

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	23rd September 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 9999
TITLE:	Update on Adoption Reform Agenda;	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 This reports seeks to update the Scrutiny Panel on the actions of the Local Authority in response to the Government's recent focus on improving the recruitment of prospective adopters and the increased placement of young children in care into Adoptive placements. The Government has challenged all Local Authorities to improve performance in this area.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 There are no specific recommendations attached to this paper, it is tabled for the purposes of up-date and discussion.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

3.1 None.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 The statutory background for this report takes account of the current Adoption Reform Agenda proposed by the Government in March 2012, and taken in conjunction with the Local Governments statutory responsibilities to young people "looked after" by the Local Authority to provide permanent, safe and stable placements where appropriate in accordance with the Children's Act of 2004.

4.2 The report also takes account of the Family Justice Review undertaken by the Government and published last year. This review sets out the need to significantly reduce the length of time the Courts take in hearing Care Proceedings, allowing

decisions on the permanent placement of young children to be made in less than 26 weeks.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The National Context; In March 2012 Government findings highlighted that 4,600 young people across the country had the potential to be adopted. These findings also highlighted the under recruitment of Adopters, and an overall pattern which underlined that a small shortfall of adopters in the majority of Local Authorities contributed to the overall significant shortfall in the country as a whole.
- 5.2 There is considerable variance in adoption practice across the country. The research commissioned by the government for its review of adoption practice highlighted that 25% enquiries by potential adopters were turned down at the first point of contact. At the time of the research 1 in 6 Local Authorities had stopped recruiting as they had sufficient adopters for the numbers of children awaiting adoption in their area. Of the 182 Adoption Agencies across the UK, the average number of new adopters recruited and approved each year is 17. This is viewed by the government as being too few. Feed-back from prospective adopters contained within the research used by the government highlighted a significant variability between agencies with the perception of un-necessary barriers to approval/recruitment.
- 5.3 Local Context; Bath and North-East Somerset Council have already taken a number of positive steps towards meeting the challenges posed this agenda. We have met with a number of regional Local Authorities to form a regional Adoption consortium called "Adoption West". The authorities comprising "Adoption West" are; Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, North Somerset and ourselves.
- 5.4 The aim of the Adoption West consortium is to develop a larger, more uniform response to both prospective adopters, to speed-up the process of placing children for adoption and crucially, the matching our cohort of children that for a variety of reasons are "hard to place".
- 5.5 A company called IPC have been commissioned to scope how effectively these Local Authorities can work together to share resources across the region. Their initial work will explore and outline ways in which the consortium might respond to any increases of demand in certain geographical areas, which will enable informed decision making and levels of collaboration.
- 5.6 The government has also provided each Local Authority across the Country with a grant to assist in reducing the time it takes to make placements for the young people identified as needing adoptive placements. We have utilised this grant to train staff in some of the changes to the adoption processes which have been implemented to speed up the assessment of prospective adopters, as well plans to recruit a Case Manager, who will work with Social Workers to ensure that we meet the new 26 week time-limit on care proceedings. The case manager will quality assure court statements, liaise with the child's Guardian, Solicitors and court staff to ensure plans remain on track and that deadlines are not missed.
- 5.7 There are also a number of local events which are already planned which will develop the strategic aims outlined in this paper. In October we will be holding a stakeholders event with IPS to update partners on the development of "Adoption

West” and to explore ways in which other agencies can contribute to the progression of these changes. In September we will be meeting with a number of other Local Authorities to begin planning a regional “Adoption Activity Day” which will involve all prospective adopters in the region being invited to a large event where they can access details and information on children that are awaiting placement and can also talk with foster-carers and Social Workers directly about the children who await placement with adoptive families. This is a new approach to matching children and we hope that this contributes to the overall reduction in delay for young people for whom adoption is appropriate.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The rationale is set out and contained within the preceding sections and links to the Government's stated desire to increase and speed-up the process of placing children with adoptive families.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 Not Applicable

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Details of this report have been discussed with the Adoption Team.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	<i>Adoption and Permanence Monitoring Report 2012-13.</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	