

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT

<b>Title of paper:</b>	<b>Commissioned Work in Fostering and Adoption – Support for Foster Carers and Adoptions</b>	
<b>Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):</b>	Satinder Gautam, Director Childrens Childrens Safeguarding Ian Curryer, Corporate Director And Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer	<b>Wards affected: ALL</b>
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<b>Other officers who have provided input:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sara Dellar – Practice Manager Fostering &amp; Adoption</li> <li>• Kwesi Williams – Project Officer CiC</li> <li>• Paul Wilkinson – Business Manager, CiC</li> <li>• Lynn Spencer (Adoption Manager – Social Work Choices)</li> <li>• Liz Hawthorne (Fostering Manager – Social Work Choices)</li> <li>• Sarah Furby – Fostering Network</li> <li>• Simon Stubbs – Social Work Choices</li> </ul>	
<b>Relevant Council Plan Strategic Priority:</b>		
World Class Nottingham		
Work in Nottingham		✓
Safer Nottingham		
Neighbourhood Nottingham		
Family Nottingham		✓
Healthy Nottingham		✓
Serving Nottingham Better		
<b>Summary of issues (including benefits to customers/service users):</b>		
<p>This report will provide an overview of the commissioned work between Nottingham City Council and two of its partners. The report will provide information regarding productivity, positive relationships and areas for development.</p> <p>Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Service provides independent, confidential advice and support to our foster carers.</p> <p>Social Work Choices is our commissioned partner who undertakes assessments on prospective foster carers and adopters in preparation for approval at the appropriate panel.</p>		
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>To offer the ongoing support to our carers through the provision of the Advice and Mediation Service as statutorily required.</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>To note the positive work undertake by commissioned partner Social Work Choices</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>To produce an end of contract year performance report on the number of assessment and approvals undertaken by Social Work Choices with specific consideration given to timescales and quality.</b>	

5	<b>Commitment to support the Fostering and Adoption Service in managing our relationship with our commissioned partners to ensure our national and local strategic priorities are met.</b>
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# 1 **BACKGROUND**

## 1.1 Fostering Network

Under standard 22.12 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) a Fostering Service is required to provide support and mediation in the event of an allegation against a foster carer that is independent of a Fostering Service. In order to meet this obligation, NCC commissioned the services of Fostering Network in April 2001.

NCC purchase household membership to foster carers to ensure they receive the information and advice they need. The package includes:

- Comprehensive legal protection insurance
- 24 hour helpline
- Access to information and advice services
- 6 free 'Signposts in Fostering' leaflets
- Subscription to 'Foster Care' magazine
- Regular information and newsletters
- Access to members only content at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

At the last Foster Carer Business Meeting in March 2012, Sarah Furby and Gill Cronin from Fostering Network gave a presentation on the services offered and recent updates. Feedback received from carers has been positive. In a consultation paper circulated to carers in June 2011, of the 31 responses, 64% felt their membership was of benefit in their role as foster carer. Only 13% felt it was of no benefit in their role (with 23% providing no response).

## Social Work Choices

### 1.2

In August 2011, Social Work Choices (SWC) were contracted to undertake a pilot to assess potential foster carers and adopters on behalf of Nottingham City Council's Fostering and Adoption Service. This is a three year pilot. During year 2, NCC will evaluate the project in all aspects and specifically all areas of VFM with the beneficiaries and workers.

The Services to be supplied by SWC in accordance with the contract comprises the delivery of an adoption assessment service.

The assessment of each applicant to become an adoptive parent must be carried out by the Contractor pursuant to:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Fostering National Minimum Standards and the associated Regulations
- The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005;
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005;
- The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 with regard to the preparation of adoption reports for the purposes of section 94(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002; and
- The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005.

For the purpose of the regulations, each adoption assessor will be supervised by a qualified social worker who has at least 5 years post-qualifying experience in child care

social work, including direct experience of adoption work, together with relevant management experience.

The same process in NCC is in place for all fostering assessments.

A comprehensive pricing structure was agreed within the contract. Early indications show that the net price to NCC of fostering and adoptions assessments is considerably less than NCC were paying previously.

Regular quarterly monitoring meetings are held with SWC to ensure quality of service and adherence to the contract. These meetings enable us to address specific issues relating to the service. These meetings have proved invaluable in managing referrals, building relationships, reaching agreements, and monitoring performance and value for money.

Since commencement of the contract NCC are now at the stage where assessments have been completed and brought to the appropriate panels for approval. Initial feedback from adoption panels has been positive. Panel chairs and members have commented on the high quality of the assessments coming through.

Initial issues relating to IT accessibility and secure emails have been resolved.

Further discussions are planned to consider the introduction of concurrent planning and dual approval, the development of a leaflet to distribute to prospective foster carers and adopters, and appropriate training and development support.

