

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families & Schools Sub-committee

Date: May 2005

Report of: Director Children, Families & Schools

Subject: Adoption Agency Annual Report

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 The work of the Adoption Agency (Brighton & Hove City Council) is governed by the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, as amended by the Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997, Adoption (Bringing Children into the UK) Regulations 2003, The Adoption Support (Local Authority) (England) Regulations 2003 and the Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption) Regulations 2004. The Agency is required by regulation to inform members, on an annual basis, of its activity.

1.2 This report will inform members of:

- National Developments; the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and its phased implementation; changes to the adoption register.
- The BHCC adoption agency inspection undertaken by the Commission of Social Care Inspection in September 2004.
- Local Adoption and Permanence activity and service developments during the year April 2004 – March 2005

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the report and the progress of the Agency in relation to adoption and permanence activity is noted.

2.2 That the Committee endorses the revised Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose and the Permanence Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference.

3. National Developments

3.1 **The Adoption and Children Act**

- 3.1.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 received Royal Assent on 7.11.02 and is being implemented in phases. It represents a radical overhaul of adoption law, modernising the legal framework for both domestic and intercountry adoption (ICA), and replaces the Adoption Act 1976. The 2002 Act provides the framework for the new approach to adoption, which is to be complemented by secondary legislation.
- 3.1.2 In June 2003, regulations restricting adoption from overseas were implemented. On 31 October 2003, the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 came into force. On 30 April 2004, the Independent Review mechanism (IRM) was introduced
- 3.1.3 Full implementation of the Act is a major task and will not be achieved until December 2005. Following extensive consultation all related regulations and guidance are now due to be finalised by June 2005. BHCC responded fully to the consultation process. The new regulations and guidance will significantly change adoption law (including the introduction of new orders such as Special Guardianship Orders) and practice.
- 3.1.4 Prior to full implementation of the associated regulations and guidance training will be provided nationally. Locally extensive training has been offered to staff in advance of the new regulations. Plans are being made with the Learning Development team and with colleagues from Legal Services to provide further training on the new legislation for key staff involved.

3.2 The Adoption Register.

- 3.2.1 In April 2004, the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) was awarded the contract to administer the national Adoption Register. This has led to considerable positive changes to how the information stored on the register is/will be used and the associated administrative processes.
- 3.2.2 It is no longer necessary to place the details of children or adopters on the register purely for statistical purposes. The register is primarily a tool for identifying potential adopters for children who need to be adopted. These are welcomed changes which it is anticipated will lead to the register being increasingly beneficial to the early placement of children with suitable adopters.

4. Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)

- 4.1 Regulation now requires that all adoption agencies are inspected every three years. The CSCI inspected BHCC Adoption Service in September 2004 for the first time. A copy of the full report is attached (appendix 1)
- 4.2 The inspection report was generally very positive about the work of the service. The only standards that were not met at the time of the inspection related to concerns about insufficient records on personnel files for staff and panel members and the need to include further information on the Statement of Purpose and Children's guide.
- 4.3 The Statement of Purpose (appendix 2) has now been amended and meets the associated standard. The Permanence Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference (appendix 3) fully met

the associated standard and therefore did not need amending. The Children Families and Schools Committee is required to review and endorse these documents annually.

- 4.4 The Panel members' files have now been updated to meet the standard and meetings have taken place with managers in Human Resources to discuss the shortfalls in the staff personnel files.
- 4.5 The very positive inspection report is a testament to the high quality adoption service provided by BHCC.

5. Agency Activity /Service Developments April 2004-March 2005

- 5.1 The agency statistics for April 2004 – March 2005 are attached (Appendix 4). This provides comprehensive information on the number of children approved for adoption and long term fostering and the prospective adopters and long term foster carers approved.
- 5.2 The level of activity within the agency has increased again this year. Significant trends and outcomes outlined in the performance information include the following:
 - 5.2.1. The number of children approved for adoption increased, by 18%, to 45. 10 children (an increase of 25%) were placed concurrently experiencing minimal disruption to their early attachments and so increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome.
 - 5.2.2. 35 children were matched and placed with prospective adopters during the year (13% increase). This represents 10.6% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more (an increase of nearly 2% on last year). 6 children (17%) were placed with inter agency or consortium adopters. This indicates that a high percentage of children continue to be placed in BHCC resources. 14 children were placed for long term fostering. Seven children were placed with BHCC adopters by other adoption agencies.
 - 5.2.3. Of the children matched with prospective adopters twenty six were aged two years or under, five children were between the ages of three and five, one child was aged 5-10 years and three children were over ten years of age.
 - 5.2.4. 27 children were adopted during the year, which represents 8.2% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more.
 - 5.2.5. The number of prospective adopters approved during the year was 27, nine of whom were concurrent foster/adopters (33% of all prospective adopters approved). This is a 13% increase on last year.
 - 5.2.6. The number of children awaiting an adoptive placement at 31.3.05 was 26 (17 placements; 8 individual and 9 sibling placements). Potential prospective adopters have already been identified for nine of these children and family finding continues for the remaining 17 children. The number of children for whom prospective adopters are yet to be identified has decreased by 15% this year which represents the success of the family finding team in identifying suitable adoptive placements.

- 5.2.7. There have been no adoption placement disruptions during this year. There were four disruptions reports presented to panel during the year. Two (a sibling placement) related to the disruption of a foster care placement, one related to a fostering by relatives placement and one related to the disruption of an adoptive placement (disruption occurred in November 03). This evidences that the disruption rate of permanence placements in BHCC is very low and is indicative of the high quality of support provided to both prospective adopters and long term foster carers.
- 5.2.8. In addition to the above the local authority has a legal responsibility to provide a birth records counselling service and to respond to enquiries about step parent adoptions. The permanence team received 40 new birth record enquiries during the year but were unable to prioritise this area of work above other commitments. The current waiting time for accessing this service is at least three months. 15 step parent adoption referrals were received by the team during the year.
- 5.2.9. The team continues to supervise 43 long-term foster carers, 64 adopters and provide support to birth families pre and post adoption order.

6. Service Developments

6.1 The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 6.1.1. The Independent Chair of Panel has reported on the work of the Adoption and Permanence Panel (Appendix 5). The Adoption and Permanence Panel continues to contribute to the positive work of the agency and met twenty two times. Two hundred and fifty five decisions were made on one hundred and seventy seven items considered (some items resulted in more than one decision – i.e. an adoption order and a freeing order).

7. The Adoption Consortium

- 7.1 The SouthEast Adoption Consortium comprises Brighton & Hove, Bexley, Bromley, East Sussex, Kent and Medway. The Consortium aims to maximise placement choice for children approved for adoption by sharing prospective adopters. 31 children were placed across the consortium this year.
- 7.2 In addition to the family finding activity the Consortium meetings offer a valuable forum for discussing policy and practice issues at this time of significant legislative and procedural change. The Consortium authorities also collaborate on certain recruitment and training activities.

8. Recruitment, Preparation and Family Finding

- 8.1 The Permanence/ Concurrency Teams ran four preparation groups for prospective adopters and long-term foster carers this year, which was attended by 39 sets of prospective adopters/carers (i.e. single people or couples). 38 of these continued to the assessment stage although 6 assessments of these were subsequently discontinued due to the applicants being unsuitable. Nationally it continues to be difficult to recruit adopters or permanent carers for

sibling groups, children over four years (particularly boys) and children from black and minority ethnic groups.

- 8.2 Following a targeted recruitment campaign BHCC has experienced some success in recruiting prospective adopters for sibling groups of two. Assessments are currently being undertaken on two sets of dual heritage adopters. Continued efforts will be made in these areas and a Recruitment and Publicity Officer for Black and Minority Ethnic Carers, funded from the Choice Protect Grant, has been appointed to assist.
- 8.3 In January 2005, a contract was established with Parents and Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter-country adopters on behalf of BHCC. PACT has considerable experience in this specialist area of work and it is anticipated that people wishing to adopt from abroad will receive a more timely and dedicated response to their enquiries.

9. Concurrency Team

- 9.1 The team recruits carers who are prepared to be foster carers and adopters. This enables a child, 0 –2 years, to be placed with one set of carers throughout the assessment and court process. If the child cannot return to the birth family, the carers can then adopt the child. Team members also undertake the assessment work with the birth family for children that are placed concurrently and work alongside fieldwork colleagues to progress pre-birth assessment work with families where adoption is a potential outcome.
- 9.2 Outcomes indicate that there is a better prospect of birth families being able to maintain meaningful contact post adoption, including face to face contact, when the child has been placed with adopters through the concurrent process. In the last year the team has been very successful in securing direct contact arrangements post adoption for a number of babies that have been placed concurrently, where this has been seen to be in the child's best interest.
- 9.3 The team has to balance the work of providing support and undertaking intensive assessment work with birth families with the need to continue to recruit and assess potential concurrency carers. The team has increased the number of prospective adopter/foster carers approved this year by 50% and the number of children placed concurrently by 25%.
- 9.4 BHCC is still one of only two local authorities in the country to be offering a concurrency model in house, despite the value of this model being nationally recognised. The Department continues to be involved in promoting the value of concurrency at a national level, including a recent meeting with the DfES.

10. Adoption Support Services (ASS)

- 10.1 Following the implementation of the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 there is a legal duty on the local authority to provide adoption support services to both adoptive families and birth families. Following the appointment of the Adoption Support Services Advisor in October 2003 there has been substantial service development in this area. The Managing Principal lawyer addressed the national Family Law

Bar Association Conference on the law and BHCC's experience in implementing the regulations last year. This is the first time that a local authority solicitor has been invited to speak at this event which indicates that BHCC service provision is highly respected.

- 10.2 BHCC continues to have a service level agreement with the Post Adoption Centre to provide a helpline, local surgeries and workshops for adopters, prospective adopters, adopted adults and birth families.

10.3. Staffing

- 10.3.1 Four part time members of staff who had previously worked as therapists in the Attachment Team, and who therefore had considerable expertise in attachment issues, joined the team in April 2004 to work specifically with adopters and their children.
- 10.3.2 A part time Social Work Resource Officer has been appointed whose main role is to support/facilitate direct contact but who contributes to other areas of the Service.
- 10.3.3 A Practice Manager who is also the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) supervises the staff members.

10.4 Work with adoptive families

- 10.4.1. Approximately sixty new referrals for adoption support have been received from adoptive families in the last year. Support and advice has been requested and provided in a number of areas including contact, managing children who present behavioural and emotional difficulties, financial issues and advocacy in educational matters.
- 10.4.2. Models for managing face to face contact between birth families and adopted children, and supporting it over time, have been developed. The experience gained in this area has been shared in Preparation groups for adoptive parents; with Consortium staff members and in a recent training event with our fieldwork and legal colleagues.
- 10.4.3. There are 140 letterbox agreements managed by the team. A part time Social Work Resource Officer has now been recruited to act as letterbox co-ordinator.
- 10.4.4. Research indicates that education is a key concern for adoptive families and this has proved to be a significant factor in much of the adoption support work locally. The Adoption Support Teacher offers advice and support to schools in relation to individual children; runs a support group for learning support assistants working with adopted children and contributes to statutory assessments. She offers input into training for social workers, adoptive parents and teaching staff and has written a booklet entitled 'Attachment Issues in the Classroom'. She is currently working on an advice booklet on children in transition to secondary school. The service hopes to develop further the support services offered to adoptive families to enable adopted children to receive the support they need within schools.

10.5 Support Groups

- 10.5.1 In addition to individual work with adoptive families the number of support groups have increased. There are three facilitated groups for adopters, a weekly parent and toddler group

and other groups that are self-run. One of the groups is co-facilitated by an adoptive parent. Another adoptive father is researching the support needs of adoptive fathers.

10.6 Events/information for Adoptive families

10.6.1. In the last year the team has hosted a Christmas get together for adopters and a very successful family craft and music event for adopters and their children. Over 100 adopters and children attended this.

10.6.2. A library has been established for adopters with relevant publications on adoption being available on loan. A newsletter has been produced and sent to all known adopters within the Brighton and Hove area.

11 Adoption Allowances

11.1 Expenditure on Adoption Allowances during 2004/2005 was £598,076.70 which related to the placement of 93 children. This represents an increase on last years figure which reflects both the successful placement of children with more complex needs and efforts by the Adoption Agency to meet it's additional duties and responsibilities under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

11.2 This confirms that the number of children who are being adopted, who would otherwise have remained in foster care for the duration of their childhood, costing the local authority considerably more in social work, foster care, education and associated resources, continues to remain steady.

12 Family and Friends Team

12.1 There has been considerable development within this team in the last year despite the team only have one part time worker for part of the year.

12.2 A Family and Friends policy has been developed and endorsed by the Departmental Management Team.

12.3 The team now consists of a part time Practice Manager, 1.5 Social Workers, and 1.5 Social Work Resource Officers. This increase in staffing, funded through the Choice Protects Grant, was essential to ensure the local authority met its legal duty to assess, support and train Family and Friends carers.

12.4 The team as well as undertaking assessments in relation to prospective family and friends foster carers are also developing a range of support services including services to support carers post Residence Order.

13 Website

13.1 In January 2005, the Fostering and Adoption Service launched its own website, www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk. The website has an open access side for prospective

carers and a secure side for approved carers containing comprehensive information on support services plus a message board facility.

14.0 Complaints and representations.

- 14.1 Three complaints were received regarding the Adoption Service this year. Two complaints related to the assessment process/recommendation and one related to the delay in accessing the birth records counselling service. All three complaints were resolved at the first stage.

15. Financial Information

- 15.1 The ASS regulations raise financial issues for all local authorities particularly as adoptive parents of children under 18 years are now able to request both financial and practical support from local authorities. This is regardless of whether an Adoption Allowance was agreed by the Adoption Panel and irrespective of the placing agency.
- 15.2 The government has provided a grant for the implementation of ASS of £70m nationally over three years starting in 2003/2004. BHCC's allocation for 2005/2006 (final year) is £168k.
- 15.3 The 2005/2006 base budget for adoption allowances is £718,700, this represents an increased council investment of £250k on the 2004/2005 budget. The new legislation could result in adoption placements previously unknown or financially unsupported by BHCC requiring resources to be allocated to them. The possible number of these cases are, by their nature, unknown but the current adoption budget now allows for growth of about 20% in financial commitments in 2005/2006.

16. Legal Implications

- 16.1 As indicated in the body of the report the current legislation and national regulations in respect of adoption law, support services, and targets is in the process of change. The Department will continue to meet its statutory obligations under the Children Act 1989, and the Adoption Act 1976, alongside the phased implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the accompanying regulations as they come into force. The Department is already being judged against the timescales contained in the National Adoption Standards, which came into force on 1 April 2004.
- 16.2 As well as the changes indicated the new Adoption Act places an emphasis on the need to consider the implications for a child's relationship to its wider family in any plan for adoption. The council's equal opportunities approach to the assessment of prospective adopters will be further supported by the opportunity for both partners in a same sex or unmarried couple to apply for adoption orders when the new Act comes fully into force. These developments are compatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which upholds the right to respect for family and private life, except where an interference is in accordance with the law and is necessary for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.
- 16.3 The Permanence Panel are required as a matter of law to make recommendations to the Adoption Agency regarding the approval or otherwise of prospective adopters, children for

adoption, and possible matches. The membership of the Panel continues to be governed by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 (as amended).

17. Environmental Implications

None

18. Implications for Prevention of Crime and Disorder

None

19. Equalities Implications

19.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2003 aligns adoption law with the relevant provisions of the Children Act 1989 to ensure that a child's welfare is the paramount consideration in decisions relating to adoption. The 'welfare' of the child includes having regard to a child's age, sex, religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background

19.2 The adoption agency must ensure that it recruits prospective adopters who can parent children with special needs or disabilities.

19.3 The adoption agency must ensure that prospective adopters have addressed the issue of sexual orientation of their children possibly being different from their own and can accept this without prejudice.

19.4 The provision in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which allows same-sex and unmarried couples to apply to adopt jointly, accords well with Brighton and Hove's inclusive adoption policy. All citizens of Brighton and Hove and surrounding area aged over 21 years who wish to apply to adopt will be responded to in a fair and open manner.

20. Consultation

20.1 The Adoption and Permanence Panel
Permanence Management Team

Meeting/Date	Children Families & Schools 6 th June 2005
Report of	David Hawker
Subject	Adoption Agency Annual Report 2004/2005
Wards affected	All

Financial implications		
As stated	David Ellis	May 2005
Legal implications		
As stated	Natasha Watson	May 2005

Corporate/Citywide implications Adoption Services are provided citywide and support services do require a corporate Council approach. This will be a key factor in planning the new services required by the Children & Adoption Act.	Risk assessment None
Sustainability implications None	Equalities implications As stated
Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder None	

Background papers Adoption and Children Act 2002 National Adoption Standards for England August 2001 NCSC (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003
Contact Officers Sue Boiling Development, Officer, Adoption and Permanence 295378 Sharon Donnelly, Head of Service, Adoption and Fostering 295427



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

Local Authority Adoption Services

Brighton and Hove City Council Adoption Service

253 Preston Road, Brighton, BN1 6SE

Inspection of Local Authority Adoption Service

**under the Adoption Act 1976
and the Care Standards Act 2000**

13th September 2004

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ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

Brighton and Hove City Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

253 Preston Road, Brighton, BN1 6SE

Adoption Service Manager

Sharon Donnelly

Tel No:

01273 295444

Address

253 Preston Road, Brighton, BN1 6SE

Fax No:**Email Address****Certificate number of this adoption service****Date of last inspection**

NA

Date, if any, of last SSI themed inspection of adoption service

NA

Date of Inspection Visit		13th September 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		02:00 pm	
Name of Inspector	1	Sally Woodget	113975
Name of Inspector	2	Maureen Moore	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Sharon Donnelly	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority adoption services are subject to inspection by CSCI, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976 as amended, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of **Brighton and Hove City Council Adoption Service**. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Brighton & Hove's adoption service is not a stand-alone service but is a part of the larger team of Permanency and Adoption. Staff in the permanence and adoption team work with children and young people for whom long term fostering and/or adoption has been identified as their plan. This inspection has not included the long term fostering work as this is inspected under different regulations.

As well as the more traditional adoption service, Brighton & Hove have a concurrency team. This project has been set up to work with children aged 0-2 years where the prognosis of a return to birth families is considered as poor. In order to reduce the number of moves that children have in the care system, children are placed directly with foster-adopters and the concurrency team social workers work directly with the birth family in an agreed programme for the child to return to them, as well as working concurrently with the foster-adopters to pursue a plan of adoption should the rehabilitation fail.

The adoption service also have a new adoption support service which provides support, guidance and assistance to Birth families, adopters and children for whom adoption is the plan and children who have been placed for adoption. This team are experienced in carrying out attachment assessments on both children and adults.

Brighton & Hove also contract services from PAC to provide independent support and advocacy to birth parents adopted adults and adoptive families and with PACT to provide a service to overseas adopters.

Brighton & Hove underwent a serious case review in 2000 and have followed the recommendations from this review very seriously; as a result they have rigorous and robust assessment process for prospective adopters.

The service provides recruitment, assessment, preparation and training service for all prospective adopters and prepares and supports them to meet the needs of the wide range of children referred to them. The service is a member of Adoption South East Consortium, which broadens the choice of adoptive families available to children.

The adoption service is involved in a national research project which will explore the use of different behaviour management styles with adopted children

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This service has been inspected for the first time against the National Minimum Standards introduced from the 1st April 2003. As a result, this report may contain a substantial number of recommendations and requirements. If so, the number of these should fall significantly at the next inspection. This inspection found however that the service was operating well and the number of developments, changes and additions that the service needed to make to comply fully with the Standards and Regulations were few. Inspectors found the strategic management of the service was strong and committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children.

Standard 1

Statement of Purpose

This standard was nearly met.

The adoption agency have provided documents to a good standard but they still need to make a few additions to both the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to fully comply with the Regulations and Standards.

