

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT

<b>Title of paper:</b>	<b>Commissioned Work in Fostering and Adoption</b>	
<b>Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):</b>	Satinder Gautam, Director 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>• Simon Stubbs – Social Work Choices</li> <li>• Sara Dellar – Practice Manager Fostering &amp; Adoption</li> <li>• Lynn Spencer Adoption Manager – Social Work Choices</li> <li>• Fostering Manager – 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 provides evidence of the commissioned work undertaken to date between Nottingham City Council and Social Work Choices. The report will provide information regarding productivity, positive relationships and areas for development.</p> <p>Social Work Choices is NCC’s commissioned partner who undertake assessments on prospective foster carers, adopters and connected persons in preparation for approval at the appropriate panel.</p> <p>The pilot with SWC has been in operation since 1<sup>st</sup> August 2012 and is a three year pilot.</p>		
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>		
1	<b>Assessments to be continued to be commissioned by NCC to a third party, SWC.</b>	
2	<b>Accept the full end of contract year performance report on the number of assessment and approvals undertaken by Social Work Choices with specific consideration given to timescales, quality and improvements.</b>	
3	<b>Ongoing commitment to support the Fostering and Adoption Service in managing its relationship with the commissioned partner Social Work Choice to ensure NCC meet its national and local strategic priorities.</b>	

## 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 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 both a fostering and adoption assessment service.

The assessment of each applicant to become an adoptive parent or foster carer is carried out by the Contractor pursuant to all relevant legislation:

- 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.

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.

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

### 2.1 Performance outcomes:

Social Work Choices have been working in partnership with Nottingham City Council since August 2011 carrying out Fostering Assessment (Form F's), Connected Persons assessment (Form F2's) and Prospective Adoptive Reports (PAR's).

Nottingham City Council	Application for Fostering Information Packs	Attendees at Fostering Information Evening	Response forms received for consideration of Initial visit (IV)
01 September 2011 – 31 August 2012	615	205	72

## Fostering Assessments

Since the commencement of the contract, SWC have had one hundred and fifteen Fostering Referrals (which includes some completed IV's completed by NCC). Out of which sixty three are currently Initial Visits and fifty two have gone forward to a full assessment(Form F).(Fig.1.)

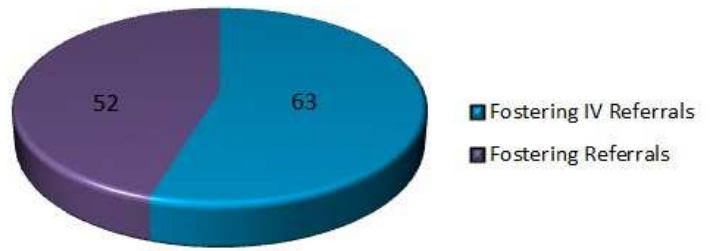


Fig.1.

Total 115



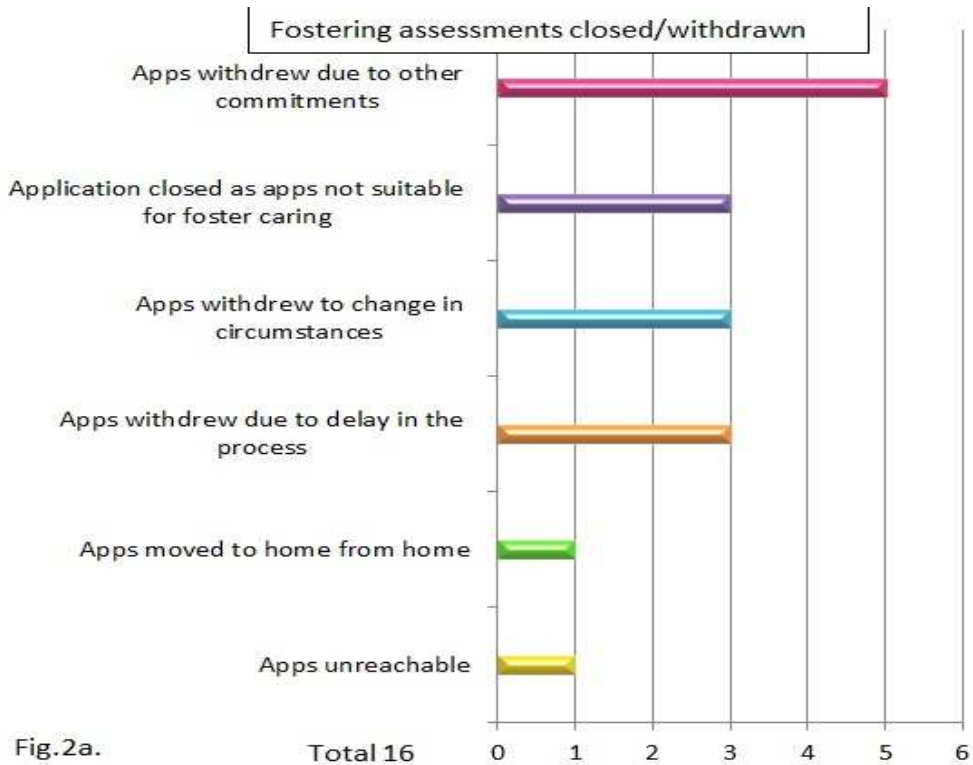
Fig.2.

