the period 2018-21.

A3: the number of children who waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family:

- This is no longer reported upon in the Scorecard.

- In the three-year period 2015-18, there were **76%** (99) of children who waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This remained at the same level as in the previous cycle. The last time this data was published in the adoption scorecard, the England three-year average (2015-18) was **56%**.

11. It is important to recognise the reason for the increase of the A1 measure in Q1-2. As has been reported in previous annual and interim reports, Wiltshire Council is ambitious for children who cannot remain living safely with their families and need to have legal permanence through adoption. This means that where we are sure that the plan for adoption is right, we will continue to search for an adoptive family. In this reporting period, the number of children in this overall cohort is small so there is disproportionate impact on performance when it takes longer to identify adopters for these children. The cohort of 12 children includes sibling groups aged 6 and 4, 3 and 1, 8 and 3 and a 10 year old. This shows that a relatively high proportion of harder to place children affects the measure; once these children are adopted, we will see the measure improving over time once again. There have also been some court delays due to the closure of Courts and the delayed submission of specialist reports because of the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that for some children Care Orders, Placement Orders and Adoption Orders have not been made in a timely fashion, all three orders having a direct bearing on his measure. This situation is now improving and will be monitored for continuing impact; full analysis of this will be included in the Annual Report for 2020/21 as the pandemic and its impact continues.

12. There is robust tracking of children (both within the local authority and Adoption West) who require decisions that they Should be Placed for Adoption, through to family finding, matching and the application for Adoption Order. This occurs monthly within the local authority and no recent significant unreasonable delays have been identified. We can see that early family finding is identifying adoptive families quickly, that transitions are happening when required and that adopters are not inappropriately waiting before they make the Adoption Order application.

13. The increased number of adoptive families being found for children across the Adoption West area is encouraging (85 families approved in 2019-20, an increase from 65 in the previous year). It remains challenging within Adoption West (and the wider region) to maintain the pool of families who want to adopt children, particularly siblings, and so it is an Adoption West priority to formulate and implement an effective recruitment strategy. The national trend is a slow increase of adopter numbers. Adoption West works nationally with other RAAs and the RAA Leaders' Group regarding national campaigning to recruit more adopters for children.

14. Processes are strongly embedded to ensure that family finding starts at the earliest opportunity and that all activities are monitored and completed in a timely fashion. Adoption West has family finding practitioners within the organisation, recognising and building on best practice and delivering good outcomes for Wiltshire's children and those across the Adoption West area.

15. The full Scorecard is as follows:

Select LA:

Wiltshire

Select indicator(s) to display on graph:

- [x] Select all
- [x] A10
- [x] A10 England average
- [x] A2
- [x] A2 England average
- [x] A20
- [x] A20 England average

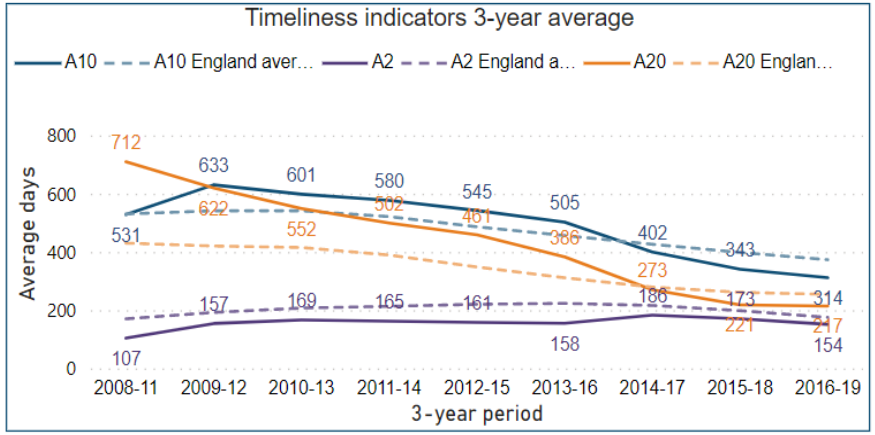
Select indicator(s) to display on graph:

