

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **24 April 2009**

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009**

Recommendation: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The Annual Progress Report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

MATT DUNKLEY
Director of Children Services

Contact Officer: Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence, Tel: 01323 747154

Local Members: All
Background Docs: None

**Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009**

1. Supporting Information

1. Number of Children Adopted	16
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	35
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	15
4. Number of Special Guardianship matches	6
5. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	20
6. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	7
7. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children): Permanence: Adoption:	4 8
8. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households)	23
9. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	8
10. Number of Children Approved for Adoption	31
11. Number of Children Approved for Permanence	14
12. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	15
13. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel	4
14. Withdrawals (couples)	1

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 The Adoption Service has undertaken a significant volume of work during 08/09, and notably the team have worked hard to enable 35 children to be matched for adoption. This is a 50% increase on the matching activity levels last year.

2.2 The Service has held one joint event with the Fostering Team (Airbourne) and one with Adoption Consortium partners. The Airbourne event resulted in 12 information packs being given out to enquirers and 19 packs were distributed at the National Adoption Week event.

2.3 Since April 2008, 168 information packs have been sent out in response to enquiries about adoption in East Sussex. Following receipt of information packs, 68

households have attended 6 information evenings run by staff from the Adoption Team, 51 prospective adoptive households have requested a home visit by a social worker and 46 have gone on to attend a readiness to adopt day.

2.4 36 sets of prospective adopters have attended 7 preparation groups over the year, and 23 of these were recommended for approval by the panel as at March 2009. By the time this report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel a further four more couples will have been presented to the panel.

2.5 The Adoption Service continues to invest heavily in refining and developing the systems for preparation and assessment. The readiness to adopt day and preparation courses effectively “weed out” inappropriate applicants at an early stage of the process. This enables the assessment process to be more efficient and effective. Nonetheless, there were 7 assessments initiated where the applicants either withdrew, were “counselled out” or were delayed for further work.

2.6 The Adoption Service continues to attract a significant number of enquiries from adults who are interested in becoming adoptors. A timely response to all enquiries is ensured by engaging independent assessors where appropriate. Hence, when the in-house staff reach full capacity and it is not possible to allocate assessments within specified timescales, work is out sourced to independent assessors. The pool of adoptors not yet matched with a child is slightly higher than last year and currently stands at 15 adoptive families available, as compared with 13 last year.

2.7 The growing demand for adoption support assessments continues to compete with staff time spent involved in the other significant aspects of the adoption service delivery, including assessments and coordinating the matching of children.

2.8 The service continues as far as possible to place children in the East Sussex area, and only uses the Consortium and agency when absolutely necessary. This is usually for children in larger sibling groups, i.e. above 2 years old, children with BME needs and children with complex needs or disabilities.

2.9 A number of adoptors continue to come forward to offer an adoptive placement to a sibling of the child already adopted. Two adoptors who would consider sibling groups and eight adoptors who would consider children aged over 2 years were approved at Panel in 2008 / 9. Four BME families were approved for adoption during this period.

3. Children with a plan for adoption

3.1 Only 16 children were adopted in 2008/09, the lowest number in the past 10 years. This reflects the sharp fall in the number of children with a care plan for adoption (just 22) in 2007/08. However, there has been an increase to 31 children with a care plan for adoption in 2008/09 and 35 children were matched with adoptors, so it is likely that the number of adoptions will rise again in 2009/10. This must be set in the context of a national decline in the number of children placed for adoption. This has been influenced by the introduction of Special Guardianship orders and by the impact of the Public Law Outline (PLO) on the court process. Whilst Special Guardianship Orders were not anticipated to be a popular choice for babies and younger children, some Courts continue to favour it when considering the ‘no order’ principle.

3.2 There are currently 25 children approved for adoption, 11 of whom are in the process of matching and 14 are waiting – a significant number are allocated and family finding activity is in process.

4. Permanence

4.1 The Permanence Coordinator continues to maintain the permanence tracking system and takes a lead role in ensuring the permanence agenda is promoted across Children's Services. The number of children has remained fairly consistent in the past 12 months.

4.2 Currently, there are 26 children approved for permanence and, of this group, 8 children are waiting for permanent placements and in the process of family finding. The remainder of the group are either placed or in the process of matching.

5. Special Guardianship

5.1 During 2008/2009 six children were matched for Special Guardianship through the adoption and permanence panel.

5.2 The anticipated increase in Special Guardianship matches in the past year has not occurred, although only those involving children of 12 years or under are presented to panel.

