



## **REPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES MANAGER (ADOPTION)**

### **ADOPTION SERVICE INSPECTION AND ACTION PLAN**

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

1. To inform members about the recent Ofsted inspection and the associated action plan and update members on recent adoption service activity.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted on 9 – 13 January 2012.
3. The report was published on the Ofsted website in February 2012, and the overall rating was satisfactory, with some good and outstanding areas of service:-
  - Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe – Good
  - Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do – Outstanding
  - Making a positive contribution - Good
  - Equality and Diversity – Good
  - Organisation – Satisfactory
4. Overall, the service helped to ensure that good matches were made for children and young people which meet their needs, often with their siblings. This means that children are happy, settled and safe in their adoptive placements and benefit from outstanding opportunities to enjoy and achieve and maximise their potential.
5. The report indicated some good features of the service:
  - the staff in the adoption team are suitably qualified and experienced and supported by a strong leadership team
  - most adopters express high levels of satisfaction with the preparation, training and support and say that they are kept well informed
  - the adoption team is now fully staffed and enthusiastic, following a period of restructuring and staff turnover which has affected the development of the service over the last two years
  - there is now a new home finder post and a team of social workers specifically dedicated to adoption issues
  - the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and to keep them safe from harm are good.

- children and young people enjoy healthy diets, regular and challenging physical activities such as kayaking, rock climbing and abseiling which promote their development and build confidence
  - the children are well prepared for adoption, with gradual introductions at the child's pace which help to build familiarity and trust, helping them to settle quickly
  - the arrangements to help children achieve well and enjoy what they do are outstanding, with a range of leisure activities which the children thoroughly enjoy, while learning new skills and making new friends. These activities significantly boost the children's sense of self worth
  - children and young people who are adopted are given good opportunities to make a positive contribution to their own lives and also to the development of the service
  - adopters are very well prepared and have exceptional ongoing support.
6. The report highlights areas where improvements are needed to improve the service and to ensure that where there is good practice it is applied consistently across the whole service. These include ensuring that children's files contain all the required information; staff and adoption panel members' files contain the necessary information; the children's guide is available in a range of formats; an effective recruitment strategy is in place; a written development plan is in place; annual appraisals take account of young people's wishes on a consistent basis and that all records are monitored and reviewed by the manager.
7. This inspection was carried out against the backdrop of:-
- Nottinghamshire's poor performance in the NI61 league table published in October 2011
  - Ofsted inspections planned changes to regime from April 2012 of:-
    - whatever is the lowest judgment is the overall judgment
    - no local authority that is not placing 100% of children within 12 months of panel decision (NI61) will be rated outstanding.
8. We expect Nottinghamshire's performance in this indicator to be improved to around 61% in April 2011 – March 2012. To increase our timeliness of placing children we:-
- 1) have a homefinder post - this is a social worker who takes all responses to children we have featured in order to maximise our opportunity to respond quickly to adoptive families and, if appropriate, consider links with all our children waiting
  - 2) developed closer links with our local voluntary adoption agencies to use their families for our children
  - 3) attended two placement activity days bringing together children and families
  - 4) organised homefinding meetings on a monthly basis to discuss all children with an adoption plan, needing a placement
  - 5) reduced delay in the process for our applicants so we can approve them with thoroughness and speed, as once approved, we currently proceed with a match immediately
  - 6) used adopters in publicity to encourage others
  - 7) launched a month long recruitment campaign
  - 8) working with local court/CAFCASS to speed proceedings, resulting in less delay for children

- 9) Nottinghamshire operates three adoption panels every month and have new systems in place to gate keep booking and rearrangement to ensure they operate to capacity. There will be additional panels to meet demand – March, May and potentially September
- 10) currently, consideration is being given to local events to share information about children waiting with interested families
- 11) a Permanence Team which works to place children for adoption has been established and now provides a County-wide service.

9. The volume of work within the adoption service remains high.

**Summary of Panel Workload  
(April 2009 – March 2012)**

	<b>Apr 2011 – March 2012</b>	<b>Apr 2010 - March 2011</b>	<b>Apr 2009 - March 2010</b>
<b>Children's Plans</b>	84 children	84 children	42 children
<b>Applications</b>	31 families	31 families	19 families
<b>Matches (Notts)</b>	40 children matched with 34 Notts families	33 children matched with 26 Notts families	21 children matched with 19 Notts families
<b>Matches (interagency)</b>	10 children matched with 5 interagency families	7 children matched with 5 interagency families	N/A
<b>Total matches</b>	50 children matched with 39 families	40 children matched with 31 families	21 children matched with 19 families

10. In the homefinding meeting around 100 children are routinely discussed. At the last meeting 34 children were in a tentative/actual match, 15 children were being considered for seven placements, and 54 children had no identified match.
11. In addition, from the six weekly adoption tracking meeting, a further 64 children have been identified who may have an adoption plan confirmed within the next six months.
12. There are seven approved adopters awaiting matches, 30 in the assessment process, and 19 at the early stages of coming into assessment (these 19 will not be available until the end of the year).
13. Up until the end of February 2012, 36 children became legally adopted. Out of a Looked After population of 770, this rate of adoption remains at around 5% of the total LAC

figure, but the numbers in the adoption process at 160 is over 20%, so if more adoptive homes can be found more children can be exited from the care of the Local Authority.

14. The numbers of adopters coming forward has not reduced, it remains consistent, but the numbers of children needing an adoptive home has risen dramatically. This is a nationwide phenomenon.
15. Following the inspection an action plan has been drawn up and the main points are:-

#### Audit

- children's files lack all the relevant information. This has been an issue in previous inspections. Consideration to be given to specialist staff auditing within their area of expertise and responsibility, and to amending the audit tool
- ensure relevant original documents are uploaded onto Framework, but paper copy is retained, e.g. letter from birth family, photos, birth certificate
- ensure relevant information is kept on relevant file, e.g. adult or child
- introduce consistency in naming documents to be stored, and significant dates/case notes
- evidence of children's wishes and feelings are recorded in reports and episodes.

#### Processes

- produce a Children's Guide for older children
- ensure panel members' files contain all documents
- incorporate children's views/feedback on EPDRs
- produce a recruitment strategy
- produce a development plan.

#### **Other Options Considered**

16. This report is an information only report.

#### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

17. 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, 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**

18. That the report be noted.

**Shelagh Mitchell**  
**Children's Service Manager (Adoption)**

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## **Constitutional Comments**

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

## **Financial Comments (NDR 29/03/12)**

20. None.

## **Background Papers**

Ofsted report 'Nottinghamshire County Council Adoption Service', (published 23 February 2012)

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.

M19C3008