

# Adoption Agency Annual Report 2016/17

# ADOPT BERKSHIRE



Working Together...  
...Creating Families

## Adoption Agency Annual Report 2016/2017

This document should be read in conjunction with the **Adopt Berkshire** Statement of Purpose 2017 and the **Adopt Berkshire** Half Year Report – April / September 2016, which included Quality Assurance Information to enable the contributing local authorities to monitor the quality of their adoption agency services under NMS 25.

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## 1) Introduction

- **Adopt Berkshire** has now been in operation for nearly two and a half years (since 1st December 2014) and is the shared Adoption Service for The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Borough Council. A service agreement, service specification and three year budget agreement are in place for the service.
- The four contributing local authorities are currently in the process of jointly negotiating to become part of a larger Regional Adoption Agency, which is likely to also include: Reading Borough Council, Swindon Borough Council and Oxfordshire County Council. It is currently anticipated that the new Regional Adoption Agency will 'go live' in Quarter 3 of 2017/18 and **Adopt Berkshire** will cease to exist at that point. The new Regional Adoption Agency will include the contributing authorities' Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Services, which are at the current time hosted in-house by the **Adopt Berkshire** contributing authorities.
- The main priorities of **Adopt Berkshire** are:
  - To achieve the placement of children in care for whom adoption is the Care Plan, with appropriate approved adopters, matched according to the children's specific needs and circumstances and within appropriate timescales.
  - To recruit, prepare and assess adoptive applicants who are likely to be able to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
  - To manage a Notified Adoption Service on behalf of the four contributing authorities.

The needs of the children requiring placement are the agency's paramount consideration.

## 2) Legislation, Regulations and Guidance

- There is a range of Legislation, Regulations and Guidance, which influence the working of Adoption Agencies. These include:
- The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 and supporting statutory guidance and regulations;
- The Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Adoption Act 2002;
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- The Children and Adoption Act 2006;
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and accompanying statutory guidance;
- The National Minimum Standards for Adoption (2011);
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2011;
- The Children and Families Act 2014.

### 3) Key Requirements of Local Authority Adoption Services

- The key requirements of all Local Authority Adoption Services have not changed significantly since the formation of **Adopt Berkshire**. These are that:
  - The focus is firmly on the needs of the child, whose needs will be paramount in all decisions relating to adoption;
  - Highly skilled professionals lead a quality service delivered to National Minimum Standards (revised in February 2011);
  - A permanency plan is identified for all children in care within four months of them coming into Local Authority care. (This may be a return home, or any of a range of different placement options, one of which is adoption);
  - Focused effort goes into finding permanent families for all children in care waiting to be adopted;
  - A range of potential adopters are welcomed and assessed efficiently in an open and fair way;
  - Children and their adoptive families have easy access to adoption support services.

### 4) Adoption Support Services

- At the current time support to the prospective adopters recruited by **Adopt Berkshire** is provided by social workers within the service up until the granting of the legal Adoption Order.
- As detailed above, at the current time The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Borough Council all provide their post adoption services 'in-house'; this includes provision of birth records counselling for adopted adults and support, where appropriate, to adopted children, adoptive parents, birth parents and others affected by adoption (Adoption and Children Act 2002). It is expected that this will change once the four authorities all become part of the new Regional Adoption Agency which it is anticipated will come into being later this year (see section 9 below).

### 5) The National Minimum Standards – Adoption

- The Adoption National Minimum Standards came into force in April 2003 and were updated in April 2011. Local authority adoption agencies are expected to fully comply with the Minimum Standards which cover all areas of an agency's responsibilities and function. (The Standards can be viewed at: [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)).
- **Adopt Berkshire's** Statement of Purpose and procedures are fully compliant with both the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011) and the revised Adoption National Minimum Standards.

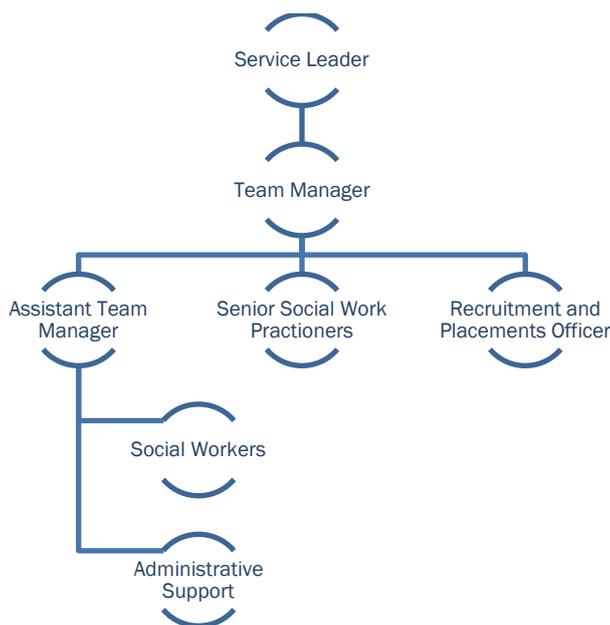
### 6) Organisation

- The ongoing work of the Service is monitored by a Management Board which includes:
  - The Head of Service from each of the four contributing local authorities;

