



Adoption Annual Report 2015-16

www.wwish.org.uk



Introduction

The WWiSH Adoption Service was established in 2011. Warrington, Wigan and St Helen's councils were the first Local Authorities to collaborate and develop a shared adoption service. The Service is hosted by Wigan Council and provides the recruitment and assessment of adopters, Adoption Panel and Adoption Support services 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 innovative 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 at the event.

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

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 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 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.

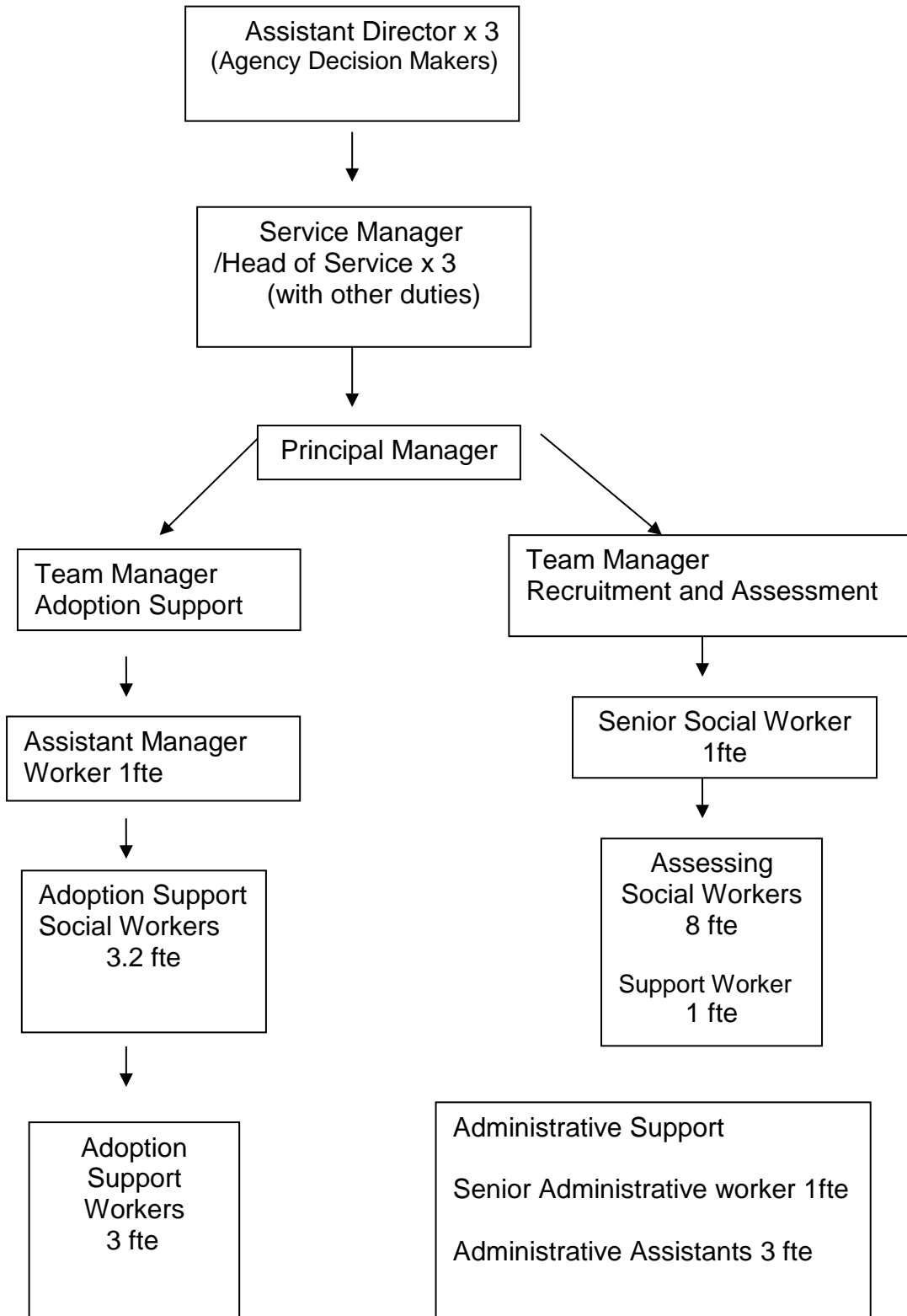
To signpost prospective adopters who are interested in Inter Country Adoption to the relevant Adoption Agency.

