

# Agenda Item 11

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **27 July 2018**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.**

---

**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 Adoption and Permanence 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 comment on and 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

## Appendix 1 - Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service

### 1. Supporting Information

	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/8
1. Number of children adopted	43	45	38	29
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	56	32	38	30
3. Number of permanent fostering matches (children)	7	10	14	5
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	33	26	30	30
5. Number of ASE adoptive matches (children)	6	0	0	0
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	3	2	0	1
Adoption:	17	6	8	6
7. Number of prospective adopters approved (households)	50	41	30	25
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	4	2	1	3
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017 (including 2 re-approvals)	43	53	52	69
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	26	14	32	24
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	20	22	20	12
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	0	1	0	1

### 2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has had a considerable reduction in recruitment activity over the past two years, particularly in relation to the number of applications started and approved. However, this reflects the national picture and what is being seen as the crisis in the sufficiency of adopters. It certainly reflects the situation with neighbouring authorities and local partners in Adoption South East (ASE). Nonetheless, the service has continued to receive positive feedback about the quality of the recruitment processes and the customer focused approach.

2.2 During 2017/2018 the Agency received 198 household enquiries, 81 households attended information events and 43 households registered their interest in adoption. The conversion rate from Information event to registration remained high but unfortunately only 25 adopters were approved by the year end, this was a drop of 5 on 2016/2017. This was in part due to a significant number of the applicants having far more complex histories than the service had traditionally received. A number of assessments could not be completed and resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. This is the second year when the number of adopters being approved was lower than expected, and this has had an impact on the family finding element of the Service.



**2.3** The Government's regionalisation agenda has gained significant momentum with 5 pilot regions going live in autumn 2017, and a further 4 going live in autumn 2018. ESCC is committed to the ASE partnership which submitted a bid earlier in the year. This proposal was accepted by the DfE who awarded a grant of £750k to take forward the first stages of the development.

**2.4** Within ASE the work streams have continued to run across the four local authorities in an effort to develop common practice and shared events. While this has proved beneficial in many ways, it has also presented major challenges. The issue of adopter sufficiency and the implications of the inter-agency fee is a critical challenge for ASE going forward.

**2.5** There has been a tension within the adopter recruitment work stream during this transitional phase of ASE due to the imbalance of adopters recruited and children requiring placement. Surrey County Council (SCC) and ESCC are and have been key providers in relation to adopter recruitment and contribute a disproportionately higher number of adopters to the regional pool. In contrast, West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and Brighton and Hove Council (B&HC) have either not prioritised or have struggled to recruit sufficient adopters and have consequently placed a significantly higher percentage of their children outside of their local authority boundary.

**2.6** Whilst there has been a drive to share resources across the region, each local authority continued to prioritise meeting local targets, especially in the context of the rising number of children with a plan for adoption.

**2.7** In 2017/18 in ESCC, 10 experienced adopters were reassessed as second time adopters and 3 sets of foster carers were assessed to adopt a child already in their care. In addition 8 sets of prospective adopters went through to offer Fostering to Adopt through an adoption match and 1 couple still await legal conclusion due to legal processes although the actual placement of the child has been made.

### **3. Family Finding and Matching**

**3.1** There was a sharp increase in the number of children with a plan for adoption (ADM) with 52 children in 2016-2017, to 69 in 2017-2018. Within this group there were 2 large sibling groups of 6 and 5 respectively, plus a sibling group of 3 and 8 sibling pairs. Of the single children between the ages of 0 – 2 years, a number of them had significant complex medical needs and developmental delay. This cohort of children was particularly challenging in terms of family finding.

**3.2.** Despite the increased numbers of children approved, there were a number of plans changed unexpectedly which caused some delay, this was primarily due to late removal from the family home or to medical and legal complications.

**3.3.** This year, 30 matches were completed which was largely consistent with previous years. The number of matches could have been higher as potential adopters were identified for this cohort of children. However, there was an increase in the number birth families who wished to appeal against the plan for adoption for their child/ren. This had a significant impact on fostering resources and consequently on the budget, whilst simultaneously delaying adoptive placements. ESCC continued to place the majority of children in the local area. Sadly there was 1 adoption plan which disrupted during the introductions stage.

**3.4** In terms of income generation, there were 11 children from elsewhere placed with ESCC adopters, this included one sibling pair and a number of single children. 7 of these were from



the ASE regional partners. Overall this exceeded the financial target set for the service and generated £263k.

**3.5** The challenge of placing siblings has been recognised as an increasing pressure both nationally and regionally, particularly as fewer sibling adopters are coming forward as they begin to recognise the increased challenge of being matched with siblings. ESCC Adoption Service is planning to review local practices and consider whether extra support and incentives can be put in place to support sibling placements.

**3.6** In the past year the service has been working closely with its ASE partners in relation to family finding and of the 4 events planned, 2 were undertaken, 1 in Horsham and 1 in East Sussex. At these 2 events ESCC had more adopters in attendance than the other three agencies, and also, along with WSCC, had greater numbers of children to be placed.

**3.7** The family finding strategy for the service concentrated on working with all key staff to identify potential children needing adoption placements as early as possible, whilst simultaneously identifying and prioritising adopters for specific children, siblings and Fostering to Adopt. Currently the service delivers a Fostering to Adopt workshop 3 times per year for potential adopters to encourage them to consider these types of arrangements.

#### **4. Staffing**

**4.1** There have been a number of staff changes during the past year, including 2 staff returning from maternity leave and 1 from secondment. However, of most significance was the retirement of the Practice Manager who had over 35 years of service within ESCC and who had made an enormous contribution to the lives of many children and to the Service overall.

