

Rotherham Adoption Service

Annual Report

2018/19



One
Adoption
Agency
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

1. Introductions

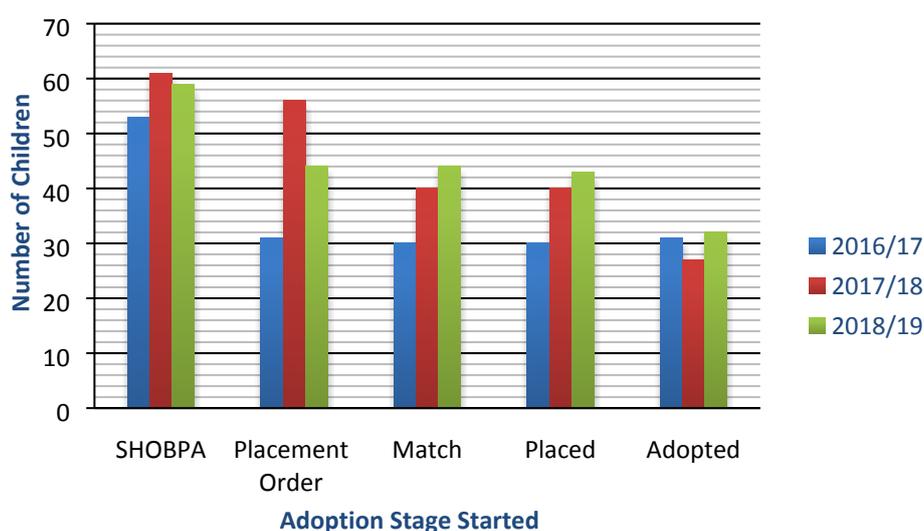
- 1.1 This report is an annual report to brief on the business and activity within the Council's Adoption Service in 2018/19.
- 1.2 The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Adoption Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving through 2019/20.

2. The Adoption Service

- 2.1 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children and Families Act 2014, Adoption Agency Regulations, the associated Statutory Guidance 2014 and the National Minimum Standards 2014.
- 2.2 Prior to September 2013, Adoption Agencies were inspected separately by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of adoption work is incorporated into the Single Inspection Framework which includes a graded judgement on adoption. In November 2017, Ofsted undertook an inspection within the Single Inspection Framework and the Children's Services overall rating was rated Good with adoption performance rated as 'Good' and achieving an Annex O, (outstanding) for the bespoke Family and Supporters training.
- 2.3 The Adoption Service undertakes the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters, family finding and matching children with approved adoptive parents, supports and supervises adoption placements and provides post adoption support services.
- 2.4 In line with the Regulations, the service has an Adoption Panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The panel considers and makes recommendations about the suitability of adopters and on the matching of children requiring adoption with approved adopters. The panel also considers the 'should be placed for adoption' decision (referred to as the SHOBPA) for children relinquished by their birth parents.

2.5 The Acting Assistant Strategic Director for Children’s Social Care performs the role of Agency Decision Maker for the Adoption Service, (referred to as the ADM). The Agency Decision Maker considers and makes decisions on whether or not children should be placed for adoption, and following consideration and recommendation by the Adoption Panel, on the suitability of applicant adopters and the suitability of a match between a specific child and approved adopters, having considered the Adoption Panel’s recommendation in each case.

3. Activity in the Adoption Service in 2018/19



3.1 Should be placed for Adoption Decisions

3.1.1 The decision by a Local Authority that a looked after child Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA decision) is a decision made by the Local Authority’s Agency Decision Maker for Adoption based on the social worker’s report, known as the ‘Child’s Permanence Report’, legal and medical advice and any other relevant supporting evidence.

3.1.2 In 2018/19 59 SHOBPA decisions were made. This is a slight decrease compared to 2017/18 when 61 children received a SHOBPA decision. Although the number of children with a SHOBPA decision has fluctuated slightly over the last 3 years, the number of children with an Adoption Plan has on the whole remained stable.

3.2 Placement Orders

3.2.1 A Placement Order is an Order made by the Court which endorses a child's plan for adoption (following the SHOBPA decision made by the Local Authority) and allows for the child to be legally placed with approved adoptive parents.

