



Adoption Annual Report 2014-15

www.wwish.org.uk



Introduction

The WWiSH Adoption Service was established in 2012. Warrington, Wigan and St Helen's council were the first Local Authorities to collaborate and develop a shared adoption service. The Service is hosted by Wigan Council and provides Recruitment and Assessment of adopters and an Adoption Support service to the communities of the three local authorities.

WWiSH Adoption Service is based at:

Oaklands
196A Newton Road
Lowton
WA3 2AQ

The Shared Adoption Service is part of the wider Children's Social Care Service in all three local authorities, and reflects each Council's commitment to 'Best Practice' in the provision of an Adoption Service.

WWiSH adoption service is an award winning service having won two prizes at the Improvement and Efficiency Awards 2013, which is a national competition honouring excellence in the public sector. At the ceremony, held in London, WWiSH were awarded gold in the "working together" category and bronze in the "innovation in social care" category. WWiSH was one of only two council services to win two prizes.

The award success came only a few weeks after the service was highlighted in a government report. The Department for Education cited WWiSH as a good example of local authorities working together in a report called Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes.

WWiSH also participated in a ground breaking documentary 15,000 Kids and Counting, which followed children's services over an 18 month period. The show aired in 2014 attracted more than one million viewers and won critical acclaim and was shortlisted by Bafta for its prestigious best factual series award in 2015.

Vision for the Service

'To improve outcomes for children whose plan is adoption: through greater placement choice and the better matching of their needs, enabling successful placements to be made within a child's timeframe, and provide an adoption support service that will support and enhance the experience of adoption for children and their adopters.

Aims

The main aim of WWiSH is to provide a child focused and efficient service, which will be demonstrated by sufficient numbers of adopters being recruited, through timely assessment and the provision of training and support, which prepares adopters well and enables children to achieve permanence in loving and nurturing families.

To provide an effective, flexible Shared Adoption Service where the needs of individual children can be met within the legal security of adoption as appropriate.

To ensure that adoption is considered as an option for all children requiring permanent alternative care away from their birth family.

To provide a proactive and professional family finding service which seeks to match individual children with prospective adoptive families that have been assessed as able to meet their needs.

To ensure that the recruitment, preparation, training and support given to prospective adopters is comprehensive and meets their needs so that they can be successful adopters.

To provide a responsive and comprehensive Adoption Support Service to children, their birth families and adoptive families living in Warrington, Wigan and St Helens who as a result of adoption require advice, counselling, practical or

emotional support. To also provide Adoption Support Services to children and their adoptive families placed by WWiSH Shared Adoption Service outside of the boundary of all three Local Authorities.

To provide the Adoption Agency Adviser and Adoption Support Service Adviser role to ensure that the quality of the shared service is supported and developed across the three boroughs.

To provide a signposting service including written information for any person requesting an Adoption Intermediary Service which is not generally provided by the WWiSH shared Adoption Service.

To signpost prospective adopters who are interested in Inter Country Adoption to the relevant Adoption Agency.

Structure of the Service

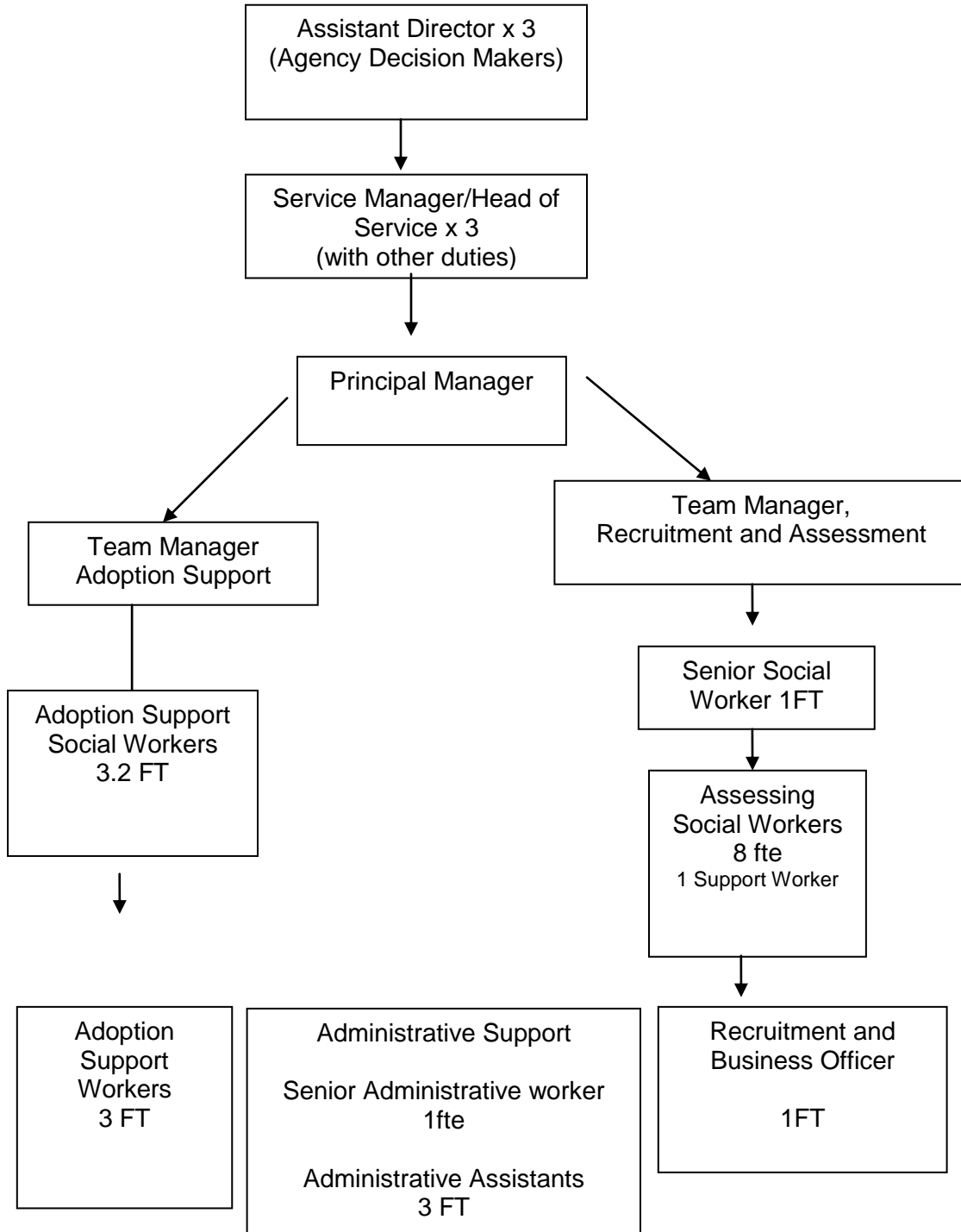
The Principal Manager of the Shared Adoption Service is responsible for the day to day running of the service, acting as Adoption Agency Advisor in respect of Shobpa (should be placed for adoption) decisions and also the Agency Adviser to Adoption Panels.

