



## **ADOPTION AGENCY**

### **Annual Report**

**For the period**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE.....	3
1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL .....	3
1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP .....	4
1.4 PANEL AND ADM ACTIVITY .....	5
1.5 CCA PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT .....	6
<b>SECTION 2 CHILDREN AND ADOPTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.0 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION.....	6
2.1 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION .....	7
2.2 PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN .....	7
2.3 TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT .....	7
2.4 ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION .....	8
2.5 AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION .....	8
2.6 CHILDREN IN SIBLING GROUPS .....	8
2.7 GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION .....	8
2.8 ADOPTION ORDERS .....	
<b>SECTION 3 ADOPTERS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.0 RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS .....	9
3.1 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS .....	9
3.2 POST APPROVAL AND POST PLACEMENT SUPPORT .....	9
3.3 TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS .....	10
<b>SECTION 4 ADOPTION SUPPORT .....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.0 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES .....	11
4.1 SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES .....	12
<b>SECTION 5 OTHER ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>12</b>
5.0 THE ADOPTION SCORECARD .....	12

## **SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.0.1 Since August 2014, under a Framework Agreement, Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) has transferred the operation and delivery of its adoption service to Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption (CCA), a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) first registered in March 2014, under DfE grant funding.
- 1.0.2 CCC remains a registered Adoption Agency. It has not devolved its corporate parenting responsibility and CCA does not hold Looked after Children cases.
- 1.0.3 This report describes the activity of Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 ('the period') as it relates to the provision of adoption services to the Council.
- 1.0.4 This report is provided to the Children's and Young Person's Committee as part of the monitoring of the adoption agency required under the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.

### **1.1 STAFFING/SERVICE STRUCTURE**

- 1.1.1 The CCA staffing within this period comprises a Recruitment and Assessment team; a Family Finding Unit and Post Adoption Support Team, supported by a Director for the VAA, 2 Service Managers, Panel Advisor and a number of administrators. A number of posts are supernumerary to the agreement with CCC, relating to other VAA activity.
- 1.1.2 The main office for CCA is at Lincoln House, The Paddocks, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 8DH. The Family Finding Unit is based at Scott House, Huntingdon, co-located with their LA colleagues in children's services.
- 1.1.3 All staff are permanent and the social workers have the required levels of post-qualifying experience.

### **1.2 THE ADOPTION PANEL**

- 1.2.1 CCA's Adoption and Permanence Panel contributes to the running and quality assurance of the Local Authority's adoption service, as delegated to CCA. It receives reports on the service and its performance and in doing so it has an overriding responsibility to promote good practice, consistency of approach and fairness in all aspects of the adoption service.
- 1.2.2 CCA's panel prepares a six monthly report for its Board in accordance with regulations, some of which is included within.

- 1.2.3 As part of its function, the CCA Adoption and Permanence Panel makes recommendations as to the following:
- The suitability of prospective applicants to adopt;
  - Whether a child should be placed for adoption with particular prospective adopters (the match)
- 1.2.4 The LA Adoption Agency retains an Adoption Panel (also operated by CCA) to make recommendations regarding:
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption (only for children voluntarily relinquished by a parent)
  - There was only one such case heard in this period, there were 4 in the previous year 2015/16.
- 1.2.5 The Panel usually meet 2-3 times a month. Within this period the Adoption Panel met on 28 occasions.
- 1.2.6 The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency, not decisions about the cases referred to it. It is the role of the agency to make a decision. For this purpose a senior person within the agency is appointed as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). This role has been delegated for approvals of adopters and matches of CCC children to CCA. Sarah Byatt, Managing Director, CCA undertakes this role.
- 1.2.7 The ADM for the decision in regard to whether a child should be placed for adoption remains the responsibility of the Local Authority. In this period, this was Theresa Leavy, Interim Children's Service Director.
- 1.2.8 In this period, the CCC ADM undertook the decision for prospective adopters to be dually approved as foster carers for the purpose of having children under concurrent planning arrangements. Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017, CCA is registered with Ofsted as a Fostering Agency and will be able to make decisions regarding the dual approval of prospective adopters as foster carers.

