

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**
Date: **26 July 2019**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 01 April 2018 – 31 March 2019**
Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 01 April 2018 and 31 March 2019**

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 East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Recommendations

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

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Local Members

All

Appendices

The Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

Background Documents

None

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service

1. Supporting Information

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
1. Number of children adopted	45	38	29	27 (AOs)
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	32	38	30	39
3. Number of permanent fostering matches	10	14	5	4
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	26	30	30	33
5. Number of ASE adoptive matches (children)	0	0	0	2
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	2	0	1	1
Adoption:	6	8	6	4
7. Number of prospective adopters approved	41	30	25	33 (of which 4 2nd time)
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	2	1	3	3
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 st March 2017 (including 2 re approvals)	53	52	69	43
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 st March 2019	14	32	24	22 (of which 10 change of Care Plan from adoption to perm)
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	22	20	12	14 (from the 33 approved this year)
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel pre Order:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	0
Adoptions:	1	0	1	1

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 Activity levels in general were higher during 2018/2019 than in the previous year. The table above shows that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) saw a greater number of adopters approved, although the numbers were still down on previous years. This reflected the national picture and the general crisis in the sufficiency of adopters. It also was reflective of the situation in our neighbouring authorities and particularly our partners in Adoption South East (ASE) i.e. Surrey, Brighton and Hove and West Sussex. In spite of the challenges East Sussex has continued to maintain a favourable position regarding recruitment compared to our statistical neighbours.

2.2 To ensure that ESCC were not losing potential adopters to other Local Authorities (LA) or Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) the Service followed up on prospective adopters who had attended Information Events in the past 18 months, but who had not returned their registration of interest form. An analysis of the trends and reasons people did not progress forward demonstrated that potential applicants were not going to other agencies. Instead the picture related to individual situations, for example, moving jobs or moving home. This confirmed anecdotal information held previously which suggested that people considering adoption would approach agencies to find out about what is required in the process, while still exploring other options or completing significant life events such as changing jobs, moving home or getting married.

2.3 The Information Events remained busy and again numbers attending these were higher than in 2017-2018. However, there was a decrease in people registering their interest to adopt in quarter 4, this was not a trend seen by our colleagues in the other ASE authorities. The service is hopeful that this is a temporary situation and there has been a slow upturn in people registering their interest in quarter 1 of 2019. However, there is no room for complacency in a competitive market place and hence ESCC has changed the policy on adopters who use vapes to come into line with the other local authorities in ASE. During 2018/2019 there was positive feedback about the quality of the recruitment programme.

2.4 During 2018/2019 88 households attended information events and 37 households registered their interest to adopt. The conversion rate from information event to registration remained high and 33 adopters were approved by the year end, an increase of 8 compared to 2017/2018. Continuing to invest time in making enquirers welcome, helping them understand the process and supporting them through Stage 1 appeared to pay dividends in encouraging enquirers who were ready to proceed to choose to adopt with ESCC.

2.5 Similarly to last year, the Adoption Service continued to attract a significant number of applicants with more complex histories than the Service was traditionally used to. A number of assessments were not completed within the year and this resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. This is the third year that the number of adopters being approved was lower than what was required in terms of children needing adoptive families.

2.6 The Government's regionalisation agenda gained significant momentum during this period with an increased number of pilot regions going live. ESCC has worked for the past 3 years with the ASE partnership to form a regional adoption service. The work stream meetings continued to operate across the four LAs in an effort to develop common practice and shared events in all areas of adoption service delivery. It was recently agreed that ESCC will host the management and coordination of the new regional service, anticipating implementation and 'go live' in April 2020.

2.8 Whilst there was encouragement to share resources across the region, each LA continued to prioritise the meeting of local targets whilst the development work is ongoing.

2.9 The majority of East Sussex adopters are White British however couples of mixed heritage including Indian, Spanish, Dutch and German were also approved. Last year whilst the majority of adopters approved were heterosexual couples, 2 single adopters and 2 same sex female couples were also approved.

3. Family Finding and Matching

3.1 In common with the National picture, there appears to have been a decrease in the number of children with a plan for adoption. During 2017-2018 there were 69 children with the plan for adoption, whereas during 2018/2019 the figure was 43 and 2 re-approvals. The number of

ADM decisions and the number of Placement Order Applications is falling and this reflects a local and national trend.