Total 52

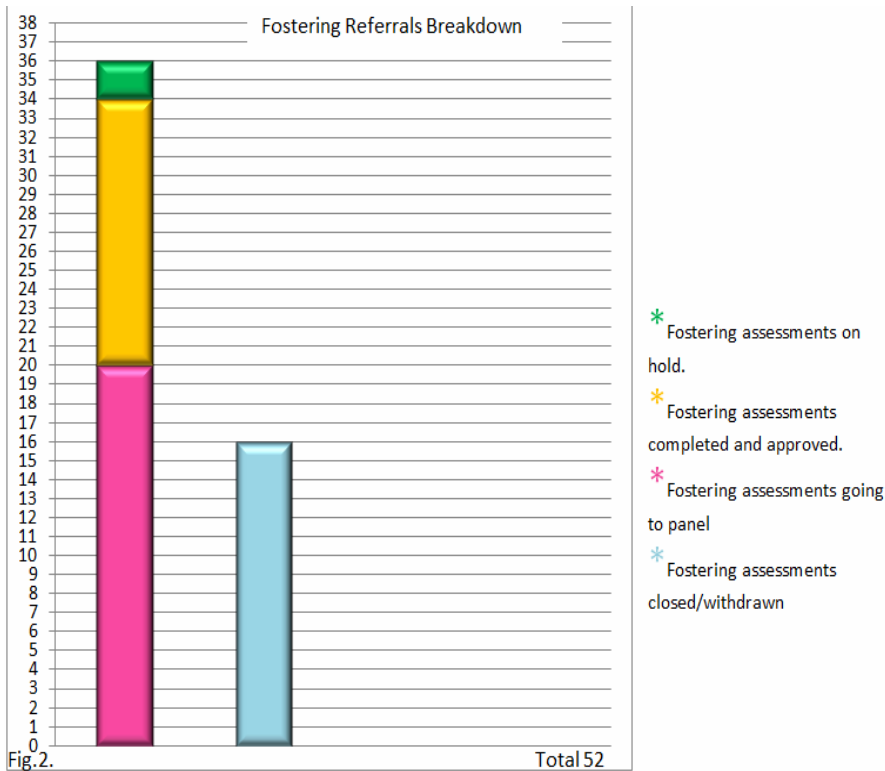
Although commissioned from September 2011, SWC's first completed assessment came to fostering panel on 17 November 2011. To date, SWC have had fourteen fostering assessments go to panel which were approved with a further thirteen booked at panel during 2012 and seven booked early 2013. since attendance at their first panel in November 2011, during the initial 12 month commissioned period, SWC will have had a maximum of twenty-seven approvals (subject to all assessments being approved).

During a similar 12 month period from September 2011 – August 2011, Nottingham City Council approved eighteen foster carers.

There were some issues with the Fostering Panel capacity. It has been agreed following the midpoint review that NCC will establish an additional Fostering Panel. This will allow for a minimum of 60 new applications to be dealt with.



Sixteen fostering assessments were closed/withdrawn due various reasons. (Fig.2a.) Two assessments are currently on hold, whilst we address the appropriateness of their housing and employment status. There are currently twenty fostering assessments in progress all of which look positive and are likely to be heard at panel and all have panel dates. (Fig.2.)