- The Service Lead;
- An experienced Adoptive Parent (who was previously approved through one of the contributing local authorities and is independent of the Cornerstone Partnership).
- The Management Board meets quarterly, has agreed Terms of Reference and makes decisions about service direction.
- A Service Agreement, Service Specification and Three Year Budget Agreement are in place for the service.
- The Service has all the necessary key document in place including:
  - Statement of Purpose (2017),
  - Policy and Plan on the Recruitment of Prospective Adopters (2017),
  - Customer Care Standards and Working Together Agreement,
- The Service has comprehensive written procedures.

## 7) Staffing

### Current staffing levels



- Following the formation of **Adopt Berkshire** the level of adoption work being undertaken within all four of the contributing authorities reduced (in line with the national picture). While there is evidence that the level of work is now beginning to increase again, this has meant that to date it has not been necessary to appoint to all of the social work posts available to the Service. The current team consists of:
  - Service Lead (Shared with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service)
  - Team Manager – Full time

- Assistant Team Manager (0.5 f.t.e.)(full time post - 0.5 f.t.e. unfilled at the current time)
- Senior Social Work Practitioners – 3.9 f.t.e. (2 x full time workers and 3 x part time workers)
- Social Workers – 2 (full time)
- Recruitment and Placements Officer – Full time (Unqualified)
- Admin Support Officers – 2 (part time)
- In May 2016 the Service Lead role was appointed to on a secondment basis, the previous **Adopt Berkshire** Team Manager having since held this role pending the service becoming part of the proposed Regional Adoption Agency (anticipated enactment date of Q3 2017/18 (see section 9 below). For the intervening period, the **Adopt Berkshire** Team Manager role is held by an Independent Social Care Manager employed on a short term contract basis. The current post holder was already well known to the team and the transition was a smooth one.
- One of the Senior Practitioners within the Team is currently seconded to a half-time Assistant Team Manager role to provide additional management cover during the period of transition into the new Regional Adoption Agency. Her previous hours have been covered by one of the team's other Senior Practitioners increasing her hours as a short term arrangement and another experienced Practitioner being employed on a 5 h.p.w. short-term contract to specifically undertake Notified Adoption assessments.
- The Service has experienced a change in Admin as our previous full-time Admin Support Officer returned to full-time education in September 2016. Her previous post has now been converted to two part-time Admin Support posts. This should enable the Service to maintain more consistent Admin cover during periods of annual leave.

## 8) Collaboration with the Cornerstone Partnership

- **Adopt Berkshire** has to date been supported by the Cornerstone Partnership, in achieving its service aims in a number of key areas, including; the recruitment of adopters, the provision of mentor support and the provision of post-approval training.
- **Adopt Berkshire** and the Cornerstone Partnership have over the last year worked to a co-production model in terms of jointly planning and delivering training to potential, prospective and approved adopters at all stages of the adoption recruitment, preparation and approval process; this means that experienced adopters have been involved in supporting and advising us on all aspects of the training provided to potential, prospective and approved adopters from the point of them first engaging with the Service. Preparation Training has as a result been extended to include more information around specific 'matching' factors, in particular common health and developmental issues; the new training also includes more use of input by a range of health professionals and therapists.
- Through our collaboration with the Cornerstone Partnership all potential adopters have been able to access support from a Cornerstone Mentor during both Stage One and Stage Two of the adoption preparation and approval process, through the matching and placement process, and following the placement of a child/ren up to the point of legal adoption.

- **Adopt Berkshire's** contract with the Cornerstone Partnership is due to change in April 2017 to become a franchise arrangement with a separately employed Mentor Manager. This should enable **Adopt Berkshire** to continue to offer the same range of services to prospective and approved adopters whilst achieving an overall saving on the service.

## 9) The Current Government Review of Adoption / Regionalisation Agenda

- As detailed above **Adopt Berkshire** is moving forward with plans to become part of a Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt Thames Valley. At the current time it is likely that the launch date for the new service will be in Q3 2017/18. It is currently anticipated that the other participating local authorities will be:
  - Oxfordshire County Council.
  - Reading Borough Council
  - Swindon Borough Council
- After a tendering process it has been agreed that Oxfordshire County Council will host the new Regional Agency and the Service Lead post is currently being recruited to.
- PACT Adoption Agency (Reading) and Barnardo's (South-East) are supporting the contributing local authorities in the design and planning of the new Service. The Cornerstone Partnership are also involved in an advisory capacity, providing the adopters' voice.
- The Department of Education paper published in June 2015 and titled 'Regionalising Adoption', first proposed the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies across the UK and anticipated that the creation of larger agencies, which included the participation of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, should serve to:
  - Speed up matching of children with adopters;
  - Improve adopter recruitment to make sure that it is more effective and linked to the needs of children waiting;
  - Ensure that high quality adoption support services are available nationally;
  - Reduce costs;
  - Encourage specialisation;
  - Broaden strategic planning;
  - Encourage innovation and investment.
- This paper can be accessed at:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/437128/Regionalising\\_adoption.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/437128/Regionalising_adoption.pdf)  
**Adopt Berkshire** was highlighted in the document as being a model of good practice (see page 9).

