

To the Chair and Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

ADOPTION LEADERSHIP BOARD (ALB) BRIEFING HEADLINE MEASURES

| Relevant Cabinet Member(s) | Wards Affected | Key Decision |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Councillor Nuala Fennelly lead Member for Children's Services; and Councillor Tony Corden, support to lead Member for Children's Services with a focus on Safeguarding | All | No |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Information on the adoption process, derived from the quarterly adoption leadership board (ALB) Adoption survey is provided at local level where available. It shows performance against the four headline measures used by the ALB to monitor performance. All regional and Local Authority level data relates to Local Authority activity only.
2. Doncaster has twice the number of children waiting per 10,000 than the England, Statistical Neighbour and Yorks and Humber averages. Information from our regional consortia indicates that whilst Doncaster has continued to maintain a high number of placement orders: locally and nationally the number of placement orders made have reduced considerably.
3. Adopter availability is twice that of our local region and statistical neighbours and over 8 times the England average.
4. Substantial delays in timeliness of adoption for children have been noted in 2014/15 to date. This is likely to be a national trend as courts respond to the recent B-S (children) 2013 judgement. The impact of this case law precedent as set out by the President of the Family Courts, Sir James Munby, was to place greater responsibility on social workers as to why adoption was the *best* option for the child rather than the only option left by process of elimination.
5. In terms of timeliness of approval of adopters: Doncaster is performing below the national average with a 10 day difference; performance however is better in comparison to the regional average.

EXEMPT REPORT

6. Not applicable

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel accepts the report and note the efforts being made to improve service effectiveness

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

8. Children in Doncaster who require adoptive families will be appropriately matched with families without undue delay. Prospective adopters in Doncaster will be assessed and matched to children without undue delay

BACKGROUND

Adoption Leadership Board: Headline Measures Statistical Briefing Quarter 2 (July to September) 2014-2015

Introduction

9. Information on the adoption process, derived from the quarterly Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) adoption survey is provided at a local level where available. It shows performance against the four headline measures used by the ALB to monitor performance. All regional and Local Authority level data in this pack relate to Local Authority activity only. Adopter information relates to adopter families.
 - Quarter 4 (January to March) 2013-14 responsibility for the collection of this data moved to the sector, 119 LAs (79%) responded.
 - Quarter 1 (April to June) 2014-15, all agencies provided a return.
 - Quarter 2 (July to September) 2014-15, two local authorities and one voluntary adoption agency did not provide a return

Changes to Quarter 1

10. Quarter 1's figures have been revised in the latest publication and replace the previous figures reported. A common reason for the amendment is the placement order date which may have occurred during the previous quarter but had not filtered through from the courts by the time of the data collection.
11. It is important to note that figures when published are rounded to the nearest 5 and may mean the change is smaller than reported; for example the actual number of children waiting has reduced from 48 to 47, which when rounded to the nearest 5, went from 50 down to 45.
12. In addition, following Local Government reorganisation there has been a change to the statistical (nearest) neighbours which previously included St Helens for Doncaster and now includes Telford & Wrekin.
13. Figures relating to timeliness cover the average across the first two quarters of 2014-15 rather than individual quarters to minimise suppression.

Summary of Key Findings at Quarter 2 2014-15

Children waiting: The number of children with a placement order waiting to be placed with an adoptive family

14. National and regional levels continue to show improvement with a reduction in numbers since the previous quarter. In Doncaster performance is still below the national average and the 60% increase in children waiting since quarter 4 shows it remains a key area of priority. Quarter 2 demonstrated progress with an 11% reduction (from the revised 45 to 40 children waiting) since quarter 1.

Adopter gap: The difference between the ‘number of adopters needed for children with a placement order waiting to be placed’ and the ‘number of adopters waiting to be matched

15. Based on the number of approvers not yet matched performance continues to improve with overall increases at national, regional and local levels. Doncaster demonstrated growth significantly above the national trend with an overall 150% increase in the number of adopter families since quarter 4. Quarter 2 demonstrated progress with a 67% increase since quarter 1.

