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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a good practice review of innovative approaches to fostering and adoption practice. The NFER research team carried out 34 telephone interviews with a selection of local authority officers, councillors and staff from partner organisations. Interviews were carried out in April and May 2012.

This document provides case-study reports on seven councils' approaches. It will be of interest to lead members, councillors and local authority officers with an interest in or responsibility for fostering and/or adoption. A brief summary of each council's approach is outlined below:

Bournemouth Borough Council

The Access to Resources Team (ART) uses a business model to support social workers with placement matching and the administrative aspects of placing looked after children. This small team helps social workers find suitable placements, negotiates better prices and has made financial savings for the council.

Cambridgeshire County Council

Cambridgeshire County Council has recently commissioned Coram (a charitable organisation) to provide strategic leadership in: embedding best practice, including early permanence planning; work with the judiciary; and exploring the viability of establishing concurrent planning for children under two years.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

The Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP) programme is an evidence-based approach based on the principles of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). KEEP is a 16-week

course supporting mainstream foster carers of 5-12 year olds. This has led to increased placement stability and reduced out of borough and residential placements, offering a saving for the council.

Norfolk County Council

To enhance and improve fostering provision, Norfolk County Council has taken a business model approach to introducing a number of programmes of change. These include: developing a dynamic purchasing system and introducing an intensive foster care programme for children with complex needs through partnerships with another council and a local charity.

The Independent Fostering Agencies Collaborative Project

A consortium of 11 councils in the south east of England collaboratively purchase foster care placements from the independent sector. Although only recently established, this approach is expected to achieve substantial cost savings and increase quality and choice of foster care placements.

Tri-Borough London Councils

Driven by a desire to improve quality, enhance collaborative working and create efficiency savings, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster have formed the first tri-borough for children's services in London. There is one Fostering and Adoption Service across the councils, split into four teams.

City of York Council

The Staying Put programme in the City of York is designed to enable young people and foster carers to extend their existing foster placements post 18 years, up to the age of 21 and to provide additional support for young people moving out of care.

Placement Matching	The Access to Resources Team (ART) uses a business model to support social workers with placement matching and the administrative aspects of placing looked-after children. This small team helps social workers find suitable placements, negotiates better prices and has made financial savings for the council.
Type of authority:	Unitary
Established:	2009
Contact details:	Gill Bishop, Service Manager for Family Support and Placement Services, Gill.Bishop@Bournemouth.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

The ART¹ team adopts a procurement and commissioning model, deploying team members' expertise in two areas: placement finding or contracts management.

Placement finding

When a child is identified as needing a placement, ART colleagues with experience in social care, work with in-house and independent providers to develop a list of potential care plan options. Once a list of suitable placements is identified (usually two to three, even with short notice placements), the ART team gives the information to the child's social workers for their final decision on the care plan. For children with complex needs, a virtual team, comprising education, social care, health and other professionals working with the child, meet virtually to make the placement decision and decide the service funding arrangements. The ART team acts as the broker and intermediary service in these instances.

Contracts management

ART colleagues with expertise in contractual and financial management are responsible for taking the administrative burdens away from social workers. They negotiate competitive and consistent prices within and across agencies, set up contracts and frameworks and manage contract notification periods.

Monitoring and quality assurance process

The ART team also manages a rigorous monitoring and quality assurance process. It conducts gap analyses and provides trend data; collects placement and profile information on all looked-after children and uses this information to better plan and manage placements. Weekly meetings are held between ART, the in-house foster care team manager, Looked-after Children (LAC) manager and the residential care manager where all looked-after children are discussed. At the earliest opportunity, it also helps the team identify: where children or carers need additional support; where a placement looks unstable, and; where alternative provision may need to be found.

In addition, ART holds routine provider meetings and, where necessary, 'challenge' or 'disruption' meetings with carers, or Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), where provision is not to the desired standard or when a placement breaks down. Furthermore, regular reports are given to the council's senior management team.