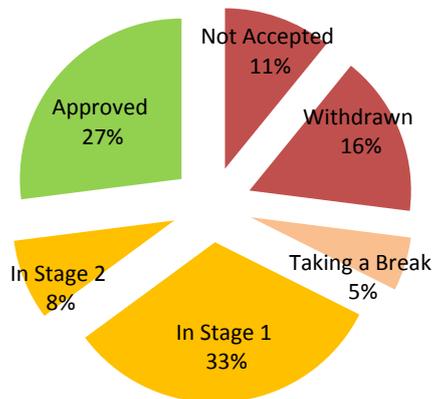
3.2.2 In 2018/19 Placement Orders were made in respect of 44 children compared with 56 Placement Orders made in 2017/18. This is a slight decrease mainly as a result of Court not granting a Placement Order at the Final Hearing. Given the age and additional needs of some of the children, to find an adoptive placement would be a challenge but one that RMBC felt was in the children's best interests, however the court did not agree. The assessments of family members were not sufficiently robust in some cases and earlier exploration of an alternative plan of permanence with foster carers would have prevented care plans having to change. The children in these cases either remained or returned to the care of a family member or the plan changed to long term fostering. Of the 59 children who had SHOBPA decisions made 2018/19 (reported in 4.1.2), 10 children are still in proceedings and therefore Placement Orders have not yet been granted. 38 children have had Placement Orders granted and 4 children's plans have been revoked and a further 7 children are awaiting revocation. A piece of work is being completed to identify themes and lessons learned which will be shared with the LAC teams and disability teams.

3.3 Adopter Approvals

3.3.1 Individuals or couples who wish to adopt a looked after child must first be approved as suitable to adopt. Applicant adopters are assessed by the adoption team and the Adoption Panel makes recommendations on the applicant's suitability and provides advice to the agency on matching criteria. The Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision on suitability.

3.3.2 Performance on recruiting prospective adopters who wish to adopt a looked after child has been maintained this year with a calendar of recruitment events throughout the year. The number of enquiries to the agency in 2018/19 was 130 compared to 146 in 2017/18. A recruitment campaign and regular publicised monthly drop in sessions, with added morning sessions, have contributed to maintaining adopter enquiries. In addition, through word of mouth, we have had a number of adopters make enquiries from the Leeds area. Although the number of initial enquiries has fallen slightly the number of Registrations of Interests has increased to 37. Of these, 10 prospective Adopter households have been approved, 12 are in Stage 1, 3 in Stage 2 plus 2 taking a break and 6 have withdrawn and 4 were not accepted. Reasons for withdrawing included; adopters recognising adoption was not the option for them following Stage 1 training, the agency advising due to unresolved issues the couple were not felt suitable to adopt, issues with pets, and concerning personal references. 10 prospective adopters in total have either withdrawn or were not accepted.

2018/19 ROI Status at Year End



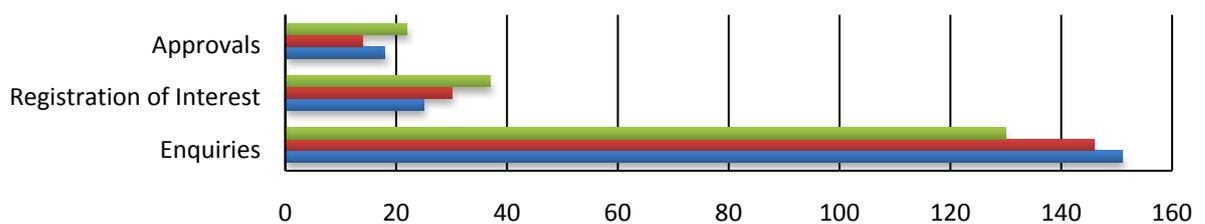
3.3.3 The Agency is ensuring that whilst prospective adopters enquiring are being given a positive welcome, the messages being shared about adoption and the children available for adoption are realistic. The agency is clear about the qualities and skills needed by prospective adopters in order to successfully parent children who have experienced separation, loss and early childhood trauma and use this knowledge and experience to counsel out prospective adopters at the earliest stage. The Stage 1

training enables prospective adopters to gain a realistic understanding of the needs of children with an adoption plan and helps them to consider if they are able to meet these needs.

3.3.4 The number of adopters the agency has approved in 2018/19 is 22 compared to 14 approved in 2017/18. Whilst the number of adopter approvals has increased the agency recognises that there is a need to recruit and approve more adopters particularly for larger sibling groups. In addition, the number of babies with an adoption plan has increased latterly and there is currently a shortage of in house approved adopters for these babies. The prediction for 2018/19 was that 23 adopter approvals would have been made. The agency was on track to approve 24 however due to 2 families choosing to take a break between Stage 1 and Stage 2 this has not been achieved . The agency has set a target to approve 30 prospective adopters in 2019/20.