The Principal Manager is supported by two Team Managers, one Team Manager with responsibility for the recruitment and assessment of adopters and the other Team Manager for the development of adoption support services for children, adoptive families, birth families and anyone affected by adoption.

Each Local Authority has two named Agency Decision Makers..

Shared Adoption Service Structure

Management Board



WWiSH is also supported by our front line Social Work teams, who endeavour to provide the highest quality service for all children and families. WWiSH and the child care teams strive to ensure that adoption is considered as an option for all children needing permanence outside of the care of their family and that children who are adopted have all the appropriate information about their history to enable them to understand their life story in an accessible and meaningful way. This process starts at point of referral and frontline social workers are aware of the vital role they play in collating this information and preparing children and families for the adoption process.

National Adoption Agenda 2014/2015

Increase in available adopters

In the three months leading up to September 2103 there were 1,830 initial decisions by local authorities in England that a child should be adopted, compared with 960 for the three months to June 2014 – a fall of 47%, according to the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB).

The ALB advised that applications for court orders allowing a child to be placed for adoption also fell by 34%. The number of placement orders granted by courts was also down from 1,650 to 750. These reductions followed the publication of a number of high profile court judgments, in particular *Re B* and *Re B-S*.

Whilst the number of children who have a care plan for adoption has reduced significantly during the last year, due to a previous investment in the recruitment of available adopters across the country we are now seeing for the first time a higher ratio of approved adopters in comparison to the number of children whose plan is adoption. This is a phenomenon echoed in WWiSH's figures.

Adoption Support Fund Pilot

In January 2013 the government published a report which, set out their proposals to attract adopters and improve the support available to adoptive families. This led to the implementation of the prototype Adoption Support Fund in December 2013 which worked with ten Local Authorities to attempt to generate sustainable improvement in the assessment and provision of appropriate therapeutic support to adoptive families. This pilot has now come to an end and the Adoption Support Fund was opened to all 152 Local Authorities in England on 1st May 2015. Accessing this fund will be a key target for 2015/16 for the WWiSH Service.

The Adoption Support fund will pay for therapeutic services such as play therapy and family support sessions to help children and their adoptive families come to terms with their children's difficult starts, which can prevent them from settling into their new homes and can create difficulties at particular stages, such as adolescence. WWiSH Adoption Support Team will assess children and families needs and make applications to the fund accordingly.

Pupil Premium

In April 2014, the enhanced pupil premium – known as the “Pupil Premium plus” was extended to those who were adopted after 30 December 2005. The Pupil Premium aims to help schools raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap with their peers. It is paid to schools in respect of disadvantaged pupils in Reception to Year 11. The Government has extended the coverage of the Pupil Premium in recognition of the traumatic experiences many adopted children have endured in their early lives and a realisation that their needs do not change overnight.

Accessing the Pupil Premium is dependant on adopters informing schools of their child being adopted. Adoption childcare workers and WWiSH Adoption Support

actively promote adopters to request school utilise this money to support their children.

In addition from September 2014 the Government extended the entitlement to free early education to two-year-old children adopted from local authority care in recognition of the difficult start in life they have endured and the identified benefit early exposure to high quality early education can have in improving their life chances.

Recruitment and Assessment

Targeted Recruitment

During 2013/2014 there were 120 expressions of interest that were suitable to progress to the initial visit stage of the assessment process. Social Workers on the team were already working to capacity with the existing families in assessment and post approval support. In March 2014 discussions took place with Managers about the increasing demands on a small team of social workers and the potential delay for prospective adopters. Further discussions took place with Adopt North West (ANW) and agreement was made, in line with Adoption Regulations 2013, to signpost future enquiries to ANW from April 2014. This continued until November 2014 as a temporary measure. The 120 prospective adopters who requested a service from WWiSH between April 2013 and March 2014 were progressed and the initial visits continued until June 2014. These families have now completed the assessment process with WWiSH Adoption Service.

During the period when new expressions of interest were being signposted to Adopt Northwest WWiSH continued to take applications from 2nd time adopters, re-approval of adopters for sibling placements and welcomed applications from foster carers who wished to adopt a child who was currently in their care.

In November 2014 a decision was made for the WWiSH Adoption Service to engage in Targeted Recruitment to consider applications from prospective adopters who would consider sibling groups, Fostering For Adoption, children over 3 and children with additional needs and complex health and learning needs within their birth families. These target groups were identified based on the needs of children who waiting for adoptive placements.

National Adoption Week, November 2014:

The 2014 National theme of “Siblings” was designed to encourage people to consider adopting a sibling group to keep brothers and sisters together. Many Local Authorities, including WWiSH, used this theme for their own Adoption Week campaign work. The Marketing teams that are linked with WWiSH surveyed every Local Authority in the UK asking how many children that they were actively family finding for were part of a sibling group. The survey found that 49% of children were part of a sibling group (the response rate to the survey was 53%).

National Adoption Week 2014 gained 1,167 pieces of coverage, which is an increase on 2013’s total of 1,081. The total PR value of that coverage was at least £1,367,639. Coverage was also helped by using Cake: Brighter Coms, a Welsh PR company who helped generate coverage in Wales especially around the new Adoption Service in Wales. The National campaign highlights include:

8% increase in media coverage in total

12.3% increase in print coverage

22.5 % increase in radio coverage

During National Adoption Week our Recruitment and Assessment team promoted WWiSH and highlighted the need for adopters who could consider sibling groups by attending 3 locations (Warrington, Wigan and St Helens) with the WWiSH stand, posters and leaflets. Social Workers were available to engage in discussions with the public about children’s needs.

