

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 20 JANUARY 2020

Title of paper:	Adoption and Permanency	
Director:	Helen Blackman Director, Children's Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Report author and contact details:	Audrey Taylor Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Audrey.taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Alison Wakefield Service Manager, Children in Care	
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Nottingham People		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Living in Nottingham		<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing Nottingham		<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect for Nottingham		<input type="checkbox"/>
Serving Nottingham Better		<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. 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. The report highlights actions that are being taken to address delays.</p>		
Recommendations:		
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	That the Corporate Parenting Board review the Adoption Leadership Board data.	

1 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 It is important that members of the Corporate Parenting Board remain informed of the activities undertaken to achieve permanency for children that the Local Authority has corporate parental responsibility for.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 Nottingham City continues to make adoption plans for a significant number of children in our 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 performance, and compare it with that of others at critical points in the child's journey towards adoption. Successfully placing children that are more complex can negatively affect our timelines, which affects our performance in some of the scorecard measures.

2.3 The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption continues to hold regular Adoption Tracking Meetings with Team Managers to progress every child's adoption plan and minimise delays.

2.4. The department continues to make good use of adoption as a permanency outcome for children in care:

In Nottingham City currently there are;

- 98 children on the adoption pathway;
- 16 children are currently placed with adopters;
- 321 children are being supported by means of a Special Guardianship Allowance;
- 84 children are being supported on Child Arrangement Orders.

2.5 There have been 19 children adopted so far in this financial year. There are a further 14 more children who are due to be granted adoption orders by 31st March 2020 making a total of 33 adoptions orders granted this financial year.

2.6 The authority is currently home finding for 11 children. Data relating to this activity is as follows:

Gender

- 4 of these children are male
- 7 of these children are female

Age

- Under 1 – 1 child
- 1 – 1 child
- 2 – 1 child
- 3 – 1 child
- 4 – 4 children
- 6 – 1 child
- 7 – 2 children

Ethnicity

- White British - 6 children
- White British/Black Caribbean - 3 children
- Mixed white black - 1 child
- White other background – 2 children

Sibling Groups

- 2 sets of sibling groups, each with 2 siblings
- 1 sets of sibling groups, each with 4 siblings

2.7 We make strenuous efforts to home-find for children; we do change plans if this will not be achieved within a set timescale. 8 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 will remain cared for by their foster carer in a permanency arrangement.

2.8 Recruitment

Recruitment of adopters is now done through Adoption East Midlands.

2.9 Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund commenced in April 2015. This is a government initiative aimed at offering support to adoptive families by enabling them to access bespoke therapeutic support for their child and the adopters. The majority of applications are now made through the post adoption team in Adoption East Midlands. There are some children who need support pre order. We have made 20 applications for children to access therapeutic support through the support fund this year.

2.10 Regionalisation of Adoption / Permanence Team

In line with the government agenda for the regionalisation of adoption by 2020, Local Authorities in the East Midlands formed Adoption East Midlands (AEM) in April 2019. The aim of which is to bring adoption resources together across the region leading to improvements in adoption planning for children.

AEM is comprised of two separate but connected initiatives. Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland are working collaboratively. Nottingham City are working with Derbyshire County, Derby City and Nottinghamshire County and voluntary agencies. This went live in April 2019, staff from the Adoption Team and Post Adoption Team were transferred via TUPE to Adoption East Midlands.

Nottinghamshire County Council are the host authority. AEM work closely with the Permanency team, who hold the majority of children who have a plan for adoption and care proceedings have ended. Children are discussed regularly in the region with the hope to match and place within the region.

2.11 Permanency Panel

Under Care Planning regulations, the consideration of permanence for a child should begin 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 should be laid out and viabilities explored, prior to a child's Looked After Review at 20 days.

Proposals for a Special Guardianship Order are 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. Children with a plan of Adoption continue to be subject to Adoption guidance, regulations and processes.

Nottingham City Council is committed to permanency planning for children. This can be in the form of Adoption, Permanent Fostering or Special Guardianship Orders. A Permanency Panel was established in order to ensure proposals made regarding planning meet the needs of children / young people. Proposals are quality assured with safeguarding responsibilities in mind, and the Panel also provides an additional forum to monitor the Local Authority's financial commitments.

In December 2019 we had a peer review looking permanency planning and Special Guardianship Orders as an outcome of permanency. The recommendations will be considered as part of our ongoing improvement work. It is likely that we will separate the functions that consider long-term fostering as a permanence outcome from the other considerations.

- 2.12 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 on 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' (Care Planning Regulations, Vol.2, 2015).
- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 Inevitably, some plans for permanence will require a package of support. Packages of support can include a range of options such as therapeutic support and or financial commitment. When a package has been agreed and scrutinised by the Service Manager (Fostering and Adoption) it will then be reviewed annually.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

4.1 None.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An EIA is not required because 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 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.