

**Subject: Adoption Agency Six Month Report**

**Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Lead Member for Children’s Services**

**Key Decision: No**

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### **Executive Summary**

The Adoption Statutory Guidance requires Adoption Agencies to monitor their performance and provide reports to the executive of the local authority every six months about children who are in the care of their local authority and who are waiting to be placed with adoptive families. Wiltshire Council is a registered Adoption Agency, approved by the Department for Education (DfE).

The Adoption Agency six month report and accompanying appendices outline the work and provide detail on the performance of the Adoption Agency from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2013. This report follows on from the Adoption Agency annual and 6 monthly report presented to Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013.

The latest Adoption Scorecard was published in November 2012. The Scorecard is attached to this report as Appendix 1 and demonstrates improvements across all 4 key measures.

Wiltshire’s Adoption Service is included within the Safeguarding Improvement Plan (SIP). A robust Permanency and Adoption Improvement Plan has been in place since May 2012, recurrently scrutinised at the Safeguarding Improvement Board (SIB) and the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Operational Group (SLOG). Improvements have been noted across the service in respect of Adoption and Permanence planning

Wiltshire Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in March 2013 and the overall effectiveness was judged to be ‘Adequate’. To achieve an ‘Adequate’ judgement Wiltshire was able to evidence that every standard and requirement had been met. Inspectors reported that *‘Wiltshire Council provides an effective, well managed and improving service’*.

### **Proposals**

#### **That Cabinet:**

- **notes and accepts the contents of the Adoption Agency report and**
- **endorses Ofsted recommendations Action Plan as set out in Appendix 3.**

## **Reason for Proposal**

The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and the 2011 Adoption Minimum Standards place a requirement on local authority adoption services to ensure that the executive of the Council receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the adoption agency to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users. They must also satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration (Minimum Standard 25.6; Statutory Adoption Guidance 3.3, and 5.39).

**Carolyn Godfrey**  
**Corporate Director, Children's Services**

**Subject: Adoption Agency Annual Report**

**Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Lead Member for Children’s Services**

**Key Decision: No**

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Executive of the Council is satisfied that the Adoption Agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children, young people and service users, as required by the 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and the 2011 Adoption National Minimum Standards.
2. It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

### **Background**

3. Wiltshire Council is a registered Adoption Agency, approved by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide services, which include:
  - deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption
  - approving people as prospective adoptive parents
  - ‘matching’ children with suitable adoptive parents
  - arranging the adoption of children
  - supporting adoptive placements before and after the making of an Adoption Order
  - assisting adopted adults to find out information about their adoption
  - assisting birth families wishing to seek information about an adopted relative
4. The work of the Adoption Agency is underpinned by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the 2005 regulations informed by this Act. The aim of this Act is to improve outcomes for children needing adoption. It brought adoption legislation in line with the Children Act 1989 and placed adoption support provision onto the statute for the first time.
5. The Adoption Agency Annual Report was presented to Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013

*“Cabinet noted that a number of new measures had been introduced in the past three years, resulting in significant improvements to the adoption service, and to the speed of the adoption process. However, it was also noted that the importance of the Council’s duty of care to children in the adoption system meant that the right decision was a higher priority than a fast decision.”*

Resolved:

*That Cabinet notes and accepts the contents of the report.”*

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

### **DfE Improvement Notice**

6. In September 2012, the DfE issued the Council with an Improvement Notice. The Improvement Notice addresses issues raised in the April 2012 Ofsted report on the inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children in Wiltshire and the recommendations made as a result of the Adoption Scorecard and Diagnostic Assessment.
7. In terms of adoption the Improvement Notice requires the Local Authority to work with their partners to take action as follows:
  - a. Adoption Services
  - b. *Within one month of the date of this Improvement Notice, the Council must agree a plan with the Improvement Board which will improve the performance of the adoption service and which addresses the concerns set out in the Outcomes UK Diagnostic Report and the Council's Adoption Scorecard. The plan must set out milestone and performance indicators which will improve the performance of the adoption service and reduce delay. Progress against the performance indicator standards, targets and timescales must be reported at each meeting of the Improvement Board and action taken to address performance concerns and where standards, targets and timescales are not being met.*
  - c. *The Council should reduce the time taken to place a child for adoption from the point that the child comes into the care of the local authority. In doing so the council should work towards meeting the timescales set out in The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations and Statutory Adoption Guidance revised in February 2011.*
8. A Permanency and Adoption Improvement Plan was developed in May 2012. Head of Service for Children in Care and Lead Commissioner for looked After Children provide regular progress reports to both the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Operational Group (SLOG) and Safeguarding Improvement Board (SIB). Independent chair of the Safeguarding Improvement Board, Mark Garvey, commented in the Second Report of the Independent Chair dated April 2013.
9. *'There is a substantial adoption improvement plan in place – the County have very properly constructed a whole service response to the need to improve permanency planning for children, both in terms of increasing numbers and speeding up the timescale for adoption and other permanent outcomes'.*
10. **Adoption Scorecard**

Between 2012 and 2013 there has been a noted improvement in the Wiltshire Adoption Scorecard. The latest Scorecard was published in November 2012 is attached as Appendix 1. Midpoint performance management data as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 reports that the average time between Wiltshire receiving a court order to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family was 122 days compared to the national average of 195.
11. Similarly, up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the average time from a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family was 630 days compared to the national average of 636.
12. Although improvements across the scorecard can be evidenced, these figures can and will fluctuate as Wiltshire continues to locate adopters for those children who because of complex health needs or challenging behaviour have been difficult to place thus far.
13. **Adoption Improvement Grant**

The Adoption Improvement Grant (AIG) is a Government initiative to fund and drive through Adoption reform. There is a national shortage of approved adopters especially those with the skill and knowledge to adopt large sibling groups, children with challenging behaviour and children with complex health needs or life limiting illnesses, and unquestionably too many children waiting too long to be adopted. The Grant is awarded for a 1 year period only. The grant allocation allows for local authorities to be creative in improving adoption services within their own boundaries and contribute to the deficit in approved adopters nationwide.