Child Timeliness: The average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family

16. Nationally there has been no improvement in child timeliness levels since quarter 4. The national average for the first half of the year is 540 days. Performance in Doncaster is significantly below average and remains a key for improvement with an average at quarter 2 of 557 days

Adopter Timeliness: The average time between an adoption agency receiving an application from a potential adopter to a child matched

17. Performance of adopter timeliness has improved nationally since quarter 4. The national average for the first half of the year is 363 days. Doncaster’s figures were suppressed and therefore not published; however local level data demonstrated timeliness at an average of 373 days, lower than the national average.

Performance Data

18. Counts have been rounded to the nearest 5 at LA level or 10 at national and regional level. Average times are rounded to the nearest day.

The following symbols were used:

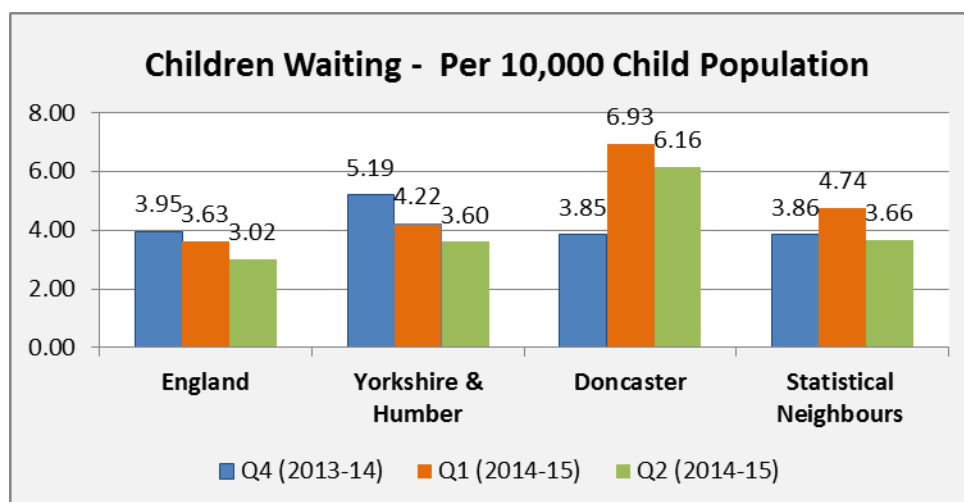
| | |
|----|---|
| x | Suppressed due to low numbers – where a count is 5 or fewer, or times and percentages are based on a count of 10 or fewer |
| 0 | Where any number is shown as zero (0), the original figure submitted was zero. |
| .. | Data not returned – note that some items have been returned but suppressed due to data quality concerns |
| . | Not applicable |
| - | Negligible – used to represent a percentage below 0.5% |

