

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Corporate Parenting Panel
2.	Date:	2 nd July 2014
3.	Title:	Fostering for Adoption
4.	Directorate:	Children and Young People's Services

5. Summary

This report informs members about the new Government led Fostering for Adoption initiative and the progress being made implementing it in Rotherham.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Panel:

6.1 Note the overall aims, benefits and risks of Fostering for Adoption

6.2 Note the good progress being made in developing Fostering for Adoption in Rotherham

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Fostering for Adoption

7.1.1 Fostering for Adoption is a Government led initiative aimed at enabling local authorities to place children whose plan is most likely to be adoption with their future adoptive parents at as early a stage in the care planning process as possible. Currently, in standard adoptions from care, local authorities are restricted by legislation from placing a child for adoption until after the court proceedings have been completed and the child has been made subject to a Placement Order.

7.1.2 Fostering for Adoption, enabled by amendments to legislation which took effect from July 2013, sets out an alternative route to adoption, in which approved adopters can also be approved as foster carers for a named and matched child early on in a child's journey. This allows the child to be placed with the dual approved carers as a foster placement well in advance of the point at which they can legally be placed for adoption.

7.1.3 The very significant advantage here is that this enables the child's early attachments and relational world to be developed with the adults who will become his or her forever parents, and avoids the disruption caused to those attachments and the child's relational world when, as in standard adoptions, the child spends significant time in a foster placement before being placed with adopters.

7.2 Identifying The Children to Whom Fostering for Adoption Might Apply:

7.2.1 There are a range of circumstances which may suggest that in planning for children whose plan is likely to be adoption, placing them on admission to care or very early on in their care journey with carers who are approved for both adoption and fostering might be the best child centred plan.

7.2.2 However, in the first instance, it is essential that the local authority has fully explored its responsibilities to engage the birth parents and the wider family in identifying solutions, and placement options have been properly discharged and fully evidenced. These are set out in the pre-proceedings requirements of the Public Law outline and Section 22C of the Children Act 1989.

7.2.3 Where these have been explored and no options have been realistically identified then Fostering for Adoption may apply, most typically in one of the following circumstances:

- **Where parents have had one or more children previously placed for adoption or other forms of permanent placement and the evidence suggests that their circumstances have not changed and they pose the same risks as they did to the previous child/ren. The local authority does not have a pro-active plan to rehabilitate the child as the circumstances of the parents are such as to pose a serious on-going risk.**

- **Where this is the first child, the circumstances of the parents and the risks to the child are such that there is no pro-active plan to return the child to the birth parents or to other family members.**
- **Where parents have indicated that they may want their child adopted, but have not formally consented. (S52(3) Adoption and Children Act 2002)**

7.2.4 Consideration and identification of children who may be suitable for Fostering for Adoption in Rotherham will initially take place at the Multi-Agency Support Panel (MASP). Social workers presenting cases seeking approval for issues of concerns meetings or legal proceedings should address in their report whether or not the child or children may be suitable for Fostering for Adoption. Where the presenting social worker is recommending a child as suitable for Fostering for Adoption, their report must contain evidence that the circumstances of the case match one of those detailed above.

7.2.5 It is essential that the birth parents are consulted about their views on such a placement and wherever possible their cooperation established. (See The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review statutory guidance 2010, paragraph 2.31) above.

7.3 The Adopters' Route to Fostering for Adoption

7.3.1 The adoption service will advise and train prospective adopters about Fostering for Adoption, so that they are fully aware and informed early on in the process that this may be an option for them. The information and training will include:

- What the objectives of Fostering for Adoption are
- In what circumstances it might apply
- What the process is for becoming a dually approved carer
- What the benefits and risks might be

7.3.2 The prospective adopter assessment will prepare and assess those interested to undertake the Fostering for Adoption role. This will include:

- Exploration of the capacity of the prospective adopters to manage the emotional and practical tasks of being foster carers for a child until and if placement for adoption is agreed by the court.
- Advising and testing the prospective adopters understanding of the nature of a possible Fostering for Adoption placement, their potential role as foster carers in such a placement, and their understanding of the possibility of the court deciding to pursue an alternative plan to adoption.

7.2.3 Applicants interested in Fostering for Adoption will have the assessment report of their suitability to adopt (Prospective Adopters Report) presented to the adoption panel in the standard way, as per other prospective adopters. The role of the

adoption panel is to make a recommendation about whether the applicants should be approved as adopters. The adoption panel cannot make a recommendation about the applicant's suitability to be approved foster carers.

7.2.4 Where applicants have expressed an interest in Fostering for Adoption this should be included in the Prospective Adopters Report and noted by the panel. The Agency Decision Maker for Adoption will also take note of those interested in Fostering for Adoption when deciding on the suitability of applicants who have been to panel.

7.4 Linking a Child Suitable for Fostering For Adoption with Approved Adopters Who Have Expressed an Interest.

7.4.1 Where a child has been identified by the social worker and MASP as suitable for Fostering for Adoption, the child's social worker will immediately discuss the child with the adoption service with a view to identifying any approved adopters interested in Fostering for Adoption who may be a suitable match for this child. In some circumstances it may be appropriate and in the best interests of the child for exploratory discussions to take place between the child's social worker and the adoption service in advance of a MASP decision, where this would facilitate a more timely plan being implemented for the child.

7.4.2 Where the discussions detailed above have taken place, and subsequently the team manager responsible for the child's case and the adoption team manager have agreed that the match between the child and approved adopters interested in Fostering for Adoption is a good one, the proposed fostering for Adoption placement will need to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption.