Structure of the Service

Each Local Authority has two named Agency Decision Makers. The Service Manager is responsible for the day to day running of the service. She is supported by the Principal Manager who also acts as the Adoption Agency Adviser 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 with responsibility for the recruitment and assessment of adopters and the other for the development of adoption support services for children, adoptive families and birth families affected by adoption.

Shared Adoption Service Structure



WWiSH staff work alongside the front line Social Work teams in each of the three Local Authorities and 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 those 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.

Review of Key Objectives for the past 12 months

Safeguarding

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

Outcome: A process has been devised and being implemented which will result in increased scrutiny regarding adopter's suitability prior to a match with a child.

Recruitment

Objective: Recruit to a full staff team

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

2 fte Recruitment and Assessment social workers

1 fte Recruitment and Business Officer

0.5 fte Adoption Support Social Worker

Outcome: The 2.5 fte social work posts have been recruited to. A review of the recruitment and business officer post has been undertaken and it was agreed that this post was no longer required, with all tasks being fulfilled by others.

Adoption Support Fund

Objective: Accessing and maximising use of the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of children and their families.

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

Outcome: The Adoption Support Team made 35 applications to the support fund in 2015/2016 totaling £113,897.54

Targeted recruitment

Objective: 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*

Outcome: Initially the focus was upon recruitment for these targeted groups however during the course of the year a significant increase in the number of babies requiring adoptive families resulted in WWiSH accepting applications from all prospective adopters in August 2015.

Continued collaborative working to improve scorecard results

Objective: 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.

Outcome: 79% of children placed from Warrington, Wigan and St, Helens were placed with WWiSH approved adopters. The aim is to improve on this figure in 2016/17.

Develop a paper/ article regarding the development of WWiSH

Objective: Warrington, Wigan and St Helens are committed to sharing Best Practice with our colleagues in other Local Authorities. In line with the Education and Adoption Bill WWiSH believes it would be useful to share our Journey with others.

Outcome: WWiSH staff have met with colleagues from other North West Regional Adoption Agency planning groups and with colleagues in other geographical areas to share their experiences of the challenges in establishing WWiSH and the benefits to working in a shared adoption service.

Increase Panel membership

Objective: Due to the continued increased demand for Panel slots WWiSH intends to increase Panel membership to reduce the call on each member's time.

Outcome: There were 2 successful recruitment campaigns for the Adoption Panel Central List. However due to members changing job roles further recruitment campaigns are to be held.

Continued staff development and training

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

Outcome: every staff member has accessed training this year in-line with their own development needs. There has also been whole service training for Safeguarding and Recording Skills.

Development of website

Objective: To update and develop the WWiSH website.

Outcome: The WWiSH website continues to be a successful forum for potential adopters to seek and obtain information about adoption and WWiSH. Work has been undertaken to update and develop the website and in 2016 -17 the website will be updated with new case studies and information packs will be available on line.

Implementation of new Policies and Procedures

Objective; to implement new adoption policies and procedures

Outcome; The three Local Authorities commissioned Tri.X policies and procedures to ensure consistency across the boroughs. These were rolled out across the three boroughs and have been updated at regular intervals.

National Adoption Agenda 2015 - 2016

The Queens Speech in May 2015 announced the Education and Adoption Bill. This Bill, if passed, will give the Government powers to force Local Authorities to merge their adoption services, if they do not do so on a voluntary basis. The government's aim is to:

- Increase the scale in which adoption agencies deliver their services by introducing Regional Adoption Agencies

- These regional agencies would work across local authority boundaries to match children without delay

As the countries first existing shared adoption service this concept is not something new to the WWiSH partnership, indeed it is this kind of innovation that Warrington, Wigan and St. Helens embraces to develop services for our children and families.

As part of the Government's proposals for Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) it is held that each RAA should have the ability to be able to match approximately 200 children per year with adoptive families. With this figure in mind the WWiSH partnership began discussions with other Local Authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. A bid has been submitted to the DFE to access available funding to assist in the development and implementation of the proposed Regional Adoption Agency. Cheshire West and Chester and Halton are the two Local Authorities who would like to work with the existing three partners to develop a new Regional Adoption Agency. There are also five partner Voluntary Adoption Agencies who are working with the five Local Authorities to develop a model where the best of the voluntary and statutory sectors can be brought together.

Recruitment and Assessment

Enquiries

There was a good level of enquires this year with 184 expressions of interests. The conversion rate to approval was approximately 25%.