Adopters approved as suitable to adopt during April 2014/ March 2015

There have been 61 approvals of adopters in 2014/2015. This number includes the approval of 4 sets of second time adopters, 2 approvals for specific children and 8 sets of foster carers approved for a child/ren in their care. One assessment presented to the Adoption Panel did not recommend approval. The panel and Agency Decision Maker agreed with this recommendation.

During this period 17 assessments were carried out under the old process (pre July 2013) as the prospective adopters initially contacted the team prior to that date. 44 of the approvals have been assessed under the new process (post July 2013). The current assessment process is in two stages. The timescale for stage one is 2 months and stage two is 4 months. The Government requires that an adoption assessment should be completed within a 6 month timescale from application to the Agency Decision for approval; however there is an allowance of a maximum 6 months break in-between stage 1 and stage 2 if the agency or the prospective adopters feel appropriate.

Timescales of Assessment (WWISH)

Old Process

There have been 17 approvals under the pre July 2013 process. 82% of these were within timescales. Failure to complete all 17 assessments within the required timescale of 8 months has been due to the volume of applicants and social workers working to capacity.

New Process

Stage One

32 Stage One Assessments have been completed, 18% of those have been completed within the required Timescale of 2 months.

Delay in completion has been for the following reasons or a combination of the following reasons

- Outstanding medical information.
- Outstanding references.
- Outstanding statutory checks.
- Outstanding DBS information.
- Personal circumstances of adopters.

Stage Two

44 Stage Two Assessments have been completed, 67.5% of those have been completed within the required Timescale of 4 months.

Delay in completion has been for the following reasons:

- 3 assessments were out of timescale due to a delay in allocation (resource issue).
- 1 has been out of timescale due to the personal circumstances of the adopters.
- 1 has been out of timescale by 2 weeks due to staff sickness.
- 2 Assessments were slightly out of timescale due the misunderstanding of the completion date of assessment ie when the report was presented rather than the Agency Decision. This has now been clarified with all team members.
- 1 has been out of timescale due to the annual leave of the assessing social worker followed by the annual leave of the adopters.
- 1 has been out of timescale due to staff sickness and the adopters holiday.
- 4 have been out of timescale due to Panel availability (this has now been rectified by an additional Panel, 3 now held per month)

An Action Plan has been implemented to improve timescales. Medicals, DBS checks and other references will be sought earlier and clear messages are now given to prospective adopters regarding their commitment to the process and stage one being adopter led.

Agreement was given to employ a full time Agency Social Worker, receive a social worker on secondment full time and an existing part time member of staff agreed to work an additional 5 hours per week to help with the volume of work. The secondment ended in September 2014 and the other positions in March 2015.

A combination of independent social workers and employed social workers have worked with the families during 2014/2015.

Due to Targeted Recruitment the current applications to adopt are less therefore there is more opportunity for the same social worker to work with the family throughout the whole process which will provide consistency and a more timely approach. As adopters enter the matching process it is crucial that they are supported by a social worker who knows their strengths and vulnerabilities.

All adopters who are in the process of assessment attend Preparation Groups which are held during stage one. These groups are held over 3 and a half days and facilitated by the Recruitment and Assessment team. During 2014/2015 there have been 9 Preparation groups run. Other pre approval training includes

- The impact of drugs and alcohol on the unborn child
- Attachment and Brain Development
- Adoption Support

All of which are very well attended.

On March 31st 2015 the Assessment and Recruitment Team were assessing and supporting 128 families.

Length of time from approval to matching with a child/ren

During 2014/2015 the average waiting time for adopters from approval to being matched with a child was 3.7 months. 15 of the 61 families have not been matched on the 31st March 2015, although lots of discussions about potential matches are ongoing, and 1 family is on hold due to health reasons.

Fostering For Adoption

Although there are risks involved for adopters who may consider fostering for adoption (the court proceedings may conclude that the child should return home or be placed with another family member) the benefits for the child and the adopters are huge. The child will be placed directly with the prospective adopters which will prevent delay and significant moves of placement and attachments can be developed earlier. The Recruitment and Assessment team actively promote Foster for Adoption during assessment and with those families still waiting to be matched.

During the year there have been 3 fostering for adoption placements with WWiSH families (2 Wigan children and 1 St Helens child). The change in legislation (April 2015) now provides prospective adopters with the opportunity of commencing Adoption Leave at the point of a child being placed in a fostering for adoption placement. The three Local Authorities are clear regarding the support available to adopters who are able to consider this route of adoption and the roles and responsibilities of the professionals involved.

During 2014/2015 8 families said that they could consider/discuss a fostering for adoption placement.

Sufficiency of Adopters- those approved 2014/2015

| Profile of adopter approval | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Adopters approved for 1 child | 44 |
| Adopters approved for 2 children | 16 |
| Adopters approved for 3 children | 1 |
| Total | 61 |

| Adopters approved to adopt the following ages | |
|---|-----------|
| 0-3 years | 46 |
| 3 + | 15 |

Of the 61 approved adopters the following have these specific profiles

| | |
|---|---|
| Foster for Adoption | 8 |
| Approved in relation to a specific child | 8 |
| Adopters applying to adopt a sibling of their adopted child/ren | 3 (of which 2 provided fostering for adoption) |

Children Matched At Panel 2014/2015

The box below identifies the total number of Warrington, Wigan and St Helens children that have been matched during the year.

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Number of children matched with WWiSH Adopters | 82 |
| Number of children matched with another Local Authority | 14 |
| Number of children matched with a Voluntary Adoption Agency | 15 |

The table below shows where each of the 3 Local Authorities' have placed their children.

| | WWiSH Adopters <u>Single child</u> | WWiSH Adopters <u>Sibling Group</u> | Other LA Adopters <u>Single child</u> | Other LA Adopters <u>Sibling group</u> | Vol Agency Adopters <u>Single child</u> | Vol Agency Adopters <u>Sibling Group</u> |
|------------|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| Warrington | 9 | 4 sibling groups (8 children) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 sibling group (2 children) |
| Wigan | 25 | 5 sibling groups (10 children) | 5 | 2 sibling groups (5 children) | 4 | 1 sibling group (2 children) |
| St Helens | 16 | 7 sibling groups (14 children) | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 sibling groups (7 children) |

Activity Days

WWiSH held its first Adoption Activity day on the 11th May 2014 in collaboration with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering. These activity days are designed to introduce children needing adoptive families to adopters. They are designed to be child focused and a fun day for the children who attend, with lots of activities and entertainment throughout the day.

