

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

ADOPTION SERVICE 6 MONTHLY BUSINESS REPORT APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2012

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with a business report summarising the work of the Adoption Service between 1st April and 30th September 2012.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption). The service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years. The outcome of the last inspection (June 2009) was very positive with the service receiving a rating of 'Good' with no requirements or recommendations. This judgment was supported by the pilot inspection of adoption in November 2011 who confirmed the service remained 'good' with 'outstanding' features.
- 2.2 The Council continues to support adoption with further investment in the capacity of the team, supporting our lead role with the region including local and regional events to ensure the continued development of adoption.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Adoption Service 6 Monthly Business report April – September 2012 is attached for information (appendix 1).
- 3.2 The North Lincolnshire Adoption Service continues to meet the national thresholds set in the Adoption Scorecard. The service has increased the number of assessments of adoptive carers, the number of children who are adopted and has set robust and challenging targets for the future.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The attached business report provides information and analysis of the North Lincolnshire Adoption Service.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 There is a national shortage of adoptive placements, particularly for children with complex needs or within sibling groups. In order for the Adoption Service to meet the future needs of the North Lincolnshire care population, the requirements of the Adoption Action Plan and the Adoption Scorecard measures, it is vital that ongoing investment in the service continues.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory - The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) and revised statutory guidance implemented in September 2012.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 Routine feedback from adopters regarding the service they receive from the Adoption Team has been positive indicating that they feel fully supported throughout the process. For example, comments included “our Social Worker was organised, sensitive and supportive throughout” and “ the information was very helpful and helped us to decide to carry on with the adoption process”

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet supports the continued development of work in Adoption.

DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Adoption Service Business Plan April 2012 – September 2012

Business Report on North Lincolnshire Adoption Service

April 2012 – September 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) which came into force in April 2011. The service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years. The last statutory inspection of service took place in June 2009. The outcome of the inspection was very positive with the service receiving a rating of 'Good' with no requirements or recommendations.

1.2 The main responsibilities of the Adoption Service are to:

- Recruit, assess and train adoptive families.
- Provide ongoing support, training and monitoring to adoptive families.
- Provide a Family Finding and Matching Service for children requiring an adoption placement.
- Provide Adoption Support Services to adopted children and their families to maintain adoption placements including support groups.
- Provide an assessment for adoption support to persons prescribed in ASR4.
- Provide Birth Record Counselling to adopted adults.
- Provide advice, counselling and support to birth parents and other significant birth family members affected by adoption.
- Provide a 'letter box' contact system between adopted children and members of their birth families, which is used by approximately 142 families at any one time.
- Regular consultation with adopters, the children of adopters and the children who are adopted.

1.3 This report follows on from the September 2011 – March 2012 Business Report and details the business of the Adoption Service during the period April 1st 2012 – September 30th 2012.

2. SERVICE MANAGEMENT

- 2.1 The Adoption Service comprises a Principal Social Worker and 5 Adoption Social Workers. The increase in capacity from 4 to 5 whole time equivalent Adoption Social Workers took place in 2011. The Adoption Team Manager left the service in April 2012 and, unfortunately, it has not been possible to recruit to the post despite it being advertised several times. The Service Manager – Children in Care Resources has taken on the role of responsible manager and interim arrangements have been put in place to cover the day to day management tasks within the service.
- 2.2 During the period, training members of the team have attended includes:
- Advanced Professional Practice in Social Work
 - Child and Family Profiling
 - Matching and Placing for Adoption- research into practice
 - Basic Microsoft PowerPoint
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Community Care Inform Training
- 2.3 Other than the Team Manager moving to a new post, the service has continued to be successful in its retention of skilled, experienced staff. The five adoption established social workers have continued to remain in post. One of these has, however, reduced to part-time working and the remaining hours have recently been recruited to.
- 2.4 The updated Statement of Purpose was agreed by Cabinet Member in July 2012, the service has subsequently been working to this revised document.
- 2.5 The service was subject to a pilot Ofsted inspection during November / December 2011. Although this was not a statutory inspection, it was a full inspection undertaken in line with the new Ofsted inspection framework. It found the service to be good with outstanding features.