## 10) Consortium Arrangement

- Separate to the creation of **Adopt Berkshire**, the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire

Borough Council all continue to be part of a formal Adoption Consortium arrangement with each other and with Reading Borough Council and Slough Borough Council. This arrangement enables the six local authorities to provide a range of services in line with current requirements on local authorities that it would otherwise be difficult for any of the authorities to provide cost-effectively, due to the low level of demand.

- As part of the Consortium arrangement each of the Berkshire Unitary Authorities contribute to the funding of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, which is hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.
- The Service provides a number of joint resources for the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, including:
  - Managing and servicing the Authorities' Adoption Panels;
  - Managing the Berkshire Information Exchange and the Post Adoption Direct Contact Service between adoptive families and birth families;
  - Providing specialist advice and assistance to staff in the six Unitary Authorities on complex adoption matters;
  - Assistance with training of staff, adopters and panel members;
  - Administration and servicing for the closed children's records and adoption records;
  - Hosting the Birth Relative Service (providing independent counselling for birth parents and relatives when children are to be placed for adoption).
- The Service Lead for the Adoption Advisory Service also holds the role of Service Lead for **Adopt Berkshire**, which ensures a dovetailed service for the local authorities which are part of both services.
- The role of the Advisory Service and the wider Consortium Arrangement has remained unchanged by the formation of **Adopt Berkshire**, however given that Slough's Adoption Services are now managed as part of Slough Children's Services Trust and the plan for the other five of the six contributing authorities to move into the proposed Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt Thames Valley – as of later this year; it has been agreed that the Consortium arrangement will end as of the new Regional Adoption Agency being launched. Negotiations are now moving forward with Slough Children's Services Trust and as part of the planning for the Regional Adoption Agency to achieve a smooth transition of Services.

## 11) Statement of Purpose and Recruitment Plan

- **Adopt Berkshire** has a Statement of Purpose and a written plan relating to the recruitment of adoptive parents both of which are compliant with all current legislation, regulations, standards and best practice guidance. These are available to all four contributing authorities and their Members and to all Service Users who engage with the Service.
- The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed (April 2017) in light of the proposed transfer of Services later this year.
- The Recruitment Plan is reviewed annually.

## 12) Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) Headline Measures released in January 2017

- The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) Headline Measures, January 2017, can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-leadership-board-quarterly-data-reports-2015-to-2016#history>
- The **Adopt Berkshire** contributing authorities' individual Adoption Scorecard information can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-scorecards>. Scorecard Information for 2016/17 should be available in April 2017.
- Each individual Authority's individual Placement Information is attached as Appendix 1. These documents enable easy comparison to the national picture.

### Summary Information regarding the national adoption picture:

#### a) Numbers of children awaiting placement: (nationally):

- As of 30 June 2016, there were 2,000 children waiting placement for adoption – this was a 10% decrease from 31 March 2016 when there were 2,210 children waiting with a Placement Order not yet placed with an adoptive family.
- As of 30 June 2016, 28% of children waiting had been waiting 18 months or more, a small decrease from 29% as at 31 March 2016.

#### b) Timeliness of Placements (nationally):

- The time taken between a child entering care and being placed with a family for children who have been adopted (Adoption Scorecard indicator A1) has decreased by 4 months since 2012-13, from 22 months to 18 months in 2015-16, this is unchanged since 2014-15. The latest quarterly data suggests there has been an improvement to 17 months during the first quarter of 2016-17

### Adopt Berkshire LAs

	Bracknell	RBWM	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Average time taken between a child entering care and being placed with a family 2016/17	30 weeks (3 children)	54.1 weeks (3 children)	29.4 weeks (5 children)	39.8 weeks (6 children)

- At 8 months, the average number of days between Placement Order and match for children who have been adopted (Adoption Scorecard indicator A2) in 2015-16 has remained the same as in 2014-15. The latest quarterly data suggests that this has stayed the same at 8 months during the first quarter of 2016-17.

### Adopt Berkshire LAs

	Bracknell	RBWM	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Average number of days between Placement Order and match 2016/17	2 days (3 children – 1 placed FfA)	11 weeks (3 children)	5.7 weeks (5 children)	7 weeks (6 children)

**c) Timeliness of adopters' assessments:**

- The latest quarterly data suggests adopter timeliness has been declining. In quarter 2 2013-14, 50% of approvals made by local authorities were made within 6 months of registration, while in quarter 1 2016-17 this had decreased to 31% of approvals. However this was an improvement on the 25% low in quarter 4 2014-15.

