

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families & Schools Sub-committee

Date: Monday 9 June 2003

Report of: Director Children, Families & Schools

Subject: Adoption Agency Annual Report

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 The work of the Adoption Agency (Brighton & Hove City Council) is governed by 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, Department of Health Circulars LAC (84) 3, LAC (97) 13, LAC (98) 20, LAC (99) 29 and LAC (2001) 21. 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, the National Adoption Standards for England, and the National Care Standards Commission Minimum Adoption Standards
- Local Adoption and Permanence activity and service developments during the year April 2002 – March 2003

2. Recommendations

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

2.2 That the Committee agrees a representative to join the Permanence Panel as required by national standards and outlined in the Adoption and Permanence Panel Report by the Independent Chair (Appendix 4)

3. National Developments

3.1 The Adoption and Children Act

3.2 The Adoption and Children Act received Royal Assent 7.11.02. The Act will be implemented in a phased approach. Adoption Support Phase 1 in October 2003. Independent Review mechanism by end 2003. Full implementation by December 2004.

3.3 Some of the main measures in the Act include the alignment of adoption law with the Children Act 1989 placing the welfare of the child as paramount.

3.3.1 The encouragement of more people to adopt by ensuring effective support is available.

3.3.2 Allowing unmarried couples to adopt jointly.

3.3.3 Restoring public confidence in the adoption process by the introduction of an independent review system for prospective adopters who may be turned down.

3.3.4 The introduction of special guardianship as an alternative route to permanence.

3.4 The new legislation will involve significant work for Local Authorities in ensuring an understanding of and adherence to the range of requirements under the Act. A familiarisation training programme is being planned for fieldwork and family placement staff.

4. National Adoption Standards for England

4.1 The National Adoption Standards came into force 1.4.03 and set ambitious standards for the assessment, approval and placement of children and prospective adopters. (see Appendix 1)

4.2 The standards have been well publicised throughout the Agency. Procedures for monitoring performance against the standards have been developed and are overseen by the Adoption & Permanence Panel and Professional Advisor. It is anticipated that the standards will be extremely hard to achieve in some cases. Where this is so, reasons will be clearly recorded and fed back to the Agency Decision-Maker and Operational Managers.

5. National Care Standards Commission National Minimum Standards

5.1 From 30.4.03 the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) assumes responsibility for the inspection of local authorities adoption services under the Care Standards Act 2002. The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, and National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Adoption Agencies)

Regulations 2003 set out clear and exacting requirements for the conduct of the Adoption Agency. The Agency will be inspected every three years. The first inspection will be in 2003-4.

- 5.2 An audit of service provision against these regulations has identified areas for development and a work programme devised to address these. A Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Agency is attached (Appendix 2). The Children, Families and Schools Committee is required to endorse and review the Statement of Purpose annually.
- 5.3 The development of a Children's Guide to adoption is a significant piece of work that will receive urgent attention. It must be suitable for children of all ages and will be given to the child as soon as an adoption plan is made. It will include a summary of the adoption process, how to access an independent advocate and how to contact the Children's Rights Director.
- 5.4 The regulations require a considerable re-write of procedures, policies and written information for those connected with adoption; children, prospective adopters/adopters (including inter-country adopters), adopted people and birth relatives of adopted people.

6. Agency Activity /Service Developments April 2002-March 2003

6.1 Agency Activity 2002-2003

- 6.2 The agency statistics for April 2002 – March 2003 are attached (Appendix 3). 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.
- 6.3 Significant trends and outcomes outlined in the performance information include the following:
 - 6.3.1 38 children were approved for adoption, an increase of 4 on the previous year, of these 7 were placed concurrently, experiencing minimal disruption to their early attachments and so increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome. 4 children were approved for long term fostering.
 - 6.3.2 37 children were matched and placed with prospective adopters during the year, which is a 48% increase on the previous year. This represents 11.4% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more and is a significant improvement on last year's figure of 8.7%. This demonstrates the strenuous family finding efforts of the Permanence Team. Of these placements 8 were inter agency or consortium (22%). 15 children were matched and placed for long term fostering again an increase, by 5 (50%) on the previous year.

