



Adopt Thames Valley Annual Report Adoption 2018 to 2019



Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2018/2019

This document should be read in conjunction with the Adopt Thames Valley Statement of Purpose 2019/20. ATV has also produced quarterly reports to enable the contributing local authorities to monitor the quality of their adoption agency services under National Minimum Standards 25. A separate annual report has been completed for the Permanence Support team. The data is based on the information available at the end of quarter 4 and may be subject to some changes.

Introduction

Adopt Thames Valley has been in operation since 1st December 2017 and is the shared Adoption Service for Bracknell Forest, Oxfordshire, Reading Borough Council, The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Swindon Borough Council, West Berkshire Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. Since go live, Reading has a different arrangement for the delivery of Children's Services through a VAA known as Brighter Futures for Children. This does not affect the RAA arrangements in respect of adoption. Similarly, RBWM delivers its Children's Services through a separate arrangement known as Achieving for Children. For the purposes of this report all references will be to the relevant local authority. A legal agreement, service specification and budget agreement are in place for the service.

The main priorities of Adopt Thames Valley are:

- The recruitment, assessment, training and support of prospective and approved adopters at all stages of the adoption process;
- Family finding for children in the care of partner LA's who require placement for adoption (including those requiring Fostering to Adopt);
- The provision of support services to all prospective and legal adopters living in the region who are entitled to receive adoption support services;
- Services to non-agency adopters living within the region who are seeking to adopt a child via a notified adoption; e.g. step-parents wishing to adopt their step-child(ren);
- Services to adults living within the region who are seeking to adopt a child from abroad via an inter-country arrangement.

Organisation

The ongoing work of the Service is monitored by ATV Partnership Board which includes: a senior manager from each of the seven partner local authorities; the Service Manager for Adopt Thames Valley; an Adoptive Parent; an Adoptee.

The Management Board meets quarterly, has agreed Terms of Reference, and makes decisions about service direction.

The Service has all the necessary key documents in place including:

Statement of Purpose (2019/20), Policy and Plan on the Recruitment of Prospective Adopters, Information Sharing Agreement

Adopt Thames Valley Adoption activity during 2018/19

Children for Placement	Bracknell Forest	Oxfordshire	RBWM	Reading	Swindon	West Berkshire	Wokingham	Total
Number of new Placement Orders – 1 st April / 31 st March 2019	5	34	4	13	19	5	9	89
Number of new ADM (Child for Placement) decisions – 1 st April / 31 st March 2019	5	44	5	14	26	3	9	106
Number of children placed in Fostering for Adoption placements – 1 st April / 31 st March 2019	2	7	3	2	1	2	1	18
Children matched 1 st April / 31 st March 2019- average number of days between Placement Order and formal match (Target 121 days)	5 (95 days)	37 (283 days)	4 (220 days)	15 (152 days)	24 (239 days)	5 (437 days – without CST 75 days)	5 (114 days)	95
Children placed – 1 st April / 31 st March 2019- average number of days between entering care and placement (using FfA placement date if applicable) (Target 487 days)	5 354 days Adjusted 278 days	37 528 days Adjusted 482 days	4 492 days Adjusted 395 days	15 436 days Adjusted 416 days	22 442 days Adjusted 369 days	7 599 days Adjusted 462 days	4 362 days Adjusted 313 days	94
Children with a Placement Order waiting matching as of 31 st March 2019	3	27	5	10	26	2	4	77
No of children adopted between 1 st April 2018 and 31 st March 2019	7	25	6	20	15	6	1	80

Children with Plans for Adoption (ADM):

Plan for Adoption decisions (ADMs):

106 children had an Agency Decision made that they should be placed for Adoption (SBPFA)

All adoption plans for children from the seven partner local authorities in court proceedings in 2018-19 have been agreed by the relevant Agency Decision Maker (ADM) with advice from one of the ATV Adoption Agency Advisors. Legal and medical advice is always available to the ADM when considering adoption plans in line with regulations. The challenge of the 26-week court timeframe has continued but ADMs and Agency Advisors have continued to provide a high level of flexibility in order to meet court timetables. The ATV Agency Advisors provide written advice and quality assurance in relation to the paperwork, along with guidance to social workers on the process and planning.

Relinquished children/children not in care proceedings:

No relinquished babies have had a 'should be placed for adoption' recommended.

Change of plan from adoption:

- 3 Oxfordshire children had their plan changed away from adoption by the courts
- 3 Swindon children and 1 OCC child have had their plans changed to long term fostering due to an inability to identify adoptive placements.
- 2 Swindon children had their plans changed by the ADM on receipt of new information.
- 3 Swindon had their plan changed away from adoption by the courts.
- 1 Bracknell Forest child had their plan changed for adoption. as it was not possible to identify an adoptive placement.
- 2 RBWM children had their plans changed away from adoption by the court.
- 2 Reading children had their plans changed away from adoption. Placement Orders were made but no adopters were identified.
- 1 Wokingham child had their plan changed away from adoption by the court.

Placement Orders

89 Children were made the subject of a Placement Order. This is a significant reduction (21%) on 2017/18 when 112 Placement Orders were made. The authorities which have seen a significant decrease in Placement orders are Oxfordshire (46 to 34) and Swindon (33 to 19) and this requires further exploration. This mirrors what is happening nationally. In 2016/17 to 2017/18 fewer permanence orders were granted nationally. Please see appendix 1 for further information about the national picture.

Children matched: A total of **95** children were matched with adoptive families.

Oxford Panel recommended **62** children for linking for adoption

Woodley Panel recommended **33** children for linking for adoption

Of the 95 children matched **39** were boys and **56** were girls

63 single children

12 sibling groups of 2 plus one child who went to join a sibling in a placement

1 sibling group of 3

1 sibling group of 4

14 children from BME backgrounds

4 under 6 months

23 under 1 year

74 under 5 years

21 over 5 years

Bracknell Forest

5 children were matched for adoption, all with ATV adopters, two within 2 months of placement order, two within 3 months of Placement Order and one within 6 months.

Achieving for Children (RBWM)

4 children were matched, 3 with ATV adopters and 1 with another local authority. Three children were matched within 4 months of the Placement Order being granted. One was within 9 months due to additional needs.

