

Isle of Wight Adoption Service

Annual Report

1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is compiled under the National Minimum Standards 2013 (Standard 25.6) and the Care Standards Act 2000. Its purpose is to inform Senior Managers of the Isle of Wight Council and Cabinet of the management and outcomes of the Adoption Agency from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.
- 1.2 The Adoption Agency comprises of an Adoption Team Manager, 2 Senior Practitioner Social Workers, 3 Social Workers, 2 part-time Adoption Child Practitioners/Support Workers and 2 Administrators.
- 1.3 The Hampshire Service Manager for Adoption took on the additional responsibility for the management of the Isle of Wight Adoption Service on 1 January 2017.
- 1.4 Appendix A sets out data of the key activities of the service for 2016-17.

2. Services Provided by Isle of Wight Adoption Agency

2.1 The Isle of Wight Adoption Team

The Isle of Wight Adoption Service covers all areas of adoption work, unlike many larger local authorities who have specific teams specialising in different areas. The following areas of work and support are offered by the Service:

- A front door service is provided for all enquiries in respect of adoption
- The Preparation, Assessment and Support of adopters from the point of enquiry through to the granting of an Adoption Order
- Child's Permanence Reports
- Adoption Order Applications
- Family Finding for Children
- Post Adoption Support
- Special Guardianship Assessments
- Step-Parent Adoption Order Applications
- Access to Birth Records Counselling

2.2 Over the year the team has dealt with 31 enquiries of individuals seeking to adopt. This compares to a figure of 25 for the previous year. The higher number of enquiries are a result of the increased marketing activity undertaken jointly with the Fostering Service.

Enquiries for Adoption	2015/2016	2016/2017
April	2	3
May	1	1
June	5	1
July	2	3
August	0	2
September	0	2
October	4	3
November	1	2
December	0	3
January	2	4
February	6	3
March	2	4
Total Enquiries	25	31

2.3 Of the 31 enquiries received over the year, 14 enquiries did not progress to a pre-stage visit. 3 closed due to a lack of response from the enquirer following an initial phone call. Other reasons for enquiries not progressing included;

- applicants wishing to only adopt a young child
- lack of child care experience
- no physical room within the household for an additional child
- health issues

2.4 The Adoption Team provide a Duty Service and ensure that all enquiries are responded to within 24 hours and follow up calls are made prior to any enquiry being closed. If required, applicants can be contacted during evenings and weekends to ensure a telephone discussion is held with them.

2.5 Of the 31 prospective adoptive households who made enquiries, 17 progressed to a pre-stage visit. All were visited within the required 10 working days. The Adoption Team ensures that applicants are visited without delay and at a time suitable for the applicant.

8 prospective adopters wished to progress and completed Registrations of Interest Forms, compared to just 4 households in the previous year.

Of the 9 households that did not progress following a pre-stage visit, the reasons are as follows:

- 1 - was very limited in what they wished to offer.
- 1 - applicant is awaiting surgery and will contact the team further when she is ready to progress.
- 1 - felt the time was not right for them as a family.
- 1 - decided to progress with fostering.
- 3 - were left a Registration of Interest Form although have not responded further to the team's follow up calls.
- 2 - have had Registration of Interest Forms left with them and are still considering if they wish to progress.

2.6 Assessment

2.7 The Isle of Wight Council approved 5 households during 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017. This compares with 9 households approved during 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016 and 7 households approved during 2014-15.

The Isle of Wight's approval rate across all 4 quarters is as follows: Q1- 1; Q2- 0; Q3- 3; Q4- 1.

The higher number of enquiries have not, therefore, led to higher approvals and reasons for this are currently being explored. The findings will inform the current marketing strategy and whether the right applicants are being targeted.

Whilst the national data suggests that the number of adopter approvals has been falling since Q2 2014/15 to the end of Q3 2015/16, with approvals falling overall by 28% compared to 2014/15, a targeted and robust marketing strategy will be put in place this year to ensure the Isle of Wight does not follow this trend and has sufficient adopters for the children that can be placed in families on the Island.