14. Wiltshire's allocation is **£881,470 (Part A non ring-fenced)** plus **£188,960 (Part B ring-fenced)**.
15. Part A (non ring-fenced) is available to support adoption reform, targeting funding at the entire adoption process and the specialist support children need.
16. Wiltshire is required to spend Part B (ring-fenced) solely on adoption services. This is to incentivise local authorities to find more adopters and address structural problems with adoption recruitment.
17. Key priorities for consideration to be funded from this grant include addressing our highest priority needs that being those children who are waiting for adoption through a high profile recruitment campaign, accessing voluntary and other agency resources, development of robust adoption support services in accordance with the government's adoption support passport initiative and strengthening of services across the piste. Front door knowledge and skill, legal support and advice, administration, adoption panel capacity are also included. There is much to be done in the time allotted, however work has already commenced on putting into action a strategy that will comply with the requirements contained within the grant allocation and have a longer term impact.
18. **Ofsted Inspection**  
  
On the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, Wiltshire Adoption Service were subject to Ofsted Inspection. The framework for the inspection followed the Journey of the Child and timescales as set within the Adoption Scorecard.
19. The report comments that Wiltshire provides an "effective, well-managed and improving adoption service". The report also states that outcomes for children are "rapidly improving" and 85 percent of children are now placed within 12 months of a decision that they should be adopted.
20. The inspectors spoke to young people involved in the service who were very positive about the help provided. The report states that adopters feel valued by the service, young people feel safe in their placements and children and young people are very well prepared for adoption.
21. The report highlights a number of improvements which have been made since the last inspection including the posts of home-finder which in the view of the inspectors has made a "positive impact." The service was given an "Adequate" rating as the service's recent developments and management systems need to be fully embedded. The report goes on to say "However the service has improved outcomes for children, in particular, in reducing delay in finding appropriate adoptive placements.
22. The Inspectors acknowledged the strengths within the Adoption Team which they say "*comprises experienced, knowledgeable and resourceful staff who engage in high quality individual work with children and adults affected by adoption*". They also acknowledged the strengths and skills of staff across the service and commented positively on "quality" CPRs

which “means that the child’s needs are identified and conveyed accurately”, improvements in the timeliness of decisions and completion of Life Story work.

23. This report details the activity within the adoption agency for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. The purpose of the report is to consider the adoption service’s capacity to meet demand for adoptive placements, to detail services provided to prospective adopters and the provision of adoption support services. The report will also look at the role and function of Wiltshire Council Adoption Panel.

1. The 2011 Adoption Minimum Standards can be accessed at <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Adoption-NMS.pdf>
2. The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g0072314/guidance>
3. The latest Adoption Ofsted report can be accessed in full <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/CARE/SC050059>
4. The amended Adoption Service Statement of Purpose March 2013 can be accessed via <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/adoption-statement-of-purpose-v7-27-02-13-feb-2.pdf>
5. Wiltshire Council adoption website <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/healthandsocialcare/adoption.htm>

# Adoption Agency Six Monthly Report 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 to 31st March 2013

## Introduction

1. The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and the 2011 Adoption Minimum Standards place a requirement on local authority adoption services to ensure that the executive of the Council receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the adoption agency to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users. They must also satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration (Minimum Standard 25.6; Statutory Adoption Guidance 3.3, and 5.39).

## Background

2. Wiltshire Council is a registered Adoption Agency approved by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide services, which include:
  - deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption
  - approving people as prospective adoptive parents
  - 'matching' children with suitable adoptive parents
  - arranging the adoption of children
  - supporting adoptive placements before and after the making of an adoption order
  - assisting adopted adults to find out information about their adoption
  - assisting birth families wishing to seek information about an adopted relative
3. The work of the Adoption Agency is underpinned by the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and the 2005 regulations made under this Act 2005. The aim of this Act was to improve outcomes for children needing adoption, it brought adoption legislation into line with the Children Act 1989 and placed adoption support provision onto the statute for the first time. The work of the adoption agency therefore spans the whole of children's social care services.
4. **Adoption staff and key members**

Name	Designation
Carolyn Godfrey	Corporate Director
Fiona Fitzpatrick	Service Director, Children's Social Care
Lin Hitchman	Head of Children in Care
Owen Evans	Adoption Team Manager
Vacancy	Assistant Team Manager Adoption
	Qualified Social Workers
Marion Hunt	Adoption Support Co-ordinator
Vacant Post	Adoption Support Co-ordinator
Denise O'Connor	Adoption Social Workers
Alison Lewis	
Vacant Post	
Pauline Fairman	
Charlotte Gilbertson	
Leonie McKenna	
Jane Priborsky	
+ 1 year temp 37 hour contract	

Name	Designation
Ann Mazzotta	Unqualified Adoption Support Worker
Catherine Bull	Unqualified Adoption Support Worker

5. All the Managers, Adoption Social Workers and Adoption Support Co-ordinators hold the minimum social work qualification have had a minimum of 2 years' experience in children & families social work or closely related field.

### **Adoption Services Provided**

6. As an Adoption Agency, Wiltshire provides a range of adoption services to children needing adoption, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, birth parents, birth families, adopted adults and the general public.
- The Adoption Team recruit, train, assess and provide support to prospective adoptive parents.
  - The Adoption Team provides a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out information about their adoption.
  - The Adoption Team, through the contract with a Voluntary Adoption Support Agency (VASA), provides an intermediary service for birth relatives and adopted adults who wish to trace each other.
  - The Adoption Team provides a consultation service to the childcare teams on matters relating to adoption placements.
  - The Adoption Team, through a contract with an external provider offers a full range of services to step-parents who wish to adopt, including the preparation of a report for court.
  - The Adoption Team, through a contract with PACT offers a full range of services to inter-country adopters including adoption support.