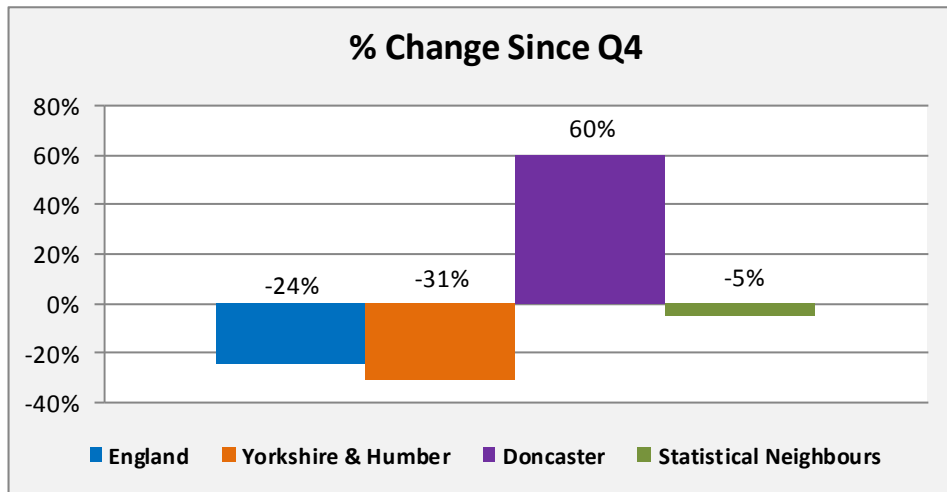
| AREA COMPARISON | Population Estimates Under 18 Years (ONS) | HEADLINE MEASURES | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|--|
| | | 1. Children waiting | | | | | | | 2. Adopter Gap | | | | |
| | | Q4 (2013-14) | | Q1 (2014-15) | | Q2 (2014-15) | | % Change since Q4 | Q4 (2013-14) | Q1 (2014-15) | Q2 (2014-15) | % Change since Q4 | |
| | | Total | Per 10,000 | Total | per 10,000 | Total | per 10,000 | | | | | | |
| England | 11,506,451 | 4,550 | 3.95 | 4,180 | 3.63 | 3,470 | 3.02 | -24% | 2,400 | 2,440 | 2,830 | 18% | |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 1,137,668 | 590 | 5.19 | 480 | 4.22 | 410 | 3.60 | -31% | 170 | 250 | 290 | 71% | |
| Doncaster | 64,976 | 25 | 3.85 | 45 | 6.93 | 40 | 6.16 | 60% | 10 | 15 | 25 | 150% | |
| Statistical Neighbours | 559,598 | 215 | 3.84 | 265 | 4.74 | 205 | 3.66 | -5% | 90 | 140 | 160 | 78% | |

| AREA COMPARISON | HEADLINE MEASURES | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
| | 3. Child timeliness | | | | 4. Adopter timeliness | | | |
| | Q4 (2013-14) | Q1 (2014-15) | Q2 (2014-15) | % Change since Q4 | Q4 (2013-14) | Q1 (2014-15) | Q2 (2014-15) | % Change since Q4 |
| England | 537 | 546 | 540 | 1% | 411 | 365 | 363 | -12% |
| Yorkshire and The Humber | 534 | 532 | 514 | -4% | 325 | 375 | 393 | 21% |
| Doncaster | x | x | 557 | . | x | x | 373 | . |
| Statistical Neighbours | 456 | 539 | 516 | 13% | x | x | 323 | . |

Headline Measures at Quarter 2 (2014-15)

19. Children Waiting: The number of children with a placement order waiting to be placed with an adoptive family





20. National and regional levels continue to show improvement with a reduction in the number of children waiting to be placed with an adoptive family since Quarter 4 (2013-14). Quarter 1's figures have been revised to take into account placements that were not included at the time of collection.
21. 'Children waiting' performance in Doncaster still remains a key area for improvement; however Quarter 2 figures show progress is taking place with a reduction in the number of children waiting since Quarter 1.

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| England: | Nationally there were 3,470 children waiting to be placed in Q2, a 17% decrease against the revised figures of 4,180 children waiting for quarter 1. Overall there has been a 24% decrease in children waiting since Q4 (from 3.95 to 3.02 per 10,000 children) |
| Yorkshire & The Humber: | A similar trend is shown across the region with a 15% decrease between Q1 to Q2 and an overall 31% decrease in children waiting since Q4, from 590 to 410 children (from 5.19 to 3.6 per 10,000 children) |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Doncaster: | Revised figures for Q1 reported 45 children waiting (when rounded to the nearest 5) not 50 as initially reported. Q2 figures demonstrate progression with an 11% reduction to 40 children. However this still equates to a 60% increase in children waiting since Q4, (from 25 to 40 children) which remains the highest percentage increase across our statistical neighbours (from 3.85 to 6.16 per 10,000 children) |
| Statistical Neighbours: | There has been a 23% reduction in children waiting since Q1 and an overall 5% reduction since Q4; from 215 to 205 children (from 3.84 to 3.66 per 10,000 children) |

