

2 March 2015**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****ADOPTION SERVICES BI-ANNUAL REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2014 TO
FEBRUARY 2015****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides a general update on activity in the Adoption Service from September 2014 to February 2015.

Information and Advice

2. The Adoption Service comprises the County Adoption Team responsible for all aspects of recruitment, approval and placement, and the panel advisers, responsible for all matters in relation to panels and agency decisions, and the Support After Adoption team, responsible for assessment of adoption support, and delivery of support to all persons in Nottinghamshire affected by adoption. Until three years after the date of the adoption order, Nottinghamshire retains responsibility for adoption support to children placed by Nottinghamshire outside of the County. After three years, responsibility for adoption support transfers to the local authority of residence.
3. The Service remains stable, with some very experienced staff, and newer members of staff becoming established in their roles. There is currently some recruitment to social work vacancies, and Recruitment and Project Officer temporary vacancies.
4. The panel adviser team (3 full-time equivalent) will be fully staffed in April, and are progressing to a position of each post holder being able to advise on adoption or fostering matters. The Business Support in this area is now managed by one Business Support Officer and the team are reviewing all processes so that as far as possible, a single process can be agreed.
5. The workload of panels is now such that just over two panels a month for each Service (Fostering and Adoption) would meet the need, and therefore we are working towards a position of five panels a month (currently six), one of which would be able to hear adoption or fostering matters.
6. This is a complex process due to the different regulations for each, but we expect to achieve this efficiency by August 2015.
7. Adoption Reform Grant has been beneficial to the Service in 2013-14 and 2014-15; it has enabled us to place children in interagency placements, thus reducing delay, and has

given us additional capacity to recruit more adopters. Interagency placements occur when Nottinghamshire place children with adopters approved by a voluntary adoption agency, or another local authority. The cost is £27,000 per child, as dictated by national agreement. Other local authorities may place children with Nottinghamshire approved adopters for the same costs. Adoption Reform Grant ceases as of April 2015.

8. The partnership with a local Voluntary Adoption Agency, Adopt Together, continues to be successful both in placing children, and in adoption support. Strong professional relationships have developed which will allow us to work together in the future. The senior managers in each agency are due to give a presentation highlighting the success of the partnership at a national conference.

Table 1 - Year on Year Activity

	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2014 – 2015 estimate
Adult Approvals	31	45	58	67
New Adoption Plans	81	104	67	72
Children Placed	51	86	91	79
Children Adopted	42	40	88	96
Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	20	35	80	65

9. Table 1 shows the year on year increase in adopter approvals. The majority meet the six month timescale for approval, and those that do not are due to complexities in the assessment, for example health issues, several previous partners, or adult children to be considered.
10. Nationally, there is now a pool of adopters, which theoretically should allow placement choice for children; however, a large proportion of this pool will only consider a single, young child with a relatively non-complex background. Locally, we have approximately 12 families waiting, all of whom have some specific matching criteria, meaning they will wait longer, but will obtain a placement.
11. We now only take Registrations of Interest from families able to make a broad placement offer, due to capacity.
12. Nottinghamshire County Council adopters will have placed 10 children from other local authorities by April 2015, this offsetting some of the interagency costs of placing children with non-NCC adopters.
13. Table 1 shows the high number of children, with new plans in 2012-13 (104) moving through the process, as children placed 2013-14 (91) and adopted 2014-15 (96)

illustrating the length of the process. Improved practice is not reflected in the scorecard measurements due to the reporting of average performance over a three year period.

14. The final line on the table shows the rise in the number of Special Guardianship Orders; these children have the same backgrounds and circumstances as adopted children, but their families do not have the same rights to support assessments.

Table 2

Homefinding Table
January 2015

Month	Children Waiting*	Match**	Hold***	Total
April 2013	32	49	25	106
June 2013	24	46	23	93
December 2013	20	59	3	82
January 2014	19	46	11	76
February 2014	20	35	10	65
March 2014	13	34	17	64
June 2014	7	37	8	52
August 2014	4	35	16	55
October 2014	7	28	17	52
December 2014	4	33	6	43