### **Adoption Support Service**

7. The Adoption Support service has a range of services in place to support adoptive families and their children including counselling, advice and information, workshops/support groups, family days and events, an annual conference, a newsletter, financial support and links with Wiltshire's Educational team and CAMHS.
8. The service also has links with various independent adoption support agencies and is in the process of developing a parenting course for Wiltshire adopters and special guardians.
9. Wiltshire have a partnership contract for adoption support with PACT (Parents and Children Together) this compliments in-house adoption support services and is a flexible contract to allow the agency to respond to complex and varied support needs appropriately and effectively.
10. Contact is promoted as a positive experience for the child and as maintaining an important connection with the child's past for their future identity. An allocated adoption social worker provides support to birth relatives and adoption support provides this for adopters. An independent social worker specialising in birth relative support is offered to birth parents or



other relatives who are losing a child/ren to adoption. This worker is provided through PACT and supported through adoption support partnership working with the Wiltshire adoption support co-ordinators. Birth parents, siblings and grandparents are offered individual and occasionally group work.

11. Wiltshire Council supports ongoing contact arrangements as required. There is a designated worker within the adoption team who manages direct contact arrangements post-adoption.
12. The Adoption Support Service facilitates both direct and indirect contact (through the post-box service) between birth families, children and significant others.
13. The adoption service provides post adoption counselling and support for adopted people living in Wiltshire. Learning from this informs current practice development.
14. PACT provide an intermediary service for adopted Wiltshire residents, and an intermediary service for birth relatives who are care leavers and have an adopted sibling. Individual and some group work are offered for young people touched by adoption.
15. The Adoption Support service has developed Life Story work practice and provided workshops for staff, adopters and birth family to ensure that all adopters have a high quality life story book for their child and all adopted children have their life history recorded in an accessible, high quality and flexible format.
16. The Adoption Support Service undertakes assessments of need for adoption support, including financial support. The Adoption Support Service also undertakes assessments of need for Special Guardianship support services.
17. There are two Adoption Support Co-ordinator posts, each covering half of the county. They are responsible for ensuring that every child being placed for adoption has an Adoption Support Plan in place and for ensuring that any of the parties to adoption are provided with an assessment for adoption support services, if requested.
18. They each line-manage an Adoption Support Worker, whose role is to provide practical support to adopters. There will be additional service pressures during 2013/2014 as the government implements the adoption passport initiative whereby adopters may be eligible for paid adoption leave, priority access to social housing, priority admission for school places and support services including counselling. Wiltshire has planned for the increase in demand for adoption support in the coming year as this has been included in the adoption improvement grant, however this has also been flagged up as an ongoing service pressure post 2014 and plans will be put in place to ensure we are able to cope with increased demand.
19. The Adoption Post-Box service is managed by the Adoption Support Co-ordinators and continues to grow; almost every adopted child has some form of ongoing contact (direct or indirect) with birth relatives. The Post-Box service acts as the channel through which communications flow between the adoptive family and the birth family.
20. There are 192 active post box arrangements, there are currently 40 direct contact arrangements. Of these:
  - 17 are with birth parents
  - 16 with siblings
  - 7 with grandparents/extended family members

## The Service to Prospective Adopters

21. The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in detail in our Adoption Agency procedures, which are available on the Adoption Service Website. All enquiries regarding adoption are welcome; the adoption team operate an open and inclusive enquiry process. All enquirers speak with a specialist adoption worker. There is access to information about adoption and to the adoption team via an enquiry line, via the website or via direct office number.

## Adoption Service Performance 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013

22. This report outlines statistical information gathered during the course of the last six months. It will then move on to consider the partnerships Wiltshire has with other key agencies and how as a collective, the needs of children and their birth families and prospective adopters are met.

## Adoption Panel statistics 2012 - 2013

Adoption process flowchart is included in Appendix 4 – page 31.

## Service Activity

23. The below chart outlines year on year activity within the adoption team and provides detail regarding activity between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. Included in the statistics are the information required to be presented to the 'executive' members in accordance with Adoption National minimum Standard 25.6:

- Number, type and age of children waiting for an adoptive placement
- How long they have been waiting
- Agency's responsiveness in relation to applications to adopt (set against timescales outlined in chapter 3, paragraph 1)
- Progress in relation to recruitment
- Number of children placed for adoption since the last 6 monthly report
- Number of children who have experienced disruptions

## Children:

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
Should be Placed for Adoption					
<b>Legal Status at That Time</b>					
	Section 20	1	4	9	9
	Interim Care Order	11	22	26	15
	Care Order	3	1	2	2
	None			1	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>27</b>

24. Since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 Should Be Placed for Adoption (SBPFA) recommendations ceased for children where there are current court proceedings. As of this date SBPFA decisions lay with the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) as it was seen to be a duplication which slowed decision making. The six monthly return figures demonstrate a significant

increase in numbers of children where SBPFA is considered the appropriate way forward. This is as a result of clearer care planning and timely decisions being made by the ADM.

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Should be Placed for Adoption</b>					
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>					
	White British	15	24	27	19
	Mixed/Other	6	3	11	8

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Should be Placed for Adoption</b>					
<b>Age</b>					
	0-12 Months	6	5	13	9
	12-24 Months	6	4	7	5
	2-4 Years	2	15	13	9
	5-10 Years	1	3	5	4
	11 Years and Over	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>27</b>

25. This table denotes improvement in the care planning process. 23 of the 27 children where Should Be Placed for Adoption decisions were made were aged 4 years or younger and addresses Ofsted concern that Wiltshire was too optimistic in respect of parents capacity for change and therefore children were drifting in the system.