3. SERVICE ACTIVITY – April 1st 2012 – September 30th 2012.

The Adoption Panel

- 3.1 The adoption panel meets monthly to make independent recommendations on the approval of new adoptive carers, matching of children to carers and plans for adoption for individual children. The system has now changed due to changes in legislation so that approval of plans for adoption for individual children is completed by the agency itself. This is now

approved by the agency decision maker and the first child was approved under this new system in September 2012.

- 3.2 10 individual children received a 'Should be placed for adoption' decision between April 2012 and September 2012 (NB 9 of these were presented to the Adoption Panel, 1 was presented straight to the agency decision maker following the new processes introduced in September 2012). This remains on track to maintain the increase we saw between 2010/11 (14 children) and 2011/12 (23 children).
- 8 further children have had matches presented to the panel and formally approved, again making good progress to match the 2011/12 performance of 16 matches.
 - 10 children were placed with adoptive families during the period. This indicates that the full year figures will see an increase on the 14 placements made in 2011/12. All 10 children placed met timescales in terms of being placed within twelve months of a 'Should be placed for adoption', as well as meeting the Adoption Scorecard indicators of less than 213 days from placement order to match and less than 639 days from entering care to placement. This indicates that the Adoption Scorecard timescale indicators will continue to improve.
 - Of the 17 remaining children, 82% are subject to placement orders enabling us to undertake intensive family finding.
- 3.3 Between 1st April 2012 and 30th September 2012, 8 children were adopted from the care of the local authority and we hope to reach 18 adoption orders by 31st March 2013. This will be further improvement on the 2011/12 outturn of 14 adoption orders.
- 3.4 Of the 8 children adopted from care 87.5% were within timescales for being placed within twelve months of a 'Should be placed for adoption'. 75% have also met the 3 Adoption Scorecard timescale indicators as described above.
- 3.5 Once again, the trend of increasing adoption has continued demonstrating that effective interventions and planning is leading to improvements in achieving permanence in a timely effective manner. The work of the service in family finding for harder to place children is also contributing towards reducing delay in children being placed for adoption.

Adopters Approved

- 3.6 To date in 2012/13 3 adoptive families have been approved by panel, with a further couple presented in November 2012 and another due to be presented in December 2012.
- 3.7 There are a further 13 potential adoptive families currently being assessed of which at least 7 are predicted to be presented to panel prior to 31 March 2013. Therefore there will be at least 12 adoptive families approved by March, this is double the previous year and will represent an increase on the last two financial years. In addition there are 3 assessments awaiting social workers to start the assessments in December and 4 potential adoptive families about to undertake the Adoption Preparation course. This means the increase in carers assessed and approved is predicted to continue. This is due to the additional capacity within the team to undertake assessments detailed above. Secondly, improvements in the teams' recruitment strategy have resulted in an increase in enquiries and applications.
- 3.8 Of the 6 prospective adoptive families approved during 2011/12, all now have children placed with them.
- 3.9 The service has continued to undertake the adoption preparation course with colleagues from North East Lincolnshire. This takes place three times a year. It is annually reviewed and the course is updated in December of each year with North East Lincolnshire. In addition to this, to ensure there is no delay in the approval process for new carers, carers can be signposted to courses available across the region.

Central List

- 3.10 The membership of the Adoption Panel is made up from a 'Central List'. This is made up of a combination of relevant professionals, independent and lay members who have been trained and have the understanding of the issues to make effective decisions as part of the Adoption Panel. The list includes Psychologists, an independent Adoption Social Worker, an Educational Psychologist and an adoptive parent. During the period, the central list of panel members increased with the addition of 2 additional people both of whom are North Lincolnshire Council Elected Members. The central list now has 12 members in total.

Inspection of the Adoption Service

- 3.11 As reported previously, a pilot Ofsted Inspection of the Adoption Service took place at the end of November 2011. This inspection was undertaken by Ofsted as part of their

development of a revised framework for inspecting adoption services.

- 3.12 The service was judged to be 'Good' with some features close to outstanding. Among the comments made in their report, the inspectors described the adoption service as: '...a flexible service which places the child at the centre of decision-making...'. They also highlighted '...Efficiency in early identification of children whose plan may be adoption, robust planning and monitoring of plans', and 'robust family finding and matching ensures that children are placed without delay'.
- 3.13 The Adoption Service and the above pilot inspection were included in the wider inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in April and May 2012. This inspection judged services to Looked after Children to be 'Outstanding' and the inspection recognised the "increased use of adoption and Special Guardianship Orders" inspectors also noted the improvements in the timeliness of placements and the investment in the adoption team.