Children Waiting Comments:

As can be seen Doncaster has twice the number of children waiting per 10,000 than the England, Statistical Neighbour and Yorks and Humber averages. Information from our regional consortia indicates that whilst Doncaster has continued to maintain a high number of placement orders; locally and nationally: the number of placement orders has reduced dramatically. A recent audit has been undertaken of those children subject of Placement Orders and as a result 11 children are in the process of having those Orders revoked in favour of Care Orders with the full agreement of the children's Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

Decision making regarding application for placement orders varies considerably across differing Local Authorities with some not progressing Placement Orders on harder to place children. In Doncaster we continue to promote adoptive placements for harder to place children and have a good success rate though these matches do take longer.

Doncaster children's services trust attended a recent DfE led matching seminar. This issue was raised by a number of Local Authorities and Martin Narey accepted the view that the score card may require amendment to reflect the degree of challenge in placement finding.

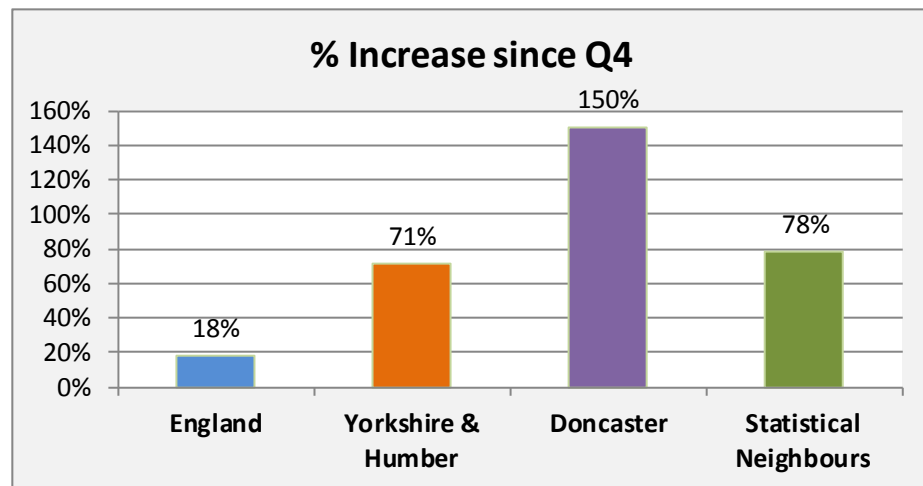
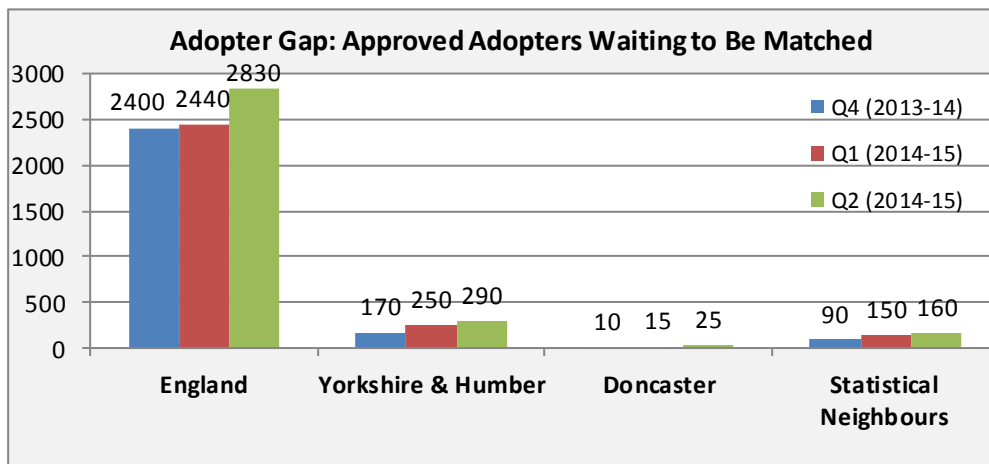
Some incremental improvements may still be made given the increased availability of approved adopters for children particularly for children over the age of 3yrs. This is evidenced by the number of adopters available on Adoption Link and those children who have been waiting for some time now being appropriately matched. Doncaster have also arranged further Adoption Panels in order to accommodate the increase in the number

of matches being made and will continue to do so as and when necessary.

