

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **19 April 2013**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013**

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.

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Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

1. Supporting Information

	2011/12	2012/13
1. Number of Children Adopted	16	44
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	41	53
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	26	10
4. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	28	53
5. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	2	1
6. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children):		
Permanence:	10	2
Adoption:	11	8
7. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households) * + one kinship approval.	21	39
8. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	7	4
9. Number of Children Approved for Adoption up to September 1 st 2012 by panel	78 (whole year)	30
10. Number of children Approved for Adoption from September 1 st 2012 onwards by ADM	N/A	39
11. Number of children Approved for Permanence up to September 1 st 2012	33 (whole year)	10
12. Number of Children Approved for Permanence from September 1 st 2012 onwards by ADM	N/A	7
11. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	12	16
12. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel:		
Permanence:	1 (during intros)	1
Adoptions:		

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 During the period 2012/13 there have continued to be significant numbers of children requiring adoptive placements in East Sussex, although fewer than in 2011/12. The Thrive project has invested additional resources into Children's Service during 2012/13, which has enabled the Adoption Service to appoint 3.6 additional Social Workers and 1.8 Children's Services Caseworkers. The additional capacity has already resulted in an increase in the numbers of children matched to adopters by more than 25%, and at the same time has improved the timeliness of the matching process. This has only been possible by enhancing the recruitment process, increasing family finding activity and maintaining an increased availability of adoptive placements. Alongside this the statistics show a welcome reduction in the use of expensive and often geographically distant interagency placements.

2.2 East Sussex County Council has been piloting the new draft prospective adopter report during this period. This was a national trial and East Sussex has led the way in developing the new two stage application process, as suggested by the Expert Working Party on Adoption in April 2012. The pilot has already proved to have had a very positive impact locally, in that there has been a noticeable reduction in the time taken to assess prospective adopters, a greater reported satisfaction with the process and an increase in the number of adopters recruited by 'word of mouth'. This, in combination with the multi media recruitment campaign 'Fillaspace', has significantly increased the level of interest in adoption and the numbers of adopters applying to East Sussex as the chosen Adoption Agency.

2.3 During 2012/13 224 information packs have been sent out to enquirers about adoption which has resulted in 64 households registering their interest in applying to adopt. (28.6%) This conversion

rate of enquiry to applications is an improvement on the same period in 2011/12 which was approximately 35 applications from 194 enquiries (18.04%).

2.4 Ten open recruitment events were held in 2012/13 and there are plans to increase this still further in 2013/14. The appointment of a recruitment coordinator to work alongside a dedicated recruitment Senior Practitioner has enabled the service to develop a more sophisticated and specialist approach to recruitment. In addition, it has certainly enhanced adopters' satisfaction with the service, as enquirers are supported through the process in an efficient and timely way. This has enabled applicants who want to proceed quickly to do so.

2.5 In the last twelve months 44 households attended six preparation courses. Included in this data are 6 second time assessments for adoptive families who are offering placements to siblings of their older adopted child/ren, and 6 fostering families who are offering to be assessed as adopters for children already in their care. The 'Fillaspace' campaign has not only increased the levels of recruitment activity across the board but has also encouraged a greater cross fertilization between the various types of care givers in-house.

2.6 There are currently 33 adopters in assessment, with 16 of them already booked into Panel for approval between April and July 2013. The success of the pilot both for adopters and children has led to East Sussex Adoption Service fully implementing and embedding the new process for adopter assessment. There is a great deal of national interest in the model East Sussex has developed and there have been numerous requests to deliver training to other adoption agencies.

2.7 The service is optimistic that with the additional capacity created by the Thrive investment last year, the strengthened infrastructure will be sufficient to recruit and assess higher numbers of adopters than will be necessary for ESCC children. The dedicated core functions for recruitment, family finding and the new assessment process have enabled the service to significantly improve its outputs this year. It is anticipated that there will be a challenging local adopter recruitment target in 2013/14. The service has already achieved a doubling in the numbers recruited in 2012/13, but is likely to require a more than tripling of adopter numbers in the coming year. However, the service is in a strong place to achieve this ambitious target given additional support of the Adoption Reform Grant in 13/14 which is intended to improve adoption services generally and is ring fenced to increase the national pool of adopters available for children waiting.

3 Children with a plan for adoption

3.1 The process for approving a child's plan for adoption was amended as from 1st September 2012 as recommended by the Family Justice Review. There is no longer a requirement for Adoption Panels to consider the suitability of adoption as the plan for a child, if it is already being considered within the court process. A revised process has been implemented locally whereby a child's social worker prepares the CPR report which is presented to the Agency Decision-Maker for consideration. The Agency Decision-Maker is assisted by written advice from the legal and medical advisors at a weekly meeting with the professional advisor to scrutinize each child's plan.