Standard 2

Securing and Promoting Welfare

This standard was met

The adoption agency provides a very child centred service, with staff working hard to ensure that children requiring a service were identified at an early stage.

Standard 3-6

Prospective and Approved Adopters

Two of these standards were met and two were exceeded

The process of assessment, preparation and training of adopters was thorough, detailed and investigative as well as sensitively handled. Adopters were positive about the service they received, and fully understood the reasons for vigilance. There was evidence of good social work practice, from experienced and skilled staff backed up by sound social work research.

Standard 7-9

Birth Parents and Birth Families

These three standards were met

The adoption agency has set up social work support independent from the child's social worker based at a local family centre. It also operates a service level agreement with PAC to provide local surgeries for birth parents offering counselling services and advocacy. The new adoption support service is also set up to provide support to birth families regarding contact issues.

Standards 10-13

Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions

One of these standards is not met, three are exceeded.

The adoption service have a robust panel assisted by the Panel Advisor which is providing a positive, quality assurance function. Panels are managed sensitively and prospective adopters and children are invited, fully prepared and asked to complete evaluation sheets following the meeting. Arrangements are managed in a timely way and the agency decision maker is sensitive to the need to provide an agency decision promptly. Shortfalls have occurred in the process of taking up relevant checks and references on Panel members

Standards 14-15

Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency

One of these standards is exceeded one is not met

Inspectors were impressed by the leadership, skills and experience of the senior managers in the adoption service, unfortunately the appropriate levels of checks and references were not evident on their personnel files.

Standards 16-18

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency

All of these standards were met

The adoption service is managed effectively and efficiently, there were clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling its activities and it had appropriate access to specialist advisors and services appropriate to its needs.

Standard 19-23

Employment and Management of Staff

Four of these standards were met one was nearly met

Staff were organised in a way, which delivered an efficient and effective service. There was an adequate level of staff, and staff felt that Brighton & Hove was a fair employer. There are good quality training programmes available for staff to keep up to date. The shortfall occurs where personnel files do not evidence the appropriate levels of checks and references.

Standards 25-28

Records

Three of these standards were met and one was not met.

The adoption service ensures accurate and up to date records are kept on children.. The adoption service provides all relevant information to other adoption agencies and other parties, complying with data protection and the Children's Rights Act. There is a written policy on case recording and file storage, which complies with the regulations. The adoption service needs to address the need to take up appropriate status checks and references on all staff and panel members.

Standards 29

Premises

This standard was met

The adoption service is situated on 2 sites which is not ideal but the authority is actively looking for an appropriate alternative. The present arrangement is suitable for its purpose and function.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's adoption service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NA

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their adoption service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of a failure by a Local Authority adoption service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority adoption service:

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first CSCI inspection)**

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	Timescale for action

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate officer of the Local Authority is requested to provide the Commission with an action plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan is shown in Part D of this report.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 or the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services. The Authority is required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for adoption services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	The Local Authority Adoption Services Reg2003 Reg 2.1 Sch 1	LA1	The Statement of Purpose must contain details about the relevant qualifications and experience of the manager and the staff employed by the authority for the purpose of the adoption service. It must also contain details of the system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services. It must also contain a summary of the complaints procedures established in accordance with Section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989 (a) and the Complaints Procedures Directions 1990 (b) including information about timescales and stages in the process for investigating complaints.	28/2/05
2	The Local Authority Adoption Services Reg2003 Reg 3(1)	LA1	The Children's Guide must contain a summary of the Statement of Purpose	28/2/05

3	The Local Authority Adoption Services Reg2003 Reg 11(3)(d) Reg 15(1)	LA11	The adoption service must ensure that no member of the panel be allowed to begin work until all relevant status checks as outlined in the schedules have been satisfactorily completed.	28/2/05
4	The Local Authority Adoption Services Reg2003 Reg 6 (2)(i) Sch 3	LA15	The adoption service must ensure that references and checks required under Schedule 3 are satisfactorily completed and that this can be evidenced on the personnel file.	28/2/05
5	The Local Authority Adoption Services Reg2003 Reg. 11(3)(d) Sch 3. Reg 15(1) Sch 4	LA28	The adoption service must ensure that references and checks required under Schedules 3 and 4 are satisfactory undertaken for all members of staff and members of the adoption panel, prior to their commencement in work.	28/2/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA19	The adoption service should ensure that all CRB disclosures are fully recorded on the personnel file before the document is destroyed including the disclosure number and date.

- Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. LA10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	NO
• Interview with birth family members	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	13/9/04
Time of Inspection	14:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	65
Number of Inspector days	6.5
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	NA
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	NA
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	17

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.
"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable on this occasion.
"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.2, 1.3 (partial) and 1.4 – 1.7)

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The adoption service's statement of purpose is comprehensive, accessible and detailed. The aims and objectives accurately reflect the facilities and services provided. It does however; need to provide further details about the relevant qualifications and experience of the staff employed by the authority for the purposes of the adoption service and the relevant qualifications and experience of the manager. The Statement of Purpose does include information on the Adoption and Permanence Panel, which is one of their key quality mechanisms in relation to adoption work. This section of the statement also includes information about the Development Officer who acts as Professional Advisor to the Permanence Panel. It does not include information on the other systems that are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services overall, to ensure that the services provided by the adoption service are effective and the quality of these services are of an appropriate standard, this needs to be added. The Statement of Purpose also needs to include a summary of the complaints procedure established in accordance with Section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989(a) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990(b) including information about timescales and the stages in the process. The omissions mentioned in this standard are a requirement under Regulation 2(1) Schedule 1.</p> <p>The Statement of Purpose is given to all staff, within the Adoption Practice Handbook, prospective adopters, and is made available on request to children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians. Inspectors have suggested that more informal, shortened version of the Statement of Purpose may be more accessible to 'lay' interested parties. The Brighton & Hove Committee endorsed the Statement of Purpose in June 2004 and it is intended that it will be reviewed annually.</p> <p>The adoption service have contributed to the BAAF Children's Guide to Adoption, and have supplemented it by adding stickers in the back of the book.. The guide must also contain a summary of the Statement of Purpose as required by Schedule 2 regulation 3(1). The document can be translated into different languages as required, and inspectors were assured that it could also be produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children for example, Moon or Braille etc...</p> <p>The service uses a children's services publication 'Dennis Duckling' and the Nutmeg and Tia range of books from BAAF, to assist in explaining adoption to very young children. The service also provides a guide for children attending Panel that assists in explaining the local process of adoption.</p>		

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually? (Record N/A if the information is not available)	<input type="text" value="YES"/>	
Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?	<input type="text" value="YES"/>	
Is there a children's guide to adoption?	<input type="text" value="YES"/>	
Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?	<input type="text" value="NO"/>	

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Brighton and Hove Adoption Service have a comprehensive, analytical and detailed recruitment strategy written in May 2004, which identifies the number of children requiring adoption and highlights their particular needs. As a result of the research completed and outlined in the strategy, Brighton and Hove have identified a need to recruit more adopters for sibling groups, for children of black and minority ethnic origin, and for babies who can be placed directly. An action plan has been drawn up which includes the recruitment of a specialist social worker whose job it will be to liaise with the ethnic minority groups locally. The Adoption Service has also continued to seek advice from a local marketing consultancy to ensure the efficacy of its advertising strategy.</p> <p>The Brighton and Hove Adoption Agency is also a member of 'Adoption South East' a consortium of 6 local authority adoption services, in order to ensure that they can offer a wider range and choice of adopters to meet the needs of the wide range of children needing a service. The consortium advertises widely within its area and ensures that the adoption agenda is kept in the public arena via newspaper articles especially during Adoption week.</p> <p>Brighton and Hove Adoption Social Workers and Concurrency Social Workers are expected to follow the agency's family finding procedures to ensure that children are matched with adopters who best meet their needs. A Permanence planning meeting which will address the marketing and family finding criteria is held and chaired by a Practice Manager in the Permanence Team and is attended by all relevant parties in the process who know the child well, including the child's present foster carers, field social workers with case responsibility, their manager and the child's guardian (if there is one). A social worker from the permanence team is then allocated the role of family finder. The profile of the child, identifying their specific needs and the profiles of families who may be able to meet this child's needs are then discussed at a matching meeting. A report will be completed on the proposed match, which is then considered at the Adoption Panel. The match takes into account a child's ethnic background and seriously considers keeping sibling groups together if this meets their individual needs.</p> <p>One adopter felt that there was little information was provided to adopters who may be matched or have a placement of a child who has a sibling, or to the children who are siblings where adoption is the plan, to provide evidence of clear assessment and decision making where decisions have been made to separate them and the reasons for this. The manager informed the inspector that training had been organised for staff on this issue recently and that careful consideration was always given to whether siblings should be separated and decisions were documented in the Form E. As the agency has a full information policy it is expected that the prospective adopter would have access to such information before a</p>		

placement is made. However in the light of the information provided to inspectors it is advised that the agency revisit this issue to ensure that all parties are assisted to fully understand the reasons for the decision making where siblings are separated.

Whilst many of the children involved in the adoption process are too young to indicate their views and wishes, the inspectors were pleased to see a number of very positive contributions being made by older children in their plans for adoption.

Whilst there were not so many approved concurrency adopters and therefore not a wide range to choose from, as there are for traditional adopters. Inspectors were assured however that if there was not an appropriate match for a child referred to the concurrency team then the case would be transferred to the adoption team for a match with an appropriate "traditional" adopter. Inspectors felt that the service had a child centred and child sensitive approach which was very positive to observe.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?
How many children were matched with adopters?
How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?
How many children were placed with other services' adopters?
How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?
In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?
What percentage of children matched with the adoption service's adopters does this represent?
How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?
How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made about adopters approved by this adoption service?
On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?

38
30
25
5
15
29
97
5
0
22

%

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The adoption agency recruits and supports sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, who can offer children a stable and permanent home to achieve a successful and lasting placement.

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Brighton and Hove adoption service has a comprehensive recruitment pack for prospective adopters. Inspectors were informed that a web site for the service is currently being created and should be operational by October 2004. Applicants are welcomed without prejudice and a copy of the written eligibility criteria contained in the recruitment pack evidences this approach.</p> <p>Inspectors were told that Brighton and Hove Adoption Service are currently negotiating with a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter-country adopters as they have few overseas adoption applications and recognise the need to provide a specialist and dedicated service for these applicants. A member of the adoption team will be responsible for handling enquiries from such applicants and managing the arrangement with the voluntary organisation.</p> <p>Inspectors saw evidence that Brighton and Hove adoption service were ‘fast tracking’ those prospective adopters who were more likely to meet the needs of children waiting.</p> <p>The recruitment pack provides information about the process of adoption including the preparation, training and support services available. All the preparation courses include the opportunity for prospective adopters to meet others who have adopted children.</p> <p>Initial assessment visits are carried out prior to the preparation and training course at which point the social worker will inform the prospective adopters of the range of children needing adoption. Information about the concurrency route to adoption is also given at this stage and further leaflets on this form of adoption provided. As the need for concurrency carers is outlined in the agencies recruitment strategy those applicants would be taken up quickly through the preparation, training and assessment process.</p> <p>As already stated Brighton and Hove adoption agency are members of Adoption South East and this family placement consortium have a reciprocal arrangement to ensure that children and families can be matched expediently. Adopters understand that their details will be referred to the Consortium 3 weeks following their approval at Panel if a match has not been made during this time.</p>		

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)**Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

Following the Serious Case Review all policies in relation to the assessment of adopters were thoroughly reviewed and the present assessment structure and process reflects these changes. Social workers in the adoption and concurrency teams carry out comprehensive, detailed, analytical and evaluative assessments clearly identifying the applicant's strength, competencies and any areas of weakness. Six referees are required, and ex partners and birth children of previous relationships approached and interviewed. A practice guidance file is given to all assessing social workers, which includes details of tools to be used during the assessment process. A full chronology of the prospective adopters lives, a genogram, an ecomap, attitudinal and experiential exercises, adult attachment interviews are examples of the tools used by assessing social workers. A second opinion visit is undertaken by the practice manager supervising the assessing social worker, the purpose of which is to highlight issues from the assessment. The professional advisors role is to quality assure all documents going before the Adoption Panel for consideration, which ensures further scrutiny to the assessment process.

Preparation groups are set up for prospective adopters and a separate preparation group is organised for concurrency foster/adopters to deal specifically with the pertinent issues of concurrency planning. The traditional adopters course includes sessions on trauma and loss, identity, contact, attachment, resilience, medical issues and post adoption support. The course takes place over 4 days and is held locally in Brighton in the Departmental Learning Development Centre.

One adopter commented that the preparation course did not cover enough on introductions to children and inspectors noted that this wasn't included in the preparation programme. All other returned questionnaires revealed that adopters felt that the preparation was "excellent", "informative" and "honest

The concurrency foster/adopters preparation group included information sessions on the processes of concurrency, and included a birth parent's perspective, health and development issues, child protection; adoptive parents experience of concurrency, and adopted persons perspective, life story work, as well as other sessions mentioned earlier.

The attendees evaluate all preparation groups, and their comments are used to inform and modify future courses.

The preparation groups fit within the framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, and adopters were happy with the time and venue of the groups.

Foster carers, who wish to adopt a child they are already caring for, are encouraged to attend the relevant preparation groups. Concurrency cares are assessed as foster carers and adoptive parents at the same time to carry out their specific role and to be able to have children placed directly with them.

Health and safety checklists are completed as are Dog questionnaires, to ensure assessors are satisfied that the home environment is a safe one, for any child placed

The applicant's capacity to look after a child in a safe and responsible way is integral to the assessment process, and inspectors were satisfied that this was being thoroughly addressed.

Where applicants have a positive disclosure on their Criminal Record Bureau, this is discussed fully at the Departmental Managers meeting, and the discussion and outcome are fully recorded and documented.

Prospective adopters were happy that they were kept fully informed throughout the process of assessment and were very complimentary about the service that they had received

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)		
Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Approved adopters are given a Post Approval Pack which includes information about the matching and introduction process, it also contains a range of comprehensive and useful information both local and national, regarding support services available for adopters and their adopted child.</p> <p>Inspectors found that the agency had a full information policy and were providing all key documents on the child to adopters to enable them to make an informed decision. Adopters usually meet with the current caregivers to the child to find out about the day-to-day needs of the child. Recently the agency has started to hold ‘Child Appreciation Days’ to obtain and provide as much information as possible from all the professionals involved in the child’s life to assist adopters and to obtain a record for the child. Inspectors saw a video to evidence this arrangement. However one case tracked by inspectors indicated a lack of information provided to an adopter prior to placement. This occurred due to a turnover of social work staff, their manager and health professional around the same time. It is advised that the practice managers are vigilant in ensuring that all information is recorded about a child in a ‘closure summary’ or equivalent, prior to a member of staff leaving, or by ensuring that a ‘child appreciation day’ is held to ensure vital information about a child’s needs and history is not lost.</p> <p>Adopters are asked to sign an adopter agreement form, which ensures their agreement to; notify the adoption agency if an adopted child dies and to pass on information to both families if they wish to have it. This document records the adoptive parents decision, was kept on their adoption file, and was evidenced by inspectors.</p> <p>Adopters are asked to produce child friendly information about their home and family for the child prior to the introductions. Inspectors saw excellent evidence of this in the form of a storybook specifically focussed on the needs and ability of the individual child to be placed. This is evidence of particularly creative, and sensitive piece of work carried out by agency adopters supported and encouraged by the adoption agency staff.</p>		
Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?	YES	

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)**Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.****Key findings and evidence****Standard met?**

4

Brighton and Hove Adoption Service have recently set up a dedicated adoption support team as part of the Permanence and Adoption Team managed by the Adoption Support Services Advisor. The service had developed an Adoption Support Responsibilities and Action Plan for 2004-05, which outlines and identifies the work of the team. Skilled specialist practitioners including an adoption support teacher staff the adoption support team. Inspectors were informed that the adoption support teacher has run a support group for teaching assistants that are working with adopted children with attachment difficulties, which is innovative and positive. She has also produced a guidance document for teaching staff on attachment issues.

It is planned that the social worker who assessed the adopter will continue to support them following their approval and also following the placement of a child. Support groups have also been set up for approved adopters and for those who have had placements, which encourage informal support arrangements amongst the group as well as offering structured sessions and continued training. Brighton and Hove also contract with P.A.C. the Post Adoption Centre, London, to provide surgeries locally for adopters and birth families, a telephone advice line, as well as local training courses/workshops for both these groups. The P.A.C. training for June 2004-April 2005 includes sessions on 'parenting teenagers', 'supporting your adopted child in school' and 'parents as healers'.

The Post Approval Handbook, as already stated, contains a wealth of useful information on local and national groups and agencies who offer assistance and help on a variety of matters relating to adoption, including financial matters such as adoption leave, support and advice services such as P.A.C., B.A.A.F. and Adoption UK.

An adoption support plan is drawn up and submitted with the marketing material to the Panel, and is reviewed at regular intervals.

In the event that adoptive families and the child in placement need more specific help and guidance the dedicated support team can offer this service.

There is also a close liaison with the local CAMHS with an agreement that adopted children and their families will be fast tracked for therapeutic services. The Head of Service also attends the CAMHS monthly referral meetings.

The adoption support team staff can advise adoptive parents on the needs of their adopted child, can facilitate letter box contact or supervise and support direct contact meetings with birth families. They will also offer specialist help in relation to the therapeutic needs of the child and assist where an adoption disruption has occurred or is in danger of occurring. The team are well placed to offer these specialist services as the staff are very experienced in working with children with attachment difficulties and hold qualifications in counselling. One member of staff is a trained teacher who can offer assistance to adopted children and their families who are having difficulty at school.

The adoption service also have a service level agreement with P.A.C.T. 'Parents and Children Together' (as already mentioned) in relation to inter-county adoption work, however once a child is in place the welfare supervision and support to the adopters will remain with the Brighton and Hove Adoption Services.

Inspectors witnessed good support services being provided to adopters throughout the assessment, approval, introductions and placement processes. Questionnaires from adopters indicated that they were happy with the level of support that they received. Inspectors found evidence from one adopter that suggested that they needed to be more mindful of the support needs of adopters who may live some distance from the agency. Inspectors were assured however that support services, including private therapists could be funded through the CAMHS fast track service and that other arrangements were in place across the consortium. Staff should however consider linking quickly with local adoption support services to prevent the possible isolation for adopters and ensure that practical services are available locally to assist with issues such as schooling, socialisation and behaviour for those adopters who live outside the consortium area..

The adoption agency informs the adopter of the need to keep safe any information provided by birth families, this happens during the training and preparation courses, reiterated via the home assessment and is highlighted in the prospective adopter agreement form.

Inspectors saw some good evidence of life story work going on, however it was noted that training for doing life story work and the time factor for busy children's social workers did mean that there was some inconsistency in this area. The service is aware of this and intends to ensure training for field social work staff in this area.

Prospective adopters are encouraged to develop strategies to help their child address issues of racism, and this is covered in the preparation course and via the home assessment. The service intends to produce a handbook for adopters of children placed trans-racially.

The service addresses the issue of helping the child to develop a positive self-identity through the ongoing training courses and workshops provided by the adoption support team.