Benefits of approach

Numerous benefits of the ART approach were reported which positively impacted on children, foster carers, social workers, team managers, and IFAs. Overall ART has helped to:

- improve the council's understanding of its looked-after children population and foster carers through its monitoring and data analyses

- enhance the choice of foster carers through in-house and independent provision
- ensure better placement planning and matching supported by weekly meetings
- improve placement stability, reduce placement disruptions and breakdowns
- reduce the pressure on social workers by taking away the need for them to find placements, thus enabling them to 'do social work'
- provide a more effective, consistent and efficient service between in-house and independent carers
- create an open, honest and transparent system for managing, supporting and developing in-house and independent foster carers supported by regular monitoring reports and meetings
- promote an environment of shared learning and improved standards as the council and IFA have learned from each other
- generate financial savings of around £300,000 over 15 months through better contract management, placement matching and reduced placement breakdowns.

Issues and challenges

Very few challenges of the ART approach were reported and where they were, they related to practical issues around individual children and families (such as placing large sibling groups or babies) rather than difficulties with the approach or its processes. One area of concern, however, related to some independent foster carers approaching the council about joining the council in-house team. Whilst, on the one hand, this could be seen as a positive, the council noted that it did not want to be seen to be 'poaching' independent carers, as the ART team

worked very hard at ensuring an open and transparent relationship between the council and IFAs.

The future

The team is likely to expand and develop into other areas in the future and the model is often discussed at service improvement meetings. As yet, there are no confirmed plans in place, but this could include, for example, the ART approach being used to support young people transferring from children's social care to adult services or supporting the council with care proceedings.

Advice for other councils

When asked what advice they would give to other councils thinking about adopting ART, interviewees said councils need to:

- ensure they know their local market
- be clear about the drivers for change
- assess whether ART will help resolve local issues
- ensure senior managers and social workers are committed
- learn from other councils that have adopted and refined the model
- have clear processes and policies and consider pooling budgets.

1 Buckinghamshire County Council, West Sussex County Council, Sheffield City Council, Peterborough City Council and the London Boroughs of Enfield, Hackney, Lambeth and Tower Hamlets have also adopted an ART approach.

Concurrent Planning	Cambridgeshire County Council has recently commissioned Coram to provide strategic leadership in: embedding best practice, including early permanence planning; work with the judiciary; and exploring the viability of establishing concurrent planning for children aged under two. Coram is a charitable organisation which has run concurrent planning projects since 1999.
Type of authority:	County
Established:	Late 2011
Contact details:	Barbro Loader, Coram–Cambridgeshire Adoption Partnership Manager, Barbro.Loader@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

Working in partnership with Coram

The overall aim of the partnership between the council and Coram is to improve early permanency planning and reduce delays in achieving permanent placements for children.

An adoption service manager, appointed jointly by the council and Coram, has a core role in driving improvements and the work with the judiciary. This post is funded by the council for the two-year duration of the programme of work. The manager and other senior adoption staff are involved from the early stages of permanence planning, and the manager chairs a permanency monitoring group comprising heads of service.

Concurrent planning

The council is also exploring the viability of a **concurrent planning** process and has begun to recruit carers. Concurrent planning is a care option for children aged up to two years where a period of foster care is anticipated during the care proceedings and where adoption is expected to be the most likely outcome. Concurrent planning places children with foster parents who have also been approved as suitable adoptive parents ('concurrent carers') at the start of court proceedings.

Benefits of approach

The partnership, and addressing the practicalities of concurrent planning, are in their infancy. The factors perceived to be crucial to embedding best practice include:

- utilising Coram's established adoption support framework
- having access to a dedicated concurrent planning team's expertise to complement the council's own practitioner teams
- involving senior managers at an early stage of permanency planning, so that they have an overview of all the children coming through the system and can better plan family-finding strategies.

Delays and working with the judiciary

At the start of the partnership, Coram analysed current processes and outputs in the adoption service. This identified that some delays in the system are related to the judicial process and confirmed the need to **work more closely with the judiciary**. To this end, the council has organised a meeting with members of the local judiciary², to discuss how to improve communication and collaboration and thereby reduce delays for children.

Issues and challenges

The council reported few challenges in establishing the partnership. Where these were reported, they generally related to managing change. Through workshops with staff, the council made it clear that

Coram's role would be supportive and advisory only and that services would be kept in-house. This also gave the opportunity for the council to share learning about the pros and cons of concurrent planning.