Doncaster have increased the number of Adoption Panels over the next quarter to accommodate pending prospective matches.

Adopter Gap

- 22. “The difference between the ‘number of adopters needed for children with a placement order waiting to be placed’ and the ‘number of adopters waiting to be matched’”
- 23. The ‘Adopter Gap’ is currently only calculated at the national level on an annual basis. Therefore the figures provided only give the number of adopters not yet matched. When comparing this to the number of children waiting, please note that adopter families may adopt more than one child.



24. The number of approved adopters waiting to be matched is improving each quarter with overall increases at national, regional and local levels. Doncaster demonstrated a growth significantly above the national trend. The substantial increase in approved adopters waiting to be matched will support a reduction in the gap when compared with the number of children waiting.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| England: | Nationally there has been a 18% increase since Q4 in the number of approved adopter families waiting to be matched (16% increase since Q1), from 2,400 to 2,830 approved adopter families |
| Yorkshire & The Humber: | Across the region there has been a 71% increase since Q4, (16% since Q1) from 170 to 290 approved adopter families |
| Doncaster: | There has been a 150% increase in Doncaster since Q4, (67% since Q1) from 10 to 25 approved adopter families |
| Statistical Neighbours: | An average 78% increase across the statistical neighbours since Q4, (7% since Q1) from 90 to 160 approved adopter families |

Adopter Gap - Comments:

Doncaster has continued to increase the number of adopters available in the local area through increasing the numbers of adopter enquiries and approvals. Adopter availability is therefore twice that of our local region and statistical neighbours and over 8 times the England average.

| | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 to date (projected) |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Enquiries | | | 126 | 81 (138) |
| Approvals | 18 | 26 | 26 | 19 (32) |
| Matches | 28 | 43 | 38 | 20 (34) |
| Adopted | 33 | 26 | 39 | 22 (38) |

As above the number of approvals has increased year on year and projected approvals will be almost double those achieved in 2011/12

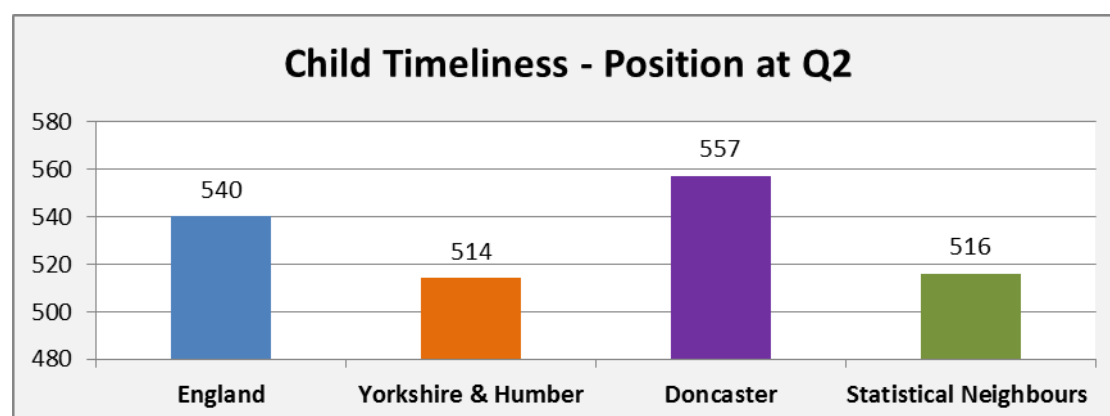
As the number of children waiting locally has reduced dramatically and it is not always possible to place children from Doncaster in Doncaster; our adopters may wait longer for a placement. For this reason the service has made the decision to only accept applications from prospective adopters who will consider older children or sibling groups or who live outside Doncaster and can therefore accept Doncaster children.