**Adopt Berkshire**

**% of adopter applications approved within 6 months of registration – 2016/17**

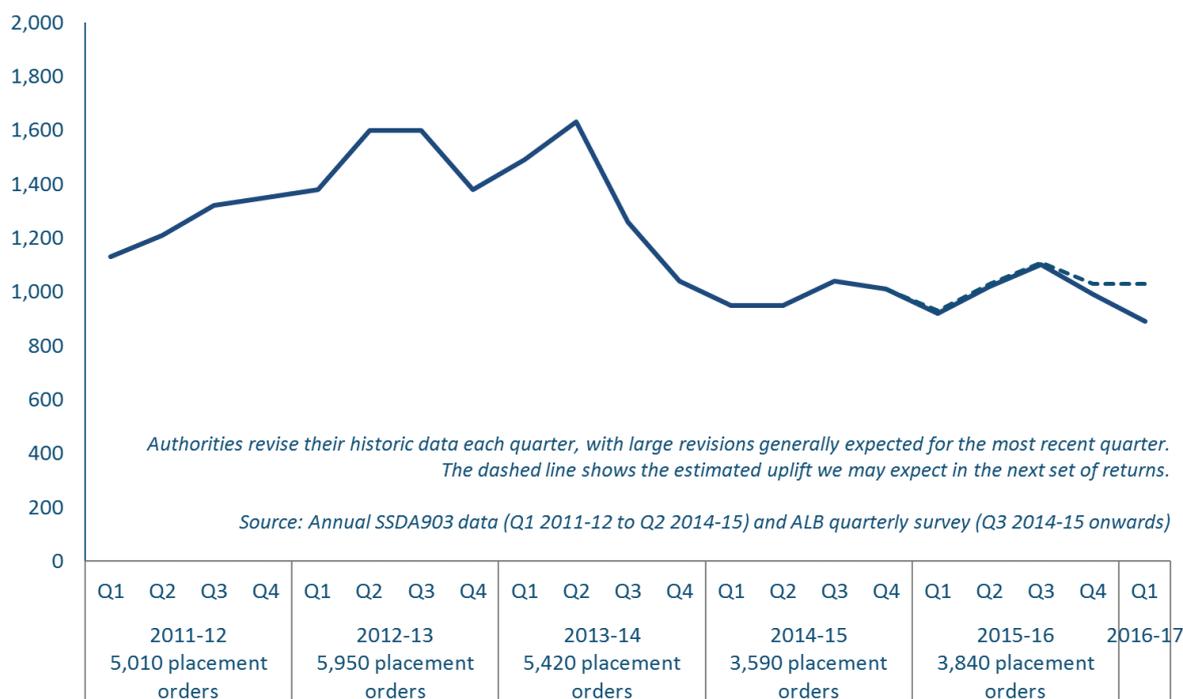
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
% in Quarter (excluding period when application 'on hold' at applicants' request)	50%	66%	75%	50%
Cumulative for year to date	50%	62%	66%	64%

- The timeliness of matches has declined. In quarter 4 2013-14, 80% of matches were made within 6 months of approval, compared to 45% in quarter 1 2016-17.

**d) New ADM Decisions and Placement Orders granted:**

- The latest quarterly data suggests that the number of new ADM decisions has continued to fall from 1,850 in quarter 2 2013-14 to 1,080 in quarter 1 2016-17, a decrease of 42%.
- The number of new Placement Orders granted have also continued to fall from 1,630 in quarter 2 2013-14 to 890 in quarter 1 2016-17, a decrease of 45%.

**Number of new placement orders granted in each quarter since 2011-12**



e) **Children adopted from Care:**

- In 2015-16, there were 4,690 adoptions, an increase of 35% from 2011-12, however, this was a decrease of 12% from 2014-15. Quarterly data suggests that there were 1,060 children adopted in Quarter 1 2016-17.
- Of the children reported to have had their ADM decision reversed during Quarter 1 2016-17, 32% were due to the Court not making a Placement Order, the same as in 2015-16.

f) **Adoptive family approvals and registrations:**

- Registrations to become an adopter decreased by 13% from 840 in Quarter 4 2015-16 to 730 in Quarter 1 2016-17. The number of prospective adoptive families approved increased slightly by 1% from 700 in Quarter 4 2015-16 to 710 in Quarter 1 2016-17.
- The DoE’s most recent estimate for the “adopter gap” suggests that the gap has closed, and there are now more approved and waiting adoptive families than children waiting to be matched. However, there are nationally still 1,730 children with a Placement Order not yet matched.

