

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 19 January 2015

Title of paper:	Adoption & Permanency	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director of Children’s Social Care	Wards affected: ALL
Report author(s) and contact details:	Sonia Cain, Service Manager Fostering & Adoption, Sonia.cain@nottinghamcity.gov.uk Kwesi Williams (Project Officer – Children in Care), 0115 8762684, kwesi.williams@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Robert Fagan (Innovation and Change Manager), 0115 8764605 robert.fagan@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	6th January 2015	
Relevant Council Plan Strategic Priority:		
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"/>
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>The report provides an overview of the permanency performance of the Local Authority and the number of Adoption. The report will primarily focus on adoption activity as this continues to be the plan for a significant number of the Authority’s children in care; however brief reference is made to Special Guardianship Orders figures.</p> <p>The report highlights actions that are being taken to address delays.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board notes the performance to date in adoption and the activities being undertaken to minimise delays.	

1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 It is important that members of the Corporate Parenting Board are kept informed of the activities being undertaken to achieve permanency for those who the Board have

corporate parental responsibility for. It is also imperative that the Board is given the opportunity to comment on current activity.

- 1.2 The report also makes reference to the actions relating to Strategic Priority Statement (SPS) two of the 'Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2014 – 2016: Valuing the future of our Children in Care and Care Leavers' and provides a brief update on progress made against these actions – see section 2.19.

2. BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 Nottingham City continues to make adoption plans for a significant number of children in its care. Many of these children have complex medical conditions, birth parents have complex histories, some of the children are sibling groups and children with disabilities. Adoption plans are made knowing that many of these children are considered 'hard to place' but with a strong belief that if children cannot live with their birth family, adoption will provide the permanency and the security they need to achieve positive outcomes.
- 2.2 The Adoption Scorecard (introduced in 2012) allows local authorities and other adoption agencies to monitor their own performance and compare it with that of others at critical points in the child's journey towards adoption.
- 2.3 The government are incrementally reducing the timescale by which children should be adopted year on year. During the financial year 2013-14, Nottingham was in line with national performance but as this is a three rolling total our position has declined with more adoptions of children who have waited longer.
- 2.4 Successfully placing more complex children can negatively affect our timeliness as the complexity of these cases brings more days to our scorecard pro-rata.
- 2.5 Since the last report, the service has been re-designed. Three separate teams have been established within the Fostering and Adoption Services, these are;
 - Fostering
 - Adoption
 - Post Order

Work is underway to move social workers into the respective teams.

Adoption Data for financial year 2014-15

- 2.6 Locally the number of children waiting to be adopted on the 3rd December 2014 was 165 children, details below;
 - 17 Children's Best Interests Decision for adoption made
 - 11 Children's Adoption Plans agreed
 - 85 Children with Placement Orders

- 5 Children Matched
- 47 Children placed with adopters

2.7 There have been 47 children adopted and it is hoped that over 50 will be adopted by the 31st March 2015. This is a marked improvement on our performance in 2013/14 where we achieved 43 adoptions for the whole year.

2.8 There are 85 children with placement orders that are not matched or placed, 46 of these children have been waiting for over 18 months. 37 of the 46 children have adoption plans which are currently in the process of being rescinded. 12 of these plans are currently within the court process awaiting a court date to revoke the Placement Order, the adoption panel having agreed that the adoption plan is no longer in the child's best interests. These children are now in other permanent placements.

