

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **24th April 2015**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015**

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 Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1

3. Recommendation

3.1 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

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

1. Supporting Information

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
1. Number of Children Adopted	44	57	43
2. Number of Adoption Matches (children)	53	50	56
3. Number of Permanent Fostering Matches (children)	10	10	7
4. Number of East Sussex Adoptive Matches (children)	44	40	33
5. Number of Consortium Adoptive Matches (children)	1	1	6
6. Number of Inter-Agency Matches (children): Permanence: Adoption:	2 8	4 9	3 17
7. Number of Prospective Adopters Approved (households) *	39	44	50
8. Number of Permanent Carers Approved (households)	4	8	4
9. Number of Children Approved for Adoption up to 31 st March 2015	69	52	43
10. Number of children Approved for Permanence up to 31 st March 2015	17	24	26
11. Number of Approved Adopters waiting to be Matched	16	17	20
12. Number of Disruptions presented to Panel: Permanence: Adoptions:	1	1	0

2. Recruitment Activity

2.1 East Sussex Adoption Service has continued to refine and develop the two stage recruitment process using feedback from adopters. It is popular with prospective adopters, who have advised that they appreciate the support they receive during the process. The improved timescales in relation to the approval of prospective adopters has been maintained this year. On average it has taken between six and nine months from applicants registering interest to approval at Adoption Panel.

2.2 Enquirers to East Sussex (ESCC) have also reported that they have found the Adoption Recruitment Service to be welcoming and helpful. This has led to an enviable reputation as being the local provider of choice, and it is clear that this has specifically led to a number of enquirers choosing to adopt with us. There is a dedicated telephone number for enquiries, a specific email address and an on-line enquiry form to ensure that all enquirers receive a prompt and personal service.

2.3 During 2014-15 the agency received 258 enquiries about adopting with ESCC. Following receipt of information packs, 88 requests were received for Registration of Interest Forms. Thus a higher than average conversion rate has been maintained at 34% in 2014-15 which is a slight increase on 33% in 2013-14. This compares very well with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) suggested national figure of 10%.

2.4 Regular recruitment activities for prospective adopters have taken place throughout the year, which target the needs and profile of the children waiting. Advertising and

recruitment activity has included providing information on the Government Gateway First4Adoption, New Family Social and BAAF websites, newspapers, radio, and bespoke advertising at railway stations, at supermarket sites, and on buses travelling around the county. ESCC Adoption Facebook page remains popular in reaching a range of prospective adopters. It is regularly updated with information regarding local adoption services, as well as any key national developments in adoption services that might interest local families. In addition monthly information events have been held in the evenings and weekends in order that enquirers can drop in and speak directly with social workers and experienced adopters.

2.5 There has been a continued national drive, led by the Government, to recruit higher numbers of adopters for children waiting to be placed. Locally ESCC has received an increased number of enquiries from outside the ESCC borders this year. This has enabled the Adoption Service to meet the demand to place the majority of East Sussex LAC locally and also to 'over' recruit adopters for use by other local authorities nationally. This has generated an income of £27k per child. Eight ESCC families have been used by other local authorities to place their children this year.

2.6 The two stage recruitment process has been reviewed and as a consequence there are a number of further changes that are planned for 2015-16 to improve still further the service offered to enquirers. The Stage 1 meeting and Preparation to Adopt course has been redesigned to provide a more seamless flow of information for adopters as they proceed through the process. This should reduce time taken in Stage 1 and address any issues promptly. The service has also streamlined the processes for experienced adopters and for foster carers who wish to adopt children already in their care in line with the Government regulations.

2.7 During 2014-15 there were 10 experienced adopters who returned for assessment and two foster carers who applied to be assessed as adopters for children in their care. There were also four families who offered fostering to adopt placements for children, thus avoiding delay and disruption for those children awaiting the outcome of a court judgement. Three of these four children were placed on a fostering basis with adoptive families where their siblings had previously been placed and adopted. The fourth child was placed with a childless couple who were willing to take the risk of offering the child a foster placement prior to it becoming an adoption placement with a Placement Order

3. Children with a plan for Adoption.

3.1 During the period 2014-15, the number of children with a plan for adoption continued on a downward trend from 57 in 2013-14, to 43 in 2014-15. This is in part due to the successful implementation locally of 'Thrive' which is continuing to reduce the number of children entering the care system. But also the impact of the court ruling ReB and ReBs in 2013-14 which required social workers to clearly explore all alternatives within the child's network before adoption could be agreed. Subsequently, the Adoption Leadership Board chaired by Martin Narey, produced a report 'Myth Busting' which attempted to redress the balance and argued that social workers had misinterpreted the ruling and that the plan for adoption should be promoted at the earliest opportunity. This trend will need close oversight in terms of any long term planning for adoption services.

