

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	28 November 2018
<b>Executive Member / Reporting Officer:</b>	Councillor Oliver Ryan – Executive Member (Children’s Services) Gani Martins – Assistant Director (Children’s Services)
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>ANNUAL ADOPTION REPORT</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	The report provides information to the Board of the work and progress of Tameside Adoption service since the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency in 2017.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	To note the progress made since the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency and the planned developmental work for 2018/2019.
<b>Links to Community Strategy:</b>	Supports vulnerable young children who cannot live with their birth families to be safeguarded through adoption.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires all Councils to be part of an Adoption Agency by 2020. The Adoption service is a regulated service and is subject to Ofsted scrutiny and inspection.
<b>Financial Implications: (Authorised by the Section 151 Officer)</b>	<p>The Executive Cabinet meeting of 18 October 2017 gave approval for the Council to become a constituent member of Adoption NoW with effect from 6 November 2017. Section 13.5 of the related report stated that <i>‘the initial two years of the Regional Adoption Agency arrangement will focus on improving quality and as such there is no intention to achieve savings from the formation of the Regional Adoption Agency, with each local authority committing to maintain staffing levels and operational budgets during this period of time.’</i></p> <p>The report approved additional investment of £ 0.059 million by the Council in the inaugural year. This was to support a share of the financing of additional recruitment and marketing posts of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), a fully funded business support post and the estimated impact of additional travel related costs for Council employees under this arrangement. The additional investment would support the increased demands placed on the RAA due to the support required relating to sibling groups and older age children within Tameside. It is envisaged the financial benefits of this additional support provided would then materialise in the longer term.</p> <p>Clearly efficiencies and demonstration of value for money (whilst maintaining quality standards) beyond the first two years of this arrangement will be expected. However, the details of expected efficiencies are not currently available. It is essential these are considered by Elected Members at the earliest opportunity when provided.</p> <p>It is also essential the development plan priorities as stated in section 5.8 of the report are aligned to the Council’s medium term financial plan to ensure the implications support the delivery of a balanced budget. In addition the development plan will require</p>

the implementation of robust performance monitoring arrangements, again aligned to the monitoring of the service revenue budget.

**Legal Implications:  
(Authorised by the Borough  
Solicitor)**

This was a pathfinder for what is a statutory requirement in 2020. We need to ensure that there some very clear monitoring to ensure our position is enhanced.

**Risk Management:**

The adoption service is currently performing well and is subject to regular monitoring as part of the DFE Improvement Plan report arrangement.

**Access to Information :**

Background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting :

Gani Martins, Assistant Executive Director (Interim) of Children's Services, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council



Telephone:0161 342 4143



e-mail: [gani.martins@tameside.gov.uk](mailto:gani.martins@tameside.gov.uk)

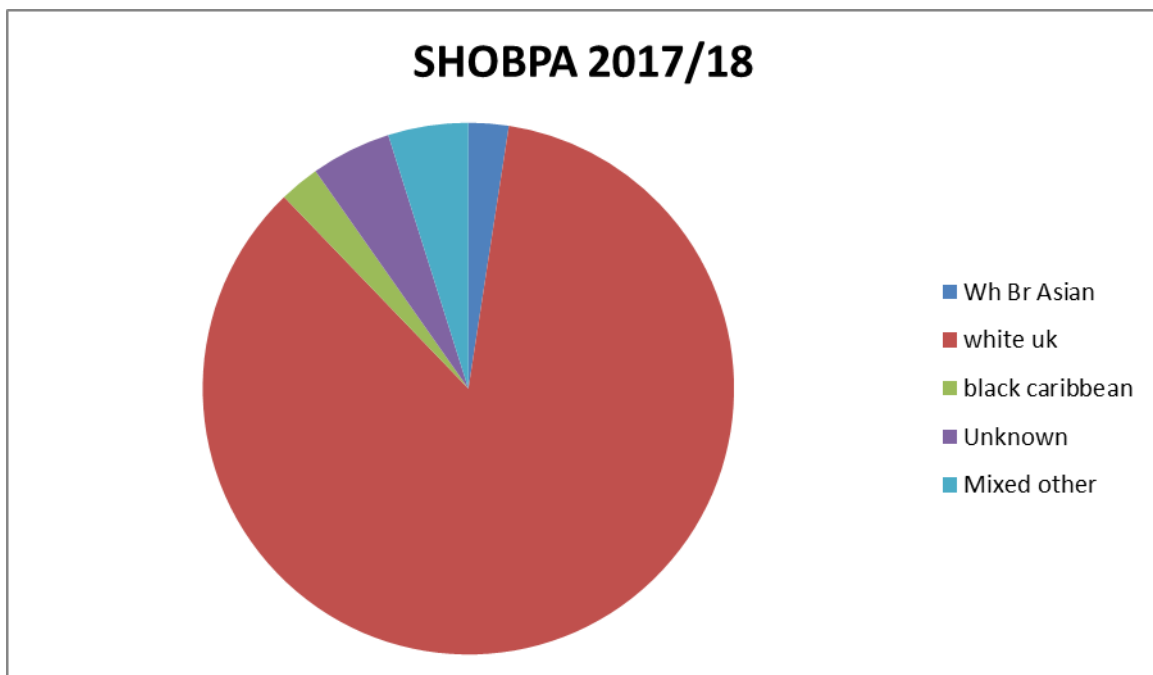
## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Achieving adoption for children contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities outlined in other Council plans.
- 1.2 In the last half of the year there has been a significant change in the way that adoption services are delivered as Adoption Now went live on 20 November 2018. Adoption Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of six Local Authorities – Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.
- 1.3 This report will reflect those changes. Data relating to children remains local data relating to Tameside children however, adoption support and recruitment data now covers the Region.

