

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2016 TO FEBRUARY 2017

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from September 2016 to February 2017.

Information and Advice

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 DofE 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 disruption data pre order and data to assess if Nottinghamshire 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. These targets are 121 and 426 days respectively.
6. The Government continues to stimulate growth in the voluntary sector by making available adoption grant monies. From September 2015 to October 2016 the Government ring fenced £30m to all local authorities to apply to the Department for Education (DfE) for reimbursement of inter-agency fees for hard to place children. Nottinghamshire claimed £552,000 in fees in the last financial year and an additional £356,000 in this financial year. The grant will be paid up until 31 March 2017 but only for children who have waited for longer than 18 months; there are no eligible children within Nottinghamshire.
7. There is less of a mis-match between the children waiting: siblings, older children, those with complex backgrounds, developmental delay, and approved adopters. 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 these factors are additional matching considerations.

8. Nottinghamshire performance is as follows:

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	April-Sept 2016
Adult approvals	58	55	31	12
New adoption plans	67	66	79	28
Children placed	91	84	73	16
Children adopted	88	96	74	29

To give context to the above table grant monies enabled us to place our harder to place children with non-Nottinghamshire County Council families hence the drop in adult approvals. We are now seeing an increase in adult approvals.

9. Of the matches made in 2015-2016, 29 children were placed with Nottinghamshire families, and 44 children placed with families from other agencies. It should be noted that the number of new plans is now steady, thus children placed and adopted in the coming years will fall correspondingly. In addition, Nottinghamshire County Council is now able to place children from other local authorities with its adopters. Eight children were placed in the last financial year and eleven children during this reporting period. This practice impacts positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting. Nottinghamshire County Council are 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). Over the last 12 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.
10. The number of adopters that the Council has approved reduced to coincide with the fact that there are fewer children waiting - 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 us longer to place such children. Those children now waiting have complexities which make them harder to place. There are currently twelve children waiting including several older sibling groups who have all experienced extreme neglect and physical abuse. 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. Up to date research into matching underpins our recruitment strategy, this is in relation to adopters having birth children and the age gap between non related adopted children, both of which may destabilise adoptive placements of subsequent 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 £252,000 awarded to fund support packages. The fund will continue for the next four years.

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 we have made seventeen 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 reducing costs. £4.3 million has been made available to stimulate initial changes in the sector. The East Midlands Adoption Consortium, which consists of Nottinghamshire, Nottingham City, Derbyshire, Derby City, Leicestershire, Leicester City, Lincolnshire, Adopt Together, Faith in Families and Coram, has been awarded further funding to progress regionalisation of these seven local authorities and three voluntary adoption agencies who placed a total of 390 children in the last financial year. Work is progressing regarding regionalisation on both a strategic and operational level.
17. The adoption service will move on or around 1 March 2017 from privately rented premises at Chadburn House in Mansfield to Nottinghamshire County Council accommodation at Trent Bridge House. The move will result in significant financial savings based on reduction of rental costs.

18. 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

19. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working 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

1) That the six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from September 2016 to March 2017 be noted.

Steve Edwards
Service Director, Children's Social Care

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Tracey Coull
Service Manager, Adoption
T: 0115 9774153
E: tracey.coull@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (TMR 14/02/17)

23. There are no direct financial implications arising 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: March to August 2016 – report to Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 12 September 2016

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0957