3.2 The Adoption Service has continued to place the majority of children locally with 'in house' adopters. Overall of the 56 children who were matched for adoption; 33 of these children were matched with in house adopters, 6 children were placed within the local consortium and 17 placed with another agency. The use of interagency options has been primarily to secure placements for those children who are considered harder to place and who have more complex needs. For example, at least three of the children who were placed

for adoption via this route had specific needs including Down's Syndrome and complex genetic conditions. In addition, two sibling pairs of boys were placed as were a number of older children with complex and abusive backgrounds who would not ordinarily have had the opportunity to be adopted. These are very significant achievements for the service, providing great outcomes for these children.

3.3 In respect of the Adoption Scorecard, East Sussex continues to remain one of the top performing local authorities in the southern area. The timeliness of placing children for adoption improved in relation to the 'three year average between children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family' reduced from 539 in 2013-14 to 522 days at the end of 2014/15. This compares very favourably with the national average of 647 days. It is particularly pleasing given that this outcome was achieved having placed three complex, hard to place children during the year who had been waiting much longer than usual. The very swift placement of the remaining children had clearly offset the longer timescales for the hard to place children and had reduced the overall average. The established dedicated Practice Manager and Caseworker responsible for the family finding and matching process have made a very significant contribution to the high performance in this area.

3.4 As a result of the lower number of children waiting for a placement, family finding events have been reduced. This year the Adoption Service attended just one National Adoption Register event. The planned Activity Day for November 2014 was also rescheduled for June 2015 as all of the children considered in the April 2014 event had been matched.

3.5 ESCC has successfully contracted with Adoption Link during 2014-15. This is a national organisation set up in 2014 which aimed to match adopters and children in a timely fashion using adopter led matching. Given the success of this initiative, East Sussex has signed a contract for a further year with this agency.

4. Permanence

4.1 The Adoption & Permanence Service has continued to target family finding for those children whose plan is permanent fostering. The permanence tracking workshop has met regularly throughout the year to monitor the timescales of permanence plans and matches closely. The number of children approved for permanence has increased slightly in the past 12 months to 26.

4.2 At year end there were 20 children with a plan for permanence via long term fostering for whom the service was actively family finding. This included three pairs of siblings; one set of three children; 11 single children. There were matches identified and being considered for four of these children. However, there remains an ongoing challenge in recruiting sufficient numbers of permanent foster carers to meet the needs of our Looked After Children.

4.3 The past year has seen an increased number of children with particularly complex needs, many of whom have been part of large sibling groups requiring placement together. The service has responded by developing a bespoke, targeted recruitment programme specifically for these children.

4.4 There have been a range of 'in house' carers who have been willing to put themselves forward to offer long term care to children currently in placement with them. In addition, a number of foster carers have also transferred from the independent sector to ESCC fostering service to provide permanent placements to our children. (see fostering annual report)

5. Adoption Support

5.1 Of the services delivered in ESCC, Ofsted commented in 2014 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'.

5.2 During 2014-15 the demands made on the Adoption Support Service have risen incrementally as the activity levels in recruitment and matching have increased. More families have contacted the Adoption Support Service throughout their adoption journey, which is reflected in the rising number of referrals peaking at 38 in 2014-15. Whilst placing increasing numbers of older children and sibling groups is very positive for the children involved, it brings its own challenges in the context of adoption support.

5.3 The specially commissioned Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for adopted children and their families, 'AdCAMHS', is now in its second year of a two year funded project. 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 for the professionals supporting them. The Service was designed to contribute to adoption stability and promote positive attachments within adoptive families (and ultimately to prevent placement breakdown). AdCAMHS was officially launched in November 2014 by Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families. As at year end the service was supporting 58 adoptive families.

5.4 The Adoption Service commissioned individual therapists throughout the year to provide specialist support to families in areas such as therapeutic life story work and 'Theraplay'. Play, Drama and Music therapies have also been identified to enable children to communicate and express themselves more creatively where required. In addition, child to parent violence was identified as a factor in a small, but significant number of families, therefore the service commissioned a systemic family therapist, with expertise in the 'Non Violence Resistance' (NVR) approach, to offer advice and interventions.

5.5 Excellent links have been maintained with the Virtual School. Since September 2013, two part-time adoption support workers have been appointed to the team, funded from the Adoption Reform Grant initially, and latterly using the Pupil Premium. These roles have provided adoptive families with support for educational and school-based issues. Training for schools on attachment and on the needs of adoptive children in an education setting, has been a key area of intervention.

5.6 The Adoption Support Service has worked closely with colleagues in the wider Children's Services throughout 2014-15 particularly in relation to a number of children who have presented very high risk safeguarding concerns such as; violence, self harm, substance misuse, offending behaviours and mental health issues. In complex adoption support cases, a team around the child approach is vital in managing risk and safeguarding both the child and family, as well as in preventing some of our young people returning to

care. At year end 2014-15, the Adoption Support Service was offering support to over 85 families with multiple and complex needs.

