

# Annual Adoption Report

2017/18



## Executive Report

## Introduction

Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities outlined in other Council plans.

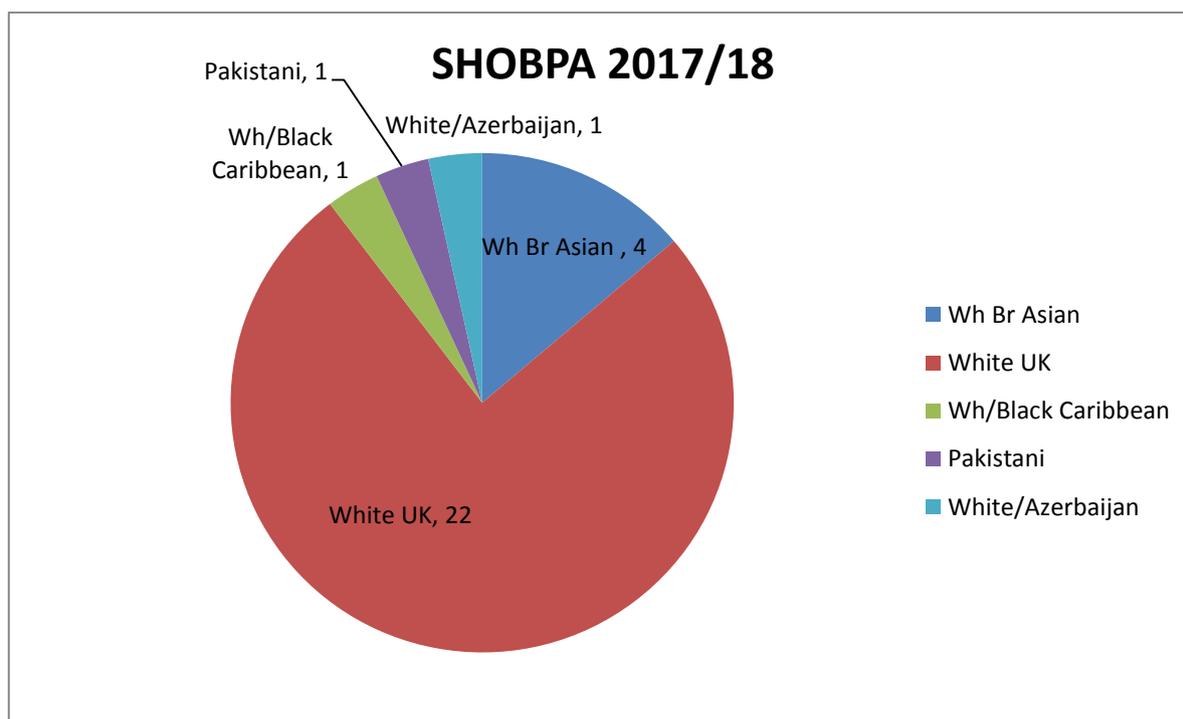
In the last half of the year there has been a significant change in the way that adoption services are delivered as Adoption Now went live on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of six Local Authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

This report will reflect those changes. Data relating to children remains local data relating to Oldham children however, Adoption Support and Recruitment data now covers the Region.

## Adoption Agency Business – Children

### **Children with an Adoption Plan**

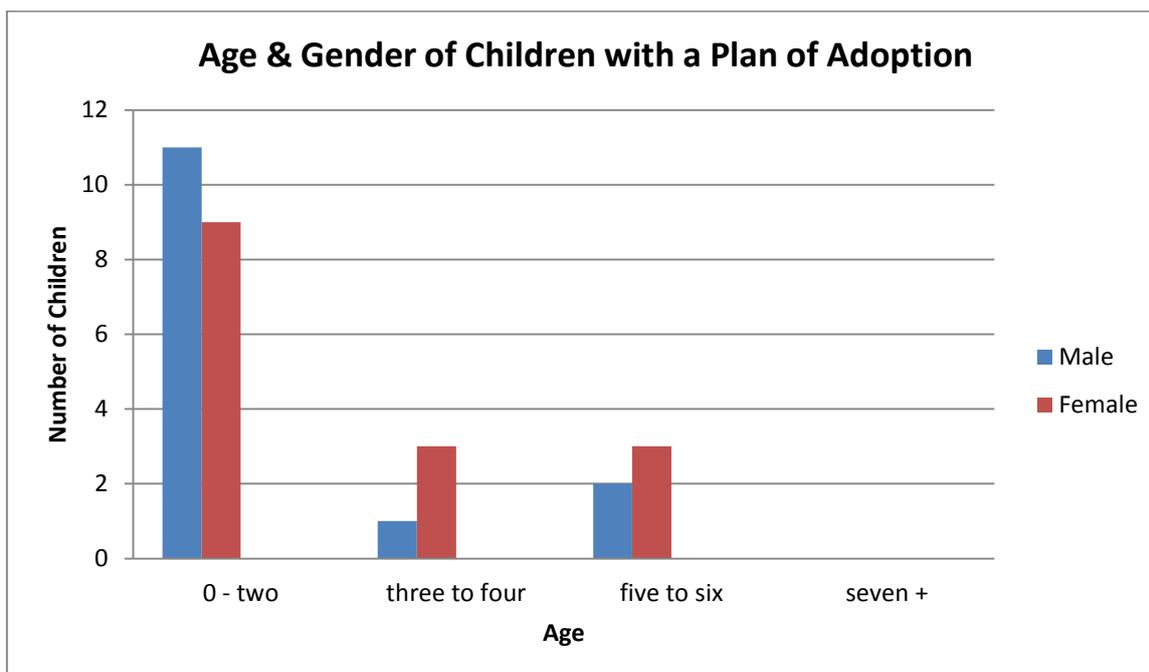
During the year 29 children have been presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a Should Be Placed for Adoption decision (SHOBPA). Of the children with SHOBPA decisions, two were a sibling group with plans to place together and two were already in two separate concurrent placements.



