

7 March 2016

Agenda Item: 7

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

ADOPTION SERVICE UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2015 TO FEBRUARY 2016

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide a six-monthly update on activity in the adoption service from September 2015 to February 2016.

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 Sir Martin Narey, with representatives from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the voluntary sector and academics continues to monitor performance and drive change. There is a regional link to the national Board – Janice Spencer, Assistant Director in Lincolnshire, is the link for the East Midlands and she in turn links to Anthony Douglas, from Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory & Support Service) who sits on the national Board.
4. The quarterly 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 in this quarter.
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 and informs the scorecard.
6. The Government continues to stimulate growth in the voluntary sector by making available adoption grant monies. The most recent budget ring fenced £30m up to March 2017 to all local authorities to apply to the Department for Education (DfE) for reimbursement of inter-agency fees for hard to place children. Nottinghamshire has claimed £163,000 in fees so far with an anticipated £323,000 in the last quarter of the financial year.
7. There continues to be a mis-match between the children waiting: siblings, older children, those with complex backgrounds, developmental delay, and approved adopters. Nottinghamshire County Council has 17 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.

8. Nottinghamshire performance is as follows:

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-2015	April-Dec 2015	2015-2016 (Estimate)
Adult approvals	45	58	55	30	39
New adoption plans	104	67	66	60	75
Children placed	86	91	84	50	62
Children adopted	40	88	96	36	48

To contextualise the above performance, numbers of LAC increased significantly in 2010-2012 and as the Council progressed plans for these children, the majority have now been adopted.

9. Of the matches made in 2014-15, 48 children were placed with 40 Nottinghamshire families, and 36 children placed with 25 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 2014-2015 one placement disrupted pre order (1.1% of all placements). In this reporting period the Council has seen the disruption of three children pre order and is in the process of assessing these disruptions. Over the last 11 years Nottinghamshire's pre order disruption rate is 3.5% which is slightly higher than the national average of 3.2% and reflects the fact that the Council places more complex children.
10. The number of adopters that the Council has approved reduced to coincide with the fact that there are very few children waiting - the Council has matched children who have waited a substantial period of time. Whilst this is a good outcome for these children it does reflect negatively on the adoption data. As an example, child B was with adopters and his placement disrupted after two years; it then took another ten months for another adoptive family to be identified. Child B is now placed which is an excellent outcome for an older boy but this has taken 34 months as opposed to the expected four months. Those children now waiting have complexities which make them harder to place. There are currently just two such children waiting - a baby with complex medical needs and a six year old boy who has 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.
11. In addition, the Council is now able to place children from other local authorities with its adopters. Nine children were placed in the last financial year and seven children during this reporting period. This practice impacts positively on national performance on numbers of children waiting. Nottinghamshire County 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.

12. Adoption support continues to be an area of development for the Government. Since 1 May 2015 the Council has been applying to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of adopters in order to purchase support packages; all applications have been successful with circa £52,000 awarded to fund support packages. The fund will continue into the next financial year. There is also a piece of research being undertaken to map existing services as the current choice and quality is variable. This is part of the challenge to ensure all adopters can access services.
13. The 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 Council to track children who may be in need of adoption and plan its recruitment strategy accordingly.
14. 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.
15. 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 approves. However, a foster to adopt placement can be made at any point in the time before the Placement Order.
16. 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 five placements in progress currently, with two babies placed straight from hospital.
17. The partnership with a local voluntary adoption agency, Adopt Together, continues to provide placements for Nottinghamshire children, 23 to date. In addition, joint provision of some adoption support services is being explored, such as groups for adopters, or children, and networks for adopters. Work is also being done together where capacity becomes an issue for either agency, directing potential adopters between the agencies as necessary.
18. 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, Peterborough Adopt Together, Faith in Families and Coram, has been awarded trailblazing funding of £100,000 to progress regionalisation of these eight local authorities and three

voluntary adoption agencies who placed a total of 390 children in the last financial year. By 2020 recruitment, assessment and support of adopters will be delivered by regional adoption agencies.

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)
- exploring the possibility of specifically recruiting fostering for adoption carers, particularly for older children (ongoing and assessed on a monthly basis based on needs of children currently waiting)
- 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 named officer leading on this project)
- 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)
- moving staff from Chadburn house to the Council's accommodation (alternate accommodation and ways of working currently being assessed).

Other Options Considered

20. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

21. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. 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 2015 to February 2016 be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

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

Financial Comments (LCJ 01/02/16)

24. 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.

Adoption Service update: March to August 2015 – report to Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 14 September 2015

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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