5.3 The initial trend of babies and very young children being placed for Special Guardianship has reduced. However, the impact of the public law outline has meant significant delays in matching and placing babies and young children, with a steep rise in the numbers of viability assessments of family friends and kinship being requested.

6. Ofsted Inspection

6.1 The Ofsted inspection of the Adoption Service took place in November 2008. This was a very positive inspection and it was very pleasing to have the hard work, commitment and high professional standards of the service recognised and highly commended.

6.2 A separate report was presented in January 2009 to the Corporate Parenting Panel which detailed the summary and recommendations of the report.

7. Adoption Support

7.1 The Adoption Support element of the service was judged as Outstanding by Ofsted. This is a tremendous achievement. The workload continues to be very demanding and all members of the team carry a caseload which includes post adoption work with children and families, as well as work with adopted adults.

7.2 The Adoption Support Service Assessor (ASSA) and senior practitioner have continued to work in close partnership with teachers, schools, virtual school and CAMHS colleagues to raise awareness and deliver more effective services to adopted children. There is a conference planned for July which will build on the learning already established around the impact of attachment difficulties for adopted children.

7.3 The Adoption Support Service has been involved in working with 39 families during 08/09. The level of support is variable but is frequently intense and ongoing. A number of families have also required additional multi-agency intervention, particularly in relation to safeguarding issues and in one case a specialist risk assessment was commissioned. There is little doubt that this support has been critically important in maintaining children within their adoptive families. All packages of support are regularly reviewed in line with the legislation.

7.4 The Contact Service for adopted children in placement is involved in supporting 77 contacts per year, of which they directly supervise 43. In addition, the Letter-box Co-ordinator currently manages 512 letter-box contacts, an increase of 36 from 07/08.

7.5 The service continues to commission complementary adoption support services through contracts with the Post Adoption Centre, Adopt UK and Norcap. The services are delivered locally and activity levels are carefully monitored through the contracting process.

7.6 The implementation of the Adoption Support Standards since 2006 has proved to be an enormous challenge within the current staffing complement. The demands of this work continue to rise and have had a significant impact on the ability of the whole service to meet other targets effectively. The balance of work is closely monitored by the Operations Manager.

8. Adoption and Permanence Panel

8.1 The Adoption & Permanence Panel has run with regularity and efficiency throughout 08/09, and indeed the quality of its scrutiny and analysis was highly commended by the Ofsted inspectors. Panel training continues to take place twice a year and is an important aspect of maintaining the high professional standards by which the East Sussex Adoption & Permanence Service operates. It is highly valued by all panel members as evidenced in the annual evaluation.

8.2 A significant number of panel members' tenure expired in December 2008 and we said farewell to a number of highly valued and longstanding members. These positions have now been successfully recruited to and 6 new panel members have been appointed. All of the new members were interviewed, undertook an induction programme and are now embarking on their career as panel members. The panel membership has a gender and BME imbalance, but this should be addressed through the recruitment to the remaining vacancy.

8.3 The next panel evaluation will take place in the autumn 2009 and will be written up and presented to the following panel business meeting.

8.4 During the last 12 months, 6 children have attended panel. There have been high levels of positive feedback and the service strives to make improvements to practice based on the evaluations completed by panel attendees.

9. Staffing

9.1 The Adoption team has enjoyed a stable staff group for some considerable time. However, 2009 has, and will continue, to see some significant departures due to career progression, maternity leave and retirement. There are currently 3 vacancies which are being recruited to, 1 Senior Practitioner, 1 Social worker, and 1 Practice Manager.

9.2 The adoption service continues to take advantage of both in house and external training opportunities, especially those provided by PAC. The team prides itself on its sophisticated knowledge of adoption issues and research. In addition, the team regularly has practice development sessions to enable staff to share and improve knowledge, research and experience.

10. Management Priorities 2009/2010

10.1 Achieve the adoption and permanence targets as detailed in the Children's Services Plan 2009/2010, particularly in relation to the planned recruitment drive.

10.2 Increase the type and range of adoption and permanence placements to meet the assessed needs of looked after children, especially children from black and minority ethnic groups.

10.3 Extend the range of Adoption Support Services to improve placement stability and life chances for adopted children.

10.4 Increase the involvement of young people, adopters and permanence carers in Service planning and delivery.

10.5 Ensure that issues of diversity and equality are integrated into secure planning and delivery.

10.6 Maximise best value and manage the service within allocated resources.

10.7 Ensure full implementation of all the Ofsted inspection recommendations.

10.8 Recruit to the vacant posts and ensure continued efficient, cost effective service delivery.