Panel Activity

- 2.8** All 5 assessments completed during 2016-17 were recommended for approval by panel.
- 2.9** No cases have been referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) which provides adoptive applicants in England with the option of applying to an independent body to review the adoption agency's decision.
- 2.10** The average time from adopters registering their interest to approval was 8 months during 2016-17. This compares to 6.5 months for 2015-16. Although average timescales have increased and are outside of the government timescales of 6 months, this average has been impacted by the small number who have been assessed. One of these applications was significantly delayed in assessment (due to the applicant being made redundant and there being financial concerns) and when removed from the average figures, the average decreases to 6.1 months.
- 2.11** Stage 1 of the adoption assessment should be completed within 2 months. They have, however, taken longer than this: 50% of Stage 1 assessments were completed within 2 months. The average timescale for completion of Stage 1 was 3.5 months.

The reasons for the delays have been due to the following reasons:

- Delays in applicants sending in their references and checks forms.
- Financial issues that required resolution for one household.
- House alterations not completed in agreed timescale for one household.

The following is now in place to address timescales:

- The references and checks have been added to the initial application form so all of the information required for checks to be actioned has been received by the service at the time of the initial application.
- When the 2 month timescale has been reached with the majority of checks returned being satisfactorily, then a decision has been made to progress to Stage 2 if the GP medical has raised no concerns and no offences have been disclosed by the applicant at the time of processing the DBS check.
- Applicants circumstances will be explored in more depth during the pre-stage visit and prior to agreeing to progress to Stage 1.
- Should unforeseen events occur during assessment, applicants will be encouraged to contact the team further when the areas have been resolved and their assessments will be closed at that stage.

It is expected that this will have a significant impact on improving timescales for the coming year.

- 2.12** Stage 2 of the adoption assessment should be completed within 4 months unless there are exceptional circumstances that lead to the agency not being able to make a decision within that time, or the prospective adopter requests that the decision is delayed.

Of the 5 assessments completed, 80% were completed within this timescale. The average time for completion of Stage 2 was 3.5 months.

The delays in the timeliness of Stage 2 are being addressed through setting clear expectations for staff around assessment visits and the writing up of assessments. There will be close scrutiny by the Team Manager during the coming year.

- 2.13** Fast Track assessments relate to those applicants who are second time adopters or are foster carers applying to adopt. The statutory guidance allows these applicants to by-pass Stage 1 of the process and enter straight into Stage 2. Timescales for Fast Track assessments should be no longer than 4 months from acceptance of the application to the end of Stage 2.

The Isle of Wight Council undertook one Fast Track assessment during 2016-17 which was completed in 5 months.

The new measures now in place to address timeliness will ensure Fast Tracked assessments this coming year are within government timescales.

2.14 At the end of March 2017 there were:

1 set of applicants in Stage 1

3 sets of prospective adopters in Stage 2

12 sets of prospective adopters being supported post-approval by the team.

2.15 As at 31 March 2017, there were 4 households approved and waiting to be matched. There has been an increase in matching Island adopters with Island children which has enabled permanence for adoptive children to be achieved in a timely manner.

Over the last year, 1 adoptive household was linked with children placed from another local authority, which is identical to the previous year. This has generated an income of £44,000 for the Local Authority.

2.16 No applicants withdrew or were counselled out (assessed as not suitable) during Stage 1; 2 households withdrew or were counselled out in Stage 2.

The two households withdrew from Stage 2 for the following reasons:

- One couple became pregnant.
- One couple were being assessed as 2nd Time Adopters for a sibling, whose plan then changed.

2.17 The average time for prospective adopters to be matched following approval was 4.5 months.

This compares to 1.4 months for 2015-16. The increase in time from suitability to adopt to matching from last year is due to less children being available with Placement Orders which has resulted in adopters waiting longer. This has had a significant impact on average matching timescales.

2.18 The Adoption Team is also involved in joint recruitment events with the Fostering Service as well as delivering the training and preparation course for prospective adopters.

2.19 The Adoption Team also deal with step parent adoption work. During 2016-17 there were 9 step parent adoption assessments undertaken. This compares with 11 step parent adoption assessments in 2015 -16 and 14 in 2014-15.

There was an increase in enquiries in both April and August which proceeded to plateau in the last 5 months of the year. There do not appear to be any specific reasons for this increase. Following a meeting with the courts, it has been identified that step-parent applications in the region are significantly higher than other areas. As a result, the team have implemented a more rigorous approach, ensuring families explore all other potential options to ensure permanence prior to considering step parent adoption.

