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8th May 2014

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) - Councillor Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director, People

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:** Family Placement Service Update Report

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

This report updates the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) on progress made in Fostering and Adoption in respect of recruitment of foster carers and adopters, the adoption score card and progress against the recommendations of the Adoption inspection in 2013.

A key priority for the Council is increasing the number of internal foster carers to meet the needs of the City's 'Looked After' Children. The strategy for the recruitment of foster carers was reviewed last year and a marketing strategy is in place to increase the number of in-house foster carers. There has been an equally robust drive to retain foster carers with specific focus on strengthening the quality of support, bringing foster carer maintenance allowances in line with Fostering Network Rates and re-establishing the Coventry Foster Carers Association.

The Adoption service was inspected by Ofsted in August 2013 and was judged to be "adequate". A report was presented to Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) in November 2013 in relation to the 13 recommendations arising from the inspection. Of these, 9 recommendations have been completed and 4 are being progressed.

There has been an increase in the number of children with a plan for adoption. Since April 2013, there has been a significant narrowing of the gap between Coventry's performance with an average of 583 days and the national target (547 days) in achieving adoption for children..

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is requested to note the progress made to date and endorse next steps regarding the future development of the service.

**List of Appendices included:**

None

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title: Family Placement Service update report**

**1. Context**

**Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Update**

- 1.1 A key priority for the Council is increasing the number of internal Foster Carers to meet the needs of the City's 'Looked After' Children. The strategy for the recruitment of foster carers was reviewed last year and a marketing strategy is in place to increase the number of in-house foster carers.
- 1.2 There has been an equally robust drive to retain foster carers with specific focus on strengthening the quality of support, bringing foster carer maintenance allowances in line with Fostering Network Rates and re-establishing the Coventry Foster Carers Association.
- 1.3 The Family Placement Service launched a more co-ordinated marketing campaign in September 2013 to increase the number of enquiries and applications to become a foster carer or adoptive parent through the City Council. The marketing campaign has included a number of different strands and incorporated strong imagery featuring 'Alfie' and then other children, representing the diversity of the children in our care (including sibling groups) and as such the need for foster carers and adopters from different backgrounds. This was informed by national research which explored reasons why people may wish to become a carer, and the perceived barriers to coming forward.
- 1.4 The impact of marketing campaign between October to December 2013 compared with the same period in 2012 indicate that initial enquiries increased by 35%; home visits increased by 130% and the number of assessments has remained the same for the period This indicates that current strategy is making an impact.

<b>Table 1</b>			
<b>October - December 2012:</b>		<b>October-December 2013</b>	
Total Initial Enquiries	78	Total Initial Enquiries:	105
Total Home visits:	20	Total Home Visits Undertaken:	46
Total Assessments started	20	Fostering Assessments started :	20
		Connected Persons Assessments	9

- 1.5 The Pop-up Shop opened on 11 December 2013 and is currently staffed 10am-2pm Monday to Saturday. The shop provides a strong visual presence in the City Centre as well as an opportunity for people to talk to the team about adoption and fostering. The Pop-up Shop accounted for 36% of all enquiries in December, and 13 January, 33% of all of January's enquiries.

Comments received from people visiting the shop have included

*'I was so excited to see the shop here- I daren't pick up the phone and call you but this is something I'd really like to explore'*

*'It's great to be able to talk to someone face to face as I didn't want to talk about this on the phone'*

*'I would never have contacted the Council again about this as last time the service was terrible (from 4 years ago) but you seem really friendly and if I can come into here to chat through it I'll certainly give it some thought'*

1.6 **Special Guardianship Orders** - Permanence through the use of Special Guardianship Orders enables children to remain with existing foster carers and relatives. There remains a year on year increase in the number of children diverted from care or where children have been successfully discharged from long term care. These have been growing in number and in 2013/14 over 204 assessments were requested and commenced. 53 Special Guardianship Orders were made and at the end of March 2014 there are over 40 special guardianship assessments underway.

1.7 **Children with a plan for adoption and performance against the Adoption Scorecard** - In 2012, the Government introduced scorecards as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system and measure how quickly children are placed for adoption. The Adoption Scorecard focuses on the following three indicators:

***For Children who have been adopted in the last three years:***

- A1 Average time between a child entering care and moving to an adopter family (days)
- A2 Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days).

***For Children who have been adopted or who should be adopted:***

- A3 The number and percentage of children who waited (or are waiting) less than 21 months for an adoptive placement before 2012, or 20 months from 2013.

1.8 Coventry's performance over a three year average falls within the bottom 25% of local authorities.

For A1, (the average time between a child entering care and moving to an adopter family) missing the threshold by 276 days.