3.2 The number of children approved for adoption during 2012/13 has dipped slightly from the all time high of 78 in 2011/12. Nonetheless, 69 approvals of children with a plan for adoption, though lower than 2012, still remains high. The number of children placed for adoption, however, has remained high with a total of 53 children being placed in 2012/13. This represents a rise of 29% over the previous year.

3.3 The Annual Report for the Adoption Service 2011/12 anticipated an increase in the likely number of interagency adoption placements required to meet the rising demand for adoption placements 2012/13. However, the number of children placed in high cost interagency placements

was in fact lower than the previous year at only 9 children 12/13, from 13 children 11/12. This represents a considerable achievement in the current climate, given that 44 of the children placed for adoption were matched with an East Sussex adoptive family. Keeping children more locally is also helpful in terms of facilitating introductions and providing ongoing support.

3.4 Improving performance by reducing the timescales in matching children to adopters has been a key target for 2012/13. The Adoption Scorecard produced by the Department of Education this year has shown ESCC placing children more quickly for adoption than the national average. These improvements have been achieved through the consolidation of the family finding developments led by the dedicated Senior Practitioner and Children's Service Caseworker who coordinate and identify potential matches. This has been very successful with over 80% of adopters approved in East Sussex waiting less than three months to be matched with a child at Adoption Panel. Only one adopter, who is currently waiting for a match, has waited more than six months.

3.5 In 2013/14 the service is planning further innovative practice in the field of family finding, by hosting the first DVD event in East Sussex. In May, the service will invite approved adopters and children's social workers to meet and discuss all children waiting for an adoptive placement. The adopters will be given an opportunity to view a range of materials and information about the children including photographs, DVDs, children's artwork and written work, and foster carers comments and anecdotes about the children. If the event is successful the intention is to organize further events during the year. This will serve to make efficient links for children, and empower adopters to influence their own matching process. The service will also continue to coordinate relevant information and support social workers and adopters to attend National Adoption Register and Consortium Exchange events to identify potential links. Finally, the Senior Practitioner and Children's Services Caseworker are planning to develop the learning gained from the national workshops on children's 'Activity Days,' which is a new initiative in the UK to link children and adopters at an event whereby they have an opportunity to meet. The Adoption service is currently initiating discussions with Consortium colleagues and BAAF to set up such an event locally for children who may not otherwise be placed with an adoptive family.

3.6 2012/13 has been a very successful year for driving forward improved outcomes in adoption and the service is well placed to improve this still further 2013/14. The staff group has demonstrated both commitment and great energy in embracing the changes/challenges that the new adoption landscape has delivered this year. I would like to share my huge appreciation to them for placing ESCC so clearly at the cutting edge of good practice nationally.

4. Permanence and Kinship Placement as the Child's Plan

4.1 The Adoption Service continues to support those looked after children who have a plan for permanence. The permanence tracking workshops meet twice a year to monitor the progress of each child and it closely tracks the timescales of all permanence plans. In addition the Adoption Service offers regular specialist consultations to Locality/LAC Social Workers both individually and by attending team meetings. This enables the service to update staff on any current trends and research as it emerges about permanence planning.

4.2 The "Fillaspace" recruitment campaign for both fostering and adoption has promoted a healthy interest from the public in considering all aspects of "care" including permanent fostering and adoption. It has also highlighted the proportion of foster carers who continue to come forward each year to offer a permanent placement for children within their care. This can be a very successful outcome for children.

4.3 The numbers of children being approved for permanence has considerably dropped in the past 12 months from 30 last year to 17 this year. This may be due, in part, to a policy change which has reduced the age range of children approved for permanence from 11 years to 9 years; and also to the changes to Panel process as the revised ADM process is still bedding down. It is also linked to ongoing rising numbers of ROs and SGOs which have resulted in children achieving permanence via those routes too

4.4 There are currently 23 children with a plan for permanence for whom the service is actively family finding. These include 9 sibling groups of two and 5 single children (all boys) There are currently 6 sets of foster carers expressing an interest in permanence, hence the challenge to continue to encourage more carers to come forward to offer permanence.

5. Adoption Support

5.1 The demands on the Adoption Support Service continue to rise as the activity levels in recruitment and matching have increased considerably. More families will need to access adoption support services throughout their adoption journey, with particular challenges in latency and adolescence. Much of the work involves advising and supporting families experiencing various levels of family discord and crisis.