2.20 The Isle of Wight Adoption Service undertakes all Special Guardianship Order Assessments. A special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

The team received 36 referrals during 2016-17, compared to 29 in 2015-16 and 12 in 2014-15. The team have co-worked on 28 of these cases with the Fostering Service where dual Special Guardianship assessments and Connected Carer Reports have been directed in court proceedings.

This is a growing area of work for the team as courts are directing a wider range of assessments and are requesting that Special Guardianship assessments are routinely considered in the majority of Care cases.

Children's Adoption work

- 2.21** A social worker is allocated to all cases to begin parallel planning, where adoption may be an option and is being considered as part of childcare planning. On the making of a Placement Order, the Adoption social worker becomes the child's case holding social worker and takes over the responsibility for all of the statutory work for those looked after children. The work includes statutory visits, family finding, supervised contact between the children and birth family, court work involved in the adoption proceedings, writing later life letters for the children and ensuring that each child has a life story book.
- 2.22** The Adoption child practitioners/support workers assist with the following: direct contact between children and their birth families; individual support to children as part of adoption preparation; support to Foster carers to prepare carers reports for social workers; support the preparation of life story books; support the Team Manager to ensure all adoption allowances and SGO allowances are reviewed regularly in line with requirements to ensure appropriate financial oversight and management.
- 2.23** The Adoption Team is represented at all Local Authority legal planning meetings. The team undertakes all Child Permanence Reports for children within parallel planning. 35 requests for Child Permanence Reports were received during 2016-2017, which compares to 25 requests received in 2015 -2016. This has not, however, translated into a higher number of Placement Orders being granted which has remained stable at 10 for both this year and last year. Whilst the conversion rate is low, the work involved in commencing the Child Permanence Reports requires a high level of resource from the team to meet the requirements of parallel planning.

2.24 Post Adoption Support

2.25 The Team has continued to provide a range of support services for adoptive families and children, in addition to support to birth parents and their families. There are currently 88 adoptive families on the team's data base who receive a newsletter and regular updates.

2.26 Services provided during 2016-17 include;

- A counselling service to adopted adults who were seeking access to records about their adoption and family of origin. A service was provided to **29** adults during the year.
- Support/counselling to birth relatives seeking to make contact with a relative who had been adopted.
- Requests for adoption support services and an adoption support needs assessment. **28** families were open to a social worker with an active adoption support plan during 2016-17.
- Supporting children and families post adoption in Common Assessment Framework (CAF) meetings.
- Adoption Information Exchange, overseeing contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families. It facilitated **100** exchanges during 2016-17.
- Regular support groups for adopters run independently by a local adopter and supported by the team.
- Full-time duty service for information/advice and support.
- Consultation sessions were available for adopters.
- Links with The Education Psychology department, from whom the team purchased a set number of consultations and training courses.
- 'Moving on' training was delivered jointly with the Fostering Service to prepare Foster carers to move children into adoptive placements.
- Direct therapeutic life story work was provided.
- Support Groups were provided for approved Adopters who have not yet been matched with a child.

2.27 The Isle of Wight Council made 15 applications to the Adoption Support Fund during 2016-17 and £57,854.20 was approved for services for adoptive families. The Adoption Support Fund is national, government fund, available for children up to and including the age of 21 (or 25 with an SEN Statement/Education Health and Care Plan) who have been adopted from Local Authority care in England or adopted from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland but living in England. From 1 April 2016, the Fund became available for Intercountry adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in England) and for Special Guardians who care for children who were looked after immediately prior to the Special Guardianship Order. The Isle of Wight also made a successful application for 1 family who had been granted a Special Guardianship Order to the value of £980.

2.28 The services included therapeutic parenting courses, play therapy, psychotherapy sessions; trauma based sensory processing assessments and sensory integration and attachment sessions.

2.29 Inter Country Adoptions

There have not been any requests for Intercountry adoption assessment this year. As requests are very low, given the level of knowledge that is required to undertake an Intercountry adoption assessment, the team would explore commissioning assessments with a specialised agency, should this be required.