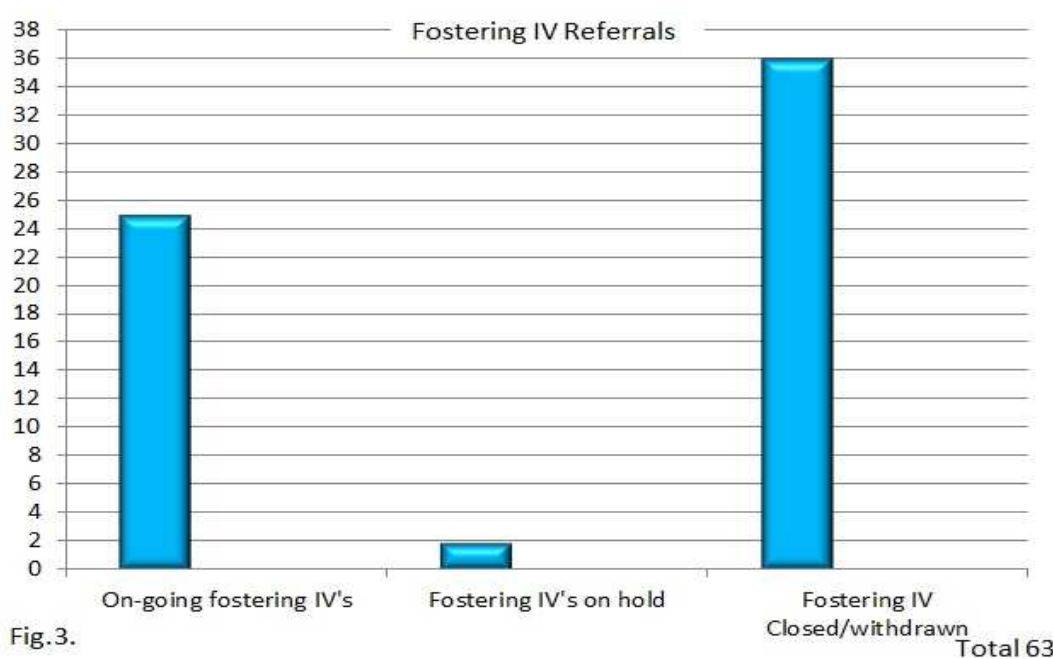


Five applicants withdrew due to other commitments and three applicants withdrew due to change in circumstances. Commitments and change in circumstances were a mixture of reasons, including current employment issues. Some applicants changed

their mind and withdrew their application to foster after understanding how intensive fostering can be and some applicants had personal problems which were not disclosed.

Three further applications were closed through a joint decision between Nottingham City Council and Social Work Choices as the applicants were not deemed suitable to be accepted as Foster Carers. The applicants had preferences for children from specific background and cultures which the Local Authority may not always be able to accommodate.

Three applications were withdrawn as result to the delay in starting the fostering assessment. One fostering assessment was closed but was reallocated to a connected person's assessment. (Fig.2a.)



Majority of the initial visits progressed on to fostering assessment and all fifty two assessments (Fig.2) were completed initial visits. At present SWC has twenty five initial visits which are more than likely to go on to a fostering assessment. Two initial visits are currently on hold as there are some issues to be addressed before they can progress on to a fostering assessment. (Fig.3.)

