

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – JANUARY 2018

Title of paper:	Fostering and Adoption Panel Chair's Report	
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 01158764526	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Clive Harrison – Chair, Panel One Phil Rogers – Chair, Panel Two Dagoberto Rojas – Chair, Panel Three Tom Elvidge - Chair, Panel Four Ian Crompton - Panel Advisor	
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):		
The Panel's primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people, placed in foster care and adoptive homes / families by Nottingham City and beyond. The Panel takes its responsibility to protect children very seriously and is vigorous in its scrutiny of reports and assessments.		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To 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 2015; 2016) states that an annual report should be prepared detailing the work of the fostering and adoption panels. The report should detail 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 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)
- Recommend the approval of adoption plans for relinquished children.

Fostering and Adoption Panels

2.2 The Fostering and Adoption panels continue to make positive progress. As reported February 2016 the number of panels was reduced to three per month with a fourth panel held every quarter. This has enabled Panel to meet as demand requires, affording flexibility and responsiveness to need in a cost efficient manner.

In 2017 we recruited three new panel members, who replaced those who were not able to commit to the role. The new members included 2 elected members - Councillors who have enhanced the accountability of panels.

In 2016 a new Panel Chair's checklist was introduced which included the Panel providing considered and detailed feedback to the Agency on the timeliness and quality of every report and assessment presented to Panel. The Panel Advisor then confirms this feedback to presenting social workers and their manager. There has continued to be noted improvements in the quality of reports presented to Panel throughout 2017, see section 2.6 and 2.7.

The use of the Children in Care Council (CICC) questions that the children felt should be asked of prospective adopters and foster carers has now been in practice for a year. The feedback from applicants has been overwhelmingly positive with prospective adopters and foster carers describing how the questions powerfully bring the role of becoming a carer to life in panel. The background to this development, reported last year, was that in 2016 the Children in Care Council ran an interactive workshop around fostering and adoption panels; one outcome of which was questions that the children felt should be asked of prospective adopters and foster carers. Each panel now identifies 2 to 3 appropriate questions from the list, produced by the CICC, which are directly asked of prospective adopters and foster carer's whose assessments and applications are being considered by panel. There continues to be interest from other Agency's in this innovative way of ensuring that the voice of young people is present when considering prospective foster carers and adopters. This is particularly so from D2N2 colleagues who have attended panel to observe how we have implemented the practice.

2.3 The merging of the Fostering and Adoption panels, which came into effect in September 2013, continues to be effective and offers availability and flexibility in regard to allocating time slots for cases to be heard.

2.4 The following is statistical information detailing the activity of the panel, according to the types of cases that have been presented.

Fostering and Adoption Panel Activity April – Oct 2017

Table 1 – Adoption Statistics

	April 2017 – June 2017	July –Sept 2017	Oct 2017	April–Oct 2017
Foster to Adopt	0	0	0	0
Applications	4	3	5	12
Matches (Nottingham)	6 children with 6 families	3 children with 3 families	4 children with 2 families	13 children with 11 families
Matches (Inter-Agency) [IA]	5 children with 5 families	6 children with 3 families	0	11 children with 8 families
Total matches	11 children with 11 families	9 children with 6 families	4 children with 2 families	24 children with 19 families
Termination of approval	1	2	3	6

Table 2 –Fostering Statistics

	April 2017 – June 2017	July –Sept 2017	Oct 2017	April–Oct 2017
Mainstream Applications	4	1	1	6
Mainstream Deferral	0	0	0	0
Connected Persons (CP)	4	3	3	10
Connected Persons Extensions	1	2	1	4

Annual Reviews	4	7	0	11
Reviews following concerns	0	0	0	0
FC Notification of Resignation	1	3	0	4
Termination of Approval	0	0	0	0
Change Of Approvals	7	0	0	7
Home From Home/Short breaks	0	0	0	0
Home from Home/short Termination /resignation	0	0	0	0

Summary of Foster and Adoption Panel Activity April 2017 - Oct 2017:

- 37 cases presented to Panel April–June 2017 (10 Panels held)
 - 16 Adoption
 - 21 Fostering
- 27 cases presented to Panel July –Sept 2017 (9 Panels held)
 - 11 Adoption
 - 16 Fostering
- 15 cases presented to Panel Oct 2017 (3 Panels held)
 - 10 Adoption
 - 5 Fostering

Quality of Reports

2.5 The period April 2017- Oct 2017 has been a busy period for Panels, with 72 cases being heard at panel. Panel membership has a strong balance of skill and experience representing diverse sectors of the community. The Panel displays a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm to the work, and ensure that high levels of scrutiny are applied to assessments with the focus always being on meeting the needs of children and safeguarding their welfare. 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 Fostering and Adoption Panel. The distribution of panel specific introduction booklets and welcome packs to panel attendees, including photos of panel members and brief biographies, was introduced at the beginning of this year, 2017, for all panels and has received very positive feedback from panel attendees, both social workers and applicants.

