

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **2 May 2014**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

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.

LIZ RUGG
Acting Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

1. Supporting Information

East Sussex Adoption Service continues to be at the cutting edge of adoption service developments nationally and the Ofsted rating of Outstanding was hard earned and well deserved. The staff group have shown great commitment and, professional skill and has embraced this very challenging agenda.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
1. Number of Children Adopted	16	44	57
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	41	53	50
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	26	10	10
4. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	28	44	40
5. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	2	1	1
6. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children):			
Permanence:	10	2	4
Adoption:	11	8	9
7. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households) *	21	39	44
8. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	7	4	8
9. Number of Children Approved for Adoption up to 31 st March 2014	78	69	52
10. Number of children Approved for Permanence up to 31 st March 2014	33	17	24
11. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	12	16	17
12. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel:			
Permanence:			
Adoptions:	1 (during intros)	1	1

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 East Sussex has successfully piloted and embedded the two stage recruitment process, which the government has now introduced to all adoption agencies from July 2013. It continues to be popular with prospective adopters who have advised that they consider the assessment to be “timely, fair and thought provoking”, together with speaking “highly of the training programme to support them.” (OFSTED 2014). The time taken to approve prospective adopters has been reduced with most being approved between six and nine months from registering their interest to approval at Adoption Panel.

2.2 A dedicated telephone number for enquiries has been introduced with a specific email address and an on-line enquiry form embedded in an updated webpage, ensuring everyone that makes an initial enquiry receives a prompt and personal service.

2.3 During 2013-14 the agency had 298 enquiries about adopting with East Sussex. Following receipt of information packs we received 99 requests for Registration of Interest Forms. We continue to maintain the conversion rate of enquiry to registration.

2.4 Recruitment activity has been more focused and has been targeted to meet the needs and profile of the children waiting. Activity has included providing information on the Government Gateway website First4Adoption, newspaper, radio, and bespoke advertising on petrol pumps, at supermarket sites, and on buses travelling around the county. In addition a concerted effort has been made to

ensure myths about adoption are challenged using the Government research. The introduction of a Facebook page is proving popular in reaching a different range of prospective adopters.

2.5 A key focus for the recruitment element of the service in 2013-2014 has been to improve performance in reducing timescales in matching children to families. The service is very pleased to report that compared to our statistical neighbours and the South East Local Authorities, East Sussex had the lowest percentage of approved families who were waiting to be matched with children. ESCC Adoption Service also had a higher percentage of adoptive families who waited less than three months to be matched to children.

2.6 The new recruitment process consists of two stages the first being adopter led and the second stage being the assessment of the prospective adopter. Within the two stage process we now offer an open Information Event where prospective adopters can meet workers and adopters every month, either on a weekday or a Saturday, across the county, which is a service development from 2012-13. The Stage 1 meeting offers support with their registration and provides an early opportunity to become aware of the children waiting for adoption.

2.7 During 2013-14 the use of the adoption reform grant has enabled the service to appoint an additional case worker for recruitment, and a senior practitioner has moved to become acting practice manager to oversee recruitment activity. The information pack has been revised and distributed electronically which means that prospective adopters receive information very quickly. In order to comply with the Government regulations there is now a bespoke process for foster carers who wish to adopt children already in their care, and for experienced adopters. This enables the service to build on the information already held about them and make their move through the process more timely.

2.8 During 2013-14 4 fostering families requested that they be assessed as prospective adopters for children in their care, and 10 experienced adopters returned for assessment. Furthermore there have been 4 families who have offered Fostering for Adoption placements for children which avoids delay and disruption for those very young children for whom the court had yet to make a judgement. All of these children were remained permanently for adoption in adoptive families where their siblings had previously been placed.

3 Children with a plan for adoption

3.1 During the period 2013/14 the numbers of children with a plan for adoption has reduced from 69 last year to 52 - 17 less than the previous year. This is a significant decrease but needs to be considered in the context of the continued popularity of SGO's and Residence Orders as well as within the context of Thrive, which is reducing the number of children entering the care system.

3.2 The revised plan for approving children for adoption by the Agency Decision Maker is completely embedded; with thorough and detailed input from our colleagues in Legal Services.

3.3 There have been some examples of decision making being delayed due to extra assessments requested by the Court of family members or friends who have put themselves forward at a later stage in the process.

3.4 A recent Court ruling, Re BS, at the end of last year has meant that the case for adoption has to be argued very clearly by the child's Social Worker in court with clear evidence which details the reasons why adoption is the best and only plan. In doing so the Social Worker is expected to explore the pros and cons of all of the alternatives including remaining with the birth parents and also remaining with the foster parents. In some cases this has led to delay in confirming the permanence plan for children.