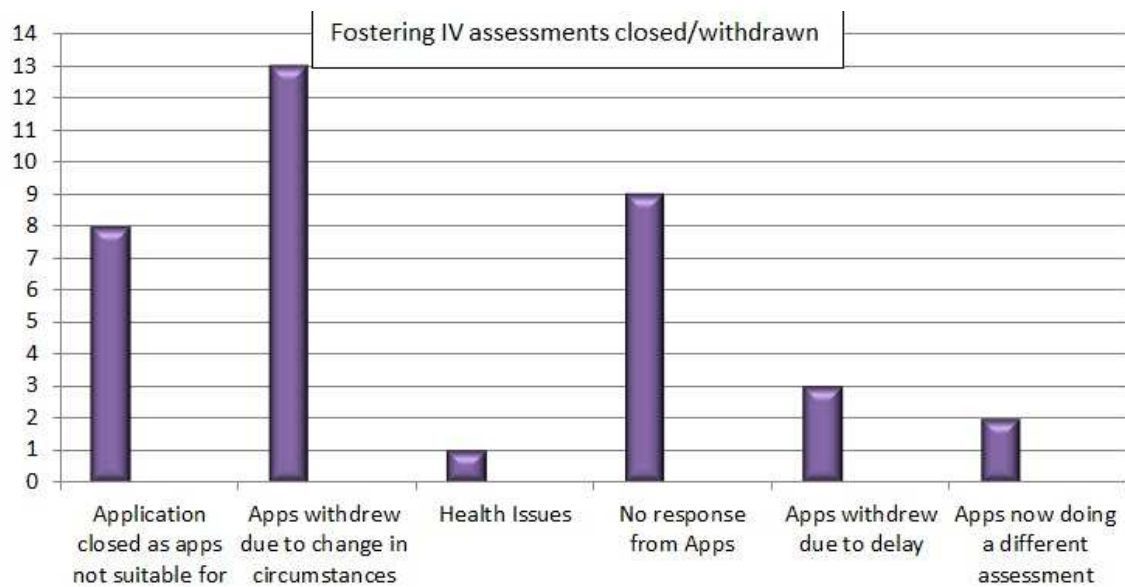


Fig.3a.

Total 36

Since August 2011 there has been in total 36 initial visits closed/withdrawn (Fig.3). There are number of reasons for this including a change in circumstance for the applicants and no response from applicants after numerous attempts in contacting them. Eight applications were closed by Nottingham City Council after robust quality assurance and consideration of the application. These applicants were not suitable to be foster carers; some applicants had issues with their immigration status, some had accommodation issues and many applicants had personal problems with which placing a child in care was inappropriate.

Two Initial visits were cancelled and reopened as an application to Adopt or became a Connected Persons Assessment. One application was closed due the applicants having health problems. Three applications were withdrawn as there was a delay in starting the initial visits from the time of when the applicants attended the information meeting.

In order to address these delays, Nottingham City Council, in agreement with SWC, has amended it's initial process so that the allocations are made concurrently to applications being completed by applicants.

### Connected Persons assessments

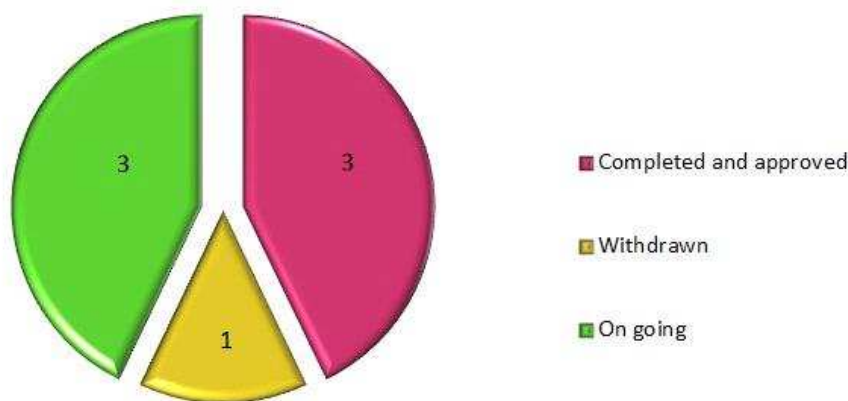


Fig.4.

Total 7

In order for a connected person to care for a looked after child, they must be approved as a foster carer under the Fostering Service Regulations (2011) or temporarily approved as a foster carer under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010).

Connected Person is defined as "A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker."

Relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent."

Currently SWC have completed three Connected Persons assessments, all three have been approved. A further three assessments are currently in the process and are likely to be approved at panel. One application withdrew as the applicant changed their mind.

During the same period September 2010 – August 2011, Nottingham City Council had 14 Connected Person Assessments approved at Panel. Until recently NCC have continued to complete some Connected Person Assessments.

Both Connected Persons Assessments and Fostering Assessment share the same panel. The allocated space on average is two-three assessments per panel. Other cases at panel are plans and matches. Nottingham City Council has one fostering panel per month at present therefore takes an average of 24-36 assessments to panel in a year. This is being addressed through the increase in panel capacity.

### Adoption Assessments

Nottingham City Council	Application for Adoption Information Packs	Attendees at Adoption Information Evening	Response forms received for consideration of Initial visit (IV)
01 September 2011 – 31 August 2012	<b>335</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>70</b>

Ninety-two Adoption Initial Visits (IV's) were sent to SWC for completion from September 2011 (This includes IV's completed by NCC prior to September 2011).

Following the I.V, fifty-two referrals have been sent to SWC for Prospective Adopter Report's (PAR's) (Fig.5).