*Children with no potential match

**Children in a potential match

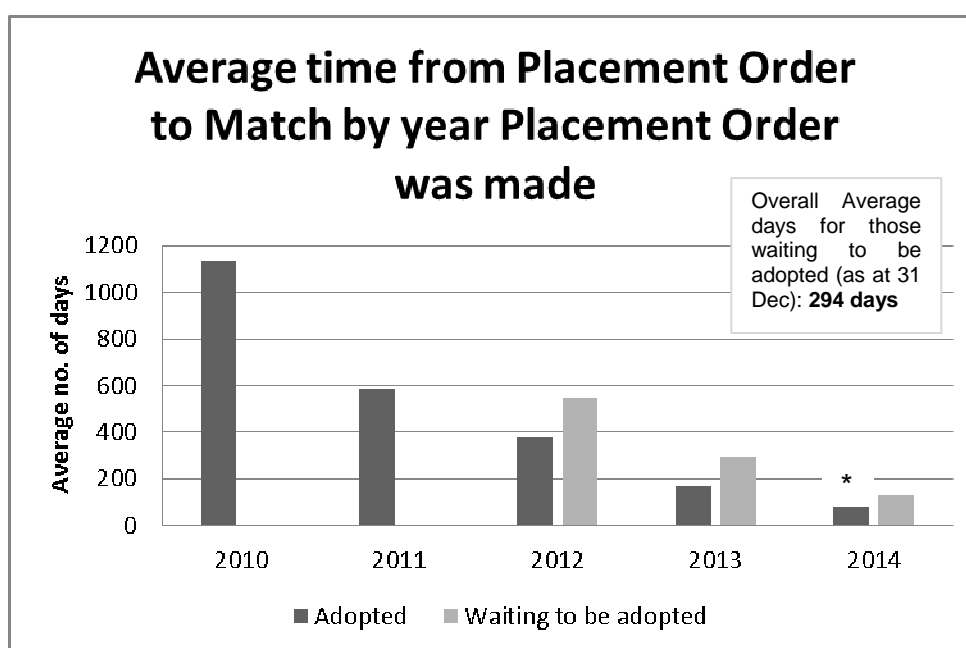
***Children awaiting placement order or possible change of plan

15. Table 2 shows the progress made in placing children. The total number of children with an adoption plan, needing a placement, has fallen by over 50% from 2013, to the end of 2014, and the number waiting (i.e. with no potential match) has fallen to single figures. This has been possible due to the national rise in approved adopters, and the consistent approach of the homefinding team which, alongside the quality of work from the permanence team, has resulted in a solid reputation for Nottinghamshire of good, timely practice.
16. In the period April 2014 to March 2015, we expect the workflow to have been fairly stable, with approximately six new adoption plans a month, six children placed, six new Registrations of Interest (adults) and six new adult approvals a month. In theory this provides sufficiency, in reality there will not be an exact match for all, due to complex matching considerations.

17. Referring back to Table 1, it can be seen that in 2011-12 and 2012-13 the number of new approvals was well below the number of plans, whereas in 2013-14 and 2014-15 it shows that the two figures are closer.
18. The latest adoption scorecard is attached as **Appendix 1**.
19. In the measurement of days between entering care and moving in with the adoptive family, we have reduced the total number of days from 639 to 606, and are under the national average of 628. However, we are not meeting the ever-decreasing target of 547 days for 2011-14.
20. In the measurement of days between obtaining Placement Order, and placing, performance has not improved, and is above the national average, but this is due to placing the children who have been waiting significant periods of time.

Table 3 - Placement Order to Match

Those waiting to be adopted who have been matched have an average number of days of 294 days compared with the latest quarter 3 figure of 338 days (see below related graph).



*Of our 67 children adopted Apr-Dec 14 60% of those were part of a sibling group

- 7% are from ethnic minority backgrounds, this compares with 11% average 2011-14

21. Table 3 shows that the number of days, as in paragraph 20 above, is reducing year on year, and therefore performance, when not taken in a three year average against a reducing target, is consistently improving.
22. The demands on the Support After Adoption Service have been increasing, coinciding with the numbers of children placed, and also the high profile of adoption in the media, generally encouraging people to access support.

23. The Government are making plans to roll out a national adoption support fund, which the Local Authority will access on behalf of adoptive families for specific therapeutic support. The detail of this is not yet clear, but the Support After Adoption team have a sound assessment process which should be a sound foundation.
24. Nottinghamshire is a member of the East Midlands Adoption Consortium, and work has started to reconsider the membership and terms of reference of this group, as the Government has expectations of adoption agencies working co-operatively.
25. There will be a change of management in April as Shelagh Mitchell, Adoption Service Manager, takes up post as Group Manager. The challenge for the new Adoption Service Manager will be to sustain this positive progress, and bring in any necessary adoption support fund changes.

Other Options Considered

26. This report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

27. This report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

28. 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 bi-annual update on activity in the Adoption Service from September 2014 to February 2015 be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (SS 13/02/15)

30. 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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