For A2, (average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family) missing the threshold by 150 days.

1.9 There has been a marked improvement since April 2013 and the scorecard will not yet reflect the improvement in performance. The one year averages show that in 2012/13, it took Coventry 821 days on average between a children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family and this is now 583 days. The national target for 2013/14 is 547 days and this reduces to 487 in 2014/15.

1.10 The scorecard measures the timescales for children achieving their plan for adoption and there has been a year on year increase of children with an adoption plan. Children at various stages of their adoption journey contribute to the measures of the Adoption Scorecard and Table 2 sets out the number children in the respective part of that journey.

<b>Table 2</b>				
	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14 (YTD )</b>
Number of Children with a decision that they Should Be Placed for Adoption (ShoBPA) as 06.03.14	56	50	73	150
Number of SHoBPA decisions since April 2013				88
Number of children with a with a decision that Should Be Placed for Adoption not yet placed (ShoBPA) as at 14 March 2014				70
Children Adopted as at 31.03.14	23	25	40	52
Children placed with their adoptive families	27	48	25	44
No of adoption order applications lodged awaiting a court date as at 31.03.14				18

1. 52 adoption orders have been secured leading to an increase of 30% since 2012/13
  2. 70 children with a decision that Should Be Placed for Adoption not yet placed (ShoBPA) as at 14 March 2014.
    - a. 36 for who active family finding still on going
    - b. 14 children to be matched at Panel in March/April 2014
    - c. 14 children for whom their foster cares are pursuing adoption or special guardianship
    - d. 6 children with a potential match being explored
  3. 18 of the 44 children placed with adopters have lodged their adoption applications to the Court.
  4. There remains a small cohort of children where the legacy of delay will impact on the performance in 2014/15 and in particular these include children where their foster carers have lodged applications for adoption or are considering adoption or special guardianship orders.
  5. 30 children have had their plans changed to permanent fostering and their placements have been confirmed with their existing foster carers maintaining continuity for the children. For some children new foster carers have been identified and for others their foster carers have sought special guardianship.
- 1.11 Court processes affect adoption performance and whilst there has been improvement in the timescales for outcomes of hearings, these are not yet being concluded within the recommended 26 weeks.
- January and March 2013, average duration of proceedings was 52.8 weeks
  - October and December 2013, average duration of proceedings reduced to 39.9 weeks

- 1.12 **Adopter recruitment** is good with majority of the children placed with Coventry approved adopters. Timeliness of assessments has improved and recruitment of adopters has remained on track with 50 adopters households approved in 2013/14 and a further 51 adopters' assessments were in progress at the end of March 2014. 6 Adoptive families for 10 children were secured from other local authorities and agencies in 2013/14.
- 1.13 The service actively encourages and is successful in the recruitment of adoptive families from a wide range of backgrounds, including ethnicity and sexual orientation as well as adopters who would consider taking siblings so that where ever possible brothers and sisters are placed together.
- 1.14 In February 2014, 31 approved adopters were not yet matched with a child, of these 15 will be matched to children in March and April 2014; 16 others are either on hold or exploring possible children or will be offered to other local authorities.
- 1.15 **Adoption Inspection 2013** - The Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in August 2013 and was judged to be "adequate". The report made 13 recommendations and a report was presented to the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) in November 2013. Of the 13 recommendations, 9 (69%) have been fully addressed, with the remaining 4 in progress. See appendix 1 for full details.
- 1.16 Over the last ten months there has been significant focus on improving performance and challenging the culture of delay across the child care system as identified below:
1. The establishment of an integrated Family Placement Service which includes the Permanence and Family Finding Social Work Team.
  2. The Adoption Reform Grant has supported the service in strengthening staffing capacity, adoption medicals and improving the quality of profiles for children.
  3. Recruitment to vacancies and by November 2014 the service had recruited to a number of management and social work posts.
  4. Service Managers have reset standards and tackled poor performance.
  5. Plans for children are rigorously tracked across Neighbourhoods and the Family Placement Service
  6. The increased use of Special Guardianship and Adoption with foster carers.
  7. Family Finding being more targeted and focussed on the needs of the child/ren
  8. Good use of inter-agency funding to secure placements for hard to place children particularly siblings and children with emotional/behavioural issues.
  9. Ensuring Adoption Panel is compliant with new regulations and rigorous in providing quality assurance. Assessment, Matching and Panel process/decision making is improved and timely
  10. Improving the quality of reports and assessments
- 1.17 The key priorities for the service in 2014/15 are as follows:
1. Increasing the number of Foster care households
  2. Strengthen the support and retention of foster carers
  3. Improve Adoption Scorecard performance
  4. Recruitment of Adopters
  5. Recruit to management and social work posts
  6. Implementation of new Adoption requirements from the Children and Family Act
  7. Continued focus on small number of children who are hard to place
  8. Continued focus on improving quality of practice and support
  9. Improve capacity and timeliness of medical assessments
  10. Improve Adoption medicals and timeliness of advice from the medical advisor
  11. Life Story work is completed in a timely manner
  12. Improve Post Adoption Support and Contact