Oxfordshire

37 children were matched, 29 with ATV families. Among the RAA local authorities, Oxfordshire is the only local authority large enough to be able to place children in house but at a reasonable distance from where the birth family live. However there has been some benefit in being able to place some of the children at a slightly greater distance. What has improved for Oxfordshire has been the capacity to make concurrent placements, because more of the Adopt Berkshire families have been open to this type of placement.

Reading

15 children were matched, 12 with ATV adopters (2 sibling groups of 2) 2 children were placed with other LA adopters and 1 with VAA adopters. 9 children were placed within 4 months and 3 were placed within 6 months of placement order being granted and 3 children were matched between 6 months-12 months of the placement order being granted.

Swindon

24 children were matched for adoption in Swindon, the second-highest number of children matched in recent years. 16 of the children (67%) were placed within ATV, and the formation of the RAA has been helpful in this regard.

All but 2 of these children, i.e. 92%, were matched within 12 months. For the 2 children not matched within 12 months, one child's placement was delayed due to a delay in decision making by the Children's team to place her separately from an older sister.

The second child is being adopted by his foster carers. There were delays in referring this child to ATV, followed by delays in the local authority concluding a standards of care investigation regarding the foster carers, then ATV had a delay in allocating an assessing

social worker due to staff shortages. However, there has been little impact of the delay on the child himself who has been able to remain with this foster family and will be adopted by them. There are a further 15 children still waiting for a match in Swindon who have been waiting over 12 months. We have matches booked into Panel for 4 of those children, 3 children are waiting to have their plans changed to long-term fostering, but we are still family finding for the other 6 children.

Given that we were not able to increase the staffing resources in Swindon until the end of September 2018, the fact that we placed 24 children is a real achievement for both agencies.

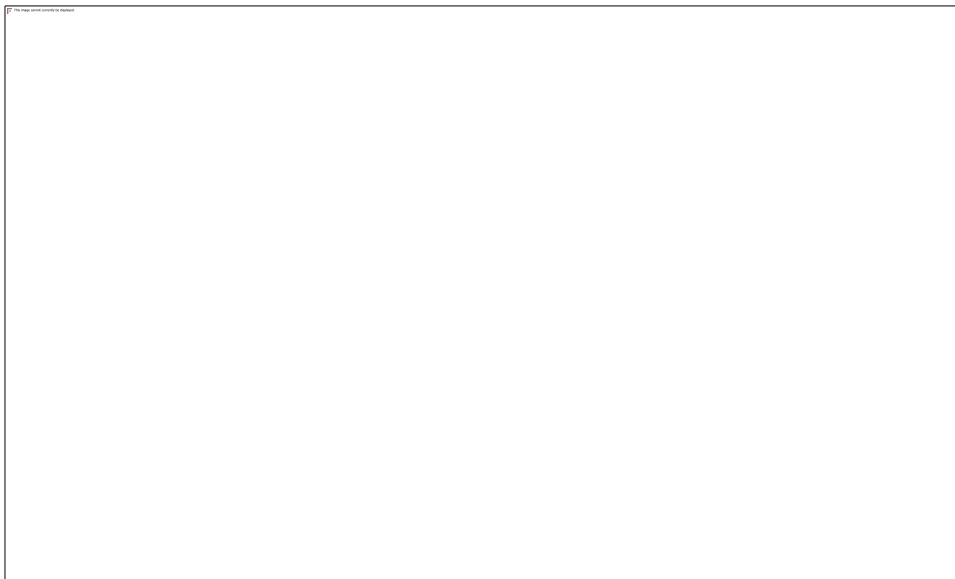
West Berkshire

5 children were matched, 1 with an ATV adopter, 3 with local authority adopters (1 was a sibling placement) and 1 with a VAA. Two were Fostering for Adoption (FfA) placements and 1 was a sibling group of two with complex needs. 4 children were matched within 4 months of Placement Order and one was 5 years from Placement Order to match. The child had experienced a previous adoption disruption and was subsequently placed with and matched to her original foster carer so this timescale is exceptional due to the circumstances.

Wokingham

2 children were matched with ATV adopters.

Of the **95** ATV children matched this year, **71** children (**75%**) were matched with ATV adopters. Of the remaining 24 children, **11** were placed with other LA's/RAA's and **13**



were placed with VAAs

This increase in identifying internal matches reflects the emerging identity of ATV and the considerable progress all staff have made towards thinking regionally rather than of individual local authorities. Placing children with ATV-assessed families is positive because children remaining more locally helps with introductions and post-placement support services. Support services to the child and their adoptive family can be more responsive for children placed in the region than for children placed further away in

interagency placements. It also avoids the need for interagency fees and reduces costs and social worker time during introductions.

Children from other local authorities matched with ATV adopters

11 ATV adopters have been matched with **12** children (**10** single children and **1** sibling group of two) from other local authorities this year, with more matches currently being explored. **11** children have been placed with **10** ATV adopters (**9** single children and **1** sibling group of two) this year. This is essential income to balance budgets and help fund any interagency placements required for ATV children.

Children Placed: Adopt Thames Valley achieved the placement of **94** children with prospective adopters

Fostering for Adoption (FfA): Adopt Thames Valley achieved **18** 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.

In March 2019 ATV achieved the ‘working towards the Quality Mark in Early Permanence’ from Coram BAAF. The assessors identified the following strengths:

- 1) Clear statement of commitment to earliest possible permanence for the benefit of and maximising a child’s potential and attachment capacity.
- 2) Commitment to an open process and communication across all stakeholders including birth family, seen as exemplary.
- 3) Family Finding Referral Form provides a sound and comprehensive platform for the RAAs early permanence work.
- 4) Strong emphasis on safe practice, explicit matching considerations and diversity as exemplified in matching grid and case study.
- 5) Statement of Purpose sets out requirements clearly and helpfully
- 6) Evidence of a clear culture and rationale for Early Permanence and guidance for practitioners to enable positive delivery.
- 7) Clarity of notes for the Adoption Panel on Early Permanence was viewed as excellent.
- 8) Guide to birth relatives on Fostering for Adoption and letters to birth families regarding Fostering for Adoption is of a high standard.
- 9) Leadership within ATV is working with LAs to integrate and harmonise practice.

The assessors identified the following area for development:

Governance across the LAs and how Early Permanence is championed as a key policy objective in planning and target setting.

Pre-order Disruptions:

3 OCC children (one sibling group and one single child) and 1 single child (West Berkshire) have had their adoptive placements disrupted pre-order - these cases have will be returning to Panel for discussion.