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Children Matched</b>					
<b>Age</b>					
	0-12 Months	4	2	4	2
	12-24 Months	3	5	7	4
	2-4 Years	6	10	11	4
	5-10 Years	7	2	5	4
	11 Years and Over	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Children Matched</b>					
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>					
	White British	18	17	22	12
	Mixed / Other Ethnicity	4	2	5	2

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>SWAC Matches</b>					
		0	1	3	3

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Nat. Adoption Register Matches</b>					
		0	0	1	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Children Matched Out Of County</b>					
		3	0	4	3

<b>Details of children Adopted</b>		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Children for Whom Adoption Achieved by Age at Adoption Order Aged</b>					
	0-12 Months	0	1	0	0
	12-24 Months	2	2	5	2
	2-4 Years	6	12	7	2
	5-10 Years	6	2	2	1
	11 Years and Over	1	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Adoption Order by Ethnic Origin of Child</b>					
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>					
	White British	14	15	14	5
	Mixed/Other Ethnicity	0	2	0	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Rescission of Decision to Place for Adoption</b>					
		5	5	1	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Formerly placed for Adoption</b>					
				27	18

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
<b>Formally Placed for Adoption within 12 Months of Decision that they Should be Placed for Adoption</b>					

		12	13	25	13
		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
<b>Disrupted placements</b>					
				1	1

### Adopters:

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
<b>Applications to adopt</b>					
Number received				74	45
Written information sent within 5 days				50	29
Invited to information session within 2 months				34	18
Information received by Panel within 6 weeks of PAR being completed				26	15
Panel recommendation made within 8 months of receipt of formal application				22	13

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
<b>Adopters Approved</b>					
		20	17	27	15

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
<b>Adopters Approved; Ethnic Origin</b>					
Ethnic Origin of Individuals					
	White British	38	29	54	30
	Mixed/Other Ethnicity	2	2	0	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
<b>Approved Adopters; Relationships of Adopters</b>					
	Single	0	2	0	0
	Married/Co-Habiting	19	15	27	15
	Civil Partnership	1	0	0	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	<b>1/10/12 to 31/3/13</b>
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Approved Adopters that Have Withdrawn					
		1	0	0	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
Rescission of Approval by Panel					
			3	3	0

		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	1/10/12 to 31/3/13
Brief Assessments					
		1	0	0	0

26. This period has seen a continuation of increase in service demand both in relation to the numbers of children with adoption as their permanency plan and enquiries from prospective adopters. For the period 2012/2013 the adoption team set a target of approving 25 sets of adopters. During this period however, in total 27 households were approved (15 of whom were during 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013) with a further 6 households being re-approved to take a second child. This is an improvement on previous years however it is planned that this figure will be exceeded 2013/2014.
27. There were 14 Adoption Orders granted during 2012 to 2013, this was a reduction on the 17 Orders granted the previous year. The main cause for the reduction lay with the under resourcing of Swindon Court administration. Due to the long term sick absence of the court administrator, no Adoption Orders were granted between January and March 2013. This issue has now been addressed and 4 orders were granted on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013 these will be included in 2013/2014 year returns.
28. The data identifies that we are not recruiting adopters from mixed or other ethnicities. This will be addressed through the recruitment strategy currently being reviewed.
29. We are currently not meeting timescale targets for responding to expressions of interest from Prospective adopters. Customer service is extremely important and the need to ensure a more robust 'front door' service has been identified and included in the proposal for service development opportunities funded from the AIG.
30. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 there were 42 approved adopters, of these
- 17 were waiting for placements
  - 21 had Wiltshire children placed with them
  - 4 had children from other agencies/local authorities placed with them
31. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, there are 63 children in Wiltshire where adoption is the likely way forward
- 0 – 5 years: 50 children,
  - 6-9 years: 12 children
  - 10+ years: 1 child

32. These children will currently be at varying stages of the care planning process and of course not all children will go on to be adopted, this can be for a number of reasons for example legal challenge, change of care plan or circumstance. However as assessment and permanence planning for children continues to improve the number of children requiring adoptive placements will rise.
33. In September 2012 a dedicated home finder post was established with a specific remit of improving the timescale for linking, matching and placing children. Since September, 20 children have been matched and placed with approved adopters. The Home finder has also forged positive links with a number of voluntary adoption agencies when seeking adopters for children who are harder to place. The improvements noted in timescale and quality of linking and matching children with adopters since the appointment of the home finder has informed the view that home finder capacity should be increased and therefore a second home finder post will be established for the next twelve months to focus specifically on finding placements for those children who because of complexity have proven harder to place.

### **Adoption Training**

34. The adoption team provide training for staff and adopters to ensure best practice in the placement of children and to support adoptive placements. Training events include:
- Life-story Work with Children
  - Preparing Later life letters/indirect contact
  - Transition planning
  - Preparing Child Permanence Reports (repeated twice a year)
  - Preparing Prospective Adopters Reports (repeated annually)
  - Contact and Attachment in Permanent placements.
  - E-safety
  - Safer caring
35. Following on from the Diagnostic Assessment undertaken by Outcomes UK and BAAF in April 2012 a training programme was developed to improve staff practice across children's services in respect of Adoption and permanence planning, this included
- Care planning and decision making.
  - Operationalising the permanency policy
  - Concurrent planning in practice.
  - Master classes on developments in attachment theory, completing child permanence reports with the child in mind, latest research in adoption.
36. All sessions were well attended by staff from across the service and have improved knowledge and skill across children's services with regard to all aspects of adoption and permanence processes.