Information from the other 3 Local Authorities in South Yorkshire shows that there has been a slight increase in the number of adopters approved regionally with a total of 91 adopters approved compared to 71 the previous year.

Recruitment Activity 3 Year Comparison



	Enquiries	Registration of Interest	Approvals
2016/17	151	25	18
2017/18	146	30	14
2018/19	130	37	22

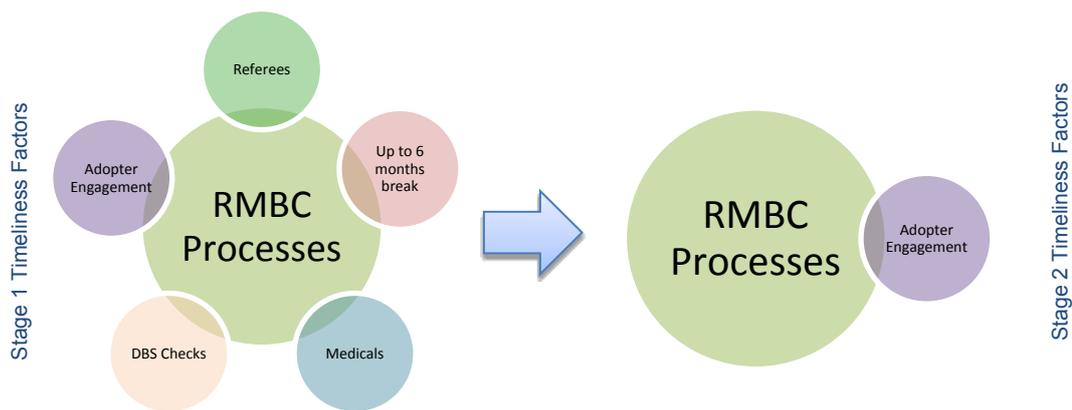
3.3.5 In addition to the 10 withdrawals pre approval, 1 approved adoptive family withdrew due to unexpected pregnancy and the Adoption Service recommended 1 single female adopter who had been approved was no

longer suitable to adopt following increasing concern about her suitability following feedback from social workers and other Adoption Agencies. This was the first case to be taken by an adopter to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for many years and the qualifying decision made by the Agency Decision Maker was upheld. Whilst the 10 withdrawals and 2 no longer suitable to adopt may appear a loss to the service, and a strain on resource in terms of social worker assessment time, the aim of this assessment process is to ensure that the adoption service is confident that adopters approved are resilient to care for Rotherham children throughout their childhood and into adulthood. At the same time, potential adopters are guided through this process in a thorough but empathic way to enable them to come to the decision, in partnership with the service that adoption at this time is not right for them and this strategy manifests itself in a very low disruption rate. Only 1 adoption placement disrupted this financial year and the adopters were not approved by RMBC.

3.3.6 Rotherham Adoption Team remains committed to increasing the number of adopters approved. To achieve this there has been a recruitment campaign utilising social media and other recruitment activities including the addition of a morning drop in session on a monthly basis to complement the evening drop in session.

3.4 Timeliness of assessment of prospective adopters

3.4.1 The average time between Registration of Interest and Agency Decision for the 22 adopter approvals in 2018/19 was 214 days, compared to the previous year's average of 208 days. The slight increase in time is due to 1 adopter taking a break between Stage 1 and Stage 2. Of the 19 families that completed both Stage 1 and Stage 2, only 1 family completed Stage 1 within the 2 month timescale due to continued delay in obtaining DBS and adopter medicals.



3.4.2 There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of adopter assessments completed within the 6 month timescale. In 2018/19 27% compared to 28.5% in 2017/18. This continues to be due to delay in Stage 1 and factors which are beyond the control of the agency for example DBS checks and adopter medicals, with only 5% of the approved families meeting the Stage 1 timescale. In contrast 95% of adopters approved met the stage 2 timescale where the agency has control.

3.5 Matches Approved

3.5.1 Rotherham Adoption Service has two full time and one part time Family Finders who work in partnership with the child's social worker to identify the most suitable approved adopters for each child needing adoption in a timely manner. Before a child can be placed with approved adopters the suitability of the match must be considered at the Adoption Panel, with the final decision resting with the Agency Decision Maker.

3.5.2 In 2018/19 the service matched 44 children with adoptive families. This compares with 40 matches in 2017/18. Successful family finding, including the introduction of Rotherham's own Family Finding Fun Days, has resulted in matches including a sibling group of 3. 70% of the children matched (31 children) are considered to have additional needs including being part of a sibling group, older children, health and development needs, BME children and children with direct contact with first family.