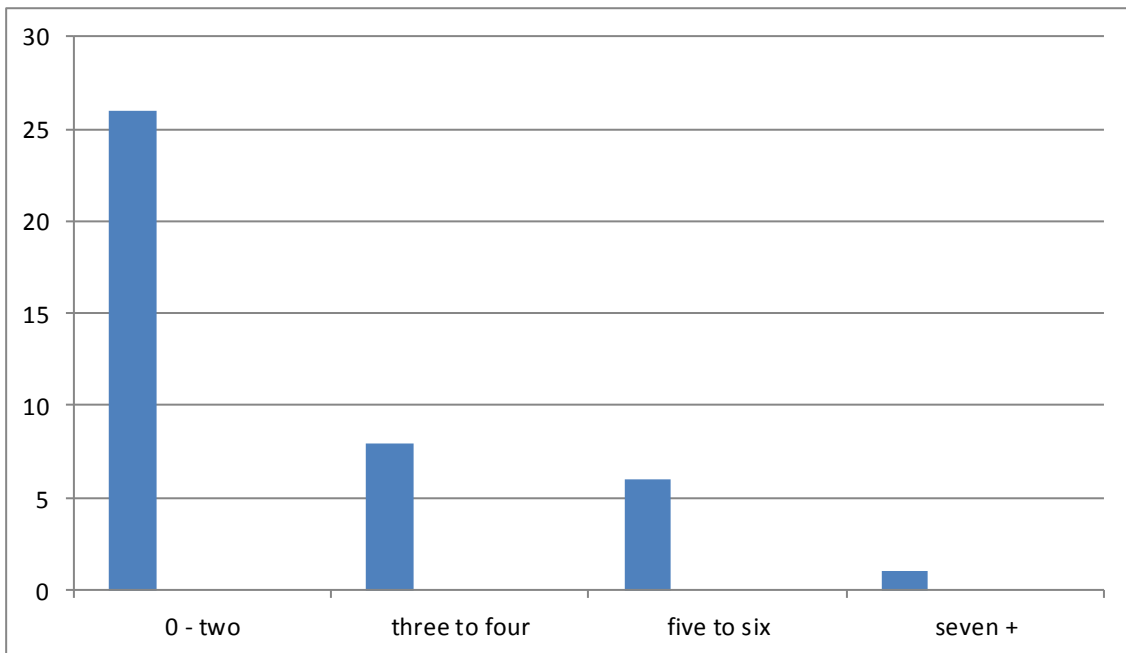
## 2. ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS - CHILDREN

### Children With an Adoption Plan

- 2.1 During the year 41 children have been presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a Should Be Placed for Adoption decision (SHOBPA). Of the children with SHOBPA decisions, twenty are part of a sibling group. 21 were single children. Twenty were male and twenty one female.