### **Quality Assurance**

37. Performance information regarding adoption is already collated on a monthly basis. The Safeguarding Improvement Board key data set includes the three DfE scorecard measures around timeliness and an indicator on permanency planning. Appendix 1
38. Cases where drift has occurred have now been identified. The Head of Service for Community Safeguarding now chairs monthly meetings with case holders, and other

relevant professionals to discuss cases where there has been drift in achieving permanence plans and corrective actions agreed.

## Finance - Adoption Service Budget Information

39. 2012/2013 financial year:

<b>2011/12 Financial Year</b>	Budget	Actual
Salaries & team running costs	415,660	433,617
Carer recruitment & training	17,000	117
Adoption Allowances (all types)	642,308	638,299
Adoption Income	0	-48,517
	<b>1,074,968</b>	<b>1,023,516</b>
Central Recharges *		143,259
	<b>1,074,968</b>	<b>1,166,775</b>

\*Overheads including : ICT, HR, SST, Premises,.

## Adoption periodical payments and Special Guardianship Financial support

40. There has been a general increase in requests for financial support to Adopters and Special Guardians over the year.
41. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 there were the following families being supported with ongoing financial allowances:

	Children	Carers
SGO Allowance	58	38
RO Allowance	67	48
Adoption Allowance	159	101

## The Adoption Panel

### The Adoption Panel and Central list

42. The current central list of potential Adoption Panel members is made up of:-
- an Independent Chair
  - Two vice chairs
  - Three social workers with at least 3 years relevant experience in child care social work, including direct experience in adoption work.
  - Two elected members of the authority, from the corporate parenting group.
  - The Agency's Medical Advisers
  - 1 agency members from specialist field
  - 5 independent members (all with personal experience of adoption).
43. Panel member's annual reviews ensure that the diversity, flexibility and knowledge base of the panel is promoted and developed.



44. The Independent Chair is independent from the day to day management of the adoption service.
45. The Agency has a Legal Adviser to the Adoption Panel who provides written legal advice and may attend if requested to do so but is not a member of the Panel.
46. There is also an Agency Adviser to the Panel who is not a Panel member but should attend Panel meetings as its adviser. He or she should be able to contribute to Panel meetings by raising issues and providing advice, for example about the Agency's procedures and practices.
47. The Adoption Panel Administrator is responsible for taking the minutes of the meetings and undertaking the other administrative aspects of the Panel's work.
48. The Agency provides an annual training day for Panel members and Adoption Agency staff. Panel members are also offered opportunities to attend other relevant internal and external training events.

### **Adoption Panel Function**

49. The adoption panel in Wiltshire currently meets twice per month these meetings are book in a year in advance, extra panel meetings are arranged as required.
50. The Panel's main function is to make recommendations to the Agency's Decision-Makers (the Service Director, Children's Social Care or deputy), who makes the Agency decision on the following matters:-
  - whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child
  - Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter.
51. The adoption panel chair and agency adviser feedback to the agency at 6 monthly intervals regarding the quality of adoption practice seen by the panel. Adoption panel six monthly report attached as Appendix 2.

### **Working together, within the authority, partners and other agencies**

52. Wiltshire adoption service has three main service contracts with PACT (Parents and Children Together) a voluntary adoption agency which specialises in assessing people as suitable for adopting a child from overseas (inter-country adoption) and in providing adoption support and intermediary services to adopted adults and the birth families of adopted people.
53. The contracts with PACT are regularly monitored and reviewed, in order to ensure that the services it provides on our behalf are meeting the needs of the public and are cost-effective. The volume of work being taken on by PACT under all three main contracts continues to increase. The PACT adoption support workers meet regularly with the Wiltshire adoption support co-ordinator's to ensure regular dialogue and coordination of services. The adoption support contract is deliberately flexible to enable response to varying need.

### **South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) Membership**

54. The Agency continues to be a member of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) to which all the local authorities and large, national voluntary adoption agencies in the region belong. The purpose of SWAC is to share resources, where it has not been possible to

achieve a local placement match for a child, to increase the range of options available, thus minimising delays. There are regular SWAC meetings where practice and service development, national developments and training are discussed and shared.

## **Strategic and Developmental Function**

55. Wiltshire is a member of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC), which is a consortium of local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Support Agencies (VASAs) and is used to share resources to increase the range of placement possibilities for children and adopters, and for the sharing of good practice. They produce the 'e-Link book', which features children needing adoption placements. The Adoption Team Manager is the link person with the Consortium and attends quarterly and other regional meetings.
56. SWAC also has regular regional group meetings for Panel Chairs, Panel Advisers and Adoption Support staff. Wiltshire has representation on all of these groups, to share issues, good practice and disseminate relevant information.
57. Wiltshire is a member of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). It provides a quarterly information pack, including details of training events, publications and practice notes. It provides licences for the printing and use of nationally recognised adoption forms. It publishes a bi-monthly newspaper 'Be My Parent' and has a Be My Parent Online Service, which feature the more difficult to place children needing adoptive placements. There are local Trainer/Consultants who are available to provide training, advice and guidance on specific issues. The Adoption Team Manager is the link person with BAAF and attends quarterly and other regional meetings.
58. Wiltshire subscribes to Adoption UK and receives quarterly journals and a 'Children Who Wait' magazine featuring children needing placements for adoption.
59. Wiltshire joins all newly approved gay and lesbian adopters to New Family Social as part of the support package.