The council faces some resource considerations in developing their approach. These will include the need for staff to liaise closely with Coram's concurrent planning team; running training sessions for council adoption personnel and contact supervisors; and the recruitment and proactive support of concurrent carers.

The future

The partnership is at an early stage of its planned two-year duration. Its continuation will depend on the results of an internal evaluation scheduled for 18 months into the agreement. Currently, the council is drawing on Coram's expertise to help establish its carer recruitment strategy.

Advice for other councils

The council had the following advice for other councils which may be considering providing actions to address delay including concurrent planning, and/or bringing in consultancy:

- Councils should consider whether concurrent planning is the right approach for their local communities and whether it will have the desired impact.
- Compared to traditional fostering and adoption routes, concurrent planning is a more complex way of working and, therefore, requires dedicated resources, particularly in supporting the carers.
- While a council could establish concurrent planning independently, external agencies can offer expertise and support. To make the relationship work, councils need to be open to ideas and new ways of working.
- A multi-disciplinary approach is essential; in particular, it is necessary to work closely with the courts.
- Senior management should initiate an honest dialogue with staff at all levels and at an early stage to clarify intentions around a potential partnership with a non-statutory agency, and should proactively seek to address any concerns quickly.

2 The meeting is to be jointly hosted by the council's leader and a High Court judge, and will include representatives of the local judiciary, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), and Children's Services.

Foster Carer Training	The Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported and Trained (KEEP) programme is an evidence-based approach based on the principles of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). KEEP is a 16-week course supporting mainstream foster carers of 5-12 year olds. KEEP works to support foster carers to manage children’s behaviour more effectively. This has led to increased placement stability and reduced out of borough and residential placements, offering a saving for the council.
Type of authority:	Metropolitan
Established:	2009
Contact details:	Jane Prashar, Head of services for children’s resources. Jane.Prashar@dudley.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported and Trained

Building on their success with MTFC, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council was one of five councils successfully appointed by the government to pilot the KEEP programme³ which began in 2009. KEEP provides foster carers with in-depth training over a 16-week programme. The groups of up to 12 carers meet every week for around two hours and the sessions are facilitated by KEEP trainers. KEEP is designed for mainstream foster carers rather than those dealing with the more complex cases that require MTFC. The KEEP programme runs over a shorter time span than MTFC, so it is more accessible. The training focuses on shaping children’s behaviour by introducing rewards.

The fostering social work team make the majority of referrals to KEEP but the programme also incorporates family and friends carers. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council have four facilitators who run the training and one of them is now certified to be able to deliver KEEP without consultation from the training provider, Oregon. The council is currently working with their eighth KEEP group (roughly 80 carers in total through its lifetime) and their aim is for every carer they are working with to complete the programme. The KEEP programme is complementary to the work of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team and carers are often involved with both methods of support during their time as a carer.

Benefits of approach

There were numerous benefits of the KEEP programme which positively impacted on children, foster carers and the council. Overall KEEP has helped to:

- reduce children’s problem behaviour which has reduced placement changes and increased placement stability which is beneficial for the child and also is cost-effective for the council
- keep children within the borough which prevents children being moved away from their roots and reduces costs for the council
- improve children’s educational outcomes
- support foster carers to parent more therapeutically, understand the child’s needs better and manage their behaviour more effectively
- create happy confident carers by bringing them together in a supportive environment and making them feel valued
- recruit additional carers to working in the council and increase retention.

Issues and challenges

As the KEEP programme is a defined evidence-based programme, the council have not experienced that many challenges. However, as the KEEP programme was developed in America, Dudley Metropolitan

Borough Council found some cultural differences but they were able to adapt this appropriately. In addition, as it is a 16-week programme it has been difficult to fit around school holidays without having a large break but the council have run overlapping groups to help with this.

