

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 1st February 2016

Title of paper:	Fostering and Adoption Panel Chairs Report	
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Other colleagues who have provided input:	Clive Harrison (Chair of Panel One) Phil Rogers (Chair of Panel Two) Dagoberto Rojas (Chair of Panel Three) Jay Nahal – Panel Advisor Maxine Bennett – Panel Advisor	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	11th January 2016	
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 Panel’s primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people placed in foster care and adoptive homes/families by Nottingham City and beyond. The Panel takes its responsibility to protect children very seriously and is vigorous in its scrutiny of reports and assessments.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	It is recommended that members of the Corporate Parenting Board (the ‘Board’) note the activity of the fostering and adoption panels which is a statutory requirement.	

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 detail 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 fostering and adoption panel report will be produced later this year, which will meet the good practice guidelines as set out by BAAF. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary to members of the Board with information pertaining to the activity of the fostering and adoption panels.

1.4 In addition, this report contains a summary of reports produced by Panel Chairs - see section 2.7.

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.

Fostering and Adoption Panels

2.2 The Fostering and Adoption panels continue to make progress in the right direction. The panel members are embracing new technologies and the roll out of tablet computers 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. That said we do understand that some members do struggle with the use of these technologies and have tried to accommodate this as much as possible through training and offering paper reports.

The resignation of the chair of panel 4 prompted a review of the panels. The result of this was that the number of panels was reduced to three per month. Going forward the plan is to continue with this and then to add a fourth panel every quarter. It was felt that this would still allow accessibility and flexibility to the panel throughout the year.

In February of this year we recruited 5 new panel members, who replaced those who had either resigned or were not able to commit to the role.

2.3 The merging of the Fostering and Adoption panels, which came into effect in September 2013, continues to be effective and offers availability and flexibility in regard to allocating time slots for cases to be heard.

2.4 The following is statistical information detailing the activity of the panel, according to the types of cases that have been presented.

Table 1 – Overall Adoption Statistics

	April 2015 – Dec. 2015	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2013 – March 2014	April 2012 – March 2013
Foster to Adopt	1	0	0	0
Applications	37 families	34 families	51 families (Until Feb 2014)	33 families
Matches (Nottm)	14 children with 14 families	30 children placed with 21 Nottm families	43 children placed with 38 Notts. families	34 children matched with 25 Notts. families
Matches (interagency)	25 children with 16 interagency families	21 children placed with 23 interagency families	14 children placed with 12 interagency families	7 children matched with 7 interagency families
Total matches	39 children with 30 families	51 children placed with 44 families	57 children placed with 50 families	41 children matched with 32 families
Total Adoptions Orders	33	70	43	40

Table 2 – Overall Fostering Statistics

	April 2015 – Dec. 2015	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2013 – March 2014	Apr 2012 – March 2013
Mainstream Applications	16	33	10	15
Connected Persons	14	11	3	13
Connected Persons Extensions	10	7	19	11
Deregistrations/resignation	18	22	22	22

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Table 3 – Outcomes for Children’s Adoption Plans (relinquished babies)

	Approved	Rejected	Deferred
Plans (April 2014 –March 2015)	4	0	0
Plans (April 2015 –Dec. 2015)	3	0	0

Quality of Reports

2.5 The quality reports being presented to Fostering and Adoption panels has been strengthened along with the quality assurance role of managers prior to the reports being submitted to panel. 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 being presented to the Fostering and Adoption panels. However, there are still one or two assessment reports that fall below the expected standard. This continues to be addressed and monitored by the Fostering and Adoption Service and Core Assets who carry out fostering and adoption assessments under a contract with this Council. We have now developed a good working partnership with this agency with the express aim of offering a professional and comprehensive service to citizens applying to become either foster carers or adopters. Regular meetings with Core Assets have gone a long way to improving the quality of output.

2.6 The year 2015 - 2016 has continued to be a busy year for Panels, with over 90 cases being heard at panel. Panel membership has a strong balance of skill and experience representing diverse sectors of the community. The Panel displays a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm to the work, and ensures that high levels of scrutiny are applied to assessments with the focus always being on meeting the needs of children and safeguarding their welfare. 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 Fostering and Adoption Panel.

The Fostering and Adoption panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure, guidance and legislation. To support panel members they will be provided with training and development opportunities, plus panel specific training annually.

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 are routinely addressed are the quality of reports to panel and completion of Life Story work, as well as the robustness of adoption support plans, this is in line with the changes in government guidelines that require us to address future support needs of adoptive children in particular.

Summary of Panel Chair's reports

2.7 As mentioned earlier the Panel Chair's are required to produce a six monthly performance report. Previous reports have highlighted the following;

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
- Improvements in timescales for adoption assessments
- 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 quarterly and the panel chairs and vice chairs are invited to this meeting.

Overall, Fostering and Adoption panels are working well and the Fostering and Adoption Service are working towards bring continuous improvements to the panel and the processes of panel. Issues raised will continue to be addressed in a timely manner.

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

None

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)