Adoption Action Plan and Adoption Scorecard

- 3.14 The government published its 'Action Plan on Adoption' in March 2012, key areas include:
- Plans to legislate to reduce the number of adoptions delayed in order to achieve a perfect or near ethnic match between adoptive parents and the adoptive child;
 - Emphasis on swifter use of the national Adoption Register
 - New adoption scorecards
 - Expectation that local authorities to seek to place children with their potential adopters in anticipation of the court's placement order;
 - Plans to speed up the adopter assessment process - two months training and information gathering - four months of full assessment;
 - "fast-track" process for those who have adopted before or are foster carers
 - Developing a National Gateway to adoption
- 3.15 This was followed by publication of the Adoption Scorecard. This compared performance against a number of indicators with a particular focus on the time taken to place children with adoptive families.
- 3.16 The north Lincolnshire scorecard has shown adoption timescales continuing to improve with 78% being placed within

21 months of first coming into care in 11/12 - compared to 56% over the previous 3 years and the England average of 58%). Adoptions from care have also increased from a 3 year average of 12% (in line with the national average) to 19.7% in 2011/12 and a potential figure of over 21% during 2012/13.

- 3.17 One of the key indicators in the score card is the number of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. The 2009-12 3 year average was our most successful period to date in placing children for adoption within minimum timescales (70% being placed within 21 months of first coming into care, compared to 56% over the previous 3 years and the England average of 56%).
- 3.18 The number of days from entering care to being placed for adoption has also improved in North Lincolnshire and is continuing to do so. Predictions for 2012/13 (based on 8 adoptions) are that this could reduce to around 550 days if the predicted 18 adoption orders are granted, which would see the 3 year average reduce to around 590 days, well below the England average of 636 days.
- 3.19 As a response to the Adoption Action Plan and the Adoption Scorecard approach developed by the government to monitor adoption performance and progress. The monthly analysis of adoption performance, information and indicators includes specific reference to the scorecard indicators.
- 3.20 This is also reviewed, analysed and actions taken as appropriate by a specific adoption cohorts meeting attended by the performance team and service managers from across the service. This ensures that information is used effectively to ensure the service continues to improve and achieve high levels of performance.

Adoption Round Table Event

- 3.21 In July 2012 North Lincolnshire hosted a 'round table' multi-agency conference focused on the Adoption Action Plan and ensuring sharing knowledge, examples of good practice and development ideas across all agencies involved in achieving permanence for children. The event was chaired by His Honour Judge Dowse and attended by partners from the Police, Social Work Services, legal representatives, the courts, CAFCASS and other professionals. An action plan has been compiled from the event and will inform services and developments to ensure effective practice and joint working continues to achieve timely permanent placements for children.

4 FINANCE

4.1 The service level agreement continues to be in place with After Adoption, Yorkshire, to provide birth parent and adoptee counselling as required. This provides birth families with access to a service that is Independent of North Lincolnshire. During the period, new individual services were provided in 11 new cases including adoptees and birth family members.

This comprised the following:

- Adoptees - 5
- Birth Relative/Sibling - 6

Referred by:

- NLC - 5
- Self – 3
- Other – 3

4.2 North Lincolnshire Council continues to be the provider authority responsible for managing and co-ordinating the business and activities of the Yorkshire & Humber adoption consortium which includes 15 Local Authorities and 3 independent adoption agencies. We lead the business model approach in relation to the operation of the consortium through a Business Manager post which is managed through North Lincolnshire on behalf of the consortium and was established from April 2012.

4.3 Adoption Financial Support

At the end of the period there were 50 adopted children in receipt of financial support at a total cost of £6,153.53 per week (a further slight reduction on the previous period).

5 CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

5.1 Routine feedback from adopters regarding the service they receive during the period regarding the service they receive from the Adoption Team has been very positive.

