

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>20<sup>th</sup> January 2015</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Fostering to Adopt/Early Permanence Placements</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Children and Young People’s Services</b>

### **5. Summary**

This report updates members on the progress implementing Fostering to Adopt in Rotherham.

### **6. Recommendations**

**It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Panel:**

**6.1 Note the overall progress the service has made in developing and implementing Foster to Adopt/Early Permanence Placements in Rotherham.**

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### **7. Proposals and Details**

#### **7.1 Background**

**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. Previously, in standard adoptions from care, local authorities were restricted by legislation from placing a child with adopters until after the court proceedings have been completed and the child has been made subject to a Placement Order. A report was presented previously to Corporate Parenting Panel setting out what Fostering

For Adoption was and advising of Rotherham's approach and progress in implementing it. **In this report, points 7.1 to 7.4 inclusive repeat some of the information contained in the first report about what Fostering for Adoption is and the process in Rotherham, to remind panel members. Up to date information about our progress with this initiative is detailed at point 7.5.**

**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 to becoming adopted. This allows the child to be placed with the dual approved carers as a foster placement well in advance of the point at which a court would grant a Placement Order and therefore well in advance of when 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.

**7.1.4** The term, 'Fostering for Adoption' to describe this initiative/process has proved confusing to some, especially members of the public. Over the last year the Government and professionals locally and nationally have begun to use the term 'Early Permanence' and 'Early Permanence Placements', to describe this process and the placements that result from it. In line with this development, we in Rotherham shall now start to use the new term of Early Permanence instead of Fostering for Adoption.

## **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 most 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 an Early Permanence Placemet 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 Early Permanence in Rotherham initially takes place at the Multi Agency Resource Panel (MASP). Social workers presenting cases seeking approval for issues of concerns meetings or legal proceedings are expected to address in their report whether or not the child or children may be suitable for Early Permanence. Where the presenting social worker is recommending a child as suitable for an Early Permanence Placements, 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 an Early Permanence Placement**

**7.3.1** The adoption service advises and trains prospective adopters about Early Permanence, 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 includes:

- What the objectives of Early Permanence is
- 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 prepares and assesses those interested to undertake the Early Permanence role. This includes:

- 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 Early Permanence 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.

**7.3.3** Applicants interested in Early Permanence 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.

**7.3.4** Where applicants have expressed an interest in Early Permanence 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 Early Permanence when deciding on the suitability of applicants who have been to panel.

## **7.4 Linking a Child Suitable for Early Permanence with Approved Adopters Who Have Expressed an Interest.**

**7.4.1** Where a child has been assessed as suitable for an Early Permanence Placement, the child's social worker will work with the Adoption Team to identify a link with an approved adoptive family who have expressed an interest in Early Permanence. Where a link is identified, written reports must be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption to approve the placement of the child with the prospective adopters as a foster placement. If in agreement, the Agency Decision Maker is effectively approving the prospective adopters as foster carers for the named child under Regulation 25(a).

**7.4.2** The placement will only legally become a placement for adoption once assessments have been completed and presented to court, the court has granted a Placement Order, and the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker have subsequently approved the match of the child and the family as an adoptive placement.

## **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/Early Permanence has been in place for some time. The details of this are summarised above. Given that professionals and professional bodies locally and nationally are now referring to Fostering for Adoption as Early Permanence

Placements, we have recently decided that we will adopt this terminology in Rotherham, as discussed above in 7.1.4

**7.5.2** As at 12.1.15 a total of three children have been placed in Early Permanence Placements.

**7.5.3** Of the three Early Permanence Placements made to date, all have so far been successful and all three children have since had their plans for adoption endorsed by the court, and the legal status of all three placements is now that the children are legally 'placed for adoption'.

**7.5.4** Of the three Early Permanence Placements, one was the placement of a child with an older sibling of theirs who had previously been adopted by the adoptive family. This means the child was enabled to be placed with their older sibling and start developing a relationship with them, as well as with the adoptive parents, at an earlier stage in their life than would otherwise been possible without the Early Permanence initiative.

**7.5.5** Of the three adoptive families that have taken the Early Permanence Placements so far, two were second time adopters. Their feedback indicates that they are very positive about adoption via the Early Permanence route compared to the first time they adopted in the traditional way, having the child placed only after the court process had been completed. Both couples cite the benefits of having the child placed with them sooner and at a younger age and being able to build relationships and attachments earlier as key advantages. The third adoptive family involved have also been very positive about Early Permanence.

**7.5.6** Currently there are a further two children who have links with Early Permanence adopters identified. We are anticipating one of these placements being made in January and one in February.

**7.5.7** The Adoption Service in Rotherham is working with the Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium to continue to develop Early Permanence regionally and in Rotherham. The consortium have offered training on Early Permanence and this has been attended by a number of staff from Rotherham including, the Service Manager, Family Placements and Residential services, our two Adoption Team Managers, and locality Children's Social Work Team Manager and a Principal Social Worker in the Adoption Team.

**7.5.8** All of the staff who attended the consortium training plus two additional Adoption Team Social Workers have been identified as Early Permanence 'Champions', tasked with promoting and developing Early Permanence in Rotherham.

**7.5.9** Workshops/learning sets on Early Permanence have been provided by the champions identified above to several social work teams across the service and these sessions will be rolled out further.

**7.5.10** One of the more complex areas to manage in Early Permanence Placements is that of contact between the child and the birth family. Unlike in standard adoptions, where the court process has been completed and direct birth family contact with the child has been terminated, children placed in Early Permanence Placements continue to have direct contact with their birth family at least until the final court hearing. Early Permanence Champions in the Adoption Team will be meeting with the services Contact Team to discuss these complexities and how best to manage them and support adoptive families.

**7.5.11** It was noted both verbally and in the writing in the recent Ofsted Inspection Report that the service was making good progress with delivering Early Permanence Placements.

## **8. Finance**

**8.1** There are no projected additional costs associated with establishing and developing Early Permanence. Placements costs for Early Permanence Placements will be offset by the equivalent costs avoided from not having to place a child in a standard foster carer household.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

**9.1** Approved adopters who go on to take an Early Permanence 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, Early Permanence 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 Early Permanence 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 Early Permanence Placements. The Ofsted inspection framework states that for an authority to be judged as good, they must be making progress on developing Early Permanence (although the inspection framework uses the terminology of Fostering for Adoption).

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

### **11.1. None**

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