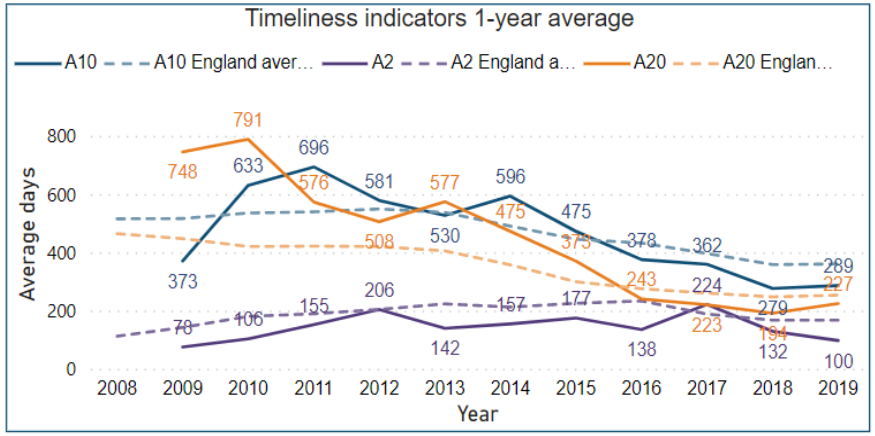
- [x] Select all
- [x] A10
- [x] A10 England average
- [x] A2
- [x] A2 England average
- [x] A20
- [x] A20 England average

RAA this LA is in:

(Blank)

Local Authority (LA): Timeliness Indicators





A10: Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster care adoptions:

2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was longer than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
289	363		314	376

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

2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was shorter than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
100	170		154	178

A20: Average time (in days) between entering care and placement order:

2019 average days:	2019 England average:	Average time in 2019 was longer than in 2018	2016-19 average days:	2016-19 England average:
227	256		217	257

Matching and Recruitment (at 31 March 2019)

A14: Number of children waiting to be placed with a placement order: 12

A11: Number of approved adoptive families waiting to be matched: 20

A13: Number of applications of adoptive families still being assessed: 25

Please see ASGLB local level files for further adopter measures. Where a LA is part of a RAA they will show as N/A for the A11 and A13 indicators.

Related information - 2019

A15: Number of ADM decisions:	A16: Number of new placement orders granted:	A17: Number of children in a FFA/Concurrent Planning foster placement:
29	26	c

Additional information - 2016-19

A5: Number of children for whom permanence decisions have changed away from adoption:	Number of adoptions:	Number of adoptions: BME:	Number of adoptions: Aged 5 or over:	Number of children starting to be looked after: Under the age of 5
9	89	c	17	186

16. Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Service retains responsibility for the children who need adoptive families. Each child has an allocated Social Worker with responsibility of ensuring that the plan for permanence through adoption is achieved whilst it remains appropriate for the child. There are robust management and reviewing arrangements in place for each child.

17. Management arrangements and staffing within Adoption West and the Local Authority have remained broadly as described in the Annual Report and are compliant with regulation in terms of qualification and experience. A Service Director leads Adoption West, supported by a Service Manager, Business Manager and Team Managers working in each of the three hubs.

18. Three aspects of services are delivered by Adoption West in relation to Wiltshire Council's children:

- The recruitment, preparation, training and approval of adopters
- The provision of Adoption Support, including through the Adoption Support Fund
- The matching of children with adopters (carried out in conjunction with the child's Social worker)

19. In addition, Adoption West is responsible for providing an intermediary service for adopted adults and birth relatives wishing to trace family members, for those wishing to trace adopted children, support for non-agency adoptions (typically step-parents wishing to adopt), and those wishing to adopt children from overseas. This will include people who live in Wiltshire.

