

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 16th November 2015

Title of paper:	Adoption & Permanency	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director of Children’s Social Care and Vulnerable Children and Families helen.blackman@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	Wards affected: ALL
Report author(s) and contact details:	Sonia Cain, Service Manager Fostering & Adoption, 0115 8764526 Sonia.cain@nottinghamcity.gov.uk Claire Shepherd, Acting Adoption Manager, 0115 8765132 claire.shepherd@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:		
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	30th October 2015	
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 report provides an overview of the permanency performance of the Local Authority and the number of children placed for Adoption and Special Guardianship. This year has been a challenging one as the impact of the Re:B:S judgement and allied judicial scrutiny of adoption plans has been working through the Courts.</p> <p>There has been a significant reduction in the numbers of children nationally being placed for adoption and a corresponding increase in Special Guardianship Orders.</p> <p>There is a national review of Special Guardianship being undertaken at present in order to align the initial viabilities, assessments and support of Special Guardians, which is going to have a significant cost implication to the Council in the next year and also have staffing implications.</p> <p>The Government have undertaken a consultation and expression of interest in Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies, mainly concentrating on those authorities which do not place many children for adoption, the East Midlands Adoption Consortium (EMAC) are not part of this cohort but have submitted and been granted funding for a development worker to explore more</p>		

collaborative working in the fields of recruitment, training and adoption support. This will be a two year project and enable EMAC to explore more joint working and economies of scale in providing Adoption Services.

Recommendation(s):

1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board notes the performance to date in Adoption and Special Guardianship and the activities being undertaken to minimise delays.

2. It is recommended that the Adoption and Permanency Report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in May in future as this will enable the Adoption Leadership Board data to be considered for the previous year and provide accurate data for the year end to be collated.

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 who the Board have corporate parental responsibility for. It is also imperative that the Board is given the opportunity to comment on current activity.
- 1.2 The report also makes reference to the actions relating to Strategic Priority Statement (SPS) two of the 'Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2014 – 2016: Valuing the future of our Children in Care and Care Leavers' and provides a brief update on progress made against these actions – see section 2.19.

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, a number of the children are part of a sibling group and children with 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, adoption will provide the permanency and the security they need to achieve positive outcomes.
- 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 are incrementally reducing the timescale by which children should be adopted year on year.
- 2.4 Successfully placing more complex children can negatively affect our timeliness as the complexity of these cases brings more days to our scorecard pro-rata.

2.5 Since the last report, the service has stabilised and is moving forward to establish standards and provide a robust service to both children and adopters. Three separate teams have been established within the Fostering and Adoption Services, these are;

- Fostering
- Adoption
- Post Order

Work is underway to employ permanent social workers to ensure that Fostering and Adoption are able to attract and retain staff,

Adoption Data to 31st October 2015

2.6 In Nottingham City currently there are 91 children with adoptions plans:-

- 91 Children's Best Interests Decision for adoption have been made
- 30 Children with Placement Orders where homefinding is active
- 4 Children Matched
- 35 Children placed with adopters
- 22 Special Guardianship Orders –Nottingham City is currently paying 260 Special Guardianship Allowance and this is going to increase over time.

2.7 There have been 26 children adopted and it is hoped that over 50 will be adopted by the 31st March 2016. This is a decrease on our performance in 2014/15 where we achieved 70 adoptions for the whole year, but a number of these adoptions were made in the first quarter, the children having been placed during the previous reporting year and the Orders being granted in 2014/15. The reduction in projected numbers of children being placed for adoption reflects a national trend whereby the increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders and Court decision making has had a negative impact on the plans for adoption.

2.8 There are 30 children with placement orders:-

- 4 matched waiting for ADM
- 10 booked into Panel for their match (a sibling group of 6 being placed together is included in this figure)
- 2 siblings placed with foster to adopt carers
- 9 Placement orders granted in the last 3 months.
- A sibling group of 2 children have been waiting over 11 months

- 2.9 There are a number of children (4) whose plans for adoption are to be rescinded which are currently underway through the Courts.
- 2.10 The Authority is currently homefinding for 52 children. Data relating to this activity are presented as followed;

Gender

28 of these children are male

24 of these children are female

Age

35 are under 5 years old

15 are between 5 – 10 years old

1 child is over 11 years old

Ethnicity

28 are white

2 are black

16 are dual-heritage

6 are other her

Sibling Groups

There are 12 sibling groups (these include 26 children)

For children who we are unable to place with our internal adopters, we make use of our Interagency Adoption budget, however recently the Government have announced that they are providing funding for hard to place children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and BME so that Nottingham can reclaim any inter-agency fees paid this year to place children with other agencies.

