

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – JUNE 2017

Title of paper:	Adoption and Permanency	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director, Children’s Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Sonia Cain, Service Manager Fostering & Adoption, Sonia.cain@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Sharon Clarke, Service Manager Children in Care and Leaving Care Sharon.clarke@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)		
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Strategic Regeneration and Development		<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools		<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning and Housing		<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Services		<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy, Sustainability and Customer		<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs, Growth and Transport		<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults, Health and Community Sector		<input type="checkbox"/>
Children, Early Intervention and Early Years		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Leisure and Culture		<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources and Neighbourhood Regeneration		<input 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 adoptions. The report will primarily focus on adoption activity and the plan for a Regional Adoption Agency.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To note the performance to date in relation to Permanency Planning for Children in Care, this can be in the form of Adoption, Permanent Fostering or Special Guardianship.	
2	To present the Adoption and Permanency report to the Corporate Parenting Board on a regular basis.	

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 whom the Board have corporate parental responsibility. It is also important that the Board is given the opportunity to comment on current activity.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 Nottingham City continues to make adoption plans for a significant number of children in its care. This is in spite of the number of children nationally being considered for adoption decreasing. We continue to make adoption plans for children with complex medical conditions who belong to a sibling group, have a range of disabilities, or have birth parents with complex histories. Adoption plans continue to be made for these children considered “hard to place” with a firmly held view that if children are unable to live with their birth family, then permanency with another family should be the care plan.
- 2.2 Nottingham City currently has 100 children with adoption plans. The Adoption Service reported a similar figure in the last report to the Corporate Parenting Board. 24 children are currently matched with adopters.
- 2.3 From 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 there were 48 children adopted from care. This was a similar figure to last year in spite of many Local Authorities reporting a reduction in the number of adoptions. There have been 3 children adopted so far this year.
- 2.4 We are currently home finding for 22 children. Data relating to this activity is as follows:

Gender

15 of these children are male

7 of these children are female

Age

Under	1 – 5 children
	1 – 3 children
	2 – 1 children
	3 – 5 children
	4 – 2 children
	5 – 2 children
	6 – 3 children
	9 – 1 child

Ethnicity

White British	13 children
White British/Black Caribbean	4 children
Black African	2 children
Pakistan	3 children

Sibling Groups

5 sets of 2 sibling groups
1 set of 3 siblings

2.5 We continue to make strenuous efforts to home find for children; we do change plans if this will not be achieved within the set timescale. 15 children currently have plans for their adoption plan to be rescinded. This is where we have exhausted all possibilities to find an adoptive home. Many of these children remain cared for by their foster carer in a permanent arrangement.

2.6 For children who we are unable to place with our own adopters, we place with another agency's approved adopters. Two years ago the DfE agreed to fund the interagency placements for children considered "hard to place". From 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 Nottingham City Council was able to claim back £243,000 from the DfE. The DfE earlier this year changed the criteria by which it supported interagency placements, in that a child would need to have been in care over 18 months to attract funding. This may then place pressure on our own internal budgets to fund interagency adoption placements, when we cannot match with our own adopters.

2.7 Recruitment

Recruitment of adopters continues to be successful and steady. We currently have 19 prospective adopters who are being assessed and 34 approved adopters waiting to be matched. Along with a number of Local Authorities in the region, we are not currently accepting applications from adopters who only would like to adopt a single child under the age of two, unless they are willing to consider a sibling group, as we have sufficient adopters for children under two. This decision is kept under review.

2.8 Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund commenced operating in April 2015. This is a DfE initiative aimed at offering support to adopters, by enabling them to access bespoke therapeutic support for them and their child if they consider it to be beneficial.

During the period April 2016 to March 2017, after we made applications on their behalf, our adopters received £157,092.83 from the Adoption Support fund. This comprised of support for 39 children Post-Adoption Order, 6 children Pre-Adoption Order being made, and 2 children who were subject of Special Guardianship Orders.

Last year there were some changes to how the Adoption Support fund was awarded, with the introduction of 2 separate fair access limits. There is a limit by the fund of £2500 for a specialist assessment. Any assessment over this limit would need to be match funded by ourselves. There is a limit of £5000 per child for therapeutic support; again any support over this amount would need to be match funded by ourselves.