3.6 Children Placed for Adoption

3.6.1 Once a match between a child and approved adopters has been approved, the service may proceed to legally place that child with those adopters. In 2018/19, 43 of the children matched were placed. One child has not yet been placed as the Foster Carers have lodged an application to Court to adopt the child and an injunction has been granted by court to prevent her removal. In addition one child who had been matched in 2017/18 was placed in 2018/19. This brings the total number of children placed to 44.

3.7 Children Adopted

3.7.1 Once a child is placed for adoption, the adopters must wait a minimum ten week period before they can apply to the Court for an Adoption Order to legally adopt the child. Once an Adoption Order is granted the adopters obtain full parental responsibility for the child.

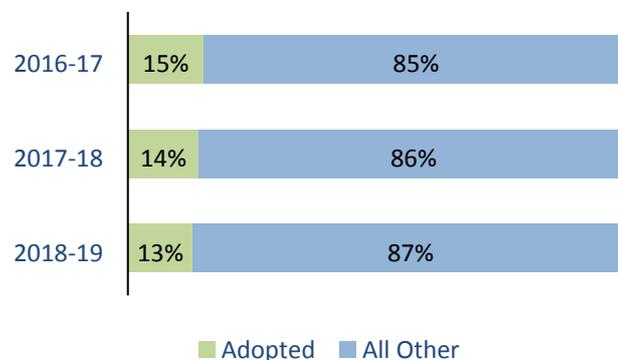
3.7.2 In 2018/19 there were 32 looked after children adopted in comparison to 27 in the previous year. In addition there are a further 6 adoption applications lodged where first families are seeking leave to contest the granting of an Adoption Order and a further 5 adoption applications are filed awaiting Court Hearing dates. There are 3 Adoption Applications with dates set. There continues to be a high number of Adoption Applications where first families are seeking to oppose which serves only to delay the Adoption Process. Of the 32 Adoption Orders granted in 2018/19, first families sought leave to oppose the granting of 10 Adoption Orders. All Adoption Orders were subsequently made. There is currently delay of approximately six weeks due to the volume of cases being heard at the Sheffield Family Court. Currently the average time from filing an adoption application to Adoption Order granted is 16 weeks.

3.8 The Percentage of Children Leaving Care via Adoption

3.8.1 13.3% of children left care via adoption in Rotherham in 2018/19. Slightly less than the previous year's figure of 14.21%. The children's tracker

meetings continue to be held to measure performance of children with an adoption plan, to prevent drift and delay and the Right Child Right Care initiative is also supporting the timely adoption of children providing senior management oversight. It is likely that the number of Adoption orders will increase in 2019/20 as more children have been placed due to the reasons outlined in 4.5.2.

Children Leaving Care



3.8.2 The table below demonstrates the number and percentage of children adopted from care in 2018/19 as compared to statistics from the previous dataset year. The table also examines the adoption of children with additional needs. The number of children being discharged from care in 2018/19 increased due to the Right Child Right Care initiative therefore whilst the number of children adopted increased, the percentage of children adopted from care has decreased.

3.8.3 Of the 32 children adopted, 16 were female and 16 were male. 25 children were of white British origin and 7 children were of BME backgrounds, 6 sibling groups of 2 children, 2 children with disabilities, 1 being over 5 years old, and 6 children over the age of 5 years. 68% of the children adopted had additional needs.

Number of children adopted in Rotherham in 2017/18	27
Number of children adopted in Rotherham 2018/19	32
Percentage of children leaving care via adoption in Rotherham in 2017/18	14.21%
The percentage of children leaving care via adoption in Rotherham in 2018/19	13.3%
Percentage of children from the 27 adoption orders granted in 2017/18 who have additional needs	29.6%
Percentage of children from the 32 adoption orders granted in 2018/19 who have additional needs	68%

The above table demonstrates the success RMBC adoption service has in achieving permanence through adoption for children with additional needs.

4. Timeliness of Adoption

4.1.1 The service has been striving to achieve adoption for children for whom it is in their best interests, in a timely manner. Children should be supported through their journey through care and to their adoptive family without delay so they can benefit from being placed with their adoptive parents at as young an age as possible, enabling the bonding and attachment process to begin.

4.1.2 The Government recognises the need for timeliness in adoption and has been measuring Local Authority performance on timeliness with their 'Adoption Scorecard' measures for several years now.

4.2 Adoption Scorecard Measure 1

4.2.1 Adoption Scorecard Measure 1, measures the number of days on average that it takes for children who have been adopted to move from first coming into care to being placed for adoption with adoptive families. The Government target on this measure is 426 days.