**Adopt Berkshire**

**Registrations and approvals**

	2015 – 16	2016 – 17
Total number of new adopters [units] approved	30	14
Total number of new applications received	29	19 (9 received in Quarter 4)

**13) Adopt Berkshire Achievements during the last year (2016/17)**

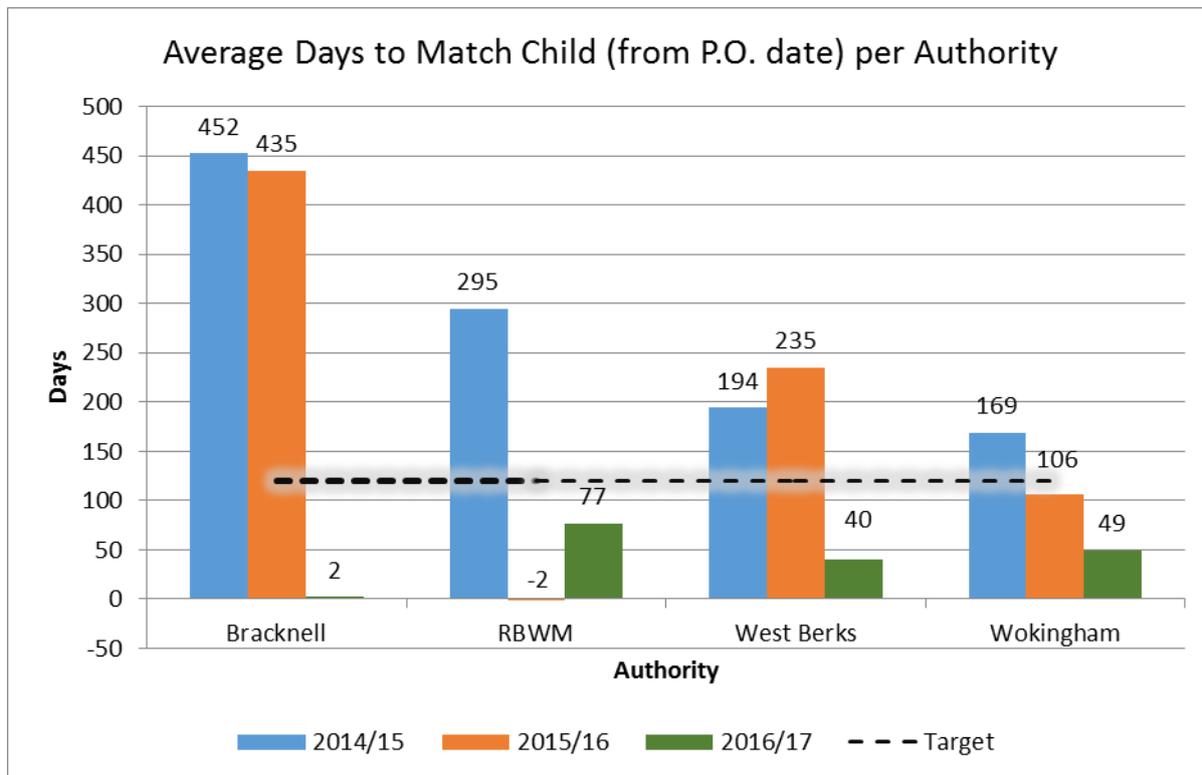
**Staffing**

- The **Adopt Berkshire Service** has continued to develop with all Team Members continuing to progress within their professional roles.
- The team is adequately staffed with no social work staff having resigned in the last 12 months.
- Our previous Placement Officer role continues to develop with the post holder now taking a more active role in the recruitment of prospective adopters (currently a priority area of work). His job title has been changed to reflect this change of role: Recruitment and Placements Officer.
- **Adopt Berkshire** moved to new office accommodation in May 2016. The staff fully embraced this office move and the move did not significantly disrupt the delivery of services.

**Children and adopters**

- **Adopt Berkshire** achieved the placement of 17 children with prospective adopters in the period April 2016 / March 2017. The timescales achieved (from Placement Order to formal match) were significantly below the national target and national average for all

four of our contributing authorities, despite a number of the children placed being older children with complex needs.



- **Adopt Berkshire** achieved four Fostering for Adoption placements in the last 12 months – these have served to significantly reduce the average timescales from Placement Order to formal ‘match’ for the associated placing authorities, with one of our contributing authorities achieving an average timescale of just two days over the year [Target timescale 121 days].

Two of our contributing authorities have achieved the placement of very young infants on the day that they were made subject to an I.C.O. [Once a Placement Order is granted, this will significantly reduce the average timescales from Placement Order to Matching for these authorities].