Adoption Orders made:

80 children were adopted in year.

Adoption Orders	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Bracknell Forest	3	1	2	1	7
Oxfordshire	6	11	3	5	25
RBWM	0	1	4	1	6
Reading	6	2	11	1	20
Swindon	3	4	7	1	15
West Berks	1	0	3	2	6
Wokingham	0	0	0	1	1
Totals	18	19	30	12	80

This is the lowest number of adoptions in Oxfordshire for several years, and this figure is related to the number of children matched in 2017-18, which was also lower than usual at 29 children. 14 Oxfordshire children have adoption applications in the Court process and are likely to be adopted in the first quarter of 2019-20.

20 Reading children were adopted in 2018/19 compared to 13 in 2017/8. The other authorities have remained consistent. 14 adoption applications are being processed across the 5 Berkshire authorities. In some cases Adoption Order applications are taking longer to conclude due to leave to appeal applications.

	Bracknell	Oxfordshire	RBWM	Reading	Swindon	West Berks	Wokingham
Number of children with ADM awaiting Final Hearing	2	11	2	5	3	0	0
Number of children with P/O not yet matched	3	26	5	10	26	1	4
Number of children placed but not yet adopted	3	33	2	7	20	6	6
Number of adoption applications in the court process	3	14	1	5	4	4	1

Children on Placement Orders awaiting Placement:

As of 31 March 2019 77 children from our contributing authorities were subject to Placement Orders and awaiting formal matching; These include 3 children from Bracknell Forest, 2 of whom are in a FfA placement; 27 children in Oxfordshire including 3 children where the plan is likely to change, 4 children with matches identified and 2 in an FfA placement; 5 children from RBWM including 3 in FfA placements and 2 where the plan is likely to change; 10 children from Reading: including 1 child with a plan due to change and 4 booked into panel; 26 children from Swindon including 2 where the plan is likely to change and 8 children with matches identified; 2 children from West Berkshire, 1 of these children had a placement disruption and the plan is to change away from adoption; 4 children from Wokingham, 1 child is in the process of being linked and three are siblings.

Of the Children on Placement orders waiting to be matched (some children fall into more than one category):

- Children of BME background (11)
- Disability/ complex medical and Health needs (13)
- Sibling Groups (19 groups of 2, 1 group of 3 with plan to separate)
- Over 4 years old (32)
- Plans likely to change from adoption (9)

Challenges in Family Finding for ATV

- Most Care Proceedings exceed the 26 weeks, this affects the A1 score. Lengthy Care Proceedings also impact on family finding, and research suggests this is correlated with adoption disruptions.
- The timeframes being set by the Court often result in experts being late in submitting their assessments and this leaves insufficient time for the LA to achieve Agency Advice / ADM Decision before their Final Evidence has to be filed.
- Some children remained at home during Care Proceedings and this nearly always delays family finding.
- Some reports that birth parents are given too many opportunities resulting in significant delays for children
- Children waiting for adoption have increasingly complex needs. Many are part of a sibling group including children of various ages. There are a number of children from BME backgrounds; a number of children are disabled or have complex health needs; children often have significant emotional difficulties and developmental needs. Increasing numbers of older children have adoption plans. Children sometimes have a number of these factors and it takes longer to find families for these children as there are limited numbers of adopters willing to consider these children.
- One of the main factors affecting family finding is the national availability of prospective adopters. 2016-17 saw the highest ratio of prospective adopters waiting compared to children waiting: 1.5 adoptive families for every child waiting.

Over the past 2 years, this has changed such that nationally there are now 3 times as many children waiting as there are families available. (Source Linkmaker website) This reduces the opportunity for all children to be matched. (except for the younger white British children who need a placement on their own and who do not have significant additional needs).

- When there are fewer potential adopters available, the family finders, their colleagues and the children's social workers need to work harder to find a match for children. Most prospective adopters now are very involved in the matching process and have a choice about which child or children they are matched with. Therefore, nowadays, if a potential link is found for a child, a timely and co-ordinated response is needed, otherwise the prospective adopters may elect to be matched with other children from agencies who can respond more quickly.
- To family find successfully, ATV requires clear and workable permanency plans for children, well written CPRs which portray children's strengths as well as their vulnerabilities, and good liaison with the children's social worker. A number of CPRs are poorly written and significantly out of date. There appears to be a lack of understanding of both the legal and physical aspects of writing CPRs. This is partly due to the high ratio of staff turnover leading to vacancies and therefore high workloads. Manager oversight is also a difficulty. Increasingly CPRs come without managers having had sight of them.
- ATV is not currently able to place all children with ATV adopters. Consequently, there is a need to place children through interagency placements. There is a cost to this and these placements are often at a long distance which makes it more difficult to support placements both in the short and longer term.
- The development of a regional adoption agency has created some challenges as well as benefits. For example, it has taken time to recruit to vacancies and this has had a significant impact on capacity in some teams.
- The current structure of some Children's teams (Oxfordshire and Reading) means there is often a delay in allocation when the case transfers to LAC at the date the Placement Order is agreed. It also takes time for the new worker to familiarise themselves with the case and get to know the child. This has an adverse effect on performance for A2 (time between having authority to place and child being matched).
- When the RAA went live in December 2017 there were insufficient adoption team social workers in the Swindon office. This impacted family finding. Family finding cases were then allocated to Oxfordshire-based and Woodley-based team members.
- Staff turnover in the Swindon children's teams has been high and this has impacted the local authority capacity to respond to requests from the family finders, and in turn this has impeded family finding for a number of children, although this is now being rectified.
- A major restructuring of the children's team's in Swindon has also impacted on the work needing to be done by the local authority so that family finding can be successful.
- Despite the above 15 children were adopted in Swindon in 2018-2019. This could easily have been more but there is an urgent need for training and processes to be put in place in the local authority so that adoption applications are submitted in a timely way and the required Court reports are completed and files as they should be.

- A significant number of children in Swindon have had their plans changed away from adoption (or soon will have their plans changed). Some of these children could have been placed for adoption, and sadly, the difficulties within the system have let these children down. This will continue unless there is clearer understanding of adoption processes within the Swindon children's team. This will be difficult to achieve while staff turnover remains so high.