The children who attended the day were children that the service had found it difficult to find adoptive families for. Some children had additional needs, were parts of large sibling groups or were over 4 years of age.

28 children from the WWiSH service attended the day. 11 of these were Wigan children (which included 3 sibling groups), 8 children from Warrington (including 2 sibling groups) and 9 children from St. Helens (including 2 sibling groups). Several children from other neighbouring authorities also attended.

BAAF advertises these days on their website and adopters from anywhere in the country can apply to attend. This opens up choice for the children.

The children and adopters were prepared for the day by their social workers. Foster carers and social workers attended on the day to provide support to both the children and the adults. There was a theme of pirates and princesses with most people dressing up to add to the fun of the day.

22 of the 28 WWiSH children were matched as a result of attending the activity day. 10 from Wigan, 7 from Warrington and 5 from St Helens therefore the day was considered a huge success.

There are 2 activity days planned for 2015/16.

Adoption Link

In February 2015 the WWiSH partnership purchased a licence for Adoption Link, which enables WWiSH Social Workers and WWiSH adopters to search for matches on-line. Adoption Link is run by adopters. It is the largest database of children waiting for adoption and of approved adopters in the UK, and the only one allowing users to share profiles and find links directly. The system finds matches for many children using high levels of privacy and security.

Adopters and Social Workers can look for a match within the WWiSH consortium and also nationwide if appropriate.

Inter-country adoption arrangements

This service is being currently provided by a service level agreement with the **Inter Country Adoption Centre**.

Adoption Panel

The WWiSH Panel has met regularly twice a month and on a number of occasions three times a month during the past year. This is due to an increase in the numbers of prospective adopters coming to Panel and a high number of children's placements that have been matched. This has inevitably placed an additional burden on the Panel members available to both attend Panel and undertake the necessary reading in advance. Over the year several experienced Panel members have left which meant that for a period achieving quoracy was a challenge. A great deal of effort has been made to recruit new members, some of whom have now joined us and are making a valued contribution. Others are in the process of being interviewed, observing Panel and undergoing the induction process. All newly recruited Panel Members were invited to attend new Panel member training facilitated by Caritas Care.

Panel members have a range of varied skill sets and backgrounds such as Educational Psychologists, adoptive parents and a former head teacher. This in turn results in the Panel being both robust and knowledgeable..

Panel members come to Panel well prepared and all make a full contribution to the discussion. They respect each other's views, are prepared to review their opinions in the light of the discussion, yet are confident to maintain any strongly held opinions. In order to improve our ability to undertake the high workload on any Panel day efficiently whilst maintaining the necessary rigour, Panel members are asked to submit questions and queries to the chair in advance so that potential issues for discussion can be collated and refined on the day.

The Panel Chair and Ofsted inspectors have given praise for the administrative support for Panel and the quality of the minutes produced.

The year has seen a change in the management structure which has resulted in new Panel Advisors. This role is shared by the Principal Manager of WWiSH and

the manager of the Adoption Support Team. Their support and guidance is always available to the chair and appreciated by Panel. Panel papers are received in good time and members of the administration are always helpful.

Quality Assurance feedback is taken at the end of each case, recorded by the Panel Advisor and returned to the relevant managers for any action that is needed, these comments also contain acknowledgement of good reports and positive practice. The Quality Assurance role of Panel is seen as very much an integral part of each members duties and members contribute effectively.

Panel members are now familiar with the Prospective Adopters Report and find it focuses on the analysis of necessary information and easy to read. Over the year the quality of the Child Permanence Reports has varied; however it has been evident that each of the three Local Authorities continue to strive for improvement and towards the end of the year saw the introduction of the new Child Permanence Report template.

Accommodation has long been a concern. The Panel meeting room is small for the number of people who attend, it is invariably a minimum of thirteen when a match is being considered and can be more if observers are present. However, waiting arrangements for applicants and presenting social workers have been much improved. Two rooms are now available which have been comfortably decorated and furnished, with a nominated member of staff to ensure visitors are welcomed and are comfortable whilst they wait during what is inevitably an anxious time. Panel members always try to treat applicants with respect and set them at their ease. Feedback from the prospective adopters about their experience of the training, assessment and the Panel process is overall positive. On two occasions birth children of applicants have asked to attend Panel. These requests have been agreed following prior discussion between the chair, parents and the children who were asked to think about what they would like to tell Panel and then being invited to join the discussion when the adult matters had been

concluded. Panel welcomed the opportunity to meet the young people and was impressed by their understanding of their parents' plans.

The annual Panel training day was held on the 16th May 2014. Social Workers and Agency Decision Makers from each of the three authorities and WWiSH also attended the day to promote shared learning. The day covered an update on adoption activity and taster of the following training and workshops;

- Drugs and Alcohol use in pregnancy
- Adoption Support
- Attachment and Brain development
- Talking to your child about adoption
- Social networking issues
- Introduction to Theraplay

Panel members have been invited to the full training sessions and workshops and have begun to attend, giving positive feedback.

Adoption Performance

Wigan

Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Twin tracking

Within Wigan CYPS there are 14 full time staff committed to Adoption, Concurrency and Early Permanence. There is a Principal Manager for Adoption, 2 Senior Adoption Social Workers, 5 full time Adoption Social Workers, 2 Full time Adoption Support Workers, and 3 Fulltime Early Permanence Social Workers. They are situated within Locality teams throughout the borough to enable them to work closely with child care social workers, identifying children whose plan maybe adoption at the earliest stage possible.

Wigan has implemented a foster to adopt/concurrency scheme in order to care plan towards early permanency. This scheme will help to maintain strong performance around the adoption scorecard and other key performance measures and will minimise delay and disruption for children who can be placed early within the achieving permanency process. The Foster To Adopt agenda within Wigan means children experience early permanence prior to conclusion of care proceedings. Carers are dually approved to allow placement prior to Placement Order. There is also forward planning taking place in terms of approaching adopters who already have one child to take a subsequent sibling on a Foster To Adopt basis.

Adoption Performance

Within Wigan 49 adoption orders have been granted during the year 2014/2015. 17 Special Guardianship Orders have been granted and 38 SHOBPAS were granted.