The service has a small number of adopters who will provide a highly specialised service but who will prove difficult to match. Two adopters are deaf and wish to have a deaf child placed and one adopter is Polish and only wishes to consider a Polish child. All three adopters are on the National Register. Moreover, a number of adopters do not wish to extend their age range above 2yrs.

Research presented at the recent matching seminar indicates that numbers of adopters are sufficient to place all children waiting for adoption. There is, however a considerable disparity between prospective adopters choice, most will only wish to consider younger children with little or no identified complexity and the more complex needs of children awaiting a match.

Child Timeliness

25. The child timeliness headline measure is the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family.



26. During the first half of the year the national average for child timeliness was 540 days for a child entering care to moving in with their adopted family. There has been no improvement since Q4.
27. This is another key area for improvement for Doncaster. The current position shows child timeliness levels in Doncaster are higher than the national, regional and statistical neighbour averages.

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| England: | During first half of 2014-15, on average the time between a child entering care and moving in with adopted family was 540 days |
| Yorkshire & The Humber: | Performance across the region is above the national average, currently at 514 days (26 days less) |
| Doncaster: | Performance across Doncaster is below the national average, currently at 557 days (17 days more) |
| Statistical Neighbours: | Information suppressed for 3 areas, performance based on the remaining areas is above average at 516 days (28 day less) |

Timeliness - Comments:

Substantial delays have been noted in 2014/15 to date. This is likely to be a national trend as courts respond to the recent B-S (children) 2013 judgement. Sheffield court does however appear to have taken a hard line interpretation of the judgement and therefore disproportionate delays may occur as a result.

Timeliness in Doncaster may be improved further through focussed social work when a child enters care. This may include:-

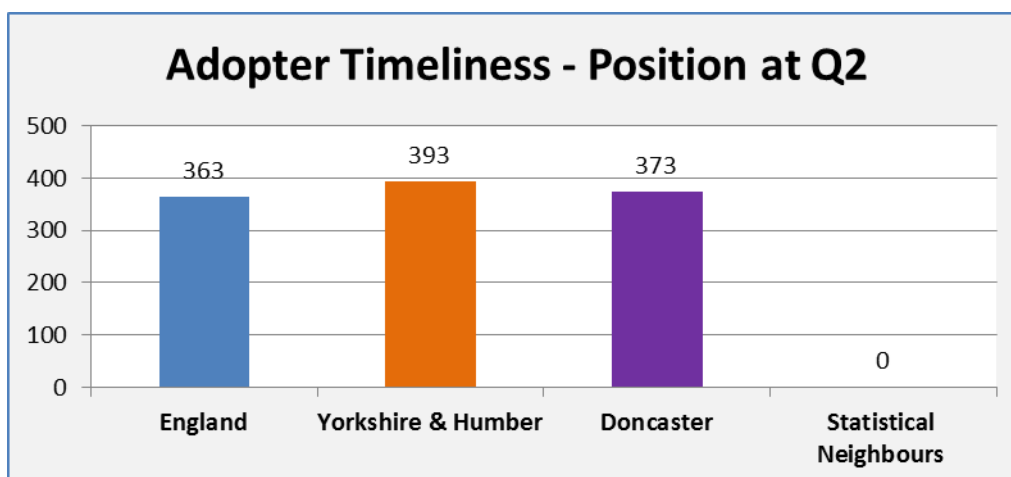
- Use of family group conferences to identify all family members who may wish to be assessed
- Better use of pre-birth assessments
- Focussed and timely parenting capacity assessments
- Considering more children for fostering to adopt/concurrency placements if this is appropriate

Numbers of children on a placement order are slowly reducing. This should have a positive effect on timeliness of family finding within the adoption team. There are also more adopters available who are willing to consider older children and this is evidenced by those who are waiting on Adoption Link and the National Register.