Improvement Initiatives:

Family Finding:

- An ATV-organised adoption play day for prospective adopters and children waiting for a placement was held on 3rd February for ATV children. 3 single children have been formally matched following this event and potential matches have been identified for 5 further children including 1 sibling groups of two. A further event is planned for October 2019 and then in March 2020.
- Targeted recruitment for BME children, siblings and children with complex health needs, has experimented with a range of media and outlets to assess which are most effective.
- Permanency Planning process training for Children's teams.
- More use of professional photos and video to enhance attractiveness of children's profiles.
- Recently set up a liaison with VAA partner PACT for early identification of potential matches for children we are unable to match with ATV adopters.
- The Reading Service Lead for Permanence meets with the Team Manager for Woodley Adoption Team on a 6-weekly basis to review the cases of children on referral, monitor timescales and seek to resolve any difficulties that have arisen.
- A system has very recently been set up for the Reading Service Manager for LAC and the Service Lead for Permanence to jointly meet with the ATV Service Manager on a quarterly basis to discuss performance and to air and address any difficulties that arise;
- Woodley are basing one family finder each week in Reading to be available for permanency planning meetings and to discuss referrals and queries with social workers such as suitability for FfA.
- An ATV Leads Meeting is held quarterly and addresses practice-related issues arising within the RAA.
- The Swindon Service lead has been liaising regularly with the ATV Service Manager to review progress on family finding.
- Open morning in Woodley for professionals with information on the adoption process and FfA. (October 2018 and May 2019).

Early Permanence:

- ATV staff are working hard to promote Early Permanence. Likely cases continue to be pro-actively tracked by ATV staff. Staff and members of the legal team joined ATV staff and Panel Members for a training session on Fostering for Adoption (Ffa) in January 2019.
- The number of adopters willing to consider early permanence has increased over the past year and the RAA has created more opportunities for this.

How can Partner LAs assist ATV with Family Finding?

- Ensure that planning for children is timely by implementing processes to ensure that children who have a Care Plan or twin track plan for an adoption experience minimal delay in the agency achieving Placement Orders for them;
- Where children have an adoption plan, all necessary information is available to facilitate ATV family finding for them and up-to-date information is maintained;
- Social Workers who hold case responsibility for children subject to adoption plans are able to fulfil the requirements on them around attending meetings and compiling reports in a timely manner, thus preventing any delays being caused by the actions, or inaction, by the partner LA.
- To ensure staff understand the role of the Agency Decision Maker, in particular, the need for Care Plans including Change of Care Plans to be presented in a timely way to the ADM.
- To keep ATV updated about the care plans for children. ATV also needs to be notified when children's care plans change during proceedings, either when adoption becomes the new care plan or ceases to be the care plan.
- To ensure that all papers submitted to the ADM/Panel are quality assured internally before they are submitted to the panel advisor for a final review.
- To regularise Permanency Planning meetings so that they are not convened or cancelled at short notice.
- To develop and roll out training to staff in permanency planning, writing the CPRs, and preparing for the ADM.
- Ensure that Early Permanence is championed as a key policy objective in planning and target setting and that systems are in place for governance of early permanence arrangements.
- To provide training for children's social worker re their responsibilities when children are successfully placed for adoption and the adoption needs to be finalised in court.
- Swindon to review their practice of not involving the legal team in adoption applications.
- To provide training and resources for social workers in life story work and preparing children for adoption.
- To ensure adequate medical advisor capacity to meet the demand for medical advice.
- To ensure that support packages and allowances are put in place at the point the Placement Order is made as needed.
- To develop a protocol for working together and properly consider the child's best interest when foster carers wish to adopt.

- Swindon and Oxford to explore the reasons for the reduction in Placement Orders in 2017/2018

Timeliness as measured by the Adoption Scorecards

	Threshold	England 3 - year average 2015-18
A1	426 days	486 days
A2	121 days	201 days
A3	n/a	58%

There is not a straightforward relationship between the quality of family finding and the scorecard. It is important to note that the Adoption Scorecard is important but not the only measure of success, and it indicates the timeliness of family finding in the past and not the present or previous year. For example in the 2018 ILACS inspection Ofsted noted that Oxfordshire demonstrates a “never give up” attitude, thereby securing permanence for children whose needs mean they are difficult to place. This approach to adoption family finding will impact the A2 score.

Adoption Scorecards 2015-2018 Ranking is out of 150 local authorities

A1 score: time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

Local Authority	Average number of days	A1 score for 2015-2018 compared to 2014-17
Bracknell	625	shorter
Oxfordshire	472	longer
RBWM	509	shorter
Reading	666	longer
Swindon	556	shorter
West Berkshire	529	shorter
Wokingham	x	shorter

A2 score: time between having authority to place and child being matched:

Local Authority	Average number of days	A2 score for 2015-2018 compared to 2014-17
Bracknell	365	shorter
Oxfordshire	235	longer
RBWM	206	shorter
Reading	279	shorter
Swindon	216	shorter
West Berkshire	138	shorter

Wokingham	x	x
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A1 & A2 scores: 1 year trend - Improvement from 2017 to 2018

Local Authority	A1	A2
Bracknell	x	x
Oxfordshire	shorter	shorter
RBWM	x	x
Reading	longer	shorter
Swindon	shorter	shorter
West Berkshire	shorter	x
Wokingham	x	x

It is of note that for all authorities for whom information is available, all except Reading improved their A1 score in 2017/18, and all improved their A2 score during this year.

A3 score Percentage of children waiting less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

Local Authority	Percentage
Bracknell	38%
Oxfordshire	58%
RBWM	44%
Reading	39%
Swindon	52%
West Berkshire	38%
Wokingham	75%

The DfE has been undertaking work on the future of Adoption Scorecards and this includes how RAA data can be incorporated into the Adoption Scorecard. In the 2015-18 Adoption Scorecard, there will be some limited RAA information for those RAAs that went live during the performance year, however, more substantial changes will be made from 2016-19. These changes will include a full set of indicators focused on both local authorities and RAAs, and there will be a particular focus on matching and recruitment. A10 will replace A1 as the main timeliness indicator. This is the same indicator but A10 adjusts for adoptions from foster care. From 2016-19, the Scorecard will include a one-year and three-year average for the main timeliness indicators.

Please see Appendix 2 for further information on scorecards.

Statutory timeframes

Panels make a recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular adopters within 6 months of the adoption ADM deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

21 of the 61 Oxford/Swindon children linked for adoption were matched within six months of the 'should be placed for adoption' decision.