Profile of children adopted 2014/2015

During 2014/2015 Wigan had 49 children where adoption orders were granted.

Of these the children were in the following groups of siblings:

1. 37 were single children
2. 6 sibling groups of 2 children

The age ranges of the children adopted is as follows:

1. 0-5 years - 41 children
2. 6-10 years - 8 children
3. over 10 - 0 children

The predominant ethnicity of the children remains White British. There was only one child of a different ethnicity who had an Asian background.

Children under 5 remain the largest group placed for adoption. 3 of the single children in Wigan had siblings who were already placed for adoption, but they were placed separately. There is a specific recruitment strategy within WWiSH to target adopters willing to consider sibling groups which can potentially include groups of children with a wide age range.

Profile of children placed for adoption

On the 31st March 2015 Wigan had 29 children placed for adoption. Of these the children were in the following groups of siblings:

- 14 were single children
- 6 groups of 2 children
- 1 group of 3 children

The age ranges of the children placed is as follows:

1. 0-5 years – 25 children
2. 6-10 years – 4 children
3. over 10 years – 0 children

The children placed for adoption in Wigan are all of White British ethnicity.

Profile of children whose plan changed from adoption

In 2014/2015 Wigan had 9 children where the plan changed from adoption. Of these the children were in the following groups of siblings:

1. 4 were single children
2. 1 sibling group of 2
3. 1 sibling group of 3

The age ranges of the children where the plan changed is as follows:

1. 0-5 years – 5 children
2. 6-10 years – 4 children
3. Over 10 years – 0 children

The children where the plan changed from adoption were all of White British ethnicity.

Profile of children with a SHOBPA plan in 2014/2015

During 2014/2015 Wigan had 38 children with a shobpa plan where the plan was not changed. Of these the children were in the following groups of siblings:

1. 21 were single children
2. 7 groups of 2 children
3. 1 groups of 3 children

The age ranges of the children with a shobpa plan in 2014/2015 is as follows:

1. 0-5 years – 37 children
2. 6-10 years – 1 child
3. Over 10 years – 0

The children with a shobpa plan were all of White British ethnicity.

Score card results overview for 2014/2015

Wigan Council has tracking processes to ensure children being cared for under Section 20 (voluntary agreement with parent) are cared for under this remit for a much shorter period. There is a key strategy to ensure this trend continues via the legal gateway tracking meetings. These tracking meetings will be effective from May 2015.

During 2014/2015 Wigan Council's performance has seen 37% of their children looked after leaving care as a result of adoption. This is double the average percentage recorded for England during 2013/14 (17%) and only two other councils reported a higher percentage in 2013/14. This is a positive trend and although certain children/sibling groups can distort the overall adoption scorecards, the actual numbers of children leaving care through adoption is good.

During the year 49 children have been placed for adoption with the length of days between a child entering care and being placed for adoption decreasing. The average number of days for the A1 target during this year has been 599 days. Year on year the A1 target has improved and is a target aimed to be improved upon again during 2015/16.

The A2 target has seen 49 children matched to adoptive families within 12 months from the date of placement order. This is an increase in numbers of children being matched, but it is recognised that the DfE target, in terms of timescales, must be improved upon. In 2014/2015 the A2 score was 336 days. There are stories behind certain cases which brings the timescales up where family finding has proved more complex. Example of such complexities are

- Possible Foetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Complex Learning disabilities within the family background
- Physical health needs
- Complex mental health needs within family background

Within the final quarter of 2014/2015 17 children had been matched within 94 days of a Placement Order being granted. This is a significant improvement which will be a target to continue to improve upon during 2015/16.

Children awaiting placement

On the 31st March 2015 there were 25 children awaiting placement. 8 of these children had had their placement orders granted in the final quarter of 2014/2015. One sibling group of 2 within the cohort had had a delay in the care proceedings due to a family member being reassessed independently. 7 children (one sibling group of 3 and two sibling groups of 2) have potential matches for these children are being pursued. 2 children may conclude with their foster carers becoming the children's adopters. Active family finding with specific profiling is ongoing in respect of the remaining 6 children who are being scrutinized during the Social Workers supervisions and Child Looked After review mechanisms.

St Helens

Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Twin tracking

Within St. Helens CYPS, there is an adoption team consisting of three permanent children's social workers, two agency children's social workers and one part time Interim Permanence Coordinator/Team Manager. The Permanence Coordinator is responsible for tracking the care planning for all children with a likely plan for adoption. An adoption advice meeting chaired by the Permanence Coordinator, is held for all children with a likely plan for adoption. Adoption Social Workers then become involved at an early stage of care planning; by supporting the allocated social workers around adoption planning and undertaking specific tasks such as completing 'together or apart' assessments for sibling groups. The Permanence Coordinator also chairs adoption planning meetings, if a plan for adoption is then recommended the children's social worker will receive support from the Adoption Social Workers around completing the CPR in preparation for SHOBPA. A profiling meeting will also be convened immediately following the adoption planning meeting. The profiling meeting is chaired by the Permanence Coordinator, an adoption social worker will also attend who will become responsible for drafting the child's profile and undertaking 'family finding'. By 'family finding' at this early stage, it is intended that children will be matched promptly at the point of placement order.

The adoption team also operate an early permanence model for younger children with a plan for adoption. These children will become allocated to an adoption social worker at the start of care proceedings. Clearly this will enable the adoption social worker to also consider family finding at an earlier stage. In 2014/2015 there were seven children subject whose plan was early permanence allocated within the adoption team. Where appropriate fostering for adoption is considered for younger children. In 2014/2015 there were three children placed fostering for adoption within the adoption team.

Adoption Performance

There were 30 adoption orders granted in 2014/2015 and 30 Special Guardianship Orders. Therefore 22% of all discharges from care resulted in adoption and 22% of all discharges from care resulted in SGO. A total of 27 SHOBPA's were made, just 4 of these did not result in a plan for adoption being achieved.

Profile of children adopted in 2014/2015

As noted above there were 30 children adopted in 2014/2015, included within this number were six sets of siblings placed together. Nine of the children were aged four years or more at the time the adoption order was granted, with the remainder being aged between 0 and 2 years at the time of the adoption. Two of the children who were adopted had complex needs arising from an illness or disability.