2.12 Recruitment

We currently have over 20 adopters who are in the process of being assessed, but the challenge which we share with a number of local authorities is to recruit enough adopters to match the complexity of the children with whom we would wish to place. We have close links with neighbouring authorities as a member of the East Midlands Adoption Consortium and regularly share profiles in relation to adopters who are waiting and children with adoption plans. We are currently exploring closer links with Derby City with a view to exchanging adopters where we have not been able to place because of location or specific needs. Along with other Adoption Agencies we are finding that adopters are waiting longer for placements as the number of

children with a plan for adoption dwindles. We are therefore going to have to refresh the Adoption Recruitment Strategy to target our recruitment activity to older and hard to place children.

2.13 Adoption Support Fund

We have been successful in developing a proactive service in applications to the Adoption Support Fund. We welcome this initiative as a means of continuing the support we offer to adopters who have adopted some of our most complex children. The Adoption Support Fund was established and went live in April 2015 for an initial one year period. There is uncertainty as to whether the ASF will continue beyond March 2016. However Nottingham City have successfully made 16 applications and to date have received over £100,000 to support therapeutic interventions for adopted children.

2.12 The Adoption Support Services Advisor is a pivotal and increasingly important role within the service as they make all the applications. This role needs to be recognised and funded within the service.

Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2014 – 2016)

2.18 As highlighted in 1.1, it is imperative that the Board is given the opportunity to comment on current activity. It is also important to show how service activity is linked to the Board's strategic priorities. Service activity has contributed to Strategic Priority Statement two of the CiC and Care Leavers strategy that states,

'Nottingham City Council believes that all children should grow up with their birth families. Where this is not able to happen we will secure permanency through adoption, special guardianship, residence orders or long-term fostering.'

2.19 A number of activities are being undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Service in order to meet this priority. The activities, as well as the progress made against them are described as followed.

Action:

We monitor the progress of children in the adoption process to help ensure children are adopted in a timely manner:

Activity:

The Adoption Analysis Journal (AAJ) The AAJ is a key document used in Adoption Tracker Meetings, which progress and track adoption plans for every child. The AAJ is produced at the end of each month to provide a detailed analysis of all children in the adoption process at the different stages. This also enables early detection of potential delays and promotes forward planning to prevent those delays.

The AAJ is used as part of the Exit Planning Meetings where adoption cases and how they are being progressed is discussed in detail.

Action:

Adoption Placement Advisors (APAs) work closely with social workers to actively seek appropriate placements for children in the adoption process.

Activity:

Regular meetings are held between the Fostering and Adoption Service Manager and the APAs. These meetings are used to ensure homefinding is initiated as early as possible in an attempt to secure permanency through adoption quickly.

Action:

The authority has commenced a rolling programme of Profiling Evenings, as well as participated in Adoption Activity Days. Both provide an opportunity to create matches for our children with adopters.

Activities:

Profile Evenings are run jointly with members of EMAC, on a six-weekly cycle. All remaining Profile Evenings have been booked for the remainder of the financial year.

Adoption Activity Days (AADs) are run by CoramBAAF. The Authority attends on average two ADDs per year.

The Profile Evenings/Activity Days Tracker records the impact of these activities.

The combined impact of the activities described has led to an increase in the number of children that the Authority has secured permanency for when compared to this time last year.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)

4.1 With the Special Guardianship Review there is going to be an increase in the statutory responsibilities and assessments that are required in this field which will require funding. This will also have an impact on the fostering service in the connected person's arena.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS)

5.1 None

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 None

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

7.1 None

8. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

8.1 Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2014 – 2016): Valuing the Future of our Children in Care and Care Leavers (2014)
<http://gossweb.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/nccextranet/index.aspx?articleid=10687>