

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **23 April 2010**

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010**

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

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010**

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

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**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

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Director of Children Services

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Local Members: All  
Background Docs: None

**Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service  
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010**

**1. Supporting Information**

1. Number of Children Adopted	32
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	27
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	10
4. Number of Special Guardianship matches	6
5. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	20
6. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	2
7. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children): Permanence: Adoption:	 1 5
8. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households)	27
9. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	6
10. Number of Children Approved for Adoption	35
11. Number of Children Approved for Permanence	10
12. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	13
13. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel Permanence Adoption	 8 (5) (3)
14. Withdrawals (couples)	2

**2. Recruitment Activity**

2.1 The Adoption Service has continued to undertake a significant volume of work and notably in the last 12 months the service worked hard to enable 27 children to be matched for adoption.

2.2 In spite of continuing staffing vacancies, the service has continued to undertake a significant volume of work evidenced in the above figures.

2.3 A recruitment event was organised during National Adoption Week in November 2009. 40 potential adopters attended and 26 information packs were given out.

2.4 From April 2009 to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010, 129 information packs have been sent out in response to enquiries about adoption in East Sussex. Following receipt of information packs, 61 households have attended 5 information evenings run by staff from the Adoption Service. Information evenings are held bi-monthly throughout the year to ensure that we comply with the Adoption Standards on timescales for group information sessions.

2.5 Following information evenings, 32 prospective adoptive households have requested a home visit by a social worker. The Adoption Service continues to run a series of preparation groups throughout the year. The preparation groups are run in 4 day blocks commencing with a Readiness to Adopt Day which is heavily front loaded and explores in detail issues of loss and separation for both potential adopters, as well as the inevitable loss experienced by all children placed for adoption. This process also allows a 'weeding out' of unsuitable applicants at the beginning of the process.

2.6 31 sets of prospective adopters attended 5 preparation groups over the year. 27 adopters were approved as prospective adopters at the Panel by the end of March 2010. A further 5 assessments were started and either withdrew, were "counselled out" or were delayed for further work by the applicants. By the time this report is presented 4 more couples will be presented to the panel by the end of April 2010.

2.7 The Adoption Service is proud of the high quality of its preparation groups as well as receiving positive feedback from participants. The service is constantly revising and refining the recruitment process to reflect the ever challenging task of permanently caring for some extremely damaged children

2.8 The Service continues to attract a significant number of enquiries from adults interested in adoption. Whilst a significant proportion of staff time is spent undertaking assessments, this has to be constantly balanced against a team which is responding to an ever increasing demand for adoption support assessments, many of which involve the prevention of adoption breakdown.

2.9 A number of second time adopters continue to come forward for the placement of a sibling from their original child's birth family. In addition we have seen a rise this year in the number of foster carers coming forward to adopt. This year 5 sets of foster carers have adopted 8 children; 1 sibling group of 3 children, one of 2 and 3 individually placed children. Whilst for some children this offers a continuous and permanent placement and is clearly the preferred option it also has an impact on reducing the pool of in house foster carers who are able to take looked after children.

### **3. Children with a Plan for adoption**

3.1 The number of children who were adopted in 09/10 was 32, this is twice the number of children adopted as was the case in 08/09. The number of children whose care plan for adoption has been approved is 35. Up to and including 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 27 children have been matched for adoption.

3.2 There are currently 31 children approved for adoption and waiting (this position changes on a weekly basis due to regular panel and linking activity), 15 are in the process of matching and 16 are waiting – a significant number of these have a family finding worker and family finding activity is progressing.

3.3 The adoption team is successful in placing the majority of children with in-house East Sussex adopters. The big push in in-house adoption recruitment has paid off this year resulting in reduced usage of the consortium, independent agencies and other local authorities.

3.4 Where there is a particular placement requirement i.e. the placing of black and minority ethnic children and sibling groups, East Sussex is always willing to explore other resources. The number of children placed in other local authorities and independent agencies is 5, plus 2 placed in the Consortium.

3.5 Family finding responsibilities are allocated within the adoption team, and prioritised according to the age, complexity of the child's needs, and whether they are part of a sibling group. In complex cases this can be a time consuming process involving a significant amount of liaison with other agencies and professionals. A linking meeting for all family finding cases takes place on a weekly basis overseen by 2 senior practitioners.

#### **4. Permanence and Special Guardianship**

4.1 So far this year East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Panel has approved and matched 10 children for permanence, as well as 6 children matched under Special Guardianship regulations.