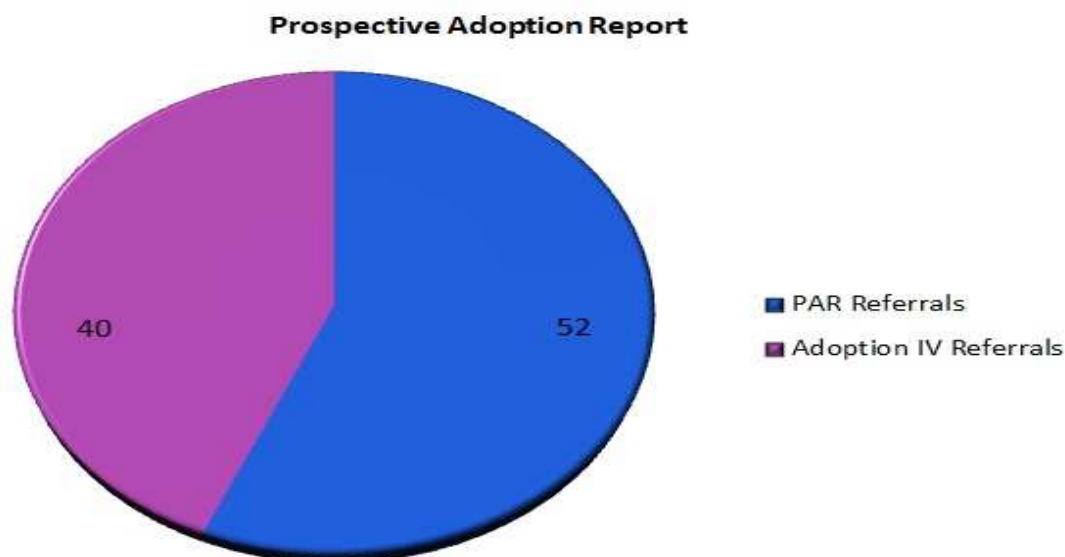


Fig.5.

Total 92

Currently there are thirteen initial visits in working progress. One assessment is on hold due to health issues and twenty six closed initial assessment (Fig.7.)

## Adoption IV Referrals

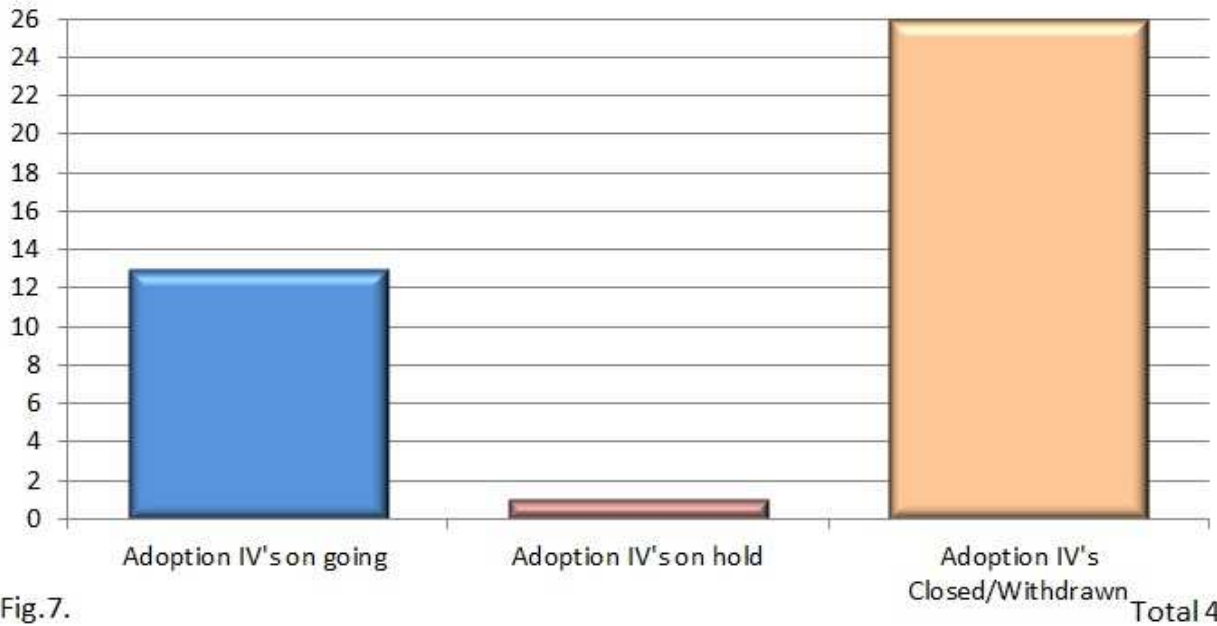


Fig.7.