The largest sibling group during this period was a group of three. However, there continued to be numbers of young children aged 0-2 needing placement as well as slightly older children and sibling groups of 2, many of whom presented significant challenges in relation to family finding.

3.2 There were 39 children matched during 2018/2019 which was a slight increase on the previous year. Whilst overall the number of children approved decreased during this period, the levels of complexity and uncertainties re health and development remained high. This, together with legal complications, at times caused significant delay to the matching process, which in turn caused extra pressure on foster placements and extra cost. The ethnic profile of children approved reflects the local population; 6 of the total number approved were from other ethnic groups including Guyanese, Sri Lankan, White/African Caribbean and Iranian.

3.3 The number of birth parents seeking leave to revoke Placement Orders continued to remain steady. The impact of this though was that adopters were often in limbo and in some cases withdrew from a potential match because of the uncertainty. In general once children are placed, adopters have become increasingly aware that parents are likely to appeal at the time of the adoption application. This, at times, resulted in a significant delay in the Adoption Orders being granted. Despite this, there were 27 Adoption Orders granted in 2018/2019.

3.4 ESCC developed a greater post placement support offer during this period in the form of; a therapist for adopters focusing on forming attachments early in placement and Video Interactive Guidance. There was also a greater focus on encouraging and providing in house training for family and close friends to offer direct support to the adoptive placement. One form of support which was highly successful was the Natter and Play group run by members of the Adoption Team. This group was for adopters who had pre-school age children. It had a high level of attendance and the feedback was very positive. The group supported adopters, which in turn helped them to feel less isolated and able to talk to people who shared their experiences. For the children, as they grow up they will know other children who have been adopted. Many families have also maintained contact outside of the group.

3.5 ESCC continued to place the majority of children within East Sussex, although this year was quite a challenge due to a mis-match between numbers of children and available adopters, coupled with some unsuitable geographic locations for some matches. Therefore the Service placed a small number of children out of county with VAAs, other LAs and with the region that will be covered by ASE. There were also 7 Fostering for Adopt placements, all made with East Sussex Adopter/Foster Carers. East Sussex continues to have a good track record for the timeliness of children entering care and being placed with their adoptive family and adopted

3.6 In terms of income generation there were 5 single children placed from other LAs with ESCC adopters which is slightly less than last year.

3.7 In conjunction with ASE colleagues, there were five profile events taken forward during the year. For the first time East Sussex hosted an Activity Day known as 'Meet and Play'. This event was designed for children from the ASE who were waiting or had been waiting for some time to attend a fun event with their foster carers and social workers, and for adopters to attend to meet and play with the children. East Sussex staff undertook the planning and preparation whilst the ASE partners assisted on the day. 23 children were featured, 10 of whom were from East Sussex. 4 children from East Sussex were matched with in house adopters. 2 were siblings aged 6 and 8 and 2 aged 3 and 5 and were part of a sibling group of 3.

4. Adoption Support

4.1 During 2018/2019 there was a national picture of an increasing number of children placed for adoption who were significantly traumatised by their early life experiences. Many adoptive

families were struggling to manage complex presentations including relationship difficulties, poor emotional regulation and challenging behaviours. In response to this the Post Adoption Support Service in ESCC co-ordinated a high number of intensive packages of support, this often required multidisciplinary/multiagency interventions particularly where safeguarding concerns were a factor.

4.2 For some families planned respite sometimes enabled children/young people to stay within their family, but resources are scarce for this complex client group. During this period there was an unprecedented number of adoptions which broke down – a total of 6. Sadly these children and young people were no longer able to live with their adoptive families. This included some quite young children aged 5-7 as well as some teenagers.

4.3 There were 56 new referrals for post adoption support assessments over the past year with the majority resulting in the provision of packages of support. The adoption CAMHS service, AdCAMHS, continued to offer a dedicated consultation and therapy service even in the context of limited clinical resources. Unfortunately, the service was without a clinical psychologist for nearly a year but this post was recruited to by year end. Other clinicians included the part time clinical lead psychotherapist, a part time art psychotherapist and a trainee psychotherapist, all supported by some dedicated administrative time.

4.4 AdCAMHS was commissioned to support 40 families but consistently provided a service to over 60 families. AdCAMHS and social care colleagues continued to offer Therapeutic Parenting Groups and a Teen Group which included an overnight woodland camp. Adoptive families very much valued AdCAMHS, as the clinical work has been proven to strengthen family relationships and increase placement stability. Feedback from adopters indicated that they appreciated the support and a key contact for ‘the longer journey’.