4.2 With the huge increase in numbers of care proceedings, there has been a drive to improve the quality of permanency planning for all our looked after children. A recent permanency planning workshop was held for all managers in children's teams led by the operations manager of the Adoption and Permanence Service. The service has agreed to reinstate the permanency tracking workshops chaired by operational managers both east and west at least 3 times a year. The focus of the workshops will be to plan at the earliest opportunity timely permanency planning options, to track these plans and avoid any drift in care planning. Consultation to all staff will be delivered through the specialised adoption and looked after children services.

#### **5. Adoption Support**

5.1 The demands on the adoption support service have been considerable in the last 12 months and all the staff caseloads involve working with adoptive children and their families as well as with adopted adults.

5.2 The adoption support service has made significant links with both education and children and mental health services (CAMHS) in promoting the needs and services required specifically for adopted children and their families.

5.3 Collaboration between the service and colleagues within the wider education teams within Children's Services and with colleagues in Health continues and where necessary adoption services are commissioned from specialist services. This is necessary to meet the intensive support needs of a small but significant group of adopted children and their families.

5.4 The adoption support manager regularly reviews packages of support in line with legislation and in the context of resource pressures.

5.5 The Letter-box Co-ordinator's work has increased. The post holder now manages 530 letter-box contacts. This work requires a high level of administrative scrutiny as well as frequent interventions to ensure ongoing contact for the child. When the current post holder retired earlier this year the opportunity was taken to upgrade to a qualified social work position to reflect the complexity of the work.

5.6 The contact service for adopted children in placement continues to grow and workers are building on their experiences to develop a skilled service in this complex and sensitive area. Currently the service is involved in supporting 93 direct contacts per year, of which they directly supervise 65. This is a 50% increase on last year.

5.7 The adoption support service has 3 significant contracts with external agencies which include The Post Adoption Centre, Adoption UK and Norcap. All these contracts are regularly scrutinised and reviewed in the context of ensuring value for money.

5.8 The team currently offers ongoing adoption support to in excess of 40 families. The degree of the support can be variable but it is often intense and ongoing. Several cases have had to be referred to our locality colleagues where safeguarding is a feature.

#### **6. Adoption and Permanence Panel**

6.1 The Adoption and Permanence panel continues to run on a weekly basis and after a quiet period in December and January 10, compromised by the snow, the volume of work has increased and panels are very busy through to mid June.

6.2 The Adoption Panel has participated in two successful training events this year, one run by an external trainer and one run in-house. Two further events are planned for the next 12 months.

6.3 The panels are due to lose 3 significant personnel. The two panel members who are also senior practitioners are leaving for reasons of promotion and regrettably, there will be a vacancy due to the retirement of our long standing legal adviser. Plans to replace the 2 senior practitioners are currently underway. The deputy legal advisor to the panel will take over whilst future arrangements are being confirmed.

6.4 The annual panel evaluation took place between November 2009 and January 2010 and the written report will be presented at the Panel Business Meeting in May 2010.

## **7. Staffing**

7.1 During the past 12 months the service experienced some significant staffing changes. The adoption support practice manager retired at the end of July 2009, a post which was not filled until January 2010.

7.2 In addition, both the letterbox coordinator and one social worker retired, and one of our highly valued panel administrators went on maternity leave.

7.3 The staffing situation has had an impact on the efficient and timely service delivery and the service is constantly trying to strike a balance between offering a comprehensive adoption support service as well as recruiting and assessing adopters, family finding and matching children.

## **8. Training**

8.1 The Adoption Service continues to run regular training events for adopters, foster carers and other staff and is frequently consulted for their specialist knowledge. A team building day is planned for May 2010 to consolidate the new staff members and to plan the service's priorities.

## **9. Management Priorities 2010/2011**

9.1 To achieve all the targets outlined in the Adoption and Permanence Service Plan for 2010/2011 especially in relation to the numbers and range of adoptive and permanence families needed for our increasing numbers of looked after children.

9.2 To 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.

9.3 To drive timely permanency planning through the permanency tracking workshops and to improve the quality of practice through training opportunities for key staff.

9.4 To review the range of adoption support services to improve placement stability and outcomes for looked after children as well as achieving best value.

9.5 To increase the involvement of young people, adopters and permanence carers in service planning and delivery.

9.6 To ensure that issues of diversity and equality are integrated into service planning and delivery

9.7 To consolidate our work with partner agencies to improve education and health outcomes for adopted children and children placed in long term permanent foster care in line with Every Child Matters.

9.8 To maximise best value and manage the service within allocated resources.