Profile of children placed for adoption

At the end of 2014/2015 there were 28 children placed for adoption. Of these children there were six sets of siblings placed together, including one set of three siblings. There were no siblings placed apart whose original plan had been to place together. Nine of the children placed were aged four or over at the time of placement, whilst the majority of them were aged between 0 and 2 years. Four of the children placed for adoption were from a dual heritage background.

Profile of children whose plan changed from adoption

In 2014/2015 there were 12 children whose plans changed from adoption. Nine of these children had a LAC review decision confirming a plan for adoption, but the Court did not grant a placement order. Of the remaining three children alternative forms of permanence are being pursued. There were no adoption breakdowns in 2014/2015.

Profile of children with a SHOBPA plan in 2014/2015

The majority of the 27 children with a SHOBPA plan in 2014/2015 were aged between 0 and 2 years, with just two of the children aged 4 years or older. Within this number there were just two sibling sets, one child from a dual heritage background and two children with more complex needs arising from illness or disability.

Score card results overview for 2014/2015

In 2014/2015 the adoption score cards results for the A1 indicator (Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted) was 587 and for the A2 indicator (Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family) was 294. The 3 year average for 2012/2015 is 626 for the A1 indicator and 248 for the A2 indicator. It is apparent that the score card highlights a progressive increase in the A2 indicator over the 3 year period. This is of concern because clearly this means that there were children with placement orders waiting for a match. It is however also important to note that the adoption team did not change children's plans from adoption and were committed to 'family finding' for 'harder to place' children. Examples of the needs of the children who waited are as follows;

- Diagnosis of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome
- A family history of Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- A Child over 6
- An older sibling group with complex behavioural needs

Children awaiting placement

At the close of 2014/2015 there twenty three children listed on the adoption tracker under the category 'not placed'. Of these children eleven had a plan for adoption with their current foster carers and the assessments of their foster carers as adopters were in progress. A further seven of the children were linked with adopters and a match had been booked onto the Adoption Panel. Two children were linked with adopters and we were awaiting further medical information in relation to the adopters before a match could progress. One child was placed fostering for adoption with the social worker having lodged an application for a placement order with the Court. We were therefore only actively 'family finding' for two children with a plan for adoption, both of whom were awaiting a final court hearing in respect of placement order.

Warrington

Safeguarding, Early Intervention and Twin tracking

Following a decision from the WWiSH Management Board in December 2013, the Warrington adoption child care staff who were based at WWiSH in Lowton moved back to join the Children in Care Service at the Warrington Council offices in April 2014.

The two members of staff (1.5 full time equivalent) were each assigned to one of the Children in Care Teams, to be managed by the Permanence Co-ordinator. The Permanence Co-ordinator was responsible for the tracking of care proceedings and adoption work, ensuring that plans for adoption were progressing in a timely way. Unfortunately, the Permanence Co-ordinator moved on from what was a temporary post in September 2014 and the responsibility for care tracking has since moved to one of the Principal Managers in the Children in Care Teams.

Since moving from WWiSH the adoption social workers have continued to hold cases for those children with a Placement Order (or relinquished) with a plan for adoption. In addition, they have provided support to other workers who have wished to increase their experience of adoption. This has had the benefit of raising the profile of adoption, enhancing and developing adoption skills across the Children in Care Service.

Prior to an application being made to the Courts, in every case, the child is brought to a Legal Gateway Meeting for consideration of whether Threshold for care proceedings is met and whether an application is to be made to the courts, work to be undertaken at the pre-proceedings stage or whether work will continue under a Child Protection Plan. Where proceedings are issued, the possibility of placement with family members is explored and viability assessments are planned to give the child the best chance of being placed with

family members. Processes are in place to ensure that children who cannot return home or be placed with extended family at the end of care proceedings are considered for adoption.

Strong care planning and early intervention ensures that adoption is considered for any child who cannot live within the birth family. Care planning meetings are held throughout care proceedings to consider appropriate plans for the child are made in a timely way and Permanence Plans are made, in line with statutory requirements, at the four month review for every child who becomes looked after. Where adoption is the main or contingency plan for a child, a social worker from the adoption service is allocated to support the child's social worker in completion of the child's Permanence Report, where necessary and in all cases prior to Final Hearing to commence family finding when the plan is confirmed as adoption.

Adoption Performance 2014/ 2015

In the year to March 2015, 17 Adoption Orders were granted to Warrington children.

In addition 14 Special Guardianship Orders were granted. There were 14 children who were made subject of a Shobpa (should be placed for adoption) Decision.

Profile of children adopted 2014/2015

Warrington achieved 17 Adoption Orders during 2014/2015. This compares to 23 in 2013/14 and is more in line with expected levels of adoption within the borough. In terms of age, 16 of these children were under five years of age and one was aged six.

Of the 17 children adopted in 2014/2015, 13 were adopted by WWiSH adopters and two (a sibling group) by adopters from another local authority, two by a Voluntary Adoption Agency. These 17 children comprised five sets of two siblings

placed together in adoptive families and seven children placed alone, each of these seven children not having a sibling with a plan of adoption. In terms of ethnicity fifteen children were recorded as White British, one recorded as White and Asian, one recorded as Any Other Mixed Background.

There were no relinquished children during this period.

Profile of children placed for adoption

There were eleven children placed in adoptive placements at the end of the period 2014/2015. Of these two (a sibling group) are placed with a Voluntary Adoption agency. All of these children are aged five years and under. These comprised three sibling groups of two children, one child under one who was placed separately to his older siblings and four individual children with no siblings with a plan of adoption. In terms of ethnicity all eleven children are recorded as White British.

Profile of children whose plan changed from adoption

There was one child who had a plan for adoption and that plan was subsequently changed.

Profile of children with a SHOBPA Decision 2014/2015

There were 14 children with a Shobpa decision made during the year.

These can be broken down as follows:

- Two sibling groups of three (6 children)
- One sibling group of two (2 children)
- Six single children (6 children)

Of the sibling groups of three, in each case, the youngest child has been placed separately from the two older siblings, who in each case have been subsequently placed together for adoption.

The age profile for these children is as follows:

- 5 years or older 1
- 4-5 years 1
- 3-4 years 2
- 2-3 years 1
- 1-2 year 0
- 0-1 year 9

The ethnicity for all of these 14 children is White British.

Scorecard results overview 2014/2015

Overall performance during the year has improved considerably in respect of the adoption Scorecard, although as a result of historical cases still being part of the three Year Scorecard, Warrington continues to fall outside of government targets for the A1 and A2 cohort.