The chart above shows children with a SHOBPA decision by ethnicity. Most children with a plan for adoption were of White British heritage, with those from dual heritage backgrounds being the next largest group.

The chart below shows the same group of children by age and gender. Most children were aged 2 or under; however, 5 of the group were aged 5-6 years.

Not all children with a SHOBPA decision will progress to adoption as a number of plans may run concurrently (twin- or triple-tracking). The high proportion of younger children is evidence of early permanence planning for children in Oldham.



This group of 29 children is made up of a sibling group of four, a sibling group of three, 3 sibling groups of two, and 16 single children.

In addition, there was uncertainty about future health needs for 2 of the children.

The profile of children with a plan for adoption and those awaiting a match with an adoptive family is of significance when considering Oldham’s performance in relation to the Adoption Leadership Board Scorecard key performance indicators, with older children, sibling groups, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with uncertainty around their future health needs being harder to place.

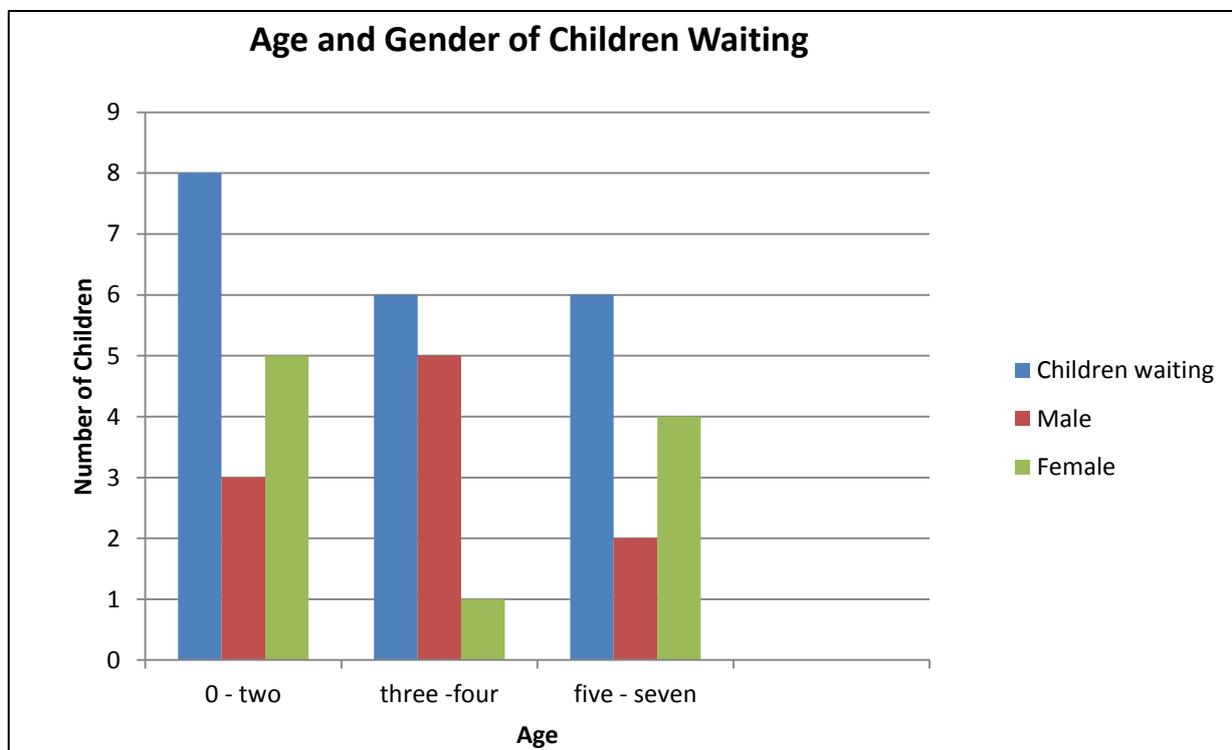
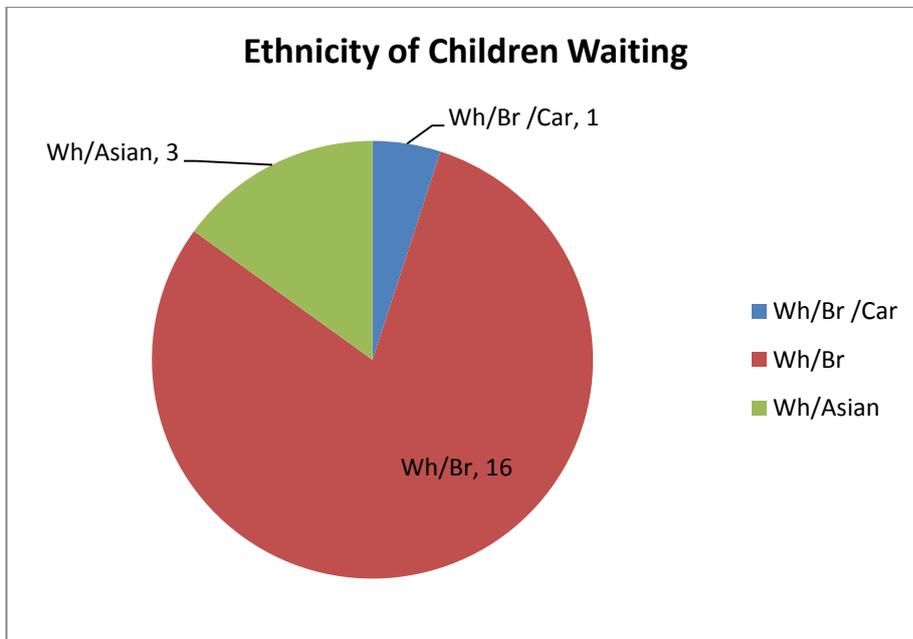
### Children Awaiting a Match

On 31 March 2018, there were 20 children with a plan for adoption (subject to a placement order) awaiting a formal match. This included 12 children considered harder to place due to being part of a sibling group. Of the 8 single children awaiting a match, 3 were considered harder to place due to health uncertainty or ethnicity.

Most children awaiting a match were of White British heritage, with the remaining 4 children being of dual heritage.

Despite 75% of the children in this group being considered hard to match, strong potential links had been identified for 2 of the sibling groups (5 children), 6 single children had links identified, and 1 child was placed in a concurrent placement as of 31 March 2018. For the remaining 9 children, potential links were being explored or active family finding was in progress. These children are monitored via regular Adoption Tracking Meetings.

The care plan for two of the sibling groups of two is being reconsidered.



Performance in relation to the length of time children spend waiting for a match is measured in the Adoption Leadership Board Scorecard. Continued efforts to match all the children waiting is a priority and will include them being profiled at Exchange days (where adopters can come and discuss children available for adoption), and all will be invited to attend an Activity day if this is appropriate for them. These run nationally and will also be run locally by Adoption Now in the coming months.

