

Adopter Sufficiency and adoption support - Adopt South West

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

1 Background

1.1 The Children's Scrutiny Committee have previously received a report (20 March 2018) outlining the background to the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies. [Link to Report.](#)

1.2 The Children's Scrutiny Committee have since received briefing notes in March 2019 and January 2020.

1.3 Adopt South West manages the adoption services for children and adopted adults from the Local Authorities of Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Somerset County Council and Torbay Council.

2. Adopter sufficiency

2.1 Identifying and assessment sufficient numbers of suitable adopters is a national challenge and improving our Adopter Sufficiency remains one of our key activities

2.2 The Adopt South West Service Manager sits on the RAA leaders National Recruitment Steering group. A national campaign recently commenced, and Adopt South West are at the forefront of this.

2.3 Locally the teams were very active during national adoption week and staged, amongst many other activities Facebook Live events making good use of the region's adopters and sharing expertise.

2.4 The team have an active presence on social media, local radio and television, and the numbers of potential adopters are increasing.

2.5 In November 2019 we had 22 enquiries from prospective adopters. In December there were 40 and in January there were 70 enquires. This is very encouraging. We are receiving approximately 1-2 registrations of interest a day.

2.6 Adopt South West is building a good reputation as an adoption agency and numbers of applicants are increasing.

3. National Recruitment Campaign

3.1 Recognising the challenge of Adopter sufficiency, the Department for Education has given the Regional Adopters Agency Leaders Group £645,000 for marketing. Just prior to Christmas the DfE announced an additional £1m for RAA leaders to spend collectively with VAAs/voluntary sector, on recruitment in 2020-21, on top of the funding for last year – this includes for 2020 National Adoption Week.

3.2 The national campaign starts on 26 March 2020.

3.3 We are confident that this will generate more interest and further enquiries, but it should be recognised that this raises its own challenges in terms of our capacity to assess applicants, and to support them in the future. The service is planning for this.

4. Close working with social care teams in Devon.

4.1 Adopt South West work closely with DCC childrens services in order to provide the best outcomes for children needing adoptive placements.

4.2 Permanency and Tracking Panels for children are held weekly in each locality area. Adopt South West attends these Panels to give advice and to start to track children if they may need an adoptive placement.

4.3 Referrals are received at the earliest opportunity and allocated to a Family Finding social worker. In November 2019, the team received 7 new referrals for family finding for Devon children, 3 of which were requests for Fostering for Adoption placements, and 5 Best Interest decisions were made.

4.4 The Adopt South West agency adviser works with the childrens team to support them in presenting a request for best interest decision from the Agency Decision Maker.

5. Family Finding

5.1 Support is offered to the child's social worker to write the Child Permanence Report. A key document for the child and the adoption process. Consideration is given to what support adopters are likely to need to care for the child.

5.2 Adopt South West make use of a range of media to try to identify and match prospective adopters with children who are to be adopted.

5.3 Family finders will look to placing a child initially with adopters approved by Adopt South West. If there are none that would prove a suitable match for the child, then permission is sought from the Service Manager to start an external search so as to avoid unnecessary delay for the child.

5.4 The team undertake a broad range of family finding activities, including:

- Local Stay and Play Days – bimonthly - 10 children attend- supporting early links
- Mini exchange events through South West Adoption Consortium
- National Exchange days – London and Leeds at least quarterly
- Specialised Family Finding events through National exchange days. Black Asian Minority Ethnic children, siblings and older children.
- Children referred to New Family Social through National events

5.5 In the period 1 April 2019 – 31 December 2019 Adopt South West matched 30 Devon children with new families.

5.6 As at 18 February 2020, there were 26 DCC children that Adopt South West were actively family finding for.

6. Linking and Matching

- 6.1 Once a potential link has been made for a child, Adopt South West chair a linking meeting to agree progressing the link with the childrens teams. This meeting will also consider the family's support needs.
- 6.2 Once matched at panel, Adopt South West will chair the Transitions Meeting. The Transitions policy of Adopt South West has been nationally recognised and commended by Professor Beth Neil and her team at the University of East Anglia.

7. Early Placement Support

- 7.1 Once placed, Adopt South West offer early placement support up to the point that the Adoption Order is granted. All of our practitioners are trained to level 1 for Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), and in the Spring, staff will be trained in level 1 Theraplay. We want this embedded in all our work with adopters right from the very beginning, through their training, assessment, matching, transitions and early placement. We offer relationship based 'play groups' for adopters with young children, and a variety of activities for young adoptive families.

8. Training for Childrens Teams

- 8.1 We undertake training of childrens social work teams. Last year Julie Young from the University of East Anglia came to the South West and spoke about helping children keep in touch with their birth families. Staff from DCC's Childrens teams, fostering teams, and IRO's attended. Later this spring the University of East Anglia is coming to the South west to talk to staff for across the childrens teams of the Adopt South West region on Transitions, and helping children move into their adoptive families.
- 8.2 Adopt South West run workshops for childrens social workers on Life Story Work, and feedback on these is very positive. A workshop for all Agency Decision Makers across the region to consider common themes and practice issues will be held in the Spring.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Whilst the recruitment of adopters remains a challenge both nationally and regionally, Adopt South West has seen an encouraging increase in expressions of interest in recent months and continues to develop its recruitment strategy and the support offered to adopters that makes it well placed nationally.

Darryl Freeman
Head of Service (Deputy Chief Officer) Children's Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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