

## Government Proposals regarding Fostering and Adoption.

### Purpose of the report and Summary

This report explains some of the changes the Government want to make to the way fostering and adoption services work.

The Government want to make it easier and faster for children to be placed in families. In order to do this they have looked at the ways we approve people to be either foster carers or adoptive carers. This report includes the suggestions the Government have for making it simpler and faster to approve people to foster and adopt. At the moment these changes are suggestions and the Government has asked for local authorities to feedback what they think of the suggestions.

Lancashire County Council will be giving feedback to the Government on these suggestions.

### Key Information and Questions for Board Members

There are currently more than 1400 children and young people who are looked after by Lancashire County Council.

At the end of September 2012, 523 of the children and young people were placed with Lancashire's own foster carers.

At the end of September 2012, 131 children were awaiting an adoptive placement.

### Background

The Government has suggested the following changes

- A new, shorter, two stage training and assessment process for prospective adopters;

It is suggested that there would be two stages to the assessment of adoptive carers. Stage One would be a two month initial training and preparation stage and will start when a prospective adopter says they are interested in adopting. At Stage One all checks to make sure the person is of good character and has not harmed children will take place. If everything is okay at Stage One the assessment would go to Stage Two. Stage Two will be the main assessment and should be finished within four months.

People who have already adopted children or who have fostered children will not need to complete Stage One.

- A fast-track procedure for previous adopters and approved foster carers;

If someone has already been a foster carer they will not need to go through the same assessment again to move to a different fostering agency. For example if a foster carer from a private agency want to join Lancashire's fostering service we will no longer need to get two references, we can just ask the agency for a report. We will also be able to look at previous reports and use the information from them.

- Increasing the use of the Adoption Register;

There is a national register that all adoption services can use to find children who need adoptive families and adoptive families who want children. The new proposal is that if adoption services have not been able to find a family for a child, or a child for a family within three months they must register their children and families on the register and allow other areas to help match children and families together.

- Requiring the use of a matching agreement between adoption agencies and approved prospective adopters;

Adoption agencies must agree with approved prospective adopters a matching agreement which says what the adopter will do and when to search for a child for who would make suitable match, and how the agency will provide support.

- A 'Fostering for Adoption' proposal;

Fostering to adopt means that we can approve someone as a foster carer and as an adoptive parent. This means that the child can be placed with the carer before the decision for them to be adopted has been made in court. The child will not then need to move once the adoption decision is made. In Lancashire we already have started to do this.

- Restricting the size of adoption and fostering panels;

It is planned to make the adoption and fostering panels much smaller. There would be no more than five people at a panel, but no less than three.

- Changes to the sharing of case records between fostering services and adoption agencies;

Changes are proposed to allow adoption agencies to share adopter or prospective adopter's case records with a fostering services or another adoption agency who they are to foster or adopt.

- Changes to the approval process for foster carers;

The plan is to make the assessment process for foster carers much the same as for adopters. There will be two stages, all the checks to make sure someone is safe to foster will take place at Stage One.

- Changes to requirements around delegation of day-to-day decision making to a child's foster carer.

This is to make sure that when a child or young person is placed in foster care everybody knows what the foster carer can and can not agree to. This includes things like school trips, sleepovers, haircuts etc.

### **Decisions required**

There are no decisions required. It is asked that the board note the proposed changes.

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