4.5 The Virtual School continued to offer a service to adopted children and young people. This support was reconfigured to develop a wider service and expertise across the whole School rather than it only being available through one dedicated post. The role of the Virtual School was to ensure that children and young people had the best opportunities and outcomes. It worked with schools to develop inclusive practice. The Virtual School also provided an extensive source of information and advice to assist in parents advocating for their children in an educational setting. The Pupil Premium Plus, introduced in 2014, recognized that adopted children and young people often required extra support in school due to their early life experiences.

4.6 The THRIVE caseworker in the adoption team continued to work closely with colleagues in the Virtual School. THRIVE is an approach which draws upon insights from neuroscience, attachment theory and child development to provide a dynamic way of working with children and young people that supports optimal social and emotional development. It is proven to help them to re-engage with life and learning.

4.7 Since being launched nationally in 2015, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has enabled large numbers of adoptive families to receive ongoing therapeutic support. Children adopted from care, intercountry adoptions and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) are all eligible. However, this Government funding is only guaranteed until March 2020 and it is very uncertain whether this will continue to be funded after that. The existence of the fund raised the expectations of adopters nationally and resulted in a high volume of requests locally, which were all screened by the service prior to submission. Within ESCC, local adopters reported that they were anxious about the uncertain future surrounding this and what impact this could have on meeting local needs.

4.8 The Adoptive Families Group (AFG) established some years ago, was rejuvenated towards the end of 2018/2019. It was originally founded by adopters in conjunction with ESCC as a support network, but also to raise awareness of adoption support issues. At that time it also took

on a lead role in lobbying the Government about support in schools for adopted children, which resulted in the extension of the Pupil Premium for adopted children. The rejuvenated AFG has begun to focus on the regionalisation agenda and the future of the ASF. A relaunch event is planned for September 2019.

4.9 With regionalisation firmly on the agenda, the ASE post adoption support work stream continued to meet during the past year. However, with the ASE 'go live' date scheduled April 2020, the main focus of the work going forward will be on identifying a core ASE adoption support offer. Adoption Support managers across the region will continue to work together to consider how resources can be shared to best support adoptive families in the south east. This is a complex area of work as the services are resourced quite differently.

4.10 ESCC provided a service to 115 adopted adults seeking to access their records/information about their adoption during 2018/2019. Relatives of adopted adults continued to be offered an intermediary service via the contract with CMB Counselling.

4.11 The Adoption Service continued to run two events annually for adoptive families which were well attended. Through the contract with PAC-Adopt UK, four support groups were offered to adopters at different locations across the county.

4.12 Referrals to the contact service continued to rise with every adoptive match during the year. The Letterbox Service continued to co-ordinate exchange of information between adopters and various birth family members. The Direct Contact Caseworker facilitated the complex face to face meetings between adoptive children and young people with birth family members. Due to increasing number of referrals into the direct contact service an additional part-time post was created and recruited to. The Contact Service supported 645 active letterbox arrangements during this period, and 192 children with an active direct contact arrangement with a birth relative.

5. Adoption & Permanence Panel

5.1 The number of Panels continued throughout the year at a similar frequency to 2017/2018 last year

5.2 The Bellbrook Centre continued to provide an appropriate and economical venue for the Panel meetings

5.3 The Panel enjoyed an excellent joint training session with the adoption team in November, which focused on good quality assessments and learning from the serious case reviews.

5.4 The contract with East Sussex Health Care Trust (ESHCT) continued to provide an excellent standard of medical advice to Panels as well as servicing the needs of LAC, adopted children and adult adopters. Where possible all adopters were offered a face to face meeting with a medical advisor prior to a match, where this was not possible a detailed telephone consultation took place prior to panel.

5.6 The Panel welcomed three new County Councillors who completed an induction course and commenced attendance at Panel.

6. Management Priorities 2019/20

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to manage the tension between the number of children and the challenge of adopter sufficiency.

- Since confirming ESCC role as host, to lead further expansion 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, in conjunction with ASE partner agencies.
- 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 the new ESHCT contract and to ensure that the improved services continue.
- To ensure ESCC's role as host to ASE brings added value, builds on success and leads the way for high quality standards of practice aiming to deliver an excellent Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).