



REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR HELP, PROTECTION AND CARE

PERFORMANCE OF ADOPTION SERVICES 2023

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 19 June 2023, the Permanence Team supports 171 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, although two of these workers are agency Social Workers.
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 fifth year of operation as the Regional Adoption Agency.
6. Services include the recruitment of adopters and finding other agency adopters where necessary. Part of the role of AEM is to identify adopters for Nottinghamshire children. AEM works closely with the Permanence Team, to ensure the plans for children within the adoption process are progressing in a timely manner, and to ensure that families are available for matching. AEM also provides information regarding the likelihood of achieving adoption where requested by the Courts.
7. AEM has developed a therapeutic support plan and a therapeutic parenting plan for use during matching children and families, to ensure that all of the appropriate support is in place. AEM also provides independent birth family services and is developing both the support for birth families affected by adoption and including the voice of birth families in developing services.

8. 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.
9. AEM is responsible for adoption support and provides a comprehensive offer that includes a peer support network, a help and advice line and assessment regarding access to the Adoption Support Fund.
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. In 2022-23 there was a fall in the numbers of adopters approved, but there remain adopters waiting from other agencies. AEM adopters are matched very soon after their approval, and only a few need to wait for a match.
 - Between February 2022 and February 2023, 54 adopters were approved via AEM (inclusive of Derby, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire).
 - Between February 2022 and February 2023, 34 Placement Orders were granted in Nottinghamshire.
 - Between February 2022 and February 2023, 37 children were placed with adopters and 24 Adoption Orders were granted for Nottinghamshire children.
11. Nottinghamshire County Council is currently the lowest County 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.
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 2023, there were 18 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. This change in approach is demonstrated through the Department for Education's decision to close the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board at the end of 2022 in order to deliver the recommendations of the independent Care Review, which includes a greater focus on kinship carers.
16. 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 in 2022 this was 33.

17. Nationally, the number of Adoption Orders has dropped from 3,850 in 2017/18 to 2,950 in 2021/22. In contrast there has been an increase in the numbers of SGOs nationally from 3,470 in 2017/18 to 3,870 in 2021/22. Children are being placed in permanent arrangements, either with family and friends or adopters. The total for both SGO and adoption would indicate no reduction in the numbers of young children leaving looked after care to permanent arrangements.
18. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (Department for Education, May 2022) has 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.
19. The review considers 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.....*"
20. In Nottinghamshire, between April 2022 and March 2023, 43 children were the subject of an SGO. Of these, 40 children were residing with a grandparent or other relative. This has remained consistent since 2019.
21. The Council has introduced a Kinship Service which was established in 2022 and is fully staffed. The team is a mix of Social Workers, Family Workers and Social Work Support Officers. There is great demand for support from the team, with some families having been unable to access support for some time. It is reassuring for families to know that they can receive support and to have a team to contact for advice and signposting. The Team continues to develop the support offer as the range of needs becomes clear. Kinship carers can now have the benefit of attending preparation seminars with other kinship carers in the region. The team is also developing peer support networks through a Department for Education grant to a Kinship charity to support this.

Other Options Considered

22. 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

23. 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

24. 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

25. 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 26/06/23)

26. The recommendation falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel by virtue of its terms of reference. Any further actions recommended by the Corporate Parenting Panel will be subject to obtaining the relevant approvals.

Financial Comments (VC 27/06/23)

27. There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

28. 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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