#### Family Finding Activity

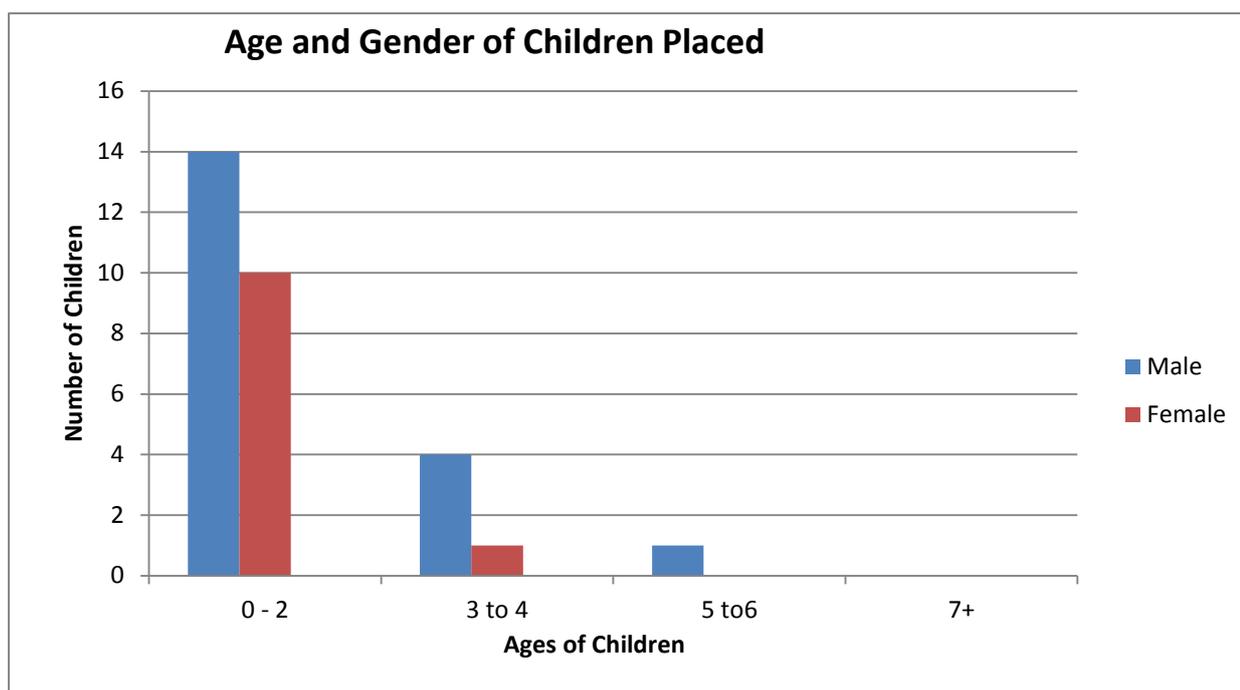
Professional links and relationships have continued to result in some positive matches, especially within those local authorities and voluntary agencies which are now part of Adoption Now. The regional placement group meeting has been redesigned and continues to operate on a monthly basis to encourage matches with local voluntary adoption agencies. Link Maker continues to be a useful tool, and children are also placed immediately on Adoption Match once a placement order is made if there are no families able to be explored from within Adoption Now.

The development of Adoption Now means that families that would have been approved by the six local authorities are all part of the same organisation and are immediately available to Oldham's children. Since November when Adoption Now went live 50% of children matched have been with Adoption Now adopters. These placements do not incur an interagency fee.

### Children Placed for Adoption

30 children were placed with adopters during 2017/18. Most were White British with 5 further children of dual heritage. The group included five sibling groups of two - four sets of siblings were of dual heritage and 1 of Eastern European ethnicity.

Of the 20 single children placed for adoption, 4 of the children were considered hard to place due to age, and additional and complex health needs.



The aim is for 60% of children to be placed with RAA adopters. The practice is to search for families within Adoption Now in the first instance and then to look further afield to other local authorities, Regional Adoption Agencies or Voluntary Adoption Agencies if required.

Prior to Adoption NoW, OMBC had experienced difficulties in matching children with its own adopters, in part due to the Borough being relatively small, which increases the risk of children being identified by their birth families. As a result, OMBC has historically relied heavily on other Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies for matches for its children.

