

Report of the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services, to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 13 January 2016.

Subject:

Adoption & Fostering of Sibling Groups - Update

Summary statement:

This report provides an update on the request to the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to develop a Policy regarding the Adoption and Fostering of sibling groups who are in the care of the Local Authority.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services



1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the request to the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to develop a Policy regarding the Adoption and Fostering of sibling groups who are in the care of the Local Authority, made by Members at the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 14 January 2015.
- 1.2 Completion of this task remains outstanding; however, the report provides an update detailing the reasons for the delay in completing a Placing Siblings Policy and the work being undertaken to inform the Policy, with a timescale for completion.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A report was previously presented at the Corporate Parenting Panel on 14 January 2015, outlining performance in relation to placing sibling groups in fostering and adoptive placements.
- 2.2 The report identified that as a general principle, the Local Authority would want to place siblings together in recognition of the fact that sibling relationships are likely to be the most enduring of family relationships. However, the report also recognised that there are times when it is appropriate to place siblings apart; and that there are many factors which can affect the final decision to place sibling groups together or not, including the individual pathway into care, the ages and individual additional needs of the children, and the attitude of social workers, foster carers, Magistrates, Judges and Guardians. The report advised that decision-making concerning placing siblings together or apart should be informed by a comprehensive assessment of the sibling relationships.
- 2.3 The report set out an action plan for improving practice in relation to placing siblings. Actions included focus in 3 areas:
 - Placing Siblings Policy
 - Training for social workers
 - Training for foster carers
- 2.4 The recommendation of the previous report on the Adoption and Fostering of Sibling Groups was for the Assistant Director (Children's Specialist Services) to be requested to develop and promote a clear policy on the Adoption and Fostering of sibling groups. This was agreed by Members, who also requested that a progress report in relation to the Policy be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel six months after implementation.
- 2.5 The development of a policy is an outstanding task; however, this report provides an update outlining the reasons for the delay and the work being undertaken to inform such a policy.



3. REPORT ISSUES

- 3.1 Further to the request from the Corporate Parenting Panel, the learning from a dynamic audit which was undertaken by the Permanency Working Group and which focused on the placement stability of looked after children, was analysed by the Placement Stability Group. This is a multi-disciplinary group, which is led by David Byrom, Group Service Manager, and whose aim is to improve performance in relation to the stability of looked after children.
- 3.2 The dynamic audit focused on a small cohort of looked after children who had experienced placement breakdowns. 6 of the 10 randomly selected children were part of a sibling group. The audit identified a need for a greater focus on placement stability for siblings, and within that, the importance of effective assessment to determine whether or not siblings should be placed together in fostering or adoptive families. The Placement Stability Group highlighted the value of developing a Placing Siblings Policy 'from the ground up', to increase social workers' skills in assessing and analysing sibling relationships.
- 3.4 To that end, a toolkit has been developed and is currently being piloted. It is based on the BAAF assessment "Siblings: Together or Apart" and was developed by an in-house Chartered Psychologist. The toolkit ensures that social workers use an evidence-based approach to assessing sibling relationships and facilitates the gathering of information under 4 headings:
- Strong reasons for separating siblings
 - Circumstances which make it difficult for siblings to be placed together
 - Protective factors which make placing siblings together more likely and sustainable
 - Formulating an opinion or recommendation
- 3.5 The toolkit is underpinned by e-learning on Attachment Theory and its application to practice. To date, 134 members of staff/carers across Children's Specialist Services (including social workers, foster carers and residential childcare workers) have completed the training, with a further 16 part-way through the course.
- 3.6 A Working Group, which includes representatives from the Adoption and Fostering Unit, Independent Reviewing Officers, Children's Social Care, and Family Centres, has been tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of the toolkit and the quality of assessments undertaken using it, and will meet to review the outcomes of the pilot in February 2016. The findings of this group will inform the Placing Siblings Policy, which will then be completed, with a view to implementation from April 2016

4. OPTIONS

None.



5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The development of a Placing Siblings Policy contributes to the strategic priority of supporting and safeguarding the most vulnerable adults, children and families, and links to the Placements element of the Journey to Excellence Change Programme.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the update on progress in relation to developing a Placing Siblings Policy set out in Section 3.

7. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. APPENDICES

None.

