

Adopted Families Group (East Sussex)

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper to the Corporate Parenting Panel of East Sussex County Council is to provide information in relation to adopted children and families and to give The Corporate Parent Panel an insight into the work of Adoptive Families Group (East Sussex). This will be AFG's first presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel and we welcome this opportunity.

Background:

Adoptive Families Group (East Sussex) was formed in January 2013. The idea for this group came from participants who had attended an eight week course run by East Sussex Adoption Team entitled 'Parenting Adopted Teenagers'. A common theme explored on this course was the difficulty that adoptive families faced in dealing with the trauma that many of their children brought to the home and school environment. The initial eight participants felt that it was time to set up a group which would actively campaign for change at both national and local levels, on issues such as post adoption support, support for adopted children in education and at the same time promote awareness of adoption issues amongst professionals who care for adopted children. At the inaugural meeting 70 adoptive families were represented.

Aims of AFG (East Sussex).

- HELP SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS TO APPRECIATE THE ISSUES AND PROBLEMS ADOPTIVE CHILDREN EXPERIENCE
- SIGNPOST SUPPORT FOR PARENTS OF ADOPTIVE CHILDREN
- LOBBY LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND GOVERNMENT FOR GREATER HELP TOWARDS SUPPORTING ADOPTIVE FAMILIES.

AFG (East Sussex) remain independent of Children's Services but work in partnership with them. As an organisation we are appreciative of the support they have provided since our inception. We also liaise with local Adoption UK co-ordinators and our aim is to compliment and not replicate their role in working with adoptive families. We focus on local adopted children and families living within East Sussex and on local issues.

AFG (East Sussex) are optimistic as to what can be achieved to improve the life experiences, opportunities and outcomes for adopted children. Adoption continues to be a focus for this current government and its commitment to increasing the number of adoptions needs to be balanced with ensuring there is sufficient support, and post adoption services. The need for a group in East Sussex to represent and work alongside adoptive families has long been overdue.

Over the last 3 years, AFG (East Sussex) have lobbied to get Pupil Premium for adopted children and we are currently lobbying to get this money ring fenced for adopted children and to make schools more accountable to adoptive parents about how this money is being used to benefit our adopted children.

We also lobbied and were delighted that the Virtual School has a designated practitioner who specialises in working with adopted children in education. AFG (East Sussex) is a great supporter of the Virtual School and specifically the work of Helen Cryer and her colleagues.

We have formed relationships with The University of Sussex who are undertaking some research into outcomes for adopted children.

We have undertaken training to head teachers and individual schools around the issues of adoption and the effects of trauma and loss on the educational achievements of adopted children.

Council proposed cuts:

It is accepted that cuts to budgets have to be made with a funding from central government and a cap on any rise in council tax limited – the council has a budget shortfall of £70/90m over the next 3 years. Children's Services need to make cuts in the region of £15 million and we are aware of the proposal to cut a further 4 posts from the adoption team, and this is in addition to the 3 posts which have already been lost in the previous round of savings.

It is understood that the post adoption team have an increasing number of open cases where families need support and help. It is expected that this will rise over time. It is also our experience that children coming into the care system are more complex and have significantly higher level of need. Just because these children then move on to adoption, does not always mean that adoptive parents are able 'to love away their children's difficulties and baggage'.

Adoptive families tend to ask for help when they reach crisis point and seeking help beforehand can be seen as an admission of failure. The support provided by the post adoption team is often required immediately and is more complex to deal with due to the history of the child. Adoption support social workers need to be very skilled and knowledgeable in all areas of adoption, trauma and loss.

