

**16 September 2013**

**Agenda Item: 5**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

### **ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a review of activity in the adoption service in 2012.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. Adoption has remained high on the Government agenda from 2012 to the present.

This has been evidenced by the following:

- October 2011 - Adoption League Table
- October 2012 - April 2013 - Adoption Reform Grant
- March 2012 - An action plan for adoption tracking delay
- May 2012 - Adoption Score Card
- September 2012 - Guidance amendments
- January 2013 - Further action on adoption: Finding more homes
- January 2013 - National Gateway for adoption
- April 2013 - Adoption maps
- April 2013 - Equalised Interagency fee
- July 2013 - New guidance on adoption recruitment

3. In addition the Government collect quarterly data on adoption: annual data via the 903 returns (an annual report with data on many aspects of looked after children) and Ofsted have begun collecting data annually since June 2012. This data is slightly different to the quarterly data and was different between June 2012 and June 2013.

4. The data collected includes:

- all children at any stage of the adoption process (approximately 200-250 Nottinghamshire children at any one time)
- any significant date in the quarter:
  - date of agency decision
  - placement order
  - match, placed
  - adopted

- all adopters at any stage of the process (pre July 2013 applications and post July 2013 recorded separately)
  - date of application, approval, match and order
  - equalities data regarding adults' marital status, ethnicity, religion, sexuality
  - figures for support after adoption assessments and plans, and adults work – such as tracing birth family.
5. The information supports the following performance measures:
- N161 – a performance indicator taken from the 903 return.
  - time from Agency decision on adoption to placement with adopters
    - *target - less than 12 months*
  - Scorecard
  - time from placement order to match with adopters
    - *target - less than 7 months, falling to 4 months by 2017 (recorded in days)*
  - time from entering looked after to moving in with adoptive family
    - *target - less than 21 months, falling to 14 months by 2017*
  - time from application to approval
    - *target to July 2013, less than 8 months; from July 2013, less than 6 months (as yet unpublished data)*
6. Further information on time scales for adoption are included in **Appendices 1 and 2**.
7. This constant focus on adoption and consequent reform is a result of falling numbers of adoptions, at the same time as a rapid increase in numbers of children looked after nationally.
8. In 2005 there were approximately 3,500 adoption orders nationally; this number fell steadily in the following years to a low of approximately 3,000 in 2011, and slightly increasing in 2012. However there were also approximately 3,000 Special Guardianship and Residence Orders, so to consider adoption statistics only is to underestimate the permanent exits from looked after care.
9. However in 2011 and 2012, the number of children subject to a placement order (permission to place for adoption) grew by an average of 820 a year, without a corresponding increase in adopter approvals.
10. At the end of March 2012 nationally, there were 4,650 children with placement orders waiting adoption (not all of these children will be in a situation where there is active home finding, an unknown number will be subject to revocation of placement order applications)
11. To provide adopters for all these children an additional 600 adopters a year are needed, approximately 20% increase in current approvals, meaning an overall approval of 200-300 adopters over the next two years.
12. 3,000 children waiting for adoption costs local authorities £1.2-1.5m per week (£60-80m per annum) in foster care costs alone.

13. Nottinghamshire has experienced a rapid year on year rise in the number of Looked After Children and consequently in children needing adoptive families.
14. The table below shows the increased activity in adoption – the rise in plans, approvals and placing children.

	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14 estimate</b>
New Plans	81	104	70
Approvals	31	45	48
Matches	51	86	96
Adoptions	43	40	58

15. Each month there is a home finding meeting where all children with agency decision of adoption are discussed. The following table shows the activity over 12 months (August 2012 to July 2013):

<b>Month</b>	<b>Children Waiting</b>	<b>Match</b>	<b>Hold</b>	<b>Total</b>
August	39	60	17	116
September	37	68	13	118
October	31	51	29	111
November	40	46	28	114
December	38	50	21	109
January	35	55	21	111
March	45	53	13	111
April	32	49	25	106
May	23	60	21	104
June	24	46	23	93
July	22	42	11	75

NB: Match is any child in a potential link; hold is no current active home finding activity.