The adoption service managers stressed to the inspectors that they operate a 'no blame' attitude when placements disrupt. There are clear procedures for staff managing disruption issues contained in the Adoption Handbook, which evidence this approach. There has been one disruption in Brighton and Hove in the last 12 months and clearly lessons were learnt following the discussion of all the issues and action taken to remedy any mistakes, and inform future practice. Adopters involved in any disruption are fully informed and consulted throughout the process.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	30	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	27	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	25	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	11	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	34	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	1	

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Brighton and Hove's adoption service are sensitive to the needs of birth parents. In particular, due to the work of the Concurrency Team, issues relating to birth parents needs for support and advocacy are kept in the foreground of the adoption service. There was very good evidence of support, advocacy and counselling and practical help offered to the birth parents of children placed with concurrency carers. Social work staff and the community family worker in this team gave numerous examples of the continued work they were undertaking with birth families, for example; assisting with housing issues, debt counselling, and liaising with the appropriate professionals to advocate on their behalf. Inspectors were informed that birth family members had found the process helpful and had reported feeling more positive about the plans for adoption going ahead when rehabilitation was no longer an option, because of the process they had been through. Unfortunately only 1 birth parent responded to the questionnaire and this response cannot be taken as representative.</p> <p>Birth parents are able to access an independent support worker in a local family centre, and are also given information about the service available from P.A.C. who hold local surgeries on a regular basis. The new adoption support service also have a remit to; provide counselling for birth relatives, advise birth parents on what steps they can take where it has been decided that their child will be adopted; work with birth parents to agree a contact plan for the child and facilitate meetings to resolve problems in relation to contact arrangements. The adoption support service are fully aware that the take-up of services from birth parents is low, and that their work in this area which they have only recently taken responsibility for is still in its early stages and requires a great deal of work and innovative strategies to achieve their goals.</p> <p>Inspectors evidenced that birth parents views were fully recorded on the form E's and in the court documents by the child's social worker, scrutiny of this process was evidenced through the work of the Professional Advisor and the Adoption Panel.</p>		

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)		
Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>As stated already birth families views are clearly recorded in the form E on the child in the court documents, and it is the role of the child's social worker to obtain as much information as possible about birth families for the child.</p> <p>The social work resource officer in the adoption support team has been given the clear responsibility for facilitating and supporting direct contact arrangements post adoption. A social worker in the team, also has the lead responsibility for the letterbox scheme, and it is intended that this will include being in contact with birth families to assist them to write letters where necessary</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1)		
The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>As already stated the adoption agency does have a clear strategy for working with birth parents which includes the service level agreement with P.A.C., the independent worker in the family centre and through the intended service provision from the adoption support team. Birth parents are given information about these services by their child's social worker as well as a leaflet on the local Natural Parents Network Group.</p> <p>The child's support plan includes a section on support services to be provided to birth parents in relation to contact which identifies the particular needs of birth families and who will be responsible for providing the service to them in this area.</p>		

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>The Brighton and Hove Adoption Service have a permanence and adoption panel that considers; prospective long-term foster carer applications, plans for children, concurrency carers (who are considered as foster carers and adopters) applications, prospective adopter applications and children's plans for adoption.</p> <p>The panel has a detailed and thorough constitution and terms of reference, which includes all the matters laid out in Standard 10.2 namely a policy and procedure for; dealing with ineffective or disruptive behaviour or attitudes; decision making when panel members are not in agreement and receiving progress reports on individual cases.</p> <p>Brighton and Hove Adoption Service invite prospective adopters to the panel meeting as a matter of course, they also invite, where appropriate, children to the Panel, and there are policies and procedures that cover their attendances in the document referred to. Inspectors saw evidence of children being welcomed to the meeting, being allowed to fully participate, and the whole process being carried out in a sensitive and supportive manner suitable to the needs of the individual child's needs which was very commendable.</p> <p>Brighton and Hove Adoption Service have produced two booklets, one for applicants and one for children and young people to inform them about the Panel and what happens at the meeting. This is commendable and sensitive practice.</p> <p>An information sheet on Panel members with their photographs is available to attendees of the panel in the waiting room for them to peruse prior to the Panel meeting, which is a thoughtful and sensitive approach. All attendees are asked to complete feedback forms on their attendance at Panel. These completed forms are evaluated by the professional Advisor and summarised information given to Panel members to enable discussion about making any necessary changes to their format or style.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)

The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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The adoption agency have as already stated has its own 'Constitution and Terms of Reference'. All Panel members have an opportunity to observe the Panel meeting and are given an induction pack and the B.A.A.F. booklet on the role of the Panel. The Panel Chair informed inspectors that any further training for new members depended on that individual member's background and experience.

All Panel members have signed a confidentiality agreement. Unfortunately not all the relevant status checks have been undertaken on the Panel members as outlined in Regulation 11 (3) (d) and 15 under Schedules 3 and 4,(this includes Panel members who had started since the adoption regulations came into force in April 2003), for example all Panel members files did not contain proof of identity including a photograph, documentary evidence of qualifications, full employment history, references and training undertaken. In one case the information did not include whether the returned CRB check was clear or not. This is a requirement under the Local Authority Adoption Agency Regulations and is the reason for the low scoring in this standard.

The adoption agency has systems in place to ensure that each Panel member is given an induction, that there is an annual joint training day with adoption agency staff and that they have access to appropriate training and skills development. The adoption agency's Professional Advisor is a key figure in ensuring these systems are adhered to, and is able to obtain the co-operation and support of all the other advisors to the Panel, legal, medical and educational to ensure panel members are kept abreast of relevant changes in legislation, regulation and guidance. Panel members also receive training in inter-country adoption via a panel member who has expertise in this area

A team development plan for the Adoption Panel has been drawn up and identifies training given and planned during 2003-04. All panel members will be introduced to an appraisal scheme, which will identify individual learning and development needs of each panel member.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO	
Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	YES	

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)

Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The adoption agency's panel meets fortnightly for a whole day, to ensure that the volume of work can be managed in a timely way. Inspectors were assured that consideration would be given to convening an extra Panel if this was necessary to prevent delay to planning for children's needs. A Panel administrator is employed specifically to deal with all the work in collecting and collating all the information required and planning the Panel meetings, which makes this an efficient and effective service. Members of the Panel receive all the necessary information in advance of the Panel and this is handled in a confidential manner.

The Panel minutes reflect the practice of the Chair's in clearly summarising the positive aspects of any applicant or match as well as any areas of difficulty or potential risk.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The agency decision maker is a Senior Officer in the Children's Services, who receives all the information on applications, children and potential matches. Following the Panel meeting, minutes of the panels discussion and their recommendation are also sent to the Agency decision maker. The professional advisor meets with the Agency decision maker to clarify any issues and the agency's decision is relayed immediately to the workers and the applicants.

The adoption agency's panel will make a recommendation, which is immediately conveyed, to the applicants by the Panel Chair. It is made clear that this is only a recommendation and needs to be considered by the agency decision maker prior to the final decision. Inspectors observed where a child was attending panel that a special arrangement was made with the agency decision maker to convey a recommendation immediately to ensure that there was no delay in the final decision being made and given to the child. This evidences how much the child is put at the centre of the process and was very laudable

The decision maker will then write to the applicants and birth families confirming the decision within 7 working days of the Panel meeting. Inspectors were able to establish that this was occurring.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>The manager of the adoption and fostering service has the relevant social work and management qualifications with considerable experience in managing children’s services and in particular family placement work. The manager of the adoption and permanence team also has appropriate qualifications and management experience with many years working in ‘family placement’ work. Inspectors advise that a management qualification would be advisable for this post. Both these managers were instrumental in setting up the concurrency team, which was the first of its kind with a local authority setting. Both managers have the management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively. Following the serious case review, all the recommendations have been actioned to create a well-structured department with more than adequate levels of accountability and scrutiny.</p> <p>Both managers clearly exercise effective leadership of the staff and operation and provide good role models for staff to aspire to. There are four practice managers each with specific duties relating to the adoption services; one takes responsibility for family finding, one for adoption support; one for concurrency work and one for recruitment duty and assessment. Each of these practice managers also has direct responsibility for supervising social work staff. All have clear written job descriptions, which set out their duties, responsibilities and levels of delegation.</p> <p>There was evidence that practice managers were seeking appropriate management course that reflected their work close to practice issues. The inspectors understand from the Head of Children’s Services in Brighton and Hove, that the authority will undertake a commitment to this training for them. Staff expressed a view that the management structure including the role of the professional advisor who is employed at a service manager level, was helpful and accessible and that roles and responsibilities were clear.</p> <p>Inspectors expressed some concern that the role of practice managers in the fieldwork setting was not so clear, with many practice managers carrying a caseload as well as supervisory responsibilities for staff. It is advised that the Head of Children’s Services review this situation, and ensures that there is clarity of roles and clear management oversight to ensure that examples such as the one mentioned in Standard 5 are not overlooked.</p>		

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?	YES
Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?	YES

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)		
Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
<p>Human resources files were inspected and a number of omissions were found. There was a lack of: documentary evidence of qualifications, proof to identity (which should also include a photograph), references and in one case employment history. Most members of staff (these were the managers files mentioned in Standard 14), had been working in Brighton and Hove for many years and prior to the adoption agency regulations which came out in April 2003, however one member of staff had been internally appointed since this date and this file also had the same omissions.</p> <p>All files need to evidence that staff are fit to manage an adoption service by ensuring that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to them in respect of each of the matters listed in Schedule 3. Regulation 6 (2) (c). This is a requirement and is the reason for the low score in this standard.</p> <p>All the managers had a satisfactory enhanced disclosure from the CRB, and inspectors were informed that these were renewed every 3 years.</p> <p>Inspectors were also informed that the Human Resources department were now undertaking telephone enquiries to verify written references but were unable to evidence this as most staff had been appointed prior to the regulations.</p>		

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Inspectors evidenced that all staff members interviewed were fully aware of the statement of purpose and that they felt that it reflected their service delivery. Inspectors were informed that clear arrangements were in place to identify the person in charge when the manager was absent, and that leave is co-ordinated between the Head of Service and Service Managers. As already stated there are clear roles for all the different managers and well-established lines of communication and accountability. Staff reported that the structure was open, accessible and supportive.

The adoption agency endeavours to ensure that all staff who work with children, prospective and approved adopters and birth parents take into account their racial origin, religion, culture and language. The service have recently undertaken a race equality impact assessment and have gathered information about their present service delivery in relation to this client group. Clear goals and action plans have been drawn up which include the recruitment of a Recruitment and Publicity Officer to work within the fostering team and whose role will be to raise awareness amongst ethnic minority groups about fostering and adoption. This process has also been helpful in raising awareness of staff and to ensure the equal opportunities are continually evaluated and reviewed.

The adoption agency has clear written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register in the Adoption and permanence practice handbook. It is advised that information on the use of this register is also made available to adopters in their Post Approval Pack.

Number of complaints received by the adoption service in the last 12 months	0
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Number of the above complaints which were substantiated	X
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Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)		
There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Brighton and Hove adoption agency produce an annual report and the Panel Chair also produces an annual report, these are submitted to the Children, Families and Schools sub-committee for scrutiny. Inspectors were informed that regular reports are presented to the management team in relation to the profile of children waiting for a placement, and to inform them of the recruitment of adopters. The Children, Families and Schools department hold monthly review board meetings with lead members from the sub committee. These meetings are used to brief members of key operational and practice issues and developments of the Adoption Service.</p> <p>There is clear information, which outlines the cost of inter-country adoption assessments, and protocols are in place for charging for placements with Adoption South East the family placement consortium.</p>		
How frequently does the executive side of the council receive written reports on the work of the adoption service?		
	Monthly?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
	Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Less than Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)		
The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The adoption agency has good liaison and co-operation with their legal, medical and educational advisors who, inspectors noted, were committed to their work with the adoption service.</p> <p>The medical advisor is Vice Chair of the adoption panel and also contributes to the preparation and training groups for adopters. The legal advisor is a senior lawyer for Brighton and Hove Local Authority and attends every panel. Inspectors evidenced the legal advisor having a considerable and appropriate input on the Panel and were informed that she contributes actively to training within the adoption service and has played a key role in establishing the concurrency team.</p> <p>Staff in the adoption service reported that they had access to these advisors, and that there were clear lines of communication with the professional services in Brighton and Hove. Staff are able to use the services of CAMHS, the Looked After Children’s educational services, and have access to advice and support via ‘Adoption South East’ Consortium, NORWOOD, PACT, P.A.C. and the Overseas Adoption Helpline.</p> <p>The written protocol governing the role of the specialist advisors is addressed in the Panels Constitution and Terms of Reference (details of status checks required on Panel Members has already been mentioned in Standard 11).</p>		

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Inspectors were informed that all practice managers and service managers who are involved in the recruitment and selection of staff have had training in this area.

All staff reported that they had been interviewed as part of the selection process, but unfortunately, whilst managers stated they had kept internal notes and records and passed these to Human Resources, there were not stored in the individual applicant/staff member human resources files for inspectors to evidence this practice. Inspectors were unable to evidence the practice of taking up telephone enquires to verify written references as outlined in Standard 19.3. However managers pointed out that as most staff had been appointed prior to the Regulations, Inspectors would not have found this. Inspectors were assured however that the Adoption Service had fully discussed the need for this check with the Human Resources department and that a pro forma document now existed on which to record this telephone check (as already discussed in Standard 15).

All human resources files indicated that CRB checks had been undertaken and when appropriate renewed regularly. In one case however, a CRB disclosure number was not included in the file. HR needs to ensure that its administration systems are robust enough to maintain accuracy in this area.

Inspectors noted that some staff had been allowed to begin work prior to the receipt of their CRB checks being received. The explanation of this was due to the backlog of CRB checks at the CRB offices during 2003. A risk assessment document had been completed on each member of staff that this delay affected, and managers signed to authorise that no unsupervised contact with children would be allowed until the checks had been returned and were satisfactory. In these cases the CRB check arrived with 3 weeks of commencement of work. Managers assured inspectors that this practice was no longer necessary, or allowed to continue.

All social workers in the adoption and concurrency teams are fully qualified social workers, and the staff team include a number of social workers with many years experience and background in adoption and family placement work. The adoption service is committed to training for their staff and a large number of the team are studying for the PQ awards and are at various stages in the process. Inspectors were impressed by the knowledge and skills of staff in the adoption services, and of how the service supports staff to keep up to date on social work practice and legal issues pertinent to their job descriptions. Inspectors have

seen the service's training programme and team development plan as well as individual staff's training records to evidence this. All staff undertaking assessments and adopters have been trained specifically in assessment in this field of work.

The adoption support practice manager takes a lead role in the area of birth record counselling and ensures staff undertaking this work develop the experience and skills in this area via training and group discussion of practice issues on a regular basis.

Work with birth parents is undertaken by an experienced social worker and a counsellor in a local family centre as already stated in Standard 7.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?	YES	
What % of the adoption service's social workers have a PQ award?	64	%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)
Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Inspectors were impressed by experienced, dedicated and skilled management team (as described in Standard 16) and particularly with the non-operational management role, Professional Advisor, with an explicit quality assurance role. This post was clearly having the desired affect and was driving up the standards of report writing, ensuring accuracy and timeliness. This position also carried responsibility for policy and practice development, and will ensure the service keeps up to date with all the new changes in legislation due in the adoption arena.

Social work staff are supervised regularly by practice managers and their workload monitored using a caseload weighting system. All staff reported the caseload weighting system to be helpful in identifying priorities and prevented being overworked and stressed. The service manager supervises and monitors the workloads of practice managers and oversees the caseload weighting system for their staff. Again all staff reported feeling valued and supported by their managers at all levels in the service. All staff had agreed a contract with their manager, which governed the practice of supervision sessions.

The service had effective structures and systems in place to ensure assessments and approvals of adopters are managed and implemented effectively, and adopters reported that they were also sensitively handled to meet their specific needs.

The service reported having some difficulties with the lack of adequate administrative support in the recent past, it was felt that this had now been rectified, and the new administrative systems were beginning to impact on the efficiency of the overall work especially in relation to referrals.

The adoption service has access to a range of advice needed to provide a good service for children as reported in Standard 18.

All staff reported having a job description and inspectors were provided with copies of these in the inspection material. Staff also reported having seen the Statement of purpose and having access to all policies and procedures and staff conditions of service

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)

There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Inspectors were informed that the staffing levels were kept constantly under review. The service had recently expanded to take account of the new adoption support responsibilities and there are plans (as already stated) to recruit a dedicated recruitment and publicity officer for black and minority ethnic adopters to meet the needs of looked after children in Brighton and Hove.

It was noted that the concurrency team had a number of staff leave around the same time causing some difficulties in continuity and skills base in this very specialised area of work and in such a small team the impact was significant. However this has now been rectified and the staff team are up to complement. Inspectors were informed that the number of referrals to this team has increased significantly due to the local 'baby boom' and not all babies who may fit the criteria for a concurrency placement can be placed via this route. The Assistant Director for Social Care Services had responded by increasing the number of social workers with responsibility for carrying out pre-birth assessments in the hospital team, as a way of managing the need caused by this demographic change. Clearly the growth of staffing levels in the concurrency team needs to be kept under review to enable the service to respond to any increase of referrals.

The adoption service have a number of freelance social work staff who are experienced in adoption and concurrency work on whom they can call on if a shortfall occurs in their staffing levels. Inspectors were assured that the service manager would monitor these staff closely. Brighton and Hove council offer a 'generous' relocation grant to new staff which inspectors were informed has resulted in better recruitment of staff and has assisted staffing levels in fieldwork teams. A number of policies exist to retain staff and staff commented on the very good training, support and supervision and sensitive packages for staff with specific needs.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	11	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	1
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	0		

Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)		
The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
All staff interviewed as part of the inspection process reported feeling fully supported and properly supervised by an effective, approachable, accessible and open management team. Good training opportunities were apparent, and all staff were aware of policies, procedures including the whistle blowing policy which is available on the corporate intranet.		

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
Standards 19 and 20 have already covered some issues on training. Inspectors have evidenced a good quality-training programme available for staff in the adoption service to develop and enhance their individual skills and to help them keep up to date with professional and legal developments.		
Each staff member has an individual training and development plan, which reflects their individual needs and the skills they need to develop to provide a better service for adopters and children referred.		
Training that has been delivered or planned includes: supervising child care practice, making good assessments, understanding the impact of caring for neglected and abused children, current advances on attachment research, “theraplay” training, working with families with learning disabilities, birth relative initiated contact, letterbox workshop, disruption meetings, and “story stem” narratives. (This is not the complete list). All new staff are given a thorough induction training and there is an appraisal system which identifies individual training needs (as already stated).		
Staff are asked to complete evaluation forms following all training events, and discuss the effectiveness of each course attended at their supervision session.		
The team plan includes objectives to ensure that the adoption service staff, children’s fieldwork staff and Panel members are kept informed of changes in practice and policy in relation to the implementation of the new Adoption and Children’s Act and has identified the professional advisor to the Panel to take the lead in this area.		

The adoption team development plan identifies specific areas of development required and how these will be addressed i.e.: via team training events or inviting in individual speakers or trainers to talk to the staff group, with dates as to when these should be achieved.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **All appropriate records are maintained securely, kept and are accessible when required.**

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Inspectors were pleased with the comprehensive and accurate case records maintained for each child and prospective and approved adopters. The adoption agency has a written policy and procedural instructions on the treatment of adoption information and records, which include cover arrangements for maintaining confidentiality.</p> <p>Inspectors visited the site where closed adoption files are archived and were impressed with the arrangements for the retrieval of information. Archives were moved to this site from a previous site some years ago following a flood, inspectors were impressed to hear that records were saved and not one was lost. There are smoke detectors that are linked to the Fire Brigade. However, whilst these files were securely stored inspectors were not convinced that the containers were sufficiently fire proof.</p> <p>There are arrangements for storing of records such as health, status and CRB checks that have been obtained for prospective and approved adopters, and their outcomes. CRB originals are held by the Head of Child Protection for Brighton and Hove and the date and disclosure number is kept on the applicants file.</p> <p>Decisions by supervisors are recorded on the case files in the recording section and inspectors saw evidence of this. Inspectors were informed that 4 days per year were put aside for a case file audit with the adoption services, and a regular system of auditing files by the management team is ongoing.</p>		

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)

The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The adoption agency follows its own operational guidelines about the treatment of Adoption Information and Records, when providing relevant information from its case records to other adoption agencies. In some cases where appropriate, the agency sought leave from the court to provide some of the legal information.

The operational instructions includes the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the Human Rights Act and sets out how staff should deal with requests for access or disclosure and details of what constitutes exempted data.