There were several reasons why these twenty six assessments were closed/withdrawn. Some applicants had issues with their health, others had a change in circumstances, some withdrew due to the delay in process, many applicants did not respond to correspondence. A further seven assessments were closed through a joint decision between Nottingham City Council and Social Work Choices as the applicants were not suitable to become adoptive parents. (Fig.7a)

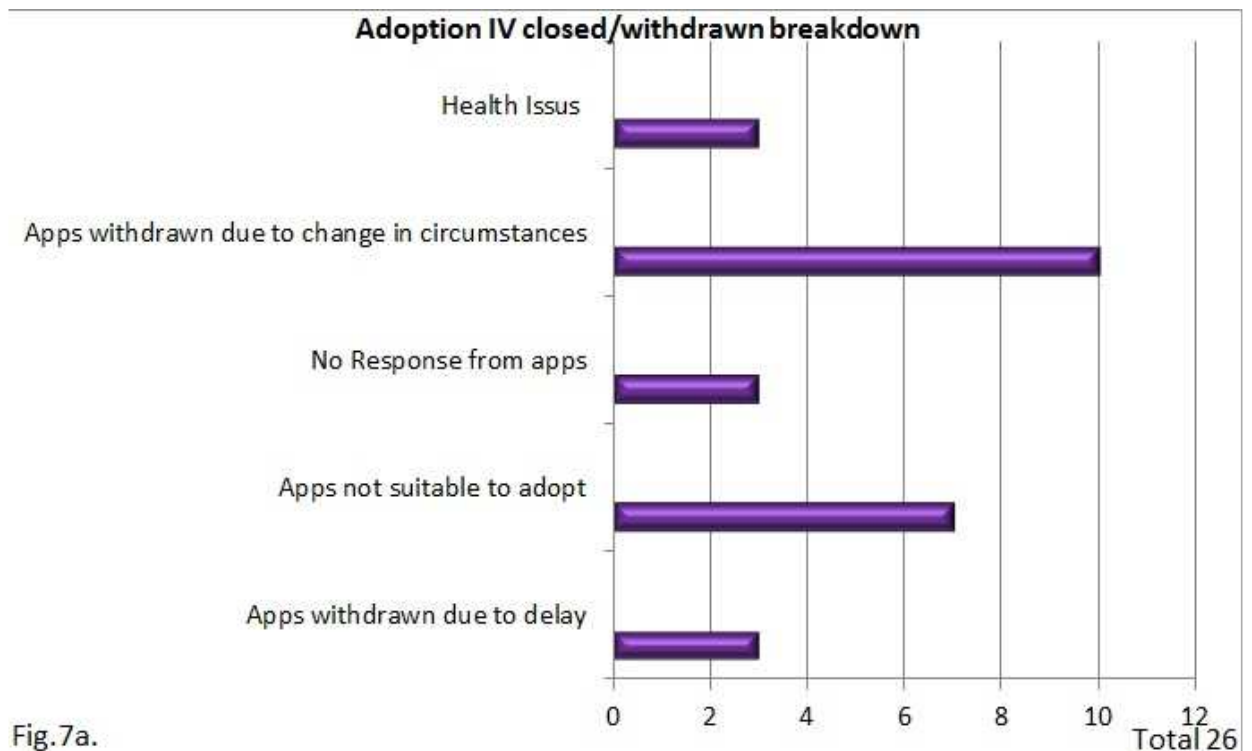
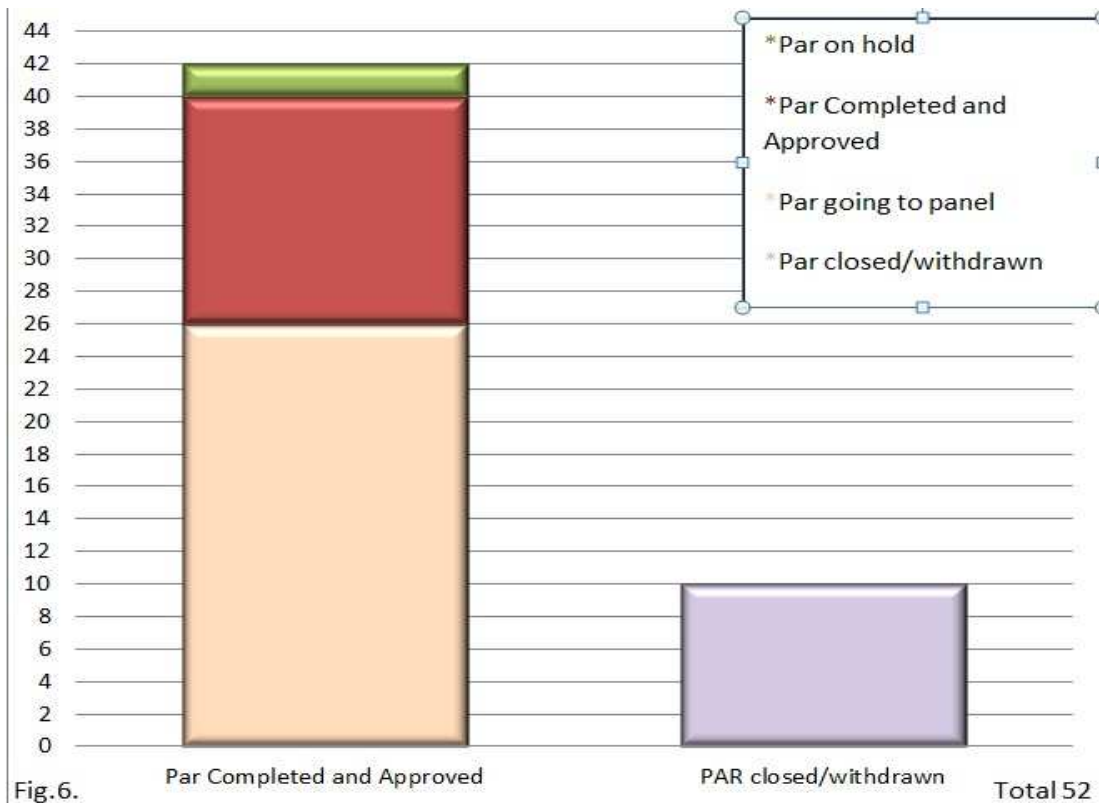


