

# Nottingham City Council

## Fostering and Adoption Services

### Annual Fostering and Adoption Panel Report

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<b>Date</b>	<b>31 March 2014</b>
<b>Version no:</b>	<b>Final</b>



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# Fostering and Adoption Panel Annual Report

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### **Guidance documents available**

1. Fostering National Minimum Standards (available on line)
2. Adoption National Minimum Standards (available on line)

# **Fostering and Adoption Service**

## **Annual Report April 2013 - March 2014**

### **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FOSTERING & ADOPTION PANEL ACTIVITY**

#### **Introduction**

This report is the Annual Fostering and Adoption Panels Report as required in the NMS. The information covers the work of Panel from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. The Fostering and Adoption Service was restructured in 2010 to ensure ongoing fitness for purpose and alignment to the modernised Fostering and Adoption Service. Primarily, this is to ensure that children and families receive a high quality service that is child centered and effective.

#### **Executive Summary**

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. Minutes are kept for each case presented. The Panel makes a recommendation on each case to the Agency Decision Maker/Service Director who then makes the agency decision.

Fostering and Adoption Panels are statutory functions and guidance in respect of their functions are outlined in the (two differing) Fostering and Adoption National Minimum Standards. See online procedures manual and the 2005 Adoption Act. Clear guidance is also produced by BAAF in the Effective Panels Handbooks.

Over the last year many changes have taken place regarding the Panel work and agreement was granted as part of expenditure against the Adoption Reform Grant for an additional Panel Adviser, which has now been appointed

to post, alongside a dedicated Principal Manager to oversee the running of panels. NCC has an increase in its Panels from 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014 from 3 to 4. This will allow for an additional 12 Panels annually.

In addition recommendations were made regarding the use of Information Technology to improve the effectiveness of the processes if delay is to be improved upon. A significant effort is being made to improve this element of the Panel service. NCC will be trialing the use of tablets to one Panel in April 2014, to make accessibility easier, before rolling this out to all the Panels.

## **Modernisation of Panels**

There was a need to modernise the Fostering and Adoption Service Panels to ensure fitness for purpose and ongoing cohesion with the Service needs including the change in the 2 stage process for Adopters and Foster Carers. All Chairs and members agreed that this was necessary given the Adoption Reform agenda.

In order to provide more capacity and flexibility, the previously separate Fostering Panel and Adoption Panel have been merged into a joint panel able to hear both types of cases. Full implementation took place from September 2013, with cases already scheduled in and all 4 Chairs and 3 Vice Chairs appointed.

This will bring about a new level and depth of robustness to the Panels. The Chairs in addition will provide a six monthly report regarding the performance of each of their Panels performance.

## **Panels / Outcomes**

### **Number of panels held**

All panels were held on three Thursday's each month, until January 2014 where we now hold an additional panel each month and these are joint Panels. From April 2013 until March 2014 a total of 45 Panels were held.

Twenty one of these were adoption, twelve were fostering and twelve were joint panels.

## Panel membership

The Central List has been updated and we currently have:

- 20 members including 4 Chairs and 3 Vice Chairs.
- 5 legal representatives
- 4 medical representatives
- 2 Panel Advisors
- 4 Business Support Staff.

The membership of the Panel consists of Adopters / Foster Carers / Social Work Representatives and Children's Representatives. They all work alongside our legal and medical representatives.

## Overall Adoption Statistics

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

## 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

### ADM Process

On 1st September 2012 amendments to Regulation 17 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 came into force. Note: From September 2012 all plans went direct to ADM except for relinquished children. As a result instead of adoption plans where there is court involvement being presented to Adoption these cases must now be submitted directly to the Agency Decision-Maker (ADM) before a final hearing. These cases will be where:

- Care proceedings are on-going
- Birth parents are not consenting to adoption
- The child has no birth parents

The revised Guidance 1.57 clarifies that the ADM must make a decision within seven days of receiving the reports

## 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

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 NCC to address these areas for development.

Business Support have provided 4 full time minute takers that ensure work is carried out to BAAF standards and maintain the tight timeframes that are set to them. Regular weekly meetings are held between the Principal Manager / Panel Advisors and the Business Support staff to help aid development of minutes and quality of work carried out. Training is also being provided as part of staff development for all Business Support Staff.

## **Feedback from those attending panel**

Applicants attending panel are asked to complete an anonymous tick box questionnaire comprising of 6 questions. They are asked to take these away with them, complete and send back. The questionnaire further asks for additional comments which they feel would help improve the panel process. The rating based on those completed forms that have been sent back has rated the service as positive. These questionnaires are discussed at our weekly pre and post panel meetings.

“We have enjoyed the process even though we have found it long and drawn out, but we understand why it needs to be this way”. (Applicants for Adoption Panel)

“It has been an extremely positive experience. We felt we had been listened too and what we were saying had been respected. We were given time to reflect and consider and we were challenged at times in a positive way” (Applicants for Adoption Panel)

Applicant acknowledged that the process of “shopping for children” was surreal, stressful and nothing in his life so far had prepared him for it. (Inter-agency match for Adoption)

“location of the Panel, as travelling out of the area, would have appreciated being able to park at the location”

## **Feedback from panel members**

### **Panel Workload**

“Currently workload is manageable. We seem to average about 7 or 8 cases per panel, some of which are shorter, i.e; resignations. The plan is to increase to 10 cases per panel which may be fine if there is a mix of long and short cases”.



## **Panel Development Day/Training attended by panel members**

“The day was helpful as a development day as it gave panel members the opportunity to meet and discuss issues. There were a large number of new panel members and this was a useful introduction for them”.

## **Panel Modernisation (both fostering and adoption cases on the same panel)**

“This started in January and I have chaired one panel, was on leave for the second and I have read papers for the third which is due this week.

I welcomed the change as it offers a wider variety of cases to consider and offers greater flexibility to the LA to try to reduce delays and meet deadlines. So far there have been no problems with panel members understanding when they are acting as a fostering panel and when as an adoption 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 one panel. Overall, all panels are working well and it is work in progress and continuous development will continue and improvements will occur in the coming year”.

## **Further Information**

In the past year there has been training either on or including the following:

- Development Day for Panels held on the 21 November 2013
- Members have attended BAAF Workshops throughout the year
- A medical advisors workshop is going to be held on 14 May 2014
- I.T training will be provided for Panel Members in relation to the pilot of the tablets to panel.
- An Induction programme has been devised for panel members and this consists of shadowing sessions as well as appropriate panel materials

being provided along with appropriate training for all new panel members.

## **Conclusion**

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.

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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.

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.

Kay Challand

Principal Manager, Fostering and Adoption

March 2014