

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **28 July 2017**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

1. Background information

1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.

1.2 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

2. Recommendation

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

STUART GALLIMORE
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence Service
Tel: 01323 747406

Local Members:

All

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Annual Progress Report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service.

Background Documents:

None

1. Supporting Information

	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
1. Number of children adopted	57	43	45	38
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	50	56	32	38
3. Number of permanent fostering matches (children)	10	7	10	14
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	40	33	26	30
5. Number of consortium adoptive matches (children)	1	6	0	0
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	4	3	2	0
Adoption:	9	17	6	8
7. Number of prospective adopters approved (households)	44	50	41	30
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	8	4	2	1
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 st March 2017 (including 2 re-approvals)	52	43	53	52
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 st March 2017	24	26	14	32
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	17	20	22	20
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	1	0	1	0

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 Activity levels have remained consistent over the past year and prospective adopters have continued to give positive feedback about the process. The dedicated telephone number for enquiries, specific adoption recruitment email address and the on-line enquiry form ensured that all enquirers received a prompt and personal service. Nonetheless there was a significant drop in the number of applications. This reflected the national picture and also that of neighbouring authorities and partners in Adoption South East (ASE).

2.2 The time taken to approve prospective adopters was maintained at an average of nine months from registering an interest to approval at Adoption Panel. With the introduction of the two stage assessment process it had been anticipated that most adopters would want to get through to approval as quickly as possible. However, the local evidence has shown that many more applicants want to take time to prepare themselves for adoption through Stage 1. However the time taken to assess applicants in Stage 2 remained on target.

2.3 During 2016/17 the Agency received 192 enquiries, 81 households attended information events and 46 households registered their interest in adoption. The conversion rate from

Information event to registration remained high, but unfortunately only 30 adopters were approved by year end. This was, in part, due to a significant number of the applicants having far more complex histories than the service has seen in previous years. A number of assessments could not be completed and resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. Fortunately the over recruitment of the previous year offset the reduction in approvals for 16/17.

2.4 The Service continued to offer monthly information events for prospective adopters, which profiled the needs of the children waiting. ESCC advertising and recruitment activity was hosted through the Government Gateway, First4Adoption, New Family Social, Coram BAAF and ESCC websites. In addition, the service's Facebook page was developed to offer information regarding local adoption services, as well as any key national developments.

2.5 Throughout the year the Government regionalisation agenda gathered pace, with the five pilot adoption regions set to go live in Autumn 2017. During 2016/17 ESCC joined the ASE partnership with Brighton and Hove, Surrey and West Sussex to explore forming an adoption region. Four subgroups were formed to develop closer working practices across the region in relation to recruitment, family finding, adoption support and finance. There remain a number of challenges given the different staffing structures, processes and cultures of each authority. However the partnership persisted in working together to find solutions which would also preserve some of the key individual features from each authority.

2.6 During 2016/17 the Service continued to receive enquiries from applicants living outside ESCC boundaries. Currently ESCC generates income from the interagency fees charged when ESCC approved adopters are used by other local authorities. Ten ESCC families were used by other local authorities to place 12 children during 2016/17, generating an income of £291,000. However this is likely to change if ASE becomes a fully functioning region with centralised processes.

2.7 In 2016/17 6 experienced adopters were reassessed as second time adopters, and 1 set of foster carers were assessed to adopt a child already in their care. In addition, 7 prospective adopters were approved for fostering to adopt i.e. beginning the placement as foster carers but then converting to adopters if the care child for the child becomes adoption. This minimises disruption for very young children.

3. Children with a plan for Adoption.

3.1 The number of children with a plan for adoption in ESCC remained consistent with 53 in 2015/16 and 52 2016/17. This was not reflected nationally, with some Courts appearing to favour a plan for Special Guardianship Orders over Adoption Orders. Locally there appeared to be more children who remained with their birth families during the legal process than had been seen in previous years. This raised a number of practice issues in relation to the care planning process, and greater complexity for the family finding process. If this becomes more widespread during 2016/17 it has the potential to cause delay for children. The Service will need to monitor this carefully.

3.2 The Service placed the majority of children with ESCC adopters. Of the 44 children matched this year; 36 were matched with ESCC approved adopters and 8 placed with interagency adopters. Of the 8; there were 2 sibling pairs, one sibling group of 3 children and a single child. Where children were not matched with ESCC adopters the main family finding organisations used were Linkmaker and ASE.

3.3 ASE held one joint adoption event which took place on 27th March 2017. It was based in, and mainly set up by West Sussex. 25 households of adopters attended of the 32 households invited and 39 children were featured. West Sussex and Surrey had the largest number of children at this event, whilst ESCC had a higher number of adopters. It is intended that 4 events will be held each year, with ESCC and Brighton to host the next one.

