



Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Adoption Agency Activity Report**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **The Mayor/Council** On: 18 July 2013

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1. Key points and Summary

- 1.1 This report is to inform members of the Torbay Children's Services Adoption Agency activities for the period **1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013**.
- 1.2 The Adoption process in England and Wales is subject to a series of Government led changes to address delay, both for children who are waiting to be adopted and prospective adopters who wait to be assessed, approved and matched with the children who wait. Torbay Adoption Service is small, and has previously struggled to meet the timescales set. However, the service was inspected in November 2012 by Ofsted and progress was shown, the service receiving an 'Adequate' grading.
- 1.3 Since November, a new permanent Service Manager, Practice manager and Senior Social Worker have been appointed and are in post. The Adoption Team of qualified Social Workers and unqualified Community Care Workers are permanent, with only one Agency Social Worker. Vacancy rates are low. Morale is positive and confidence building. Data shows that more children are being identified for whom adoption is the plan or a concurrent plan, more children are matched for adoption and more children are placed for adoption. The number of approved adopters is increasing but at a slower pace than the children for whom adoption is the plan.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 There is a requirement that Adoption Agency activity is reported twice a year to the Executive.
- 2.2 The Executive Head: Safeguarding and Wellbeing is the Agency Decision Maker who makes the decisions about adoption cases after he had considered the recommendation of the Adoption Panel. There have been no cases where the decision has differed from that recommended by the Panel.
- 2.3 The plan for a child will come before the Agency Decision Maker on two occasions – firstly for approval of an adoption plan for the child and second to approve the match. The Panel will consider the suitability of particular prospective adoptive

parents for the child (approval of match).

2.4 Panel also recommends the approval of prospective adopters following assessment. Applicants are invited to attend the Panel when their approval is considered and when a match is proposed. As part of legislation the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) has been set up, where adopters may have their applications reconsidered when the Panel has not recommended their approval and the Agency Decision Maker is minded to turn down the application. The recommendation from this Panel then goes back to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision.

2.5 Under the legislation, the Adoption Panel can also consider a brief assessment report, where it is felt that the assessment of prospective adopters should not continue. Applicants can also apply to the IRM if the Agency Decision Maker is minded to turn down an application in these circumstances. Applicants have forty working days to make this decision. There were no applications to the IRM during the period.

3.0 Plans for children

3.1 There were 50 children who were subject to an adoption plan at 31 March 2013.

Table 1 Children for whom a formal plan is adoption

Adoption Plans approved	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	12/13
White British	16	12	6	14	12	20	15	12	9	13	49
Other ethnicity					1	1	1		7	2	1
Total	16	12	6	14	13	21	16	12	16	15	50

4.0 Placements

4.1 Panel approved 22 placements during this period.

4.2 Torbay does not have enough adopters to offer placement choice for Torbay children needing placements. Adopters who live within Torbay are often not appropriate for Torbay children. Therefore Torbay Adoption Team are also recruiting from neighbouring areas.

4.3 In addition, children are placed via the South West Consortium, a group of Local Authority and voluntary adoption agencies. Hard to place children, for example those in sibling groups, with special needs or older children, are referred to the National Register.

5.0 Adoption Orders

5.1 During the period 12-13, 11 children were adopted.

5.2 The percentage of children adopted during the year is based on the total number of children looked after (for over six months) on the 31 March and it is this percentage

that is reported. However, almost two thirds of these children are in the ten to eighteen age range and adoption is not likely to be a realistic option for these children, who have close attachments to their birth families.

5.3 The numbers of children adopted in recent years, other than the year ending 31 March 2004 which was exceptionally high at seventeen, has remained between ten and thirteen per year.

The number of children adopted for the year 2012-2013 is, at eleven, within this range, but as the number of children looked after is higher, the percentage rate is lower.

5.4 The aim of Torbay Council is to consider adoption for all children who cannot remain in or return to their birth families

Table 2

Percentages of children adopted from care

Date	Total number of children looked after for over 6 months	Percentage of all children adopted	Children aged 0-9 years looked after over 6 months	Percentage of children aged 0-9 years adopted
31/3/02	205	6.8%	86	16.3%
31/3/03	184	2.7%	50	10%
31/3/04	177	9.6%	55	30.9%
31/3/05	176	6.25%	60	18.33%
31/3/06	149	8.72%	55	23.63%
31/3/07	151	6.6%	61	16.39%
31/3/08	164	6.1%	69	13.0%
31/3/09	156	7.69%	62	19.35%
31/3/10	149	10.06%	50	33.55%
31/3/11	167	6.58%	61	18.03%
31/3/12	195	2%	69	5.79%
31/3/13	221	4.98%	104	10.6%

6.0 Timeliness

6.1 For children adopted during the year 2012-13, the time between the point the child became looked after to placement with adopters, and the time from Placement Order to Matching is still below the national average. There are children who have a plan for adoption where this is no longer realistic or achievable. These children have been reviewed by the newly formed Permanency Panel and will be returned to Court to change the plan to long term fostering. Progress is now being made to improve the timescales for children being adopted:

- Between April 2012 and March 2013, 11 Adoption Orders were made
- Since April 2013, 11 Adoption Orders have been made.
- Currently there are 13 children placed with adopters, of whom 6 Adoption Orders are predicted by August 2013. The remaining Orders are likely to

be made by 31 March 2014.

