

# Corporate Parenting Panel report



8 December 2021

## FOR INFORMATION: ADOPTION CONNECTS SIX MONTHLY REPORT

Report sponsor	<b>Dr Mac Heath</b> Director - Children's Services
Report author	<b>Nickie Phillips</b> Service Manager, Adoption Connects <a href="mailto:Nickie.Phillips@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk">Nickie.Phillips@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk</a>

Exempt / confidential / not for publication	<b>No</b>
Council Plan reference	<b>Ref number / Not in Council Plan</b>
Wards affected	<b>All wards / list individual wards</b>

### Purpose of this Report

The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require Local Authority Adoption Agencies to report to Members at six monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of a six-monthly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel each year.

### Recommendation

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to consider and note the Adoption Agency six-month report 2021-22.

### Main Body of the Report

1. This report covers a period during the Covid-19 pandemic where practice and the service offer responded to required changes to working practices, legislation, and service delivery to ensure core business enabling children to progress to permanence.

2. Virtual information sessions for anyone considering adoption have been provided throughout this period. Daytime and evening sessions were offered twice per month to provide anyone considering adoption with information about adoption and the assessment process.
3. Advice and information is also available on the website, via an enquiry line available Monday to Friday, social media and email.
4. The marketing strategy has included the support of the National Recruitment Strategy #YouCanAdopt.
5. The service used the flexibility within the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus)(Amendment) regulations 2020 legislation to progress applicants to Stage 2 of the assessment process pending the completion of the medical report and DBS check to ensure prospective adopter assessments were able to progress. All applicants had a medical report and DBS completed before recommendation to panel and agency decision.
6. The Covid-19 amendments ended on 24 September 2021.
7. The training offer for prospective adopters continued to be delivered virtually and supports applicants' readiness and preparation to adopt. The training is supported by guest speakers including adoptive and birth parents. The mandatory training includes:
  - **Preparation training** for prospective adopters which includes three modules of training covering loss, trauma and identity, assessment and matching and adoption support.
  - **Family and friends** - preparation video and Q&A session providing opportunity for support networks to learn about adoption, explore their expectations and questions and their role in offering support and being related by adoption.
  - **Nurturing Connections** Program - a PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) based approach to parenting.
  - **Foster for Adoption training** which covers Skills to Foster and the benefits of Early Permanence for children.
8. This has supported the continued number of enquiries and applications to adopt. Adoption Connects have received and accepted 31 applications of prospective adopters during this period.
9. As of 31 September 2021, 40 prospective adopter assessments were in progress.
10. 15 applicants/households were newly approved as prospective adopters.

11. One approval was withdrawn by the couple due to a change of circumstances
12. One recommendation for approval was not agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
13. As of 24 September 2021, there were 26 approved prospective adopter households waiting for a match of which eight have a link with an identified child being explored.

### **Adopter Approvals and plans for Children**

14. Adoption Connects and Milton Keynes Council year to date performance:

	2021-22 (up to 30/09/21)
Adoption Connects Prospective Adopter Approvals	15
Adoption Plans	8
Matched for adoption	7
Adoption Orders granted	17

15. There were 17 Adoption Orders granted in this period. The orders were granted on:
  - 13 single children and 2 x 2 siblings:
    - Three were placed via Early Permanence (Foster for Adoption).
    - One was placed with a sibling previously adopted.
    - Six were adopted by their foster carer.
16. At the end of this reporting period there were:
  - 12 children placed in adoptive placements pending the granting of an Adoption Order of which 3 children have an application to adopt submitted to court pending a date for a hearing (expected to be granted in 2021-22).
  - 14 Children with a plan and consent to place for adoption where family finding was taking place.
17. One placement disruption was experienced. The child returned to the foster care placement where their care plan is currently being considered.

## Placements

18. Adoption Connects have successfully matched 8 children with prospective adopters during this period. Of the 8 children matched 1 was placed by Central Bedfordshire Council and 7 placed by Milton Keynes Council:
19. Placement type:
  - Six children were matched with prospective adopters approved and supported by Adoption Connects.
  - Two children were matched with external placements (prospective adopters approved by another adoption agency namely interagency).