22 out of the 34 Woodley children were matched within six months of the 'should be placed for adoption' decision.

Adopter recruitment:

Enquiries

613 enquiries were received from prospective adopters during 2018/19

Enquiries	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxfordshire	29	62	43	81	215
Swindon	22	24	23	22	91
Woodley	45	55	64	55	219
Other/ No info given	11	27	19	5	62
Out of area			1	10	11
Unknown			7	8	13
Totals	107	168	157	181	613

Since the end of quarter one on 30/06/2019 the number of enquiries has increased by 69%, indicating that current marketing and recruitment strategies are having an impact.

Information sessions

275 prospective adoptive families attended information sessions

Information meetings	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxfordshire	27	32	23	35	117
Swindon	4	7	7	6	24
Woodley	34	24	39	37	134
Totals	65	63	69	78	275

Registrations of Interest

76 registrations of interest (ROI) were received.

Registrations of Interest accepted	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxford & Swindon	5	14	16	12	47
Woodley	7	8	8	6	29
Totals	12	22	24	18	76

This is a conversion rate of 1:8 which is high.

Preparing adopters: Courses and workshops held in 2018/19

11 Reflection workshops across the region.

6 Parenting Skills courses: 3 in Oxfordshire, 2 in Berkshire and 1 in Swindon

11 Preparation courses across the region.

Adopter Approvals

ATV had a target to recruit 80 new adoptive households in 2018/19. As of the end of Quarter 4 we have approved 72 new adopter households

72 adoptive households approved

Approvals	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxford & Swindon	9	5	8	19	41
Woodley	8	6	5	12	31
Totals	17	11	13	31	72

53 households were heterosexual couple adopters, 6 households were same-sex female couples. 2 were same-sex male adopters. 10 were single female adopters, 1 was a single male adopter.

50 households were first-time adopters.

16 households were second-time adopters

6 families were foster carers being approved for the child already living with them

24 of these households were willing to consider an early permanence placement

17 households included adopters from BME/other ethnic backgrounds

Adopter assessments in process on 31/03/2019

50 adopter assessments were underway on 31/03/2019

Assessments in progress at end of quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Oxford & Swindon Stage 1			15	15
Woodley Stage 1			12	11
Oxford & Swindon Stage 2			20	13
Woodley Stage 2			14	11
Totals	46	49	61	50

Statutory Timeframes:

Panels should make a recommendation on the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt within six months of receipt of the prospective adopter's registration of interest (ROI).

22 of the 72 households approved received a Panel recommendation of suitability within 6 months of ROI. The majority of the Stage two assessments were completed within the 4 months timescale. Reasons for delay in stage one were varied - delays in medicals being

completed, applicants needing to complete voluntary work or building work, applicants needing to work at a slower pace, some staffing issues. Work is being undertaken to address delays in Stage one.

Improvement initiatives

- Additional one-to-one support for adopters during Stage 1.
- More rigorous monitoring of timescales during Stage 1 to minimise delay.
- Adopters are being encouraged, where appropriate, to create their matching profiles a couple of weeks ahead of their approval panel.
- Increasing the number of information meetings and spread them across Oxfordshire county and Swindon area in a variety of new venues. We are also experimenting with a variety of times, evenings and weekends.
- Continuing to invest heavily in radio advertising as a means to reinforce the ATV brand among would-be adopters as well as specific radio campaigns eg siblings, BME adopters.
- Experimented with ATV presence at national and regional specialist audience events (e.g. the Times Educational Supplement Special Education Needs Show, The Fertility Show). In 2019 we will be experimenting with festivals and fun days as well as returning to the TES SEN Show and The Fertility Show.
- Regular outreach in community centres, such as libraries and faith centres, - concentrating on areas of most need e.g. Swindon, areas at a distance from one of our centres, plus areas with specific demographics that we wish to recruit e.g. high BME density. ATV staff attended a church event in Reading in March 2019 to highlight the need for more adopters from the BME community. We have been invited to return and are exploring more opportunities among different faith centres.
- We are currently undertaking a joint recruitment campaign to recruit more BME adopters with ACE (Adopt Central England) Regional Adoption Agency. Strands will involve postcard distribution, a supplement to The Voice newspaper, and possibly digital or radio campaigns.

Early Permanence

- We are re-designing the home page of ATV's website, so it has a dedicated tab for FfA. We will also run social media campaigns using extracts of interviews with FfA adopters creatively to raise awareness while being careful to preserve confidentiality.
- All prospective adopters now receive training on FfA during the initial preparation course to encourage them to think about FfA. Those who are interested may then attend the specialist one-day training on FfA.
- ATV is working towards the Early Permanence Quality Mark (Coram BAAF)

Notified Adoptions

Adopt Thames Valley continues to receive a steady flow of notifications in respect of in-family adoptions.

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. The assessments are being done by sessional workers and by staff members on a casual basis. An Independent Social Worker is employed to supervise this work. Information meetings are held monthly for prospective adopters. Cases continue to be complex and some have multiple Court hearings.

40 Adoption Orders for non-agency adoptions (step-parent adoptions, in-family and intercountry) were made in year 2018-2019. Currently there are 52 step parent adoption assessments open to ATV.

There have been **141** non-agency adoption enquiries

Non-Agency Enquiries	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxford	19	9	6	9	43
Swindon	4	8	9	10	31
Woodley	12	13	9	16	50
Unknown			9	8	17
Totals	35	30	33	43	141

40 adoption orders were made in respect of children subject to non-agency adoption applications

Non-Agency Adoptions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Oxford	4	5	3	4	16
Swindon	3	5	4	0	12
Woodley	2	0	4+1tbc	6	12
Totals	9	10	11+1 tbc	10	40

54 non-agency adoption assessments are currently in progress across the region

Non-Agency Assessments in progress	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Across the region	70	61	51	54

Intercountry adoptions

ATV has a contract with the Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) to respond to an unlimited number of adoption enquiries and applications on behalf of ATV.