Fig.7a.

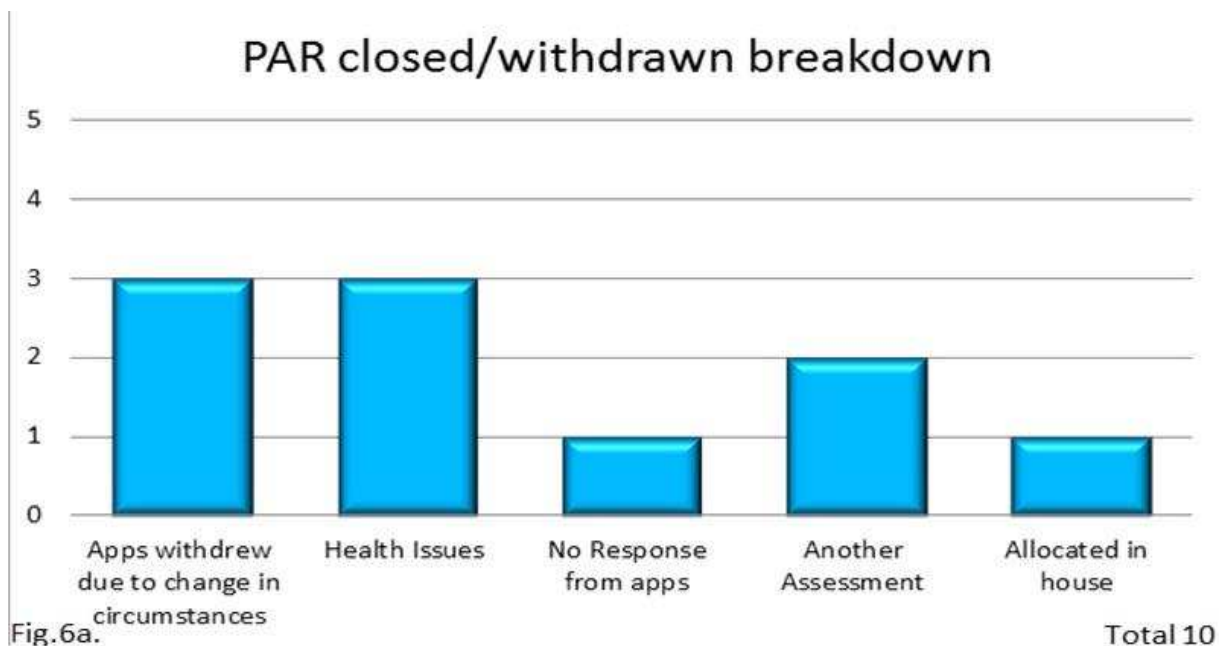
Out of the fifty two referrals to PAR, fourteen assessments are completed and went to adoption panel and subsequently approved. A further twenty six assessments are currently in progress, are going to go to panel and are likely to be approved and all have panel dates. Two assessments are on hold due to health issues. (Fig.6.)