## **Priorities for the next six months**

60. To ensure all recommendations from March 2013 Ofsted Inspection are completed. The recommendations and actions are included in Appendix 3. The key recommendations are to:
  1. Ensure that children are supported to achieve their educational potential; in particular, continue to develop virtual education services to include adopted children (NMS 7.1)
  2. Promote consistent quality and timeliness of life story books and later life letters; in particular, ensure that both are delivered to the adopters within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony (NMS 2.7 and 2.8)
  3. Ensure that the agency retains records of recruitment and suitability checks; in particular, that records are kept of telephone verification of references (NMS 21.1)
  4. Ensure that personnel files are well ordered and can be easily audited to show that files contain evidence of identity checks and all the other requirements of Schedule 3 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 (Regulation 11 (3) (d), Schedule 3 and NMS 21.3)
  5. Ensure that the Statement of Purpose contains all the information required by Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; in particular, the name and address of the service's manager (NMS 18.1 and Regulation 2, Schedule 1)

6. Ensure that the children's guide to adoption contains a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; in particular, a summary of the complaints procedure and contact details for the office of the Children's Rights Director. (Regulation 3 and NMS 18.5)
61. To ensure all actions contained within the Permanency and Adoption Improvement Plan (PAIP) are completed. The key priorities over the next six months are:
1. Agree and finalise the key dataset which will be used as evidence to monitor progress and improvement of the PAIP making use of the timescales using "The New Adoption Standards, Regulations and Statutory Guidance (England): What's new? What's changed?"
  2. Collate an evidence file for the PAIP.
  3. Agree key 3 month milestones linked to key objectives in the PAIP.
  4. Monitor our progress against the changes being made the Department for Education through the Adoption Reform Programme – changes being implemented, and in light of adoption Legislative and Regulation proposals.
  5. Development and implementation of Concurrent Planning Policy and practice guidance (PAIP 1.1).
  6. Implementation of dual approval policy (PAIP 2.5).
62. In May 2013 The government confirmed it is to proceed with a series of legal changes to speed up the adoption system through encouraging more prospective adopters ensuring adopters are approved more quickly through the implementation of a two-stage approval process. The changes mean that local authorities will need to have robust systems in place to ensure prospective adopters are approved to adopt within six months, and introduces responsibilities on local authorities to have in place a 'fast track' procedure for approved foster carers and previous adopters who wish to adopt. Wiltshire Adoption Team will implement the new assessment process from June 2013. Training for all staff involved in the assessment of prospective adopters and for adoption panel members will be a priority to ensure a smooth transition.

## **Environmental and climate change considerations**

## **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

## **Risk Assessment**

Risks are regularly reviewed and monitored with appropriate action plans in place where required

## **Financial Implications**

The significant difference in financing of the adoption service in this current year is the Adoption Support Grant (ASG). Wiltshire Council must adhere to the terms and conditions of the Adoption Improvement Grant which include increasing the number and speed of adoptions, plus increasing the number of potential adoptive families. It is likely that this will increase the volume and budget requirement in future years for adoption support payments to families. However, this should be countered by a reduction in looked after

children foster care payments and the budget 14/15 onwards will reflect estimates of these movements. The grant will be fully maximised in the financial year 2013/14.

## **Legal Implications**

The legal implications arising from the report are limited at present, this being an interim report and update post the October 2012 to March 2013 report period. I note that service provision is progressing post the March 2013 Ofsted Inspection. Clearly the authority is dedicating and resourcing improvement, as well as identifying improvement sources such as the Adoption Improvement Grant. It is important that the subject matter of the September 2012 Improvement Notice are addressed, working in collaboration with the DfE and partner agencies.

The requirements under the 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance Regulations and the 2011 Adoption Minimum Standards are noted. The attached report complied with the requirements of report presentation to the Executive of the council on the management, outcomes and financial position of the adoption agency so as enable the achieving of good outcomes for young people and service users.

There are no legal issues arising within the report.

## **Conclusions**

This has been an extremely busy and productive six month period and there are still many challenges ahead. The outcome of the Ofsted Inspection, improvements in the Scorecard and the positive feedback from the Independent chair of the Safeguarding improvement Board all evidence that improvements are being made across children's services in respect of permanence and adoption planning and that Wiltshire Adoption Agency is committed to delivering the best possible service to both children for whom adoption is the plan and prospective and approved adopters.

**Carolyn Godfrey**  
**Corporate Director, Children's Services**

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Date of report: 9 May 2013

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Adoption Scorecard and keyset data  
Appendix 2 Report to Cabinet from Adoption Panel Chair  
Appendix 3 Adoption Inspection Action Plan  
Appendix 4 The Adoption Process Flow chart

Background papers - none

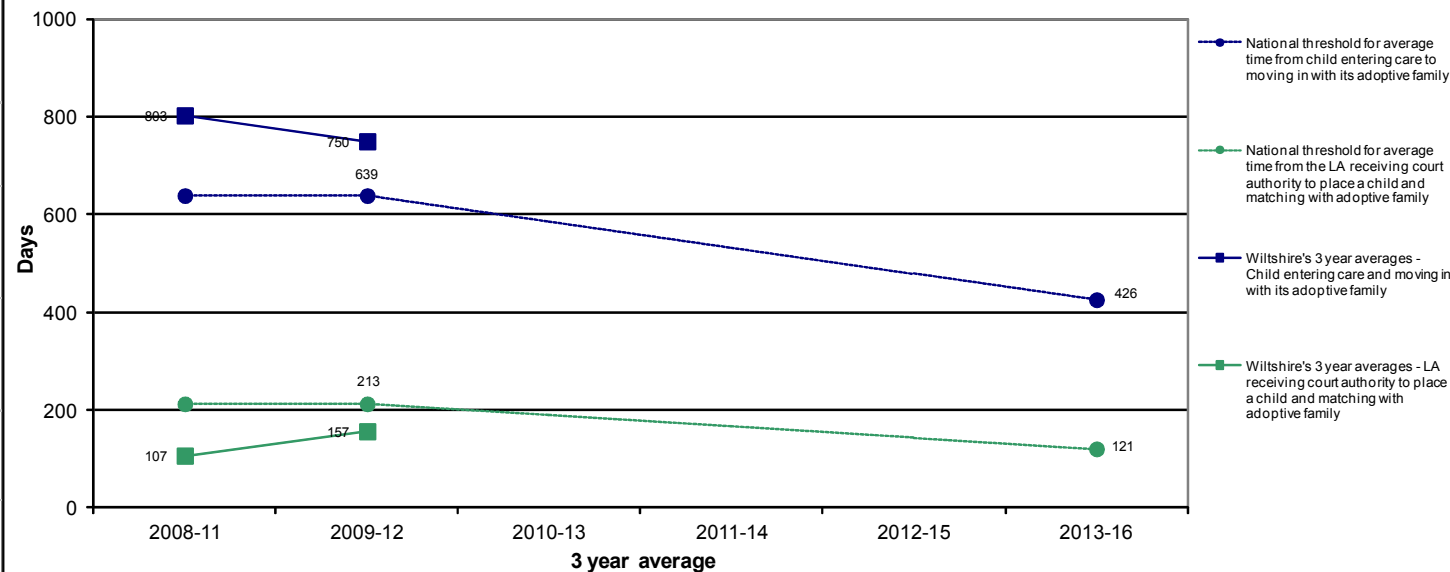
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Appendix 1(a): Wiltshire's Adoption Scorecard published November 2012