20. Adoption West has its own governance arrangement. There is a Board of Directors in place, an Adoption West Scrutiny Board and a Service Leads Group. The agency has its own development plan.

21. The key objectives as described in the Adoption West Statement of purpose are:

- More children will be identified earlier for an adoption plan
- We will recruit a larger pool of adopters with diverse skills and abilities including more adoptive parents able to consider "hard to place" children
- Fewer children will wait more than 6 months for an adoptive family
- Children will experience fewer moves before being settled into a permanent home
- Our adopters will be better prepared with relevant training and support
- There will be fewer disrupted adoptions
- We will be more efficient with our resources to achieve best value
- An increased range of post-adoption services will reach more adoptive families to improve the quality of family relationships
- Children and young people will have a strong sense of their identity.

22. As required to be provided to Cabinet, brief performance information and commentary relating to Quarters 1-2 in 2020 is as follows:

Profile of children waiting for an adoptive placement (at end of period)

Legal status	2018/19	2019/20	Q 1-2 2020/21
Section 20	0	7	3
Interim Care Order	19	5	9
Care Order	0	5	0
None	2	0	3
Total	**21**	**17**	**15**

Ethnic Origin	2018/19	2019/20	Q 1-2 2020/21
White British	20	16	9
Mixed/Other	0	0	0
White Irish	0	0	0
Other Ethnic Group	1	1	6
Total	**21**	**17**	**15**

Age	2018/19	2019/20	Q 1-2 2020/21
0-11 months	3	3	2
12-23 months	2	1	4
2-4 years	6	7	4
5-10 years	10	6	5
11 and over	0	0	0
Total	**21**	**17**	**15**

23. To be noted is that some children may have remained at home with birth family whilst subject to care proceedings with a care plan for adoption. For those children, other permanence options (such as Special Guardianship Orders) will be considered by the court. In this reporting period 3 children ended up subject to Special Guardianship Orders.

Wiltshire Children adopted

Age	2018/19	2019/20	Q 1-2 2020/21
0-11 months	4	2	1
12-23 months	15	12	4
2-4 years	9	6	3
5-10 years	5	2	4
11 and over	0	0	0
Total	**33**	**22**	**12**

Rescissions of Placement Orders and Disruptions

24. In 2019-20, 5 rescissions were made where the plan for the child moved away from adoption, leading to the rescission of Adoption and Placement Orders. Wiltshire Council applies rigorous scrutiny to care planning and it is inevitable that there will be developments in a case or a child's situation that means that adoption is no longer in that child's best interest; this does not mean that an incorrect decision

was initially made about the care plan but that situations change over time. For example, a family member or parent can resume the care of a child where it had not previously been envisaged, a court may not grant a Placement Order but make a Special Guardianship Order instead or a plan will move to long term fostering, particularly for older children. In Q1-2, 2 rescissions were made and there are a further 3 children who are currently in this rescission process. Of these children 3 will live with family members under Special Guardianship Orders and 2 will be in long term fostering arrangements. This is broadly in line with previous years, reflecting a continuing ambition for Wiltshire's children, and more detail will be included in the annual report. The rescissions do not impact upon the scorecard measures as the children do not meet the definitions of the cohorts.

25. During 2019-20, there were no adoption placement disruptions notified to the Council before an Adoption Order was made. In Q1-2, there have been no disruptions.

26. Details of the recruitment and assessment activity of Adoption West is available in their Annual Report and so is not included here. However, Cabinet requires assurance of sufficiency for Wiltshire children and so, in summary, at 31st March 2020, Adoption West had approved 84 families in the year of which 21 lived in the Wiltshire area. In Q1-2, a further 14 families were approved as suitable to adopt with 26 families currently in assessment through the Trowbridge hub. As indicated above, the challenge is to find adopters for older children and siblings and so this must be reflected in the Adoption West adopter recruitment strategy.