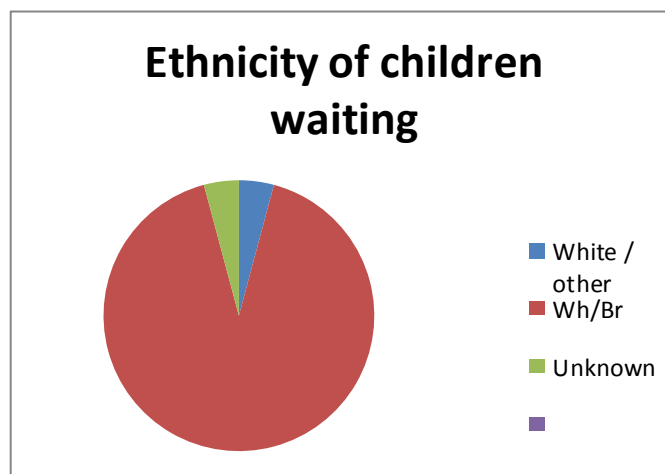
- 2.2 The chart above shows children with a SHOBPA decision by ethnicity. Tameside still place predominantly white British children for adoption with those from dual heritage backgrounds being the next largest group.
- 2.3 The chart below shows the same group of children by age and gender. Most children are aged two or under.
- 2.4 The chart below shows the same children by age. What is notable is that there are a relatively high number of new decisions to place children for adoption (41 when number of adoption orders in year is 18 suggesting a reasonably significant increase in possible plans for adoption) and that whilst the majority are two years old or under there are also a reasonably significant number of older children many of whom are part of sibling groups (20).



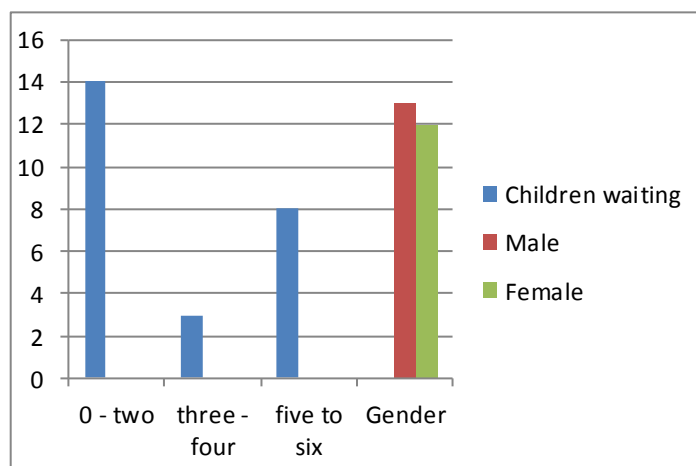
**Children Awaiting a Match**

2.5 On 31 March 2018, there were 25 children with a plan for adoption (subject to a placement order) awaiting placement. 17 of these children were part of a sibling group.

2.6 22 children are of white British heritage, two of White British/ other heritage and 1 of unknown ethnicity.



### Age and Gender of children waiting



- 2.7 Family finding is on-going for all these children. What is notable is that 17 of the 25 children waiting are part of sibling groups which often means that family finding is harder and takes longer. One of these children has experienced a recent placement disruption and there will be a disruption meeting held to try and understand the reasons for this.
- 2.8 Some of them will be young and will not have waited long and would be expected to be placed quickly.
- 2.9 Continued efforts to match all the children waiting will include them being profiled at Exchange days where adopters can come and discuss children available for adoption and all will be invited to attend an Activity day if this is appropriate for them. These run nationally and will also be run locally by Adoption Now in the coming months.