The ratio of initial enquiries to approved application in the North West was 15% (2013/14) which was the same as the previous year (2012/13). However there is considerable variation across local authorities in 2013/14 ranging from 4% to 33%. The WWiSH conversion rate when compared with the above figures is positive.

Approvals

44 sets of adopters have been approved in 2015/2016. 20 of these were fast tracked to stage two of the assessment process due to being foster carers wishing to adopt the child/ren in their care, adopters wanting a sibling placement or 2nd time adopters.

79% of children from Warrington, Wigan and St. Helens have been placed with WWiSH adopters during this year; however it has been recognised that due to 46% of approved adopters living within the Wigan area it has restricted the placement choice within WWiSH for Wigan children. The recruitment campaign for 2016/17 will encourage applications from a wide range of areas to provide additional resources for all the children within the service.

Of those adopters matched during 2015/2016 the average waiting time from approval to match was 4.8 months. This is good practice.

Approval figures were lower than the previous year; however this reflects the national picture as there are now twice as many approved adopters as there are children waiting for families. The Recruitment and Assessment team are now fully staffed therefore there will be more scope for recruitment campaigns and targeted recruitment throughout the following year in order to approve adopters whose matching criteria reflects the children waiting.

Targeted recruitment

Recruitment campaigns will target adopters for the following areas

- Sibling Groups
- Fostering for Adoption
- Children with a background of complex health needs, learning disabilities and mental health needs
- Adopters who live in a wider range of areas.

Timescales

Additional efforts have been made to address and reduce the timescales of assessments in accordance with the adoption regulations. The average percentage of stage two assessments being completed within timescales has increased during the last 6 months of the year to 94%.

It is acknowledged that performance in relation to the timeliness of completion of stage one assessments was poor. In the main this was largely due to the delay in return of DBS disclosures and medical information. This is an issue not only for

WWiSH but for other adoption teams in the North West. The Regional Adoption Managers group is considering ways in which these delays can be lessened. WWiSH has taken steps to combat unnecessary delay by re-vamping the process during the early stages of assessment. Applicants are now given the DBS forms prior to the initial visit and the documents are checked during the initial visit by the social worker to ensure that full information has been provided. Once the Registration of Interest form is received then the DBS can be processed immediately. The applicants are asked to arrange an appointment for an adoption medical with their GP prior to submitting the Registration of Interest form, thus ensuring that the medical takes place during the timescale for the stage one. Social workers have been asked to complete the stage one and two plans in a robust way, giving clear direction and guidelines to the applicants and these are monitored during supervision sessions. The team manager and senior social worker have completed audits during stage one and two to track progress and address any issues that might cause delay. Stage one timescales were beginning to improve at the end of the year as a direct result of these changes. These timescales are tracked and monitored on a monthly basis and will continue to do so through the next 12 months to ensure continued improvements.

Training

Preparation training- all applicants attend this training

A three day course is held during stage one of the prospective adopter's assessment and is based around the following themes:

- The meaning of adoption for children and prospective adopters
- Children's care plans and legal routes to adoption
- Options for permanence and why permanence is important
- What do children need from an adoptive family?
- Child development and unmet need
- Children's and birth parents backgrounds and possible implications
- Abuse and neglect and the impact on children
- Considering ways of supporting children from abusive backgrounds
- Opportunity to consider children's profiles
- Loss and Grief

- Identity
- Attachment
- Parenting Strategies
- Resilience
- Adoption from a child's perspective (about preparing children for adoption, transition to placement, life story work and later life letter.) Opportunity to meet with a child's social worker.
- Contact
- Adoption Contact Triangle
- Matching and introductions -- opportunity to meet with a foster carer
- Procedures and practice around approving prospective adopters.

From April 2015 until March 2016 WWiSH held 6 preparation training groups. WWiSH works closely with our partners in Halton to ensure prospective adopters receive timely training. Over the last six months several adopters from Halton have attended some of WWiSH's pre-approval training and in April two sets of WWiSH adopters will be attending Halton's training as they are unable to make the WWiSH dates.

Speakers evening

The preparation group is then followed up by a speakers evening, which is an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet with adopters who have previously adopted or are currently adopting children. The adopters who speak at the evening are chosen to reflect the group issues that have been raised during the three days preparation course, for example adopting sibling groups.

The effects of substance and alcohol misuse during pregnancy training session

This session is delivered 3 or 4 times a year and has always been well received by adopters. WWiSH have evidenced within assessments that this session has had a positive impact on prospective adopters matching considerations and their understanding of children's potential needs. Applicants are able to attend this training in stage one or two of their assessment.