## Adoption Support

20. The universal adoption support offer has continued with adaptations due to Covid-19. This includes support and peer opportunities for adoptive parents, counselling for birth relatives and staying in contact support for birth and adoptive families.
21. The offer has continued to provide connection events such as:
  - a. **ConnectTeens** (Adopted Teens group).
  - b. **Connection drop ins** - held monthly and includes representation from Virtual Schools.
  - c. **Teddy Bears Picnic**.
  - d. **Summer Event** at Woburn Safari Park.
  - e. **Stay and Play** - parent and child sessions were introduced in partnership with a partner Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).
22. Feedback received from parents who attended one of these services was:

*“Thank you for organizing the Stay and Play. We loved it! I kept saying “that so much fun!” all the way home”. (parent)*

*“I would like to thank everyone involved in making this happen. Even the rain and being stuck on a swan boat in the pouring rain did not dampen our spirits and we had an amazing day. Keep up the great work and thank you on behalf of all that attended”. (parent - Woburn Summer Event)*
23. As of 31 March, the Adoption Support Team had 109 children (60 - CBC and 49 - MKC) with an open adoption support plan accessing direct services via an allocated social worker.

24. 22 consultations (11 - CBC and 11 - MKC) were provided to families seeking advice, guidance, and support and a further 8 were provided for subsequent siblings in the family.
25. Feedback from a parent who accessed support for her three children was:
- 25.1. *“L (AC Social Worker) was totally behind us on our case from day one. She completely understood what the issue in hand was and our frustrations dealing with other agencies. We were all totally comfortable with L from the start. She has a fantastic ability to listen and understood what our daughters’ needs were and the support that was required. L kept in contact with us throughout the assessment period and kept us updated. A refreshing person to deal with during the last 18mths. We have had a brilliant experience with L as our social worker. Prior to being allocated to L we were getting very frustrated with the system being passed around various agencies trying to get therapy for our daughter K who was falling quickly down the depression route. L quickly got the assessment under way and secured funding for therapy. Therapy sessions have been going really well for K.*
- L has also assessed our other two boys and also secured funding for therapy – this really has been a game changer for them. This change in our lives has all been down to L. We as a family cannot praise L’s efforts enough. A true professional - just brilliant”.*
26. Support also continues through post adoption contact arrangements for each individual child placed for adoption via ‘staying in contact’ plans. Post adoption contact seeks to ensure a secure and consistent record of contact between birth family, adoptive family and the child to support the development of a positive identity and sense of self. This often includes letters and occasional photographs that are often of high significance to the adoptee later in life but also includes direct contact with birth family.
27. From 1 April 2021 Independent Birth Relative Counselling was aligned for both local authorities commissioned to an independent Voluntary Adoption Agency. 15 MKC referrals were transferred from the previous provider with a further 16 completed during this period. 5 - CBC and 11 - MKC.
28. Feedback from those accessing the service includes:
- 28.1. *“it has helped me to open up my mind set and the way of thinking and feeling. The service is great.”*
- 28.2. *“it has got things off my chest and been a comfort”.*
- 28.3. *“I’m dealing with lots just now and counselling is a let out and also it helps me clarify stuff and no u guys are doing a great job”.*

28.4. *“Its helped me talk about things and let go of things that I was worrying about or fearing and to deal with them get stronger too”.*

29. During this period Adoption Connects received three complaints where improvement actions have been completed.

### **Options for Consideration**

30. To consider and note the Adoption Agency Six Month Report.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

31. Adapted practices such as the offer of virtual information sessions and preparation training have continued improving the accessibility of information about adoption.
32. Practice is subject to continuous review as the agency responds to Government guidance. As such it is too early to define what changes will remain to ensure we continue to maintain high practice standards.
33. Practice improvement areas include timeliness of the adopter and child journey and Early Permanence.

### **Appendices**

None.

**Nickie Phillips**  
**Service Manager**  
**Adoption Connects**

**1 October 2021**