The future

The council are involved in piloting a training programme for adopters called ADOPT based on the principles of KEEP which will be rolled out in the autumn across four boroughs of the Black Country. Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell will be working together as a consortium to pilot the programme. This particular programme has been commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and the national implementation team from Oregon social learning centre. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council have also supported these three other boroughs to develop their own KEEP programmes which will be starting in spring/summer 2012. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council are also expanding their KEEP programmes within Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to work with 3-6 year olds and adolescents so that all age groups are covered.

Advice for other councils

When asked what advice they would give to other councils thinking about adopting KEEP, interviewees said councils need to:

- recruit the right people, from carers to social workers, with wide experience and the enthusiasm towards the KEEP model
- ensure staff trained to deliver the programme will stick to the consistency and continuity of the programme
- ensure that social workers are highly skilled and experienced for this work, particularly in the areas of attachment, child development and brain science and they must be able to communicate at the right level for the carer rather than using jargon
- build on existing good practice rather than changing everything
- make sure that KEEP is embedded in the fostering team and not an 'add-on' within staff training and development or through CAMHS provision
- integrate fostering and adoption services across the different council agencies so that they can work together.

3 London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Oxfordshire County Council, Solihull Council and West Sussex County Council were also part of the pilot programme for KEEP. For international research on KEEP please see <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2676450/>

Commissioning	To enhance and improve fostering provision, Norfolk County Council has taken a business model approach to introducing a number of programmes of change. These include: developing a dynamic purchasing system and introducing an intensive foster care programme for children with complex needs through partnerships with another council and local charity.
Type of authority:	County
Established:	Late 2011
Contact details:	Justin Rolph, Strategy and Commissioning Manager for Corporate Parenting, Justin.Rolph@norfolk.gov.uk

Overview of the approaches

In 2011 Norfolk County Council sought to increase in-house fostering placements and reduce out of county and residential care placements. This was in response to a decline in the availability of in-house foster placements and a series of financial cuts. To this end, Norfolk County Council introduced two new main initiatives: developing a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) and introducing an intensive foster care programme.

A Dynamic Purchasing System

The DPS is an **electronic process for setting up and maintaining a list of foster care providers.**

The aim of introducing the DPS was to rate Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) on a league table based on quality and cost. IFAs are scored on their recruitment of new foster carers and Ofsted ratings for placement stability. Driven by a desire to be at the top of the league table, this has encouraged IFAs to recruit more suitable foster carers and drive up standards. Since introducing this system, the council has gone from regularly using around six IFAs, to 15 approved providers, which has seen an increase in foster carers with placement availability.

Commissioning complex placements

Secondly, Norfolk County Council took a decision to focus on providing 'mainstream' placements in-house but to commission complex placements through an 'intensive foster care' programme. This is currently being developed using the efficiency savings made through the introduction of the DPS and is being

targeted at 11-16 year olds. The intensive foster care programme will have two main projects starting in the autumn 2012: firstly, a partnership with a charity called Break and secondly, working with Suffolk council, providing Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). Both programmes will support foster carers of children with complex needs.

Break is a local charity that helps vulnerable children and young adults. Its support services including short break provision, mental health support, training and mentoring. Break, working with the council, will train eight foster carers specifically to be therapeutic foster carers. MTFC is an international evidence-based approach which gives special attention to young people with more complex needs but who do not require residential care. Through the programme, and supported by the national MTFC team, foster carers receive training in social learning theories and behaviour management.

Benefits of approach

Numerous benefits of introducing the DPS were reported. These include:

- offering greater placement choice for children with a range of different needs
- increasing foster carers by 117 per cent
- reducing residential and out of county placements helps children maintain links with their community, as appropriate and creates financial savings

- saving an average of £5000 for each looked-after child through changes to external block commissioning.

In addition, potential benefits of working with Break and adopting an MTFC approach were reported. These include:

- the MTFC programme focuses on children's specific needs which will help improve their life chances, educational outcomes and family relationships
- foster carer numbers increasing as a result of enhanced recruitment strategies and packages of support, reducing the need for residential placements
- council staff will develop new skills (including social learning techniques) which will improve social service provision for children and foster carers
- Norfolk County Council will share learning by working with another council and local charity and gain support from the national MTFC team.