3.5 The Adoption Service continues to place the majority of children locally with 'in house' adopters. The total number of children matched in the past year was 50, only 9 of these children, i.e. less than 20%, were placed outside of East Sussex in interagency placements; a considerable achievement in the current climate. There is an obvious advantage to placing children locally, in that it is easier to achieve smooth transitions and providing ongoing support. But in addition the service has retained the ability to secure interagency placements for harder to place and more complex children.

3.6 The Adoption Scorecard issued by the Department of Education has for the second year shown that East Sussex County Council places children for adoption more speedily than the national average. This is an excellent result. The government's focus on adoption timescales continues and the attention to waiting times for children and adopters is critical. The majority of adopters, over 80%, wait less than 3 months before a child is placed. East Sussex continues to maintain its positive reputation for delivering a timely service to both children and adopters. The increased funding from the Adoption Reform Grant made a significant contribution to the progress development and activity levels of the Adoption Service in the past financial year.

3.7 The service has recruited a dedicated Practice Manager with specific responsibility for matching and linking children and an additional full time caseworker. This has also enabled the service to progress the liaison with other agencies, as well as supporting links with the National Adoption Register and the Consortium. The service has prioritised family finding, linking and has promoted a more efficient exchange of information between the Adoption Service and children's services teams. Generally there has been an increase in collaborative working across the services to promote the matching of children.

3.8 East Sussex held a second DVD event in February 2014. Children's social workers attended and brought along information relating to the children such as books, soft toys etc. The impact of the event was to enable adopters to question their own matching criteria. The result of this was that some adopters moved from thinking about just having young children to considering older children.

3.9 In addition during the early spring East Sussex attended two other events, one run by the National Adoption Register and another arranged by our Consortium partner, Kent. From these events alone interest has been expressed in seven children and links are currently being followed up.

3.10 On April 26th 2014 East Sussex is initiating an Activity Day with the Consortium partners. East Sussex are taking 13 children, 3 sibling pairs of 2 and 7 single children. There are two more Activity Days planned, one on November 8th 2014 and one will take place in Spring 2015. Only invited adopters and workers can attend and there will be between 40-50 children at each event.

4. Permanence

4.1 The Adoption & Permanence Service continues to target family finding for those children whose plan is for permanent fostering. The permanence tracking workshop continues to meet at least twice a year and monitors the timescale of permanence plans and matches very closely.

4.2 Targeted recruitment for these children is necessary, particularly for those who have complex needs or are part of a sibling group. A significant proportion of current foster carers both in house, and agency put themselves forward to offer long term care to children they currently care for. This is significant, in that these are carers and children who claim each other and this frequently leads to successful outcomes for all involved.

4.3 The number of children approved for permanence has risen in the past 12 months to 24. Some of these children may be subject to an SGO in the near future but foster carers sensibly wait until they feel confident in the potential stability of a placement before they offer this.

4.4 There are currently 19 children with a plan for permanence for whom the service is already family finding. These include 3 sibling groups of 2 children; one sibling group of 3 children and 12 single children. Currently matches are being considered for 4 of these children. However, the continued challenge is to recruit increased numbers of permanent foster carers.

5. Adoption Support

5.1 The East Sussex Adoption Service has gone from strength to strength in the last year and in the Ofsted report the judgement was made that: 'Adoption support services are excellent and the level of support provided for adoptive families is exceptionally strong. The service demonstrates an impressive commitment to adoption support, one that is well tailored and individualised at all stages of the adoption journey'. The service currently offers support to over 65 families with multiple and complex needs and this number is likely to increase.

5.2 The demands on the post adoption service continue to rise as activity levels in recruitment and matching have increased considerably. An increasing number of families are needing access to adoption support services throughout their adoption journey, with particular challenges in pre-adolescence and adolescence; this is reflected in the rising number of referrals.

5.3 The adoption service continues to work collaboratively with the local CAMHS service. The specially commissioned CAMHS service for adopted children and their families, 'ADCAMHS', is continuing to thrive. The aim of the service is to support families post adoption with a dedicated therapy and consultation service, providing specialist consultations and individual, family or group therapy for adopted children, their families and the professionals supporting them. The desired outcome of the service is to contribute to adoption stability and promote positive attachments within adoptive families (and ultimately to prevent placement breakdown).