Summary of work completed by IAC in 2018/19

Pre-approval data	Bracknell Forest	Oxfordshire	RBWM	Reading	Swindon	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Advice line: no of contacts	4	15	6	8	3	5	-
No of information packs sent	5	10	3	7	1	2	
No of applicants attending information sessions							
No of initial interviews		1		1			
ROI form sent out		1					
Registration received, accepted and stage 1 started		1		1			
Families in Stage 1 (as at 11/03/2019)				1			
Families started Stage 2		1					
Families in Stage 2 (as at 11/03/2019)		1					
Families to Panel and resulting Agency Decision							

Post-approval data	Bracknell Forest	Oxfordshire	RBWM	Reading	Swindon	West Berkshire	Wokingham
Families approved awaiting a match (as at 11/03/2019)							
Families matched (as of 11/03/2019)							
Children returned to the UK							
Families with a child in placement (as at 11/03/2019)	1	3	1				
Children requiring post-placement/adoption reports	1	2					
Post-placement/post-adoption reports completed	1	1	4				
Cases requiring FER(Foreign Element Regulations 2005) reporting (at 11/03/2019)							
FER visits completed							

Adoption Panels:

A total of 55 Panels were held in 2018/19
32 Oxford Panels were held in 2018-19
23 Woodley Panels were held in 2018/19

Issues relating to the make-up of Panels:

A decision was taken to combine the Swindon and Oxford Panels in 2018/19. Panel members continue to be very committed to the task and are able to be flexible and willing to attend additional Panels on request. Panels have always met the attendance requirements in terms of independent and social work members and are always quorate. The Independent Chair for the Oxford/Swindon Panel continues to be Donald McPhail, who has chaired the majority of Panels this year, providing strong and consistent leadership across the Panels. There are four Vice-Chairs to provide cover for the Chair and they have done so over this past year to good effect. The Independent Chair for the Woodley Panel is Usha Sharma who has chaired the panel on all but two occasions this year when extra panels were needed to prevent delay for children. Usha continues to provide consistent leadership and strong guidance for the panel. There are two Vice-Chairs who have efficiently covered the Panel when needed in the past year.

There has been very little change to Panel membership over the past year. There is currently only one elected member on the central list for the Oxford/Swindon Panel. The Woodley Panel has three elected members on the central list and has increased its membership this year to include more male members. Efforts to extend the range of background, experience and expertise amongst Panel membership continues and priority is currently being given to recruiting adopted adults and adoptive parents to Panel and particularly those who have knowledge of the Swindon area. The medical advisor for Swindon has remained on the rota of medical advisors to the Oxford Panel.

All active Panel members have an up-to-date DBS check and have had an appraisal within the last 12 months.

Panel Training

An ATV Panel Members training day was held in Woodley in November 2018 with sessions on Adoption Disruptions, Fostering for Adoption, Pre-Meets and the Adoption Support Fund. A half-day training was provided on Early Permanence in February 2019 and a full day's training run by New Family Social on assessing LGBT+ adopters has been arranged for April 2019.

Social Worker Compliance with Restriction on Adoption Reports Regulations:

Persistent efforts are made to ensure that all social workers who prepare adoption reports for an Adoption Panel or for ADM understand the Restriction on Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 and are appropriately qualified or are supervised by someone who is in compliance with the regulations. This is monitored by the Panel/Agency Advisor when papers are submitted and challenged at that point if the matter is not clear. This requirement is also regularly highlighted during training sessions on CPR writing for social workers/managers across the region.

Quality Assurance:

Panels

The Panel/Agency Advisors fulfil a quality assurance role in relation to paperwork submitted to ADM/Panel. A sessional worker in Oxfordshire provides additional early support to social workers writing CPRs. Biannual training is provided for social workers in Oxfordshire on Permanence Planning Processes and CPR writing. The Oxford Panel Advisor attended a Team Managers Meeting in Swindon in March 2019 to provide feedback and guidance on CPR writing and the ADM process. Further training for Swindon social work staff would be beneficial. The Woodley Panel Advisor has provided training to three Berkshire agencies on CPR writing and has facilitated training to adopters in the assessment process on involving their wider family and friends in their adoption process. Training has also been provided by the Woodley Panel Adviser to Berkshire social workers on Life Story Work for children.

Panel asks the Panel Advisor to feed back issues concerning the quality of paperwork or to follow up on practice issues that it considers are of concern. Issues identified by the Chair are then fed back to the agency.

The Panel Advisors provide individual feedback to social workers and team managers where required concerning the quality of paperwork or to follow up relevant practice issues. Panel also asks the Panel Advisor to raise issues that are considered to be of concern or to highlight examples of good practice. Issues and themes identified by the Chair are fed back to the Service Manager and reported to managers.

Panels are provided with six-monthly updates on all cases, thus providing an opportunity to monitor progress and address any issues/learning from a specific case.

Ofsted

An ILACS inspection of Children's Services in Oxfordshire was undertaken from 16th to 20th April 2018. The overall judgment was good. The Ofsted report contained the following feedback about Adoption.

'Since December 2017, the local authority has hosted the Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt Thames Valley). The local authority is aspirational in seeking to achieve adoption where this is the right option for the child. Social workers and managers demonstrate a 'never give up' attitude, which has secured permanence for some children who have been difficult to place. Despite a decline in the number of children achieving permanence through adoption and the timeliness of matching, adoption performance remains good compared to statistical neighbours. Adopters are overwhelmingly positive about their experience and particularly value the sensitivity and professionalism of the social work practice in Oxfordshire. There is a wide range of post-adoption support and the local authority makes good use of the adoption support fund.'

DfE Audit

On 2 May 2018 Mark Owers (management consultant involved in supporting the development of RAA's and John Myers (DfE) visited the Adoption teams to undertake an audit of matching and early permanence as part of a national audit with all live RAAs. Mark provided the following feedback:

'I want to thank you for last week's matching and early permanence practice audit visit. It was so insightful immersing myself in your day-to-day practice and strategic plans. You clearly have an impressive staff group doing great things! Please extend my thanks to your colleagues!'

Practice Week

Practice weeks in Oxfordshire involve senior managers visiting teams twice a year to meet staff, learn more about the work of the team, hear about good practice and understand more about the challenges facing staff in their day-to-day work.

Earlier this year David Clarke, Deputy Director for Education, visited the Woodley Adoption team and he provided this feedback following his visit:

'It was great to meet you and your teams on Tuesday. I did indeed find the visit very informative and helpful as I went away having felt I was able to 'see' the process by which your team operates and the impact this has on the child, birth parent(s), adopting parents and also a school.