Brighton and Hove operate an open access policy and a leaflet is provided to all adopters in the Post Approval Pack.

The adoption agency also have a policy and procedure 'Birth Relative Initiated Contact' to assist staff in dealing with enquiries from birth parents wishing to find out information about their adopted children and arrange contact with them.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

This report has already referred to the policies, which establish the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of case files including information on access. Inspectors were informed that separate records were kept for complaints and allegations.

Inspectors saw the new proforma documents to be used for auditing the case files of adopters, concurrency carers and children, and heard that case files were audited regularly at supervision and during the 4 annual audit days.

Inspectors were pleased with the standard of recording in the case files, which were legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and signed and dated.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)**Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?**

1

Inspectors looked at the Human Resources files of staff working for the adoption service and were concerned that they lacked information required by the regulations. Many of the staff working for the adoption service have been working for Brighton and Hove for many years and prior to the local authority reorganisation were employees for East Sussex, inspectors were concerned that as employees changed their job within the organisation or obtained promotion that references were not appropriately undertaken and checks taken up.

Inspectors were concerned that files lacked: documentary evidence of qualifications, proof of identity including a photograph, full employment history and references. Inspectors were informed that the human Resources department do hold a number of electronic records on employees including a database with photographs, which are used for ID purposes and a separate database for CRB checks however inspectors were not informed about these at the time of the inspection.. However a number of items are still outstanding. This is a requirement and therefore reflects the low score on this standard.

Files of Panel members are also required to meet Regulation 11 (3)(d) Schedule 3 and Regulation 15 (1) Schedule 4 and again inspectors found that these files lacked: documentary evidence of qualifications, references, proof of identity including a photograph, employment history.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Brighton and Hove’s main adoption service and the concurrency team is based in a large building in Brighton. This building houses the majority of staff employed within the fostering and adoption service. Rooms are available in the basement for contact with birth parents. These were in use at the time of the inspectors visit, but inspectors were informed that they had been furnished and decorated in a comfortable and pleasant manner and that birth families had access to a small kitchen to make drinks and snacks.

Emphasis and confidentiality issues was noted by inspectors, and social workers were especially sensitive to this issue when adopters were bringing children placed with them for contact with their birth families. The main adoption and permanence team and that of the concurrency team are situated in different parts of the building and are seen as quite separate, although inspectors were informed that communications is good and information shared regularly. The new adoption support team are based in a separate building in Hove and this has caused some operational difficulties in working together with other team members. The managers are fully aware of the concerns about accommodation and are actively working for a solution to this.

Inspectors checked the premises at both sites and found the Brighton site to be secure with a swipe entry card system in place the building is fully alarmed. The site at Hove was not so secure, but inspectors were assured that an alarm system was being fitted the following week.

All computers used by the adoption service are protected by a password system and a list of passwords is kept for access in emergencies following the recommendations of the recent serious case review.

There is a letterbox database, which inspectors found to be very secure with the password known only to the staff that operate the system.

Insurance on both buildings is organised corporately, and inspectors were informed that there was a disaster recovery plan in place.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Empty box for Lay Assessor's Summary.

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 Local authority manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 13TH September 2004 factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the local authority adoption manager, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 1st February 2005 , which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents.

REGULATIONS

Record of Compliance found on inspection with
The Adoption Agency Regulations 1983
and

The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

This record does not form part of the public inspection report, but is required for CSCI monitoring purposes.

	1983 REGULATIONS	Met (Yes/No/NA)
5	Establishment of adoption panel and appointment of members	YES
5A	Tenure of office of members	YES
6	Adoption agency arrangements for adoption work	YES
7	Adoption agency's duties in respect of a child and his parents or guardian	NO
8	Adoption agency's duties in respect of a prospective adopter	YES
8A	Criminal convictions of a prospective adopter	YES
9	Adoption agency's duties in respect of a proposed placement	YES
10	Adoption panel functions	YES
11	Adoption agency decisions and notifications	YES
11A	Adoption agency decisions and notifications – prospective adopters	YES
12	Placement for adoption	YES
13	Review of case where no placement has been made within six months of freeing for adoption	YES
13A	Information on adoption	YES
14	Confidentiality and preservation of case records	YES
15	Access to case records and disclosure of information	YES
16	Transfer of case records	YES

	2003 REGULATIONS	Met (Yes/No/NA)
2	Statement of purpose.	NO
3	Children's Guide.	NO
4	Review of statement of purpose and children's guide.	YES
5	Appointment of manager.	YES
6	Fitness of manager.	YES
7	General requirements.	YES
8	Notification of offences.	YES
9	Arrangements for the protection of children.	YES
10	Staffing of agency.	YES
11	Fitness of workers.	NO
12	Employment of staff.	YES
13	Staff disciplinary procedure.	YES
14	Arrangements for absence of manager	YES
15	Records with respect to staff.	NO
16	Fitness of premises.	YES
17	Complaints.	YES



**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT**

**ADOPTION SERVICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**Fostering & Adoption Service
253 Preston Road
Brighton
June 2005**

1 Introduction

- 1.1** Brighton and Hove City Council is committed to providing a high quality adoption service and welcomes the National Adoption Standards for England and the National Minimum Standards. The statement of purpose will detail the aims and objectives of the service, quality assurance mechanisms, and the range of services provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth families.
- 1.2** The Statement of Purpose includes details of the staffing and organisational structure of the service, management arrangements, complaint procedures and the details of Commission for Social Care Inspection and should be read in conjunction with the fostering statement of purpose.
- 1.3** The principles within the statement of purpose apply to placements made with other adoption agencies and also non agency placements such as step parent, kinship and inter-country adoptions. These placements will receive the same high quality professional and management attention.

2 Key aims and principles

- 2.1** A child's welfare is the paramount consideration. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving and caring family, which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child or young person are at the centre of Brighton and Hove's Adoption Service. Children come from a wide range of cultural, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds, therefore the Adoption Service will endeavour to recruit carers who reflect this.
- 2.2** Brighton and Hove City Council, with other agencies and community groups, will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children.
- 2.3** Where children or young people are not able to live safely with their birth parents then active consideration will be given to that child being cared for within the wider family or friendship network. The Children, Families and Schools department is working to enhance the service provided to family and friends carers.
- 2.4** Where children or young people are not able to remain with their birth family or be placed within the wider family network a family placement with foster carers or adoptive parents will be sought. Good childcare planning is essential to prevent children drifting in the care system. Delays in progressing permanence plans can have a severe impact on the health and development of children.
- 2.5** Birth parents and birth families will be provided with a service that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated in an open, fair and respectful manner throughout the adoption process

- 2.6** The views and wishes of the child should be sought by a range of age appropriate means. The Children's Rights Service and Advocacy service will continue to play a key role in promoting the wishes and views of looked after children and enabling their voice to be heard. If adoption is agreed as the plan children will have his or her wishes and feelings recorded and taken into account. An age appropriate children's guide to adoption with key local information is available to all children where adoption is the plan.
- 2.7** The Adoption Service will aim to provide a diverse and wide range of adoptive placements to meet the needs of Brighton and Hove's children. The service will maintain a clear, inclusive and pro-active recruitment strategy to encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds and walks of life.
- 2.8** Prospective adoptive parents will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Enquiries will be responded to promptly and prospective adopters given full information about the recruitment, assessment training and approval procedures.
- 2.9** Adoptive carers will be carefully recruited and trained and given access to a range of adoption support services. It is recognised that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from a range of agencies and organisations that have to work together to meet the needs of those affected by adoption.
- 2.10** The preservation of adoptive families and the reduction of the risk of disruption is a key aim of the service. The needs and background circumstances of children and their birth families will need to be fully assessed so that careful matching considerations can be drawn up and children matched with adopters that are best placed to meet their needs.
- 2.11** A range of adoption support services will be made available for children and adoptive families. If placements do disrupt in spite of intensive placement support, disruption meetings will be convened that are chaired by an officer that has not been involved in the care planning process to date. All parties in the placement will be invited to attend and express their views and the views of the child will be sought. The disruption meeting will address the future needs of the child and the chair will ensure that a full record of the meeting takes place and any lessons for future practice are fully disseminated.
- 2.12** Adoption support services in line with regulation under the Adoption & Children Act 2002 will be provided to all parties in the adoption process including adoptive adults, birth families as well as adoptive families.
- 2.13** The Adoption Service has a full information policy and will ensure that adoptive parents are given access to full information about the child prior to placement.
- 2.14** The Adoption Service values the role that experienced adopters play in the training and preparation and support of new adoptive families and will continue to work to facilitate such contact.
- 2.15** Staff within the Adoption Service will receive supervision and access to a range of training opportunities to ensure they are well equipped to recruit, train, assess, and support adoptive families, family find and place children appropriately and provide support to adopted adults, birth families and others in the adoption process.

3 The Children

- 3.1** Adoption will be considered as a positive option for looked after children that are unable to return to live with their birth parents or be placed with family or friends carers.
- 3.2** Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption and careful consideration will be given to recruiting carers that can meet the range of needs of our looked after children needing adoptive families.
- 3.3** All decisions for children will be based on a rigorous assessment and care planning process. Achieving permanence for children within the child's timescales is a key objective. A careful balance has to be achieved between allowing the birth family sufficient time with access to all appropriate support services to make the changes necessary to resume the care of their children safely and the need for children to have the opportunity to live in a stable and permanent family.
- 3.4** All Looked after Children will have a Care Plan. The wishes of the child will be taken into account as appropriate in drawing up the care plan. The birth family should be involved in the care planning process and their views represented.
- 3.5** The Care Plan will be reviewed at every Looked After Child Review and at the 4 month review the plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan will be based on the needs of the individual looked after child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved ideally by return to birth family or if that is not possible through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up to expedite the permanence planning, which will be appropriately monitored and considered at every subsequent review.
- 3.6** Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a review, plans will be made to take the plan for adoption to Permanence Panel within 2 months.
- 3.7** Every child will have their wishes and feelings listened to in an age appropriate manner, recorded and taken into account regarding plans for their future. Where they are not acted upon reasons for this will be explained to the child and recorded on the file. The Children's guide to adoption service is available to children when adoption is being considered as the plan. Children of a sufficient age and understanding will also be given details of the national telephone helpline Talk Adoption.
- 3.8** The National Adoption Standards in respect of planning for child will be followed and any delay in achieving those timescales will be monitored by fieldwork managers, Permanence Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.
- 3.9** All children will have a named social worker responsible for them throughout the adoption process. The social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the child is well prepared before joining a new family. Age appropriate information will be given and foster carers will be trained and supported to enable them to help children prepare to move to a new adoptive family.
- 3.10** All children moving on to adoptive or permanent families should have a life story book and be supported to retain key items and momentos from their past. Children should have access to

specialist skilled help as appropriate to enable them to express their feelings about their past and plans for the future and be better placed to develop new attachments to permanent/adoptive families.

- 3.11** Where adoption is identified as a potential plan a referral should be made by the child's social worker to the appropriate Practice Manager in the Permanence Team. This Practice Manager will oversee the referral and family finding process.
- 3.12** The Practice Manager will offer consultation and organise a Permanence Planning meeting as appropriate with the child's social worker and foster carers to consider the plans for the child, look at the detail of the matching consideration and devise a family finding strategy.
- 3.13** A social worker from the Permanence Team will take responsibility for family finding and will work closely with the social worker for the child and other key parties to the process. Clear and detailed matching criteria will be drawn up and children will be placed with families that are best able to meet their needs.
- 3.14** Children will not be left waiting for a 'perfect family'. Children should be placed with adoptive parents of an appropriate ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. However if no such match can be found within reasonable timescales, alternative adopters who can help a child understand their background and culture should be identified to avoid delay in the child moving to a permanent placement. These adopters should be provided with access to specific support services as necessary.
- 3.15** The family finding social worker will consider adoptive resources within the local pool of Brighton and Hove carers, approved adopters within the South East Adoption Consortium, that Brighton and Hove belong to, as well as any resources identified by the National Adoption Register. If no local placements are available specific family finding activities will be undertaken by advertising for adopters within appropriate journals and contacting a wide range of adoption agencies.
- 3.16** The option of the child remaining on a permanent basis and achieving a permanent family ideally through adoption with their foster carers will always be considered and explored if appropriate. However other matching considerations such as the age of the child, the need to place siblings together if possible and the particular needs of the child and circumstances and family structure of the foster carers' family will also be taken into account.
- 3.17** The family finding social worker will take the lead in identifying appropriate families, liaising with the adopter's social worker and accompanying the child's social worker on meetings with the prospective adoptive family. The family finding social worker will remain involved until the match has been agreed at Panel and by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 3.18** The Adoption service will make it clear to potential adopters for a child that it is a requirement that the child's name should be retained unless there is a very good reason not to.
- 3.19** Sisters and brothers should be placed together where appropriate and practicable. Taking decisions to separate siblings is a difficult task and training and guidance will be provided for staff on this issue. The impact of any decision on the ability to family find must also be taken

into account. A decision to separate siblings should be fully recorded on the file and explained to the child as appropriate. A clear contact plan for maintaining the link between siblings must be presented as part of the plan for adoption to Permanence Panel.

- 3.20** Appropriate contact for children with their birth family will always have to be considered in the final care plan and welfare checklist for the child within the court proceedings. These plans will also be considered by the Permanence Panel when the plan for the child is presented to Panel. When direct contact arrangements are planned to continue post adoption the aim should be to promote a positive sense of identity for the child, not rehabilitation to the birth family.
- 3.21** Indirect contact arrangements for the child with his or her birth family will be arranged via the Adoption Service's 'letterbox scheme'. The expectation is that letterbox arrangements will be put in place for all children where direct contact is not being maintained. It is recognised that the child's needs for contact and information about their birth family develop and change throughout their childhood and the adoption support social worker will facilitate this or organise access to specialist services to review contact and promote the setting up of appropriate direct or indirect contact arrangements.
- 3.22** Children with attachment difficulties and histories of a traumatic and disrupted past may need continued access to multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption. Adoption support needs for the child will be identified within an adoption support assessment and a plan will be drawn with the prospective adopters and key agencies and along with the Matching Report will be presented to Panel. This adoption support plan will be kept under review.
- 3.23** Adoption files will be carefully stored and archived and information from the agency's records will be made available when they are of sufficient age and understanding. Adoption files will be retained for 75 years.

4 Birth Parents and Birth Families

- 4.1** Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications and their rights.
- 4.2** The views of birth families about the adoption and contact plans will be clearly recorded on the case file and the BAAF Form E when the plan for the child is presented to Permanence Panel. Birth parents will be given sight of this Form to enable them to comment on its content prior to Panel.
- 4.3** The wishes and views of the birth parents will be taken into account in the planning of placements particularly in regard to religion.
- 4.4** Social workers for the child will make efforts to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth family about themselves and their history and encourage them to contribute to the child's life story material.

- 4.5** Staff within the adoption service will explain to adoptive parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and to provide this to the adopted child as appropriate.
- 4.6** Birth parents will be given access to a support worker independent from the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. Birth parents will be provided with written information about this service as well as the services they could access from the Post Adoption Centre and the Natural Parents Network and the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and their Parents.
- 4.7** Birth parents and appropriate relatives will be given the opportunity to meet the adoptive parents, usually prior to placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances that would make such a plan unsafe and against the best interest of the child.
- 4.8** The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with extended birth family members particularly birth grandparents is recognised and will be supported as appropriate and included in letterbox or direct contact arrangements.
- 4.9** The Adoption Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and will provide services in accordance with guidance document ' Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives' (DOH 2000) and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 4.10** The Adoption Service will also develop provision to meet the requirement to provide 'birth relative initiated contact' and will ensure that staff are sufficiently trained to provide a sensitive and responsive service.
- 4.11** Birth parents and families will be advised of the complaint procedures and their right to make representation and complaints.

5 Prospective Adopters

- 5.1** Applications from prospective adopters will be welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It is recognised that a wide range of adopters are needed to meet the needs of our looked after children and that these needs will determine the priority given to progressing applications from prospective adopters.
- 5.2** Prospective adoptive families will be given information about the type of children waiting for adoption and the specific need to recruit adopters offering placements for children with disabilities and special needs, children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, sibling groups, and children over 2 years of age.
- 5.3** Prospective adopters will be given information about the fact that there are relatively few babies available for adoption and that in Brighton and Hove most babies are placed with concurrency carers. These are foster carers that are also approved as adoptive carers and able to provide a permanent home to the child by adoption if rehabilitation work with the birth family is not successful.

- 5.4** The Permanence team will provide a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Initial details will be taken and information given about eligibility criteria. Full information packs will be sent out to potential adopters within 5 working days. These information packs will contain information about the assessment and training process, the types of children needing adoptive placements and adoption support services. All of this information for prospective adopters is also made available on the Fostering & Adoption website, www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk
- 5.5** Applicants must be over 21 years and legally domiciled in the UK and within a reasonable travelling distance of Brighton and Hove. Couples will normally have to have been in a relationship for a reasonable length of time. Couples that have infertility issues will normally be expected to have concluded any medical intervention and made a positive choice about adoption as a route to parenting.
- 5.6** The information material to prospective applicants gives details of issues relating to past criminal convictions, health and age considerations. The age of applicants is considered in relation to their energy and activity levels and the age of the child they wish to be considered for. Children under the age of 2 years and children with specific relevant health issues will not be placed in smoking household because of the well-recognised risks of passive smoking.
- 5.7** The Adoption Service has developed a conflict of interest policy that details the fact that certain staff groups in children services and certain elected members of the authority are not eligible for assessment by the authority because of the potential conflict of interest. They will be assisted to access services from neighbouring adoption agencies.
- 5.8** Prospective adopters will be informed about the fact that Brighton and Hove is part of the Adoption South East Consortium with East Sussex, Kent, Medway and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. Once approved if they are not linked with a Brighton and Hove child within 3 weeks of approval their details will be circulated to Consortium members for consideration for their children. Information will also be given about the National Adoption Register.
- 5.9** If a prospective adoptive family is offering a particular resource that may result in them not being linked with a local child, e.g. because of their ethnic origin, they will be informed that their details will be circulated to other agencies with minimum delay to maximise the opportunity for them to be linked with an appropriate child.
- 5.10** Prospective adopters that decide to proceed following the provision of the information pack and their initial enquiry to the agency will be offered an initial home assessment visit. If the Adoption service feels it cannot prioritise or progress an application a full explanation will be given and recorded on the file. Applicants will be given details about the complaint procedures. Under certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the social worker to consult with the Professional Advisor to Panel or Permanence Panel about an issue concerning an application.
- 5.11** Initial home assessment visits to applicants wishing to adopt an under 2 year old will be made by a social worker from the Concurrency Team who will be able to explain the particular challenges and expectations of the concurrency route as well as the traditional route to adoption.