Children

	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)
LA's 3 year average (2009-12)	750	157	30 (43%)
1 year trend - improvement from 2011 to 2012	Average time in 2012 was shorter than 2011	Average time in 2012 was longer than 2011	n/a
3 year trend - improvement from 2008-11 to 2009-12	Average time in 2009-12 was shorter than in 2008-11	Average time in 2009-12 was longer than in 2008-11	n/a
England 3 year average (2009-12)	636	195	10,180 (56%)
Distance from 2010-13 performance threshold	111 days	Threshold met	n/a

Average Time Indicators



Prospective Adopters

Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed
Data not available until 2013		

Related Information

	Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)	Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. Where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of BME children leaving care who are adopted)	Adoptions of children aged five or over (number adopted and % of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)	Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	Number of children awaiting adoption (as at 31 March 2012)	Number of approved prospective adopters (as at 31 March 2012)
LA's 3 year average (2009-12)	50 (11%)	5 (7%)	633	x (x%)	15 (5%)	67	15	Data not available
England 3 year average (2009-12)	9,740 (12%)	1,360 (7%)	546	1,490 (6%)	2,520 (4%)	53	5,750	Data not available

**Appendix 1(b)**  
**Key dataset**

		Indicator	Wiltshire											English average 2011/12	Statistical neigh Average 2011/12 (denotes good +)		
			2010/11	2011/12	2012/13 Up to 30 June	2012/13 up to 30 Sept	R A G	2012/13 up to 31 Dec	R A G	2012/13 Up to 31 March		2012/13 estimate based year to date	2012/13 Target			2013/14 Target	
		<b>Indicators that focus on initial access</b>															
50	Q	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) A1	716 (803 3YA)	652 (750 3YA)	597	750	A	661	A	630	↓	630	700	534	G	3YA 636 2009-12	3YA 533 2009-12
51	Q	Average time between a local authority receiving a court order to place a child and the local authority deciding to match an adoptive family A2	155 (107 3YA)	214 (157 3YA)	77	178	A	136	A	122	↓	-	125	113	G	3YA 195 2009-12	3YA 128 2009-12
52	Q	% children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family A3	(46% 3YA)	63% (43% 3YA)	50%	50%	G	67%	G	61%	↓	-	50%	66%	G	3YA 56% 2009-12	3YA 63% 2009-12
53		Number of newly approved adopters and time taken to approve adopters from application B2		18	Apr - June 4	July - Sept 7		Oct - Dec 12		Jan - Mar 3		Total					
		0-3 months			0	0		1		1		2				-	-
		3-6 months			2	1		3		0		6					
		6-12 months			1	4		7		2		14					
		More than 12 months			1	2		1		0		4					

## Appendix 2

### Report to Cabinet from Adoption Panel Chair

#### Panel Activity

Panel activity is shown in the table below, with the last six months highlighted. Should Be Placed for Adoption (SBPFA) recommendations ceased to be a function of Adoption Panels on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2012, for children where there are current court proceedings. The one SBPFA since is for a relinquished baby. It can be seen that there has been a significant increase in numbers of applications and some increase in the number of matches during 2012/13 over the previous year. Panel notes that this has been achieved despite pressures including staff and management changes within the Agency.

	<b>01 Apr 11 – 30 Sept 11</b>	<b>01 Oct 11 – 31 Mar 12</b>	<b>Total 11/12</b>	<b>01 Apr 12 – 30 Sept 12</b>	<b>01 Oct 12 – 31 Mar 13</b>	<b>Total 12/13</b>
SBPFA*	12	18	30	13	1	14
Applicants Suitability to Adopt	9	8	17	17	11	28
Match	10	10	20	14	11	25
Reviews of children+	16	26	42	37	42	79
Rescissio n of Plan for Adoption	3	2	5	1	0	1
Rescissio n of Suitability to Adopt	2	1	3	3	0	3

\*SBPFA – *Should Be Placed for Adoption*

+ *Monitoring the progress of children with a plan for adoption through consideration of LAC Review reports*

#### Quality of work presented to Panel

The quality of reports to Panel has been mainly good. Where there have been gaps in information the verbal presentation has enabled recommendations to be made. Only one deferral for further work has been necessary during the last six months. Panel has seen some examples of excellent social work practice, with proactive action, including pre-birth, towards securing permanency for children. Where timescales for children have not been met and there has been delay, this has been primarily associated with lengthy court proceedings and/or staff or team changes. Timescales for assessment of adopters have mainly been met and exceeded in many cases. Prospective adopters are generally very positive in what they say to Panel about their experience of the adoption service.

