



Social Care Services Board
16 March 2017

Fostering and Adoption Services

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services

To scrutinise Adoption Agency and Fostering Service activity as presented in the Adoption Agency Report and Statements of Purpose for both services

Introduction:

1. For both Adoption and Fostering services, the Statements of Purpose and the Adoption Agency annual report highlight the breadth of activity which the services undertake serving the needs of looked after children who require care when they cannot live with their birth family, including services when a permanent alternative family is needed, whether through adoption, special guardianship or long-term fostering.
2. Both descriptive and performance data is provided to support the committee in performing its scrutiny role

Adoption Agency Annual Report

3. The Adoption Agency Annual report is a statutory report that provides information on the services provided through our Adoption service. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires that Local Authority Adoption Agencies present regular reports of agency activity to Elected Members.
4. The Adoption Agency was inspected as part of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services that took place in October 2014. Adoption is a sub-category of the main inspection and as such receives its own grading. Surrey's Adoption service was rated as Good.
5. Adoption performance of local authorities is monitored by the Department of Education and a National Adoption Leadership Board through an annual scorecard and performance table (including rankings for the 152 authorities).

6. 37 looked after children were matched with adopters. 27 of these children were placed with adopters approved by Surrey and 10 with adopters approved by another adoption agency (to ensure the best match for the child).
7. 51 adoption orders were made through 2015 / 16 (some of these children would have been placed with their adoptive families during the previous year, with the formal order sought following an appropriate settling in period).
8. Most children were placed following legal action on the part of the local authority, which is a reflection of modern day adoption, with very few birth parents requesting adoption for their children. In 2015-16 no children were adopted as a result of parental request.
9. 33 applications were approved as prospective adopters, including heterosexual couples, single adopters and same sex couples.
10. 6 children were adopted where they had initially been placed through Foster2adopt, an approach whereby approved adopters assume care of a child under fostering regulations, with the intention that if care proceedings confirm the plan for adoption then the placement will change to an adoptive placement without the need for the child to move. This approach carries more uncertainty for the prospective adopters as the outcome of care proceedings is not set at the start, but it does allow for significant improvements in stability for the child if confirmed.
11. The Adoption Panel meets regularly to ensure that matches of children with adopters are heard in a timely way, and adopters approved. The demands on the panel members are high given that each case requires reading several hundred pages of background reports on the children and prospective adopters as well as attendance at a half day meeting when the cases are considered. An independent chair, professional and lay members, the agency adviser and panel administrators all work together to ensure that panel operates smoothly and effectively and that recommendations are reached.
12. A significant element of work within the Adoption service is focused on how we support families post-adoption, knowing that as children grow up support and help may be needed at different times. Since the creation of the national Adoption Support Fund in May 2015, we have made 67 successful applications to the fund between May 2015 and March 2016, providing access to funding for timely and accessible therapeutic support for families.

Adoption and Fostering Statements of Purpose

13. The Statements of Purpose for both Fostering and Adoption services are produced to meet statutory requirements.
14. For the Adoption service, the Statement of Purpose is produced in line with the requirements of the Adoption and Children's Act 2002, Adoption Agency regulations (2003, 2011), Adoption Support Regulations 2005 and National Minimum Adoption Standards 2011.

15. For the Fostering service the Statement of Purpose is completed to meet the requirements of Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
16. Both Statements of Purpose incorporate a statement of principles which underpin the work of the services, outlines of activity, management and staffing and accountability
17. The Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose outlines the process for prospective adopters and the various stages of information, training and assessment they will work through as well as providing performance information.
18. The Statement of Purpose can be read in conjunction with the Annual report to provide a comprehensive overview of the service.
19. The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of our Fostering Service and sets out our strategy for meeting those aims and objectives.
20. It outlines the services provided and the staff who work within the service.
21. At the end of March 2016 the Fostering Service had 357 approved foster care households caring for a total of 403 children. There were also 108 young people over the age of 18 years, continuing to live with their foster carers under Staying Put arrangements.
22. Staying Put is a national initiative to support young people to remain with their foster carers post-18, recognising that children who are looked after are all too frequently required to move to independence many years before their peers, with poor impact on their future achievements and progress. Young people who can remain with their carers will receive good support as they complete their education and move on to higher or further education or employment.
23. We continue to need more foster carers and the service is currently developing a refreshed Recruitment and Retention strategy for foster carers, building on the strengths of our offer for Surrey carers whilst recognising the need to review our allowances and support to ensure they are keeping pace with other agencies and authorities.
24. In March 2016 an internal audit of the administrative and financial elements of the foster care service had been completed by Corporate Audit. The audit's finding was of Unsatisfactory with 27 recommendations (including 12 of high priority) needed to be addressed. The service has addressed these findings and a follow up audit in January 2017 has moved to a finding of 'Some Improvement Needed' with three medium priority recommendations to be completed. Two of the recommendations relate to ensuring the up to date maintenance of a spreadsheet pending the implementation of an electronic system of

record keeping for the Fostering Service and one is related to confirming the wording of the insurance policy guidance for foster carers. These are being actioned.

25. It is a top priority for our Corporate Parenting Strategy to support more children to be able to be placed in Surrey, close to their communities, and the service works to support the recruitment and retention of a range of carers to provide the placements our children need. As part of this work, Surrey County Council has become a Fostering Friendly employer and was successful in September 2016 in receiving the award of Fostering Friendly employer of the year from The Fostering Network.

Conclusions:

26. Both Adoption and Fostering Services are working to ensure they provide a high-quality service that is tailored to the needs of our looked after children in Surrey.
27. Both services are meeting their regulation requirements and standards.

Recommendations:

28. The Board is asked to receive and scrutinise the Adoption Agency annual report and the Statements of Purpose for the Adoption and Fostering Services and consider what recommendations it would wish to make.

Next steps:

To implement any recommendations as required.

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Sources/background papers:

Annex A - Adoption Agency Report 2015 – 2016
Annex B - Mid-Year Report of the Adoption Agency April –Sept 2016
Annex C - Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose
Annex D - Fostering Service Statement of Purpose