Issues and challenges

Few issues and challenges of the approaches were reported. Those reported related to:

- the MTFC programme having a long lead-in time, however, that meant the council had time to thoroughly plan, prepare and introduce the changes to staff
- staffing problems, including organisational restructures, maternity leave and sickness
- ensuring foster carers, especially those with children with the most complex needs, are well supported within current financial budgets.

The future

Norfolk County Council has a clear commissioning plan for the next three years which frames their work. This includes enhanced and regular monitoring and evaluation procedures. The DPS, for example, will be updated quarterly and will provide information on which IFAs are most often commissioned. In addition, there are plans to conduct a review of foster carers to see if they are being utilised in the most efficient way. Finally, Norfolk County Council is also looking to expand provision within the intensive foster care programme.

Advice for other councils

When asked what advice they would give to other councils thinking about restructuring their fostering services, interviewees said councils might like to consider:

- assessing local needs and developing an appropriate programme of change
- if considering adopting a DPS model to develop capacity of foster carers, councils should have a clear commissioning plan
- employing a skilled procurement team who can help with legal processes and a skilled project manager
- developing relationships with partner agencies and other councils to share services and practice whilst ensuring that terms of reference and lines of accountability are agreed
- ensuring model fidelity for the MTFC programme, accessing support from the MTFC team.

Consortium Approach	A consortium of 11 councils in the south east of England collaboratively purchase foster care placements from the independent sector. Although only recently established, this approach is expected to achieve substantial cost savings and increase quality and choice of foster care placements.
Type of authority:	Unitary
Established:	April 2012
Contact details:	Sam Ray, Safeguarding Commissioning sam.ray@southampton.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

Eleven councils comprising Southampton City Council, Hampshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Surrey County Council, Slough Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council took the proactive decision to design and implement a collaborative approach to independent foster agency (IFA) procurement.

Reducing cost and improving quality

The ambition of the collaborative approach is to reduce the cost and improve the quality of independent foster care placements. The councils generally use in-house foster care arrangements which tend to be more competitively priced and locally sited, but have used IFA provision to meet a recent rise in demand for placements.

Sharing roles and responsibilities

Around two years ago, the consortium started with five councils. An additional six joined in late 2011. Across the **11 councils**, the approach has been fully consultative with one council taking a lead role on individual elements of the project. Southampton City Council led on procurement, Oxfordshire County Council managed communication and Hampshire County Council developed the specification, for example. Although one council led a specific work stream, all councils were involved in offering feedback and finalising policy and procedures.

Commissioning

In terms of commissioning, the consortium invited IFAs to tender for a placement on the framework. Successful IFAs have been placed on to three frameworks: general placements, parent and child placements, and placements for disabled children. Each framework has a ranked distribution list of all of the providers, which are arranged into two or three tiers on the basis of quality and cost. As all IFAs have an Ofsted rating of good or above, 80 per cent of the mark for the second stage of the tender process was based on cost.

When a placement is needed and to prevent delay, referrals are sent to providers across all tiers. Where tier one placements are identified as being suitable, these are considered above lower tier providers. The aim is to incentivise IFAs to give the best price and improve quality, led by a desire to be in the top tier of a framework.

Management and monitoring

The consortium appointed a project manager to ensure that the model runs smoothly. The project manager acts as both a point of contact for providers and the councils, sharing information and looking for trends and issues in performance.

The approach is supported by thorough monitoring arrangements. These include: providers completing and submitting a quarterly standardised electronic monitoring form; annual meetings between providers and councils; and regular monitoring visits to placements. Providers' performance is measured through a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) and provider forums have been set up to share good

practice. Monitoring processes are succinct and only information that the councils will use to measure performance is collected.

Benefits of the approach

The new approach has increased the quality and choice of foster care placements, fostered collaboration between councils and providers, and promoted workforce development. Specific benefits of the approach include:

- developing councils' and providers' understanding of what 'good' care placements look like, managing expectations, and managing placements to ensure that they improve outcomes for young people
- providing a more transparent commissioning approach and improved relationship between the councils and providers due to having a clearer set of rules of engagement
- increasing opportunities for councils and providers to share effective practice through participating in development, review and monitoring processes
- facilitating communication between partners. Providers welcomed meeting with council officers in person and having a named contact person in the consortium
- streamlining collaborative working through using shared quality monitoring processes

The new approach is expected to generate an average saving across the consortium of 5.4 per cent in the first year.