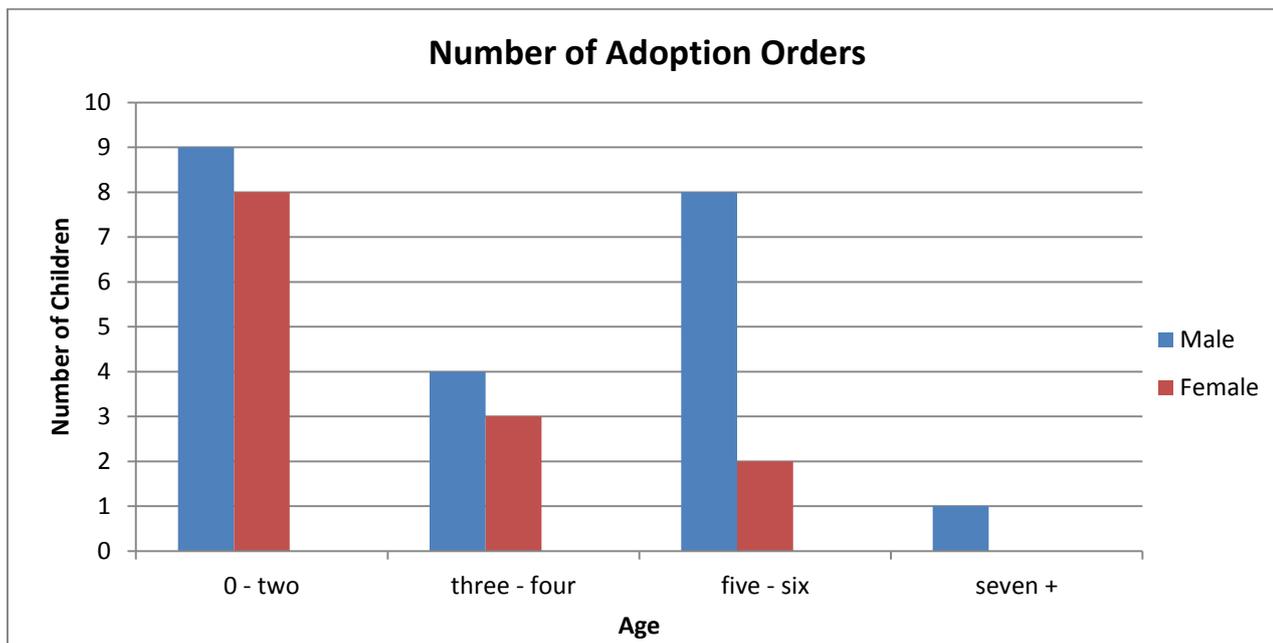
Since the launch of the RAA in November 2017 to the end of March 2018, twelve children were matched to potential Adopters. Of these some had links identified prior to, and outside of Adoption Now.

Of the 12 children matched, 2 were placed in concurrent placements while proceedings were ongoing, 7 in other Local Authorities, 1 with a VAA, and 2 within the RAA. The number of children placed within the RAA is below the 60% target, which may be explained by the fact that 4 children were siblings (2 sets of 2 siblings) and 2 children being of dual heritage.

### Children Adopted

35 adoption orders were made during the year. It is these children to whom the score card data refers.

Thirty of the children were of White British heritage, four of Asian/White UK dual heritage, and one of Black African/White UK heritage. 7 sibling groups of two and one sibling group of three were adopted within the group of 35 children.



Of the 35 children adopted, 11 were aged 5 years and above. In addition there were a number of children at the cusp of being 5 years old at the point of the Adoption Orders being granted. 6 single children were identified as having health uncertainties.

### Adoption Leadership Board Scorecard

The scorecard data for the 35 children placed and adopted within the year is as follows:

Measure		Oldham average
Placement Order to Matching (A2)	Scorecard Indicator 121 days	141 (YTD) 265 (3 Year)
Child entering care starting adoption placement (A1)	Scorecard indicator 426 days	544 (YTD) 430 (3 year)

Oldham's performance in relation to A1 and A2 exceeds the expected timescales set out by the Government. A number of factors contributed to Oldham's performance during 2017/18:

- 4 children were placed at home on Care Orders (subject to Placement with Parents Regulations) for significant periods prior to the children being removed and subsequently placed for adoption, which will have skewed the data
- The cohort of children adopted included a high proportion of children considered hard to place due to age, ethnicity, health needs and/or being part of a sibling group, which will have caused delay in identifying a suitable
- The high proportion of children who are considered hard to place due to age, ethnicity, health needs and being part of a sibling group will have created delay in identifying suitable adoptive families
- In 1 case, therapeutic and direct work was needed following the Placement Order in order to prepare the child for adoption, which caused significant delay

- In a further case, a child entered care in July 2013 and was placed for adoption in 2014/15 before the placement broke down. This child was successfully adopted in 2017/18, however, the length of time spent as a looked after child skews the data in relation to A1 and A2.

A focus on timescales for care proceedings will be required in the coming year to reduce the delay in progressing plans for adoption.