Examples include:

- comments from prospective adopters about a life appreciation day “Please could we pass on our thanks to all concerned for organising such a well planned and comprehensive day and for taking such accurate and detailed minutes of the important information discussed”.
- “Our Social Worker was organised, sensitive and supportive throughout”
- “ the information was very helpful and helped us to decide to carry on with the adoption process”

5.2 Feedback regarding the Adoption Service given by birth families during the period was also extremely positive with none of them giving less than 5 out of 5 for all aspects of the service.

Comments included:

- “I highly recommend [the Adoption Social Worker] to anyone who has need of a case worker in a sensitive situation”
- “Your diligence has changed my life”
- “I am very pleased with what [the Adoption Social Worker] has done for me. She has helped me andvery much”

6 PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE – UPDATE ON SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS AND ACTIONS

6.1 In order to ensure the service continues to progress, the high profile and importance of an excellent adoption service is prioritised within the council, an Adoption Service Manager post has been created. This is currently being advertised and will be appointed to in the near future.

6.2 North Lincolnshire continues to take the lead in the business approach adopted by the Yorkshire & Humber consortium. This continues to be successful in greater collaboration between member authorities on the recruitment of carers. The Business Manager is based within North Lincolnshire and a new manager will take up the post in January with a clear remit to develop joint approaches across the region that increase the choice and availability of adoptive placements.

6.3 It was planned during the period for North Lincolnshire to host a regional conference to promote joint working, share best practice and develop services across the region. This took place in October 2012 and will be reported on in the following business report.

6.4 Further editions of the adoption newsletter providing information about the service to adoptive carers, children and relevant others will be developed and distributed.

6.5 Under partnership arrangements with NE Lincolnshire to provide inter-country adoption services, a jointly commissioned service level agreement continues with Yorkshire Adoption Agency to provide this service.

6.6 In response to new guidance regarding the adoption assessment process, the service is liaising with colleagues across the adoption consortium to ensure there is timely access

to Adoption Preparation courses as soon as potential carers are ready to attend.

- 6.7 These new requirements are that the assessment process should only take 6 months from start to finish. To ensure that North Lincolnshire is responsive to this, work is being undertaken to develop self-directed learning opportunities as part of the preparation process including on-line learning and self-assessment opportunities. The government has provided a small adoption development grant to help facilitate this and this will be utilised in developing modular learning options, systems improvement and staff training.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Following the review of the Children and Young Peoples Service a further investment in the North Lincolnshire Adoption Service has been agreed with the creation of an Adoption Service Manager to manage the service. This recognises the high profile of adoption and the need to be competitive within the region to ensure the service has high quality leadership. There is a real focus across the region in increasing the numbers and availability of adoptive placements as there is still a substantial shortfall in placements available compared to the number of children with a plan of adoption.
- 7.2 The service continues to focus on increasing the number of assessments of new carers. This has continued to increase and the service is in a strong position to complete a further 20 assessments of new carers over the next 12 months. This will further provide an increased choice of placements and be within the adoption business consortium approach to improving the availability and timeliness of placements. This will generate income enabling further recruitment and assessment of carers to take place.
- 7.3 At the last statutory inspection of the service in 2009, the service was judged to be 'good' with no recommendations or requirements. The positive outcome from the pilot inspection and the inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after Children Services provides continuing evidence that adoption services in North Lincolnshire continue to provide services that are effective, meet the service objectives in achieving timely permanence for children and are progressive and developmental.
- 7.4 The number of children adopted or moving to Special Guardianship arrangements has continued to increase as a proportion of those leaving care and the timescales in achieving

adoptive placements for children with a plan of adoption during this period have been at their best ever level.

- 7.5 There is a good platform for further developments in preparation for the next statutory inspection and addressing the requirements of the governments 'Action Plan on Adoption'. The service meets all the thresholds in the Adoption Scorecard and the three year averages as measured in the scorecard are continuing to improve.
- 7.6 The recent pre-publication circulation of the Adoption Scorecard demonstrates that all our adoption timescales continue to be maintained or improve. The 2009-12 3 year average was our most successful period to date in placing children for adoption within minimum timescales (70% being placed within 21 months of first coming into care, compared to 56% over the previous 3 years and the England average of 56%).

Adoptions from care have increased from a 3 year average of 12% for 2008-12 (in line with the national average) to 15% for 2009-12. The projection for 2012/13 is 21.2%, running well above the national average.

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Oct 2012