

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 19 January 2015**

<b>Title of paper:</b>	<b>Fostering and Adoption Panel Chairs Report</b>	
<b>Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):</b>	<b>Helen Blackman, Director – Children’s Social Care</b>	<b>Wards affected: ALL</b>
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<b>Other colleagues who have provided input:</b>	<b>Clive Harrison (Chair of Panel One)          Phil Rogers (Chair of Panel Two)          Dagoberto Rojas (Chair of Panel Three)          Sue Seabrook (Chair of Panel Four)          Kay Challand – Principal Manager          Jay Nahal – Panel Adviser          Maxine Bennett – Panel Adviser</b>	
<b>Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> January 2015</b>	
<b>Relevant Council Plan Strategic Priority:</b>		
Cutting unemployment by a quarter		<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut crime and anti-social behaviour		<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure more school leavers get a job, training or further education than any other City		<input type="checkbox"/>
Your neighbourhood as clean as the City Centre		<input type="checkbox"/>
Help keep your energy bills down		<input type="checkbox"/>
Good access to public transport		<input type="checkbox"/>
Nottingham has a good mix of housing		<input type="checkbox"/>
Nottingham is a good place to do business, invest and create jobs		<input type="checkbox"/>
Nottingham offers a wide range of leisure activities, parks and sporting events		<input type="checkbox"/>
Support early intervention activities		<input type="checkbox"/>
Deliver effective, value for money services to our citizens		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):</b>		
<p><b>Providing permanency for looked after children in Nottingham with adoptive parents and foster carers. The Fostering and Adoption Service are modernising aspects of the service. The Panel’s primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people placed in foster care and adoptive homes/families by Nottingham City. Panel takes its responsibility to protect children very seriously and is vigorous in its scrutiny of reports and assessments.</b></p>		
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>It is recommended that members of the Corporate Parenting Board (the ‘Board’) note the activity of the fostering and adoption panels.</b>	

## **1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 Good practice as suggested by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF 2012; 2013) states that an annual report should be prepared detailing the work of the fostering and adoption panels. The report should details the following:
- the numbers and profiles of foster carers and children
  - strengths and achievements of the service
  - performance targets and measurements and further areas for development
- 1.2 The report should be made available to elected members.
- 1.3 An annual report has been produced (see appendix 1). The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of members of the Board with information pertaining to the activity of the fostering and adoption panel.
- 1.4 In addition, the Panel Chairs are required to provide six monthly performance reports. This report contains a summary of these six monthly reports (see section 2.11).

## **2. BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)**

### **Function of Fostering and Adoption Panels**

- 2.1 The primary functions of the fostering and adoption panels are to;
- Recommend the approval of prospective adoptive parents
  - Recommend the approval of prospective foster carers
  - Recommend the placing of children with approved adoptive parents (i.e. matching)
  - Recommend the approval of adoption plans for relinquished children

### **Modernisation of Fostering and Adoption Panels**

- 2.2 The modernisation of the Fostering and Adoption panels is continuing to progress in the right direction. Fostering and Adoption panel members are embracing new technologies and the roll out of tablet computers to members continues. This method allows for the secure distribution of reports and other documents to panel members. This goes a long way to supporting the Councils aim for a paperless office.
- 2.3 The merging of the Fostering and Adoption panels, which came into effect in September 2013, has gone well and has had the desired effect of providing availability and flexibility with regard to allocating time for cases to be heard in a timely way.
- 2.4 The following is statistical information detailing the activity of the panel, according to the types of cases that have been presented.
- 2.5 There is an emerging national picture in the reduction of perspective adopter applications, which has reflected in the activity of the adoption panel for this year (see

Application for 2014 April – Dec. 2014, Table 1). Despite a decline in the expected perspective adopter applications, it is hoped that the increased number of perspective adopter enquiries will yield an increased applications in the future. Enquire figures for April 2014 – November 2014 show 193 enquiries, and increase of 40 when compared to the same period in 2013.