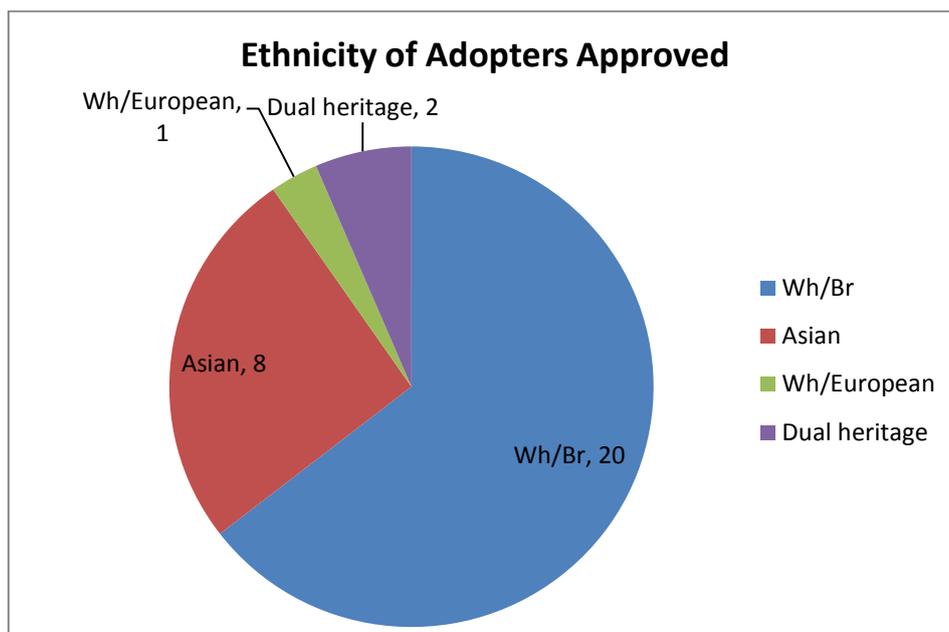
### Adoption Disruption

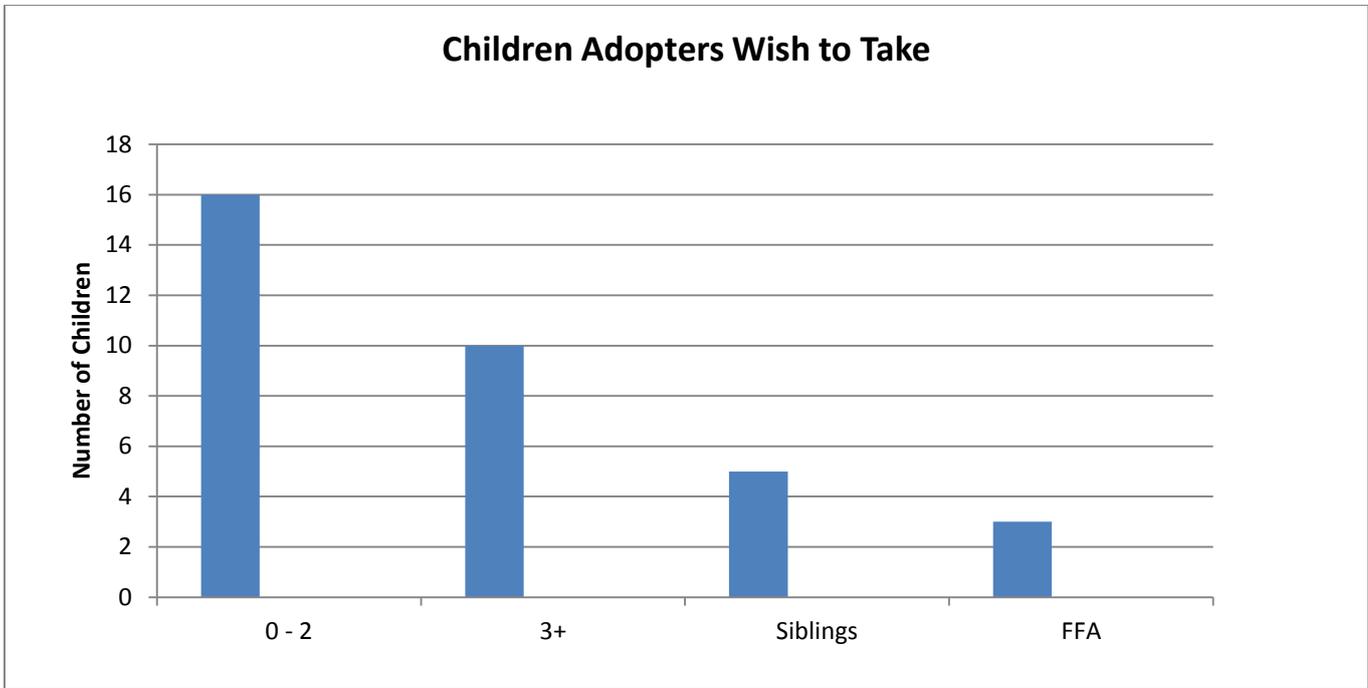
There were no adoption disruptions for Oldham children during 2017/18.

### Adoption Agency Business - Adopters

#### Adopter Recruitment

Adopter recruitment transferred to Adoption Now from 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Recruitment of adopters now covers a much wider geographical area. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> November, 21 adoptive families have been approved by Adoption Now. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 31 adoptive families approved and available for a variety of children. The ethnicity of adopters does broadly reflect the ethnicity of children available for adoption however there are insufficient numbers being approved to meet the needs of all children across the Regional Adoption Agency.