- 6.2 A significant increase is therefore predicted in number of children adopted this year (2013-14).
- 6.3 Between April 2012 – March 2013, 12 children were matched and placed with adopters. These included:
- A sibling group of two who had been waiting for adoption for over a year;
 - 7 children matched and placed within 4 months of the date of the Placement Order
 - 1 child matched and placed within 6 months of the Placement Order
 - 2 children matched and placed within 6-12 months of the Placement Order.
- 6.4 Introduction of an Adoption Social Worker early in cases where permanence is identified has assisted in earlier matching and placing. Further training is planned to ensure this practice is embedded.
- 6.5 The remedial actions taken to progress existing cases continues to have an impact upon Torbay's performance against the national thresholds, as we are addressing cases already outside the timescales.
- 6.6 Up to 31 March 2013, there have been 14 children where the adoption plans are over 12 months duration which include:
- Two children, siblings, have Placement Orders made in 2008. They were placed in 2010 with adopters. Due the adopters' anxiety and difficulties in parenting, there was extensive delay in applications being made for the Adoption Order. Intensive support was given to the family and reassessment of whether this placement was actually viable, done. An application was finally made and Adoption Orders granted in June13.
 - There continues to be difficulty finding adopters for a boy aged 2.5 years old. Issues which have made this match difficult include his dual heritage and significant mental health issues within the birth family.
 - Care plans for 5 children are being changed from adoption to long term fostering. A sibling group of 2, aged 7 and 5years old were matched and introduced to adopters in October 2011. These adopters then withdrew. Family finding of new adopters for the boys has continued but without success. The boys are now settled in a foster placement and do not wish to be adopted. A sibling group of 3 girls aged 8, 7, and 6 years had Placement Orders made in 2011. The girls were assessed as needing to be placed together. There has been no success in finding adopters for 3 children, despite nationwide searches. The girls have now settled in their foster family and wish to stay.
- 6.7 Case examples of good and timely adoption outcomes include:
- **Child A**, a boy. Placement Order made 5.3.13 and placed on 20.3.13. In this case the adopters were assessed prior to the Placement Order being made and plans for the match determined in advance. These were second time adopters who had previously adopted the boys' half sibling.

- **Children B**, sibling girls aged 5 and 3 years old, were placed together after extensive family finding for 9 months.

7.0 Approved Adoptive Families

7.1 Torbay's Adoption Service recruit, assess and via the panel, approve adopters. At 31 March 2013, 17 families were approved. Of the 17:

- 9 families were waiting to be matched to children
- 8 had children in placement but final adoption order not been issued

7.2 Between 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013:

- 6 families were granted a final Adoption Order
- 11 families were matched to a child or children
- 0 families withdrew prior to a placement being made
- 0 families withdrew following a placement being made
- 1 foster carer was approved to adopt the child they were fostering

8.0 Recruitment of Adopters

8.1 Recruitment has been lacklustre in previous years. Part of the Adoption Grant is being used to refocus the advertising campaign, to target carers who might adopt, foster to adopt, or foster.

8.2 Between 31 March 2012 – 1 April 2013:

- 83 initial enquiries to become adopters were received
- 14 applications from people wishing to adopt were received. There was also 1 application from previous year outstanding
- 9 applications were approved
- 6 are still in assessment process
- 0 applications were withdrawn
- 0 applications were refused by the Agency decision maker.

9.0 Timeliness of Adoption Matches

9.1 Between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2013 the 11 adoptive families who were matched in Torbay waited between the date of approval and the date they were matched to children:

- 6 less than 3 months
- 3 3 to 6 months
- 0 6 to 9 months
- 0 9 to 12 months
- 0 12 to 18 months
- 2 18 months or more

10.0 Work with Birth Relatives

- 10.1 The National Adoption Standards require that birth parents have access to support when adoption is planned and for support both pre and post adoption. An Adoption Support Worker is part of the Adoption team.
- 10.2 A Social Worker trained in therapeutic techniques works directly with a number of children and adoptive families, which has been beneficial in helping placement stability and preparation for moving on to adoption.

11.0 Adoption Panel

- 11.1 A new Panel has been recruited and trained during Spring 2013. A new Panel Chair has also been appointed who is independent of the Local Authority. Panel offers a quality assurance process, as well as considering the assessment and approval of adopters and matches.
- 11.2 The new Panel first met in May 2013.

12.0 Service Development

- 12.1 In response to government initiatives, work has begun across the South West Peninsular to consider more formal arrangements for the development of a Peninsular Adoption Service. Meetings have taken place including other Local Authorities and a Voluntary Adoption Agency to consider a hard federation or mutual organisation. This is in the early exploratory stages. A meeting with other Local Authorities who have progressed this, and a meeting with the Minister are due in July.

13.0 Work with Adoptive Families

- 13.1 Work with families following a post adoption assessment of need has increased. The majority of these referrals relate to children and young people who require direct work and support with life story work.
- 13.2 Social groups for adopters continue to be held three times a year. Adopters are also offered training on a variety of topics, which includes trauma and loss in the adoption process, life story books and the family finding and matching process.

14.0 Recommendations

- 14.1 Accept the information in this report.