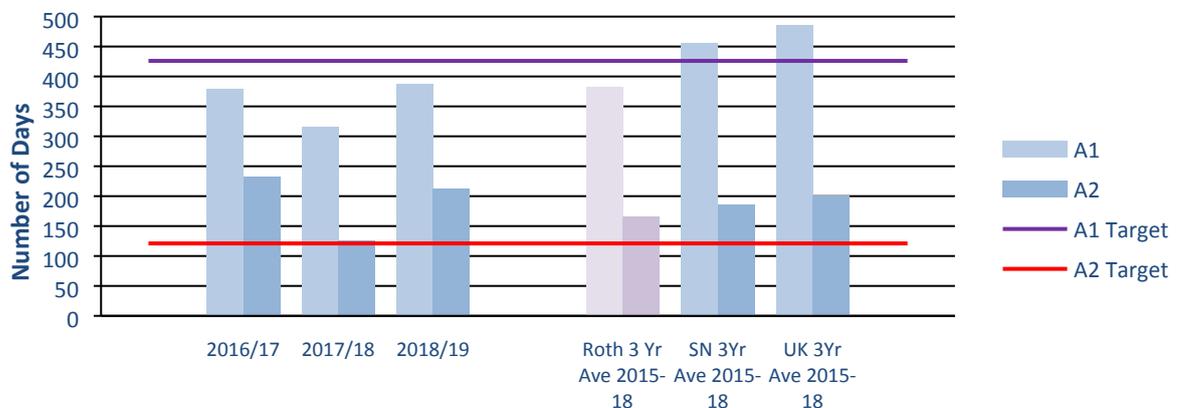
4.2.2 Rotherham's performance in 2018/19 was an average of 387 days. 69% of children adopted met the A1 measure. The children who did not meet the A1 measure had significant needs including health needs or were sibling groups. It therefore took significantly longer to identify suitable adoptive families for these children.

4.3 Adoption Scorecard Measure 2

4.3.1 Adoption Scorecard Measure 2, measures the number of days on average it takes for adopted children to move from being made subject to a Placement Order to them having a match with adopted parents agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. The Government target on this measure is 121 days.

4.3.2 Rotherham's performance in 2018/19 for children adopted was 212 days; the increase in days is a reflection of the percentage of children with additional needs who achieved permanence through adoption.

Timeliness Measures



5. Family Finding

5.1 The service has two full time and one part time family finding social workers who are supported by a family finding co-ordinator.

5.2 The service strives to provide as many adoption placements as possible from its own recruited adoptive families but where there is a shortfall of in-house adopters, or a child's needs cannot be met by RMBC recruited families, this is identified prior to the SHOBPA decision so that regional and national family finding can commence. The team will strive to find a

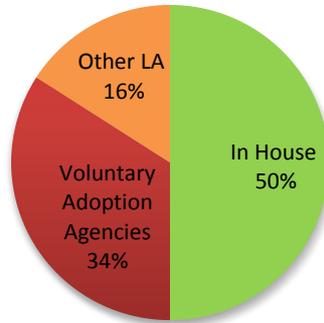
suitable family in the region and across the whole country through families approved by other Local Authorities and by Voluntary Agencies.

- 5.3 Rotherham utilises all resources available to secure adoptive placements for children where this is their plan. This includes Adoption Match (previously known as the National Adoption Register), Link Maker, Exchange days, Activity days and arranges local profiling events. In April, October and March the Adoption Team arranged and facilitated Fun Days (similar to an Activity Day) where a total of 82 children with an Adoption Plan attended, supported by their foster carers and social workers. Invites to adopters locally and nationally were sent and 50 families have attended. These Fun Days resulted in matches being identified for 25 children plus a further 7 links are being pursued from the Fun Day held in March.
- 5.4 When placing a child with adopters approved by another Local Authority we are required to pay an inter-agency fee of £27,000 for one child or £43,000 for a sibling group of two, and £54,000 for a sibling group of three children. This fee for the VAA's increased on 1st April 2018 to £31,000, £50,000 and £68,000 with a further increase for Voluntary Adoption agency placements anticipated from April 2019 to £31,620, £51,000 £69,360 and £79,560 for four children.
- 5.5 Of the 44 children matched for adoption in 2018/19:
- 22 were matched with in-house approved adopter
 - 15 were matched with voluntary adoption agency adopters (9 single children and 3 sibling groups of 2) equating to a cost of £429,000
 - 7 were matched with other Local Authority adopters (2 single children, 1 sibling group of 2 and 1 sibling group of 2) equating to a cost of £151,000

However, given the placement and invisible costs that would be incurred from maintaining these children in care, this is still deemed to

be financially beneficial as well as being the best outcome for the children involved.