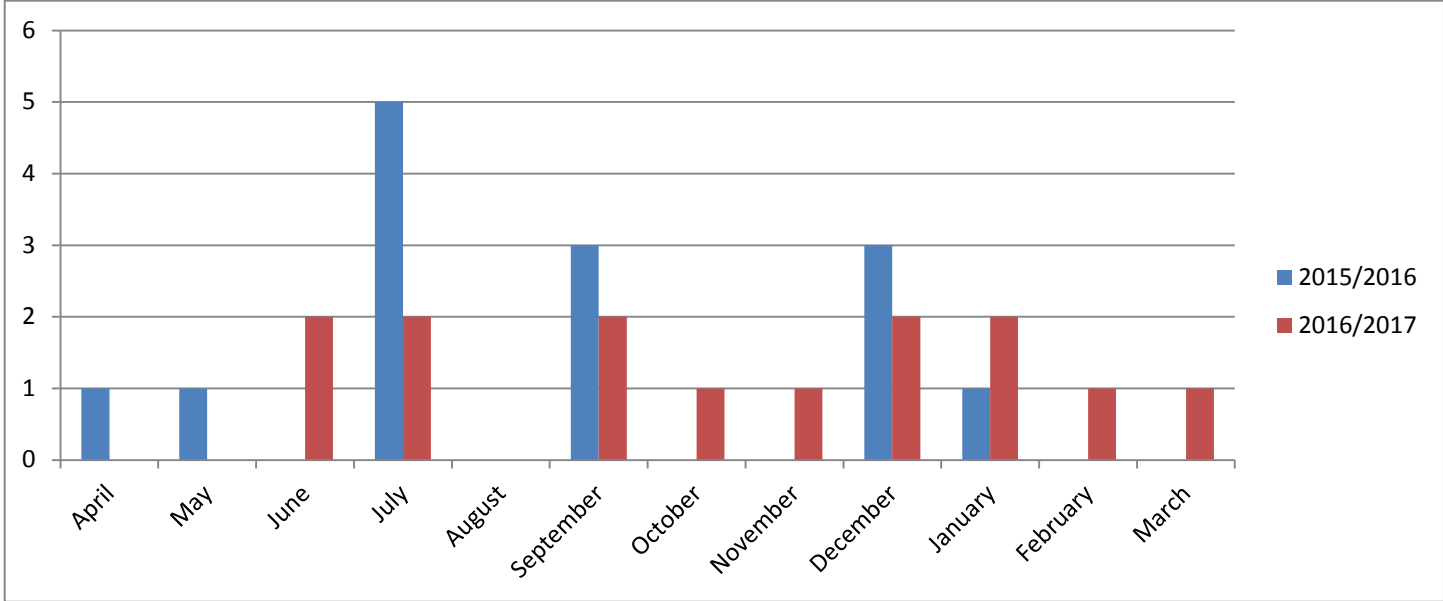
2.30 Children with Plans for Adoption; Placed for Adoption and Prospective Adopters Approved from 1 April to 31 March 2015-16 and 2016-17.

1st April to 31st March		
	2015-16	2016-17
Children's Plans for Adoption	14	14
Plans for Adoption Rescinded	4	1
Children Linked/Placed	15	13
Adoption Orders Made	9	16
Disruptions (pre-Adoption Order)	0	0
Approved adopters	9	5

2.31 There were 14 children's plans referred to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) or Adoption Panel (where the child is relinquished) during 2016-17. This is an identical number to that of last year.

The breakdown of these is as follows: Q1- 2; Q2- 4; Q3- 4; Q4- 4.

