

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**
Date: **27 April 2012**
Title of Report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service (1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012)**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Purpose of Report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012**

Recommendation:
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. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report and the progress of the service.

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Local Members: All
Background Documents: None

Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012

1. Supporting Information

	2010/11	2011/12
1. Number of Children Adopted	34	16
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	30	41
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	12	26
4. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	26	28
5. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	3	2
6. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children):		
Permanence:	2	10
Adoption:	1	11
7. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households)	32	21
8. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	6	7
9. Number of Children Approved for Adoption	49	78
10. Number of Children Approved for Permanence	18	33
11. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	18	12
12. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel:		
Permanence:		
Adoptions:	1 (adoption)	1 (during intros)

2. Recruitment Activity

During the last 12 months there has been a significant increase in the numbers of LAC requiring adoptive placements. This has been recognised in the recent investment of extra resources into the service (Thrive). It is intended that this will enable the service to meet the needs of our LAC locally. Thereby reducing the need to use expensive agency placements.

2.1 The number of children needing adoption has continued to rise significantly in line with the rise in numbers of children in the care of East Sussex. All areas of adoption service activity have also continued to increase from family finding, recruitment and assessment of adopters to adoption support. Notably in the last 12 months the service worked hard to enable 41 children to be matched for adoption which was 11 more than 2010-11.

2.2 From April 2011 to 31stth March 2012, 194 information packs have been sent out in response to enquiries about adoption in East Sussex, which is an increase of more than 50 compared to last year.

2.3 Recruitment events were organised during national adoption week in November 2011 with an excellent response from the public. Over 30 potential adoptive households attended which is a record for East Sussex. Following the agreement to the Thrive Project funding in December 2011, a new recruitment strategy was devised around increased publicity and regular monthly recruitment events arranged from January 2012 through to 2013, building on the success of the event in Adoption Week.

2.4 The Thrive Project increase in staffing, are being appointed to between February and June 2012. The Children's Service's Caseworker post was created to coordinate the increased recruitment activity alongside a dedicated Senior Practitioner to respond to and oversee all initial enquiries. An improvement in speed of response to, and consistent communication with, enquirers has already become apparent. It is intended to improve the service to prospective adopters, so that East Sussex Adoption Service becomes the first choice for local residents considering adopting a child.

2.5 Following receipt of information packs, 79 households have attended 7 information evenings run by staff from the adoption service through 2011-12. Information evenings were held bi-monthly through 2011 but have now increased to monthly (see Paragraph 2.2 above). The new arrangement exceeds National Minimum Standards for the frequency of information events for enquirers about adoption, as part of the strategy to increase numbers of prospective adopters.

2.6 Following information evenings, 37 prospective adoptive households have requested a home visit by a social worker. The application procedure has changed over previous years in that we have reconfigured the process to reduce the number of stages that adoptive applicants have to undergo and to release staff time for assessment work. The Adoption Service continues to run a series of preparation groups throughout the year which are run in 4 day blocks. Seven preparation courses are planned for 2012 -13 which represents three more courses than 2011-12.

2.7 31 sets of prospective adopters attended 4 preparation groups over the year. Due to some applicants needing to take a break from the assessment due to family reasons, two applicants became pregnant during the process and two others withdrawing for other reasons, 21 adopters were approved as prospective adopters at the Panel by the end of March 2012. While a disappointing outcome, the momentum has already been restored in that 12 prospective adopters are booked into adoption Panel for approval in the first quarter of 2012-13 (between 1st April and 30th June 2012). Currently there are 33 assessments underway.

2.8 Whilst a significant proportion of staff time is spent undertaking prospective adopter assessments, this has had to be constantly balanced against an ever increasing demand for adoption support services. Over the past year we have increasingly put in early support services to new placements, that are assessed as more vulnerable, which has been well received by adopters and has contributed to our enviably low record on placement disruptions. In order to increase the overall recruitment of adopters over the coming year, we cannot risk losing our reputation for providing timely and appropriate support when this is needed.

2.9 Confidence in adoption support service provision continues to be particularly pertinent in view of the ongoing change in the profile of children referred for adoption. As last year, there continues to be a steady increase in the number of sibling groups and ages of children, in proportion to the overall profile of children needing adoption. Given the increased risks around placements of older children and sibling groups, adoption support needs remains a pressure and is a major concern for enquirers thinking about adopting them.

2.10 The Adoption service has a target of 56 new adoptive households over 2012-13 underpinned by the new staffing resources funded by the Thrive project. This target represents an increase of over 80% over the target for 2011-12. The new recruitment strategy for 2012/13 has, as stated above, increased the accessibility of information about adoption for members of the public thinking about

adoption. Alongside this a massive joint recruitment publicity campaign is planned with Fostering services to increase awareness and enquiry numbers around adoption and fostering. The additional staffing resources will be used to facilitate additional adopter preparation courses and complete assessments of adoptive applicants.