2.9 There are 37 children whose plans for adoption are to be rescinded, the breakdown is as follows

Gender

21 children are male

16 children are female

Age

5 children are under 5 years of age

26 children are 5 – 10 years of age

6 children are 10 years and over

Ethnicity

31 children are white

2 black

4 dual-heritages

Sibling Groups

9 sibling groups containing 19 children

Disability

2 children have a disability

2.10 The average time scale awaiting placement with an adoptive family for the 37 children being rescinded is 1211 days.

2.11 The Authority is currently homefinding for 48 children. Data relating to this activity are presented as followed;

11 have been waiting for over 18 months (23%)

Gender

32 of these children are male

16 of these children are female

Age

34 are under 5 years old

13 are between 5 – 10 years old

1 child is over 10 years old

Ethnicity

38 are white

2 are black

8 are dual-heritage

Sibling Groups

There are 12 sibling groups (these include 26 children)

2.12 The average waiting time for children at this stage in the process is 376 days across the 48 children cohort; however the average is impacted upon by a small group of difficult to place children, details of these children are below. We are actively pursuing matches for all of the 48 children for whom we have a placement order and adoption is still their plan. The only children that we are not pursuing active matches for are those for whom we have plans to rescind their adoption plans.

2.13 For children who we are unable to place with our internal adopters, we make use of our Interagency Adoption budget.

Recruitment

2.14 Part of the Adoption Reform Grant has been used to employ a Marketing Officer and two Customer Service Officers. These appointments have contributed to an increase in the number of adoption enquiries over the last 2 years.

- 2.15 We currently have over 20 adopters who are in the process of being assessed, but the challenge which we share with a number of local authorities is to recruit enough adopters to match the complexity of the children with whom we would wish to place. We have close links with neighbouring authorities as a member of the East Midlands Adoption Consortium and regularly share profiles in relation to adopters who are waiting and children with adoption plans.

Adoption Support Fund

- 2.16 We are about to commence planning for the roll out of the Adoption Support Fund to all local authorities. We welcome this initiative as a means of continuing the support we offer to adopters who have adopted some of our most complex children.

Special Guardianship Orders

- 2.17 There has been 30 Special Guardianship Orders between the beginning of the 2014-15 financial year to the time of writing this report (December 2014).

Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2014 – 2016)

- 2.18 As highlighted in 1.1, it is imperative that the Board is given the opportunity to comment on current activity. It is also important to show how service activity is linked to the Board's strategic priorities. Service activity has contributed to Strategic Priority Statement two of the CiC and Care Leavers strategy that states,

'Nottingham City Council believes that all children should grow up with their birth families. Where this is not able to happen we will secure permanency through adoption, special guardianship, residence orders or long-term fostering.'

- 2.19 A number of activities are being undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Service in order to meet this priority. The activities, as well as the progress made against them are described as followed.

Action:

We monitor the progress of children in the adoption process to help ensure children are adopted in a timely manner:

Activity:

The Adoption Analysis Journal (AAJ) is produced at the end of each month to provide a detailed analysis of all children in the adoption process at the different stages. This also enables early detection of potential delays and promotes forward planning to prevent those delays.

The AAJ is used as part of the Exit Planning Meetings where adoption cases and how they are being progressed is discussed in detail.

The AAJ is also a key document used in Adoption Tracker Meetings.

Action:

Adoption Placement Advisors (APAs) work closely with social workers to actively seek appropriate placements for children in the adoption process.

Activity:

Regular meetings are held between the Fostering and Adoption Service Manager and the APAs. These meetings are used to ensure homefinding is initiated as early as possible in an attempt to secure permanency through adoption quickly.

Action:

The authority has commenced a rolling programme of Profiling Evenings, as well as participated in Adoption Activity Days. Both provide an opportunity to create matches for our children with adopters.

Activities:

Profile Evenings are run jointly with Leicester City, on a six-weekly cycle. All remaining Profile Evenings have been booked for the remainder of the financial year.

Adoption Activity Days (AADs) are run by BAAF (the British Association for Adoption and Fostering). The Authority attends on average two ADDs per year.

The Profile Evenings/Activity Days Tracker records the impact of these activities.

The combined impact of the activities described has led to an increase in the number of children that the Authority has secured permanency for when compared to this time last year.

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

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

7.1 None

8. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

8.1 Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2014 – 2016): Valuing the Future of our Children in Care and Care Leavers (2014)

<http://gossweb.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/nccextranet/index.aspx?articleid=10687>