

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

9 July 2013

ADOPTION DIAGNOSTIC

Report of the Head of Safeguarding

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Corporate Parenting Board on the outcome of the Adoption Diagnostic carried out by Core Assets and BAAF in April 2013 and to provide members with the draft action plan, which has been developed in response to the findings of the recent Adoption Diagnostic Assessment.

2. Background

- 2.1 Sunderland has a very strong track record on adoption, including adoption of older and hard to place children. A very successful adoption inspection in February 2013 was judged to be 'Good' for 'Overall Effectiveness' and each of the four sub-judgements with the exception of 'Quality of service' which was considered to be 'Outstanding'.
- 2.2 Despite this positive endorsement of the service, concern remained about the timelines of adoption overall, but particularly whether permanence is considered early enough in the child's journey.

3. Adoption Diagnostic

- 3.1 In April 2013, Core Assets / BAAF were therefore invited to undertake an Adoption Diagnostic Assessment in Sunderland. The primary focus of the diagnostic was to concentrate on the start of the permanence / adoption process with a subsidiary aim of challenging the whole journey timescales in order to identify where delay arises.
- 3.2 During their time in Sunderland the assessors:
- Held interviews with a range of key internal and external stakeholders in the adoption process (e.g. Senior Family Court Judge, CAFCASS Service Manager, Chair of the SSCB)
 - Held focus groups with teams involved in the child's journey (e.g. IRT, IROs)
 - Observed a 'Children Waiting' and Matching meeting
 - Reviewed key documents
 - Examined five cases
- 3.3 At the end of the diagnostic the assessors presented their key findings to senior managers and the Lead Member. An initial action planning session was held immediately after the presentation, which has informed the subsequent draft action plan.

4. Key findings and improvement actions

4.1 Within the 'Management Summary' of the final report (see appendix 1), Core Assets / BAAF made the following comments:

"Sunderland City Council is an authority that has much to be proud of in its adoption practice, especially its commitment to finding families for those children in its care that many local authorities might not consider 'adoptable'. It is rightly concerned about the timeliness of adoption overall, but particularly whether permanence is considered at an early enough stage. Given that timescales in this year have not seen significant improvement, the Council is seeking a new perspective on what might be the causes of delay and what service improvements might be effective in 'turning the curve'.

It does seem to be the case that bringing forward questions about how a child's long term future might be secured into the very early stages of engagement with a family (even in the first 24 hours was suggested at the workshop) could help to embed permanence into the culture of your planning for children. One particular area to develop near to the front end of the process would be Family Meetings (not necessarily a full-blown Family Group Conference model) so that the resources and potential of the child's birth family are understood, non-viable options are ruled out and possible carers fully assessed at an early stage.

There are other stages at which delay could be addressed, especially by using a wider range of family finding techniques to improve the chances of harder to place children (those who are older, are to be placed with siblings or have a disability) being matched and placed with adopters more quickly.

After falling below the thresholds in the 2012 Adoption Scorecard, Sunderland started its own analysis, has had confirmation of much good practice from the Ofsted inspection of adoption and is now keen to use the adoption diagnostic assessment to further pick up the pace in securing permanent futures for children.

4.2 Core Assets / BAAF suggested the following 'Ideas and Opportunities' to support improvement:

- Family Group Conferencing – Family Meetings
- Review PDRs
- Targeted Recruitment Campaigns
- Update Procedures
- Embed Permanence in Early Assessments
- Activity Days
- Adoption Parties
- Improve Profiling of Children
- Develop 'Foster to Adopt'

5. Action Plan

5.1 An action plan (see appendix 2) has therefore been drafted to take forward the ideas and opportunities suggested by Core Assets / BAAF, and address other issues raised throughout their time on site and within the final feedback presentation and report. The action plan is centred around four key areas:

- Vision Strategy and Leadership
- Managing Resources
- Assessment and Planning
- Family Finding and Matching

6. Appendices

6.1 Sunderland City Council Adoption Diagnostic Assessment – Final Report

6.2 Draft Adoption Diagnostic Action Plan