2.11 The new staff availability will take six months to show an increase in adopter assessments to Panel and until the impact of the increase in adopter resources is realised there is likely to continue to be a shortfall of adoptive families for children waiting. This will lead to continued pressure on inter agency placements until later in 2012-13

3. Children with a Plan for adoption

3.1 The significant increase in numbers of children in care has continued from 31st March 2011 – from 581 to 622 in 2012. In 2011-12 adoption was the approved plan for 78 children at Adoption Panel, which is massive rise of over 60% over 49 children 2010-11. The profile of the children over the last 12 months continues to show a higher proportion of sibling groups and older children as referred to in paragraph 2.7. Over the last year around 30% of the children with an adoption plan have needed to be placed with a sibling, which continues to impact on adopter recruitment activity

3.2 The lead senior practitioner for family finding reviews all children waiting on a weekly basis to try to identify possible links in house or across the South East Adoption Consortium. Where necessary children are referred to the National Adoption Register or advertised in national family finding magazines to expedite identifying potential matches. The senior practitioner, along with members of the adoption and children's teams, have attended two National Adoption Register events and an Adoption Consortium exchange day with invited adopters to feature children waiting. A number of potential families for the children have been identified as a result.

3.3 While the majority of children placed have been matched with in-house East Sussex adopters, the predicted shortfall in adoptive placements has resulted in increasing use of the Consortium and other adoption agencies over 2011-12. As mentioned above this situation will inevitably continue through most of 2012-13 until the benefits of the current campaign for more local adoptive families can bear fruit and begin to impact on these figures.

3.4 Alongside the pressures of the general shortfall in adoptive placements where children have other additional needs for a particular placement type, East Sussex has always been willing to explore outside resources to avoid delays in family finding. 13 children were placed in the Consortium or other adoption agencies. Other matches are currently being explored to avoid delay.

3.5 The use of an experienced Senior Practitioner and a Children's Services Caseworker dedicated to family finding, to coordinate Family Finding work is still at an early stage. It has already begun to increase the profile of this crucial area of work and speed up the processes around identifying possible families for children The Senior Practitioner has also focused on making strong links with the children's teams to improve support to less experienced members of staff, particularly in the Family Support Teams.

4. Permanence, Kinship & Adoption as the Child Plan

4.1 The outcome of a major legal review The Family Justice Review was recently announced.

We understand that the Government has accepted the recommendation of the Family Justice Review removing the requirement for Adoption Panels to consider the suitability for adoption of a child whose case is before the Court. Evidence from the Family Justice Review consultation confirmed that cases can be delayed while waiting for the child to be presented to Adoption Panel. Delay can be particularly detrimental to a child's prospects for adoption, and given the independent scrutiny of all the evidence which the Courts must exercise in any case, the Government accepted the Review's argument for making this change so that the additional risk of delay was removed.

Implementation of the change would be through an amendment to the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, but we are awaiting further detail of the timing and implementation of this new ruling.

4.2 In view of the Kinship Care Regulation 2010 all Kinship Carers who have been caring for children for more than 16 weeks must be approved at Panel. The Panels have been trained accordingly.

4.3 The Adoption service continues to drive the improvement of permanency planning for all looked after children. The Permanence Tracking workshops continue to meet twice a year on both sides of the county, the focus of the workshops continues to be exploring timely permanency planning options for children needing adoptive and permanent placements, and to ensure that these plans are followed through in a timely fashion and delay and drift are avoided.

4.4 The Adoption Service continues to offer regular consultation to Locality Children's Social Workers on all aspects of adoption and permanence planning.

4.5 The number of children and young people matching permanently with their foster carers continues to grow and last year at panel were 26. Many of these young people attended panel for the formal matching process.

5. Adoption Support

5.1 The demands on the Adoption Support Service continue to rise alongside the increased numbers of children matching as well as requests for support from adoptive families whose children have considerable problems and challenges in their adolescent years. Much of the work involves advising and supporting families experiencing various levels of family dysfunction and crisis.

5.2 In order to meet the rising demand for Adoption Support Services under Thrive the service has successfully recruited two new full time equivalent social workers.

5.3 The Adoption Support Service has forged some excellent links with our local CAMHS Services and offer a monthly surgery to professionals involved in supporting some very complex situations. It is essential that this level of CAMHS provision with particular expertise in adoption continues.

5.4 In addition to the above the Adoption Support Service manager spot purchases a number of specific therapeutic interventions from a number of selected independent providers which adoptive families find invaluable in supporting them through challenging times but enabling families to stay together.

5.5 In addition effective collaboration continues with the virtual head and regular liaison ensures effective interventions with schools and personnel to ensure that specific issues pertaining to adopted children are sensitively addressed.

5.6 Effective liaison and closer links are being formed with colleagues in Youth Support teams and Duty and Assessment teams to promote the need for family support to some adoptive families.