- As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March only five children from our contributing authorities were subject to Placement Orders and awaiting formal matching; of these four (two sibling pairs) had been linked, with the proposed ‘match’ being due to be considered by the Adoption Panel in April 2017.
- While the number of applicants being prepared/assessed/approved to adopt has reduced, in line with the national picture, we have to date been able to place most of the children referred who have not been identified as having significant additional needs within our own resources, whilst also maintaining a reasonable pool of approved and waiting adopters available for consideration for children needing placement ‘in house’.
- Despite the ‘difficult’ adoption climate reported nationally, **Adopt Berkshire** has been successful in achieving inter-agency placements with a number of our approved and waiting adopters, thus facilitating children being placed by other local authorities achieving successful placements whilst also achieving related income to the Service.

- In the period April 2016 / March 2017 21 **Adopt Berkshire** approved adopters (units) were 'matched' with a child/ren requiring adoption. Of these:
  - 8 adopters were linked to children requiring placement 'in-house';
  - 4 adopters were linked with children being placed by our future RAA partner agencies;
  - 9 adopters were linked with children being placed by other local authorities.

An income of £416,000 was generated through inter-agency placements (although some will be payable in the coming year).

- While six placements have been purchased externally (for two sibling pairs and four single children), two placements met the criteria for the inter-agency fee to be reclaimed from the Adoption Support Fund thus reducing the financial impact on the contributing authorities. The total cost to the contributing local authorities will be £124,000.

**Note:** The criteria for Placing Authorities being able to reclaim inter-agency fees from the Adoption Support Fund has now changed and it is unlikely that any future placements will be eligible for funding.

#### The Cornerstone Partnership

- The Service's partnership arrangements with The Cornerstone Partnership has continued to develop throughout the year (see Section 8 above).
- **Adopt Berkshire** has now negotiated to move into a Franchise arrangement with the Cornerstone Partnership thus enabling us to continue to gain the benefits of working with Cornerstone and having a group of experienced adoptive parents working closely with the service whilst also achieving a level of financial saving.

#### Engagement with Adopters

- **Adopt Berkshire** is mindful of the benefits of engaging with prospective and approved adopters around Service Development at all levels and seeks to do this through:
  - Engagement with the Cornerstone Partnership;
  - Discussions around development issues at the Monthly Support Group for approved and waiting adopters;
  - Seeking written feedback about their experiences of working with **Adopt Berkshire** from adoptive applicants, approved and waiting adopters and legal adopters, at key stages of the adoption process [Feedback questionnaires have been revised in the last six months to better reflect current processes and are now being routinely sent out to adopters once they complete each main stage of the adoption process];
  - Having an experienced adoptive parent as a member of the **Adopt Berkshire** Steering Group.
- In addition the work on developing our proposed Regional Adoption Agency is being supported by two Voluntary Adoption Agencies – PACT (Reading) and Barnardo's (South-East) – as well as by the Cornerstone Partnership.

#### Practice

- Life Appreciation Days are routinely considered for all children aged 12 months and over who are placed for adoption as well as for younger children if they have experienced changes of foster-carer. Life Appreciation Days are all run by the **Adopt Berkshire Service**.
- The **Adopt Berkshire Monthly Adopters’ Support Group** is now well established, providing an additional avenue of support for approved and waiting adopters and reducing the amount of social work time required in supporting these families prior to linking. Attendance at this group has now been opened up to Reading Borough approved adopters in anticipation of the authorities’ services merging in the future on the creation of our proposed Regional Adoption Agency.
- **Adopt Berkshire** staff have at different levels continued to support adoption workers and managers in Reading Borough Council around practice and development issues as there is less adoption expertise within this team at the current time. In anticipation of the two services’ future merge Reading Borough Adoption staff recently joined an Adopt Berkshire Team Day, which focussed on considering specific aspects of adoption work that were applicable to both services.
- **Adopt Berkshire** has maintained a contract with The Inter-country Adoption Centre (<http://www.icacentre.org.uk/>) to provide Inter-country Adoption Services to residents living in the four contributing local authorities’ areas who want to adopt from abroad (see Section 15 below). The previous contract has now been renewed up until November 2017 in anticipation of a joint Service Contract then being negotiated on behalf of the seven local authorities who are to be part of our new Regional Adoption Agency.

**14) Comparative Data for the Adopt Berkshire Unitary Authorities – 1st April 2016 / 31st March 2017**

**Children for Placement**

	<b>Bracknell</b>	<b>RBWM</b>	<b>West Berkshire</b>	<b>Wokingham</b>
<b>Number of new Placement Orders 2016/2017</b>	6 (Incl. 1 x 2 sibs)	5 (Incl. 1 x 2 sibs)	4	4 (2 x 2 sibs)
<b>Number of new ADM (Child for Placement) decisions since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016</b>	9 (Incl. 2 x 2 sibs)	6 (Incl. 1 x 2 sibs)	9 (Incl. 2 x 2 sibs)	4 (2 x 2 sibs)
<b>Number of children placed in FfA placements since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016</b>	1	0	1	2 (Sibling pair)
<b>Children matched in 2016/17 - average no of days between Placement Order and formal match</b> <b>Target – 121 days</b>	2 days (3 children – 1 placed FfA)	77 days (3 children)	40 days (5 children)	49 days (6 children)