#### **5. Permanence**

**5.1** The permanence tracking workshops have continued to meet regularly and in addition, the Practice Manager responsible for family finding has had regular meetings with the wider Children's Services staff to offer advice and guidance at an early stage in the planning for permanence. The majority of permanence placements continue to be 'home-grown' from current foster carers claiming and making a commitment to children in their care.

#### **6. Post Adoption Support**

**6.1** The demand for an assessment for post adoption support has continued to rise. ESCC has a legal duty to assess adoption support needs and to provide a service if necessary. The increased placement of children with complex needs, older children and sibling groups has significantly raised the challenge of adequately supporting these families. A number of adopters who requested assessments had moved into East Sussex from other areas and so were not previously known locally. Last year there were 55 referrals requesting an adoption support assessment with the majority of these requiring a range of support services to be offered.

**6.2** Some of the most complex family situations required the service to coordinate a multiagency, multidisciplinary approach. In these situations it was essential that the service worked closely with colleagues in Locality to manage risk and safeguarding concerns either through child protection plans or children whose needs were such that there was a high risk of imminent placement breakdown. In addition, there were an increased number of adopters who requested respite due to the complexities of their adopted children and the impact of their presenting behaviours. Several complicated young people have become LAC as a result of adoption breakdowns.

**6.3** Adoptive families have continued to greatly benefit from the services of the dedicated adoption worker in the Virtual School. Unfortunately the post holder retired earlier this year, but a replacement caseworker was recruited who recently started in the role. The remit has



continued to provide adoptive families with support for education and school based issues, as well as offering training to schools in relation to the attachment needs of adopted children affecting their ability to access learning. A caseworker in the adoption team also plays a key role in supporting adopters and their children in school, and works alongside the Virtual School.

**6.4** The adoption CAMHS service, AdCAMHS, has continued to offer a dedicated therapy and consultation service. The unique partnership model enabled clinicians and adoption social workers to think together to consider the therapeutic needs of children and their adoptive families. Undoubtedly the service contributed to the increased stability in adoption, promoted positive attachments and ultimately helped to prevent adoption breakdown for some families. Due to the limited clinical resource the service has considered therapists offering more consultations to social workers and doing less of the direct work, which could be bought in via the national Adoption Support Fund (ASF). AdCAMHS was offering therapeutic support to 64 children at year end.

**6.5** The ASF was launched nationally in 2015. The Government guaranteed ongoing funding, increasing year on year until 2020. The ASF is specifically for the provision of therapeutic support to children adopted from care, intercountry adoptions and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) who were previously Looked After. The types of work which have been funded are Psychotherapy, Non Violence Resistance (NVR), DDP, Play therapy, Music therapy as well as the commissioning of multidisciplinary assessments. East Sussex has worked closely with the administrators of the fund and has used this to complement the work of AdCAMHS. Sadly it has not proved possible to date to secure funding for AdCAMHS as a service from the ASF despite the fact that arguably this could be more cost effective.

**6.6** The ASE adoption support work stream has met regularly during the last year. The focus has been working on a joint offer of adoption support which would be consistent across ASE. There was also discussion about making regional bids to the ASF as well as looking at where resources could be shared. The challenge has been to try to identify where there is commonality across 4 very different adoption support services.

**6.7** The demand on the Contact Service has increased during this year, both in relation to indirect/letterbox contact and direct/face to face contact. Every adoptive match which was approved had a letterbox arrangement, often with multiple exchanges between the adopters and various birth family members. Facilitating direct contact was, and continues to be, a complex piece of work if the actual face to face meeting is to be successful for the child. Contact arrangements were regularly reviewed to ensure that they continued to be in the best interests of the child. There were 605 active letterbox arrangements at year end.

**6.8** The referrals from adopted adults seeking to access their records/information about their adoption remained consistent. In the last year there were 159 enquiries from adopted adults. Also relatives of adopted people were offered an intermediary service through a contract with CMB counselling.

**6.9** The Adoption Service held two social events for adoptive families during the past year which were well received. Through the contract with PAC-UK 4 different support groups for adoptive families were offered across the county. In addition a Children's Group, Teenage Group and Therapeutic Parenting Group were delivered in conjunction with AdCAMHS Adoption Support.

## **7 Adoption & Permanence Panel**

**7.1** There were a similar number of Panels convened during 2017/2018 to that of the previous year. However, the activity for the forthcoming year is anticipated to increase due to a higher forecast of assessments underway. The Panel membership remained relatively stable during this period with the addition of 3 new County Councillors. An induction programme will take place early in 2018/19, and a whole Panel training event is planned for the autumn of 2018.

7.2 The contract for medical advice for Panel and Children's Looked After Services has continued to be delivered by East Sussex Health Care Trust. The feedback provided by staff and services users alike has been that the Senior Paediatrician and the team provided an excellent and reliable service. All adopters were offered face to face meetings with a Medical Adviser prior to a match, and given the increased complexity of children being matched, this was particularly helpful.

### **Management Priorities 2018/9**

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to manage the tension between the rising numbers of children and the challenge of adopter sufficiency.
- To continue to strengthen and build on ESCC's high national profile and to further expand the regional service together with our partners in SCC, B&HCC and WSCC.
- 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 continued use of the Adoption Support Fund to good effect.
- To maintain the contract with East Sussex Health Care Trust and to ensure that the service continues to improve.
- To ensure ESCC's role in the regionalisation agenda brings added value and builds on success.