2.9 Regionalisation of Adoption

Plans for an East Midlands Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be established and operating by 2020 continue. To this end there are now plans for a pilot including Derby City, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City (D2N2) to commence in the summer. The pilot will look at reconfiguring current staff into permanence teams, or establishing permanency social workers who will jointly work with children's social workers who are undertaking care proceedings and will progress their adoption plans. It has been evidenced that social workers skilled and experienced in adoption

with a solely adoption caseload will be able to progress adoption faster, and avoid changes of a social worker at significant times in the child's adoption journey.

As well as the establishment of permanency teams / permanency social workers, planning has commenced to bring together the D2N2 Authorities to look at the sharing of adopters, and the matching of children. It is all part of commencing working together in a region.

The DfE has high expectations that Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies working together regionally will improve outcomes for adopters, and their children. The child's journey towards adoption should be quicker with timescales improved, and the costs should decrease.

To this end we are fully involved in the life and work of the RAA and making a contribution on behalf of the City.

2.10 Future Reports to the Corporate Parenting Board:

- The progress in relation to Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention, this is an important work stream for the Department in a competitive market. This report will come to the Board in July.
- The Statement of Purpose in relation to both Fostering and Adoption will come to the Board in November for the Boards approval. It is a requirement that this is approved annually.
- This report, in relation to Adoption and Permanency, will come every six months and is planned to come again in January 2018.

2.11 Permanency Panel

Nottingham City Council is committed to confirming permanency planning for children. This can be in the form of Adoption, Permanent Fostering or Special Guardianship Orders.

2.12 A Permanency Panel has been established in order to ensure proposals made regarding planning meet the needs of children / young people. Proposals are also quality assured with safeguarding responsibilities in mind, and the Panel also provides an additional forum to monitor the Local Authority's financial commitments. The Panel ensures compliance in respect of relevant legislation; Amended Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010), Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (2015), Working Together (2015), Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (Vol.2, 2015).

2.13 Under Care Planning regulations, the consideration of permanence for a child should be considered, if not before, then immediately after a child is accommodated. As such, Social Workers immediately start to care-plan the best route for permanence. The objectives are laid out and viabilities explored, prior to a child's Review at 20 days. The options for a Special Guardianship Order should be presented to the Permanency Panel for scrutiny and approval, before it is confirmed at a Review or submitted to Court. Those children whose plans are to be permanently fostered are agreed at the child's Reviews, prior to being presented to Panel. Those children with a plan of Adoption continue to be subject to Adoption guidance, regulations and processes.

- 2.14 The Permanency Panel is comprised of Service Managers from Children's Neighbourhood Social Work Teams, Children in Care, Fostering and Adoption as well as an Independent Reviewing Officer. Legal advice is also available if required. The Panel reflects upon the proposed plans and ensures that the presented match between the prospective carer and child is viable and appropriate. The Panel considers the information, and measures this against the objective for each child as defined in the Regulations; 'permanence is the long term plan for the child's upbringing... ensure having a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging' (Planning Page 20 Regulations, Vol.2, 2015).
- 2.15 The Panel makes recommendations, and these are ratified by the Nominated Senior Manager (Head of Service, Children in Care) and the Director of Children's Integrated Services, both in respect of the plan and the financial expenditure it will incur.
- 2.16 The Panel may not agree to the proposals made, and may either recommend further work or suggest alternative options. It has to be clearly demonstrated that the placement clearly meets the best interests of the child, now and in the future. Expenditure has to be approved via our usual processes.
- 2.17 Inevitably, some plans for permanence will require a package of support. When a package has been agreed and scrutinised by the Service Manager (Fostering and Adoption) it will then be reviewed within one year. Packages of support can include a range of options such as therapeutic support and or financial commitment.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 None

4 FINANCE COLLEAGUE COMMENTS (INCLUDING IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)

- 4.1 None.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COLLEAGUE COMMENTS (INCLUDING RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES, AND LEGAL, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS)

- 5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE COMMENTS (FOR DECISION RELATING TO ALL PROPERTY ASSETS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE) (AREA COMMITTEE REPORTS ONLY)

- 6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?

No



An EIA is not required because:

(Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)

Not required as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

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

8.1 None.

9 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

9.1 Amended Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010), Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (2015), Working Together (2015), Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (Vol.2, 2015). Planning Regulations, Vol.2, 2015 Adoption Minimum Standards.