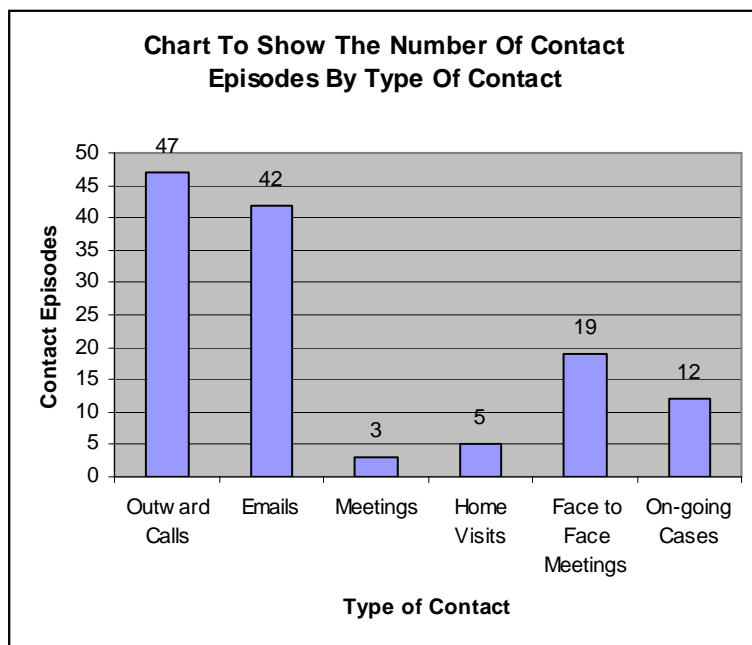
## **2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)**

### **2.1 Fostering Network**

Fostering Network produce an Annual Performance Report for Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council with an obligation to ensure it is received by the end of June. In addition to the Annual Performance Report, a quarterly monitoring report is produced and submitted by. The quarterly report details the type and amount of contact between the Advice and Mediation Service and foster carers and current matters of interest within the fostering community. Figures in the most recent report, which covers activity between December 2011 and February 2012, show there were 128 contact episodes. These range from email correspondence to face-to-face meetings with carers. (See Chart 1)

Information provided in both the annual performance and quarterly monitoring reports, as well as evidence obtained through consultation with foster carers, are used to direct our decisions regarding re-commissioning.

Positive work and relationships built over an 11 year period have enabled NCC and its foster carers to utilise the resources and expertise offered by the Fostering Network. Feedback received indicates that they offer flexibility and support to our carers when it is most required.



## 2.2 Social Work Choices

NCC has agreed for an end of year report to be submitted at the end of September 2012. The report will incorporate statistical data relating to referrals, outcomes and approvals. It will also include timescales and explanations for anomalies i.e. where difficulties have been encountered and financial breakdown of cost incurred. This information will inform targets for the following year and will help establish whether the arrangement continues to offer value for money.

As part of CiC Services 'Reshaping Prevention and Safeguarding Services for Children Transformation Programme', the Fostering and Adoption Service aims to demonstrate the potential to make savings through a timely adoption process.

The outcomes from the Pilot with SWC will be made available to the Board in late 2012.

## 3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1 Fostering Network

Availability of other service providers has been considered. With regard to independent Advice and Mediation, they are only two providers nationally. Throughout the coming year it is proposed that further assessment of both providers will be undertaken. Foster Carers and young people in foster care will form part of the process for deciding on the organisation that will provide the service for a following 3 year period.

### 3.2 Social Work Choices

The current staffing infrastructure in Fostering & Adoption does not support in-house assessments and to change direction now would significantly delay approval of new foster carers and adopters. The pilot is for 3 years and will be extensively evaluated.

A full tendering process would be needed to consider other providers in this field beyond the pilot.

Current statistical evidence is showing that during the period April – Nov 2011 when Nottingham City Fostering & Adoption Service undertook the assessments, 13 applicants were taken to adoption panel. Since the commissioning of Social Work Choices, during the same period April – Nov 2012 (including those already booked to attend) 21 applicants have or will be attending panel. This reflects an increase of 53% which supports the national government agenda on reducing adoption timescales through the provision of more adopters.

Mainstream foster carer approvals remain consistent.

Part of the imperative given to SWC is to cut the timescales for both fostering and adoption assessments. This is a key performance measure that will be fed back to the Board.

## **4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY)**

### 4.1 Fostering Network

The independent advice and mediation service is a statutory requirement under Fostering National Minimum Standards. Currently the contract is provided through Fostering Network which from statistical evidence and feedback is delivering the quality and level required. Foster Talk is another provider offering this service and further work will take place over the coming year to ensure the right provider is contracted to the Fostering & Adoption Service and the appropriate services are deployed with Value For Money (VFM) being achieved. This will be completed through consultation and a thorough VFM exercise

### 4.2 Social Work Choices

SWC are providing the services required within the financial framework identified and agreed within the contract as a pilot. Where issues have occurred, these have been addressed on an individual needs basis and will be reconsidered at the point of contract renewal to ensure the service provider continues to offer VFM.

## **5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS)**

5.1 The potential risks presented by the services currently contracted to Nottingham City Council include the following:

- Poor quality assessments
- Under performance
- Financial overspend

- Failure to meet Fostering National Minimum Standards
- Failure to meet Adoption Regulations

These risks have been minimised through regular quarterly monitoring and review, the provision of statistical performance reports and consultation and feedback from the service users. Financial monitoring is undertaken to ensure budgets and targets are met.

## **6 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION**

- 6.1 Quarterly Fostering Network monitoring statistics – Dec 2011 – Feb 2012
- 6.2 Nottingham City Council and Social Work Choices contract  
[Contract Reference: 260-ADOPT-SD-08-2011]
- 6.3 Adoption data from SCW Ltd as at 23.05.12 (Adoption quarterly review of contract 24.4.12)
- 6.4 SWC Fostering Contract and quarterly minutes 2011-2012

## **7 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

- 7.1 Fostering Network – Advice & Mediation Service publication
- 7.2 Fostering National Minimum Standards
- 7.3 The Nottingham Plan to 2020
- 7.4 Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- 7.5 The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005;
- 7.6 The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005;
- 7.7 The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 with regard to the preparation of adoption reports for the purposes of section 94(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002; and
- 7.8 The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005.