5.2 The Adoption Service has developed some excellent links with the local CAMHS service and continues to offer monthly consultation sessions to professionals involved in supporting some very complex situations. This has been supplemented during 2012/13 by the spot purchasing of specific therapeutic interventions from a number of selected independent providers, to support families in enabling them to stay together and to prevent children coming back into the care system. The service is very pleased to have secured a contract with CAMHS (initially for two years) for the future delivery of a specialist service to those children and adopters with complex needs. The service is also increasingly investing in supporting families during the early days of placement to assist with relationship building and the formation of strong attachments which might avert crises in later years.

5.3 Effective collaboration continues with the Virtual Headteacher for LAC and regular liaison ensures that attachment behaviours manifested in the school environment are identified clearly, and that teachers respond appropriately and sensitively to adopted children and their families. There has been good progress made but there is still work to be done.

5.4 Collaborative links continue to be forged between the Adoption team and the Locality services, particularly with Duty and Assessment, Family Support, Youth Support and Targeted Youth Support teams where additional specialist resources are required. This also includes assessments in relation to safeguarding and risk, particularly where older adopted children are concerned; i.e. between 12 and 16 years.

5.5 The service currently offers support to over 50 families with complex needs, with a number of them having significant safeguarding issues and/or mental health issues.

5.6 The Adoption Support Team has facilitated a number of groups and training activities during the past year for adopters and their children. The Parenting Teenagers group has lead onto the formation of the Adoptive Families Group (AFG) launched in January 2013, which is an independent entity with a focus on lobbying, awareness raising and education in relation to the issues pertaining to adoption support. East Sussex staff are working closely with the group.

5.7 The Adoption service held 3 events last year for adoptive families; an Easter party and Autumn and Christmas get-togethers, all of which were very well attended.

5.8 The service has continued with its contract with Adoption UK and is now funding a third group to ensure that support is provided consistently to adopters by covering a larger geographical area. This ensures that adopters have access to support independent of the Adoption service. This contract is regularly monitored by the Adoption service and evaluated by service users. Unfortunately East Sussex no longer has a contract with AAA-NORCAP as they ceased trading on 14th January and applied for insolvency. We are currently exploring the market for other providers who are able to work with adopted adults and their relatives.

5.9 The delivery of direct contact continues to increase every year and the service is currently involved in supporting 198 arrangements, up from 157 2011/12. The activity in the indirect/letterbox service has also increased and is currently involved in 616 agreements, up from 581 in 2011/12. This aspect of contact requires a high level of professional scrutiny as well as dedicated administrative support.

6. Adoption & Permanence Panel

6.1 The past 12 months have seen considerable interest from Central Government and the DFE in all aspects of adoption activity. There has been a raft of initiatives; the Children and Families Bill, Adoption Gateway, Adoption Score Cards and the new legal process of the Family Justice Review. This has led to major changes to local adoption processes this year.

6.2 The Adoption and Permanence Panels continue to meet on a weekly basis and although the removal of children for decision making from the Panel agendas has created some space, the speed with which the service is successfully recruiting adopters and matching children is beginning to fill up the Panel agendas once again.

6.3 The Adoption Panels have participated in two training events; one facilitated by a BAAF trainer in July 2012 which focused on the anticipated changes to children's plans and the new Prospective Adopters' Report, and the second on the impact of social networking on adoptive children and families, facilitated by an in house trainer.

6.4 There have been a range of difficulties experienced this year in the provision of medical advice to the Panels which has resulted in an absence of advice to some panels. This Commissioner is well aware of the issues and attempting to resolve them as a matter of urgency.

6.5 The Panel appraisal process, which involves the evaluation of individual panel members, is undergoing review and will be implemented in May 2013.

7 Management Priorities 2013/14

7.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the performance and achievements of the East Sussex Adoption Service for this period, and endorse the key management priorities outlined in the Adoption Service Improvement Plan 2013/14.

- To continue the excellent progress made in recruitment and to continue to roll out the new prospective adopter report.

- To target recruitment to meet the needs of all children approved for adoption in East Sussex, and to 'over recruit' adopters in anticipation of being able to release the additional resources to other local authorities.
- To continue the process of revising policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and guidance when they are issued later this year.
- To consolidate Adoption Support developments particularly with the newly revised CAMHS contract and extend the partnership with the Virtual School
- To continue to offer a broad range of adoption support services with further developments of provision from in-house resources and skills i.e. support groups and training sessions.
- To ensure a resolution is found to the outstanding difficulties regarding the delivery of medical advice to the Panels.