Average no of days between entering care and placement 2016/2017 (using FfA placement date if applicable) <b>Target – 487 days</b>	210 days (3 children)	379 days (3 children)	206 days (5 children)	279 days (6 children)
Number of children placed who experienced a placement disruption prior to the Adoption Order being granted	0	0	0	0
Children with a Placement Order waiting matching (31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017)	3	2 (Sibling pair , provisionally matched)	0	0
No of children adopted since 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2016	4	6	12	3

### 15) Adopt Berkshire – Statistical Information

#### Adopter recruitment and matching/support

2016/17	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
New enquiries	55	42	43	62
Number of new Rol received (units)	5	3	1	9
Number of new adopters approved (units)	2	6	4	2
Average length of time between application and approval (weeks) (excluding period when application 'on hold' at applicants' request) <b>(Target 26 weeks)</b>	21.2 weeks	23.5 weeks <b>Half Year average = 22.9 weeks</b>	22.5 weeks <b>Nine month average = 22.8 weeks</b>	31.2 weeks <b>Full Year average = 24.0 weeks</b>
% of decisions made within six months	50%	66% <b>Half Year average = 62%</b>	75% <b>Nine month average = 66%</b>	50% <b>Full Year average = 64%</b>

Total number of Families in the Adoption Process as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017

Stage One Preparation	Stage Two Assessment	Approved and waiting 'matching'	Matched but pre-placement	Child/ren placed pre-adoption
4	6	16	0	21
(6)	(3)	(5 provisionally linked)	(0)	(19)
		(20)		

(Figure in brackets = figure as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016)

## 16) Outsourced Services

- As detailed above the four contributing authorities each have a contract in place with the Intercountry Adoption centre (IAC) to provide counselling and information to applicants enquiring about adoption from abroad. The IAC also undertakes the preparation and homestudy assessments of applicants who decide to pursue a formal inter-country adoption application and on completion applicants are considered by the IAC's Adoption Panel.
- Individual Statistics for each contributing Local Authority are available, however in summary:

## Assessment Data

Task	Bracknell Forest	RBWM	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Total number of enquiries	1	7	13	2
Initial Interviews held	1	0	2	0
Applications progressed	1	0	2	0
Families in Stage 1 as at 31/03/2017	0	0	1	0
Families in Stage 2 as at 31/03/2017	1	0	1	0
Families approved by the Agency between 01/04/2016 – 30/03/2017	0	0	1	0

## Post Approval Data:

Stage in adoption process	Bracknell Forest	RBWM	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Awaiting a match	0	0	1	0
Matched	0	0	0	0
Child in placement	0	0	0	0
Post Placement Reports	0	0	0	0
FER	0	0	0	0

## 17) Notified Adoptions

- Adopt Berkshire continues to receive a steady flow of notifications in respect of in-family adoptions.
- All inter-country adoption applications are allocated immediately notification is received that a child has been placed / entered the UK in order to ensure that Safeguarding Requirements are met.
- In-family applications that relate to children who are within their birth families and not in local authority care are allocated for completion of the necessary enquiries and Court Report/s as and when staffing allows; it is usual for all application to be allocated within three to six months of the notification being received.

## Adopt Berkshire – Notified adoptions

Quarter in which Notification received	2015/16 Quarter 1	2015/16 Quarter 2	2015/16 Quarter 3	2015/16 Quarter 4	2016/17 Quarter 1	2016/17 Quarter 2	2016/17 Quarter 3	2016/17 Quarter 4
Inter-country Adoptions	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
In-family Adoptions	4	4	2	2	4	6	2	2
Number of children	4	4	2	2	9	7	4	3
Total application in year	12 In-Family (Total of 12 children)				14 In- family and 3 ICA (Total of 23 children)			

## 18) The Inspection of Local Authority Adoption Agencies

- Adoption Services are inspected as part of OFSTED's Single Inspection Framework for Child Protection and Looked After Children which was introduced in September 2013 and which also includes inspection of local authorities' fostering and adoption functions. Adoption Agency work is given a separate judgment within the wider inspection framework.
- Three of **Adopt Berkshire's** contributing authorities have been subject to an OFSTED Inspection of their Child Protection and Looked After Children's Services since the creation of **Adopt Berkshire**. Their respective judgments regarding their provision of Adoption Services were as detailed below:
  - Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead      March 2015      'Requires Improvement'
  - West Berkshire Borough Council                      March 2015      'Requires Improvement'
  - Wokingham Borough Council                      October 2015      'Good'
- Bracknell Forest Borough Council is due an OFSTED Inspection.