Adopters who have previously adopted have also linked into this session through the Adoption Support team.

Attachment & Adoption Support training session

This training is a full day and is provided by the adoption support team. The training focuses on the following themes:-

- Attachment and brain development
- Impact of neglect
- Letter box contact
- Agency support available
- The adoption support fund
- Adopted adults and accessing records.

This session allows applicants to focus more on the importance of attachment and allows them the opportunity to meet with the adoption support service. This session is delivered 3 times a year.

Foster For Adoption Training

The Recruitment and Assessment team has further developed the Foster for Adoption training. It was held that it would be beneficial to provide this training on two levels. Firstly, initial information provided during a Foster for Adoption information evening and then secondly, a more in-depth training course looking at the requirements of being a foster carer. Wider family members are also invited to this training to allow them to see the reality of the support that is needed.

Fostering for adoption placements are beneficial for children and prospective adopters for a number of reasons which includes:

- Children are placed with carers who may become their adopters, giving permanence at an early stage and it allows prospective adopters to begin bonding as early as possible, in some cases following the child's discharge from hospital after birth
- It avoids the damage caused by terminating temporary foster care relationships which they will have experienced as their primary parenting relationship

- It allows the early months and years of the child's life to be what most children need and expect

For these reasons WWiSH aims to recruit as many Fostering For Adoption carers as possible by providing applicants with relevant information and training.

The full days training sits within stage two of the prospective adopter's assessment and is compulsory for all applicants to attend if they wish to provide a fostering for adoption placement.

The training covers the following themes:

- What is fostering for adoption
- Child's needs and profiling
- Fostering for adoption assessment
- Approval as a foster carer
- Fostering Agreement and Safer caring
- Parental Responsibility
- Record keeping
- Managing contact
- Support
- Rehabilitation home.

This day is delivered with the support of Wigan's fostering team and is also an opportunity for applicants to meet with adopters who have provided a fostering for adoption placement. Feedback from applicants is that the training was beneficial in giving clarity and support.

Feedback from adoption workers has indicated that the training has allowed prospective adopters to become more comfortable and confident in providing a fostering for adoption placement.

Fostering for adoption working party.

WWiSH have acknowledged that there needs to be a common practice and procedure across the three Local Authorities and WWiSH and that colleagues from the future Regional Adoption Agency need to be involved in the planning, therefore a working party was established, which included our future partners from Cheshire West and Chester and Halton.

The working party involves fostering workers, adoption workers, childcare workers, adopters from all five local authorities.

The working party meets every 6 weeks and is currently focusing on the following themes:-

Fostering for adoption – fostering agreement

Fostering for Adoption Handbook

Safe care policy

Health and Safety agreement.

Delegated responsibility.

Recording.

Sufficiency of Adopters- approved adopters in 2015/2016

Profile of adopter approval	
Adopters approved for 1 child	39
Adopters approved for 2 children	6
Adopters approved for 3 children	0
Total	45

Adopters approved to adopt the following ages	
0-3 years	27
3 +	18

Of the 45 approved adopters the following have these specific profiles

Foster for Adoption	7
Approved in relation to a specific child	12
Adopters applying to adopt a sibling of their adopted	8

child/ren	
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Inter-country adoption arrangements

This service is currently provided through a service level agreement with the Inter Country Adoption Centre.

Adoption Panel

The adoption Panel met 31 times in the period 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016.

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

Children matched at panel	Total to date
No. of children matched	96
- Wigan children	46
- Warrington children	12
- St. Helens children	38
Children matched with WWiSH adopters	77
- Wigan children	38
- Warrington children	11
- St. Helens children	28
Children matched with other LA	13
- Wigan children	9
- Warrington children	0
- St. Helens children	4
Children matched with VA	6
- Wigan children	0
- Warrington children	1
- St. Helens children	5

Two relinquished babies were also presented to Panel for consideration as to whether a 'Should be placed for adoption decision' was in their best interests.

Maintaining the central list has been a key focus. Over the year several experienced Panel members, both independent members and social workers left due to job changes and changes in personal circumstances. This has meant that achieving quoracy has often been difficult but has always been achieved. A great deal of effort has been, and continues to be made, to recruit new members. Members are in the process of being interviewed, observing Panel and undergoing the induction process. All newly recruited Panel Members are invited to attend new Panel member training facilitated by Caritas Care.

Panel members bring varied skill sets and backgrounds including backgrounds in social work, education, as adoptive parents and adopted adults. The contributions from the Medical Advisers are both essential and much valued. On one occasion it has been requested that a legal adviser attend panel and their presence and advice was much appreciated. The contribution from all these Panel members has served to enable the Panel to be robust and informed when considering applications and matches.