### **1.3 ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP**

- 1.3.1 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, CCA Adoption and Permanence Panel central list was as follows:

KN - Panel Chair, independent, SW background
LC – Panel Chair, independent, SW background
KH – Deputy Panel Chair / Birth Parent
Dr RB – Medical Adviser (CCC)

MR – Independent Member/Educational Psychologist (Retired)
RW – Independent Member/Adoptive Parent
SC – Independent Member/Adopted Person
EW – Independent Member / Social Worker
JA – Fostering Senior Social Worker (CCC)
RM – Independent Member/ Social Worker (Retired)
YM – Independent Member/Adopted Person
AL – Independent Member/Social Worker (Retired)
DW – Independent Member / Social Worker
LB – Senior Social Worker, Post Adoption Support Team (CCA)
PJ – Independent Member/Adoptive Parent
HA – Independent Member / Social Worker
Dr DP – Medical Adviser (CCA)

1.3.2 In attendance but non-voting members are:

AC – Professional Adviser
EW – Panel Administrator

1.3.3 The Legal Advisors to the Panel are from Coram Legal Centre on behalf of adopters and Cambridgeshire County Council Legal Services on behalf of their children for adoption.

#### **1.4 PANEL AND AGENCY DECISION MAKER ACTIVITY**

1.4.1 Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, the CCC ADM decided that adoption should be the plan for 72 children. This compares to 65 in 2015/16.

1.4.2 In this period the CCA Adoption Panel met on 28 occasions, hearing a total of 78 cases of approvals and matches plus 5 resignations of approved adopters were presented.

1.4.3 In relation to the approval of prospective adopters, the Panel recommended that 32 households were suitable to adopt. Following a split recommendation, one was issued with a qualifying determination. In early April 2017, the ADM made the decision not to approve this application as suitable. Thus 31 households were approved in total in the period.

1.4.4 Ten of the 31 households were approved as concurrent carers.

1.4.5 In terms of matching children with prospective adopters, the Panel considered matches for 45 children. This includes a sibling group of 2 whose match, presented in July 2016, was not recommended by Panel, nor agreed by the ADM. To note, it was

presented and agreed early in April 2017. Thus 43 matches agreed, compared with 44 in 2015/16.

## **1.5 CCA PANEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 1.5.1 A day's training was provided in December 2016 on Post Adoption Support interventions from the CCA clinician. Panel chairs have taken up opportunities for training and practice forums with Coram/BAAF. They also receive independent supervision.
- 1.5.2 All panel members have been appointed with relevant references and up-to-date enhanced DBS checks. Annual group appraisals took place in November 2016 with the Panel Advisor and the Chairs, where individual and group development needs are identified. The Panel Chairs' appraisals with the ADM took place in November 2017.

## **SECTION 2 – CHILDREN AND ADOPTION**

### **2.0 CHILDREN REFERRED FOR ADOPTION**

- 2.0.1 In 2016/17, there were 183 children from Cambridgeshire referred to the Family Finding Unit for planning where adoption would be the alternative plan if no other options were available. This was an increase of at least 50 from the previous year, however not all those referred will have a final Care Plan for Adoption.
- 2.0.2 CCC's permanency strategy is to avoid case drift or delay for children, social workers are expected to refer children for family finding when adoption is a possible, even if unlikely, outcome for that child. In CCC's Permanence Monitoring Group, all children in care are considered, which ensures robust care planning is undertaken. In many cases, children return to parental care or are placed under other legal orders, with extended family members.
- 2.0.3 Every child looked after, who may need a new permanent family via adoption, has a social worker from the Family Finding Unit allocated to take lead responsibility for finding a suitable family. The Family Finding social worker calls regular permanence planning meetings with other professionals involved with the child. Should a child not be able to return to parents or extended family, adoption or long term fostering will be considered. The social workers are active in identifying suitable adoptive families who are able to meet the majority of a child's needs without delay to ensure a child is able to move to a permanent family in a timely manner. This includes consider whether concurrency or Foster for Adoption is appropriate for the child.
- 2.0.4 Early permanence planning is a well-embedded practice in Cambridgeshire and CCA. Three children were placed under these arrangements in the period compared with

12 in 15/16. A number of further cases were considered in the period however were not agreed in court or could not be progressed for health reasons.