Children’s Plans for Adoption



2016-17 Total 14

2015-16 Total 14

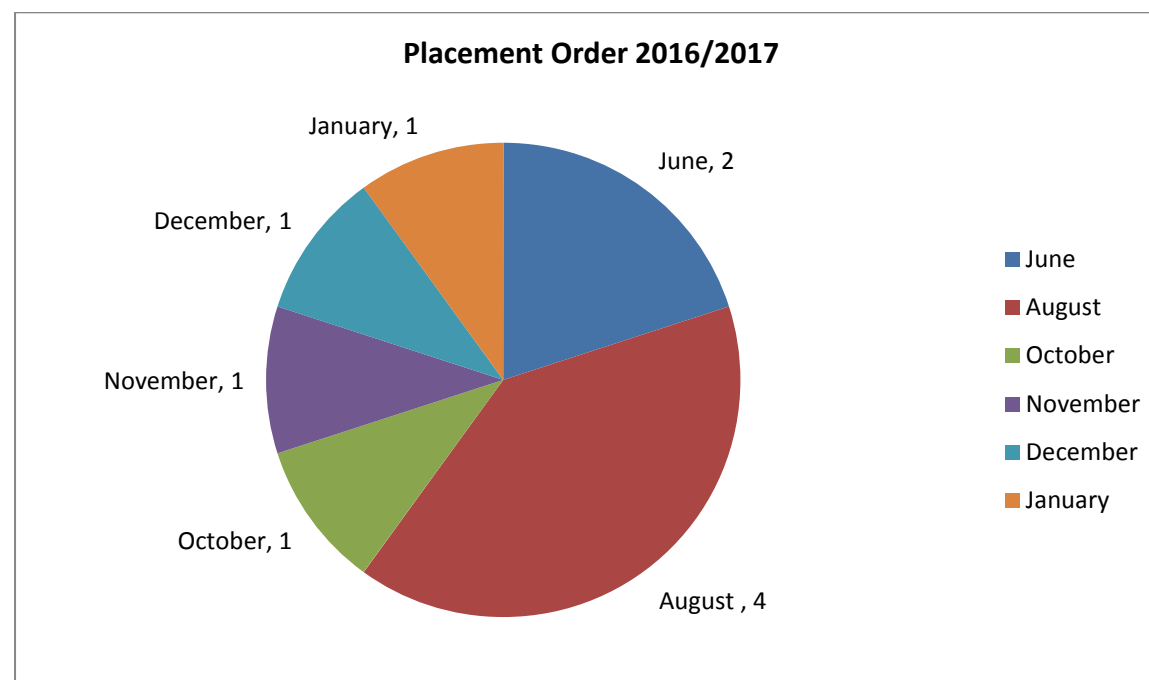
2.32 Between 1 April 2016- 31 March 2017, there was 1 child who had their plan for adoption rescinded, compared to 4 children during 2015-16.

The plan was rescinded due to the Placement Order not being made after ADM. The plan changed during proceedings and the child was placed with a family member under a Special Guardianship Order.

The decrease in revocations can be attributed to closer, positive working relationships with the child care teams from the point of legal planning to ensure ADM decisions are requested at the latest possible point to enable all other options to have been ruled out. Even with this measure in place, there are still occasions, however, when last minute approaches are made to the court by other relatives which require decisions to be delayed.

2.33 Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, 10 Placement Orders were made on the Isle of Wight.