5.4 The adoption service also commissions individual therapists to provide specialist support to families in areas such as therapeutic life story work and 'Theraplay'. A systemic and family psychotherapist is currently working with three families, post adoption, piloting a 'Non-Violent Resistance' approach where child to parent violence is a feature of family relationships. A Senior Practitioner from the adoption support service has undergone specific training in this which is particularly pertinent as there is a steady rise in the number of such cases.

5.5 Excellent links continue to be forged with the Virtual School. Since September 2013, two temporary part-time adoption support workers have been appointed to the team, funded from the Adoption Reform Grant. These roles provide adoptive families with support for educational and school-based issues, with the aim of promoting the educational achievements of adopted children within East Sussex. These workers have set up a weekly helpline for parents and have established a new student council for adopted children. They are also assisting with development of local thinking on the Pupil Premium Plus. The development of these services is welcomed by adoptive families and their children.

5.6 Collaborative links continue to be made between the adoption team and locality services, particularly with the Duty and Assessment, Family Support, Youth Support and Targeted Youth Support teams where additional resources and social care assessments are required. In complex post adoption support cases, a team around the child, is vital in managing risk and safeguarding issues, as

well as in preventing some of the more seriously disturbed and damaged young people returning to care.

5.7 During the last year, the post adoption team has facilitated a group for adopted children aged 10-11years. At the end of April 2014, a second group will be running for 11-12yr olds. In May 2014, an adopted teenage group will be run and facilitated jointly between the adoption service and ADCAMHS. A therapeutic parenting group will be launched in September 2014, facilitated by two child and adolescent psychotherapists through the designated ADCAMHS service.

5.8 The adoption service continues to support and work closely with the Adoptive Families Group (AFG) which was set up in January 2013. This is an independent adopter-led group who focus on lobbying, awareness raising and education in relation to issues pertaining to adoption support.

5.9 The service has continued with its contract with Adoption UK and funds three support groups at different locations across East Sussex. This contract is regularly monitored and reviewed and is evaluated by service users. Since AAA-NORCAP ceased trading in January 2013, the adoption service has commissioned an independent counselling practice to ensure that a service continues to be offered to adopted adults and their relatives.

5.10 The adoption service held two events last year for adoptive families, an Easter party and an event in September, both of which were very well attended. A further event is planned for 12th April 2014.

5.11 The Same Sex Adopters Group continues to meet on a regular basis, facilitated by members of the adoption team, with speakers sometimes invited to attend.

5.12 The activity of the indirect/letterbox and direct contact services continue to increase every year. The direct contact service is currently involved in supporting 218 arrangements, up from 198 in 2012/13. There are currently 685 indirect contacts agreements on the system, up from 616 in 2012/13. This aspect of the contact service requires a high level of professional scrutiny as well as dedicated full-time administrative support.

5.13 In January 2014, East Sussex was selected as one of 10 Local Authorities nationwide to pilot the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) prototype. As part of its programme of reforms to the adoption system, the Government has committed to putting in place new strengthened arrangements for post adoption support, as the supply of adopters has increased. The prototype began in January and will run for 18 months until the full ASF is in place. It is adopter led but it is envisaged that the fund will pay for therapeutic services that are of high cost. Trialing the use of personal budgets for adopters is also part of this process.

6. Adoption & Permanence Panel

6.1 The major change to Panel process was detailed in last year's report, namely that children's plans for adoption are no longer presented to Panel. This has obviously led to a reduction in the workload of Panel and has led to some Panels being cancelled – approximately one a month to date. However, given the continued emphasis on timeliness for approval of adopters and matching of children it would not be prudent to reduce the frequency any further.

6.2 The Adoption Panels have participated in one in house training event in October and a further event is planned for May/June involving an external trainer.

6.3 The Panel appraisal process was reviewed in 2013 and a further process was implemented which has proved more efficient and equally effective. Once again, high levels of satisfaction were experienced by all Panel members.

7 Management Priorities 2014/15

7.1 To continue the excellent progress in adoption recruitment and continue to promote the outstanding adoption service within and beyond the East Sussex boundary. To ensure that the diverse needs of the community and of the children requiring adoption are reflected in active adopter recruitment.

7.2 To prioritise and target recruitment for East Sussex children and to maintain a strategy of over recruitment in order to release additional resources to other local authorities.

7.3 To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.

7.4 To maintain and extend all Adoption Support Developments including the revised CAMHS contract and close partnerships with the Virtual School.

7.5 To take forward opportunities offered for development e.g. piloting the prototype of Adoption Support Funds.

7.6 To expand the opportunities to deliver medical advice across the Fostering and Adoption Panels.

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