

29 October 2012

Agenda Item: **6****REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER, REGULATED AND CORPORATE
PARENTING****HOMEFINDING ACTIVITY IN THE ADOPTION SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Members of the range of homefinding activity currently taking place and the results achieved in April – September 2012.

Information and Advice

2. A new post of Homefinder was created within the adoption service in 2012 and was recruited to in November 2012. The post holder is involved in all home finding activity for children who cannot be placed within our own resources (i.e. Notts approved families). In some local authorities a homefinder carries a small case load of children s/he is finding families for. Due to the volume of children we homefind for, the post in Notts has the most impact by maximising our homefinding activity for all children, and is not a case holding post.
3. Every month a homefinding meeting is held, which is chaired by the Adoption Service Manager and attended by the Homefinder, Recruitment and Publicity Officer, Permanence Team Managers and Adoption Team Manager.
4. Every child who has an adoption plan agreed by the agency decision maker, but has not yet had a match presented to adoption panel, is discussed in the meeting.
5. As the table overleaf shows, the total number of children discussed is between 100 and 120. The number on hold varies as it includes those children not subject to a placement order yet. We are limited in homefinding for these children until a placement order is obtained.

2012 - Month	Children Waiting	Match	Hold	Total
February	47	34	0	81
March	46	39	17	102
April	51	43	0	94
May	32	58	14	104
June	40	51	10	101
July	39	62	9	110
August	39	60	17	116
Sept	37	68	13	118

6. What is pleasing to note is that the number in a match has steadily increased this year, whilst the number waiting has slightly reduced.

7. The homefinding options are as follows, and usually follow this order:-

- a) An in-house family may be identified within the meeting. We consider all families due to be approved within the next 3 months, and will share information about the specific child prior to approval. In some cases we take approval and match to the same adoption panel, thus minimising delay.

If there is no Nottinghamshire approved family, and a child is subject to a placement order, the next stage is:

- b) Referral to the local Consortium. This is a group of local authorities and voluntary agencies within the East Midlands who will work co-operatively to place children within their pooled resources. The limitation of this is the current demand for placements local authorities are experiencing which means they are unlikely to be able to give a family to a neighbouring authority.

For example only one Notts family has taken a non Notts placement in the past 15 months at least.

- c) Detailed profile sent to one of our local Voluntary Adoption Agencies that we are working closely with, Family Care and Adopt Together. We recently held a joint recruitment event with Family Care. We have contributed to the Adopt Together preparation programme, and expect to use several of their families in 2012. A member of their staff will start to attend our homefinding meeting so that matches can be discussed alongside our own – further reducing delay.

- d) Referral to the National register, and responses followed up immediately. There are a limited number of approved adopters on the register and their details are sent out for many children. When the Service Manager was first in post (July 2011) the register produced no families for Notts children but was generating a high level of work in referring children. (It is a requirement to refer children where no family has been identified within 3 months). As we can now accurately predict our future resources available we do not wait 3 months before referring children. If there is no in house link, and stage b and c achieve nothing we refer immediately. The homefinder has developed a system to reply immediately to all register possibilities, with a concise and professional profile which has sufficient information for adopters to make a decision regarding our children. This means that families who are not a match are ruled out early on, but also that everyone has a timely response. This in turn has improved our reputation, and increasingly other agencies are seeking to work with us.

- e) If there is still no family we will feature children in Be My Parent or Children Who Wait and on the Website of both. We will repeat feature if necessary.

- f) In addition we attend national register exchange days, where adopters attend and view profiles. (Leeds, Cardiff, London) and we hold local exchange events, in the same way at County Hall.

- g) At the same time we will identify children for Adoption Activity Days.
8. Adoption Activity Days are a new home finding initiative for harder to place children, being run as a pilot project for two years by the British Agency for Fostering and Adoption. It is based on principles of empowerment of children waiting for a new family and adopter-led linking. The project is based in the East Midlands Adoption Consortium, which embraces 9 local Authorities, although initially only 5 were willing to take part.
 9. Nottinghamshire is one of the lead authorities in the pilot project steering group, and has been well regarded both locally and nationally for the commitment to developing practice and placement of children in this area. Staff from the Authority have been involved in well-received radio and newspaper broadcasts as well as being a part of a video of the first event, which is used for national training purposes, and securing additional sponsorship for the project.
 10. There have now been three Adoption Activity Days with two more planned for October 2012 and March 2013. As expertise has developed and children have been matched and placed, so Government interest and support for the days has grown. Martin Narey, adoption champion for the Government, is planning to attend the event in October 2012.
 11. So far the Adoption Activity Days have offered 128 places to children, several of whom have attended twice. Between 23 and 27 adoptive families have attended each event. Each day has given the children a memorable day of activities. Each child has a trusted carer with them, as well as their social worker and activities are geared around age and interest. The event finishes with food and singing for the children, a buffet for all the adults, and the children all go home with a small bag of toys. The event has been held in different large venues with the capacity for about 180 people. General feedback from the children has been that they have had a great day out.
 12. Specifically, Nottinghamshire had places for 23 (out of 39) children at the first day, 13 (out of 41) children at the second day, and 9 (out of 48) children at the third day. As more authorities witnessed the success of the days, so more East Midlands Agencies signed up to take part, giving less child places per authority.
 13. Our children included a range of children with additional needs, some had profound disabilities, others were older, and some were brothers and sisters wanting to stay together. Many were boys. Although the children were predominantly white, a few Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children also attended. We have also sent two sets of Nottinghamshire adopters to the events, as they had been waiting a long time to find the right child for them.
 14. Feedback from all participants has been balanced, constructive and largely very positive. One of the positive spin offs has been children being pleased to see so many children waiting for families, like them, which makes it feel more normal.
 15. In terms of matching children, 22 children have found families from the three events. Specifically, Nottinghamshire will have matched 5 children, representing 23% of children placed so far in the pilot. Nottinghamshire children consisted of 2 sibling groups and a single child, 3 boys and 2 girls in the age range 3 to 6 years, and with a range of different additional needs.

16. The Homefinder produces a full detailed, accurate and attractive profile of all children. We use professional photographs, but taken in the child's home, and have had very positive feedback about these.
17. The profiles again have raised our reputation, and the response other adopters and agencies experience from all our staff has made us a desirable agency to work with.
18. This year, from April to September, 42 children have had a match approved by panel. For 2011 – 12 it was 51 in total.
19. Of those, 33 have been placed in house and 6 of those were presented as approval and match (i.e. minimising delay).
20. 9 have been placed with other agencies, both local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.
21. These families were identified by the adoption register, other than one who responded to a feature. This clearly demonstrates we now have useful activity from the National Adoption Register.
22. Of the adopters we used internally, 18 had their match confirmed in less than 4 months post approval. 3 were 5 months, 1 was 6 months, 1 was 7 months, and 2 were 10 months. The longer time is due to adopter's choice, i.e. considering more than one match, having specific matching requirements, or a match previously not proceeding.
23. To the end of September 2012, 22 families were approved to adopt and 18 are booked to panel before the end of the year. In 2011-12 31 families were approved in total.
24. The media campaigns locally and general high profile of adoption are benefitting us greatly, as is our continued reputation of offering a good service.
25. We have matches due to come to panel of older children, siblings, and children with disabilities. These were obtained via register exchange days, features, and internal matches.

Other Options Considered

26. As this is a report for noting, it is not necessary to consider other options.

Reasons for Recommendations

27. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

28. 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the report be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (NDR 17/10/12)

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

Background Papers

Update on progress in the Adoption Service – report to Children and Young People’s Committee on 8 October 2012
Anonymised Profile.

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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