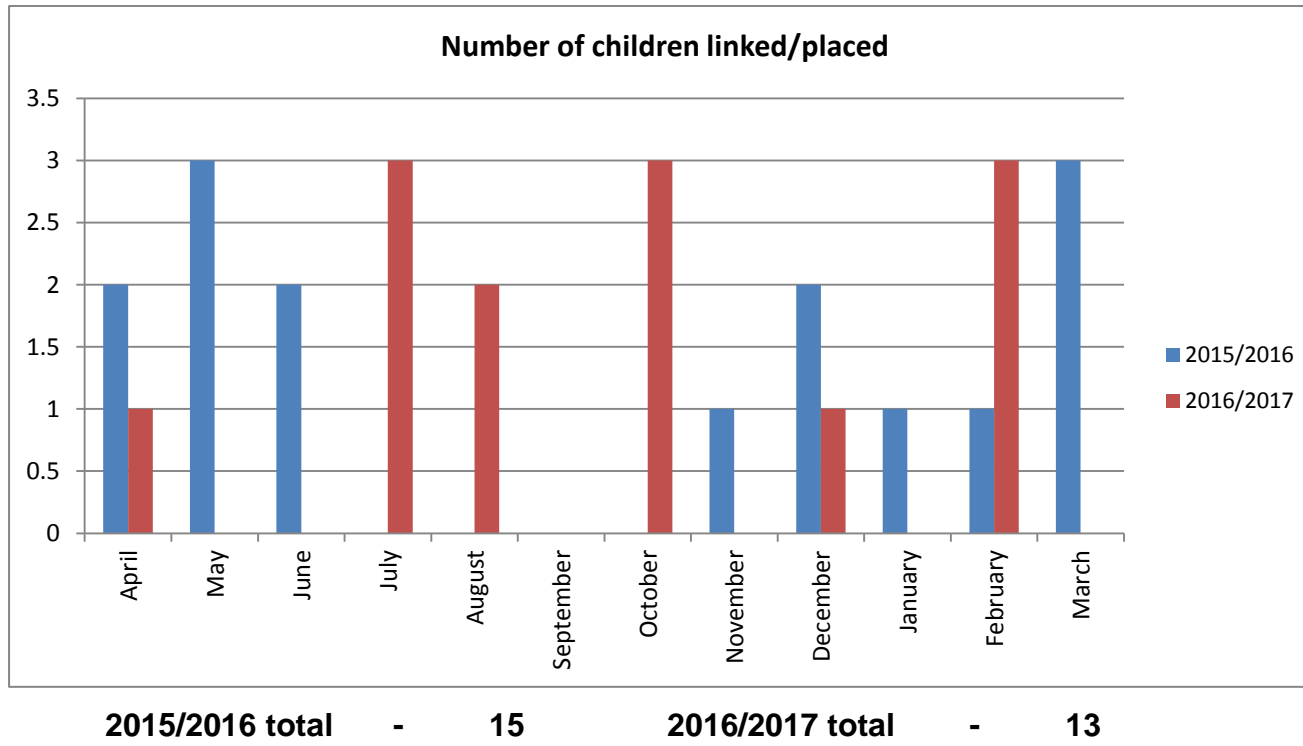
Placement Orders



2016-17 Total 10

- 2.34** At the end of March 2017, there were 2 children awaiting adoption with a Placement Order, compared to 3 children last year. Both of these children had families identified and had been linked at panel in February 2017. Transition plans were being implemented and both children were placed by April 2017.
- 2.35** A total of 13 children were placed with 11 adoptive families during 2016-17 which compares to 15 children being placed with 13 adoptive families the previous year.
7 were placed with Island adopters, compared to only 2 during 2015-16. This has ensured more effective local support to both the adopters and the children and has enabled Island children to maintain their links to the Island when it has been safe to do so.

