

15 April 2013**Agenda Item: 10****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****ESTABLISHMENT OF POST ADOPTION LINKING SCHEME (PALS) POSTS
IN THE ADOPTION SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek Committee approval of the establishment of Post Adoption Linking Scheme (PALS) posts within the Support After Adoption Team in the Adoption Service. The PALS scheme uses sessional staff deployed from a bank of staff. There are currently 12 PALS workers though it is envisaged that this number will rise to meet increasing demand to around 18 over the next 12 months.

Information and Advice

2. The PALS scheme has been running since 2005. Set up to support families post adoption, the scheme has been successful in averting a number of adoptive placement breakdowns and in improving outcomes for this very vulnerable cohort of children. Following legislative changes PALS services are now implemented on completion of a statutory adoption support assessment.
3. PALS workers are currently engaged via an agreement with the Children, Families and Cultural Services department. Workers are recruited using a selection process aligned with Foster Carer assessments. Once PALS posts are formally established this process will be aligned to standard Council recruitment and selection processes.
4. A review of the PALS scheme in 2012, which is available as a background paper, initiated a change process from which it became clear that PALS worker posts should become formally established within the County Council, underpinned by a formal job description/person specification, which is also available as a background paper. Following the formal establishment of posts a more standard recruitment process will be applied to PALS.
5. By underpinning the PALS worker role with a formal job description and person specification, the Council will be able to ensure clearer performance management.
6. The recommendations made will ensure the PALS scheme continues to deliver high quality services whilst increasing alignment to Council policies and processes. PALS workers are paid on an hourly rate to ensure the Scheme meets need without wasting public resources. The Scheme is overseen by the PALS co-ordinator whose role has been reduced to 3 days per week (previously 5 days/37 hours per week). The remainder

of the co-ordinator's time will be spent undertaking more generic Support After Adoption tasks to meet the increased demands on the team due to rising adoption figures in Nottinghamshire in line with national trends.

7. Other recommendations made by the review include: reducing individual supervision sessions across the PALS scheme and requiring PALS workers to attend group supervisions, ensuring activities undertaken in sessions offer good value, simplifying back office systems and reducing required training from two to one session per annum.
8. The PALS scheme is overseen by the PALS Panel made up of representatives from the Adoption Service, Youth Service and user group representatives. This ensures a One Council approach, consistent application of policy and procedure and user group representation.

Other Options Considered

9. Retaining existing systems is untenable as the agreement with PALS workers is likely to be challenged in the future. PALS workers are in effect employees of the Council and are therefore legally entitled to have a contract of employment in place, as opposed to the current departmental agreement. It is therefore not advised to retain current systems.
10. PALS workers work very closely with social workers within the Support After Adoption Team, being part of the overarching Adoption Support Plan. Commissioning this service is therefore considered not to be cost effective, nor would it offer the immediacy and responsiveness required were it to be delivered by an alternative provider. Adoption is a highly confidential issue, with adoption records not visible even by colleagues within Children's Social Care services. As such, the PALS scheme must be retained in house to meet quality, complex need and sensitive confidentiality requirements. Commissioning the PALS scheme externally, separately from the rest of the adoption support scheme, is not advised.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. The Council ensures that the employment status of PALs is brought into standard processes meaning that there will be a clearer system for managing performance and ensuring maximum efficiency of the service.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, adoption legislation 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.

Human Resources Implications

13. Advice from Human Resources regarding existing engagement of PALS workers and recruitment processes was to seek approval of the job description with a view to the

formal establishment of PALS worker posts within the Council via the Children and Young People's Committee.

14. PALS workers, the PALS Steering Group and the wider Support After Adoption Team have been consulted on the proposed job description and person specification. Trade Unions were sent the draft paper in respect of this agenda item in early March 2013.

Implications for Service Users

15. The PALS scheme will continue to deliver a front line service seamlessly. These recommendations will enable some PALS co-ordinator time to be freed to meet wider demands on the Support After Adoption team. This will allow increased capacity within the team to meet the needs of:
 - the increasing number of families requiring post adoption support
 - adults to whom the Council must offer statutory Birth Records Counselling and/or Access to Records.

Financial Implications

16. Whilst there are no financial savings arising from the recommendations made in this report, efficiencies outlined above will improve the Council's overall performance and ability to perform well in its next Ofsted Inspection, combining value for money with good quality services. The changes will not result in increased costs or payments to PALS workers, but are changes to the employment status only. These proposals are therefore cost neutral. Although numbers of PALS workers are hoped to increase, the intention is to offer increased choice to adopted young people rather than to increase budgetary expenditure.

Equalities Implications

17. Amongst the most vulnerable of cohorts, adopted children and young people have generally suffered trauma resulting in developmental challenges and increased risks of placement break down, mental health issues, addiction and other issues. Adoption has a lifelong impact, therefore support in: recovery, making positive attachments and preventing further rejection or abandonment is crucial to promoting positive outcomes for this group.
18. As such, the recommendations address some of the inequalities faced by this cohort.

Human Rights Implications

19. The PALS scheme supports the right to family life by promoting young people's potential to remain within a family environment, often against the odds when they are reluctant to trust and invest in family life.
20. Forming a positive attachment with a PALS worker can underpin an adopted young person's recovery. Where adopted young people are unable to remain within a family environment, PALS workers have consistently aided transitions in very difficult circumstances. For example:

- recently a PALS worker has supported a young person in becoming drug free after years of cannabis use
 - another PAL worker has mentored a young person requiring a specialist placement, enabling him to rebuild bridges with his family and spend Christmas with them for the first time in several years.
21. PALS is likely to help to break the cycle of adopted young people's own children being removed by Social Care by providing additional role models for appropriate adult behaviour even in cases where adoptive placements have been challenging.

Safeguarding of Children Implications

22. The Council is required legislatively to offer support after adoption to families, often following their child/rens' extensive historical involvement with safeguarding systems leading up to the adoptive placement. Further rejection or abandonment for this cohort is likely to be detrimental to their mental and consequently physical health into their adulthood.
23. It is therefore imperative that adoptive families receive the support they need. The PALS scheme evolved to respond to this need.
24. The Council's support of the PALS Scheme demonstrates its commitment to corporate parenting by preventing unnecessary adoptive placement breakdown, proactively addressing the complex needs of a vulnerable cohort and supporting their families to parent their children towards recovery, involving therapeutic interventions when required to address specific challenges

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee approves the establishment of the PALS worker posts within the Adoption Service in the Support After Adoption Team.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 02/04/13)

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

Financial Comments (KLA 22/03/13)

26. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 16 of the report.

Background Papers

PALS Review 2012

Job description and person specification for PALS worker posts.

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.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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