I learnt so much from a very a different perspective after having an insight from a school/Headteacher's perspective and was able to gain a greater understanding of what work is done behind the scenes so to speak by all your various teams to ensure that a match is truly successful for all the various people involved. I was aware of just how complicated the process would be but got a whole new insight after speaking with the teams as to just how complex and complicated it is. I will now be able to feed this back to my teams as well as discussions with schools in relation to adopted children for example how you place children in a school following an adoption.

I was truly humbled by how dedicated and committed everyone was to making the adoption process a success and it was clearly evident just how passionate everyone was to Adopt Thames Valley and the work you all do.

Could you please pass on my sincere thanks to everyone who gave me their time and insights on Tuesday. I would like to also thank you for your time, planning and preparation (the folder is very useful) for my visit as this really made sure it was a very productive time. I truly appreciated it.'

Internal Audit

An audit of Adopt Thames Valley was undertaken as part of the 2018/19 Internal Audit plan, agreed by the Director of Finance, Director for Children's Services and approved by the Audit & Governance Committee. The audit was undertaken during the 4th quarter of 2018/19.

Adopter feedback

Feedback from Panel Attendees:

The Panel routinely requests feedback from observers, social workers and applicants. In general, there has continued to be a satisfaction with the experience of Panel. Comments have included:

Oxford/Swindon

- *All panel members were welcoming... It was very professionally conducted.*
- *The panel was very positive - it felt as if they were on our side - willing us to get the yes we were wanting.*
- *We were made to feel comfortable and relaxed. All panel members were professional but friendly. Please try to keep Donald as the chair - he is an asset!*
- *All aspects of our panel hearing were dealt with a sensitive and professional level.*
- *All panel members were friendly and instantly made us feel at ease as we were rather nervous. All the questions asked were very fair and not at all intimidating. We were also made to feel welcome.*
- *I felt panel were very approachable and friendly. The chairman came to explain the process beforehand which was nice.*
- *Panel was good, with an empathetic and gentle approach which helps in a potentially nerve-wracking experience for potential adopters.*

Woodley

- *Very positive experience. It is clear that all members and panel chair have the children's best interest in mind.*
- *Really lovely members, I could see with their answers how much they care and how much they love what they do.*
- *Very friendly and understanding of our nervousness.*
- *A great balance with lots of relevant questions.*
- *Excellent, organised and efficient.*
- *Everyone was welcoming and made us feel at ease.*
- *Thought-provoking questions delivered compassionately.*
- *Very open and friendly panel and environment with well-considered questions.*
- *Really good to have a mixture of backgrounds, and people who have experienced adoption.*
- *Professional, thoughtful, considerate and knowledgeable. It was great to hear feedback afterwards on strengths, vulnerabilities and recommendations.*

Feedback to Adoption staff

Quarter 1

A private solicitors firm thanked an Adoption Team Social Worker for providing helpful court statistics around family finding.

Panel feedback to an Adoption Social Worker:

"Panel have been impressed by your presentation and manner both yesterday and on previous recent Panels. In particular, comment was made of your ability to remain non-defensive despite some quite challenging questioning, and your no-nonsense and uncomplicated approach, all of which translates into a sense that your judgement can be trusted."

Adopter feedback to Adoption Senior Practitioner: *"We very much value the patience, professionalism and guidance from S, who has considerably supported us with the linking and introductions to our daughter, and the ongoing support."*

Quarter 2

Email from foster carer of 4 siblings who went on to be adopted regarding the Senior Practitioner/Family Finder: *"We very much want to express in writing, our thanks and respect for the intensive, caring and valuable work that X IRO for Oxford, SW X and X 'family finders/adoption team' have done for 4 siblings we fostered for 2 years. X from the family finding team worked tirelessly to find an adoptive family that could keep all 4 siblings together and was hugely successful in doing just that."*

X's compassion shines through and is intrinsically tied to her work ethic. Excellent communication including receiving emails from X during the weekend when delicate introductions were taking place, undoubtedly helped to ensure that the introductions were successful, as was the handover. The children, the prospective adopters and ourselves were all reassured by the smoothness of the transition at this delicate time which was all down to X. We are very grateful to her for that and for taking account of the feelings of all involved."

Quarter 3

Feedback to Adoption Social Workers

'We have been so lucky to have you guide us through 'the process' and really couldn't have been in better hands. Thanks for your kindness and professionalism throughout, you will always hold a special place in our family"

'We just wanted to write to thank you for all your work and support this year. We both feel you've gone 'above and beyond' in helping us and making (child's) transition...as smooth as possible'.

'My husband and I wanted to write this email to say a huge thank you for your support and assistance in the collation of all (child's) post-adoption order paperwork. Over the past few months, since our original email, you have been particularly instrumental in this process and we simply cannot thank you enough for your interventions'.

Quarter 4 Feedback to Adoption Social Workers

'That call I made in the summer last year where you were so unbelievably supportive, will never ever leave me. Your team are amazing. You are amazing and we are indebted to your faith, guidance and support throughout what is and has been simply the most intrusive, intense and ultimately rewarding journey we've been on.'

'You are a gracious and lovely lady. Thank you so much for your support and good wishes. Looking back, I've been a mass of emotion for a long time and no one who hasn't gone through this will ever realise what it's like. Apologies to you especially for my possible overreactions and my gratitude that you are all as marvellous as you are. Someone should be talking about this process and you guys much more than is happening currently.'

'A huge "thank you" for all your help & support throughout our recent journey.....it has been an absolute delight'

'Thank you so much for taking the time to write this lovely kind letter to us. We have greatly appreciated the support you and your team have given us and your friendly, approachable, seemingly informal style and taking on board and acting on our comments'

'I thought you would also like to know just how well x is doing...At the end of each term her school gives out awards & certificates to children in assembly. x was given a merit medal at the end of last term, they only give out one for each year group, so she was chosen out of 60 children & got the medal for all round achievement (friendship, work, attitude) It is the highest award they give out, so we are super super proud of her. Particularly given her story & that she only moved to us a year ago. What an amazing little girl. She has settled so well & she is totally thriving. I thought it would be really nice for (family finder) to know how well x has adapted & progressed. We are sooooo thankful to her for choosing us for x & would love for you to pass on our appreciation if that is possible'.

Complaints

There has been one complaint relating to the work of adoption teams in 2018/19. This involved a couple who were counselled out at Stage 1. They raised concerns regarding communication and recording. This complaint was resolved at Stage one of the complaints process.