Issues and challenges

An element of competition between providers in councils and agencies was reported. The new approach has helped to reduce this and build more constructive relationships, but the competition is still apparent. Finalising the approach to the procurement process between all 11 councils was also identified as

a challenge, particularly around agreeing legal documentation and the time commitment required.

The future

Over the coming months, the consortium will refine the monitoring processes and finalise the information-sharing protocol. Discussions are underway to expand the model in other areas of work, such as the residential care sector. The possibility of including other councils in the collaborative procurement model is also being considered, but they will be unable to join until the model has been running for three years. At that point, the consortium will evaluate the model and determine its future size and format.

Advice for other councils

Interviewees would give the following advice to other councils considering implementing a similar collaborative model for procuring foster care placements:

- Consider the budget and the local market, what influences them, and how they might change over time. This can be achieved through conducting a thorough, succinct and timely needs analysis.
- Appointing a project manager to lead the collaborative model and provide a main point of contact can save time and money in the long term.
- Raise staff awareness of the rationale for change, and promote the benefits, to prevent misunderstanding when developing and implementing such models.
- Build an open and honest business relationship with IFAs.
- Ensure that all tendering documentation is clearly worded and contains all of the necessary information. Queries arising from unclear documentation can lead to delays in implementing practice changes.

Consortium Approach	Driven by a desire to improve quality, enhance collaborative working and create efficiency savings, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster have formed the first tri-borough for children's services in London. There is one Fostering and Adoption Service across the councils which is split into four teams.
Type of authority:	London Councils
Established:	2012
Contact details:	Sally Pillay, Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption Services, sally.pillay@lbhf.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

The Tri-Borough Fostering and Adoption Service's priority is to find permanent placements for all children in their care. It aims to:

- place all children with in-house foster carers
- increase the pool of prospective adopters and reduce the time children spend waiting for a permanent placement
- enhance placement choice and better matching of needs for all its looked-after children
- prevent post placement breakdown or disruption through support for carers, adopters and children

Reducing competition for carer recruitment

Instead of competing for the same carers and having different arrangements with providers, the merged service enables the Tri-borough service to use economies of scale to develop and improve practice. The service comprises four teams: Recruitment and Assessment; Duty and Placement; Connected Persons; and Permanence and Post-order. Each team has a manager and dedicated team that specialises in its given area.

Recruitment and Assessment Team

A dedicated Recruitment and Assessment Team works with potential foster carers and adopters from an initial enquiry through to approval. They target recruitment at specific types of carers as determined by local need. This team aims to increase the pool of carers and adopters and create better placement matches.

Duty and Placement Team

The Duty and Placement Team offers dedicated support, training and supervision to carers. They work hard to retain carers and provide stable placements.

Connected Persons Teams

In the three councils, the Connected Persons Teams were small and undertook a range of Family and Friends work. The merged team consolidates the remit of the Connected Persons work into one service whereby the team undertakes all assessments, supervision and support of approved Connected Persons Carers. The team is also involved in the Family Court Proceedings Pilot which aims to reduce the timescale for concluding care proceeding to six months.

Permanence and Post-order Team

The Permanence and Post-order Team has two key responsibilities. The Permanence Team has the remit for special guardianship, long-term fostering, residence orders and adoption. When a child is identified as probably not being able to return home, all locality teams refer or consult with the Permanence Team at this early stage. The team supports with parallel planning to reduce delay in achieving permanence for looked-after children. The team also helps birth parents whose children are being adopted or being placed in special guardianship. The Post-order Team provides support for adoptions and special guardianship support plans; for adopted adults; access to records; intermediary services and events and support seminars for adoptive families.

Benefits of approach

Anticipated benefits of the approach include:

- an enhanced pool of foster carers and adopters which will support better placement matching, improved placement stability and fewer placement breakdowns leading to better outcomes for children and carers
- a single enhanced referral and assessment procedure which improves the process for social workers, carers and children and enables earlier, faster and better planning discussions with permanence teams
- improved training and support for foster carers and adopters, including specialist support for kinship (or 'connected') carers
- social workers providing a more consistent and quicker response as a result of having a wider pool of carers
- shared learning between the councils for both strategic and operational staff
- financial savings through a reduced reliance on independent providers.

