

17th January 2022

Agenda Item: 10

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL WORK

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WORKER POST IN THE PERMANENCE TEAM

Purpose of the Report

1. The report seeks approval to establish an additional 1 fte Permanence Support Worker (grade subject to job evaluation) post within the Permanence Team.

Information

2. The Permanence Team works to ensure all children who have adoption as a permanence plan have this plan or other permanence options progressed without delay. The role of the Permanence Support Worker is as follows:
 - to work directly with children who have or may have an adoption plan to help them understand their plan
 - to promote working therapeutically with these children who have often experienced trauma
 - to assist social workers in undertaking life story work
 - to work with foster carers and adopters to enable them to adopt parenting styles to best meet their child's needs and to support moves of the child from foster carer to adoptive parents
 - to assess the child's therapeutic and attachment needs and if required signpost to other agencies to meet these needs
 - to also support carers / parents when the child's permanence plan is changed from adoption to being reunification with parents or a kinship carer.
3. The proposed post is required in addition to the 1.5 fte Permanence Support Workers already in the team given that there is a need to expand the service and deliver a new package as part of the service. This service is currently contracted to an external provider and is to provide adoption support and counselling to birth family when there are plans for a child to be adopted. The service would also want to extend this, where appropriate, to some more complex permanent moves of children to kinship carers.

4. Where there is an adoption plan it is a statutory duty that Nottinghamshire County Council needs to provide. The National Minimum Standard (7.4) requires that 'birth parents, will have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child'. Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 requires agencies to offer 'counselling, advice and information'.
5. This role is currently undertaken by Adoption Plus, an independent agency, who were contracted to provide counselling sessions from a trained counsellor. Adoption Plus is based in Bedfordshire and, pre-pandemic, travelled to Mansfield to offer these sessions. Since the pandemic, counselling has been offered by phone. They have had a contract with Nottinghamshire for some years and the last contract, which ran for three years, comes to an end in February 2022. This contract has been reviewed and it is considered that it is not providing the best or most cost-effective service. In the year 2019/20 only 56% of the 276 sessions available were used by nine clients. In 2020/21 75% were used by 13 clients. The service has been promoted fully but the uptake is still low.
6. It is considered that a service could be provided that would better meet the needs of birth families by provision of a local flexible service where visits can be made to families and support offered. The service has looked at what neighbouring counties offer - Derby and Derbyshire both provide the service by support workers, not trained counsellors, and they report that their services are being well used with a waiting list.
7. In providing this service within the Permanence Team it is anticipated that parents are likely to accept support more readily; they could be supported to have input into their child's life story and to keep in touch with their child post adoption. These are areas of adoption support currently being promoted by the Department for Education. This proposed role, at the start of and during the child's adoption journey, will increase the likelihood of better working relationships between adopters and birth families in the future. The Permanence Team co-works cases with Court Team colleagues through the court process and so can be seen to be independent of the child's social worker.
8. There are a few cases where birth families require counselling by a trained counsellor and in such circumstances any money saved could be used to purchase some counselling sessions.

Other Options Considered

9. There is an option to extend the Adoption Plus contract for two further years but this would not offer good value for money and not provide the service which it is considered our birth families would benefit from.
10. There is a statutory responsibility to provide access to a support worker so to not offer a service would not be an option.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. Locally other authorities have provided this service through support workers and it is valued and well used by birth families. A more flexible service would be provided by support workers who have a good understanding of adoption; supporting birth families and setting in place positive communication will support the child's adoption in the future. The use of

the service would be reviewed after a year including seeking the views of birth parents on how the service has met their needs and might be improved.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

13. Adoption Plus has been paid £37,500 pa to undertake an Independent Counselling Service. The funding for this service would be enough to cover employing a Permanence Support Worker in the Permanence Team and would also be used to purchase counselling sessions, should they be assessed as needed. The contract with Adoption Plus ends at the start of February 2022.

Human Resources Implications

14. The post has a job description which is currently subject to job evaluation and will be recruited to in line with the Council's existing processes.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

15. Recruitment to this post will improve the Council's ability to safeguard children and young people.

Implications for Service Users

16. Recruitment to this post will improve the quality of service provision to children and families.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That approval is given to establish an additional 1 fte Permanence Support Worker post (indicative Grade 4 but subject to job evaluation) the Permanence Team.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 06/01/22)

17. The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee.

Financial Comments (LCD 06/01/22)

18. Adoption Plus has been paid £37,500 pa to undertake an Independent Counselling Service. The funding for this service would be enough to cover employing a Permanence Support Worker in the Permanence Team and would also be used to purchase counselling sessions, should they be assessed as needed. The contract with Adoption Plus ends at the start of February 2022. The current Permanence staffing budget is £705,989.

HR Comments (BC 05/01/22)

19. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The post is currently subject to job evaluation processes and will be recruited to in line with the Council's vacancy control and recruitment procedures.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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