## **2.1 OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PLANS FOR ADOPTION**

2.1.0 The number of Placement Orders by the Courts made in the year was 68, which is a significant increase on the previous year when 35 were made.

2.1.1 Of the 72 children with plans for adoption agreed by the Agency Decision Maker during 2016/17, 17 have been placed for adoption, with a further 2 children matched awaiting placement. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017; 10 children with Placement Orders had been linked with matches progressing, 17 children with Placement Orders have active family finding ongoing including a child with Autism. Twelve children have plans to be placed as part of a sibling group. Family finding for these children include local, regional and national searches and children are featured at Adoption Activity Days, National Adoption Events, Adoption Link Maker and Adoption Match.

17 children have Care Proceedings ongoing including 12 children who are part of sibling groups. One relinquished baby with Downs Syndrome has a match booked into panel. Plans for adoption were declined by the courts for a further 9 children. 4 of these children have returned to care shortly following the end of their proceedings. These children are now the subject of further proceedings.

2.1.2 A total of 42 children were placed in the year. 29 of these were placed with CCA adoptive families and 13 were placed with other agency adopters.

2.1.2 There have been no disruptions of placements in the period. There are 4 children where a change in the adoption plan is likely.

## **2.2 PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN**

2.2.1 9 sibling groups were placed within the year, 8 x groups of 2, and 1 x group of 3.

2.2.2 One child placed had a recorded disability

## **2.3 TYPE OF ADOPTION PLACEMENT**

2.3.1 Of the 42 children placed with prospective adopters, 29 were placed with adopters approved by Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption Agency. 13 children were placed with prospective adopters approved by other agencies.

2.3.2 Within this period 3 children have been placed via early placements, 2 under dual approval arrangements with adopters formally approved as foster carers and under Fostering for Adoption regulations for one specific child as appropriate.

- 2.3.3 Fostering for Adoption places a child during the period that they are looked after with adopters who are also approved as foster carers. If the court agrees that the child should be placed for adoption the child can then be matched for adoption with those carers. This ensures that the child benefits by experiencing consistency of care during the first few months of their life.

## **2.4 ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

- 2.4.1 Of the 42 children placed for adoption 38 children were of White British heritage, 1 child was of Asian heritage and 2 children were dual heritage White British Asian and South African heritage.

## **2.5 AGES OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

- 2.5.1 Of the 42 children placed for adoption by Cambridgeshire, 17 were under the age of 1 year and a further 3 children were under 2 years at the point of placement.

## **2.6 GENDER OF CHILDREN PLACED FOR ADOPTION**

- 2.6.1 Of the 42 children placed 23 were female and 19 were male

## **2.7 ADOPTION ORDERS**

- 2.7.1 Adoption Orders were made in respect of 39 children. 13 children were placed and adopted within the same year.
- 2.7.2 There has been an increase in the number of parental challenges to the making of the Adoption Order. This has resulted in delays to orders being granted whilst the court considers their objections. In all of these cases the orders have been granted.
- 2.7.3 As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017, 37 children were placed with their adoptive families. 10 children had adoption applications made to the courts but not yet granted. It is expected that the majority of these children will have orders granted during 2017/18. A small number of placements continue to require support before adoption applications are considered.

# **SECTION 3 – ADOPTERS**

## **3.0 RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS**



- 3.0.1 Adoption Agencies have a duty to recruit a range of adopters to meet the needs of the children they are seeking to place for adoption and for children nationally. The principal method for recruitment is via websites. Searches on CCC's website for adoption are now automatically forwarded to CCA's, namely [www.coramcambridgeshireadoption.org.uk](http://www.coramcambridgeshireadoption.org.uk)
- 3.0.2 The recruitment strategy in this period identified the insufficiency of adopters for sibling groups. Some targeted activity took place towards the end of the year, including website updates and social media presence. It is not yet possible to report on the impact of this.