The concept of a shared service has been aided and supported by local political leaders and enhanced by the appointment of a single Director of Family Services for the three councils. Another factor that helped to facilitate change was ensuring staff had an opportunity to participate in the design of service improvement plans. Consultation and participation work-stream groups were set up to support this. These enabled staff to share ideas about similarities and differences in practice and culture and collectively take the best aspects of each council's practice forward in the new plans. For example, one council has a well-established and excellent Family Group Conference practice which is now being shared as a model across the tri-borough service.

Issues and challenges

Minor issues and challenges of the approach were noted. Generally these related to reorganisational issues, such as combining three councils' ways of working, cultures and practices into one approach. To help overcome this challenge, the differences between the councils were acknowledged at the outset. Staff consultations also helped to share information, manage expectations and provide staff with an

opportunity to actively contribute their views. Despite these efforts, managers had to support staff through uncertain times to ensure staff remained motivated and service delivery and performance were not lost as a consequence of the changes. Furthermore, difficulties and delays in setting up the infrastructure (IT and phone systems) proved challenging in ensuring the team had access to appropriate information and systems to deliver the service.

The future

The tri-borough service plans to enhance the progress and developments achieved to date by ensuring that staff and carers remain committed and feel supported. Additionally the service hopes to ensure that staff who carried out generic social worker roles previously, maintain their skills, knowledge and relationships in their new specialist roles. There are plans to promote and develop working with partners, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and virtual schools, across the councils. Furthermore, the service is currently looking at developing their quality assurance systems and looking at creative ways to seek service user feedback.

Advice for other councils

When asked what advice they would give to other councils thinking about adopting a shared service approach, interviewees said councils need to:

- carry out a thorough needs analysis to ascertain where local needs are not being met and consider a suitable approach to meet these
- at the outset, dedicate sufficient time for discussions between the different councils; this will help develop the approach and establish strong foundations from which to build
- provide time to consult with strategic managers, frontline staff and carers
- ensure partners, such as CAMHS and virtual schools, are involved in early conversation and take them on the journey too
- ensure the infrastructure (finance systems, IT and telephones) is discussed and understood early; furthermore, ensure that it is in place and working before merging services, practice and co-locating teams.

Extended Care	The Staying Put programme in the City of York is designed to enable young people and foster carers to extend their existing foster placements post-18 up to the age of 21 and to provide additional support for young people moving out of care.
Type of authority:	Unitary
Established:	2008
Contact details:	Mary McKelvey, Service manager, Family Placement Team. Mary.McKelvey@york.gov.uk

Overview of the approach

The City of York Council was one of eleven councils to be part of the Staying Put pilot programme⁴ which began in 2008. The government's funding for Staying Put ran for three years and the City of York Council has continued to fund the programme by incorporating it into their budget.

A family-based approach

Each pilot council was able to develop their own Staying Put programme and the City of York Council chose to take a family-based approach, consulting with foster carers and young people. This meant that foster carers continued to receive payments directly from the council, rather than young people receiving the money themselves in the form of benefits. This prevented the foster carer role becoming more like a landlord and ensured that the young person was still treated as a member of the family.

Consultation with carers and young people

Through the consultation with young people and foster carers they also developed an information pack about Staying Put which was on a memory stick. This gave the young people a chance to find out about the programme at their own pace. Young people were visited by their accommodation officer and link worker where they were able to discuss if they were interested in joining the Staying Put programme. During Staying Put, young people receive regular reviews. When they have decided to leave the placement they also have an exit interview.

National evaluation

Staying Put was evaluated by The Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University, in collaboration with the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) in a report published in 2012⁵ and the findings showed that the percentage of young people in full-time education at 19 was double for those who had stayed put in comparison with those who had not been part of the scheme.