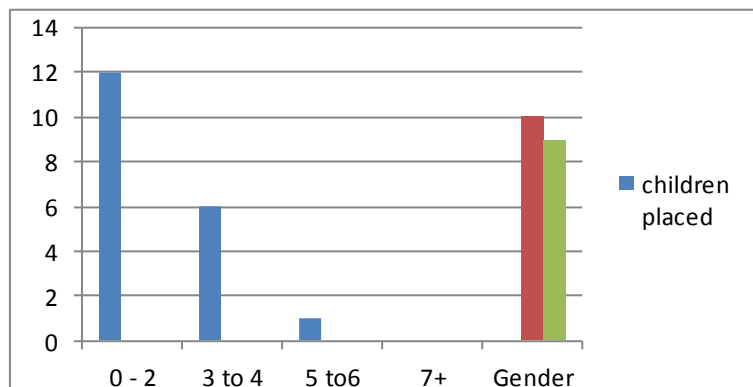
#### Family Finding Activity

- 2.10 Professional links and relationships have continued to result in some positive matches, especially within those local authorities and voluntary agencies which are now part of Adoption Now. The regional placement group meeting has been redesigned and continues to operate on a monthly basis to encourage matches with local voluntary adoption agencies. Link Maker continues to be a useful tool, and children are also placed immediately on Adoption Match once a placement order is made if there are no families able to be explored from within Adoption Now.
- 2.11 The development of Adoption Now means that families that would have been approved by the six local authorities are all part of the same organisation and are immediately available to Tameside's children. In quarter three there were 30% children placed with inter agency (not with RAA) adopters. In quarter 4 this figure was 25%. These placements incur an interagency fee per child. In quarter 2 100% were placed inter agency so the introduction of the Adoption Now has provided some financial benefits in relation to placement of children as Adoption Now placements do not incur a fee. The relatively high numbers of children in sibling groups waiting for placements however may be a challenge in this regard as Adoption Now currently has only a few approved adoptive families for sibling groups. Increasing adopters approved for sibling groups is part of the recruitment strategy for the coming year.

#### Children Placed For Adoption

- 2.12 There have been 19 children placed with adopters this year. They were all single children placed in separate placements. Seventeen children were of white British heritage, one from British Caribbean background and one of unknown heritage.

2.13 Age of children placed: -



2.14 One child was placed in a concurrent placement however the ultimate plan was not an adoption one so the child returned to birth family members.

2.15 It is practise to search for a family within Adoption Now in the first instance and then to look further afield to other local authorities, RAA's or voluntary adoption agencies.

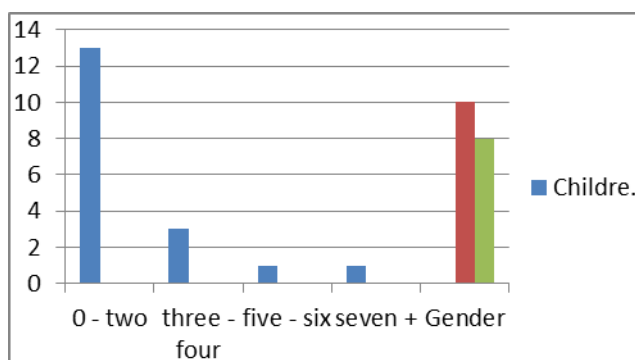
2.16 The scorecard data for children placed and adopted within the year is as follows: -

Measure	Scorecard Indicator	Tameside average
Placement Order to Matching (A2)	Scorecard Indicator - 121 days	99
Child entering care starting adoption placement (A1)	Scorecard indicator – 426 days	305

2.17 These figures show that during the year timescales were met between child entering care and starting adoption placement for the indicator measuring placement order to matching. The Scorecard measures are not 'counted' until the year after an Adoption Order has been made, therefore these positive figures will not influence the published Scorecard results for some time yet.

**Children Adopted**

2.18 18 adoption orders were made during the year. It is these children for whom the score card data refers. 17 of these children were of white British heritage and one of unknown ethnicity. Six of these children were a part of sibling groups.



2.19 There was a high number of young children adopted during this period.

- 2.20 Most adoption orders have been made in a timely fashion despite birth parents requesting leave to contest on the majority of cases.
- 2.21 In year indicators A1 and A2 are showing the service is performing well in terms of adoption timeliness. The three year average moves more slowly but both measures show improving performance with performance with performance are 456 for days between a child entering care and being placed for adoption and 162 days between a Placement order and matching.

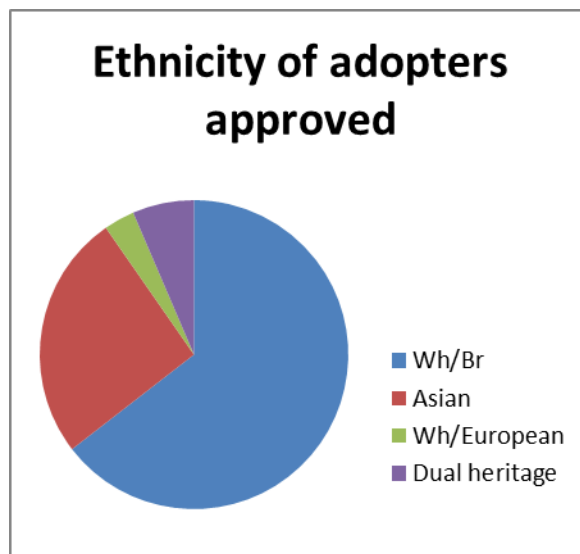
**Adoption Disruption**

- 2.22 There has been one disrupted adoption placement this year and this will be followed by a disruption meeting to allow for any learning from that.