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, and yet are confident to maintain any strongly held opinions. In order to improve Panel member's ability to efficiently undertake the high workload on any Panel day, whilst maintaining the necessary rigour, Panel members have been asked to submit questions and queries to the chair in advance so that potential issues for discussion can be collated and refined swiftly on the day. Feedback from Panel members indicates that this is a helpful practice and the procedure will continue to be refined.

The role of Panel Advisor is currently shared by the Principal Manager of WWiSH, the manager of the Adoption Support Team and the manager of the Adoption Assessment Team. Their support and guidance is always available to the chair and appreciated by Panel.

A number of experienced staff from the administrative team has moved onto new jobs. This has resulted in the remaining staff facing considerable pressure to complete the numerous administrative tasks. New staff have been appointed; however Panel would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that throughout this difficult time members of the administrative team have always been helpful and supportive to Panel members.

Quality Assurance feedback is collated 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 member's duties and members contribute effectively.

Panel members continue to view the format of the Prospective Adopters Report positively and find it emphasises the analysis of necessary information.

Over the year the quality of the Child Permanence Reports continues to vary; it has been evident that each of the three Local Authorities continues to strive for improvement. The new Child Permanence Report template was fully implemented this year and Panel members think that this is a clearer format than the previous document. The reports are always completed within six weeks of being submitted to Panel.

Accommodation remains an issue. 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, the waiting arrangements for applicants and presenting Social Workers have been much improved. The two rooms available 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 and comments from applicants confirm that this has been their experience. Feedback from the prospective adopters about their experience of the training, assessment and the Panel process is also overall positive.

The annual Panel training day was held on the 7th October 2015. Social Workers and support workers from each of the three authorities and WWiSH also attended the day to promote shared learning. The feedback from Panel members was that the content of the day was informative and helpful.

Panel members continue to be invited to attend the training sessions and workshops available to prospective adopters and have begun to attend, such courses as:

- 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 also been invited to Safeguarding training.

Adoption Performance

Warrington

Following a restructure in July 2015 the adoption social workers now sit within the Safeguarding Service. This decision was made to enable the adoption social workers to work closely with the child care social worker, identifying children whose plan may be adoption at the earliest opportunity.

There are 2.5fte adoption social workers who are managed by a Safeguarding Principal Team Manager who has overall responsibility for adoption work across the service, including case tracking, meeting adoption targets and liaison with WWiSH.

The adoption social workers continue to hold cases for those children with a Placement Order (or relinquished) with a plan for adoption. The adoption social worker works alongside the safeguarding social worker once a plan of adoption is being considered and supports the completion of the Child's Permanence Record and attends the profiling meeting prior to the Placement Order being made. Once the profiling meeting has been held the adoption social worker commences 'family

finding.' By 'family finding' at this early stage it is intended that children will be linked with their prospective adoptive family at the point of Placement Order.

Over the last twelve months support and training has been offered to the safeguarding social workers in permanence planning as this was a new task for many, as care proceedings and permanence planning was previously managed within the Children in Care Team. This training is continuing further into 2016 - 17.

Where appropriate Fostering for Adoption is considered for younger children and in 2015/2016 two children were placed in Fostering to Adopt placements.

In 2015 - 16 17 Adoption Orders were granted for Warrington children. This is the same number as for 2014 -15 and is in line with the expected levels of adoption for the size of the borough. In terms of age, 15 of these children were five years of age or under and 2 were aged 6 at the time that the Adoption Order was made. Two of these children had complex needs arising from a disability.

These 17 children comprised four sets of two siblings placed together in adoptive families and 9 children placed alone. Of the children placed alone 7 did not having a sibling with a plan of adoption; one was a sibling placed apart from his two older siblings and one was a child placed with siblings that had been adopted in the previous year. In terms of ethnicity 16 of the children were recorded as White British, with one recorded as Any Other Mixed Background.

In addition to the 17 Adoption Orders 28 Special Guardianship Orders were granted.

There were nine children placed in adoptive placements at the end of the period 2015/2016. All of these children are aged five years and under. These comprised two sibling groups of two children, and five individual children with no siblings with a plan of adoption. In terms of ethnicity all these children are recorded as White British.

There were no children whose plan for adoption was changed in 2015/2016.

There were 25 children with a should be placed for adoption (Shobpa) decision made during the year. One of these children was adopted in the same year (2015/2016) as the Shobpa Decision made.