Children Matched by Agency 2018/19



5.6 As of 31st March 2019 there are 19 children with an adoption plan where family finding is ongoing. Of the 19 children 8 have a Placement Order. The children waiting the longest are a sibling group of 2 with additional needs in respect of their age and ethnicity. The children have had their Placement Orders for 492 days. RMBC perseveres with searches when adoption is deemed to still be the right care plan thereby demonstrating commitment to achieving permanence for our children. An updated sibling assessment has concluded that these children's needs would be best met if they were separated and family finding is now ongoing to find families who would facilitate direct contact between the children. For children with a Placement Order not yet placed the average time waiting in days for a match since granting of Placement Order is currently 235 days. The time between Placement Order and match reflects the additional needs of the children with an Adoption plan for example older children and sibling groups.

6. Early Permanence Placements (Fostering to Adopt Placements)

6.1 Rotherham Adoption Service continues to promote Early Permanence Planning and the use of Early Permanence placements. Early Permanence is extremely positive for the child and the Adoption Agency ensures that the adopters are comprehensively prepared and supported to manage the risks. The use of Early Permanence contributes to overall performance in improving timeliness. Rotherham Adoption Service is

recognised as being a regional practice lead in Early Permanence Provision.

6.2 Rotherham Adoption Service has 2 Early Permanence Champions, who alongside the Adoption Team Manager, work closely with social workers to identify children who can benefit from Early Permanence Planning.

6.3 There are currently 7 children in Early Permanence Placements. 6 of the children adopted in 2018/19 experienced early permanence placements. The average time from becoming looked after to being adopted for these children is 479 days, compared to 741 days for the 26 children who did not experience Early Permanence. This demonstrates the positive impact EPP has in securing permanence at the earliest opportunity.

6.4 Rotherham has experienced its first EPP placement not progressing to adoption. Whilst this was distressing for the EPP carers this demonstrates the benefits of EPP for children. Nonetheless, Rotherham has reflected on this case and identified lessons learned for future practice. This includes more robust assessments of family members and clear messages to EPP carers that there are always risks associated with these placements. RMBC has made the decision that EPP carers who are not approved by RMBC will be expected to attend RMBC EPP training to support their understanding.

7. The Adoption Panel

7.1 Panel Member Training

7.1.1 It is a legislative requirement that there is at least one training day annually for Panel members. Panel members in 2018/19 received training on the Rotherham Family Approach and a workshop to reflect on the impact of Attachment Style Interviews on adopter assessments.

7.1.2 The Adoption Panel members are committed to their learning and development. Training offered is always well attended and well received.

7.1.3 New panel members have been recruited, 4 independent members and 4 social work members and 4 social work members.

7.2 Panel Business

7.2.1 During 2018/19 the Adoption Panel considered and made recommendations in respect of matches for 44 children and approval of 22 prospective adopters.

7.3 Quality Assurance of Reports

7.3.1 The Adoption Panel plays a key quality assurance role for the service, providing feedback on the quality of reports it is asked to consider. The reports include Child Permanence Reports, (CPR's), matching reports and post adoption support plans and Prospective Adopter Reports.

7.3.2 CPR's are Quality Assured by a Service Manager and the Adoption Team Managers who form the Quality Assurance Group (QAG). Feedback on the quality of the report and amendments needed are shared with the Social Worker and Team Manager.

7.3.3 During 2018/19 there has been 1 adoption disruption in Rotherham; a single older child. An Independent disruption review has been completed and the findings shared with the Adoption Panel, the Adoption Team and LAC 4 and 5. Presenting themes noted that there needed to be clear reflection in the CPR on the possible challenges of caring for a child who has experienced trauma and adoption panel's role in ensuring that adopters being matched with a child whose needs are more significant have had an updated assessment to explore ability to meet the child's needs and the importance of "time out" during transitions to allow adopters to fully reflect with their social worker before progressing. The QAG is addressing the quality of CPR's to ensure the impact of traumatic early life experiences on children's behaviour is clearly identified. The Adoption Panel chair and panel members have had the opportunity to reflect on their role when considering matches and further training is planned to address appropriate questioning. A pause and reflect day is included in all transition plans and the expectation that the adoption social worker spends time with the adopters during this day reflecting

before progressing further is made clear particularly for interagency placements.

