



executive summary

a good practice overview of fostering and adoption activity

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Background

Councils are continually developing their services for children, young people and families. Across England, councils are looking at ways in which they can provide high quality and timely foster care and adoption services. Arrangements are being developed both within and across councils and with partner organisations, with the aim of supporting the achievement of the best outcomes possible for looked-after children. Alongside such arrangements, there is a drive to continue to develop innovative ways of ensuring an adequate supply of suitable carers. With this in mind, the Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a good practice review of innovative approaches to practice.



Purpose and aim of the study

The aim of this study is to provide information on existing models of practice that would be useful to other councils considering adopting a similar approach in their own fostering or adoption services. The study focuses on three key areas:

- the benefits and challenges of approaches
- how models of working might be refined in the future
- any actual or future impacts expected through the new models of working.

The research team identified examples of good practice, carrying out a desk review of council websites, specialist journals and examples already collected by both the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) .

This was followed by a series of case studies, selected to offer a cross-section of council type, region and different types of practice and length of involvement in their given area.

Key findings

Approaches to fostering and adoption

Whilst a variety of approaches were taken in structuring and delivering fostering and adoption services, ultimately all councils wanted to improve looked-after children's outcomes. In addition, they wanted to: improve the pools of carers available for both foster and adoptive placements and the support offered to them; improve service provision and front-line practice; and reduce delays in finding children an adoptive family.

What works well

Interviewees reported numerous benefits associated with their council's approach to fostering and adoption services. Generally, positive impacts of the approaches related, firstly, to the council and its partners; secondly, to service managers and frontline staff and thirdly, to children and their carers or adopters.

Issues and challenges associated with councils' approaches

Generally, councils were positive about their fostering and adoption approaches and, therefore, reported relatively few issues and challenges associated with these. However, where they were reported, they commonly related to:

- communicating with stakeholders and developing partnership arrangements
- working with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)
- challenges associated with frontline staff
- setting up the infrastructure.

Conclusion and recommendations

This good practice report shows that the issues and challenges facing councils in this area appear to be similar. Generally, these relate to improving outcomes for children and enhancing provision whilst managing increased numbers of looked-after children and budget cuts. Moreover, councils' desired outcomes for their looked-after children are consistent.

Where our case study councils differ related to the mechanisms by which they hope to achieve their aims. Some councils, for example, have adopted business model approaches to bring about improvements. Others are working in small or large consortia to share practice and create economies of scale to reduce costs.

The research shows that more needs to be done to improve councillors' awareness of the fostering and adoption agenda. All councillors should be aware of their council's responsibility as 'corporate parents'.

Furthermore, in an era of local and national governments increasingly requiring evidence of impact and the value for money assessments, lead members and directors have a responsibility to find out the impact of service provision and its cost effectiveness. Councils could commission external bodies to evaluate their practice or develop their in-house expertise to demonstrate evidence of impact. Indeed, some of the case-study councils reported collecting and reporting impact to senior colleagues.



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