5.7 During the year, the Team facilitated two groups for adopted children aged 10-12 years. In addition the AdCAMHS service jointly facilitated a group for adoptive teenagers within the adoption service. Additionally a 12 week Therapeutic Parenting Programme was successful in bringing adopters together to focus on adoption issues with the support of two child and adolescent psychotherapists, also under the umbrella of AdCAMHS.

5.8 The Service has continued to support and work closely with the Adoptive Families Group (AFG), set up in January 2013. This is an independent adopter-led group which focuses on lobbying and on raising the profile of the needs of adoptive families both locally and nationally.

5.9 The contract with Adoption UK has delivered four support groups at different locations across East Sussex during 2014-15. In addition the services of CMB counselling (a small independent agency) have been commissioned to ensure that a service is provided for adopted adults and their relatives. These contracts have been regularly monitored and reviewed by the adoption service.

5.10 Two events were hosted by ESCC 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 18th April 2015.

5.11 The Same Sex Adopters Group met on a regular basis throughout the year, facilitated by members of the adoption team, with keynote speakers in attendance.

5.12 The Service was involved in supporting 249 direct contact arrangements in 2014-15, which is a significant increase from 218 in 2013-14. There were 765 indirect contact agreements being facilitated by the service, once again an increase from 685 in 2013-14. This aspect of the service requires a high level of professional scrutiny as well as dedicated full-time administrative support.

5.13 In January 2014, the Adoption Support Service in East Sussex was selected as one of ten local authorities nationally to pilot the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) prototype. As part of its programme of adoption reform, the Government was committed to putting in place new strengthened arrangements for adoption support, as the supply of adopters increased. The ASF is available specifically for the provision of therapeutic support; in recognition that many adopted children have been through difficult and traumatic experiences in their birth families. To date ESCC Adoption Service has made successful bids to the fund raising a total of £87,190.60. The ASF will be rolled out nationally in May 2015, pledging £19.3m to therapeutic support. East Sussex has been instrumental in testing the criteria and in helping to shape the operation of the fund prior to its launch. Unfortunately the roll out of the fund will also see the end of the Adoption Reform Grant which will reduce the financial base of the service by £400k in 2015-16.

6. Adoption & Permanence Panel

6.1 The panels have experienced a number of changes in venue, administration, professional advice and membership during the past 12 months. The Panels have extended their thanks to all those who have stepped down, and warmly welcomed all new participants.

6.2 It is to the credit of panel admin that it has been made possible for the panels to become fully electronic for 2015-16 and from mid-April all panel members will receive their papers electronically. This will make a significant saving to the local authority, not to mention the environment, considerably reducing and almost eliminating the cost of printing and postage which hitherto has been in the region of £12k.

6.3 In a further attempt to reduce costs, a change in venue was agreed during 2014-15. This has proved to be efficient in terms of travel, parking, refreshments and reliability. Detailed comparative exercises have been undertaken by panel admin to achieve the most cost effective option which can meet the complex requirements.

6.4 Panels have continued to meet on a weekly basis with a steady number of adopter approvals and matches being presented. Ongoing training to Panel members was delivered during the year.

6.5 Inclusion of the Adoption Service within the new integrated health service for LAC has been very positive, with more timely health assessment of children coming to panel and better advice to both prospective adopters and to panel when matches are being considered for children with complex needs.

7. Consortium

7.1 For 12 years East Sussex has been a member of the South East Regional Consortium together with Brighton and Hove, Bromley, Bexley, Kent and Medway. Brighton and Hove left the consortium in July 2014 and Kent's position has been challenged by their contract with Coram. Medway, Bexley and Bromley have understandably forged links with Central London local authorities. After much discussion East Sussex Adoption Service decided to join a newly formed and much larger consortium – South Central. This consists, amongst others, of Hampshire, Brighton and Hove, Surrey, Oxford, Portsmouth, Berkshire and some independent adoption agencies including Cabrini and PACT. The advantage will be to build closer professional links with a larger number of agencies in the South.

7.2 In terms of linking and matching children, and providing effective post adoption support, it is anticipated that this will bring distinct advantages. Recent experience during the year of placing children at a distance has shown that it can bring extra pressures and strains in negotiating effective wrap-around services to an adoptive placement if there are difficulties. Membership of the new consortium will bring the benefits both of greater placement choice for the children of East Sussex; and timely matching of East Sussex adopters within the consortium. This will bring additional cost benefit as £27k per placement 'sold' can be recouped. .

8. Management Priorities 2015-16

- To continue the excellent progress in adoption recruitment and continue to promote the outstanding adoption service within and beyond the East Sussex boundary.

- To prioritize 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 and thus generate income for ESCC.
- To strengthen and build on our high national profile and build on the opportunities given to further expand the East Sussex Adoption Service.
- To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.
- To maintain and extend all Adoption Support Developments including the revised CAMHS contract and close partnerships with the Virtual School.
- To formally embed the new medical service provision across adoption and fostering services.
- To ensure our role in the new consortium brings added value to the service and greater local placement choice for children.