27. One principle of Adoption West is that there will be more people becoming approved as adopters who are more immediately accessible to social workers looking for families for Wiltshire children. It is not necessarily the case that these children will be placed with adopters living in Wiltshire as the match with the family best placed to provide permanence through adoption, and meet the needs of the child, is paramount. The wider access to adopters will support children where there are concerns about the proximity of birth parents and families to adopters' homes. It is nationally recognised that it is more challenging to find placements for children with complex needs, older children and sibling groups and so a larger pool of prospective adopters, who Adoption West knows well, is a benefit.

28. There were 6 Wiltshire children with Placement Orders waiting for placements at the end of Q2. Of these, a sibling group of two (waiting a year) plus two one-year olds will be matched at Panel in November. Another child has a potential link with an adopter. Of the remaining two children, one is aged seven and had been waiting for a year and one is two and has been waiting six months. These situations are regularly reviewed through the child's review and Permanency Options Meetings to ensure that decisions remain appropriate and in the best interest of the child.

Financial summary of the agency

29. The 2019/20 financial summary of the Adoption Service within Wiltshire Council was reported to Cabinet in the last Annual Report. The annual summary for 2020/21 will be reported to Cabinet in the Annual Report to be presented in July 2021. The table below indicates the current budget for the financial year 2020/21:

Adoption Team	**2020/21 Budget (£)**	**Actuals to 30th Sept 2020 (P6)**	**2020/21 Forecast (£)**	**2020/21 Forecast variance (£)**

Contract Value with Adoption West	**764,960**	**0**	**764,960**	**(32,740)**
Adoption Support	**329,750**	**141,597**	**350,000**	**20,250**
Adoption Allowances	**368,590**	**147,125**	**334.020**	**(34,570)**
Residence Orders	**87,520**	**29,548**	**68,653**	**(18,867)**
Special Guardianship Allowances	**1,833,190**	**890,888**	**2,086,233**	**253,043**
Adoption income (from interagency placements)	**0**	**(41,333)**	**(41,333)**	**(41,333)**
Total	**3,384,010**	**1,167,825**	**3,562,533**	**145,783**

30. The net overspend in the table above largely relates to an overspend on Special Guardianship Allowances. The number of such orders has grown over recent years and the complexity of the children and their support needs is reflected in the allowances that are paid. (All such plans require agreement from a senior manager before implementation and are subject to regular review to ensure that they remain required and appropriate.) This includes transitional payment arrangements where guardians who have previously been approved as foster carers receive payments that reflect fostering allowances which then reduce over time.

31. With effect from 1st April 2019, there has been a contract for services with Adoption West which is currently managed by the appropriate Director and scrutinised internally and through the work of the Board of Governors and the Scrutiny Board. It provides value to the Council by ensuring that adoptive families are found for Wiltshire Council's children, utilising the increased options for family finding presented by Adoption West.

32. Adoption Panel

	2018/19 (Wiltshire)	**2019/20 (Adoption West)**	**Q 1-2 2020 (Adoption West)**
No. Panels held	18	56	66
Adoptive families considered	26	30	84 approved of which 21 live in Wiltshire
Matches considered	32 (24 Wiltshire children and 8 from other AW local authorities)	90 (21 Wiltshire children)	105 (25 Wiltshire children)
Relinquished Children	0	0	0
Reviews of Adopters notified	0	0	0

36. Adoption Panels are fully within the remit of Adoption West. As indicated in the Annual Report, the Adoption Panel complied with Regulation: appraisals for members have been held and Adoption West Training days are implemented. Panel matching and suitability recommendations are

considered by the local authority and Adoption West Agency Decision Makers (ADM) respectively. Arrangements are robust within Wiltshire Council as there is a rota of three ADMs.