- 5.12** The Permanence team have established a contract with Parents and Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter-country adopters on behalf of BHCC. PACT has considerable experience in this specialist area of work and will provide a timely and dedicated response to enquiries from people wishing to adopt from abroad.
- 5.13** The Permanence team will also provide a duty service to give information, respond to enquiries and undertake the work required to progress step parent adoptions.
- 5.14** In situations where foster carers are being assessed as prospective adopters for the children in their care they will be entitled to access the same training and support services. Assessments will be conducted within timescales compliant with the National Adoption Standards.
- 5.15** Regular preparation training groups will be run for prospective adopters. These groups will be run for applicants for children 0-2 years and applicants for children over 2 years. The training groups will always include input from experienced adopters and details of the scope and focus of these groups will be provided to applicants in advance. The preparation groups provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to consider in detail issues relating to adoption, meet other prospective adopters and decide whether they wish to proceed by making a formal application to be assessed as adoptive parents.
- 5.16** Views of prospective adopters about the content and running of the group are canvassed at the end of the group and again when they are visited towards the end of the assessment process to complete the second opinion report.
- 5.17** The assessment and approval process is comprehensive, thorough, fair and fully explained to applicants. The Adoption Service will endeavour to work in partnership with applicants, however it is necessary for both parties to be clear that a risk assessment is being carried out when a home study assessment is being completed. Assessment will distinguish clearly between self-reported and independently evidenced information with verification of key aspects of the applicant's accounts.
- 5.18** A second opinion visit will be made by the supervisor of the social worker conducting the assessment towards the end of the assessment, the views of the applicants about the assessment process will be sought and included in the supervisor's report. This report will be appended to the BAAF Form F and made available to the applicants.
- 5.19** An assessment of the prospective adopters adoption support needs will be completed and appended to the BAAF Form F. The information contained in this assessment will form part of the adoption support plan, which is drawn up after the adopters are linked with a specific child.
- 5.20** Applicants will receive a copy of the BAAF Form F and have the opportunity to comment on it. Applicants are given full information about the Permanence Panel and provided with a booklet about the Panel process. Applicants are strongly encouraged and supported to attend. Panel will comment on the strengths and possible risk factors in the application and applicants are informed at Panel about Panel's recommendation. The decision of the Agency Decision

Maker will be passed on to the applicants verbally on the day that it is made and followed up immediately in writing.

- 5.21** Prospective adopters will be advised about the adoption support services provided by the local authority, the Post Adoption Centre and Adoption UK and other appropriate services.

6 Adoptive Parents

- 6.1** Approved adopters will be given full information about the matching, introduction and placement process including information on the Consortium and National Adoption Register. These documents and others will be made available to them in the Brighton & Hove Adopters handbook issues to all newly approved adopters.
- 6.2** Brighton and Hove has detailed procedures for staff about the matching and placement and introduction procedures and guidance for other authorities and agencies when a match is being considered for a child with inter agency adopters.
- 6.3** An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Permanence Panel for consideration. A full matching report will be completed which details the positive factors about the match, any risk areas, information on any other possible matches that have been considered and adoption support services that will need to be made available to the family.
- 6.4** As well as having full information about the child's history prior to the match the prospective adopters will also have the opportunity to meet the child's foster carers, seek information from the Medical Advisor and meet any other key professionals.
- 6.5** The Adoption service will work to develop the practice of holding child appreciation days so that adopters have the opportunity to meet key people in the child's past and learn more about them prior to placement.
- 6.6** The Adoption service will provide access to ongoing training and specialist services to adoptive families as part of the adoption support service. Assessments in relation to adoption support services including financial support will be undertaken and reviewed and key workers identified in line with the new responsibilities detailed within the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and corresponding regulations. The role of the Adoption Support Service Advisor will be explained to all adoptive families.
- 6.7** The Adoption service will work with other agencies and key stake holder groups, including Adoption UK, to continue to review and develop adoption support services.
- 6.8** The Adoption service currently provides a range of adoption support groups including a specific group for gay and lesbian foster carers and adopters and an adoptive parents and toddlers group.
- 6.9** There is a service level agreement with the Post Adoption Centre to provide local surgeries that can be used by adoptive families, adopted adults, birth families and adoption professionals. The PAC also provide a helpline and a range of training courses for professionals and all parties in the adoption circle. Newly approved adopters will be encouraged to become

members of Adoption UK and benefit from the various support services it provides. Brighton & Hove will pay their membership fee to this organisation for their first year post approval.

- 6.10** The Adoption Support Services Advisor within the service will oversee the provision of adoption support services. The service will also be responsible for undertaking adoption support assessments, advising and supporting adopters and their children, contributing to training and workshops for adoptive families and professionals, offering advice and consultation on adoption related matters, undertaking specialist pieces of work for court and managing all direct and indirect post adoption contact.
- 6.11** The Adoption Support service will also provide a specific service to adoptive families to support and advice on schooling and education issues. An Adoption Support teacher will take the lead in developing this dedicated provision.
- 6.12** Adoptive parents will be supported to enable the child to maintain any appropriate contact arrangements, either direct or indirect, with birth family members or significant others such as previous foster carers. It is recognised that contact arrangements need to be kept under review and will need to adapt over time to meet the child's needs.

7 Adopted Adults

- 7.1** The Adoption service will provide a service to adopted adults that are seeking to find out information about their past history from case records or trace their birth family.
- 7.2** Adopted adults will also be given information about the services they can receive through the agreement Brighton and Hove has with the Post Adoption Centre. They will also be given information on the services available from key voluntary user groups such as NORCAP.
- 7.3** The Adoption Service will continue to involve representatives of the local NORCAP group, representing adopted adults, in the development of adoption support services.
- 7.4** The Adoption service will also continue to involve adopted adults in the preparation training groups run for prospective adopters, recognising the significance of adopters understanding the lifelong impact of adoption for any child that is adopted.
- 7.5** The Adoption service will from time to time commission the Post Adoption Centre to run specific local workshops for adopted adults.

8 Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 8.1** Brighton and Hove have key quality assurance mechanisms in place in relation to adoption work. A Development Officer is employed that does not have operational responsibility for the Permanence Team to act as Professional Advisor to Panel.
- 8.2** The Professional Advisor will read all the paperwork for Panel and take up quality assurance issues with staff and managers and withdraw assessments from Panel if further work is needed. The Professional Advisor oversees the timetabling of the Panel agenda to ensure that sufficient time is given to consider each item on the agenda.

- 8.3** The Professional Advisor will ensure policy and practice issues are picked up and disseminated to staff in fieldwork and family placement teams. The Professional Advisor will also act as a consultant to all staff and managers in the department on issues relating to adoption and permanence policy and practice.
- 8.4** The Professional Advisor will recruit members of the Panel in line with Adoption regulations and will provide training and induction as necessary and organise for all Panel members to have the opportunity for regular training input on key areas of adoption practice to ensure that they are kept updated on changes in legislation and regulations. One of the training sessions during the year for Panel members will be held jointly with Permanence team staff.
- 8.5** Brighton and Hove employs a suitably qualified and experienced person to act as independent chair of the Adoption and Permanence Panel. The chair also has a clear quality assurance role and will take up issues directly with the Professional Advisor or Agency Decision Maker as necessary. The chair will also provide a separate report on the activities of Panel as Part of the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.6** Brighton and Hove's Adoption and Permanence Panel meets on a fortnightly basis, usually for the whole day, to ensure that there is no delay in considering children for adoption, approval of adopters and matching.
- 8.7** Brighton and Hove has clear written policies and procedures relating to the constitution of Panel and decision making. Staff and prospective or approved adopters attending Panel are asked to complete evaluation forms and their views are taken into account when reviewing the functioning of Panel.
- 8.8** The Panel will receive progress reports on a six monthly basis on children that have been presented to Panel. Panel will also monitor compliance with the targets set for progressing permanence plans for looked after children. Individual issues will be addressed with appropriate staff and managers and the overall performance will be reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.9** Panel will also monitor compliance with the standards in relation to the assessment of adopters. Panel will receive progress reports on approved adopters if they have not had children placed. If they have not had a child placed within 3 years they will require to be re-assessed.
- 8.10** Panel members will receive all the documentation for Panel in good time to allow time to read and fully consider the issues.
- 8.11** Panel will make a recommendation and convey that to the staff member or adoptive applicant at Panel. They will be informed when the meeting will take place with the Agency Decision Maker which will be within 5 working days of the Panel. The decision will be reported back to applicants and staff verbally and followed up in writing within 7 days.
- 8.12** The Professional Advisor will meet with the Agency Decision Maker and ensure that the decision maker has the details of the Panel discussion and recommendation to inform the decision making.

9 Staff within the Permanence team

- 9.1** Brighton and Hove employ sufficient staff to work within the Fostering and Adoption service and the staffing structure is kept under review.
- 9.2** All staff undertaking assessments of adoptive applicants are social work qualified and General Social Care Council registered with access to appropriate training, supervision and support.
- 9.3** Staff within the team undertake recruitment, training and assessment of carers, supervision and support of placements (pre and post adoption and with permanent foster carers), family finding and birth records counselling work.
- 9.4** Staff within the team work closely with colleagues within the service and with fieldwork teams. Staff have access to training courses and are kept updated on developments in practice and legislative changes.
- 9.5** The Permanence Team Service Manager has responsibility for the Concurrency Team, Permanence & Adoption Team including the Adoption Support Service, and the Family and Friends Team.
- 9.6** The Concurrency Team not only recruits, assesses and supervises concurrency carers, they also undertake the direct assessment work with the birth families for children placed concurrently and act as key worker for the child. The Concurrency Team also runs a monthly support group for concurrency carers that carers continue to attend post adoption. Experienced concurrency carers always have an input into the preparation training course run for prospective adopters of children 0-2 years.
- 9.7** Managers within the service are all qualified and experienced social worker practitioners and have access to a range of managerial training courses. The Head of Service is an experienced manager with a management and social work and qualification. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service.
- 9.8** The Adoption Support Services Advisor within the service will meet with the Assistant Director for Children's' Social Care within the Directorate on a quarterly basis to update on key practice and operational issues and to ensure that any issues of a strategic nature are taken forward.
- 9.9** The Head of Service is Sharon Donnelly and can be contacted at the Fostering and Adoption Service, Brighton and Hove City Council, 253 Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SE. Telephone number 01273 295444, email sharon.donnelly@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- 9.10** A structure chart for the Fostering and Adoption service is appended to this statement of purpose.

10 Monitoring & Evaluation

- 10.1** The Adoption Service produce an annual recruitment strategy and progress in relation to recruitment activity is reported on at the monthly Fostering & Adoption Management Team Meeting. The Service Manager meets fortnightly with the Practice Managers to discuss allocation issues and review workloads. There is a caseload weighting system in place within the Service.
- 10.2** The Professional Advisor has a key quality assurance role and reads all the reports that are going before Panel. She has a broader role in policy development and ensuring practice issues are disseminated within the Fostering & Adoption service and fieldwork teams. The Chair of Panel is an independent and experienced manager and therefore also plays a quality assurance role. Panel regularly raise issues with the Agency Decision Maker about aspects of practice and the Chair of Panel provides a report to accompany the Adoption Agency Report to Committee.
- 10.3** The Fostering & Adoption Service Management team undertake a regular file audit programme and ensure that all files of carers and adopters are audited at least annually.
- 10.4** Monthly meetings are held with lead members of Children, Families & Schools [CFS] Committee and senior managers within the Department to ensure that members are kept up to date on key service developments. Issues related to the work of the Fostering & Adoption service are regularly reported on at these meetings. As well as the Annual Report members of CFS also receive a six monthly summary report of adoption activity.
- 10.5** The Fostering & Adoption Service Management team meet monthly and part of the remit of this meeting is to ensure services are effective, responsive and of a high quality. All staff have access to regular supervision and there is a performance and development process in place across the authority. A Service Day for all the teams within the service is held annually to review the Service plan and discuss practice developments.
- 10.6** The Service produce an annual service plan with key objectives, targets and actions. This plan is reviewed regularly and reported on corporately at the end of the year. The service training and development plan is linked to objectives within the Service Plan.

11. Complaint procedures

- 11.1** Users of our Adoption Services, including children, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and adopted adults, are provided with copies of the complaints procedure, advised how to access the procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with services provided. Service users are advised that independent sources of support are available to help them make a complaint and advocate on their behalf if they feel unconfident making a complaint by themselves, including access to the Post Adoption Centre and the Children's Rights Service. Service users are advised that the Customer Services Manager who oversees the complaints procedure can be contacted at:

Brighton & Hove City Council
Kings House

Grand Ave

Hove

Or by writing to Standards & Complaints, Freepost SEA2560, Brighton BN1 1ZW

The Freephone number is 0500 291229

Information about the complaints process can be found by going to the City Council website:

www.brighton-hove.gov.uk or the Fostering & Adoption Service website:

www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk

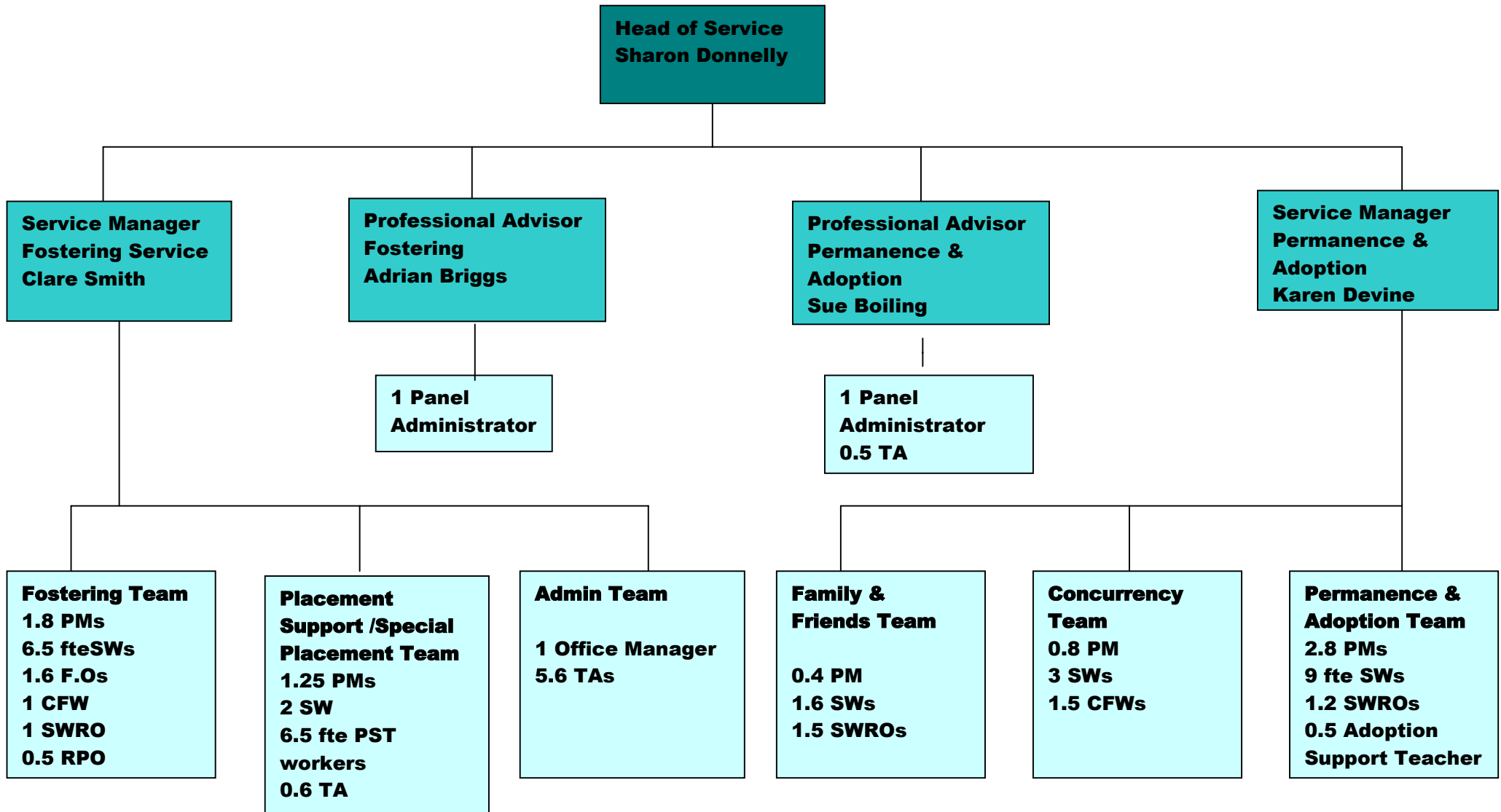
Complaints can also be emailed to complaints@brighton-hove.gov.uk

- 11.2 Most complaints are resolved informally and speedily by the local manager and records are kept of all complaints, compliments and representations made to the Service. There are clear procedures in place for responding to complaints. Formal Stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within 2 working days and should be responded to within 10 working days. If someone is still unhappy after the complaint has been dealt with at Stage 1 they can ask for Stage 2 investigation. The Standards and Complaints team will aim to conclude all Stage 2 investigations within 20 working days. Members of the public can complain to the local Ombudsman at any time. However the Ombudsman will usually want the Council to have chance to investigate the complaint first.
- 11.3 The Complaints procedure for Children's Services is currently being revised nationally and the Department will produce new complaints leaflets as soon as these have been finalised. The Department produces separate complaints leaflets for children and young people and information about how to complain is also included in the Children's Guides to adoption.
- 11.4 The Service reports annually on complaints within the Adoption Agency Report that goes to Children, Families & Schools Sub Committee. Corporately records of complaints, compliments and representation are reported on regularly.
- 11.5 The Management team within the Fostering and Adoption Service regularly discuss any issues arising from complaints, standards of care, or allegations against carers to ensure any lessons learnt can be disseminated and changes in practice made.

12. Commission for Social Care Inspection

- 12.1 The Adoption Service will be inspected by the Commission for Social care Inspection in accordance with the Regulations of the National Adoption Minimum Standards. These inspections will take place on a 3 yearly basis. Inspections reports are public documents.
- 12.2 The Commission can be contacted at East Sussex Area Office,
Ivy House,
3 Ivy Terrace,
Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 4QT.
Telephone – 01323 636200

Structure Chart – Brighton & Hove Fostering & Adoption Service June 2005



Key

PM – Practice Manager, SW – Social Worker, SWRO – Social Work Resource Officer, CFW – Community Family Worker
 RPO – Recruitment & Publicity Officer, F.O – Fostering Officer, TA – Team Administrator , fte – full time equivalent

appendix three.

BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT

PERMANENCE PANEL

CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Professional Advisor – Adoption and Permanence
Hove Park Mansions
Hove Park Villas
Hove
BN3 6HW

BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL PERMANENCE PANEL CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Brighton and Hove City Council is a local authority Adoption Agency and a Fostering Service Provider. The Permanence Panel considers adoption and long-term fostering. Accordingly the permanence panel must comply with regulations relevant to both fostering and adoption.
- 1.2 The composition of Adoption Panels, terms of reference and functions are set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended by the Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews)(Miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 1997. Guidance on the Regulations is provided in LAC (84) 3 and LAC (97) 13. Further duties in relation to adoption allowances can be found in The Adoption Allowance Regulations 1991. Detailed guidance is also available in the BAAF publication Effective Panels. The relevant regulations and guidance under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (currently in draft form) have informed this document but a full revision will occur when these regulations come into force.
- 1.3 The composition of Fostering Panels, terms of reference and functions are set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
- 1.4 All Adoption Agencies and Fostering Service providers are legally required to have adoption and fostering panels.
- 1.5 The Regulations ensure that permanence panels have an independent role separate from the agency.
- 1.6 This constitution and terms of reference will be the framework for the operation of the BHCC permanence panel. It will be reviewed annually.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The aim of the Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) Permanence Panel is to ensure the provision of a high quality adoption and permanence service that safeguards and promotes the welfare of children looked after by the local authority.
- 2.2 The permanence panel will carry out its responsibilities in accordance with the Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Adoption Guidance and Regulations, Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and departmental policy and procedure.
- 2.3 The permanence panel is committed to anti-discriminatory practice and will carry out it's duties in accordance with BHCC Celebrating Diversity policy and will not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, religion, sexuality or disability.

2.4 In all matters the permanence panel will hold the welfare of children to be paramount.

3. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The role of the permanence panel is to consider:

- Whether adoption is in the best interest of a child and if the panel recommends that it is, whether an application should be made to the court to free the child for adoption.
- Whether permanence via long-term fostering is in the best interest of a child.
- Whether applicants are suitable as prospective adopters or long term foster carers
- Whether specific prospective adopters or long term foster carers are suitable for a particular child.
- Reports regarding placement disruptions and progress in relation to permanence planning for the children considered by panel.
- The adoption support services that will be provided to the child, the adoptive family and the birth family.

3.2 In addition to the above the permanence panel should be involved in the preparation and review of agency procedures and policies in relation to adoption and permanence. The panel will be rigorous in monitoring quality standards and will contribute to the development of good practice.

