

22 September 2014**Agenda Item: 5****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****ADOPTION SERVICES BI-ANNUAL REPORT****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from March to August 2014.

Information and Advice

2. The Government continues to drive improvement of performance in the adoption sector, with a range of legal, policy and organisational changes.
3. A national Adoption Leadership Board has been established, chaired by Sir Martin Narey, with representatives from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the voluntary sector and academics. Mark Owers, Chief Executive of the Council of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, is vice-chair. The Leadership Board now monitors performance and drives change. There is a regional link to the national Board – Janice Spencer, Assistant Director in Lincolnshire, is the link for the East Midlands and she in turn links to Annie Hudson, from the College of Social Work who sits on the national Board.
4. The quarterly survey reports on all significant dates for all children with an adoption plan, and from 2014, for all adults who have completed a Registration of Interest in adoption, and has a number of targets for timescales.
5. In addition it allows national and local analysis of number and demographic of children waiting for adoption, and adopters available to take placements of children.
6. The Government continues to stimulate growth in the voluntary sector by making available adoption grant monies, which Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) can bid for, to enable schemes to increase recruitment. There have been two major Government initiatives to support the voluntary sector to recruit more adopters.
7. In 2013-14 the growth in the voluntary sector was approximately 17%, which was below the desired target.
8. In the same period, the growth in the local authority (LA) sector was 27%, the largest for some time. The experience in the East Midlands consortium (9 LAs) is of growth such that there is now a pool of adopters available for young, single children.

9. However there continues to be a mis-match between the children waiting: siblings, older children, those with complex backgrounds, developmental delay, and approved adopters.
10. Nottinghamshire performance is as follows:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	April - July 2014	2014-15 estimate
Adult approvals	31	45	58	19	57
New adoption plans	81	104	67	19	57
Children placed	51	86	91	23	69
Children adopted	42	40	88	39	117

11. Of the matches made in 2013-14, 60 children were placed with 52 Nottinghamshire families, and 31 children placed with 20 families from other agencies. It should be noted that the number of new plans in 2013-14 fell to 75, and is now steady, thus children placed and adopted in the coming years will fall correspondingly.
12. The number of adopters that Nottinghamshire County Council recruits continues to be approximately 60 per annum, thus performance has improved by almost 100% since 2011-12. This, coupled with the high numbers of children placed means we now have very few children waiting; we have now matched children who have waited a substantial period of time. Those now waiting have complexities which make them harder to place.
13. In addition we are now able to place children from other local authorities with our adopters. This impacts positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting.
14. The adoption quarterly data is now returned to the Adoption Leadership Board, and includes data regarding adults in assessment, or approved adopters. For adults the information had not been reported by all local authorities, but the first national reporting showed an increase in adopters and only about 30-40% of assessments being within six months (national figures). Nottinghamshire's Adoption Service currently processes approximately 60% of assessment within six months.
15. For children, Nottinghamshire performance using a three year average remains off target, however using a tool provided by the Department for Education (DfE) which measures current performance only, Nottinghamshire is closer to target.
16. Adoption support continues to be an area of development for the Government. There is a current pilot of 10 local authorities, and VAAs, of personal budgets, for adopters to purchase support packages. There is also a piece of research to map existing services as the current choice and quality is variable. This is part of the challenge to ensure all adopters can access services.

17. In addition, 2013-14 was the first year all local authorities were required to report on adoption disruptions. The Government commissioned research into disruption was published in 2013 and showed that adopters valued the support of social workers who understood adoption and attachment and that support which questioned parenting style was not helpful. It also showed that violence towards parents was a common feature of unstable placements and this is an area that will be investigated further by the Government.
18. The new process for assessing adopters has been in place a year, from July 2013 to June 2014. The team has vastly improved their performance in time taken to approve adopters with 66% meeting the six months timescale, from January to June 2014. Matching is also much speedier now, with many adopters application to match within nine months, a timescale which is in fact challenging to adopters.
19. Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) continues to utilise all home finding opportunities for children – publicity, adoption activity days, adoption register events, local profile sharing events and this consistent activity across the range does produce matches, for most children. There is no one activity proving more successful than another.
20. New regulations allow children to be placed in a fostering placement which will become adoption. This is not the same as foster carers who may then choose to adopt (about 15% of all adoptions of children from care are by foster carers) but relates to approved adopters who are also temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child, to enable a child to be placed with them at an earlier point. This is then a foster placement until it becomes adoption.
21. There is an element of risk for the adopters in this type of placement, but the advantage is that the child is settled in a permanent placement at a much younger age, usually an adoption placement can only be made after a child is subject to a Placement Order, and the adoption panel have recommended a match which the agency decision maker approves. However a foster to adopt placement can be made at any point in the time before the Placement Order.
22. Increasingly adopters are considering foster to adopt. Nottinghamshire have seen one child placed at under three months of age and adopted at nine months of age. There are a further four placements in progress currently.
23. The partnership with a local Voluntary Adoption Agency, Adopt Together, continues to provide placements for Nottinghamshire children, 11 to date. In addition, we are now exploring joint provision of some adoption support services, such as groups for adopters, or children, and networks for adopters. We are also working together where capacity becomes an issue for either agency, directing potential adopters between the agencies as necessary.
24. Future plans include:
 - consolidating learning and practice for foster to adopt
 - exploring the possibility of specifically recruiting foster to adopt carers, particularly for older children
 - reviewing the process to identify any delay in the Placement Order to match process

- awaiting the result of the pilot projects of personal budgets for adoption support, and review of implications for NCC
- building on the reputation of NCC when placing children to enable NCC adopters to adopt children from other Local Authorities.

Other Options Considered

25. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

26. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That the six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from March to August 2014 be noted.

Steve Edwards

Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Shelagh Mitchell

Service Manager, Adoption

T: 0115 97 74169

E: shelagh.mitchell@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

28. As this report is for noting only no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (KLA 28/08/14)

29. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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