5.7 The Adoption Support Team currently offers support to in excess of 50 families, some of these have significant safeguarding issues and require referral to locality teams and occasionally admission to care.

5.8 The service has continued with its contracts with Adoption UK and NORCAP and are considered to offer value for money as well as some useful 'off line' service provision for both adopters and adopted adults.

5.9 The Contact Service continues to grow year on year and is currently involved in directly supporting 157 direct contacts (145 last year).

5.10 The Letter Box coordinators work has also seen an increase on last year 581 (568 last year). This aspect of service delivery requires a high level of professional scrutiny as well as dedicated administrative support.

6.0 Training & Events

6.1 A successful Team Day was held in January in preparation for the imminent Ofsted inspection. Preparations were effective and paid huge dividends.

6.2 The Adoption Service held a very successful annual Summer Picnic in September at Knock Hatch outdoor activity centre in excess of 250 adoptive families attended. This was followed by a successful Easter Party at the end of March attended by 110 of adopters and their children.

7. Adoption & Permanence Panel

7.1 The Adoption and Permanence Panels continue to run on a weekly basis frequently to full capacity agendas and currently have bookings through until the end of June 2012.

7.2 The Adoption Panels have participated in two training events, one facilitated by an external trainer and one in house. In addition extra training is planned for both panels in May on the impact of social networking.

7.3 A successful joint panel and Adoption Service training was held in December 2011 focusing on a range of health issues pertaining to adopters and children; this was run by a well known paediatrician, Dr Mary Mather.

7.4 The East Panel which meets in Bexhill has seen some long standing panel members stand down; however, newly appointed panel members are currently being recruited.

7.5 The frequent and effective running of panels is well serviced by an excellent panel administrator and whilst one of the panel administrators has recently gone on maternity leave the service is working towards replacing her as soon as possible.

7.6 The annual Panel appraisals process was completed early this month and a general feeling of satisfaction was acknowledged by all panel members together with their perception of panel as a cohesive and professionally run process.

7.7 In spite of national media criticism East Sussex does not experience delay to children's planning and placement caused by infrequent or inefficient panels in fact quite the opposite!

8. Ofsted

8.1 The Adoption Service was inspected between, 20th-24th February 2012 and achieved the overall rating of outstanding and there were no "notifications for improvements". The following summary taken directly from the report indicates their high degree of satisfaction with East Sussex Adoption Service -

"The service also provides an excellent service in preparing families and children for adoption. Although East Sussex is predominantly a white area of the country, children from minority ethnic communities have been successfully matched with families who can best meet their needs. Inter-country adopters are welcomed without prejudice and receive the same high standard of service as domestic adopters. Services to birth family members and adults affected by adoption are also of a very high standard. All adopters, those that have been affected by adoption and young people spoken to during the course of this inspection praised the high quality of the service they received.

Social work and administrative staff are skilled, experienced and passionate about providing an excellent service for children and families. The agency has continued to develop its resources despite the financial restraints within local government. The agency has recently expanded the capacity of the adoption service to improve the efficiency of the family finding and recruitment process and stream lined the recruitment process to ensure adopters are recruited in a timely manner and ensure children are placed without delay. The service is managed by a strong, effective and reflective leadership. Staff within the adoption team are valued and supported, whilst the service continues to strive for further improvement."

9. National Adoption Developments

9.1 Martin Narey, the Government Advisor on Adoption, visited the Adoption Service in December 2011 and was very impressed with the Service. As a result of this, Managers of the Service were asked to attend various consultation meetings with both the Children's Minister and the Prime Minister. East Sussex now has a central role in the National Adoption Development and reforms that are currently underway.

10. Summary

10.1 Clearly this has been a challenging but productive and successful year for the service. The key management priorities outlined in the adoption and permanence service improvement plan for 2012/2013 will be:

- To focus and prioritise recruitment and assessments via the specialist recruitment and assessment team to maximise enquiries from prospective applicants to adopt and to follow government initiatives in reducing timescales from initial enquiry to approval.
- To target recruitment for older children and siblings.

- The new Adoption Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 are now bedded in. The Adoption Service will need to update policies and procedures in line with the new Government announcements in the summer. .
- To prioritise the provision of Adoption Support and offer a range of services to meet the vast complexity of needs in a timely fashion.
- To recruit and retain sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the support assessment needs of adopters. This includes the successful appointment of the four extra staff employed to attain the “Thrive” adoption targets.
- To continue to improve partnership working with locality social work, family support teams in achieving timely and stable adoptive families for children.
- To continue to build on our successful partnership with education and health and particularly CAMHS service.
- To continue to promote adoption by foster carers where appropriate.
- To ensure that equality and diversity are fully integrated into service planning and delivery.
- To increase the involvement of young people adopters and permanence carers in service planning and delivery.
- To ensure that the service meets the targets set out in the Thrive programme and thereby contributes to managing resources effectively within CSD.

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