## 19) Complaints

- In the period 1st April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 only two complaints have been received relating to **Adopt Berkshire**: one of these related to the Agency having decided not to progress an application from a prospective adoptive couple while the other was from the relative of an approved adopter protesting that the Agency had decided against pursuing a link with the prospective adopters concerned. Neither of these scenarios constitute grounds for pursuing a formal complaint; however the couple whose application was not accepted are now pursuing a claim against RBWM (their local authority) on the grounds of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

## 20) Challenges and priorities for the year ahead

- To continue to support the development of a Regional Adoption Agency (in line with government expectations) ensuring that **Adopt Berkshire** takes a key role in contributing to the design of the new service and the development of future practice in all areas. This will include continuing involvement in:
  - Specific working groups (considering specific aspects of Service practice);
  - The Partnership Profile Sharing Project (aimed at working closely with RAA partner agencies, including the VAAs, to identify early 'matches' for children requiring placement);
  - Participation in the Adopt Thames Valley Specialist Group;
  - Participation on the Adopt Thames Valley Board.
- To establish the Cornerstone Partnership Franchise Model as a way of providing additional adopter led training and support to prospective and approved adopters in a more cost-effective way.

- To continue to develop the **Adopt Berkshire** Team Culture, whilst supporting opportunities for joint working with Reading Borough Council's adoption staff in anticipation of the two teams merging later this year.
- To support Bracknell Forest with their forthcoming OFSTED Inspection (Targeted Inspection of the Authority's Services to Children in Need of help and protection) with the intention of achieving a rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for the Authority's Adoption Service.
- To continue to maintain the service's excellent record regarding the timelines of Adoption Placements.
- To continue to improve the timelines of prospective adopters' assessments.
- To continue to seek feedback from the adopters with whom we work regarding all aspects of the Service and to set up a process for seeking feed-back from older children being placed for adoption about their experience of the adoption process, in order to inform both **Adopt Berkshire** and our future Regional Adoption Agency about potential areas for further development.
- To support staff in adapting to further changes of service and team structure, management and possibly office accommodation as we move into our proposed Regional Adoption Agency.

## 21) Conclusions

- It must be acknowledged that the landscape of adoption has continued to change both nationally and locally as the number of children with a Placement Order has continued to fall nationally while locally the **Adopt Berkshire** contributing authorities are moving towards becoming part of a larger Regional Adoption Agency – **Adopt Thames Valley**.
- **Adopt Berkshire** continues to strive to be at the forefront of good adoption practice. The Agency has achieved significant success in achieving timely placements for children requiring adoption and is continuing to promote Fostering for Adoption when appropriate to the needs and circumstances of individual children.
- Positive working relationships are well established between the **Adopt Berkshire** Team and all four of our contributing local authorities and shared planning can be clearly evidenced. This has meant that children in need of placement have been identified at an early stage and many children with complex needs have been securely placed for adoption.
- The feedback received from adopters engaged with **Adopt Berkshire** is generally very positive and a number of inter-agency placements have been successfully achieved in the last 12 months, suggesting that the quality of preparation and assessment of our approved adopters, and the training and support package available to them, is being recognised positively by other placing authorities.
- Our four contributing authorities all continue to support innovative practice and this underpins the planning to move into a larger Regional Adoption Agency.
- The coming year will be a period of further significant changes for the Adopt Berkshire Service with the proposed move to become part of a larger Regional Adoption Agency – **Adopt Thames Valley**. However, the evidence to date continues to support that shared

adoption services, with a focussed approach and a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, can be a highly successful form of service delivery.

**Hilary Loades**

**Service Lead – Adoption**

**6<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

APPENDIX 1

Bracknell Forest – Individual Local Authority Information 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Number of new Placement Orders since 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2016	None	Two	Two	Two
Number of new ADM (Child for Placement) decisions since 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2016	None	Five	Two	Two
Number of children placed in Fostering for Adoption placements	None	None	None	One
Children matched since 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2016 - average no of days between Placement Order and ADM decision to match (using FfA date if applicable)  <b>(Target 121 days)</b>	N/a	N/a	One  Nine month average – minus 155 days (One child)	Two  Full Year average – 2 days (Three children)

<p>Children matched since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 - average no of days between entering care and placement (using FfA placement date if applicable)</p> <p><b>(Target 487 days)</b></p>	<p>N/a</p>	<p>N/a</p>	<p><b>One</b></p> <p>Nine month average – 0 days (One child)</p>	<p><b>Two</b></p> <p>Full Year average – 210 days (Three children)</p>
<p>Children with a Placement Order awaiting matching (31<sup>st</sup> March 2017)</p>	<p>One child– PO granted 12/2016</p> <p>Two children– PO granted 01/2017 – Prospective adopters identified and proposed ‘match’ to be considered by Panel on 27<sup>th</sup> April</p>			
<p>No of children adopted since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016</p>	<p><b>One</b></p>	<p><b>Two</b></p>	<p><b>None</b></p>	<p><b>One</b></p>

HL  
06/04/2017