During the same period September 2010 – August 2011, Nottingham City Council approved nineteen adopters approved at panel. This comparator does not take into consideration the recent high numbers of adoption plans which have had to be prioritised at panel due to court direction.



Ten PAR assessments were closed/withdrawn due to the following reasons: applicants withdrew their application due to change in circumstances; some applications were closed due to health issues; others were better suited to a Special Guardianship Order and one application was closed due to no response from the applicants and another was allocated within NCC. (Fig.6a.)



A comprehensive pricing structure was agreed within the contract. Early indications show that the net price to NCC of fostering and adoptions assessments represents Value for Money.

<b>Fostering/CP</b>			<b>Totals</b>
Completed Form F Assessment	<b>£2000 per assessment</b>	14 + 3 (+ 20 going through at present (13 booked in 2012 and 7 in 2013))	37 x 2000 £74,000.00
IV + Checks	<b>£30 per hour</b>	115	115 x 6 (hrs) x 30 £20,700
Assessment ceased by mutual agreement	<b>£30 per hour up to a max £2000</b>	18 +1	19 x 8 (hrs) x 30 £4,560.00
<b>Adoption</b>			<b>Totals</b>
Completed PAR assessment	<b>£2200 per assessment</b>	14 (+ 26 in progress)	40 x 2200 £88,000
IV + Checks	<b>£30 per hour</b>	92	92 x 6 (hrs) x 30 £16,560.00
Assessment ceased by mutual agreement	<b>£30 per hour up to max £2000</b>	10	10 x 8 (hrs) x 30 £2,400.00

The above costings are approximate as some timings will be under and some over the designated time allocated to complete.

A review of the pricing structure is scheduled and will also consider include travel costs.

Initial feedback from both fostering and adoption panels has been positive. Panel chairs and members have commented on the quality of the assessments coming through. A satisfaction questionnaire was distributed to our potential adopters/foster carers who had made an enquiry to us from April 2011. The purpose of this was to capture feedback about our Fostering and Adoption Service as well as Social Work Choices. To date we received 20 feedback questionnaires from prospective adopters and 18 feedback questionnaires from prospective foster carers. An analysis of the responses is being completed and will be available for the board late 2012.

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.

As part of our 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. SWC are supporting Nottingham City in our implementation of this.

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

Internally NCC have had to give some real consideration to its administrative processes which have not always been timely and well organised. This has led to some delays for both prospective foster carers and adoption applicants.

The work therefore undertaken by SWC has been more challenging as they have in some cases been unable to secure timely slots at Panel to present cases

A review of the administrative structures has taken place and processes are now much more defined and will reduce delays.

There have been some issues internally with the scheduling of the pre-approval Training for both foster carers and adoption applicants. Feedback from applicants is that there have experienced some delays due to cancelled training thus preventing their approval going to Panel. Feedback from applicants in respect of adoption has asked that NCC review this training with some urgency and make changes.

Some consideration is being given to how best the training should be delivered and by whom to ensure that it is fit for purpose, timely, relevant and appropriate to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays.

Establishing the second fostering panel which will be smaller and more discreet will provide for a supportive environment for prospective carers.

### **3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 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.

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 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 and Adoption National Minimum Standards

These risks have been minimised through regular 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 Nottingham City Council and Social Work Choices contract  
[Contract Reference: 260-ADOPT-SD-08-2011]

6.2 Fostering & Adoption data from SCW Ltd as at 17.08.12

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

7.1 Fostering National Minimum Standards

7.2 The Nottingham Plan to 2020

7.3 Adoption and Children Act 2002;

7.4 The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005;

7.5 The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005;

7.6 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

7.7  
7.8 The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005.