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 There have been robust improvements in the delivery of service to achieving adoption over the last 10 months. There is clear ambition to build on the success that has been achieved so far and move closer to national targets.
- 2.2 The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is requested to note the progress made to date and endorse next steps regarding the future development of the service.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 Feedback from children in Placement, Foster Carers, Foster Carers' own children and the child's Social Worker are sought at every foster home review.
- 3.2 Children and Young People are regularly involved in the recruitment and selection of staff in the Family Placement Service and in the commissioning of services. This involvement includes face to face contact with interviewees and perspective service providers.
- 3.3 Children and Young People have been consulted on and involved in writing the Children and Young Persons Guide to Foster Care, Adoption and Adoption Support.
- 3.4 Prospective and approved Foster Carers and Adopters receive an invitation to attend Fostering and/or Adoption Panels and systems to seeking feedback from carers routinely has been developed and is being embedded.
- 3.5 Further consultation with Foster Carers and Adopters is planned to take place in May 2014 to inform service development.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 There are prescribed targets and timescales for achieving permanence plans for children and these are measured annually through the adoption scorecard. Progress on this and the priority areas identified will be reported in the annual fostering and adoption report to the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

## **5. Comments from Executive Director, Resources**

- 5.1 Financial implications

### **Fostering Financials**

- 5.1.1 In-House Fostering Fees - 2013/14 forecast

At period 8, forecast spend for all foster fees (including family and friends and transport costs) was £3,174,000 against a budget of £3,695,000, an underspend of £521,000. This has arisen because the number of carers is significantly lower than expected – actual predicted for 2013/14 is 190 carers based on average bed nights, against a target of 234. For 2013/14 it had been assumed that the base position for 2012/13 would be improved by 23 new carers, however the reality is that numbers have decreased steadily since 2011/12 when the actual number of carers based on average bed nights was 245.

### **Adoption Financials**

- 5.1.2 Adoption Improvement grant (AIG) 2013/14

Coventry received £1.1m for 2013/14 as part of the Government's drive to address the backlog of children awaiting adopters as well as supporting wider improvements in

adoption support services. Of this, £420k is ringfenced, and £643k is non-ringfenced. Ringfenced grant has been utilised to ensure appropriate resources are available to meet the demand for adopters, developing new innovative ways of finding adoptive families improving support and reducing assessment times and developing capacity within the adoption teams.

### 5.1.3 Adoption Support Budget 2013/14 – financial support for adopters

At period 8, forecast spend is £728,000 against a budget of £721,000 – overspend of £7k.

### 5.1.4 Inter-Agency budget

At period 8, forecast spend is £147,000 against a budget of £298,000 – underspend of £151,000. £29,000 of this spend has been resourced through the AIG for inter-agency adoption fees. Most children have been placed with Coventry approved adopters. There has been robust profiling of children through a range of medians including advertising where internal adopters are not available. The underspend is also due to income generated from the placement of children by other local authorities with Coventry adopters.

## 5.2 Legal implications

National Minimum Standards stipulate that the executive side of the local authority, receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months; Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users; satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration. Regulations require that each local authority compiles a Statement of Purpose that must be kept under review. National minimum standards stipulate that the review must be at least undertaken annually.

## 6. Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The Family Placement Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a fostering, adoption and other permanent placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting – that of securing appropriate family placements for 'Looked After Children' (LAC), as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

Without an effective and timely Fostering and Adoption Service, Coventry's Looked After Children would stay in care longer, and/or potentially be placed further away from the city in costly other agency placements. This risk is being managed through the delivery of the Fundamental Service Review of Fostering and Adoption, which is examining how to increase the number of children adopted each year effectively.

### 6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Increasing the numbers of internal foster carers and children placed in permanent arrangements, such as adoption and Special Guardianship will reduce the need for more costly external placements.



#### 6.4 Equalities/EIA

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment was undertaken as part of the Fundamental Service Review in 2012.