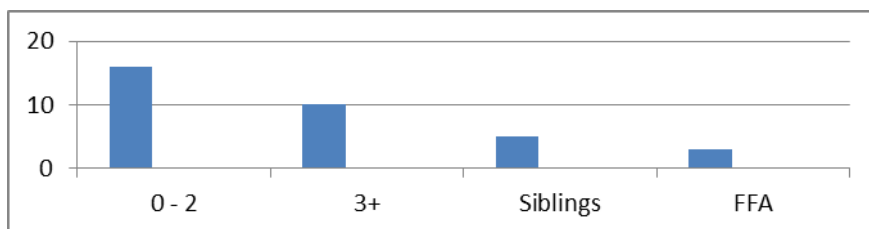
**3. ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS - ADOPTERS**

**Adopter Recruitment**

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



**Sorts of children approved adopters wish to consider**



- 3.2 Most of the adopters waiting were approved within the previous six months however, some have waited for a placement and this has been for various reasons. Some Asian families have waited because they specifically want to adopt young babies and there have been a

limited number available. Some of the dual heritage families have wanted to wait for a child who reflects their existing family rather than take a child from a different ethnicity. Other adopters had waited a while when they transferred to Adoption Now and we do know that adopters who have already waited a good while tend to be viewed more suspiciously by family finders. We are working hard to find children to place with them.

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

#### **Recruitment Activity**

- 3.4 Nationally there is a shortage of adopters and numbers of children available are rising again as the looked after population nationally and locally rises. This happened shortly after many adopters had had to wait for long periods as a consequence of case law that changed the practise of the courts in terms of agreeing adoption plans for children. The message to the public was and still is to some extent that there are few young children available for adoption and that numbers have fallen significantly.
- 3.5 The recruitment strategy of Adoption Now has been to dispel this myth going live with a campaign that visibly showed with balloons how many children there were available in this area alone.
- 3.6 The new recruitment team will be fully staffed by early June 2018 and recruitment campaigns are scheduled three times per year with considerable presence at local events across the six local authority areas and beyond over the summer months.
- 3.7 The target is to increase numbers of adopters being approved by at least 20 families per year by the end of year 2.
- 3.8 A recruitment strategy and annual recruitment plan exists to support the need to recruit more adopters.

#### **Adoption Panels**

- 3.9 The adoption panels are now run by Adoption Now and there is a panel at least weekly and when demand is high five times per month. One of the panels sits in Blackburn and the others in Rochdale and Bolton. The panels consider adopter approvals, matches and de registrations from all six local authorities. In all cases in the last six months, the panel recommendations were agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- 3.10 For every panel, panel members received the papers in sufficient time to enable them to read the papers thoroughly and in all Tameside's cases they had received sufficient information to consider the case and reach a conclusion. The majority of reports in relation to matches and approvals were considered to be good or excellent. Support plans were found to be appropriate to the child's needs. Timescales for approvals and matches were considered and the panel were satisfied with the explanations provided regarding any delay.
- 3.11 The need to improve timeliness of adopter assessments is part of the annual development plan for that service area. There is also a need to be more consistent with the matching paperwork across the six local authorities and this is also a focus of improvement activity over the coming year.
- 3.12 There are three panel chairs who operate across the panels. Panel members from each of the six local authority areas were pooled and many have continued to service the newly arranged panels.



#### 4. ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS – ADOPTION SUPPORT

##### Training and Support to Adoptive Parents

- 4.1 Preparation training for prospective adopters being assessed continues to run at least once a month across the region. Adoption Now facilitate these groups. In addition Adoption Now has run preparation groups for second time adopters twice as this enables them to consider the specific issues around bringing a second child into the family. This has received positive feedback from adopters attending.
- 4.2 The Adoption Service recognises the value of on-going training and support for adopters at different stages in the adoption process and their child's/children's development, to prevent family breakdown in later years and add quality of life to adoptive families. Post approval and post adoption training is now delivered by Adoption Now and is spread across the region.
- 4.3 During the last six months there has been a launch of adoption now which over 200 people attended from the region. There has also been training delivered for adoptive parents one safety, promoting positive attachments – therapy and PACE, the developing brain and starting your adoptive family. In addition there have been coffee mornings, the continuation of a young people's group called Club Awesone and the establishment of a new therapeutic toddler group to add to the ones already running (as these are very popular).
- 4.4 There is a plan to deliver more social type events and training in accordance with the wishes that adopters expressed at the launch event when they and young people were consulted about what they wished to see running in order to support them.