During the year 17 children have been adopted with the number of days between a child entering care and placed in an adoptive family decreasing from the previous year. The number of days for the A1 measure (the number of days between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family) during this year was 517 days. This is an improvement on the previous year when the average time was 527 days.

For the A2 measure (the number of days from Placement Order being made to a child being matched with an adoptive family) our in year figure stands at 238 set against a government target of 121 days. This is a decrease in performance when compared to by the previous year when Warrington in year figure stood at 218 days. This can be accounted for by a sibling group of two with additional needs and two individual children with disabilities that were harder to place. The A2 measure for the other thirteen adopted children is 158 days.

The current real-time figure for children placed with adoptive families demonstrates a considerable improvement in performance. For this group of children the A1 measure is 332 days and for A2 is 122 days.

At the end of March 2016 there were eight children awaiting a match. Of these two (siblings) had a family selected and were booked into Panel for matching. Two other children had a family selected and family finding was being progressed. The other four children are a sibling group of four with a plan to place the two younger twins together and the two older siblings together.

Wigan

During the 2015/2016 Wigan's adoption team has seen a Principal Manager appointed and in post by May 2015. The team at this time consisted of the Principal Manager, two senior Social Workers, 5 Social Workers and 2 support workers seconded to the team for a 12 month period; however the support workers were successful in gaining permanent posts in other teams before the 12 months secondments were completed and they could not be replaced.

In November 2015 a finance officer was appointed to the Adoption and Special guardianship service. She is placed within the team and conducts initial financial assessments and annual reviews of financial assessments in respect of both special guardianship allowances and adoption allowances. This is a positive addition to the team.

During 2015 - 2016 41 Adoption Orders were granted for Wigan children. 22 were single children, 16 were in sibling groups of 2, and, 3 were a sibling group of 3 children.

The above children ranged in ages as follows:

0 – 5 years	37 children
6 -10 years	4 children

Of the 41 children adopted during 2015/2016 one child had a diagnosed disability. All of the children were of White British heritage.

On the 31st March 2016 Wigan had 33 children placed for adoption and 17 children not placed but where Shobpa's had been granted.

During 2015/2016 Wigan has had two adoption disruptions prior to the prospective adopters lodging their applications to adopt. One couple had had the child placed with them for only 8 weeks. For this particular child, a 7 year old boy, a disruption meeting was held as per procedures and some lessons learned from this related to:

1. CPR required rewriting to tell a more comprehensive and up to date story of the child and his needs
2. Consideration needs to be given to the length of introductions and 'rest days' being built in for all concerned
3. The impact of targets/timescales on children being considered in future from both a positive and negative perspective.

This child is now placed with alternative adopters following a connected person expressing a wish, along with her husband, to be assessed to care for him.

The second child, an 8 year old boy, was placed with his single female adopter in September 2013. She never lodged her application to adopt and the placement disrupted in January 2016. A disruption meeting has been scheduled. His care plan is now being reconsidered.

Wigan placed 6 children under Fostering For Adoption regulations during 2015/2016 and one child is placed in a concurrency placement with Caritas Care.

Wigan are represented by the Principal Manager on a working group led by Caritas Care to look at a Dual Approval Scheme aimed at primary school aged children with additional needs where fostering should lead to a placement becoming an adoptive placement. The lead managers from Caritas Care have visited Wigan and given two separate presentations to adoption and social work team managers and to the respective social workers in the teams. Awareness of this scheme being developed may promote alternative ways of achieving permanence if Caritas Care is successful in recruiting carers to meet the need.

Both the A1 and A2 scorecard results have improved this year; however there has been a number of children who have either achieved adoption this year or been placed for adoption (11 in total) who have taken longer to match than the score card targets. The story behind these children who have waited longer to achieve permanence through adoption has been analysed. Although such children do skew the adoption scorecard, Wigan Council will always strive to ensure that children do achieve permanence through adoption if this is the proposed care plan and it is determined to be in their best interests.

The A1 scorecard average for 2015/2016 (the average length of time from when a child becomes looked after to being placed for adoption) was 467 days. Without the identified 11 children the A1 scorecard for 2015/2016 would have been 368 days. The government target for this is 426 days so Wigan would have exceeded this target figure for 2015/2016. The statistics gathered by the DfE cover each three

year period – so for 2013/16 Wigan’s A2 scorecard is 272 days and Wigan’s A1 scorecard is 583 days.