Objectives 2019/20

- Increase recruitment of prospective adopters within ATV. ATV has a target to recruit 100 new adopter households in 2019/20.
- To undertake a joint recruitment campaign with ACE RAA to increase the number of BME adopters (aim for joint venture to recruit 12 households between the two RAAs including families from sibling groups).
- Manage and support staff with the relocation from Nash Court and Lyndhurst Crescent
- To improve timescales for recruitment of adopters in Stage 1.
- To establish a regular effective liaison meeting with Swindon to involve senior managers, the Panel Chair and Advisor, legal and medical reps.
- To develop work on early permanence with a view to achieving the Quality Mark award from CoramBAAF
- To further develop the ATV website so that there is a professionals' password-protected portal containing information and guidance on adoption processes through ATV plus key contacts; clearer signposting to Fostering for Adoption (FfA) information and resources; and possibly a password-protected training information area for adopters.
- To implement the recommendations of the internal audit.



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Contributors

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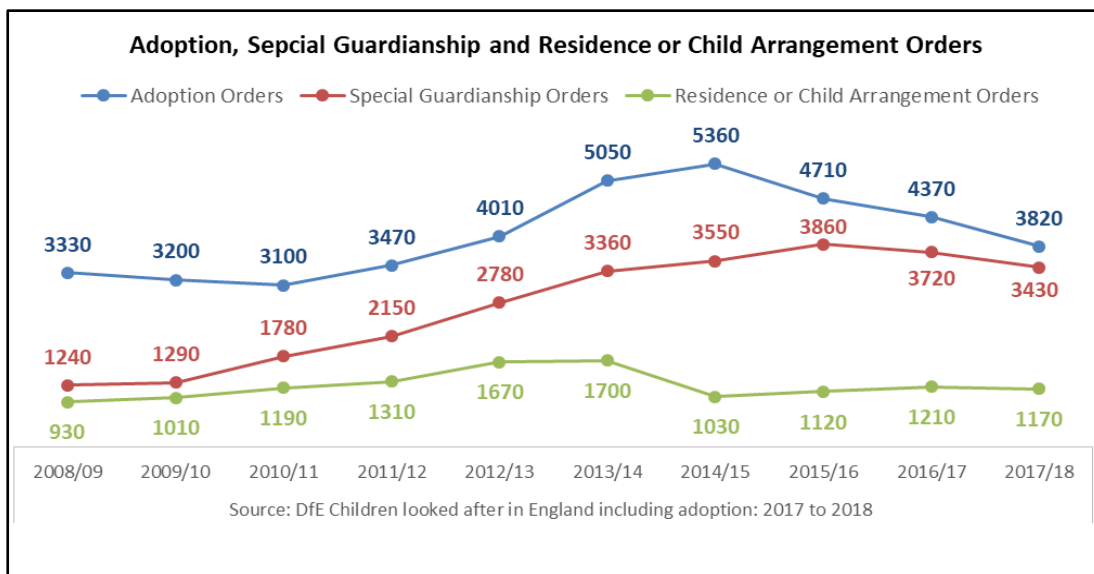
Appendix 1

National Data on Permanency orders

From 2016/17 to 2017/18, there have been fewer permanence orders granted nationally.

In 2017/18:

- 3,820 children ceased to be looked after due to adoption – a **decrease of 13%** on 2016/17.
- 3,430 children ceased to be looked after due to a special guardianship order, a **decrease of 8%** on 2016/17.
- 1,170 children ceased to be looked after due to a residence or child arrangement order, a **decrease of 3%** on 2016/17.
- Overall, **permanence orders declined by 9.5%** on 2016/17.



Appendix 2 Adoption Scorecards

Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	436	6	410	7	439	23	472	72
A2	133	15	157	17	207	73	235	117
A3	73%	n/a	65%	n/a	68%	n/a	58%	n/a

Oxfordshire's scorecard for 2015-18 was better than the England average for A1 (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family)

Oxfordshire's scorecard was worse than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the LA receiving authority to place and the child being matched.).

Oxfordshire's scorecard was equal to the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).

Swindon

Swindon	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	842	147	916	148	684	142	556	116
A2	173	38	193	50	253	115	216	103
A3	43%	n/a	45%	n/a	47%	n/a	52%	n/a

Swindon's scorecard for 2015-18 was worse than the England average for A1, (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family)

Swindon's scorecard was worse than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the L/A receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

Swindon's scorecard was worse than the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months)

Bracknell Forest

Bracknell	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	593	76	650	121	657	138	625	
A2	274	126	305	135	372	142	365	
A3	41%		29%		38%		38%	

Bracknell's scorecard for 2015-18 was worse than the England average for A1 (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family).

Bracknell's scorecard was worse than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the LA receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

Bracknell's scorecard was worse than the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).

Windsor & Maidenhead

Windsor & Maidenhead	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	738	141	694	139	564	104	509	
A2	277	130	277	119	243	99	206	
A3	36%		39%		42%		44%	

RBWM's scorecard for 2015-18 was worse than the England average for A1 (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family).

RBWM's scorecard was slightly worse than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the L/A receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

RBWM's scorecard was worse than the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).

Reading

Reading	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	635	100	667	127	644	136	666	
A2	291	135	339	142	285	132	279	
A3	30%		35%		35%		39%	

Reading's scorecard for 2015-18 was worse than the England average for A1 (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family).

Reading's scorecard was worse than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the L/A receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

Reading's scorecard was worse than the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).

West Berkshire

West Berks	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	502	22	541	66	544	89	529	
A2	128	10	149	13	147	20	138	
A3	45%		21%		26%		38%	

West Berkshire's scorecard for 2015-18 was worse than the England average for A1 (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family).

West Berkshire's scorecard was better than the England average for A2 (the number of days from the L/A receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

West Berkshire's scorecard was worse than the England average for A3, (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).

Wokingham

Wokingham	2012-15	Rank	2013-16	Rank	2014-17	Rank	2015-18	Rank
A1	676	124	x		546		x	
A2	58	2	x		x		x	
A3	40%		x		60%		75%	

Wokingham's scorecard for 2015-18 was xxx than the England average for A1, (the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with his or her adoptive family).

Wokingham's scorecard was xxx than the England average for A2, (the number of days from the L/A receiving authority to place and the child being matched).

Wokingham's scorecard was better than the England average for A3 (the percentage of children matched within 12 months).