### **3.1 THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS: ENQUIRIES, ASSESSMENTS AND APPROVALS**

- 3.1.1 CCA has a single point of contact to the service through a local rate telephone line and the website mentioned above. An information pack is made available to all enquirers and a duty SW takes calls three days a week. Social workers offer make arrangements to meet with enquirers and offer attendance at information meetings and initial interviews.
- 3.1.2 Information sessions are held once a month where current information on the needs of children requiring adoption and the process of assessment is given to those people who are interested in becoming adopters.
- 3.1.3 In the period:
- 310 enquiries were received
  - 14 information sessions were held
  - 282 individuals attended information sessions, comprising 157 households
  - 49 Registrations of Interest to proceed to stage 1 were received and accepted
  - 20 did not proceed to stage 2 assessment phase (NB these are not all from 49 above)
  - 28 started stage 2 assessment
  - 32 households presented to panel for approval
  - 31 approved
  - 1 issued with Qualifying Determination
- 3.1.3 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, there are 20 households in stage 1 of the process and 5 in stage 2.

- 3.1.4 Ethnicity of 31 households approved: 23 were White British, 1 Black African, 2 White British & Black Caribbean, 1 White British & Japanese, 2 White Italian, 1 White British & Russian, 1 White Serbian & White Swiss.
- 3.1.5 The characteristics in the period of approved adopters were 1 same-sex female, 3 single females, 4 second time adopters, 2 applicants with birth children.

### **3.3 POST APPROVAL AND POST PLACEMENT SUPPORT**

- 3.2.1 All approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team from approval through the process of matching and placement to the making of an Adoption Order.
- 3.2.2 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, there were 23 households approved and waiting, of those 3 have been waiting over 12 months. Six of the 23 households have prospective matches of CCC children booked in Panel in the first quarter of 2016-17. Six of those waiting are approved for concurrent/Foster for Adoption placements.
- 3.2.3 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 21 CCA families have CCC children placed and 6 have other LA children placed.

### **3.3 TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS**

- 3.3.1 Preparation training for adopters is presented by managers and social workers from the Recruitment and Assessment team

Prospective adopters attend two modules in stage one covering:

- Types of Abuse
- Children's experiences
- Child development
- Trauma and attachment
- Concurrent planning
- Understanding challenging behaviour

Two further modules are presented for adopters in stage two covering in more depth:

- The child's journey
- The adopters Journey
- Identity
- Loss and grief
- Post adoption support

Additionally those prospective adopters interested in concurrency/foster to adopt attend a further two days training addressing

- Early permanence planning/the legal context

- Contact
  - The fostering role
- 3.3.2 Stage one and stage two training is presented according to numbers of adopters in the process but at least every other month. Training is evaluated at the end of each set of modules, with feedback from participants being consistently positive.
- 3.3.3 Adopters pre and post placement have access to the Annual foster carer training programme offered by Cambridgeshire County Council. This includes workshops on topics such as 'Building attachments', 'First aid for foster carers' and 'Nurturing your child's developing mind'.
- 3.3.4 Adopters with children early in placement are able to attend parenting groups such as Foundations for Attachment presented by clinicians from the Adoption Support team.

## **SECTION 4 – ADOPTION SUPPORT**

### **4.0 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT TO FAMILIES**

- 4.0.1 CCA undertakes on behalf of CCC all the statutory responsibilities relating to the provision of adoption support services. The team manager is the Adoption Support Services Adviser for the LA. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs.
- 4.0.2 In this period the Adoption Support team received 37 new referrals for assessment. At March 2017, 127 children from 89 families are receiving a service.
- 4.0.3 Families either self-refer or are referred via other agencies such as school or health services. In such cases the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, as specialist service may be commissioned.
- 4.0.4 The DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has been available since May 2015. In this period 105 applications to the ASF have been made. 102 have been accepted to date for the provision of eligible therapeutic interventions to families, 60% of which have been commissioned externally.
- 4.0.5 The team have a mailing list of adoptive families who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days.
- 4.0.6 Adoptive parents support groups have been run regularly throughout the year at 3 locations in the County. 'Stay and Play' is offered on a six weekly basis. Children's groups have been held twice a year for two different age bands.
- 4.0.7 Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their family. The majority of these are indirect contact arrangements via the letterbox

service. In the year the service dealt with 1189 exchanges, of which the slight majority were adopter contacts.