The scorecard, during 2015/2016 for A2 (the average length of time between the Placement Order being granted and the match) was 215 days. Without the identified 11 children who have skewed the figures, the A2 scorecard for 2015/2016 would have been 148 days. The government target is 121 days and Wigan is working towards this but with due regard being paid to the individual needs of each child.

Of the 126 children made subject to adoption orders since April 2013 the identified 11 children in the 2015/2016 cohort of children adopted or placed tell the story for a minority of children this year. The plan of adoption has always been maintained, sometimes against all the odds and these children (bar one) have managed to achieve permanence through adoption. In Wigan, if the care plan should be one of adoption, then this plan will be pursued. Scorecards are put in place to prevent drift and to ensure timely placements for our children and tracking of all children is undertaken. However, there will always be some children who need more time, where selection in reality proves wrong, or where the challenges faced need further care planning. Such children still deserve permanence and Wigan will strive to achieve this regardless of scorecard expectations.

During 2015/2016 Wigan has had 44 Special Guardianship Orders granted. Of these 11 have been granted to former foster carers and 32 have been granted to connected persons other than foster carers. This has been a huge increase in terms of numbers and, in some instances, complexities of issues for the carers. As a comparison in 2014/15 only 12 special guardianship orders were granted, however it is noted that there is a national trend in terms of an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders being made.

Wigan has 1.5 fte support workers assigned to specifically offer support to Special Guardians and social work support can be initiated via the friends and family social work team should there be a need for this.

St. Helens

Within St. Helen's People Services there is an Adoption team consisting of three permanent adoption social workers, managed by the Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption. The Service Manager is responsible for tracking the care plans for all children with a likely plan for adoption. The adoption social workers meet with the frontline social workers and offer adoption advice in respect of all children with a likely plan for adoption. This means that adoption social workers become involved at an early stage of care planning and are able to support frontline social workers.

Adoption social workers 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 Service Manager is responsible for chairing adoption planning meetings. If a plan for adoption is then recommended the frontline social worker will receive support from the adoption social workers around completing the Child's Permanence Record in preparation for the Shobpa decision. A profiling meeting will also be convened if the adoption planning meeting highlights adoption as an appropriate plan. The profiling meeting is chaired by the Service Manager, an adoption social worker also attends as it is this worker who will be 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 2015/2016 there were eleven children whose plan was early permanence allocated within the adoption team. Where appropriate Fostering For Adoption is considered for younger children. In 2015/2016 there were three children placed fostering for adoption within the adoption team.

At the close of 2015/2016 there were eleven children listed on the adoption tracker under the category 'not placed'. Of these children two had a plan for adoption with their foster carer but this had been delayed due to the older child exhibiting very challenging behaviour. An assessment is now being completed looking at the plan

for these two children and a care planning meeting is scheduled. Three of the children are linked with adopters and for the remaining six children family finding is in progress. Of the remaining six children there is only one child with a Placement Order for whom a link has not been identified. For this child permission has been granted for 'family finding' outside of WWiSH and the social worker is in the process of considering adopter profiles sent through Adoption Link.

There were 50 Adoption Orders granted for St Helens children in 2015/2016 and 26 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). Therefore 31% of all discharges from care resulted in adoption and 18% of all discharges from care resulted in SGO. A total of 28 Shobpa's were made in 2015/2016.

As noted above there were 50 children adopted in 2015/2016. Included within this number are nine sibling sets placed together one of whom was a sibling set of three. Fourteen of the children were aged 5 or over including one child aged 11 years. The remainder were all aged 0 - 4 years. Three of the children were from a Dual Heritage Minority background.

At the end of 2015/2016 there were 15 children placed for adoption. Of these children there were a sibling set of four children placed in two separate placements and another sibling set of two children. Four of the children were aged 5 or over with the remainder aged 0 - 4 years. All of these children were from a White British background.

In 2015/2016 there was just one child whose plan changed from adoption. This child had a Looked After Child review decision confirming a plan for adoption and a Shobpa decision. A placement order was not however granted in Court.

The majority of the 28 children with a Shobpa decision in 2015/2016 were aged between 0 and 2 years, with just four of the children aged 5 years or older. Within this number there were just two sibling sets, no children from a Dual Heritage background and two children with more complex needs arising from developmental uncertainty.

In 2015/2016 the adoption scorecard 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 558 days against a national target of 487 days 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 317 days against the national target of 121 days. In 2015/2016 the team have shown a real commitment to matching children in a timely fashion and this is beginning to show on the score card with 15 children in 2015/2016 having achieved a match within 121 days of placement order. There was however a significant number of children adopted in 2015/2016 that had previously waited for a year or more to achieve a match. On a positive note St. Helens remained committed to a plan for adoption for these children but clearly A2 performance has been poorer as a result.