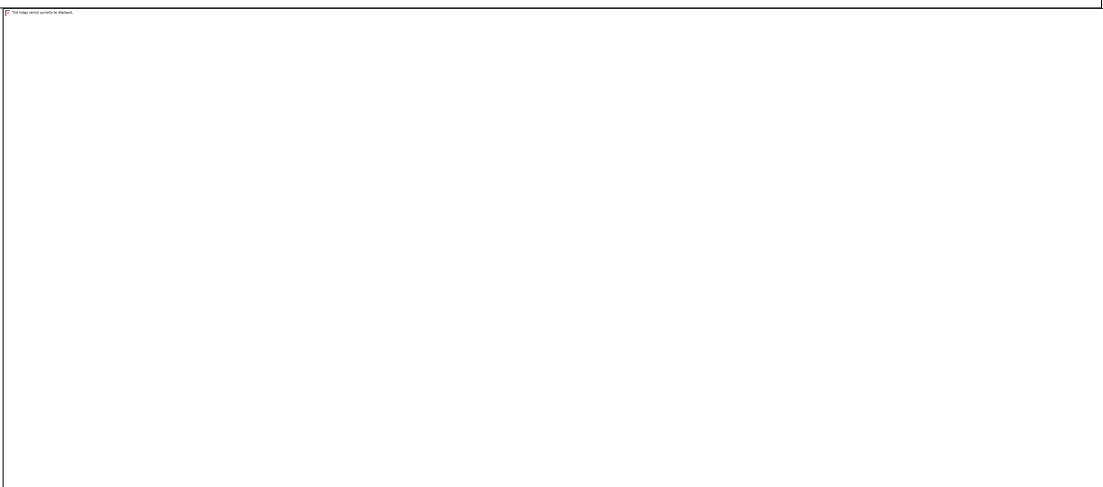
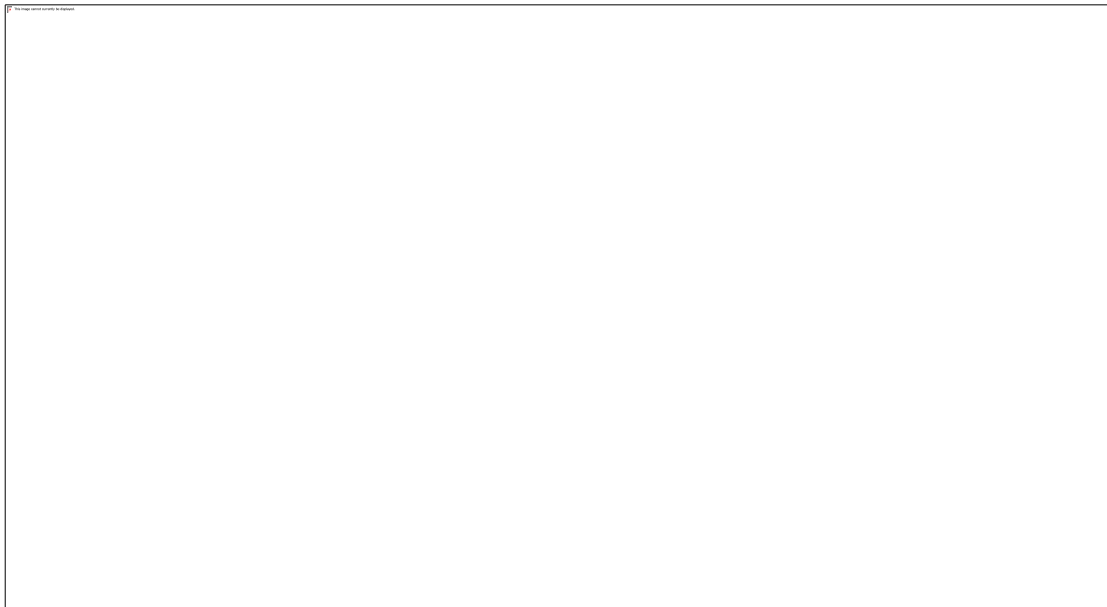
ESCC are currently undertaking adoption recruitment on the local radio and are stating that they will be 'there with you to support you both during and after adoption'. This is a promise that AFG feels is crucial to encourage and support more adoptive families. Adoption support needs to be increased in order to meet the current demand.

Adoptive children:

Adoptive Children will see the world differently to a child in their birth family. They tend to have:

- Feelings of rejection and loss
- Being different from everyone else
- Carry a painful history
- Suffer from low self-esteem
- A need to prove their right to exist
- Friendship problems
- A need to be in control

These feelings can manifest themselves in many ways. One area they suffer is with attachment which starts in the womb and continues throughout their lives. When a child is adopted their attachment with the birth parents is broken and this can affect them and their behaviours at home and at school. This is an extract from a presentation the AFG (East Sussex) gave to Head Teachers last year to raise awareness of issues and possible reasons for adverse behaviour that adoptive children may have in school and equally applies to the adoptive home:



What support is currently being given by Post Adoption Support:

Post adoption support provided to adoptive families and children is of a very high standard and prevents family breakdown and children going back in the care system. East Sussex's adoption Services is known by the Government as a Flagship service that other Local Authorities are advised to follow for best practice. Currently there are a low number of adoptive family breakdowns in East Sussex due to the support given.

The types of support can be varied as it is designed to meet the specific needs of the family or adoptive child (children). One area of great success is the provision of a dedicated mental health support specifically for adoptive children – AdCAMHS (Adopted Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). Those children that have used this support network have found it has helped them manage with feelings of loss, anger, the perception of being different etc.

Other services include:-

- Life story work
- Attachment therapy
- Family therapy
- Adoptive children's groups
- General adoption advice
- Access to records
- Birth family tracing
- Non-violent resistance therapy
- Theraplay
- Adoption-related training
- Direct contact
- Letter box contact
- Adopted family events
- Adoption support groups
- Adopt UK newsletter
- Virtual School for adopted children
- Adoption support fund for therapeutic needs
- Thrive attachment based support

Another important part of the post adoption service provided by East Sussex is the continuum of service from social workers who have a sound knowledge of the child's history as well as good knowledge of the adoptive family. Continuity of social workers is crucial when families contact the team for support during their time of crisis.

Impact of proposed cuts to Post adoption services:

The proposed cuts to the Post Adoption Service are of great concern to AFG and adoptive parents and AFG (East Sussex) has written to each County Councillor, MP's and Government voicing its concerns.

AFG (East Sussex) feel the impact of the cuts will lead to:

A potential increase in family and placement break-downs - this can have a direct effect on the increased costs for the Local Authority that could negate any savings made to the post adoption team as a child is less likely to be adopted after a breakdown, the costs of foster, long term guardianships or LA care will directly affect the children's services budget.

Post adoption Services being rationed and the currently recognised high level of support will fall – this can manifest in more problems for adoptive children later in life – possibly falling into in the Criminal justice system, Increase in mental health issues and ultimately a higher cost to the Local Authority and the country.