#### **4.1 SERVICES TO ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES**

- 4.1.1 The Adoption Support team provide an advice and counselling service to adopted adults seeking information and access to their birth records. For all residents of Cambridgeshire an access to records counselling service is offered. Information is also provided to other agencies that are supporting adopted adults living in their area who were adopted through Cambridgeshire.
- 4.1.2 Initial counselling interviews are offered to those seeking birth records and work is undertaken to locate records held by Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopter adults and their birth relative.
- 4.1.3 Birth relatives seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and the Agency can act as an intermediary where appropriate.
- 4.1.4 The team received 38 new referrals for 'adult' work. At the end of the period there are 41 open cases with a waiting list of 35.
- 4.1.5 In accordance with regulation, the team offers a counselling and information service for birth parents and relatives affected by the adoption plan. The Birth Relatives Outreach Worker (BROW) is proactive in offering of support, advice and guidance and is independent of the child's social worker. This is a confidential service unless concerns arise about the welfare of a child.
- 4.1.6 In the year, there were 14 new referrals to the BROW service, with 24 open at the end of the period.

## **SECTION 5 – OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **5.0 The Adoption Scorecard**

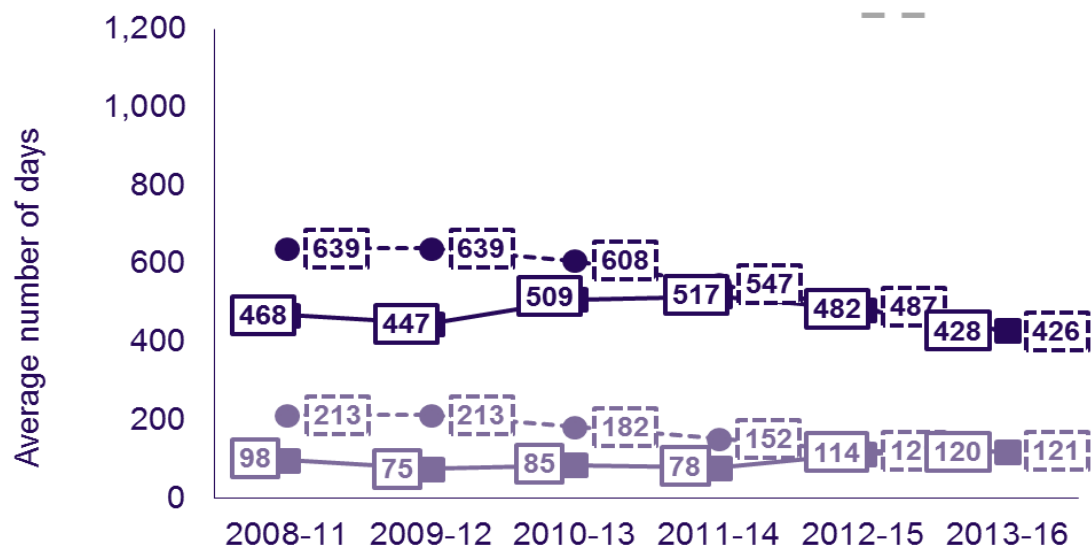
- 5.0.1 The Scorecard was introduced by the Department for Education in 2010, to address the delays in the adoption system. This indicator is based on a local authority's average performance over a 3 year period. This performance is based on timescales for children adopted in the reporting period, which decrease year on year.

