



16th July 2018

Agenda Item: 6

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK**

ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE: JUNE 2017 TO MAY 2018

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an annual update on activity in the Adoption Service from June 2017 to May 2018.

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, comprising of 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 monitoring tool. The survey reports on all significant dates for all children with an adoption plan, and from 2014, for all adults who have completed a Registration of Interest in adoption. Further reporting fields have been added such as how many placements have broken down and how many children have been placed with adopters not approved by Nottinghamshire.
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. 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, all of which are additional matching considerations.
7. Nottinghamshire performance is as follows:

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	April-May 2018
Adult approvals	31	39	27	4
New adoption plans	79	57	60	16
Children placed	73	69	65	8
Children adopted	74	76	58	4

8. The Council is now able to place children from other local authorities with its adopters. This practice impacts positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting. The Council is able to recoup £27,000 for a single placement, £43,000 for a sibling group of two children and £60,000 for a sibling group of three children (these figures are agreed nationally). Any income supports the spend on placements for waiting children. Over the last 14 years Nottinghamshire's pre order disruption rate has been 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.
9. Consultancy firm Newton Europe undertook an independent evaluation of Nottinghamshire's Adoption Service in December 2017 and concluded that "cost avoidances through adoption improvements have already helped avoid over £1.8 million in costs".
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 11 children waiting including two large sibling groups who have experienced neglect and physical abuse. The Council's current recruitment practice is reviewed in line with need.
11. The Council continues to utilise all home finding opportunities for children through publicity, adoption activity days, adoption register events, local profile sharing events and this consistent activity 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.
12. Changes to legislation in March 2014 allow 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.

13. 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.
14. 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 23 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.
15. Adoption support continues to be an area of development for the Government. Since 1 May 2015 all local authorities are able to apply to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of adopters in order to purchase support packages. All Nottinghamshire applications have been successful with circa £760,000 awarded to fund support packages. The fund will continue at least until 2020.
16. In June 2015 the Department for Education set out proposals to move to regional adoption agencies. The belief is that regionalisation will speed up matching and markedly improve life chances alongside reducing costs. £4.3 million was originally made available nationally to stimulate initial changes in the sector. Work is progressing regarding regionalisation at both a strategic and operational level. Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Derby and Nottingham City are currently working towards establishing a Regional Adoption Agency. Nottinghamshire is currently piloting and leading on a D2N2 model in relation to home finding for harder to place children with 20 matches identified as a result of this joined up process.
17. The service moved in March 2017 from privately rented premises at Chadburn House in Mansfield to Nottinghamshire accommodation at Trent Bridge House. The move has resulted in significant financial savings based on reduction of rental costs.
18. In September 2017 Committee approved changes to the structure of the Adoption Service resulting in a decrease in Social Work posts and the introduction of Adoption Social Work Support Officers (ASWO's). This new model is now embedded with the recruitment of 1.5 fte ASWO's to the Support After Adoption service. These workers take on tasks that do not require a qualified social worker and this change to the service is going well.
19. Future plans for the service include:
 - 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 Nottinghamshire's difficult to place children (in progress with a working party in place)
- building on the reputation of the Council when placing children to enable the Council's adopters to adopt children from other local authorities (ongoing)
- working with partner agencies to continue to drive proposals to move to regional adoption agencies (ongoing to 2020).

Other Options Considered

20. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

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

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. 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 only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

1) That the Committee considers whether there are any actions it requires in relation to the annual update on activity in the Adoption Service.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 18/06/18)

24. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the contents of the report. Members should consider whether there are any actions they require in relation to the issues contained within the report.

Financial Comments (SAS 19/06/18)

25. 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.

Children's Social Care Transformation Programme - Adoption Services restructure: report to Children and Young People's Committee on 18 September 2017.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C1130