Next Steps and Recommendations

37. As can be seen from the scorecard, overall performance trajectories have remained positive following the implementation of Adoption West in March 2019. To continue the positive outcomes for Wiltshire children who require adoptive families, actions were indicated within the Annual Report and these continue to be relevant and will be reviewed at the time of the Annual Report. Additional measures are needed to manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Continue to robustly track the adoption journeys for Wiltshire's children to ensure that the impact of Covid-19 is recognised and reduced in terms of adoption delay for children, liaising with the courts, including the Children's Guardians, where necessary to mitigate against delay
- Recognising the performance of A1, ensure that the Adoption West adopter recruitment strategy recognises the need for adopters who can look after older children and sibling groups, including those of older children
- Use a range of management and performance information to track the effectiveness of adoption practice in terms of children requiring adoptive families to be confident that the work the Families and Children's Service and the partnership with Adoption West has positive impact on outcomes for Wiltshire's children
- Through the Board of Directors and the Service Leads Group, maintain a high level of involvement and challenge with Adoption West; meeting the needs of Wiltshire's children through ensuring good matching and support of adopters
- Use the scrutiny and challenge of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel to improve outcomes for Wiltshire's children
- Regularly convene operational and strategic meetings between Council staff and Adoption West staff regarding the decision-making processes for children
- Have an officer within the Senior Management Team of the Families and Children's Service to be the lead on adoption and to be the link manager to Adoption West
- Through specific discussion and regular liaison meetings, continually work with the local judiciary to further improve the way that the courts deal with care cases in a timely manner, recognising the potential delays for children where additional family members (sometimes multiple) may be considered as carers late in proceedings or where additional assessments are indicated
- Provide Early Permanence placements for our children via Adoption West
- Work closely with Adoption West to ensure proactive and effective family finding practice to bring about timely identification of potential adoptive matches for children who require adoption

- Provide training, led by Adoption West, for children's social workers in writing Child Permanence Reports which are used in court, to match children to adopters and to be the central component of their life story
- Hold Adoption West to account to ensure a sufficiency of adopters who can meet the diverse needs of the population of children requiring adoption in Wiltshire. A strong pool of approved adopters allows matching to begin early in the process, often before a Placement Order is made.
- In cases where it is recognised that the agency may struggle to match children with in-house prospective adopters, request Court consent to feature the children's profiles beyond Wiltshire's boundaries and, through Adoption West, be pro-active in referring children to regional and national family finding services once a Placement Order has been granted (sooner with the consent of the court)
- Ensure that where required and appropriate, match funding is applied to ASF applications to provide high quality support to adoptive families
- Hold formal Disruption Meetings where adoption placements breakdown before Adoption Orders are made to consider key learning to inform whole service improvement.

Background

38. The Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Service provides permanency for children who are no longer able to live safely with their parents or other family members. This may be achieved through several routes, one being the provision of quality adoptive placements for children who live in Wiltshire and where a decision has been made that adoption is in their best interest. These adoptive families are assessed and approved by Adoption West.

39. The fundamental requirement of the Service is that children are placed with families who have been assessed as being suitable to adopt. A recommendation of suitability is made by the Adoption West Panel and this is ratified as a decision by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Through this process, there is rigorous assurance that approved adopters can provide safe, secure and enduring family placements for this vulnerable group of children. This allows the children to grow, develop and thrive in a nurturing, supportive and loving family environment, removed from the stigma of being Looked After by the local authority.

40. To do this, there must be an appropriate range of enduring adoption placements to meet the assessed needs of children who need permanent adoptive families. These families must promote stability, safety and positive outcomes for children by working in partnership with all agencies as required.

41. The legislative basis of this work is the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the accompanying 2005 Regulations. Adoption West is the Regional Adoption Agency; Wiltshire retains the functions of an Adoption Agency that relate directly to children's planning.

42. The local authority, through reporting to Cabinet, must be assured of regulatory compliance and effectiveness through performance monitoring, challenge and improvement planning.