7.3.4 Consultation and support is available from the Therapeutic Team to support the preparation of children and adopters for transition and ensure an appropriate support plan is in place. The potential for input in to the quality assurance of CPR's by the Therapeutic Team is being considered to ensure that the potential impact of early life experiences on a child's development, emotional wellbeing and attachments is clearly understood.

7.3.5 A robust approach is taken with regards to Registration of Interests and progression to Stage 2 with clear managerial oversight and decisions and areas identified where additional assessment is required.

7.4 Quality of permanence planning, The Child Permanence Report, Preparation of Children and Post Adoption Support Plans

7.4.1 The Child Permanence Report is the application to Court for a Placement Order. Support is available to social workers completing CPR's from the Adoption Team Manager and consideration is being given to linking adoption social workers to teams as a point of reference and guidance.

7.4.2 The Quality Assurance Group (QAG) continues to QA CPR's and meet with the social worker and Team Manager to provide advice, guidance and feedback on areas of the CPR needing further work. Advice and guidance is available from the Therapeutic Team to Social Workers completing Life Story Work and Books. In addition bespoke narratives and guidance on transition planning and preparation of children is offered. The Court Permanence Teams and Adoption Team work closely together with the aim of improving quality of assessments, permanence planning, quality of reports and the preparation of children and their adoptive families. Both Looked After Children Permanence Teams have Advanced Practitioners whose role is to work with the teams to improve practice.

7.4.3 The Adoption Team Managers continue to work closely with the managers of LAC Teams 4 and 5 to improve practice around permanence planning. The family finders in consultation with the child's social worker commence family finding once a child is referred for a SHOBPA decision. This ensures earliest opportunity to identify potential matches for the child and promotes timeliness. The number of Care Proceedings for children where Adoption is likely to be the Care Plan remains high. Adoption team managers and court permanence team managers track progress of children and quality of work to identify training needs and areas for improvement. Fortnightly performance meetings support senior management oversight.

7.4.4 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was introduced by the Government to improve access to therapeutic support services for adoptive families. In 2018/19 148 applications were made to the fund and a value of £450,628 received to provide Therapeutic Support to 126 adopted children. In addition, £14,696 had been provided from applications made in 2017/18 for support in 2018/19. Applications to the fund are made following an assessment of the child's therapeutic needs which is reviewed by Rotherham's Therapeutic Team. Applications to the Fund can also be made for SGO Therapeutic Support. The increase in the number of children placed for adoption increases the demand on the Therapeutic Service for applications to the fund. There is a £5,000 limit set for each Therapeutic Package and any costs above this have to be met by the LA.

7.4.5 2 Adopted children attended Summer Camp funded through the ASF.

7.4.6 37 referrals were received from Adoptive Families requesting Post Adoption Support and post adoption support has been provided to 139 adoptive families.

8. Staffing

8.1 The Adoption Service is responsible for recruiting, assessing, training and supporting adoptive families as well as family finding for children with an

adoption plan. There are two full time team managers and 10.5 full time equivalent social work posts. Currently there is a 0.7 FTE post vacancy and a full time family finding coordinator vacancy. In addition, there are 2 full time support workers, who cover adoption support and letter-box co-ordination.

8.2 The two team managers' report to the Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering who reports to the Head of Service for Looked After Children.

9. Adoption Support Services

9.1 Rotherham's Therapeutic Team is an in-house service that has developed extensive knowledge around the emotional wellbeing of children in care, and the needs of adopters and foster carers. Led by a Consultant Psychologist, this specialist service provides training and support specifically for children in care and adoption and this best practice service has led to better outcomes for children and adoptive family experience. The service provides input from point of assessment of adopters, work with foster carers and children in care, and through to adoption and beyond to promote stability and permanence. With regards to adoption, the team offers a range of services to adoptive parents, which includes:

- Assessment of children with complex needs,
- Attachment training
- Training around transitions and moving on
- Training, consultation and advice on sibling assessments
- Training on life story work
- Direct work regarding narrative
- Direct work with families
- Therapeutic parenting course
- Theraplay

9.2 The Therapeutic Team have a pre-adoption worker who is available to foster carers, child, social workers and adopters to support and advise on the transition plan to enable a positive adoption experience. This can

include preparation work with the child, including narrative therapy, attachment understanding and therapeutic parenting techniques.