For the A1 measure (the number of days between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family), our three year scorecard stands at 646 days against a government target of 487 days. Our in-year figure stands at 527 days which shows an improving performance.

For the A2 measure, (the number of days from Placement Order being made to a child being matched with an adoptive family), our three year scorecard stands at 254 days against a government target of 121 days. Our in-year figure stands at 218 days which again shows an improving performance.

However, whilst these figures are improving, if we consider the **real time** performance, with the cohort of children who have been made subject of a Placement Order in the last 12 months, the figure is considerably improved. For those children, (10 placed, 1 adopted), the A1 average is **362** days and the A2

average is **99** days which demonstrates a significant improvement in performance and well ahead of government target on both key indicators.

For A3 (the percentage of children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with the adoptive family), Warrington falls short of the target of 60% on the Three Year Scorecard (49%) but exceeds target in-year with a figure of 66%.

These improvements are supported by improved timescales for the completion of care proceedings and a concerted push to more timely family finding for our children along with high numbers of adoptive families available from WWiSH. When the service was inspected by Ofsted in February and March 2105, this reasoning was accepted as an indicator of good performance and the Service was rated as Good in the final Ofsted report for Warrington.

Children awaiting placement

At the end of March 2015, there were six children awaiting a match with an adoptive family. Of these two children had complex and additional health needs and their current foster carers were being assessed to adopt them; both children having been accommodated at birth with their respective foster carers. Whilst each of these children have had lengthy periods whilst waiting to be matched for adoption, their experience is a positive one in that neither have had any changes of placement and the plan for them is to remain in these placements.

A sibling group of two needed therapeutic work to be undertaken before they could be placed. A positive decision was made to delay placing them pending the completion of this work in order to enhance the prospect of a successful match. There was an active match under consideration and the two children have been subsequently placed with adopters.

The other two children had Placement Orders made in January and February 2015 and both had an active match under consideration with one being considered for a match with their two older siblings who had been adopted previously.

Disruptions

In 2014/2015 there were no adoption disruptions post placement across the three boroughs. There was however one disruption during introductions for a Wigan child matched with WWiSH adopters. To ensure lessons were learnt from this disruption a Disruption Meeting was held, chaired by an independent person. It was identified that a key trigger to the disruption was in relation to the adopters birth child, which is a known risk factor.

This child has since been successfully placed with another adopter and the placement is going well.

Adoption Support

Adoption support is provided by a team of 5 social workers (one vacancy) and 3 Support Workers. This provision is supplemented by the commissioning of therapeutic services from a range of qualified specialists. This model enables the team to provide a flexible response and value for money.

There has been an increase in both the amount and the level of support offered to children in Warrington, Wigan and St Helens with a plan for adoption. This includes direct work with children who are awaiting an adoptive placement to ensure a stable transition into an adoptive placement. The range and scope of adoption support available increases the potential to place children with the most complex needs in a permanent family. In addition commissioned services have enabled us to broaden the menu of support available to children and families; however the majority of the support provide by WWiSH is provided by our team with a limited commissioned service through independent providers.

The services we provide on a 3 tiered basis:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Tier 1 | Wide universal support to adopters includes: Post adoption contact coordination. Unlimited access to adoption related workshops and family days. Telephone advice. Information via the WWiSH adoption website. Regular updates via newsletters. |
| Tier 2 | All of tier 1 and in addition: Activity days for primary school aged children, Therapeutic nurture groups for adoptive parents and their pre-school children, Webster Stratton adoptive parenting programme, support with complex contact issues, Birth records counseling for adults. Also included in this tier is support and independent counselling for birth relatives whose children have been adopted. |
| Tier 3 | Tiers 1 and 2 plus specific adoption support: Assessment of need is completed and individual adoption support plans devised, including Theraplay sessions to improve attachment, Life Story Work to address identity issues, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP). This tier also includes assessment of therapeutic needs, identification of relevant therapy and available resources and applications to the Adoption Support Fund. |

Tier 1

At the core of this Tier is the provision of a range of adoption related workshops and family days, which are organised and delivered by the adoption support team. WWiSH have created a rolling program of 2 ½ hour workshops, which are delivered at varying times in the day and week to ensure choice and easy accessibility for adopters. The range of workshops includes: talking to your child about adoption, introduction to DDP, attachment and brain development, social media issues and introduction to Theraplay. During this period we ran 10 workshops with an average attendance at each workshop of around 9 families; feedback from the workshops is extremely positively, evidencing that the subjects are relevant, interesting and useful. Family days are offered twice a year, summer and winter and are a very popular and well attended event, averaging

approximately 70 families, which results in over 100 children attending each one. The Birth Ties service is delivered by After Adoption. This service aims to provide counselling, guidance and information to birth families to assist them in dealing with loss. The service also aims to promote and support post adoption contact. After Adoption provide these services via 1-1 support and also groups in our local areas.

In the last year 23 Wigan Families have accessed support from Birth Ties, 8 St Helens Families and 8 Warrington families

Post Adoption Contact Scheme activity

April 2014 – March 2015

As of 31st March 2015 there were 359 arrangements for letterbox contact.

In 2014/2015 the following number of new post adoption contacts were set up

Warrington: 12

Wigan: 26

St Helens: 27

The following number of cases were closed as the children had reached 18:

Warrington: 2

Wigan: 3

St Helens: 2

Tier 2

During this year the Webster Stratton adoptive parenting programme has continued. This ten week training course, which is offered to all adopters, has been a highly successful addition to our adoption support provision at this level. The programme is delivered in-house by members of the team who have undergone the relevant training. Over the past year we have delivered three programmes with 22 families successfully completing the course. Feedback from

participants is very encouraging and indicates that the program is effective in preventing disruption and strengthening adoptive placements.

The adoption support team has two Social Workers trained to level 2 Theraplay and one to Level 1. In order to utilise these skills to advantage our adoptive families we have developed a theraplay nurture group for adopters of very young children. Our first course of six 1 ½ hour sessions took place in January with a group of 6 adults and 8 children aged 4 and under. The purpose of the group is to strengthen attachments, build confidence and establish a nurturing relationship between parents and child. The programme develops and enhances adopter's range of parenting skills, including equipping them with some easy to use Theraplay techniques.