16. Recruitment of adopters has increased by almost 50% in 2012-13 and is expected to maintain or slightly increase again. Even with this increase, it is not enough to place all children.
17. We are highly active in home finding activity:
- professional photos and extensive profiles

- home finder social workers actively seeking links for Nottinghamshire children
- national adoption register events
- local profile exchange events
- adoption activity days
- features including DVD footage, in Be My Parent, Adoption Today
- use of adoption register.

18. In addition we now have a partnership with a local voluntary adoption agency, Adopt Together, using some of the adoption reform grant to place 20 Nottinghamshire children in 2013-2014. This benefits us as we can develop close working relationships, share resources, and adopters are in the Midlands.

19. In addition we have found some agencies repeat work with us, such as Buckinghamshire Local Authority, Clifton Children's Society, Coram, due to high quality of work from the permanence team, and the child focus of Nottinghamshire staff.

20. We have been successful recently in placing sibling groups (4 groups of 3 children) older children (eldest 9) and children with disabilities. We continue to need adopters for boys, same gender sibling groups and children with delay or uncertainty.

21. Nottinghamshire Performance:

	<b>Children Adopted 2012-2013</b>	<b>Children Placed 2012-2013</b>
N161	67.5%	48%
21 months	47.5%	52%
7 months	60%	45%

22. The above performance measures (when published) are triggered by the adoption order. Thus children adopted in 2012-13 were likely to have been subject to care proceedings and placed 12-18 months previously. In addition the cohort of children is constantly shifting, for example, those adopted in 2012-2013 will not have been placed in a corresponding cohort, some children who will be adopted in 2013-14 were placed in 2011.

23. As we also place more children, many of whom have waited a significant amount of time, this will affect performance, for example, a five year old boy about to be placed has been in the Home Finding process for over 2 years. It is positive that he now has a family and adoption will be achieved, however, not giving up on Home Finding later reduces published performance.

24. Of the 30 children subject to a placement order and matched in 2012-13:

- 16 met the 4 month timescale (53%)

- 27 met the 7 month timescale (90%)
25. With regard to adults approved, less than 30% meet the 8 month target; usual performance is 12 months. There is no national data on this performance measurement as yet, but we expect it to be included in the next score card publication. Nottinghamshire adopters have historically followed a sequential process, which has included waiting times, for example before and after preparation groups. Whilst we have altered the process we have also experienced a 50% increase in volume, making it impossible as yet to remove all waiting times.
  26. We have recently had one permanent, and one temporary full time post added to establishment, but these workers are not yet in post. However, Nottinghamshire adopters are matched very quickly, with most having a placement within four months of approval.
  27. We now have a new process in place with six months to approve families. Workers in adoption are generally risk averse and make very thorough assessments. The new targets are a challenge which workers are actively aiming to meet.
  28. A Bill currently before Parliament, if passed, will allow the Government to remove the right to function as an adoption agency from local authorities. It is not yet known if this will be used only for poorly performing adoption agencies.
  29. The Government has yet to publish plans for adoption support. It is generally acknowledged that there is a need for the right support to be available to adopters as they need it, and this must be a lifelong commitment.
  30. Nottinghamshire has a relatively well resourced support after adoption team, offering services to children, families and adults. Services are available to families living in Nottinghamshire; these are not necessarily children placed by Nottinghamshire.
  31. This team is increasingly busy managing adoption support, and with more children placed, the on-going need for support rises. The team also manage on going contact arrangements; currently there are almost 400 letter box arrangements with 800 exchanges a year which need to be monitored. These are confidential exchanges between adopters and birth family, usually an annual letter, via the Support After Adoption Team.

### **Other Options Considered**

32. The report is for noting only.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

33. The report is for noting only.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

34. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service 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 review of activity in the adoption service in 2012 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**

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

## **Financial Comments (KLA 29/08/13)**

36. 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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# Child's Journey to Adoption

# Appendix

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