

29th April 2019**Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE: JUNE 2018 TO MARCH 2019****Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update on activity in the Adoption Service from June 2018 to March 2019.

Information

2. The Government continues to drive improvement of performance in the adoption sector, with a range of legal, policy and organisational changes.
3. The National Adoption Leadership Board, chaired by Andrew Christie, with representatives from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the voluntary sector and academics, continues to monitor performance and drive change.
4. The quarterly adoption survey is a Department for Education (DfE) monitoring tool. The survey reports on all significant dates for all children with an adoption plan, and since 2014, for all adults who have completed a Registration of Interest in adoption. Further reporting fields have been added such as disruption data pre order and if children have been placed with in-house or external adopters.
5. The data allows national and local analysis of number and demographic of children waiting for adoption, and adopters available to take placements of children. This data informs the scorecard, which sets targets in relation to placement order being obtained to children being matched and children entering care to placement with an adoptive family.
6. Nottinghamshire County Council has very few adopters waiting at present (seven). The adopters who continue to wait have a narrower matching profile than peers - for example only wanting a girl or a very young child or having birth children or adopted children, which are additional matching considerations.
7. Nottinghamshire performance is as follows:

Financial year	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Adult approvals	39	27	35
New adoption plans	57	60	51
Children placed	69	65	50
Children adopted	76	58	29

8. To give context to Nottinghamshire figures, children are not always adopted in the year that they are placed. Furthermore, children achieve permanence via various routes including Special Guardianship and Adoption. In 2017/18 65 children were placed for adoption whereas in 2018/19 it had reduced to 50 children. This figure aligns with the reduction in the number of adoption orders in 2018/19.
9. The Council is able to place children from other local authorities with its adopters. This practice impacts positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting. Over the last 14 years Nottinghamshire's pre order disruption rate has remained at 3.5% which is slightly higher than the national average of 3.2% and reflects the fact that the Council is ambitious in its plans for children and places more complex children where there is a greater risk for disruption.
10. The Council has consistently matched children who have waited a substantial period of time and children whose first placement has disrupted. Whilst this is a good outcome for these children it does reflect negatively on the adoption data as it takes longer to place such children. Those children now waiting have complexities which make them harder to place. There are currently seven children waiting including three sibling groups. The Council's current recruitment practice is to not recruit adopters who are only interested in the 0-2 years age range, adopters who have birth children aged five and under, and adopters who already have a non-related adopted child aged seven and under. The recruitment strategy is constantly reviewed based on the needs of the service and research into matching underpins the recruitment strategy. This is in relation to adopters having birth children and the age gap between non-related adopted children.
11. Adoption support continues to be an area of development for the Government. Since 1 May 2015 all local authorities have been applying to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of adopters in order to purchase support packages. All Nottinghamshire applications have been successful with circa £950,000 awarded to fund 450 support packages. The fund will continue to 2020.
12. Nottinghamshire County Council 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. Local media continues to be utilised to publicise the need for adopters and videos of adopter stories have been added to the Council's web pages. Throughout the year there has been a sustained recruitment campaign for foster carers which also benefits the recruitment of adopters. Consistent partnership working with children's social care allows the service to

track children who may be in need of adoption and plan its recruitment strategy accordingly.

13. Changes to legislation in March 2014 allows 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.
14. 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 has recommended a match which the agency decision maker agrees. However, a foster to adopt placement can be made at any point in the time before the Placement Order.
15. Increasingly adopters are considering fostering for adoption. Nottinghamshire has seen one child placed at under three months of age and adopted at nine months of age. There are a further three placements in progress currently, and the Council has made 26 foster for adopt placements in total. The use of Fostering for Adoption means that children can be placed earlier with their permanent family which is a positive for them.
16. In June 2015 the DfE set out proposals to move to regional adoption agencies. The belief is that regionalisation will speed up matching and markedly improve life chances alongside efficiencies. £4.3 million was originally made available to stimulate initial changes in the sector. Work is progressing regarding regionalisation on both a strategic and operational level Nottinghamshire have been selected to host the RAA and Shelagh Mitchell has been seconded as Interim Head of Adoption East Midlands (Derbyshire, Derby City, Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City) RAA. Adoption East Midlands went live on 3rd April 2019 and a six-monthly update will be presented to the Committee in October 2019.
17. Future plans for the service include:
 - hosting Adoption East Midlands on behalf of Derbyshire, Derby City and Nottingham City.
 - evaluating the effectiveness of Adoption East Midlands both in outcomes for children and efficiency
 - consolidating learning and practice for fostering for adoption (ongoing)
 - consolidating learning from Adoption Support Fund and expanding claims for support packages (ongoing and evidenced in increase in packages funded)
 - reviewing the process to identify any delay in the Placement Order to match process and highlighting the longer timescales to place Adoption East Midlands difficult to place children (in progress with a working party in place)
 - building on the reputation of Adoption East Midlands when placing children to enable Adoption East Midlands adopters to adopt children from other local authorities(ongoing)

Other Options Considered

18. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

19. It is regulatory advice that an annual update is provided to the Committee. This report is also accepted by Ofsted as an annual update.

Statutory and Policy Implications

20. 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

21. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That Committee considers whether there is any further action it requires arising from the update on activity in the Adoption Service from June 2018 to March 2019.

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Constitutional Comments (SLB 02/04/19)

22. Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments (SAS 04/04/19)

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

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.

Adoption Service update: June 2017 to May 2018 – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 16th July 2018

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C1233