## Development needs

The Adoption Panel has noted the significant commitment within the agency for improving the adoption service to children and adopters. Feedback from the Panel to the Agency in the last six months has included the following themes for attention:

- Greater understanding of attachment issues and applying this to practice in all aspects of adoption work
- Continuing development in analysis and evidencing decision-making in written reports - important in relation to changing requirements in adopter assessments
- Early identification of prospective adopters and giving consistent, early and pro-active attention for children who are likely to be hard to place
- 'Finishing off' the adoption work once a child is placed in a permanent home, for example, completing later life information, formally rescinding plans when they have changed, preparing information for adoption order hearings.

Panel is aware that a training programme is in progress to continue to raise the standard of adoption practice, including in the areas above. This is in the context of the changes to the statutory framework for adoption due to be implemented during this year. Regular meetings between the Panel Chair, Service Director and senior and adoption managers provide an opportunity to raise and address quality assurance issues.

Liz Martins  
Adoption Panel Chair  
5<sup>th</sup> May, 2013



**ADOPTION INSPECTION ACTION PLAN**

	NMS	Recommendation	Action being taken to address recommendation	Lead Person/ Service	Completion Date	Update	Evidence
1	NMS 7.1 “Children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning”.	Ensure that children are supported to achieve their educational potential; in particular, continue to develop virtual education services to include adopted children. (NMS 7.1)	Virtual School Head Teacher has met with Head of Service CIC and Lead Commissioner for LAC to discuss inclusion of 1 additional VSO for 2013/2014 funded from AIG to develop systems, processes and provide support for adopted children (approved)	KR/LH	May 2013		
2	NMS 2.7 and 2.8 “The life story book is given to the child and prospective adopters in stages; at the latest by the second statutory review of the child’s placement with the prospective adopters and the completed life story book at the latest within ten working days of the adoption ceremony.”	Promote consistent quality and timeliness of life story books and later life letters; in particular, ensure that both are delivered to the adopters within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony. (NMS 2.7 and 2.8)	Training on ‘Life Story Work and Later Life Letter Writing’ for all staff commissioned	LH/LK via AIG	June 2013		

	<p>“The social worker who knows the child writes the later life letter. The letter is realistic and sufficiently detailed so that the young adult fully understands their life before adoption, why they could not remain with their birth parents and why they were adopted. The prospective adopters receive the letter within ten working days of the adoption ceremony.”</p>					
3	<p>NMS 21.1</p> <p>“All people working in or for the purposes of the agency, and persons applying to be included on the central list, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking up their duties. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references.”</p>	<p>Ensure that the agency retains records of recruitment and suitability checks; in particular, that records are kept of telephone verification of references.</p>	<p>Service Head HR Business operations to work with Head of Service CIC to address all matters raised in respect of NMS 21.1</p>	<p>PL/LH</p>	<p>July 2013</p>	
4	<p>NMS 21.3</p> <p>“The agency has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for staff,</p>	<p>Ensure that personnel files are well ordered and can be easily audited to show that files contain evidence of</p>				

<p>volunteers and persons on the central list which includes:</p> <p>a identity checks;</p> <p>b CRB Disclosures, including the level of the Disclosure and the unique reference number (in line with eligibility to obtain such checks);</p> <p>c checks to confirm qualifications which are a requirement and others which are considered by the agency to be relevant;</p> <p>d at least two references, preferably one from a current employer, and where possible a statement from each referee as to their opinion of the person's suitability to work with children;</p> <p>e checks to confirm the right to work in the UK</p> <p>f where the person has lived outside of the UK, further checks as are considered appropriate where obtaining a CRB Disclosure is not sufficient to establish suitability to work with children."</p>	<p>identity checks and all the other requirements of Schedule of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 (Regulation 11 (3) (d), Schedule 3 and NMS 21.3)</p>					
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5	<p>NMS 18.1</p> <p>“The adoption agency and adoption support agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance.”</p>	<p>Ensure that the Statement of Purpose contains all the information required by Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; in particular, the name and address of the service’s manager. (NMS 18.1 and Regulation 2, Schedule 1).</p>	<p>Statement of Purpose to be updated to contain all information required in Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003</p>	<p>LH/OE</p>	<p>May 2013</p>		
6	<p>NMS 18.5</p> <p><u>“Children’s Guide to adoption</u></p> <p>The local authority gives the child a copy of the Children’s Guide to Adoption after the decision maker has decided that the child should be placed for adoption and after being counselled as required by regulation 13 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 20205. The guide is appropriate to the child’s age and understanding and includes a summary of what happens at each stage (including at</p>	<p>Ensure that the children’s guide to adoption contains a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; in particular, a summary of the complaints procedure and contact details for the office of the Children’s Rights Director. (Regulation 3 and NMS 18.5)</p>	<p>Children’s guide to be revised to ensure compliance with Schedule 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003;</p>	<p>O/E</p>	<p>June 2013</p>		

<p>court) and how long each stage is likely to take. The Children's Guide also contains information on how a child can find out their rights; how they can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate."</p>						
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## Appendix 4 – The Adoption Process Flow Chart

### Timescales

<b>Children</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
From entering care to moving in with Adoptive Family	21 months
From date of Care Order / Placement Order to Matching	7 months
From Agency decision for Adoption to Matching where parent is requesting adoption for a child under 6 months old	3 months

<b>Adopters</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Application to adopt - Written information	Sent within 5 days
Adopters invited to information session	Within 2 months
From Completion of PAR to Presentation at Adoption Panel	6 weeks
From formal application to be assessed and approved as adopters to presentation at Adoption Panel	8 months