7.4.3 The adoption social worker who has undertaken the Prospective Adopters Report will provide an additional Reg 25A assessment report to the Agency Decision Maker (using the template form to be provided/drafted) which evidences that the requirements of regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (see amendment regulations 2013) are met, to include the following:

- Evidence that the most appropriate placement for the child is with a person who is not approved as a local authority foster carer, but who is an approved adopter
- Evidence that it is in the child's best interests to be placed with the proposed Fostering for Adoption prospective adopters
- Evidence that the approved adopters are suitable to care for the child as foster parents
- Evidence that the proposed arrangements will safeguard and promote the child's welfare and meet her needs as set out in the care plan.

7.4.4 The adoption social worker and social worker for the child will also complete a matching report, which will need to address the issues relevant to matching for a fostering placement and for a likely adoption placement when and if a Placement Order is made. (Template Report Form to be drafted using adoption matching report form)

7.4.5 The Agency Decision Maker for Adoption is required to consider approving the adopters as temporary foster carers for the named child under regulation 25A(Care Planning, Placement, and Case Review Regulations 2010). The Agency Decision Maker will do so through considering the Prospective Adopters Report, The Reg 25A assessment report and the Fostering for Adoption matching report.

7.4.6 The Agency Decision Maker must be satisfied that the adopters meet the requirements of Regulation 25A and that there is sufficient evidence of this in the assessment reports provided to her. Once the Agency Decision Maker has made a decision to approve a Fostering for Adoption placement, the child's social worker can proceed to place the child with the carers as a foster placement. The child's social worker should strive to follow the usual standards of good practice in introducing (if appropriate and where time allows) and placing the child.

7.4.7 Whilst the child remains with the carers as a looked after child in a fostering placement, the adoption social worker will take the role of a supervising social worker to the carers. The carers will need to care for the child as foster carers, working with the care plan and the on-going assessments and care proceedings, and being mindful of who holds parental responsibility and what if any authority for decisions is delegated to them as foster carers.

7.4.8 As the care planning process continues, the plan for adoption for the child will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption in the usual manner. Following the child being made subject to the should be placed for adoption decision, the child's social worker will apply to the court for a Placement Order

7.4.9 Once a Placement Order is granted the social worker for the child and the adoption social worker will need to take the match for an adoption placement between the child and the Fostering for Adoption carers to the adoption panel for consideration. The social workers will need to provide for panel a completed matching report inclusive of evidence of how the child and family match up from the relationship that has developed thus far in the foster placement, the most recent looked after children review on the child, and the Child Permanence Report and Prospective Adopters Report.

7.4.10 While the adoption panel will have the advantage of direct evidence of the quality of the placement of the child with the carers from prepared reports, 'its role is still to make a recommendation about a placement that is fundamentally changing its legal and psycho-social status from foster care to adoption. In that sense the role of

the panel is not to 'rubber stamp' that which has already happened but to openly and supportively explore what has happened and what might need to happen.'

7.4.11 Following a recommendation at panel on a proposed adoption match, the match will need to be considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker will be familiar with the case having already considered the Child Permanence Report, the Prospective Adopters Report, and the Reg 25A report earlier in the care planning process.

7.4.12 Where the Agency Decision Maker approves the match for adoption, the status of the placement of the child with the Fostering for Adoption carers can change from that of a foster placement to being an adoption placement. The child's social worker must be clear with all relevant parties about the date on which the legal status of the placement changes to an adoption placement and this must be clearly and accurately recorded.

7.4.13. There will not be the usual requirement to plan introductions and a placement day but a planning meeting should still be held after the decision has been made to clarify the new status of the placement and the implications of this for the child and prospective adopters, including any changes to the exercise of delegated authority or contact arrangements, for example.

7.4.14 From this point onwards the child's placement for adoption will progress as for all other adoption placements towards a future court date and the making of an Adoption Order.

7.5 Progress in Developing Fostering for Adoption in Rotherham

7.5.1 A policy for and process about the implementation of Fostering for Adoption has been drafted and agreed, the details of which are set out above.

7.5.2 As at 23.6.14 one child has been placed with Fostering for Adoption carers, with the case having followed the process set out above.

7.5.3 .As at 23.6.14 three adoptive families have expressed a desire to offer a Fostering for Adoption placement for a child. This is in addition to the one family already caring for a child as a Fostering for Adoption placement.

8. Finance

8.1 There are no projected additional costs associated with establishing and developing the Fostering for Adoption initiative. Placements costs for Fostering for Adoption placements will be offset by the equivalent cost of placing a child in a standard foster carer household.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 Approved adopters who go on to take a Fostering for Adoption placement will do so on the understanding that if the local authority plan for adoption changes or the Court does not agree with the local authority plan for adoption, then the child will be moved to an alternative placement or return home to parents or birth family. This presents the risk to adoptive families that they bond with a child with the expectation that the child will be part of their family forever only to find that the child has to move on.

9.2 For children, Fostering for Adoption provides an opportunity for them to be placed with their forever family much earlier than otherwise and potentially in some cases at birth. This promotes the development of early attachments for the child with adoptive parents and reduces the number of placement moves a child may experience. In effect Fostering for Adoption transfers the risk of delayed placement with a forever family and placement moves for a child from the child to the risk for adult adopters taking on a child whose plan may subsequently change away from adoption.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

10.1 The Government is very keen for local authorities to develop Fostering for Adoption placements. The Ofsted inspection framework states that for an authority to be judged as good, they must be making progress on developing Fostering for Adoption placements.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

11.1. None

Paul Dempsey,
Service Manager, Family Placements and Residential
01709 823444
Paul.dempsey@rotherham.gov.uk