#### 6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

#### 6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Councillor Jayne Innes	Deputy Cabinet Member		27.03.14	28.04.14

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[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendix 1

### Summary Recommendations of the Adoption Inspection and Action Taken

1.	<p><b>Ensure the life story book is given to the child and prospective adopter at the latest by the second statutory review of the child's placement with the prospective adopters; and the completed life story book at the latest within ten working days of the adoption ceremony.</b></p> <p><b>Action: In progress</b></p> <p>A monitoring system is place and is robustly tracked by team managers on a monthly basis. Progress against completion of life story work within the required timescales is challenging. Resources have been identified to address the backlog and this will be monitored and reviewed as appropriate.</p> <p>Training for life story work has been provided in 2013 and further training is to be commissioned in 2014. A short working group has been established to strengthen the guidance and toolkit for completing life story work and books which will report in May 2014.</p>
2.	<p><b>Ensure the agency helps individuals comply with the agreed contact arrangements; with specific reference to ensuring an effective and efficient system is developed.</b></p> <p><b>Action: In progress</b></p> <p>The transferring of the post adoption records from the manual system to Protocol has been explored. At present, this is not possible due to system functionality. This is being progressed with the system supplier. In the interim, a spreadsheet has been produced and a manual audit and transfer of over 150 arrangements is in progress and will be completed by end of April 2014.</p>
3.	<p><b>Develop a stronger focus, within the recruitment strategy, on the recruitment of adopters, and target people from a wider range of backgrounds than is currently the case.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b></p> <p>The recruitment strategy has been strengthened to ensure a stronger focus on Adopters. This was signed off by the Recruitment and Retention Steering Group in January 2014. The strategy is updated every quarter to align this with the children requiring adoptive families.</p>
4.	<p><b>Ensure where these timescales have not been met in relation to cases, the panel records the reasons in the written minutes of the panel meeting.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b></p> <p>The Chair of the Panel and Panel Advisor have reviewed the recording of panel minutes.</p>
5.	<p><b>Ensure that the adoption panel provides a quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to panel and whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b></p> <p>The newly appointed Chair, Ms Brothwick, has agreed a reporting template and will this will provide a report every six months and the first of these reports was presented at the end of March 2014. Adoption Decision Makers have noted that the</p>

	quality of reports has improved.
6.	<p><b>Ensure any advice panel gives, for example about the age range of children the prospective adopter should be considered for, is not recorded on the minutes as a recommendation (The Adoption and Children Act Statutory Guidance 2002 Chapter 1, paragraph 1.20)</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> The Chair of the Panel and Panel Advisor have reviewed the recording of panel minutes and these now comply with the recommendation.</p>
7.	<p><b>Ensure the child's birth parents are informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working day</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> Social Workers have been briefed and systems have been reviewed to ensure those parents are notified in writing. Compliance with this requirement will be audited in October 2013.</p>
8.	<p><b>Ensure a guide to adoption support is provided to the child when support is being provided</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> A guide has been developed, amended in the light consultation with young people and practitioners and is now published.</p>
9.	<p><b>Ensure a full record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for staff are maintained on staff personnel files; with specific reference to ensuring that the record made during interviews regarding any gaps of employment are transferred to the staff member's file before the record is shredded.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> The process for recording any gaps in employment to the staff member's file for staff recruited by the service are in place.</p>
10.	<p><b>Ensure that the arrangements for staff to access specialist advice needed to provide a comprehensive service for children are developed through permanent agreement; this is with specific reference to the arrangements with health services.</b></p> <p><b>Action: In progress</b> Access to timely specialist advice and timeliness of medicals is compromised by the increase in demand and in August 2013, interim funding was secured. The recommendation was reviewed with the CCG and Local Authority and a report will be presented to the Joint Commissioning Board in May 2014.</p>
11.	<p><b>Ensure that evaluative monitoring of all records kept by the service takes place; with specific reference to: improving the quality of the data for children and adopters' timescales; complaints; reports to panel; the quality and content of children's and other files relating to adoption.</b></p> <p><b>Action: In progress</b> Work has already commenced to transfer recording into the electronic system for all active and new cases. This will ensure better data quality. This work will continue to progress over the next 6 months by which time it is envisaged that the adoption</p>

	process and monitoring will be on the electronic system.
12.	<p><b>Ensure the premises are suitable to enable the agency to meet its Statement of Purpose; with specific reference to ensuring suitable rooms are available for panel attendees to wait in and for social workers to carry out therapeutic work with children.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> Adoption Panel is now booked in council meeting rooms, these rooms provide quality meeting and waiting areas. Family friendly rooms for Social Workers to carry out therapeutic work with children are being made available within Children's Centres.</p>
13.	<p><b>Ensure Ofsted is notified of any revision of the Statement of Purpose within 28 days. (Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 Regulation (4)(a) and (b)).</b></p> <p><b>Action: Completed</b> The statement of purpose was approved on 15 October 2013 by the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) and was sent to Ofsted on 22 October 2013.</p>