



2 July 2024

Agenda Item: 9

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR HELP, PROTECTION AND CARE

PERFORMANCE OF ADOPTION SERVICES 2024

Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides information and an update regarding the performance of Adoption Services for Nottinghamshire County Council.

Information

2. The Permanence Team provides a service to all Nottinghamshire children who have a plan for adoption. This also includes 'Together Apart' assessments (assessing whether siblings should live together), Child Permanence Reports, matching with adopters, post adoption support and non-agency adoptions.
3. As of 3 June 2024, the Permanence Team supports 160 children.
4. The Permanence Team has an establishment of 11 full-time equivalent (FTE) Social Workers and 2 FTE Team Managers. The team is countywide and is fully staffed other than one part time position, although one worker is an agency Social Worker. The team is also supported by 1.5 FTE Adoption Support Workers whose role is to support adopters around providing therapeutic parenting and providing vital support to prevent breakdown of placements; they are both qualified in play therapy.
5. The Permanence Team works closely with Adoption East Midlands (AEM). AEM provides a range of adoption services on behalf of Derby City, Nottingham City, Derbyshire County and Nottinghamshire County Councils, and is in its sixth year of operation as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).
6. As the RAA, AEM aims to provide all children with an adoptive family that meets their needs, provides information, support and advice to those affected by adoption and ensures that families are well prepared for and supported to care for children with plans for adoption. AEM also provides information regarding the likelihood of achieving adoption where requested by the Courts.
7. AEM has developed a therapeutic parenting plan for use with prospective adopters and all families have an individualised Therapeutic Parenting Plan. AEM also provides independent birth family services, and the Birth Family Support Team has now been

established which seeks to hear the voices of those with lived experiences and what support should look like for parents who lose their children to adoption.

8. The Voices of Adoption Young People's Support Group is established and allows young people to share experiences and develop service delivery.
9. AEM facilitates all of the 'keeping in touch' work for children to maintain links with birth families. This is evolving from letters only to more modern ways of keeping in touch as adoptive children become ready to explore this.
10. Most adoptive carers identified for Nottinghamshire children are assessed and provided by AEM. When there is no available family in AEM the Family Finding Team seek an adoptive family from another adoption agency. There is a partnership across the Midlands, with the aim of keeping children as local as possible. AEM adopters are matched very soon after their approval, and only a few need to wait for a match. Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:
 - 65 adopters were approved via AEM (inclusive of Derby, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire). This is an increase from the last financial year.
 - 46 Placement Orders were granted in Nottinghamshire. This is an increase in the last financial year.
 - 25 children were placed with adopters and 24 Adoption Orders were granted for Nottinghamshire children.
11. At the end of 2023-24, Nottinghamshire County Council had the lowest value of all local authority's within AEM in terms of number of days from the Court giving authority for a child to be placed for adoption to a match being identified, at 188 days.
12. There is a target for confirming a match with an adoptive family within 121 days of a Placement Order being made. This is challenging for some children who may be older or have complex needs, or where siblings need to be placed together. In addition, there can be more legal challenges to Placement Orders at the point of the match and this causes delay whilst the Court hears the challenge. The latest data shows the national average to be 199 days.
13. As of 31 March 2024, there were 39 children with a Placement Order waiting to be matched with adopters.
14. A Permanence Plan has historically often been considered only within the context of an Adoption Order but, over more recent years, as has been the case nationally, there has been a shift towards other ways of achieving permanence for children, including via Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).
15. The number of children adopted within Nottinghamshire has dropped since 2015. In 2017, 64 children were no longer considered Looked After as they had been adopted, whereas at the end of 2024, this was 24.

16. Nationally, the number of Adoption Orders has dropped from 3,850 in 2017/18 to 2,980 in 2022/23. In contrast there has been an increase in the numbers of Special Guardianship Orders nationally from 3,470 in 2017/18 to 3,870 in 2022/23.
17. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (Department for Education, May 2022) considered a change in the way in which kinship arrangements for children and their families are considered, with much more focus being placed on how to strengthen and support arrangements long term for children within their own wider families.
18. The review considered that "*children who leave care through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).....achieve better outcomes and make better progress than children in care. In 2021, the average Attainment 8 score for those who left care on a Special Guardianship Order was 33.5 compared to 22.2 for looked after children....kinship care also helps to preserve important sibling relationships.....*"
19. In Nottinghamshire, between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, 51 children were the subject of an SGO, up from 43 in the previous year. Of these, 37 were residing with a grandparent or other relative whilst 11 remained with their foster carer.
20. The Council now has an established Kinship Support Service. The small team is multi-disciplinary and made up from experienced Social Workers, Family Workers and Welfare Rights Officers with Social Work Support Officer administrative support. There is significant demand for support from the team from those who already offer Kinship care or those considering this. It is reassuring for families to know that they can access support quickly and without referral by direct support, advice and signposting. The team continues to develop the support offer based on identified need and since being established now jointly run Kinship Youth Group, work closely with the Contact Service offering drop-in support and commission support from Kinship Reach Charity for carers to access peer support and individual advocacy. The team works alongside agencies such as the Virtual School and Developmental Trauma and Attachment Team (DTAT) to improve outcomes for children living in Kinship arrangements. The team continues to grow and develop to meet the unique demands of children living within Kinship arrangements.

Other Options Considered

21. To not bring this report to the Panel: this option is discounted because this report provides information that forms an important part of the Panel's remit in assisting the Council in fulfilling its legal corporate parenting duties and acting as an effective corporate parent.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

22. The report provides an opportunity for the Panel to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

23. 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

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers whether there is any feedback that it wishes to give and any actions that it recommends in relation to the information contained in the report.

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Constitutional Comments (LPW 13/06/24)

25. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (VC 10/06/24)

26. There are no additional 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.

[Independent Review of Children's Social Care, Department for Education, May 2022](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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