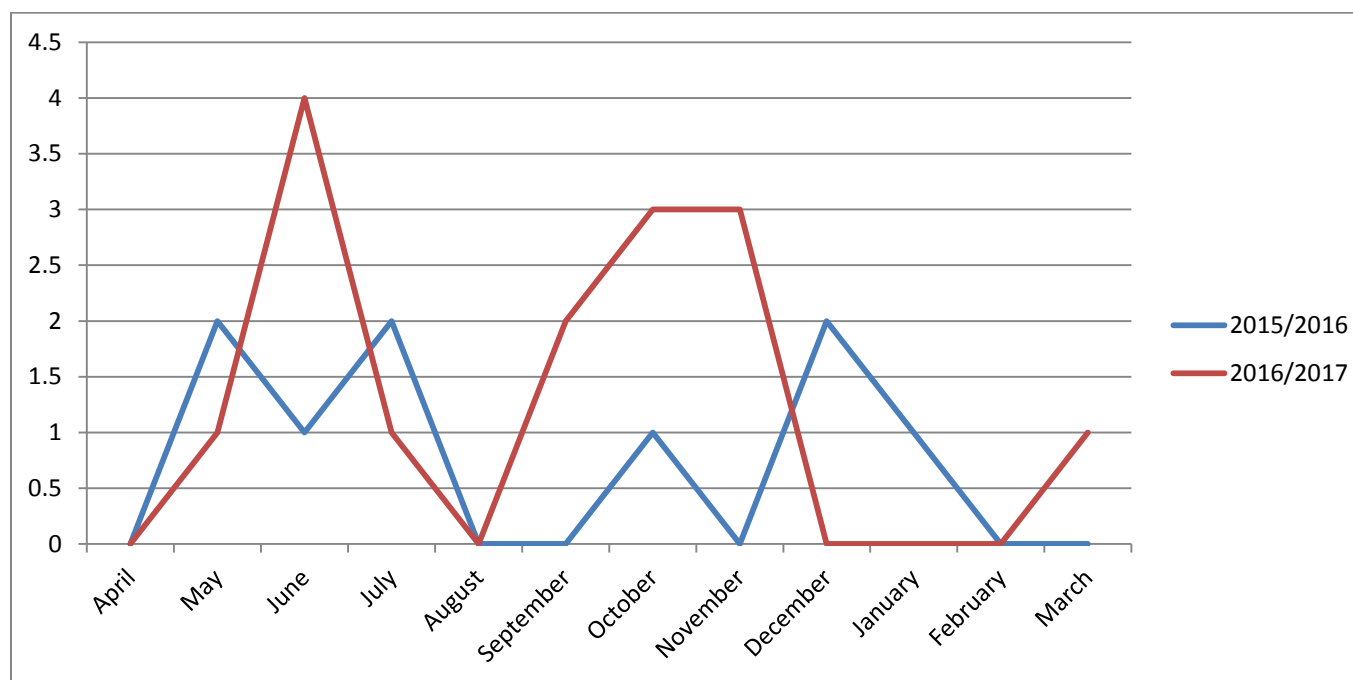
Number of Children Linked/Placed



2.36 There have been no disruptions during 2016-17.

2.37 16 children were adopted between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. Although the national data suggests that the number of adoptions have been falling since Q2 2014-15, the Isle of Wight Council's figures have increased with 5 more adoptions than 2015-16 when there were 9. The majority of children were aged less than 5 years old and were male.

2.38 Adoption Orders



- 2.39** Of the 16 children adopted during the year, 2 were adopted by their Fostering for Adoption Carers. This is the first completed adoption under this arrangement for the Isle of Wight.
- 2.40** Of the 16 children adopted during the year, 2 children were from minority ethnic backgrounds. This compares to no children from minority ethnic backgrounds in 2015-16.
- 2.41** Of the 16 children adopted during the year, 3 children were aged 5 years or over. This is an identical number to the previous year.
- 2.42** During 2016-17, the total spend on inter-agency placements was £226,000, compared to £234,000 the previous year. This included final payments for children placed in the previous year. £86,000 reimbursement from the DfE was received for harder to place children.
- 2.43** During 2016-17, one set of prospective adopters approved by the team were matched to two siblings from another Local Authority, providing an income of £44,000. This compares to one set of prospective adopters being sold the previous year, providing an income of £27,000.

2.45

Breakdown of profile of children with new plans for adoption

<i>Breakdown of profile of children with new plans for adoption</i>	<i>April 2015 – March 2016</i>	<i>April 2016 – March 2017</i>
Single male children:	6	4
Single female children:	1	9
Sibling pairs:	2 (4 children)	0
Sibling group of 3:	1 (3 children)	0

2.46 Ethnicity of children with new plans for adoption

Ethnicity of Children with new Plans for Adoption (Total Number of children:)	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – March 2016
White British (WBRI)	11	14
Mixed: White & Black African (MWBA)	0	0
Mixed: White & Black Caribbean (MWBC)	1	0
Mixed: White & Asian (MWAS)	0	0
White Other (WOTH)	2	0

Mixed: Other (MOTH)	0	0
Black Other (BOTH)	0	0
Black African (BAFR)	0	0
Other Ethnic Group (OOTH)	0	0
Not known (refused/unable to provide): REFU/NOBT	0	0

2.47 Ages of children with new plans for adoption at time of agency decision

April 2015 - March 2016

0-6mths	7-12 months	1-2 yrs	2-3 yrs	3-5 yrs	5+ yrs	TOTAL
4	3	3	1	2	0	14

April 2016 - March 2017

0-6mths	7-12 months	1-2 yrs	2-3 yrs	3-5 yrs	5+ yrs	TOTAL
6	0	2	3	1	2	14

2.48 Adoption Scorecards

2.49 Adoption Scorecards were introduced by the government as part of an approach to tackle delays in the adoption system. The scorecard allows local authorities and other agencies to monitor their performance and compare it with others.

2.50 Scorecard 1 – Average time between the child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

For the 16 children who were placed in adoptive placements between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, the average time in days between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family was 627 days. This is an increase of 99 days on 2015-16, when the average time was 528 days. The government's threshold is 426 days.

The average time has increased as there were 7 children in sibling groups who were hard to place during 2015-16. Due to the small numbers placed, this impacted significantly on timescales as one child's delay can impact on the performance indicator.

The following measures are being put in place to address timescales.

- A new marketing strategy is being put in place, where the drive is to attract adopters who have the child care skills and experience to meet the needs of the children we have waiting, including attracting adopters who can take sibling groups.
- Clear expectations and timescales around matching processes have been set.
- Reviewing plans for children over the age of 5 and those in sibling groups in a much more timely manner and whether adoption is the appropriate plan.

2.51 Scorecard 2 – Average time between the Local Authority receiving court authority and the Local Authority identifying a match

For the 16 children who were adopted between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, the average time between Placement Order and the Local Authority identifying a match was 256 days.