Most of the adopters waiting were approved within the previous six months however, some have waited for a placement and this has been for various reasons. Some Asian families have waited because they specifically want to adopt young babies and there have been a limited number available. Some of the dual heritage families have wanted to wait for a child who reflects their existing family rather than take a child from a different ethnicity. Other adopters had waited a while when they transferred to Adoption now and we do know that adopters who have already waited a good while tend to be viewed more suspiciously by family finders. We are working hard to find children to place with them.

Most adopters are still wishing to take young babies with few long term concerns in relation to their wellbeing. The need is to recruit more adopters who can offer homes to older children up to the age of eight years old, those who can adopt brothers and sisters in groups of 2, 3 or 4 and those who can consider children with additional needs.

**Recruitment Activity**

Nationally there is a shortage of adopters and numbers of children available are rising again as the looked after population nationally and locally rises. This happened shortly after many adopters had had to wait for long periods as a consequence of case law that changed the practise of the courts in terms of agreeing adoption plans for children. The message to the public was and still is to some extent that there are few young children available for adoption and that numbers have fallen significantly.

The recruitment strategy of Adoption Now has been to dispel this myth going live with a campaign that visibly showed with balloons how many children there were available in this area alone.

The new recruitment team will be fully staffed by early June 2018 and recruitment campaigns are scheduled three times per year with considerable presence at local events across the six local authority areas and beyond over the summer months.

The target is to increase numbers of adopters being approved by at least 20 families per year by the end of year 2.

A recruitment strategy and annual recruitment plan exists to support the need to recruit more adopters.

## **Adoption Panels**

The adoption panels are now run by Adoption Now and there is a panel at least weekly and when demand is high five times per month. One of the panels sits in Blackburn and the others in Rochdale and Bolton. The panels consider adopter approvals, matches and de registrations from all six local authorities. In all cases in the last six months, the panel recommendations were agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

For every panel, panel members received the papers in sufficient time to enable them to read the papers thoroughly and in all Oldham cases they had received sufficient information to consider the case and reach a conclusion. The majority of reports in relation to matches and approvals were considered to be good or excellent. Support plans were found to be appropriate to the child's needs. Timescales for approvals and matches were considered and the panel were satisfied with the explanations provided regarding any delay.

The need to improve timeliness of adopter assessments is part of the annual development plan for that service area. There is also a need to be more consistent with the matching paperwork across the six local authorities and this is also a focus of improvement activity over the coming year.

There are three panel chairs who operate across the panels. Panel members from each of the six local authority areas were pooled and many have continued to service the newly arranged panels.

## **Adoption Agency Business – Adoption Support**

### **Training and Support to Adoptive Parents**

Preparation training for prospective adopters being assessed continues to run at least once a month across the region. Adoption Now facilitate these groups. In addition Adoption Now has run preparation groups for second time adopters twice as this enables them to consider the specific issues around bringing a second child into the family. This has received positive feedback from adopters attending.

The Adoption Service recognises the value of ongoing training and support for adopters at different stages in the adoption process and their child's/children's development, to prevent family breakdown in later years and add quality of life to adoptive families. Post approval and post adoption training is now delivered by Adoption Now and is spread across the region.

During the last six months there has been a launch of adoption now which over 200 people attended from the region. There has also been training delivered for adoptive parents on E-Safety, promoting positive attachments – therapy and PACE, the developing brain and starting your adoptive family. In addition there have been coffee mornings, the continuation of a young people's group called 'Club Awesome' and the establishment of a new therapeutic toddler group to add to the ones already running (as these are very popular).

There is a plan to deliver more social type events and training in accordance with the wishes that adopters expressed at the launch event when they and young people were consulted about what they wished to see running in order to support them.

### **Post Adoption Support**

The adoption support team combines workers from across the six local authorities. Some staff had therapeutic training and there were also staff new to adoption support work. The team are based together in Bolton however, they continue to deliver services locally to where families live.

The benefits of becoming a much larger service are that it is easier to match a family's needs with staff with the relevant skills, duty can be delivered on a daily basis so families can always get in touch if they need support and it is possible to run a wider variety of support groups and training events for adopters.

The Post Adoption Support Team provide a variety of services including supporting birth parents, adoptive parents and children with contact arrangements, facilitate direct contact for a number of children with their

birth families, provide an access to records service for adult adoptees, provide assessment of need and more individualised support to those adopted children and their families who are in greater need and respond to lower level queries with advice and one off support.