Furthermore, as stated above those Adoption Agencies who persevere in securing adoptive placements for the harder to place children are actually penalised in real terms via the Adoption Scorecard process. Unsurprisingly it usually takes longer to locate appropriate parents for these children and once placed they have a negative impact on the aggregate timescales and Doncaster has had recent success in placing some children who have been waiting for some time to be placed. Had Doncaster simply not attempted to secure adoptive placements for these children and proposed a Care Plan of long-term fostering at Court or had revoked the Placement Orders in favour of Care Orders within a defined period of time then the overall performance of DCST would have been improved as a result. As stated above this 'perverse incentive' was raised at a regional adoption event and we have been invited to suggest a refinement to the Scorecard process that better reflects best practice in respect of these children.

Adopter Timeliness

28. The average time between an adoption agency receiving an application from a potential adopter to a child matched



29. Nationally there has been an improvement in performance of adopter timeliness since Quarter 4. During the first half of the year the national average was 363 days between potential adopter application and child match.
30. Doncaster's figures were suppressed, however local level data shows Doncaster is performing below the national average with a 10 day difference; performance however is better in comparison to the regional average. Statistical neighbour figures were suppressed and not included in the publication.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| England: | During first half of 2014-15, on average the time between adopter application and child match was 363 days |
| Yorkshire & The Humber: | Performance across the region is below the national average, currently at 393 days (30 days more) |
| Doncaster: | Information suppressed, however local level data indicates an average of 373 days based on 8 adopter application and child matches (10 days more than the national average) |
| Statistical Neighbours: | Information suppressed due to a count less than 10, with the exception of 3 areas which varied to produce an average of 323 days |

Adopter Timeliness - Comments:

Doncaster is performing below the national average but above the regional average. The current performance is made against a clear trend of placement orders on harder to place children. These include: 9 sibling groups; 3 children with complex health needs; 2 five year old boys (older boys are much harder to place than girls); 5 children requiring therapeutic packages.

There is a current national imbalance between considerable adopter availability for children aged 0 to 2 and increased placement needs for older and more complex children. A number of Doncaster adopters will only consider placement of children aged 0 – 2 and may therefore wait longer for a placement. The adoption team are working with adopters to assist them to re-consider their offer, however many continue to consider only younger single children. The downward trend may therefore be unsustainable in the long term.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

31. Not applicable

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

32. Not applicable

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

33.

| | Priority | Implications |
|--|--|---------------------|
| | <p>We will support a strong economy where businesses can locate, grow and employ local people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i> | |
| | <p>We will help people to live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> | |
| | <p>We will make Doncaster a better place to live, with cleaner, more sustainable communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> | |
| | <p>We will support all families to thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i> | Improved family life for some of the most vulnerable children in Doncaster. Early placement for adoption provides good value for money |
| | We will deliver modern value for money services. | |
| | We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership. | |

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

34. Although plans are in place to improve performance improvements require concerted work across all social work service areas. Despite improvements in the number of adopters approved if the numbers of placement orders made remain high there will be a funding gap in purchasing placements.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

35. The only legal implication arising from this report is the likely increased case-load and court work arising from the number of Placement Orders that will need to be revoked in favour of Care Orders.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

36. Every child who is adopted brings some financial benefit to DCST in that we no longer have to pay foster care allowances on an ongoing basis. However, there are significant financial costs arising from every adoption placement 'purchased' from the Consortium which amounts to £27,000 per child although over the lifetime of the child being in care this still brings a cost benefit as well as a much greater chance to achieve positive outcomes.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

37. None

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

38. None

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

39. None

CONSULTATION

40. This report has significant implications in terms of the following:

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|
| Procurement | | Crime & Disorder | |
| Human Resources | | Human Rights & Equalities | x |
| Buildings, Land and Occupiers | | Environment & Sustainability | |
| ICT | | Capital Programme | |

BACKGROUND PAPERS

41. None

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