Table 1 – Overall Adoption Statistics

	April 2014 – Dec. 2014 (8 months)	April 2013 – March 2014	April 2012 – March 2013	April 2011 – March 2012
Children's Plans	46 children (incl. 4 rescinded plans)	56 Children	84 Children	54 Children
Applications	23 families	51 families	33 families	29 families
Matches (Notts)	21 children placed with 16 Notts. families	43 children placed with 38 Notts. families	34 children matched with 25 Notts. families	28 children matched with 23 Notts. families
Matches (interagency)	14 children placed with 11 interagency families	14 children placed with 12 interagency families	7 children matched with 7 interagency families	9 children matched with 8 interagency families
Total matches	35 children placed with 27 families	57 children placed with 50 families	41 children matched with 32 families	37 children matched with 31 families

Table 2 – Overall Fostering Statistics

	April 2014 – Dec. 2014 (8 months)	April 2013 – March 2014	Apr 2012 – March 2013	Apr 2011 – March 2012
Mainstream Applications	19	10	15	19
Mainstream Deferral	4	6	10	11
Connected Persons	8	3	13	13

Connected Persons Deferrals	1	19	11	4
Annual Reviews	10	3	4	3
Deregistration	23	22	22	13
Change Of Approvals	7	3	4	13
None Approvals	2	0	2	1
Home From Home	2	0	0	6

## Quality of Reports

2.6 The quality reports being presented to Fostering and Adoption panels has been strengthened along with the quality assurance role of the managers prior to the reports being submitted. The two panel advisors continue to provide the panels the quality assurance that panels require in order to make decisions. It would be fair to say that Panel members continue to see that there have been improvements in the quality of reports that have been presented to the Fostering and Adoption panels. However, there are still a small proportion of assessment reports that fall below the expected standard. This continues to be addressed and monitored by the Panel service and by the Children's Service Manager. On the 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2014, the Authority entered into a new contract with Core Assets, who would be responsible for undertaking the assessments of prospective foster carers, adopters and connected persons on behalf of the Authority. Regular meetings between Core Assets and the Authority provide an opportunity for the quality of reports to be discussed and addressed. Thus far, overall, we are pleased with the quality of the reports that have been presented.

2.7 In order to avoid disruption for applicants in the assessment process, the decision was made to allow the outgoing assessment provider, Social Work Choices (SWC), to continue work allocated until completion. Unallocated applications, previously held by SWC, have been reallocated to Core Assets.

2.8 The newly constituted Panel has a strong balance of skills and experience in the required areas and now more closely reflects the make-up of our local community. The Panel displays a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm to work, in ensuring that high standards of scrutiny are applied to assessments. The Panel further recognises

the responsibility it has in balancing this with a need to ensure that applicants and staff feel welcome and respected by the Panel.

2.9 The Fostering and Adoption panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure and legislation. To support panel members they will be provided with training and development opportunities. This will be in the form of "Bite Size" training on the day of panel and the annual training event, which is currently set to take place on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

2.10 The Panels as a whole have the opportunity to feedback any issues or concerns which are then addressed via the respective panel advisors. Matters that have been of concern in the past have been the quality of reports to panel and completion of Life Story work and also the robustness of adoption support plans.

### **Summary of Panel Chair's reports**

2.11 As mentioned earlier the Panel Chair's are required to produce a six monthly performance report. Below is a summary of those reports highlighting strengths and areas for developments for fostering and adoption:

#### Strengths

- Adoption reports are of good standard
- Agency Decision maker timescales are being met
- Child centred services to children and carers
- Good summary and analysis for matching children with adopters
- Panel members have been given the opportunity and have attended BAAF training seminars
- Team of Panel Advisors consistent
- Meeting with Service Managers to address needs identified by panel members
- Panel Steering groups meet bi-monthly, and the panel chairs and vice chairs are invited to this meeting.

#### Areas of development

- Adoption support plans for children need to be strengthened
- Improvements required for high quality assessments for both fostering and connected persons
- Better communication between Social Work Choices (outgoing agency provider), NCC CSW, Fostering and Adoption
- Panel minutes
- Training on using IT to streamline paperwork

Overall, all panels are working well and the Fostering and Adoption Service are working towards bringing continuous improvements to the panel. Issues they have raised have been addressed.

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

3.1 None

**4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)**

4.1 None

**5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS)**

5.1 None

**6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions

**7. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION**

7.1 Appendix One - Annual Fostering and Adoption Panel Report.

**8. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

8.1 BAAF, Effective Fostering Panels: Guidance on Regulations, Process and Good Practice in fostering panels in England (2012)

8.2 BAAF, Effective Adoption Panels: Guidance on Regulations, Process Practice and permanency panels in England (Sixth Edition) (2013)