Benefits of approach

There were numerous benefits of the Staying Put programme reported which positively impacted on children, foster carers and the council. Overall Staying Put in York has helped to:

- give young people more stability and support, as well as flexibility and choice in their lives
- prevent young people becoming homeless after leaving a placement at 18
- improve life chances and educational outcomes for young people including supporting more young people to go to college, university or into employment
- give young people the time to make decisions about their future and plan where to live
- ensure that carers can support the young person as part of their foster family until they are able to be fully independent
- save the government from paying out benefits for these young people in most cases.

Issues and challenges

Staying Put had received positive feedback from both young people, foster carers and the council. However, a few challenges were identified as follows:

- there may need to be a renegotiation of roles for the foster carer and young person as they move into adulthood
- calculating a payment system for Staying Put was complex with the need to ensure payments remained in budget, were sustainable and were reasonable
- Staying Put has meant that some foster carers who would have been available for a new placement when the young person left home are not taking on new placements (however, the council has used Staying Put funding to appoint a 0.5 full time equivalent post to support recruitment of new carers).

The future

The council are planning on continuing to run the Staying Put programme. In addition, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have been asked by the council to examine provision for children on the edge of care and services for young people leaving care, so services in these areas may be further developed in the future.

Advice for other councils

When asked what advice they would give to other councils thinking about adopting the Staying Put model interviewees said councils need to:

- keep the model simple and avoid involving the benefits system where possible
- consult with a council that has already implemented Staying Put to get advice
- consult with family placement staff and foster carers to gain their perspectives before implementation.

4 Devon, Dorset, Hertfordshire, Hillingdon, Lincolnshire, Nottingham City, North Tyneside, Reading and Warwickshire were also part of the Staying Put pilot from July 2008–March 2011.

5 Please see <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR191> for more details.

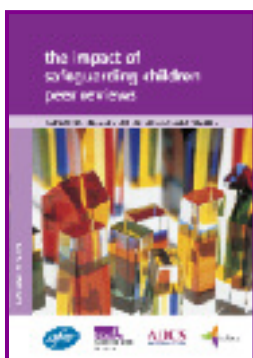
Further information

For further information about the research, please contact Claire Easton, NFER Research Manager, by email at: c.easton@nfer.ac.uk

Download the full research report at:
<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGFP01>

Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at: www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/



The impact of safeguarding children peer reviews

The safeguarding peer review approach appears to be suitably flexible to allow authorities in intervention and those who are not, to achieve a successful outcome. This qualitative study included telephone interviews with LA officers, councillors and staff from partner organisations. The report explores the impact of peer reviews for LAs in intervention.

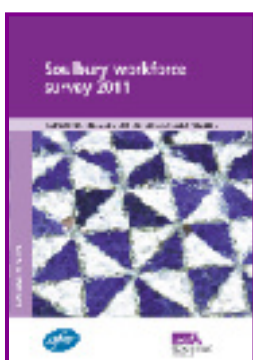
www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGIS01



Alternative provision for young people with special educational needs

This study explores the ways in which young people with SEN access and engage in alternative provision. Based on interviews with young people and staff from five local authority areas it explores the interface of alternative provision and SEN and illustrates effective features in commissioning, delivery and monitoring of alternative provision for this group of learners.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/APSN02



Soulbury workforce survey 2011

The findings from the Soulbury Workforce Survey 2011 show the current pay levels, recruitment and retention issues and characteristics of the workforce, which includes education improvement professionals, education psychologists and young people's/community service managers. The picture presented largely reflects the budgetary changes, workforce restructures and other demands on local authorities over the last two years.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SCWS01

For more information, or to buy any of these publications, please contact: The Publications Unit, National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ, tel: +44 (0)1753 637002, fax: +44 (0)1753 637280, email: book.sales@nfer.ac.uk, web: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications.

Across England, councils with their partner organisations are looking at ways in which they can provide high quality and timely foster care and adoption services whilst managing increased numbers of looked after children and budget cuts.

This case study report outlines seven councils' models of fostering and adoption practice. Each case study summarises:

- the model of working
- its benefits and challenges
- the actual or anticipated impact of their work.

It will be of interest to policy colleagues, elected members and professionals working in fostering and adoption services.