- 9.3 The adoption team run a range of support groups. These include 'Tiny Tuesdays,' which is a group for new adoptive families with children under the age of 5 years, and 'Big Apples,' which targets adoptive families of 5 – 11 year old children. Teenagers have access to the support group for teenagers via the Regional Hub.
- 9.4 RMBC Adoption Services commission PAC-UK to provide a range of post adoption support services to adults including birth parents, adult adoptees and relatives of adopted children. In the Ofsted inspection in 2017 it was noted that whilst a high level of families affected by adoption access PAC UK this wasn't promoted on the adoption website. Following the inspection this action has now been addressed.
- 9.5 Yorkshire Adoption Agency undertakes inter-country adoption assessments on behalf of RMBC when requested to do so as part of commissioned services through the regional hub.

10. The Regional Adoption Agency

- 10.1 In May 2015, the Government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services. By 2020, all adoption services would need to be delivered on a regional basis. The Government advised that where Local Authority services did not form or become part of a regional adoption agency by 2020, it would legislate to force them to do so. The rationale from the Government for this was a belief that a smaller number of larger regional agencies would be better placed to deliver an increase in the number of children adopted, to reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted, and to improve post adoption support services to families who have adopted.

10.2 In 2018/19 Rotherham has continued working towards a regionalised adoption agency, in partnership with:

- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service
- Sheffield City Council Adoption Service
- Doncaster Children's Trust
- Alliance of Voluntary Agencies

10.3 Rotherham is continuing to discuss and work toward a regional adoption agency proposal with Barnsley, Sheffield and Doncaster.

11. Summary

11.1 The service continues to achieve adoption for a high number of Looked after children including children with additional needs, 32 children being adopted in 2018/19. Tracking and monitoring of adoption plans continues to ensure a timely response to adoption and early identification of areas of delay so swift action can be taken to address this.

11.2 In this adoption year, the service has been successful in achieving adoption for a wide range of children who are considered to have additional needs due to age, disability, ethnicity or part of a sibling group. 68% were children considered to have additional needs.

11.3 Rotherham Adoption Team has continued to promote early permanence planning for children, with 7 Early Permanence Placements (EPP) being made in 2018/19.

11.4 The number of days for the 2 Adoption Scorecard measures has increased this year. The A1 measure remains within the Government target being 39 days below the target measure of 426 days. However the A2 measure is 91 days over the target measure of 121 days. This increase identified in 12.2 is due to the higher percentage of children with additional needs achieving permanency through adoption.

11.5 Rotherham Adoption Service has successfully supported adoptive families by accessing the Adoption Support Fund.

- 11.6 One adoption placement disrupted in 2018/19 for a single older child. Independent disruption reviews identified lessons learned and these have been implemented. The plan for the single child has changed to Long Term Fostering in recognition of her significant attachment and behaviour needs.
- 11.7 The Panel has operated successfully and plays a key quality assurance role. The quality of CPR's has been variable and the Quality Assurance Group has continued to improve consistent quality.

12. Improvement and Development for 2019/20 onwards

12.1 We will continue to strive to improve and develop our service over 2019/20. Adoption has a key role to play within our overall Looked after Children and Care Leavers Strategy and the Right Child Right Care strategy. Key improvement actions include:

- Recruit more adopters who are able to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan. The target is 30 and current performance indicates that only 21 adopters will be approved with the shortfall arising from some prospective adopters withdrawing from the process, some taking a break and some delays being experienced in stage 1 of the process eg issues in securing references and medical information.
- Increase number of Early Permanence Placements available and the use of EPP to include consideration for older children.
- Deliver EPP training across the South Yorkshire region to ensure consistency of training and preparation for EPP carers.
- Refresh and redeliver the EPP training to social work teams and legal.
- Improve the timeliness of the adoption journey for both children and applicant adopters through robust tracking. Adoption Team Managers will check performance trackers on a fortnightly basis to identify any children or adopters who are experiencing delay and the reasons and address this with the social workers and team managers.
- Improve the quality of assessments through training and guidance for SW's.

- Improve the quality of post adoption support plans by clear analysis and identification of the child's individual needs and how these can be met by the adopters, including therapeutic support needs.
- Continued access to Adoption Support Fund to ensure that adoption therapeutic support needs are best met.
- Use training, supervision, tracking meetings, legal gateway meetings and Public Law Outline to promote adoption best practice and ensure that timely planning and achieving permanence is prioritised.
- Continue to embed changes to Transition planning in line with research and practice.
- Track the provision of Life Story Work.
- Engage in the ongoing development of the South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency.
- Agree and deliver a training package for prospective adopters to be delivered across the region to provide consistent quality of training and availability.