### **Adoption Support Work**

Open cases	311
Assessments completed	40
Pre order support	11
Access to Records	56

All the assessments led to a service being provided and most resulted in applications to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March, a total of 311 cases were open to Post Adoption Support.

In addition, birth parent support is offered through surgeries that occur weekly in each of the six local authorities. If birth parents require additional support then they can be referred to After Adoption who are commissioned to provide that independent support.

### **Adoption Agency Business - Other**

#### **Non-agency adoptions**

There has been one adoption order made in this period and working with 6 enquiries as of March 18.

#### **Inter-country adoption**

Inter-country adoption services are rarely requested in Oldham but the Local Authority has a statutory obligation to provide or commission a service. The Borough remains part of a regional commission for inter-country adoption services provided by the Inter Country Adoption Centre.

#### **Participation of Young People**

Prior to going live Adoption Now commissioned a voluntary adoption agency to consult with young people and their views helped fashion the set-up of the new adoption agency.

Since then Adoption Now has consulted with a large group of young people at its launch event. Services being designed will be in line with their expressed wishes. Creative ways continue to be used to encourage participation from children who access post adoption support as well as those children who are awaiting adoption, especially, but not exclusively, those who are verbal.

The management team have also met with a participation officer in Blackburn to advise as to what is required for Adoption Now to acquire an investors in children award. This will be pursued over the coming year.

#### **Complaints/Compliments**

Adoption Now has not received any complaint in relation to Oldham children or families.

#### **Allegations**

There have been no allegations in the last six months.

#### **Staffing**

Over the last 6 months the service has operated with a core team of eight full time equivalent social workers, a deputy team manager and a team manager. These staff now work as part of Adoption Now and support a much larger regional service.

### **Budget**

For the Financial year 2017/2018 Oldham's income from other Local Authorities was £27,000, income from government grants totalled £27,000.

Oldham's gross interagency expenditure total is £599,438 with a net cost of £545,438.

### **Adoption Support Budget**

The operational budgets supporting adoption were transferred to Adoption Now and combined with the budgets from the other five local authorities.

Since 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 for Oldham children was £10,691.88.

All except £1,400 of this total has been claimed via Oldham's ASF account due to the applications being started pre RAA or just before we started making RAA applications so they have been finalised through the Oldham ASF account. The ASF money claimed via Oldham will be paid to Oldham.

All of these applications to the fund have gone to have further work with new applications to the fund since 01/04/2018 via the RAA account.

From the £5,425 figure, where the RAA have paid for interventions, £2770.34 has been for Oldham children.

The types of work that this funding has covered has included, specialist assessments, sensory processing assessments, ongoing DDP and attachment focused parenting and filial therapy.

### **Team Development**

Adoption Now hold fortnightly team meetings where staff learn together and develop practise. In addition there has been team building training in each of the work streams and training on access to records delivered by Coram BAAF. Training planned includes training in DDP, Nonviolent resistance training, GDPR training and how it affects us in adoption and therapeutic life story work training. This is a benefit of the new regionalised approach in that pooled budgets allow for staff to be better equipped to manage children and families coping with transition and trauma.

A decision was made to reserve some 'set up' budget in order to skill staff up to meet the needs of families requiring support. This should prevent escalation of difficulties and enable staff to have a better understanding of the issues facing families to ensure the correct support is offered at the correct time.

### **Development Plan for 2018/19**

A development plan has been drawn up for the coming year. The main aspects of that are as follows: -

- Recruit more adopters to meet the needs of children needing families. Targets exist around approval of adopters. The recruitment workers will be in post from early June 2018.
- Ensure that adopters and young people's views are consistently sought and that they shape development of the service.
- Work towards achieving Investors in children award placing young people's views at the centre of our service.
- Work towards achieving consistency in practise in all three work streams.
- Panels to have a better balance in terms of ethnicity on membership.
- Ensure the IT system can reliably produce accurate data.

- Improve timescales for approval of adopters so that more are approved within the six month timescales.

The progress of children who have a plan for adoption remains the responsibility of each Local Authority in the RAA. For Oldham, the priorities are as follows:

- Improve performance in relation to ASGLB KPIs, specifically to improve the timeliness of the adoption process for Oldham children through effective early permanence planning, to include children placed at home under Placement with Parent Regulations.
- Establish and embed a process to provide scrutiny and challenge to reduce the spend on interagency placements and increase the number of Oldham children placed with RAA Adopters.
- Embed a culture of support and guidance to promote effective permanence planning through monthly Adoption tracking meetings in partnership with Adoption Now.
- Identify key themes from audits and tracking meetings for dissemination across the wider Service to embed a culture of continuous service development.

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3/09/18

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10/7/18