3.3 The permanence panel's role is to provide thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it and to make sound and appropriate recommendations to the agency decision-maker.

3.4 The panel will offer consultation and guidance on cases and about adoption and permanence where appropriate.

3.5 The panel will evaluate the standards and quality of assessments and reports and give feedback to the appropriate managers via the professional advisor to the panel.

3.6 The panel will be committed to anti-discriminatory practice and to ensuring that the welfare of the child is paramount

3.7 The Panel will be transparent in its decision-making processes and will welcome comments and suggestions, which will improve both its practice and operation.

Questionnaires are sent to all those who have attended panel to assist in achieving users views.

4 MEMBERSHIP

4.1 As a permanence panel the membership must satisfy regulations related to both adoption and fostering panels.

4.2 Membership of Adoption Panels is prescribed by Regulation 5 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations amended by Regulation 2(4) of the Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997.

4.3 Membership of an individual adoption panel should not exceed more than ten members and must include:

- Two social workers in the employment of the Adoption Agency. As a matter of good practice one of the social workers should be currently engaged in work involving the placement of children for adoption. The other social worker should be a senior manager with broad experience in the management of social services for children including adoption.
- One elected member of the Local Authority from the Children, Families and Schools sub committee.
- The person nominated as the medical adviser to the adoption agency
- Three independent members. Where practicable an adoptive parent and an adopted person over the age of 18 should be included. The independent members should be chosen to reflect the composition of BHCC's local communities.
- At least one male and one female

4.4 Fostering Panel membership is prescribed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The requirements of panel membership is as above except that it stipulates that four independent members are required and that this should include at least one person who is, or within the previous two years has been a foster parent for a fostering service provider other than the one whose fostering panel is being established. However, under these regulations the medical adviser would be deemed independent.

4.5 The Membership of the BHCC permanence panel therefore comprises of:

1. Independent Chairperson
2. An elected member of the Children, Families and Schools sub committee
3. The agency medical adviser (vice chair)
4. An adopted person
5. An adoptive parent

- 6. A foster parent from ESCC
Two qualified social workers from the local authority -
 - 7. Practice Manager - Fieldwork - BHCC
 - 8. Head of Service, Fostering and Adoption- BHCC
 - 9. Education representative - Head of School Admissions and Transport
 - 10. Independent member with professional experience in adoption practice and policy.
- 4.6 The list of names of current member is attached (appendix A). Under current regulations substitutes (deputies) for panel members are not allowed.
- 4.7 All panel members will have suitable qualifications and/or experience and are expected to comply with the panel protocol.
- 4.8 The permanence panel will conduct no business unless at least six of its members are present and this must include the chairperson or vice chair, a social worker in the employment of the local authority and two independent members.
- 4.9 All panel members will be appointed for a three year term of office and will be asked to sign a contract. Panel members, with the exception of the Medical Adviser, should not hold office for more than two terms without an intervening period of at least three years. [BHCC is aware that Panel regulations in relation to fixed terms of office is currently under review]
- 4.10 Agencies are required by Regulation 5A(2) to ensure as far as possible that the term of office of a third of panel member should expire each year. This provides for continuity of membership and for new members to be introduced at regular intervals.

5. PROTOCOL FOR MEMBERS

- 5.1 Panel members are expected to attend a minimum of 75% of meetings in a year. Members unable to attend a panel meeting must ensure that apologies are sent in advance to the professional adviser. The professional adviser will have discussions privately with any panel member where attendance is proving to be a problem.
- 5.2 Panel members will be committed to anti-discriminatory practice and will consider each case on its own merits.
- 5.3 Each panel member has a duty to maintain the confidentiality of the information to which they have access. They are required to sign a confidentiality agreement in accordance with the requirement on confidentiality in Regulation 6 (2) of the 1983 Regulations.
- 5.4 Panel members should have read all panel papers carefully before panel and should come prepared to contribute to panel discussions.

- 5.5 Panel members are expected to keep up to date with developments in fostering and both domestic and inter-country adoption and to avail themselves of training opportunities.
- 5.6 Panel members will be kept informed about current practice, issues and legislation in relation to adoption by means of updates from the professional adviser, consultations and will also be provided with the BAAF quarterly journal.
- 5.7 A minimum of 2 annual training events are offered. There is an expectation that panel members will attend 50% of the training events. Members will be consulted on the content and format of the training.
- 5.8 Panel members must declare any personal or professional interest in any matter for consideration by the panel.
- 5.9 All panel members will have a current enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau, which will be updated every three years. Panel members must inform BHCC at once if they are convicted or cautioned for any criminal offence.
- 5.10 If not employed by BHCC, or acting as a representative of the agency, two satisfactory written personal references will be required prior to their appointment to the panel.
- 5.11 Each panel member will have a file held by BHCC with details of recruitment, references, full name, date of birth, home address, qualifications and experience and any complaints and allegations made against the panel member, details of investigation and its outcome.
- 5.12 All new panel members will be expected to observe at least one panel prior to full membership.
- 5.13 All new panel members will receive a comprehensive induction pack. The professional adviser will offer support regularly to independent members.
- 5.14 A panel member may resign at any time by giving 28 days notice in writing to the panel chair or professional adviser. If BHCC is of the opinion that a member is unfit or unable to hold office, the agency may terminate his or her office by giving him or her notice in writing of the reasons.
- 5.15 The professional adviser, in consultation with the panel chair, will informally approach any panel member whose behaviour is considered inappropriate or ineffective. If the matter cannot be resolved at the informal stage by further individual training and/or advice and guidance, a letter addressing the issue will be sent to the panel member with a copy to the agency decision maker and panel chair. If there are no substantive changes and difficulties persist then consideration will be given to terminating their membership. If this course of action was to be undertaken and the panel member was dissatisfied then appeal could be made in writing to the agency decision-maker whose decision is final.
- 5.16 Panel members who do not attend panel as part of their employment will receive an expense payment of £80 per panel attended. This will be paid on receipt of

an invoice. This payment will cover all transport, parking, childcare and other costs associated with panel preparation and attendance.

6 PANEL CHAIRPERSON

- 6.1 The chair of the panel will be an independent person with significant experience of social work and adoption work; including at a senior management level and the necessary skills to ensure that the panel's work is carried out efficiently and sensitively. The vice-chair will be another Panel member that does not have line management responsibility for the fieldwork or fostering and adoption service within the authority.
- 6.2 The chair will ensure that panel meetings are conducted in a professional and proper manner and that all items of business are covered and to assume responsibility for co-ordination of discussion and time keeping. The chair will ensure that all applicants, social workers and managers attending panel will be treated with respect and courtesy.
- 6.3 The responsibilities of the chairperson are detailed in the 1997 guidance and include:
- Deciding who will attend panel in addition to panel members (10.2).
 - Ensuring that all panel members participate fully and that, if possible, consensus is reached (10.3) .
 - Involvement when a panel member appears unfit, unwilling or unable to continue (10.23).
 - Involvement in deciding when a matter is urgent and when an additional panel meeting may need to be convened (48 & 49).
 - That there is clarity concerning the reasons for panel's recommendation and accurate recording of such.
 - The promotion of good practice and consistency of approach and fairness by panel members in assessing carers.
- 6.4 The chair of the panel will be responsible for producing an annual report of the panel's work for BHCC.

7 INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

- 7.1 There are four independent members on the BHCC permanence panel. These members are not elected members or employees of the local authority and have personal or professional knowledge and experience of adoption and/or fostering. The independent members should reflect the composition of the local communities that BHCC serves.

8 MEDICAL ADVISER

- 8.1 The medical adviser is the only panel member who is not appointed for a fixed term.

- 8.2 The medical adviser is a member of the adoption panel and is currently the appointed vice-chair. He/she is not confined to commenting solely on medical issues and is encouraged to make an active contribution on all matters.
- 8.3 The medical adviser will be a senior member of the community child health service and will have an in-depth knowledge of child health and development and the consequences of abuse and neglect.
- 8.4 The medical adviser is available, where appropriate, to children, social workers, foster carers, adopters and birth family members. The medical adviser will provide a written report to the panel on adopters, foster carers and children presented and will be available to discuss resulting issues. Where appropriate he/she will also be available for consultation and advice on emerging medical issues post placement.

9 LEGAL ADVISER

- 9.1 The legal adviser is a senior lawyer employed by BHCC and is experienced in family and child care law and in adoption work.
- 9.2 The legal advisor will give specific legal advice to panel members on each individual case presented to the panel.
- 9.3 The legal adviser will give general advice to panel members on the legal functions and duties of the panel.
- 9.4 If the legal adviser is unable to attend panel they will endeavour to ensure that alternative arrangements are made in order that the panel can have legal advice.
- 9.5 The Legal adviser can be contacted by social workers for advice.

10.0 THE PROFESSIONAL ADVISER

- 10.1 The professional adviser to the Panel will be the Development Officer - Adoption and Permanence. The professional advisor does not have line management responsibility for staff within the fieldwork or fostering and adoption service and plays a key quality assurance and professional advisory role within the department.
- 10.2 The professional adviser will advise the chair and panel as required on matters relating to BHCC's practice, policy and procedure.
- 10.3 The professional adviser is responsible for ensuring comprehensive and appropriate papers are sent to panel members at least one week before the panel meeting and for reporting back to the agency any concerns or issues raised by panel members.

- 10.4 The professional advisor is responsible for ensuring that accurate and timely minutes of panel are produced and that verbal and written notifications of the Agency Decision makers are forwarded within timescales that adhere to the national adoption minimum standards.
- 10.5 The professional adviser is also responsible for the performance management of individual panel members. The professional advisor will also play a key role in recruiting, inducting and supporting new panel members as required.
- 10.6 The professional adviser is available for consultation and advice on matters relating to the panel and attends a briefing meeting with the agency decision-maker after every panel meeting. If the professional adviser is unavailable alternative arrangements will be made to ensure that panel has professional advice.
- 10.7 The professional advisor will provide panel members with specialist advice and access to appropriate training materials as necessary, this will include giving particular advice on such areas as inter country adoption.

11 OTHER ADVISERS

- 11.1 If other specialist advice is required for any other reason the professional adviser to panel will source this appropriately.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 12.1 All information presented to the permanence panel is confidential and panel members must respect this.
- 12.2 All panel members (and any observers) will be required to sign a confidentiality bond in accordance with the 1983 Adoptions Agencies Regulations.
- 12.3 All panel members must be able to indicate what arrangements they have for ensuring that confidential papers sent to them are kept in a secure place.
- 12.4 All documentation and reports should be returned to the panel administrator at the end of each panel meeting. If a panel member is unable to attend a panel meeting it is their responsibility to ensure that the papers are returned safely to the panel professional adviser.
- 12.5 Any breach of confidentiality by a panel member will be considered as serious and will be taken up by the professional adviser.

13.1 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- 13.2 It is possible for a panel member to have some knowledge, either in a professional or personal capacity, of a case under consideration.

- 13.3 If a panel member believes they may have personal knowledge they should not read the papers before seeking advice from the professional advisor or panel chair.
- 13.4 Professional knowledge should be declared at the panel meeting.
- 13.5 The chair will decide whether a declared interest in a case is such as to debar the panel member from the discussion relating to that case and/or participation in the panel recommendation.
- 13.6 Declaration of an interest, personal or professional, may not of itself preclude a panel member from being involved in considering the item. Any declaration of interest will be recorded in the Panel minutes.

14. ADMINISTRATION OF THE PANEL

- 14.1 An experienced administrator will support the work of the panel.
- 14.2 The Permanence Panel administrator will minute panel meetings. The minutes will record:
- Date of panel
 - Attendance at panel
 - Apologies for absence from panel
 - Name of applicants/adopters/foster carers/child
 - Purpose of presentation to panel
 - Issues raised by panel members
 - Areas discussed with social workers and applicants/carers/children
 - The positive factors and potential difficulties/risk factors
 - Any legal advice given
 - Recommendation reached
 - Whether the recommendation was unanimous
 - Any panel member/s not in agreement with the recommendation and why
 - Any request from panel for further information, amendments to reports or reporting back to panel
 - Any business for discussion
- 14.3 Panel members must agree minutes. The chairperson will sign all panel minutes to confirm their accuracy.
- 14.4 The panel minutes and recommendation made when the plan for a child is considered, and in respect of matching a child with adopters or foster carers, will be placed in the child's file to be available to him or her.
- 14.5 The panel minutes and recommendation relating to the approval or review of approval of adopters and foster carers will be placed on the adopters/foster carer's file. Adopters and foster carers do not have the right to see panel minutes, however they will receive the list of the positive factors and risk factors identified by panel with their letter informing them of the Agency Decision Maker's decision.

- 14.6 A central record of all minutes of the permanence panel is kept securely at Hove Park Mansions. The panel administrator will collate relevant statistical data.
- 14.7 The tabling of reports and agenda items is co-ordinated by the Panel Administrator in consultation with the professional adviser. Panel members will receive copies of the agenda and all reports/papers at least one week in advance of the meeting. An agenda is sent to all panel attendees.
- 14.8 The panel administrator will be responsible for the booking of rooms for panel meetings and all practical arrangement relating to panel business.

15. PANEL MEETINGS

- 15.1 The panel meet every 2 weeks usually from 9.30am – 4.30pm
- 15.2 The panel will consider cases with the following minimum timings:
- Approval of children for adoption or long term fostering (best interest decision): 45 minutes
 - Approval of adoptive applicants or foster carers: 1 hour
 - Matching of children to adopters/foster carers: 1hour - 1.5 hours (at the discretion of the professional adviser)
 - Progress report on children approved for adoption/permanence: 15 minutes
 - Disruption reports: 30 minutes
 - Review/re-approval of adopters/foster carers: 30 minutes
 - Termination of approval: at discretion of professional adviser
- 15.3 Panel members are expected to read the panel papers in advance of the panel meeting and come prepared to contribute to the discussion. All panel members have an equal role in reaching a recommendation.
- 15.4 Panel members will discuss the issues they wish to explore with the social workers and applicants before inviting them in. The chair will co-ordinate the discussion and ensure that all areas are covered and that the social workers and applicants have the opportunity to present any other relevant information.
- 15.5 Panel members are expected to reach a consensus and the chair will ensure that all members have the opportunity to express their views.
- 15.6 If a consensus cannot be reached then a majority view will prevail with the dissenting member's views being noted in the minutes and if requested will be attributed. The chair will make the final decision on the recommendation.
- 15.7 If there is insufficient information available for panel to reach a recommendation, they will defer the case until the additional information is provided by the relevant social worker.

- 15.8 At the end of each case the chair will summarise the recommendation made and the reasons for it. The chair will also advise all attendees of the decision making process and when the agency's decision will be made.
- 15.9 The appropriate workers will convey the panel recommendation orally to all those involved i.e. children, birth parents, applicants, adopters and foster carers within 24 hours.

16. REPORTS FOR PANEL

16.1 The panel will require the following reports

- Approval of children for adoption and permanence via long term fostering : a completed BAAF Form E with supporting documents and an adoption support assessment.
- Approval of adoptive applicants: a completed BAAF Form F, chronology, financial verification, written references and an adoption support assessment.
- Matching of children to adopters: completed BAAF Forms E and F, a completed matching report, all relevant panel minutes and the adoption support plan.
- Six monthly progress reports on children approved for adoption and long term fostering: a completed progress report, and all relevant panel minutes
- Annual progress reports on approved adopters awaiting placement: a completed progress report and all relevant panel minutes
- Adoptive placement disruptions: Summary of disruption meeting, action plan, recommendations and all relevant panel minutes
- Review of foster carer approval - annual foster carers review report
- Rescinding of the approved adoption plan for a child: a completed rescinding report, BAAF Form E and all relevant panel minutes. N.B. If the child is already placed under the adoption regulations and the request to rescind is because the status of this placement needs to change then the panel will also require the Adopters' BAAF Form F, the matching report and all relevant panel minutes.
- Review/re-approval of adopter's 2 years after original approval where no child has been placed: BAAF Form F, relevant panel minutes and an up-date report plus any other relevant reports.
- Termination of adopters' approval: BAAF Form F, relevant panel minutes and a report on reasons for termination plus any other relevant reports

16.2 The professional adviser to the panel will be available to offer advice to social workers on the completion of reports and the standards required by panel.

17. ATTENDANCE BY SOCIAL WORK STAFF

17.1 All appropriate social workers must attend with their managers as appropriate and present their cases to panel as follows, this expectation also applies to social workers attending from other fostering or adoption agencies:

- Approval of children for adoption and permanence(also to include decisions on rescinding): child's social worker and his/her supervisor.
- Approval of adoptive applicants: supervising social worker and his/her supervisor.
- Matching of children to adopters: child's social worker and his/her supervisor and the prospective adopters supervising social worker.
- Progress reports on children approved for adoption and permanence: not required unless requested by professional adviser or chair
- Progress reports on approved adopters awaiting placement: not required unless requested by the professional adviser or chair
- Disruption reports: chair of the disruption meeting, child's social worker and the prospective adopter's supervising social worker
- Review/re-approval of adopters 2 years after original approval where no child has been placed: supervising social worker
- Foster carer review of approval: supervising social worker
- Termination of adopters' approval: supervising social worker and his/her supervisor

17.2 The chair must be notified as soon as possible regarding any problems with staff attending panel. The chair will then decide whether it is appropriate to proceed.

17.3 Staff attending panel will be asked to complete a feedback form regarding their experience of the panel process.

18 ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN, APPLICANTS, ADOPTERS AND FOSTER CARERS AND OBSERVERS.

18.1 Brighton and Hove is committed to user involvement and transparent decision-making. Prospective adopters and foster carers are expected to attend panel when their initial application is being considered and when their suitability for a specific child is being considered. Only in exceptional circumstances will the panel make a recommendation regarding the suitability of applicants who do not attend.

18.2 It may often be appropriate for current foster carers to attend panel with the social worker for the child when information on a child is being presented for a best interest decision. Panel would welcome and encourage such attendance.

18.3 Attendees will be given a panel leaflet explaining the panel process and what to expect when they attend. Attendees will also be sent a feedback form so that their views on their experience at panel can be gained and fed back on a regular basis to panel members.

18.4 All applicants will be given sufficient notice to enable them to attend. The responsibility for this lies with the supervising social worker and should ideally be done when the worker books the panel date.

- 18.5 A letter of invitation will be sent to applicants by the panel administrator confirming the date and time of the panel meeting at least one week beforehand.
- 18.6 When applicants attend they will be invited into the panel meeting with the social work staff after the panel has decided upon the areas it needs further discussion or clarification on. The applicants will remain in the panel meeting with the social work staff whilst the panel asks its questions. The applicants will be introduced to the panel, and will also have the opportunity to ask any questions they may have of panel, give any further information they may want panel to be aware of or make a statement to panel.
- 18.7 Applicants will be informed of the strengths in their application and the potential risks/areas of concern. They will then be asked to briefly leave the meeting whilst panel reaches its recommendation.
- 18.8 The applicants will then return to the panel meeting to be informed of the recommendation and be advised when the decision will be made by the agency decision-maker.
- 18.9 Approved foster cares will be encouraged to attend the panel meeting when their first foster care review, subsequent review or any other relevant information regarding the care they provide is being considered. Carers are welcome to bring a representative or friend with them if they so wish.
- 18.10 Birth parents are encouraged to make written or recorded representation to panel and in any event should be shown and be fully aware of the information about them which is presented to panel.
- 18.11 Children should be supported and encouraged to write or record their views for panel or, when appropriate to attend in person. Arrangements for a child to attend panel should always be discussed in advance with the professional adviser. When the plan for a child is adoption they will be given relevant publications (i.e. BAAF's Children's Guide to Adoption, Dennis the Duckling etc.).
- 18.12 Usually no more than two people at a time will be allowed to observe at panel. Panel attendees will be informed that observers are often at panel; if they have any objection to this they must notify the professional adviser in advance of the panel meeting. Observers are required to sign an undertaking regarding confidentiality.

19. DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND NOTIFICATIONS

- 19.1 The chair will provide immediate feedback to all attendees of the panel's recommendation.
- 19.2 Social worker will verbally convey panel recommendations to children and birth parents within 24 hours. However, applicants, children and birth parents must be clear that whilst panel make a recommendation the decision is made by the agency decision-maker.

- 19.3 The Head of Child Protection - Children, Families and Schools has delegated responsibility for making the decision on behalf of BHCC and is the designated agency decision-maker.
- 19.4 The agency decision-maker must take into account the panel recommendation when making the decision. However, the local authority cannot delegate the decision making to the panel and no panel member can take part in any decision made by the agency.
- 19.5 The agency decision-maker will be sent a copy of all the papers presented to panel. He/she will be notified of all recommendations made by the Permanence Panel via draft panel minutes and a verbal briefing session with the professional advisor within five working days of the panel meeting.
- 19.6 The Professional Adviser will notify the social workers of the agency decision. Social Workers will orally inform adopters, birth families and children of the agency decision within 24 hours. The decision-maker will write to the applicants/carers, and birth family confirming his/her decision within 7 working days of the panel meeting.

20. VARIATION OF PANEL RECOMMENDATION

- 20.1 Circumstances may arise necessitating a change in the permanence plan in respect of a child whose plan has previously been approved via the panel process. In these circumstances it will be necessary to make a further application to panel for any variation to the original recommendation.
- 20.2 Similarly where adopters or foster carers wish to vary their original approval this will need to be considered by the panel.

21. PROTOCOLS FOR EMERGENCY AND ADDITIONAL MEETINGS

- 21.1 Additional or longer meetings may be required when there is sufficient pressure of business and the organisation of any additional/longer meetings will be undertaken after consultation with panel members.
- 21.2 An emergency permanence panel meeting is not for use as an extra or additional meeting and will only be used exceptionally in order to meet timescales for court hearings. Where the next scheduled panel date would incur unacceptable delays for a child and/or proposed placement consideration will be given to amending the agenda of an earlier meeting if possible before an emergency panel is arranged.
- 21.3 The normal panel procedures will apply to emergency panels. Panel members will, whenever possible, receive the papers at least 24 hours in advance of the panel meeting. If this is not possible reading time will be given at panel before the case is discussed. Panel members will be contacted by telephone or email to ascertain their availability and the professional adviser will liaise with the chair to arrange the meeting.

22. MONITORING ROLE /FEEDBACK TO AGENCY

- 22.1 Progress report - panel will review individual cases of children approved for adoption or long term fostering at not less than 6 monthly intervals in order to promote their timely placement.
- 22.2 The professional adviser will take responsibility for reporting back to the local authority any concerns or issues raised by panel members and will meet with the agency decision-maker after each panel meeting. Examples of good practice will similarly be fed back. The agency decision maker will take forward practice issues as necessary within the agency.
- 22.3 An annual report on the work of the adoption agency/fostering service provider will be published in June of each year and presented to elected members of Children, Families and Schools Committee. This report will include the annual panel report prepared by the chair and the updated adoption agency statement of purpose for endorsement by elected members. In October of each year the professional adviser will prepare an interim report for elected members. Both of these reports will include statistical information about the work of the panel. Summaries of these reports will be available to prospective adopters, foster carers, birth parents and children as required.
- 22.4 The Agency Decision maker will be invited to panel for an agenda item on an annual basis. This will enable a dialogue to take place between panel members and the Agency Decision maker on general practice and quality assurance issues. The Agency Decision maker will also be invited to take part in at least one of the two annual Panel training days.

23. DISRUPTIONS

- 23.1 A disruption can occur at any time after the match has been recommended by the panel; before placement, after placement or post adoption order.
- 23.2 Disruptions should be notified to the panel via the professional adviser as soon as practicable.
- 23.3 A disruption meeting should be held following every disruption within 3 months. A summary of the disruption meeting, the relevant reports, an action plan and recommendations will be presented to the permanence panel as soon as possible after the disruption meeting has taken place.
- 23.4 Panel through the Professional adviser will ensure that any broader practice issues from disruption meetings are disseminated appropriately through the department.

24 COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

- 24.1 Any complaint specifically about the permanence panel should be directed to the professional adviser or chair in the first instance to assist resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved at stage one then the usual complaints procedure for BHCC will be used.
- 24.2 Where an applicant/carer is not in agreement with the decision made, and/or the Permanence Panel's recommendation the following representation procedure will be followed.
- **FOSTERING MATTERS.** The carer(s) should write directly to the agency decision-maker within 28 days. The decision-maker may meet with them to discuss their concerns and then refer the matter back to the BHCC permanence panel. The panel will re-consider the matter taking into account the applicant's/carers comments and concerns and will make a recommendation. This recommendation will be communicated to BHCC decision maker who will make the final decision.
 - **ADOPTION MATTERS.** The prospective adopter(s) may choose to make a representation directly to BHCC **or** to an Independent Review Panel (IRP). If a representation is made directly to BHCC the prospective adopters must write directly to the agency decision-maker within 28 days. The decision-maker may meet with them to discuss their concerns and will then refer the matter to the adoption panel of a neighbouring local authority. The panel will consider the matter taking into account the applicant(s) comments and concerns and will make a recommendation. This recommendation will be communicated to the BHCC decision maker who will make the final decision. If the applicant makes a representation to the IRP he/she should directly notify the IRP of his/her wish to do so. BHCC will forward all relevant information to the IRP within 10 working days of being informed of the need to do so. The IRP will review the matter and notify the BHCC decision maker of it's recommendation and the reasons for it. The BHCC decision maker will make the final decision.
- 24.3 Where a practitioner is not in agreement with a recommendation made by the Permanence Panel and wishes to pursue the matter, he/she should do so directly through their line manager and the professional adviser (who will inform the chair of the panel).

25 ANNUAL REPORT

- 25.1 The panel chair will produce an annual report on the work of the permanence panel in April of each year.
- 25.2 The report should include:

- number of children approved for adoption and permanence, age, gender, ethnicity
- number of adoptive applicants approved, ethnicity, family structure, geographical location
- number of foster carers approved, ethnicity, family structure, geographical location
- number of matches of children with families approved
- work of the panel and the service
- strengths and weaknesses of current provision
- quality of work presented to panel
- specific issues arising for panel over the past year
- recommendations re: the operation of panel and the provision of adoption and permanence services in Brighton and Hove.

25.3 The annual report will be presented to panel.

25.4 The annual report will be presented to councillors at Children Families and Schools Committee as part of the Annual Adoption Agency Report.

26 REVIEW

26.1 The function, role, policy, procedure and operation of the permanence panel will be formally reviewed yearly in the annual report.

26.2 After each panel a questionnaire will be sent to all attendees (applicants, adopters, social workers, foster carers and children) seeking their views and feedback. The outcome of these questionnaires will be presented on a quarterly basis to panel and incorporated into the annual report.

REFERENCES

The Adoption Act 1976

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983

The Adoption Allowance Regulations 1991

Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) (Miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 1997

Care Standards Act (2000): Regulations and Minimum Standards

The National Adoption Standards (implemented April 2002)

The Adoption and Children Act (2002)

Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services
2002

The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003

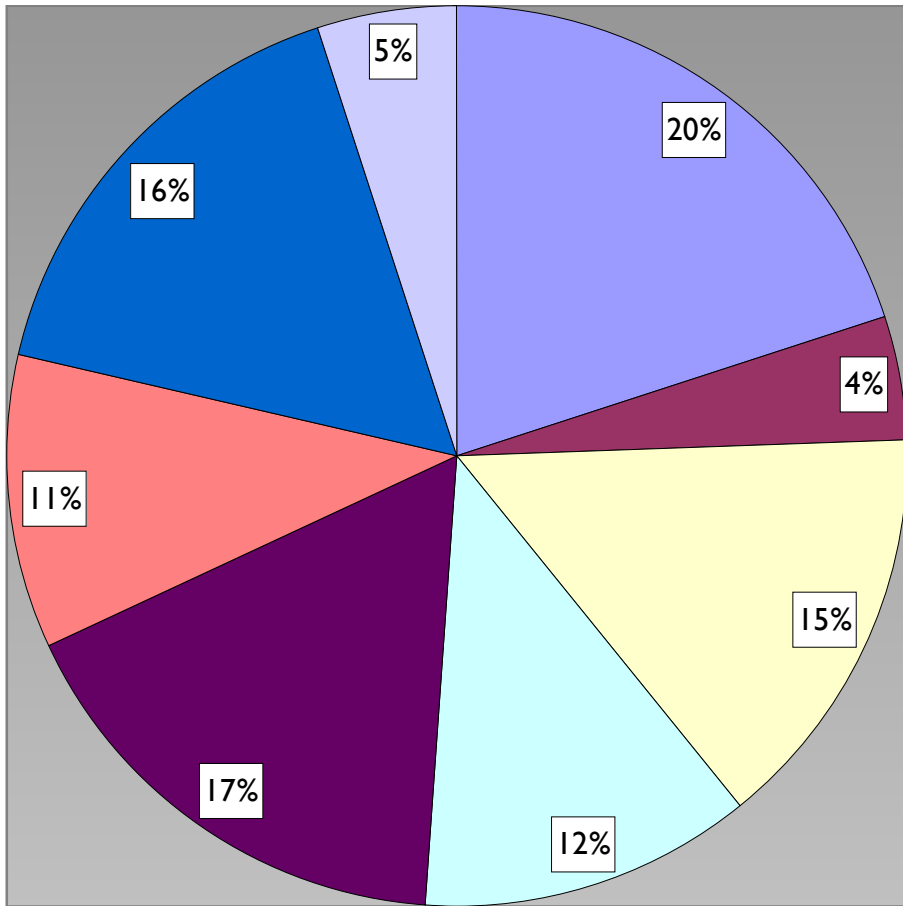
Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service March 2003

London Borough of Islington Adoption Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference.

Sue Boiling – Development Officer – Adoption and Permanence April 04

Adoption & Permanence Panel Activity

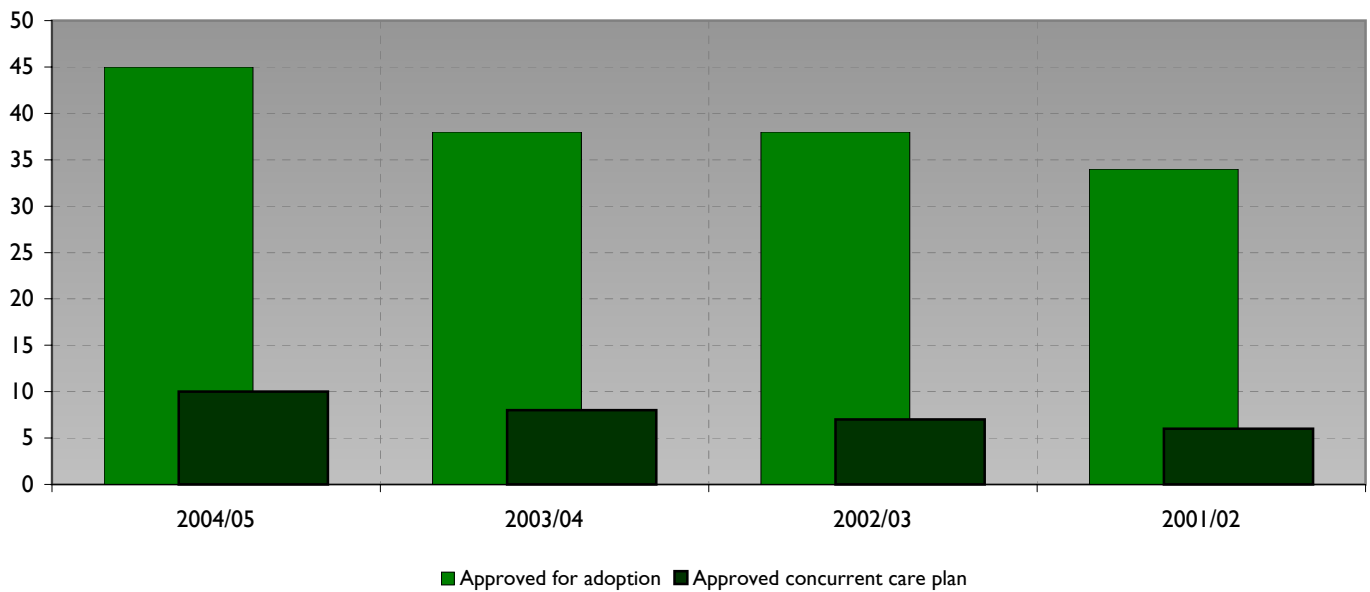
Decisions



Adoption in child's best interest	45
Concurrent care plan	10
LTF business (incl. Best interest decisions, matches and variations to approval)	33
Prospective adopter approvals	27
Children matched with prospective adopters	38
Progress reports	24
Freeing orders	37
Misc	11

Adoption & Permanence Panel Activity

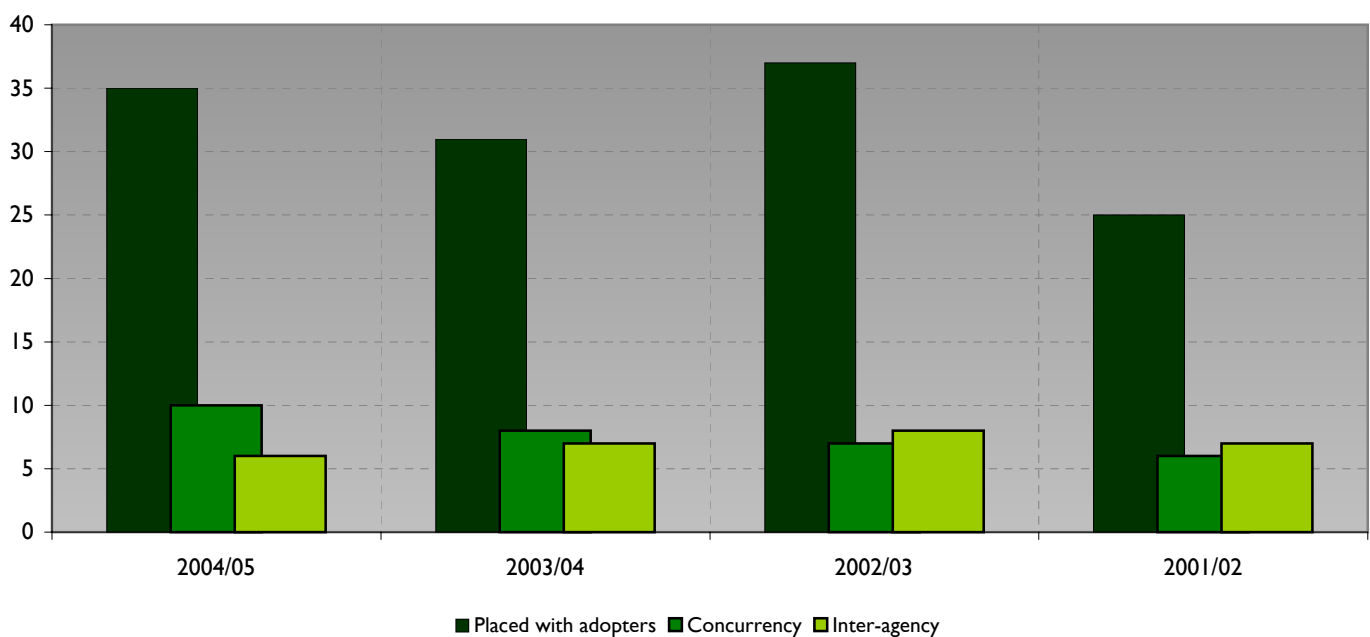
Adoption in child's best interest decision



	2004/05	2003/04	2002/03	2001/02
Approved for adoption	45	38	38	34
Approved concurrent care plan	10	8	7	6

Adoption & Permanence Panel Activity

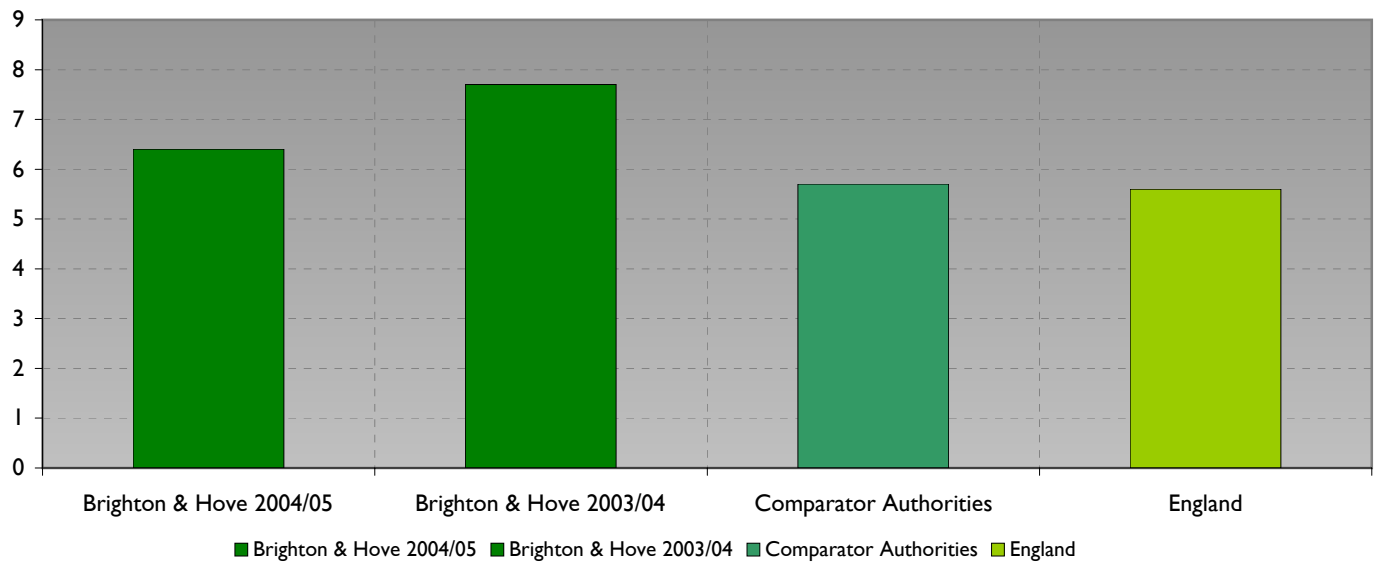
Children placed with prospective adopters



	2004/05	2003/04	2002/03	2001/02
Placed with adopters	35	31	37	25
Concurrency	10	8	7	6
Inter-agency	6	7	8	7

Adoption & Permanence Panel Activity

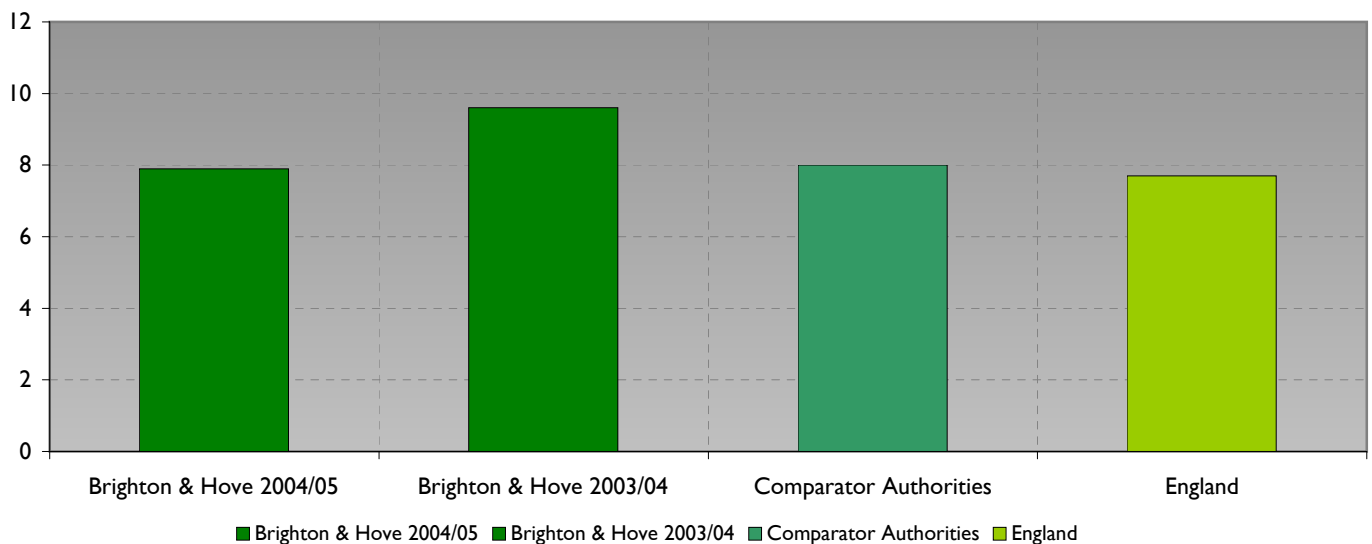
% looked after children placed for adoption in the year to 31 March