The Fostering and Adoption panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure, guidance and legislation. To support panel members they will be provided with training and development opportunities, plus panel specific training annually.

The digital distribution of panel papers and the conduct of panels, following a successful trial period, was introduced in April 2017. This has will lead to an estimated £7725.00 annual saving to the authority, greater security in the distribution of papers and a much more environmental friendly model of working. Panel members have also reported how they prefer working digitally.

The Panels as a whole have the opportunity, in addition to the direct feedback to the Agency on the quality of reports presented, to highlight any issues, concerns, themes and acknowledgments of outstanding practice which are then addressed via the panel advisor. Matters that are routinely addressed are the quality of reports to panel and completion of Life Story Books, as well as the robustness of adoption support plans including contact plans; this is in line with the government guidelines that require us to address future support needs of adoptive children in particular.

- 2.6 The quality of reports presented to Fostering and Adoption panels continues to be strengthened along with the quality assurance role of managers prior to the reports being submitted to panel. The Panel Advisor of which there is now one, previously two, provides panels with the consistent quality assurance and advice that panels require in order to make recommendations. The four Panel Chairs and panel members in their annual appraisals, completed late 2017, have all reported significant improvements in the quality of reports being presented to the Fostering and Adoption panels. The feedback to the agency on the quality of report by the individual assessment of all cases has enabled the Panel Adviser to produce quantitative and qualitative analysis of these reports and in 2017 they were able to report that 79% of all reports presented to panel were identified as good or outstanding by panel members. However, there is still one or two assessment reports that fall below the expected standard. This continues to be addressed and monitored by the Fostering and Adoption Service and Core Assets, who have an established good working partnership with the express aim of offering a professional and comprehensive service to citizens applying to becoming either foster carers or adopters. Regular meetings with Core Assets have gone a long way to ensuring sustained improvement in the quality of output.
- 2.7. The rigour, professionalism and independence of the Fostering and Adoption Panel was highlighted in the Ofsted Inspection of Nottingham City Council Children's Social Care Services (pilot inspection) January – February 2017.

Summary of Panel Chair's reports

2.8 As mentioned earlier the Panel Chairs are required to produce a six monthly performance report. The reports of all four panel chairs have highlighted the following;

Strengths

- Adoption and Fostering reports are of an increasingly good standard including some that increasing numbers that are outstanding
- Agency Decision Maker timescales are being met
- Child centred services to children and carers
- Good summary and analysis for matching children with adopters
- Continued Improvements in timescales for adoption and fostering assessments
- A single Panel Advisor providing consistent advice and quality assurance
- Meeting with Service Managers to address needs identified by panel members
- Panel Steering groups meet quarterly, and the panel chairs and vice chairs are invited to this meeting, and this is a useful group to drive continued improvements in the service
- The introduction in 2017 of quarterly meetings of the panel chairs, vice chairs and the panel advisor have enabled continued improvement in, and consistency of, panel practices.

Areas for further development

- Increase in the membership and representation of younger people with care experiences sitting on panels
- Apply learning from Serious Case reviews
- Develop further strategies to keep a focus on the child when considering all reports presented to panel
- Be able to use a Discrepancy matrix tool to assist panel members in analysing evidence in reports presented to panel
- Use the Strengthening Families Framework to analyse information and apply critical reading methods to reports presented to panel

Overall, Fostering and Adoption panels are working well and the Fostering and Adoption Service are working towards ensuring continuous improvements to the panel and the processes of panel. Issues raised will continue to be addressed in a timely manner.

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.

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 BAAF, Effective Fostering Panels: Guidance on Regulations, Process and Good Practice in fostering panels in England (updated Fourth Edition) (2015).

9.2 BAAF, Effective Adoption Panels: Guidance on Regulations, Process and Good Practice in Adoption and Permanence Panels in England (updated Seventh Edition) (2016).