In comparison to the previous year 2015- 16, the average time between Placement Order and a match being identified was 224 days. The government's revised threshold is 121 days and timescales this year, therefore, have increased from last year due to 7 of the children who were adopted being older, part of a sibling group and with complex needs.

Again, timescales will be addressed this year through improved targeted recruitment and setting expectations and timescales around matching processes.

2.52 Scorecard 3 – % of children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family.

During 2016-17, 12.5% of children (2 out of 16) waited less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family, which compares to 41% last year.

Again, timescales will be addressed during the coming year through the measures outlined above.

2.53 Adoption Panel and Advisory Service

2.54 The Isle of Wight Adoption Agency provides an advisory service which oversees the recruitment, training, management and administration of the Central List of Adoption Panel Members for the Isle of Wight's adoption panel. A Team Administrator oversees this aspect of the service.

- 2.55** The Isle of Wight has one panel which usually meets for half a day with an agenda containing up to 4 cases. The panels are flexible and convene when needed to meet the needs of the children requiring decisions.
- 2.56** Between 1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017, the panel met on 4 occasions. 18 cases were presented to panel during the year; 5 approvals; 13 linkings.
- 2.57** The Isle of Wight currently has 11 persons on its Central List of Adoption Panel Members.
- 2.58** Adoption panel members attended a joint training session with Fostering Panel members during 2016-17. A further joint training day has been arranged for October 2017.
- 2.59** Adoption panels are required to provide feedback to the agency on the quality of the reports presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met (that children's and adopter's reports are only completed by registered and experienced social workers or student social workers who are supervised by registered and experienced social workers) and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.
- 2.60** In response to some feedback regarding waiting times for prospective adopters the panel process was changed so that prospective adopters are now invited into the panel with their social worker at the beginning of each case: this has led to more participation from prospective adopters. In response to other feedback from prospective adopters, panel members now have their panel roles as well as their names on their place cards.

3. Regional Adoption Agencies

The Government has progressed its proposals to move to Regional Adoption Agencies. The aim is to improve adopter recruitment and adoption support, speed up matching and reduce costs.

- 3.1** The Isle of Wight's partners in the Regional Adoption Agency (Adoption South Central) are Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton Local Authorities and three Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Barnardos, Adoption UK and Parents and Children Together (PACT).
- 3.2** Plans are progressing to establish Adoption South Central with the aim for it to commence in 2018.

4. Summary and Work Plan for 2016-17

Strengths during 2016-17 include;

- Increase in matching Island children to Island adopters when it is appropriate and safe.
- Timeliness of Stage 2 assessments.
- Numbers of children linked with prospective adopters.
- Numbers of children adopted.
- Number of successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund.
- 100% of life story work and later life letters being completed within government timescales. (to be complete within 5 days of Adoption Order.)

Work Plan for 2017-18

- To put in place a new targeted marketing strategy where the drive is to attract adopters who have the child care skills and experience to meet the needs of the children waiting.
- To recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the children needing to be placed for adoption. A target of 10 new adoptive families has been set.
- To investigate the low conversion rate following a pre-stage visit and whether the right adopters are being targeted.
- To urgently address the timeliness of Scorecards 1, 2 and 3.

- To address the timeliness of Stage 1 assessments.
- To continue to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund.
- To continue to embed the policy and process for Fostering for Adoption, to enable the early placement of children.
- To reduce the number of Step-Parent Adoption assessments in line with the courts view.
- To support the work of the Regional Adoption Agency, developing services to be ready for 2018.

Rachel Reynolds
Adoption Service Manager
June 2017

APPENDIX A APRIL 2016 - MARCH 2017

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Total No Adoption Enquiries	3	0	1	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	6
No of enquiries with no response/counselled out on Duty	1	0	1	2	2	2	3	0	2	3	2	4
RIF forms returned/General	2	2	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0
Total number of PAs approved in this month	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
No of PARs to Panel (sets of PAs)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Childrens Plans for Adoption to Panel (CPR'S)	6	4	0	1	5	8	0	4	1	3	1	0
Children's Plans for Adoption Referred to ADM (as from 01.09.12)	0	0	1	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	1	1
Total No of Linkings to panel (no of children/sets of adopters)	1/1	0/0	0/1	3/1	2/0	0/0	3/3	0/0	1/0	0/0	3/3	0/0