Adoption Support

Adoption support for Warrington, Wigan and St Helens is provided by a team of 5 social workers and 3 support workers based within WWiSH. 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. 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, via the adoption support fund, have enabled us to broaden the menu of support available to children and families. A high level of the support provided to children and their adoptive families continues to be delivered WWiSH's adoption support service, although this has reduced slightly over the past twelve months with a notable increase in commissioned services through independent providers.

The adoption support service received a total of 120 requests for support in 2015/2016. This is a significant increase when comparing the number of requests in 2014/2015 which was 47. Of these 120 requests 113 families received specific support. These figures do not include access to records support services.

We provide services on a 3 tiered basis:

Tier 1	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.

At the core of tier one is the provision of a range of adoption related workshops and family days, which are organised and delivered by the Adoption Support team. WWiSH has 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 12 month period the team 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 very popular and well attended events. Attendance on average is approximately 70 families, which results in over 100 children attending each event.

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 related to adoption. 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.

Post Adoption Contact Scheme activity

April 2015 – March 2016

As of 31st March 2016 there were 477 arrangements for letterbox contact.

In 2015/2016 the following number of new post adoption contacts were set up:

Warrington: 11

Wigan: 40

St Helens: 39

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

Warrington: 3

Wigan: 11

St Helens: 23

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. The programme is delivered in-house by members of the team who have undergone the relevant training. Over the past year the team has delivered two programmes with 15 families successfully completing the course. Feedback from all families who have participated in the course 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, two social workers and one support worker to Level 1. In order to utilise these skills to benefit adoptive families a theraplay nurture group for adopters of very young

children has been developed. The first course of six 1 ½ hour sessions took place in January 2015 with a group of 6 adults and 8 children aged 4 and under. Two further courses took place in April and September 2015, with a total of 9 families participating. 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.

In early 2015 the Adoption Support team identified a need to provide a support service to primary school aged children, who are affected by adoption. Two activity events for this group of children were provided in April and August 2015. The purpose of these events was to create a safe, relaxing and supportive environment which would enable the participating children to meet and to talk about adoption. Based on the good attendance and positive feedback, similar events are being planned for the future.

The service received 26 referrals for birth records counselling, which is a year on year reduction. There were 41 referrals last year and 55 the previous year. In 2015/2016 WWiSH provided a service to 51 adopted adults.

In addition 35 enquiries were received from people seeking advice and support in tracing birth relatives. WWiSH does not provide a full intermediary service, 25 people received a partial intermediary service and 10 cases were signposted.

All referrals to the Adoption Support team 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, by the team manager, to adoption support workers who are trained to provide specialist input across a range of methods, for assessment

The requests for support have 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
- New placement challenges
- Complex issues within school

. 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
- Applications to the Adoption Support Fund for a range of commissioned services

Until the middle of 2015 the number of requests for adoption support remained steady and those being provided with a Tier 3 service was fairly constant. However, the referral rate for adoption support has begun to increase, most likely due to the growth of adoption support services, the launch of the Adoption Support Fund and the increased publicity around the support now available to adoptive families.

The Adoption Support team will endeavour to continue to assess and provide support to adoptive families in a timely and efficient manner.

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. WWiSH ensures that

services are provided 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 in 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 who would be at risk of harm if they remained in the care of their birth family. WWiSH ensures that all prospective adopters backgrounds are thoroughly checked, which includes DBS checks and references in stage 1. Applicants are provided with information 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 Authorities and has implemented increased DBS checks in using the on-line checking service.

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 were introduced following information sharing by another Local Authority who had been informed by one of their approved adopters, just at the point that a child was about to be permanently placed following introductions, that he had been arrested for possession of indecent images of children. Had it not been for the prospective adopter's honesty the child would have been placed and thereby placed at further risk or harm.

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, with all staff attending Safeguarding training in 2015. All Panel members were invited, with several attending, including the Chair.

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 2016/2017

The focus for the next 12 months will be the development of the new Regional Adoption Agency. Warrington, Wigan, St Helens, Cheshire West and Chester and Halton and the five voluntary adoption agency partners have submitted a development plan to the DFE to form a Regional Adoption Agency. The existing WWiSH partnership and its staff are already experienced in working within a shared service therefore the service is looking forward to working with our new partners.

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