

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 19th May 2014

Title of paper:	Fostering and Adoption Panel Chairs Report	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman, Director – Safeguarding	Wards affected: ALL
Report author(s) and contact details:	Sonia Sandiford (Acting Service Manager – Fostering and Adoption, sonia.sandiford@nottinghamcity.gov.uk, (0115) 876 5984)	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	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 Kwesi Williams – Project Officer (Children in Care)	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	7th May 2014	
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>Providing permanency for looked after children in Nottingham with adoptive parents and foster carers. The Fostering and Adoption Service are modernising all aspects of their service delivery and outputs. The Panel’s primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people placed into foster care and adoption by Nottingham City. 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.	

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 2.7).

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)

Modernisation of Fostering and Adoption Panels

- 2.2 There is has been a need to modernise the fostering and adoption panels to ensure fitness for purpose and ongoing cohesion with the Service needs including the change in the two-stage approval process for prospective foster carers and adoptive parents. All panel Chairs and members agreed that this was necessary given the Adoption Reform agenda.
- 2.3 In order to provide more capacity and flexibility, the previously separate fostering and adoption panels have been merged into a joint panel, able to hear both types of cases. This change came into affect in September 2013.
- 2.4 Following is statistical information detailing the activity of the panels, over the last three years according to the types of cases that have been presented.

Table 1 – Overall Adoption Statistics

	April 2013 – March 2014	April 2012 – March 2013	April 2011 - March 2012
Children's Plans	56 Children	84 Children	54 Children

	April 2013 – March 2014	April 2012 – March 2013	April 2011 - March 2012
Applications	51 families (Until Feb 2014)	33 families	29 families
Matches (Notts)	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 12 interagency families	7 children matched with 7 interagency families	9 children matched with 8 interagency families
Total matches	57 children placed with 50 families	41 children matched with 32 families	37 children matched with 31 families

Table 2 – Overall Fostering Statistics

	April 2013 – March 2014	Apr 2012 – March 2013	Apr 2011 - March 2012
Mainstream Applications	10	15	19
Mainstream Deferral	6	10	11
Connected Persons	3	13	13
Connected Persons Deferrals	19	11	4
Annual Reviews	3	4	3
Deregistrations	22	22	13
Change Of Approvals	3	4	13
None Approvals	0	2	1
Home From Home	0	0	6

Table 3 – Outcomes for Children’s Plans Presented

April 2011 – March 2014

	Approved	Rejected	Deferred
Plans (April 2011 –Aug 2012)	67	0	2
Plans (Sept 2012 – Present)	80	1	2
Applications	67	1	9
Matches	88	0	1
(Matches and applications together)	27		
Withdrawal of plan	14		
Withdrawal of approval	0		

Quality of Reports

2.5 The quality assurance work of the social workers writing the reports has been strengthened along with the quality assurance role of the team managers prior to the reports being submitted. Training and support for the two new Panel Advisors has been given and both have a history of report readiness preparation for panels, which has helped to strengthen the quality assurance process. However, there are still challenges to this process and concerns have been raised from Panel regarding the standard of reports in relation to both Assessments and Social Workers reports. This is being addressed and monitored by the Panel service and by the Children’s Service Manager. Social Work Choices, our external assessment agency are also involved in training and are working in partnership with the Service to address these areas for development.

2.6 In closing the year 2013 - 2014 has been a busy and challenging year for the Panels. 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.

We are still developing the panel and looking at new ways of working and having consistency with the way all panels work. Also acknowledging that chairs and members will have different styles on how they approach business, some of this will be discussed in appraisals. We are introducing technology to cut out paperwork and will be piloting tablets with panel one.

Some issues and concerns which have been observed on panel is poor quality of reports, life story work not completed, children and young people’s views not sought regarding adoption. These issues have been raised with Social Work Choices and

children's social workers and are being addressed, monitored and reviewed in order to work together in the best interest of children.

Summary of Panel Chair's reports

2.7 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
- Improvements in timescales for adoption assessments
- Panel members have been given the opportunity and have attended BAAF training seminars
- Team of Panel Advisers consistent
- Meeting with Service Managers to address needs identified by panel members

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 (agency provider), NCC CSW, Fostering and Adoption
- Meeting with Chairs and Vice Chairs to look at what is working and what needs improving
- Panel minutes
- Young people views not sought regarding adoption
- Training for panel members on understanding fostering, connected persons and adoption assessments
- Training on using IT to streamline paperwork

Overall, all panels are working well and NCC is working with them to bring continuous improvements and issues they have raised have been addressed with the providers/NCC workers to ensure good quality reports. There is meeting with chairs/vice chairs to look at developing the service further.

2.8 It is pleasing to note that during all the challenges of the last year and challenges that lay ahead, overall, all panels are working well and are positively embracing the changes to enhance children and their families' lives.

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)