**Indicator A1** - average time (days) between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

**Indicator A2** - number of days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

Scorecard data for:	Indicator 1 timescales	Indicator 2 timescales
2010 to 2013	20 months	6 months
2011 to 2014	18 months	5 months
2012 to 2015	16 months	4 months
2013 to 2016	14 months	4 months

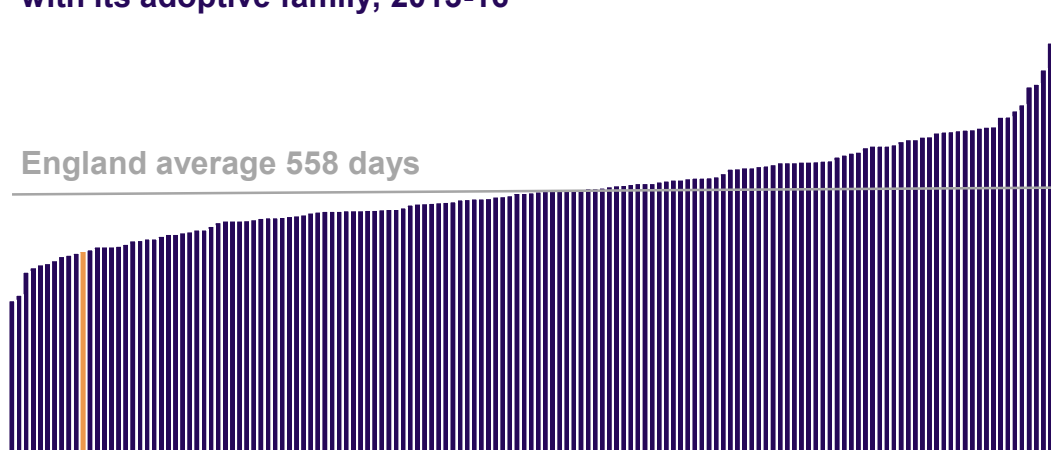
#### 5.1.2 Cambridgeshire County Council Adoption Scorecard 2013 to 2016 (unpublished)



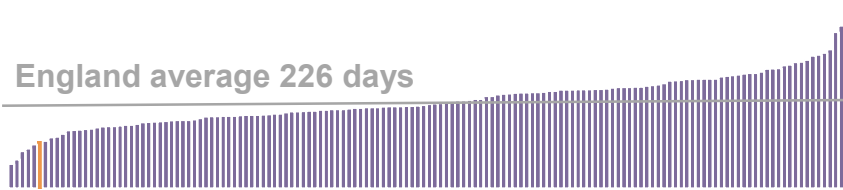
#### Cambridgeshire's National Ranking (Draft)

##### A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2013-16

England average 558 days



## A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority



Cambridgeshire continues to perform strongly for both adoption threshold indicators. Whilst the threshold for the 3 year average timescales for **indicator A1** was missed by 2 days, at 428 days, Cambridgeshire's performance is provisionally ranked 11<sup>th</sup> nationally. This suggests that other LAs had also struggled to meet the threshold for this indicator.

For indicator A2, the 3 years average time between children who had been adopted receiving a placement order and being matched with their adoptive family was 120 days and was within the threshold. Cambridgeshire is provisionally ranked 6<sup>th</sup> nationally.

- 5.1.3 From internal analysis using scorecard criteria the position of the Agency for the one year period on **Indicator 1 - Average time between child entering care and moving in with adoptive family 01.04.16 to 31.03.17**, the Agency showed considerable improvement to 277 days, which is almost 5 months less than the threshold of 426 days. Despite lengthier journeys for 5 children in the cohort, this is achieved by the number of children placed soon after birth in early permanence placements and reflects the focussed partnership work between the permanence units and CCA.
- 5.1.4 The number of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family in the period 01.04.16 to 31.03.17 has improved to 92% for similar reasons as noted above.
- 5.1.3 On **Indicator 2 – Average time between LA receiving authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match with an adoptive family 01.04.16 to 31.03.17** has also improved to 104 days, 17 days below the threshold of 121 days.
- 5.1.4 The number of children who moved in with their adoptive family within 4 months of the decision for adoption in the year was 56% and 100% moved in within 12 months of the decision which is an improvement on previous years.