43. The Families and Children's Service, working in partnership with Adoption West, continues to provide adopters for infants and younger children. Through a programme of recruitment, Adoption West maintains the pool of adopters, including for those who can provide permanence for children who may be considered "harder to place". This group includes older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities. Adoption West is part of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) which works regionally to identify matches for children across the area. Adoption West subscribes to Link Maker, a national online adopter-lead resource to help adopters be linked with children.

44. Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency involving six local authorities and a small number of locally operating Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This provides a single Adoption Agency for the region in line with government requirement. Adoption West will have significant impact on outcomes for Wiltshire's children as it will deliver a more effective regional response to adoption and the needs of children.

Safeguarding Implications

45. The adoption of children is carried out within the Families and Children's Service, in conjunction with Adoption West. The work of the Service is delivered in accordance with Wiltshire Children's Services Policy and Procedures, overseen by the Wiltshire Safeguarding Vulnerable People Panel. The local authority has clear and effective safeguarding procedures in place for children and vulnerable adults.

46. This report is for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Public Health Implications

47. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Corporate Procurement Implications

48. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal (detailing conclusions identified from Equality Analysis, sections 4 and 5)

49. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

50. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Risk Assessment

51. Risks that may arise if the performance and management of the Families and Children's Service (and Adoption West) regarding the adoption of children is not effective and it does not achieve good outcomes for children:

- Safeguarding risk to looked after children if they are placed with adopters who have not been fully assessed, prepared and supported. Safeguarding is considered a high-level risk within the corporate risk register.
- That the governance and scrutiny arrangements of Adoption West are not robust, impacting upon outcomes for Wiltshire's children.
- An inadequate supply of adopters to meet the needs of Wiltshire children requiring permanence through adoption.
- Reputational risk for the Council if the Agency (and Adoption West) is not effective and does not achieve good outcomes for children who require adoption.
- Reputational risk if statutory timescales are not meet regarding adoption.
- Reputational risk if the Service is rated as Inadequate through inspection.
- Financial risk if placements are made, are unstable and subsequently breakdown leading to children returning to local authority care.

Effective delivery of the Service in relation to adoption and the effectiveness of Adoption West, the improvement plan, reporting and challenge will mitigate these risks.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

52. See above. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

53. See above. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Financial Implications

54. The budget and forecast expenditure are included above, the service is forecasting an overspend which is 8% of the net budget. This pressure relates to packages of adoption support and Special Guardianship support (there are complex children made subject to SGOs and being adopted and when adoptive parents return to seek support from the local authority after Adoption Orders have been granted, sometimes after a number of years, there are increasingly complex packages of support required to support the, now older, children in question).

55. The cost of supporting an adopted child is less than the average cost of looking after a child in the care system and is often time limited as opposed to costs of care which extend to 18 years old and beyond. Cabinet has previously received information relating to the financial implications of Adoption West and the contribution that the Council makes to the organisation. This interim report relates to the work of the families and Children's Service in relation to adoption and *not* Adoption West.

Legal Implications

56. It is a requirement of registration as an Adoption Agency that the Executive side of the Council receive regular written reports regarding the effectiveness, compliance and management of the Agency. It has been agreed that this will be in the form of an annual report and interim report

and so it ensures that legal requirements are met. There are no additional legal implications arising.

Options Considered

57. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Conclusion

58. Recent years have seen considerable change within the world of adoption and a focus on improving adoption performance. This has led to the need to review and develop services, amend policy and practice and so increase the effectiveness of the Wiltshire Adoption Service. The implementation of Adoption West has built upon, and taken forward, this overall improvement trajectory, as evidenced in the Scorecard information. At the heart of this is the belief that, for some children, adoption is the best route to legal permanence, security and the opportunity to achieve their potential. Wiltshire Council is committed to improving service delivery and, therefore, outcomes for children. Adoption West brings further significant change and improvement. The Council is an Adoption West partner, working collaboratively and regionally to ensure a whole service approach to prevent delay in securing appropriate adoptive placements for children in a timely and safe way.

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Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

None

Appendices

None

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