	2003/04	2004/05
Brighton & Hove	7.7	6.4
Comparator Authorities	5.7	Not Available
England	5.6	Not Available

Adoption & Permanence

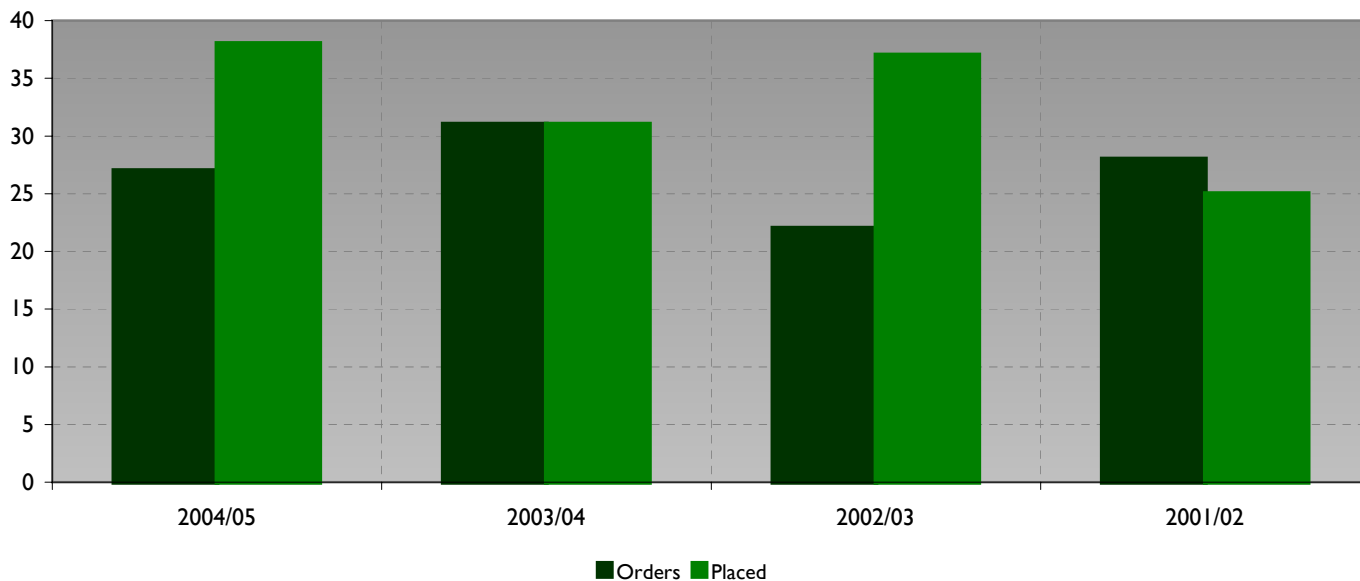
% of children looked after adopted from LA care



	2003/04	2004/05
Brighton & Hove	9.6	7.9
Comparator Authorities	8	
England	7.7	

Adoption & Permanence Activity

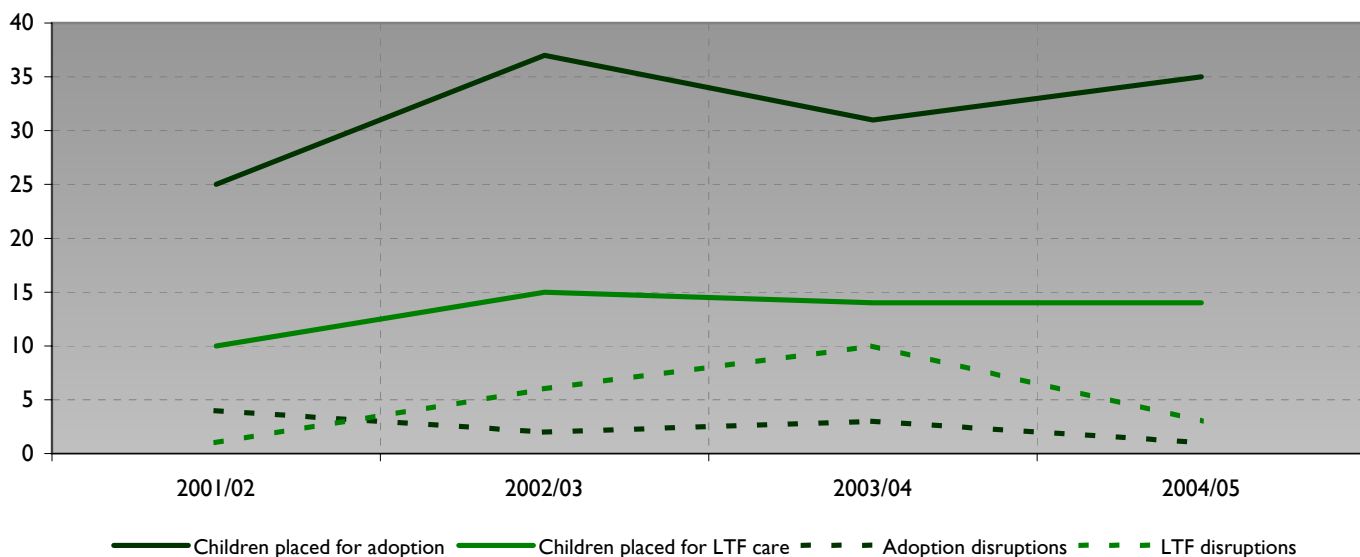
Children placed with prospective adopters and adoption orders granted



	2004/05	2003/04	2002/03	2001/02
Orders	27	31	22	28
Placed with adopters	35	31	37	25

Adoption & Permanence

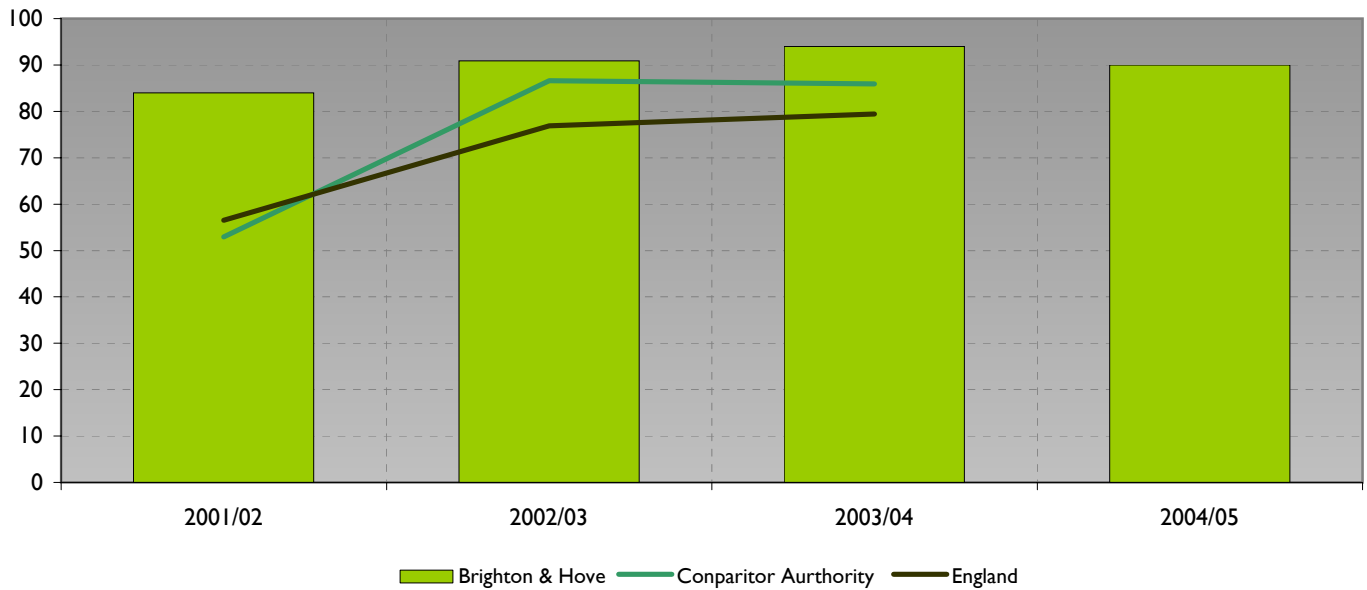
Disruptions



	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Children placed for adoption	25	37	31	35
Children placed for LTF care	10	15	14	14
Adoption disruptions	4	2	3	1
LTF disruptions	1	6	10	3

Adoption & Permanence Activity

% looked after children who were adopted during the year and were placed for adoption within 12 months of best interest decision being made



	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Brighton & Hove	84	90.9	94	90
Comparitor Authority	52.9	86.6	85.9	Not Available
England	56.5	76.9	79.4	Not Available

BRIGHTON & HOVE PERMANENCE PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2004 – 2005

1. Introduction

1.1 This report covers the period from 1st April 2004 to 31st March 2005. This report briefly summarises the work of the panel over this period including any policy and practice matters.

2. Composition of the Panel

2.1 There have been changes to the composition of the panel during this period.

2.2 The following members have left the panel:

Christine Cook, independent member, adopted person
Tina Henderson, independent member, foster carer

2.3 New members to panel during this period are:

Chris Thornton, independent member, foster carer
Denise Charlton, independent member, adopted person

2.4 The current panel membership is:

- Gill Harris, Independent Chair
- Dr. Sian Bennett, Medical Adviser and Vice Chair
- Councillor Juliet McCaffery, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Chris Thornton, independent member, foster carer
- Denise Charlton, independent member, adopted person
- Samantha Adams, independent member, adopter
- Julia Ridgeway, independent member
- Sharon Donnelly, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
- Chris Jackson, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare
- Stephen Healey, Brighton & Hove council officer, education

2.5 The panel is at its full membership of ten and continues to meet both the requirements of the Adoption Regulations and the Fostering Regulations. One member will be resigning in April 2005 and a new panel member has been appointed to start at that point. The panel will then be more balanced in respect of race and ethnicity. Although predominantly female, the panel does have three members who are male in contrast to some other agencies which struggle to recruit any men to their panels.

2.6 Brighton & Hove continues to pay a fee for independent members to attend.

This needs to be reviewed to ensure that Brighton & Hove remain competitive with other agencies and that the payment reflects the cost to independent members of attending panel.

2.7 The Legal Adviser to the panel continues to be Natasha Watson.

2.8 The professional adviser to the panel for the year has continued to be Sue Boiling.

2.9 Andrea Critcher has continued to be the panel administrator.

2.10 There is a requirement for panel members of attendance at 75% of meetings over the year. Three members have been unable to meet this requirement over the past year. One has resigned due to inability to meet the attendance commitment. One had short term health problems which are currently being monitored. The remaining member is confident that the required level of attendance will be achieved in the future.

2.11 The annual appraisal scheme for panel members continues to be used with some minor amendments; all members have completed this. This informs the professional adviser and the chair of the individual and collective training needs of the panel. The professional adviser is able to help panel members in accessing appropriate training including national courses run by BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering). Brighton & Hove also pays for all panel members to be members of BAAF. This entitles them to the regular quarterly journal and other relevant publications.

2.12 The chair's role and performance is evaluated each year via a meeting with the professional adviser and the Head of Service with feedback from panel members, attendees and relevant managers within the Department.

3. Work of the Panel

3.1 The panel continues to meet on a two weekly basis. It has met on twenty two occasions during this period; a panel was cancelled in October and only one panel took place in December. Seventeen of the panels have been full day meetings and five have been half days. As can be seen from the figures, this has been a very busy year for the panel both in terms of the number of items considered but also the amount of preparation and reading necessary. On average a set of Panel papers number 500 (and can be up to 720).

3.2 The panel used the meeting on 28.4.04 as a training day on the recruitment of black and minority ethnic adopters and carers. This was joint training with the Permanence team. Panel also spent a half day on 10th November 2004 looking at policies and practice and was joined for part of this by the managers from the Permanence Service. Panel has also incorporated into other panel meetings time to look at procedures, regulations and other relevant issues. This has added up

to approx two and a half days of training over the year. This exceeds the planned two days as outlined in the panel constitution.

3.3 During this period the panel dealt with and made **225** recommendations on **177** items considered. The number of recommendations exceeds the number of items as for some cases presented more than one decision is made (i.e. a Freeing Order and an Adoption Order).

3.4 The panel has made recommendations in respect of 45 children for adoption. This is an increase of 18%.

3.5 The panel has recommended concurrent care plans for 10 children; an increase of 25% on last year's figures.

3.6 The panel has recommended adoption matches for 38 children (although not all of these proceeded to placement); including 10 in concurrency placements and 6 in inter-agency placements. This is an increase of 23% on last year's figures.

3.7 The panel has made recommendations in respect of 7 children for long term fostering. This is a significant decrease of over 174% on last year's figure of 19. This figure is likely to further decrease during 2005/06 as the age at which children need to be presented to panel for long term fostering best interest decisions has been reduced to ninth birthday.

3.8 The panel has recommended long term fostering matches for 14 children including 9 in Independent Fostering Agency placements. This number is similar to last year's.

3.9 The panel has recommended the approval of 27 new adoptive families including 9 concurrency foster-adopters. This is an increase of over 22% on last year's figures. The panel has also recommended the de-registration of 3 prospective adopters.

3.10 The panel has recommended the approval of 2 prospective long term foster carers. The panel has also made recommendations in respect of 3 annual reviews of long term foster carers.

3.11 The panel has received and discussed 24 Progress Reports and 4 disruption reports in relation to children. Progress Reports are now being presented to panel on a more regular basis.

3.12 The Agency Decision Maker has endorsed all of panel's recommendations.

3.13 The panel has also been used to offer consultation and guidance in respect of problematic cases before a formal presentation.

4. Functioning of the Panel

4.1 The format and process of the panel meetings, including the agreed structure for the discussion of the paperwork, remains largely as outlined in last year's annual report. There has been no reason to change it significantly as it appears to work well.

4.2 In order to improve the Panel's ability to consider cases in a timely way, and thus prevent any unnecessary delay for a child, a revised administrative system for placing cases on the agenda was introduced in February this year. So far the system appears to be working well but a formal review of the revised procedure will take place in August 2005.

4.3 The attendance of applicants, prospective adopters and foster carers is well established. Panel is very aware of how difficult it must be for them to walk into the panel meeting and therefore makes a considerable effort to ensure that they are welcomed and made to feel as relaxed as realistically possible in a formal meeting. Applicants, prospective adopters and foster carers also have information available to them in respect of panel members and the Agency Decision Maker in the waiting room, a booklet sent to them re attending panel and discussions with their assessing social worker or supervising social worker to prepare them for attending panel.

4.4 When there has been information that the panel needed to discuss in confidence with the workers or where there were questions around the assessment or matching process itself rather than in relation to the applicants, prospective adopters or foster carers, then panel has seen the workers alone.

4.5 A new development at panel has been the attendance of older children and young people, mainly at the matching stage. All children and young people, where it is thought appropriate due to their age and the circumstances of the match, are able to attend panel if they wish. A booklet is available to them to explain the process as well as discussions with their social worker to prepare them for attending. The panel marks the occasion with a cake for the child or young person to take home.

4.6 There has been an opportunity this year for the vice chair to chair a panel meeting in the absence of the chair.

4.7 Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants, prospective adopters and foster carers attending the panel to ensure that the panel is aware of their experiences and views and any changes that need to be made to the way that panel operates. Panel looks at this feedback in general twice a year. However, specific feedback which requires action is presented to panel by the professional adviser when it is received. The panel has in the past been proactive in pre-empting feedback as members have already identified where something could work better and have made the necessary changes.

4.8 The panel has received 44 feedback forms for this period; 27 from applicants, prospective adopters and foster carers; 1 from a young person and 16 from social work staff.

4.9 In general the feed-back has been positive The main concern expressed by applicants prospective adopters and foster carers attending is the number of people on panel and how over-whelming this can feel on walking into the room. However, they also indicate that they value being included as fully as possible in the panel process and feel well prepared for attending panel and valued and treated with respect at panel.

4.10 The feedback from the young person was positive. It was clear that he had been well prepared for attending and felt listened to at panel and was able to say what he wanted. He commented that although he was very nervous that he thought everyone at panel was really friendly.

4.11 The panel has met with the team manager and practice managers from the Permanence team when appropriate to discuss issues in the service and to enable panel members to keep up to date with developments. For example panel has had input from the ASSA (Adoption Support Service Adviser) regarding the support and services available in Brighton & Hove. The panel also meets once a year with the Agency Decision Maker. Panel members value this opportunity for discussion and consider it contributes to open and effective communication with the agency.

4.12 The chair continues to complete a feedback form for the Agency Decision-Maker on every case presented to the panel. This arrangement continues to work well and be of value.

4.13 The panel is a very confident and competent panel and overall operates in an open and effective manner.

5. Panel Terms of Reference

5.1 The constitution and terms of reference for the panel continues to meet the requirements of the Adoption Regulations and National Standards for Adoption and of the Fostering Regulations and Minimum Fostering Standards.

6. Practice

6.1 In general panel has felt that the work presented to it is of a good standard. When this has not been the case the panel has highlighted its concerns to the Agency Decision Maker via the professional adviser.

6.2 The panel considers that the Adoption Support plans presented are flexible and generous. This is seen as a key element in placement stability for children

and a low adoption disruption rate. Panel considers that this is a very positive aspect of the work in Brighton & Hove.

6.3 One area of concern that panel has highlighted in respect of post placement or adoption support is the lack of support often available for some children and adoptive families outside of the Brighton & Hove area, for example via CAMHS or the LEA. This is an area that the Department is fully aware of and attempts to address, both via the consortium or with individual authorities, with varying degrees of success.

6.4 Panel has highlighted its concerns in respect of neglect cases presented to it. Panel is worried that in a significant number of cases there appear to have been unnecessary delays before action has been taken to safeguard children. Panel is concerned that this is due to staff not being sufficiently aware of the issues involved in neglect cases as opposed to incident led child protection cases. Panel has fed this back consistently to the Agency Decision Maker via the professional adviser. A meeting with the Agency Decision-Maker to discuss this, and how things might be taken forward has now been arranged.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) has undertaken its first inspection of Brighton & Hove's Adoption Service and observed a panel meeting and met with the chair as part of this. The feed back has been very positive in respect of the organization, functioning and performance of the panel. However, in relation to Standard 11 (which relates to information kept on panel members' files) a 1 was awarded as it was considered that this standard was not met. Additional information has now been added to the aforementioned files.

7.2 The authority was awarded by CSCI three "4"s in respect of the panel's work in relation to Standards 10, 12 and 13. This is the highest possible mark, which means that the work of the panel exceeded the requirements of the Regulations.

7.3 The panel continues to play an important role in ensuring the provision of a quality permanence service to children.

Gill Harris
Independent Chair
Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel
14th April 2005