3.4 The recruitment and family finding elements of the Service continued to work closely together to identify adopters needed to match the children coming forward. It should be noted that there were a number of children who required genetic testing and/or had complex health needs. In addition many of the children had experienced domestic abuse, severe substance misuse and neglect within their birth families.

4. Staffing

4.1 At year end the service was recruiting to a range of posts as 6 staff had moved on during 16/17. It is pleasing to note that this was largely for promotion, retirement or relocation. This meant that the service was more dependent on freelance Social Workers to complete some of the key tasks such as assessments whilst recruitment was underway. Nonetheless there was some impact on the overall service offer and delivery.

5. Permanence

5.1 The Service has continued to target family finding for those children whose plan is permanent fostering. The permanence tracking workshop met regularly during 16/17 to closely monitor the timescale of permanence plans and matches. The number of children approved for permanence increased by 50% during the year to 32. There was specific targeted recruitment for a number of these children given the complexity of their needs and care plans. A number of 'in house' foster carers offered long term care to children already in placement with them, or were matched via the family finding newsletter. At year end there were 7 children with a plan for permanence for whom the service was actively family finding.

6. Adoption Support

6.1 There was a significant increase in the number of adopters who requested adoption support during 16/17. The placement of children with complex needs, or who are older and part of sibling groups always poses more challenges in the context of adoption support. From 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 there were 56 requests for assessments of post adoption support needs, and of these 52 resulted in the provision of support.

6.2 'AdCAMHS' has continued to offer a dedicated therapy and consultation service during the year. It continued with its established unique partnership model, where clinicians and adoption workers 'think together' to consider the therapeutic needs of children and their parents. The desired outcome for the service was to contribute to adoption stability, to promote positive attachments within adoptive families and ultimately to prevent placement breakdown. At year end AdCAMHS was working with an average of 65 families.

6.3 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was launched nationally in May 2015. The Government committed to ongoing funding of ASF for the duration of Parliament, originally being 2020. The ASF criteria was extended during this period, to be available to children adopted from care, intercountry adoption and children subject to Special Guardianship

Orders. The remit of the ASF though continued to be based specifically for the provision of therapeutic support. ESCC has worked closely with the fund, and used this to complement the work of AdCAMHS.

6.4 The Adoption Service worked closely with dedicated workers within the Virtual School. During the year they provided adoptive families with support for educational and school based issues, and offered training to schools in relation to the attachment needs of adoptive children in education.

6.5 For some families exhibiting high levels of need, the Adoption Service worked closely with Locality colleagues to manage safeguarding risks, with the aim of preventing adoptive families from breaking down.

6.6 During the year, the adoption service has held two social events for adoptive families. These were organised and supported by the service to enable adopters and their children to meet informally and have a fun day out. In addition, a number of support groups for children and adopters were facilitated by the service, and the contract with PAC-UK was maintained.

6.7 The demands on the indirect/letterbox and direct contact services increased throughout 16/17 with 817 indirect contact agreements open at year end, and 312 direct contact arrangements being supported by the service. Furthermore, the service also worked with 81 adopted adults wanting to access their records, and commissioned CMB Counselling to provide an intermediary service to adopted adults and their relatives.

7. Adoption & Permanence Panel

7.1 The number of Panels reduced over the last 12 months due to the reduction in recruitment activity and the introduction of greater efficiencies across the county. The number of Panels held in 2015/16 was 32, reducing to 27 in 2016/17.

7.2 The contract for medical advice to the panels transferred from Kent Health Care Trust to East Sussex Health Care Trust at the end of the year. This resulted in a greater level of consistency to both Panels, and also delivered a greater connectivity in relation to the paediatric needs of ESCC Looked After Children.

7.3 The Panel venue moved permanently from The View Hotel in Eastbourne in July 2016 to the Bellbrook Centre in Uckfield. This proved to be a successful move and has led to significant savings.

7.4 A successful Panel Training day was held in June focussing on disruption and fostering to adopt. This was well received by all.

8. Management Priorities 2016/17

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to work towards regaining previously achieved targets.
- To continue to strengthen and build on ESCC's high national profile and to further expand into a regional service together with our partners in Surrey, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex.

- To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.
- To maintain and extend adoption support developments including the revised CAMHS contract, close partnerships with the Virtual School and continue to use the Adoption Support Fund to good effect.
- To maintain and support the new Health Services contract to improve provision to children.
- To ensure ESCC's role in the Regionalisation Agenda brings added value and builds on success.