

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – JANUARY 2018

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:	Audrey Taylor – Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Audrey.taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Sharon Clarke – Service Manager, Children in 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 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 Order figures.</p> <p>The report highlights actions that are being taken to address delays.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To note the performance to date in relation to Permanency Planning for Children in Care, which 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 twice yearly. The year-end report will enable the Adoption Leadership Board data to be considered for the previous year and our performance in this area to be reviewed.	

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 that the Local Authority has corporate parental responsibility for. It is also imperative that Nottingham City Council 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. Many of these children have complex medical conditions, belong to a sibling group, have a range of disabilities, or have birth parents with complex histories. 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 then a permanency option should be considered.

- 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 continues to incrementally reduce the timescale by which children should be adopted year on year.
- 2.4 Successfully placing more complex children can negatively affect our timelines, as the complexity of these cases brings more days to our scorecard pro-rata.
- 2.5 The Service Manager continues to hold regular Adoption Tracking Meetings with Team Managers to progress every child’s adoption plan and minimise delays.
- 2.6 In Nottingham City currently there are 84 children with adoption plans. The Adoption Service reported a similar figure in the last report to the Corporate Parenting Board. The department continues to make good use of adoption as a permanency outcome for children in care:
 - 24 children are currently matched with adopters
 - 301 children are being supported by means of a Special Guardianship Allowance.
- 2.7 There have been 18 children adopted so far this year. We expect this quarter that at least 12 children will be adopted, and we are predicting that by the end of the year over 40 children would have been adopted. This will be a similar number to the number of children that were adopted last year.
- 2.8 The authority is currently home-finding for 21 children. Data relating to this activity is as follows:

Gender

10 of these children are male
11 of these children are female

Age

Under 1 – 3 children
1 – 4 children
2 – 6 children
3 – 1 child
4 – 1 child
5 – 2 children
6 – 2 children
8 – 2 children

Ethnicity

White British 7 children
White British/Black Caribbean 10 children
Black African 2 children
White British/Pakistan 1 child
Serbian 1 child

Sibling Groups

5 sets of 2 sibling groups

2.9 We make strenuous efforts to home-find for children; we do change plans if this will not be achieved within a set timescale. 14 children currently have plans for their adoption plans to be rescinded. This is for children who we have exhausted all possibilities to find an adoptive home. Many of these children remain cared for by their foster carer in a permanency arrangement.

2.10 For children who we are unable to place with our own adopters we make use of the interagency budget. For the last 18 months the cost of purchasing these placements outside of this Local Authority has been met by the Department for Education (DfE). We have recently been informed that the DfE will be ceasing the support soon, but have not yet been given a date. From the 1st April this year to date we have claimed £130,000 from the Interagency Grant funding and since July 2015 we have claimed a total of £491,000. Reduction in this budget will place pressure on our own budgets to find adoption placements that we cannot match with internal adopters.

2.11 Recruitment

We have 14 prospective adopters who are being assessed and a similar number of approved adopters waiting to be matched. 5 of these prospective adopters are foster carers therefore child specific. We are currently now accepting applications from adopters who only want a single child under the age of two as we don't have sufficient adopters for children under two. We will keep this under review. We need to look at a recruitment drive to increase our pool of adopters.

2.12 Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund commenced in April 2015. This is a Central Government initiative aimed at offering support to adoptive families by enabling them to access bespoke therapeutic support for their child and the adopters. This financial year we have made 37 applications to the Adoption Support Fund totalling £95,442.32 of which we have received £90,015.52. There are 3 applications submitted which are pending approval totalling £5,426.80. Recent changes to the fund mean that this department will have to match any fund application to the fund over £5,000.

2.13 Regionalisation of Adoption / Permanence Team

Plans are underway to establish an East Midlands Regional Adoption Agency by 2020. We are one of 9 Local Authorities and 3 Local Voluntary Agencies who will be a member of the EMRAA, the aim of which is to bring adoption resources together across the region leading to improvements in adoption planning for children, and a reduction in cost.

In line with the government agenda for the regionalisation of adoption, Nottingham City are working with Derbyshire County, Derby City and Nottinghamshire County (D2N2) and voluntary agencies. We have implemented a Permanence Team in Nottingham City. The Team comprises a Team Manager, Senior Practitioner and 4 Social Workers. The Team work with those children who have a plan of adoption to ensure plans are progressed in a timely way, and there is no drift or delay. Early indications show that the Team are improving time-scales for adoption. The Team work closely with D2N2 porters, to ensure consistency across the region.

2.14 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. 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).

2.15 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.

2.16 The Permanency Panel is comprised of Service Managers from Neighbourhood Fieldwork 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).

2.17 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.

2.18 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.

2.19 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 COMMENTS (INCLUDING IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)

4.1 None.

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

5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY 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.

Yes

Attached as Appendix x, and due regard will be given to any implications identified in it.

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.