##### Post Adoption Support

- 4.5 The adoption support team combines workers from across the six local authorities. Some staff had therapeutic training and there were also staff new to adoption support work. The team are based together in Bolton however, they continue to deliver services locally to where families live.
- 4.6 The benefits of becoming a much larger service are that it is easier to match a family's needs with staff with the relevant skills, duty can be delivered on a daily basis so families can always get in touch if they need support and it is possible to run a wider variety of support groups and training events for adopters.
- 4.7 The Post Adoption Support Team provide a variety of services including supporting birth parents, adoptive parents and children with contact arrangements, facilitate direct contact for a number of children with their birth families, provide an access to records service for adult adoptees, provide assessment of need and more individualised support to those adopted children and their families who are in greater need and respond to lower level queries with advice and one off support.

##### Adoption support work

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

- 4.8 All the assessments led to a service being provided and most resulted in applications to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services.
- 4.9 On 31 March, a total of 311 cases were open to Post Adoption Support.

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

## **5. ADOPTION AGENCY BUSINESS - OTHER**

### **Inter-Country Adoption**

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

### **Participation Of Young People**

- 5.2 Prior to going live Adoption Now commissioned a voluntary adoption agency to consult with young people and their views helped fashion the set-up of the new adoption agency.
- 5.3 Since then Adoption Now has consulted with a large group of young people at its launch event. Services being designed will be in line with their expressed wishes. Creative ways continue to be used to encourage participation from children who access post adoption support as well as those children who are awaiting adoption, especially, but not exclusively, those who are verbal.
- 5.4 The management team have also met with a participation officer in Blackburn to advise as to what is required for Adoption Now to acquire an investors in children award. This will be pursued over the coming year.

### **Complaints/Compliments**

- 5.5 Adoption Now has not received any complaint in relation to Tameside children or families.

### **Allegations**

- 5.6 There have been no allegations in the last six months.

### **Staffing**

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

### **Budget**

- 5.8 During 2017/18 a total of £0.332 million was spent on placing children with outside agencies by the Council. In addition, £0.050 million was spent on adoption support related expenditure.
- 5.9 The operational budgets supporting adoption were transferred to Adoption Now from the Council alongside the related budget allocations from the other five local authorities.
- 5.10 The Executive Cabinet meeting of 20 October 2017 gave approval for the Council to become a constituent member of Adoption NoW with effect from 6 November 2017. Section 13.5 of the related report stated that *'the initial two years of the Regional Adoption Agency arrangement will focus on improving quality and as such there is no intention to achieve savings from the formation of the Regional Adoption Agency, with each local authority committing to maintain staffing levels and operational budgets during this period of time.'*
- 5.11 The report approved additional investment of £ 0.059 million by the Council in the inaugural year. This was to support a share of the financing of additional recruitment and marketing posts of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), a fully funded business support post and the

estimated impact of additional travel related costs for Council employees under this arrangement. The additional investment would support the increased demands placed on the RAA due to the support required relating to sibling groups and older age children within Tameside. It is envisaged the financial benefits of this additional support provided would then materialise in the longer term.

- 5.12 Clearly efficiencies and demonstration of value for money (whilst maintaining quality standards) beyond the first two years of this arrangement will be expected. However, the details of expected efficiencies are not currently available. It is essential these are considered by Elected Members at the earliest opportunity when provided.

#### **Team Development**

- 5.13 Adoption Now hold fortnightly team meetings where staff learn together and develop practise. In addition there has been team building training in each of the work streams and training on access to records delivered by Coram BAAF. Training planned includes training in DDP, Non-violent resistance training, GDPR training and how it affects us in adoption and therapeutic life story work training. This is a benefit of the new regionalised approach in that pooled budgets allow for staff to be better equipped to manage children and families coping with transition and trauma.
- 5.14 A decision was made to reserve some 'set up' budget in order to skill staff up to meet the needs of families requiring support. This should prevent escalation of difficulties and enable staff to have a better understanding of the issues facing families to ensure the correct support is offered at the correct time.

#### **Development Plan For 2018/19**

- 5.15 A development plan has been drawn up for the coming year. The main aspects of that are as follows: -
1. Recruit more adopters to meet the needs of children needing families. Targets exist around approval of adopters. The recruitment workers will be in post from early June 2018.
  2. Ensure that adopters and young people's views are consistently sought and that they shape development of the service.
  3. Work towards achieving Investors in children award placing young people's views at the centre of our service.
  4. Work towards achieving consistency in practise in all three work streams.
  5. Panels to have a better balance in terms of ethnicity on membership.
  6. Ensure the IT system can reliably produce accurate data.
  7. Improve timescales for approval of adopters so that more are approved within the six month timescales.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 As stated on the report cover.