The Adoption Support Team has identified a need to provide a support service to primary school aged children, who are affected by adoption. Plans are underway to provide an activity event for this group of children, to enable them to meet and talk about adoption, in a relaxed and supportive environment. Based on attendance and feedback, similar events will be arranged in the future. It is also hoped that attenders can be encouraged to develop as a focus group, to be used as the voice of adopted children in the ongoing development of the adoption support service.

The service received 41 referrals for birth records counselling, which is a reduction from last year, when we received 55 referrals. In the last year WWiSH provided a service to 37 adopted adults.

In addition 25 enquiries were received from people seeking advice and support in tracing birth relatives. WWiSH does not provide a full intermediary service therefore most of these cases are signposted.

Tier 3

This tier provides a higher level of involvement to those families who require direct adoption support, with tailored plans of intervention. All referrals are initially considered by the duty worker to determine what support can be provided through Tier 1 and Tier 2 services. Cases are then allocated to adoption support workers, who are trained to provide specialist input across a range of methods, for assessment. The range of support provided to adoptive families has included:

- Direct work with children and young people and their families. Work has included Theraplay (MIMS) assessments and sessions. Other therapeutic and behaviour management techniques, such as DDP and CBT have also been used.
- Life work and pre 18 summaries with adopted young people
- Child specific sessions with teaching staff
- Life story work with adoptive families

The Centre for Adoption Support is an independent service established using monies from the Adoption Reform Grant. For the past year WWiSH have worked closely with this service who provide a range of non-charged services to WWiSH adopters, thereby enhancing the range of services we are able to provide in-house. This has included direct work with children with an assessed support need, work within schools who have pupils affected by adoption, preparation for adoption and a range of training events.

During 2014/2015 the support service received 47 new referrals. Of these 36 became support cases under Tier 3. The requests for support covered the following areas:

- Difficult and complex behaviour problems
- Attachment problems
- Children and young people unaware they are adopted
- Identity and self-esteem issues
- Telling complex life stories

- Issues with contact, including social media complexities
- Mediation to prevent disruption
- Mental health issues
- Terminal illness and death within adoptive families
- New placement challenges
- Relationship issues/breakdown relating to the adopters

Over the past three years the number of requests for adoption support has remained steady and those being provided with a Tier 3 service is fairly unchanged. The service is supporting some extremely complex cases with children who have significant difficulties.

Diversity

Each Council has a Corporate Diversity and Equalities Strategy and WWiSH Adoption Service works towards achieving their objectives.

WWiSH Adoption Service has a key role to play through the provision of placements that are able to meet a diverse range of individual needs. We ensure that we provide services in a way which appropriately meets the needs of all individuals, and that our practice, policies and procedures do not discriminate against disadvantaged groups.

Safeguarding within WWiSH

The safety and wellbeing of all children is central to all of the work carried out at the WWiSH Adoption Service. This includes providing a sufficient pool of adopters to promote the best possible matches for children whose plan is adoption and would be at risk of harm if they remained in the care of their birth family. We ensure all prospective adopters backgrounds are thoroughly checked, which included DBS checks and references in stage 1. We also talk to applicants about Safer Caring and children's complex needs during preparation training and throughout their assessment. Approved Adopters who are not matched are also regularly reviewed and checks updated accordingly. This currently stands at 2

yearly intervals; however WWiSH has considered the learning from another Local Authority and will be implementing increased DBS checks in 2014/2015. The new process consists of;

- A requirement that applicants sign up to the on-line checking service once they have received their DBS certificate
- The certificate is then re-checked via the update service just prior to Panel for approval, prior to any introductions starting and again at the point of an application for an Adoption Order being made.

These changes have been introduced following information sharing by another Local Authority who had been informed by one of their approved adopters, just at the point of a child was about to be permanently placed following some introductions, that he had been arrested for possession of indecent images of children. Had it not been for his honesty the child would have been placed and there placed at further risk or harm. The WWiSH board considered this case and agreed on the new more robust system which will be fully implemented in 2015.

In addition each of the three Local Authorities complies with their own in-house Safer Recruitment policies for Staff. WWiSH staff regularly update their safeguarding training and also attend other relevant training e.g CSE training

Whistle blowing policy

Warrington, Wigan and St Helens are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, integrity and accountability. In line with that commitment, each Local Authority expects any staff member (including temporary and agency workers) who have genuine concerns about any aspect of the Council's work, to come forward and "Speak Out" under the auspices of the Whistle blowing policy and the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

Key Objectives for the coming 12 months

Safeguarding

To implement an enhanced process for the DBS checks of prospective and approved adopters.

Recruit to a full staff team

On the 31st March 2015 WWiSH had the following vacancies;

2 Fulltime Recruitment and Assessment Social Workers

1 Fulltime Recruitment and Business Officer

1 Part Time Adoption Support Social Worker

Accessing the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of children and their families

The Adoption Support Fund is to be launched on the 1st May 2015. The adoption support team will work with families to complete assessments of need and make appropriate applications to the fund.

Targeted recruitment

Recruitment campaigns will target adopters for the following areas

- Sibling Groups
- Foster For Adoption
- Children with a background of complex health needs, learning disabilities and mental health needs

Continued collaborative working to improve scorecard results

WWiSH will strive to continue to provide sufficient adopters to meet each of the three Local Authorities needs to ensure suitable and timely matches. WWiSH will also ensure there are sufficient Adoption Panels held to meet demand.

Develop a paper/ article regarding the development of WWiSH

Warrington, Wigan and St Helens are committed to sharing Best Practice with our colleagues in other Local Authorities and Independent Adoption Agencies. The Education and Adoption Bill, announced in the Queens Speech in May 2015, introduces measures that will enable the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies. As we have been working with this model for over 3 years we believe it would be useful to share our journey with others.

Increase Panel membership

Due to the continued increased demand for Panel slots we intend to increase Panel membership to reduce the call on each member's time.

Continued staff development and training

Each staff member will continue to access appropriate training that supports their learning and development relevant to their role

Development of website

The WWiSH website continues to be a successful forum for potential adopters to seek information about adoption and WWiSH. This following year the website will be updated with new case studies and information packs will be available on line.

Implementation of new Policies and Procedures

The three Local Authorities have recently commissioned Tri.X policies and procedures to ensure consistency across the boroughs. WWiSH are in the process of localising these and plan for the implementation of the completed policies and procedures by the end of summer 2015.

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