- 6.3.3 22 children were adopted during the year, which although a decrease on last years high of 28, is still, at 6.8% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more, above the national average for Unitary Authorities (6.3%)
- 6.3.4 The number of prospective adopters approved during the year rose dramatically to 34, an increase of 15 (79%) on the previous year, of these, 11 were concurrent adopters (32% of all prospective adopters approved that year). This is a testament to the hard work and efforts of the Permanence and Concurrency Teams in recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters. 7 long-term foster carers were approved which was the same figure as the previous year.
- 6.3.5 The number of children awaiting an adoptive placement at 31.3.03 was 32, (21 placements; 8 sibling and 13 individual placements). The number waiting long term fostering was 12 (9 placements; 3 sibling and 6 individual placements). Both figures are an improvement on the previous year.
- 6.3.6 There were 2 adoption disruptions during the year. This represents 5.4% of all adoption placements made in the year. The national figure for disruptions is 20% for children aged up to 10 years. The average age of children featuring in our adoption disruption figures was 4 years 3 months.
- 6.3.7 There were 6 disruptions of a long term fostering placements, which is a significant increase on previous years. This reflects the very real difficulties many of our older looked after children present. Many of the disruptions occurred some time into the placement when the impact of their attachment history and entrenched nature of their difficulties becomes more apparent. What is clear is that many of these children will have benefited from some placement stability for a period and in many cases positive contacts have been maintained with their carers.

7. Service Developments

7.1 The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 7.2 The Independent Chair of Panel has reported on the work of the Adoption and Permanence Panel (see Appendix 4)

8. The Adoption Consortium

- 8.1 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. There has been considerable activity during the year with matches of 26 children in 18 placements. Brighton and Hove placed six children with other authorities and had three children placed with their adopters.

8.2 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. Joint recruitment and training events are planned.

9. Recruitment, Preparation and Family Finding

9.1 The Permanence/Concurrence Teams runs four preparation groups for prospective adopters and long-term foster carers each year with an average of 10 'units' (couples or single applicants) attending each group. The Permanence Team is developing a workshop to help prospective adopters look at issues of loss and infertility before participation on the preparation groups.

9.2 Generally, the teams recruit sufficient numbers of carers for concurrency and children under 5 years of age. The difficulties in recruitment reflect the national picture: insufficient long-term foster carers, carers for larger siblings groups and older children, particularly boys.

9.3 A major recruitment campaign for adopters and foster carers is being launched in May 2003 and the new fostering payment scheme and carer support package is hoped to have an impact on the numbers of long-term carers recruited.

9.4 The Permanence Team now takes the lead role in Family Finding, with a social worker allocated to implement the family finding strategy agreed at the Permanency Planning Meeting. This includes exploring local, consortium and inter-agency resources and specific advertising. This appears to have had a significant impact on the numbers of children placed as well as preventing drift.

10. Concurrence Team

10.1 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.

10.2 The work undertaken by the team fits well within the National Adoption Standards timescales for permanence planning for looked after children. The average time taken for care proceedings to be concluded is 7 months, and 12 months from initiation of care proceedings to Adoption Order.

10.3 Spring 2003 saw the BAAF (British Agency for Adoption & Fostering) publication of the independent evaluation of the work of the three UK concurrence teams (Coram Family in London, Goodman in Manchester and Brighton & Hove). Two successful and well-attended national conferences were held to disseminate the findings. Concurrent

planning as a model and the work of the three teams received support and congratulations from Dame Butler Sloss (President of the Family Law Division) who spoke at the London conference.

- 10.4 The researchers compared the speed of placement of concurrency cases with children younger than 12 months across the whole of England who were taken into care and for whom adoption was the outcome. They found that there was an average of 26 months in care for the national sample, double the time taken on concurrency cases.
- 10.5 The team has also provided consultation to consortium colleagues from Kent County Council who are in the process of setting up their own concurrency team.

11. Attachment Team

- 11.1 The Attachment Team has continued to offer a therapeutic service to meet the educational, social and mental health needs of children living permanently away from their birth families. These children are in long-term fostering, adoption or kinship care placements, and because of their histories they and their carers need skilled help to enable all the family members to make and sustain new attachments.
- 11.2 The Team is multi-disciplinary, and is jointly managed, funded and staffed by South Downs Health (NHS) Trust and the Children, Families and Schools Directorate, with additional grant funding from the Department of Health.
- 11.3 Between April 2002 and January 2003 the Team worked with 51 children from 38 families. Of these, 35 were fostered, 9 adopted and 7 were subject to Residence Orders.

12. Adoption Support Services

- 12.1 A significant challenge to Adoption Agencies in the Adoption and Children Act is the requirement to develop a comprehensive adoption support service (ASS). Councils are required to plan and deliver ASS with local health and education bodies and other key stakeholder groups.
- 12.2 The Agency has audited services against the requirements of the new legislation, standards and draft regulations and is in the process of drawing up plans to develop an adoption support service strategy.
- 12.3 Current provision includes 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.
- 12.4 The longstanding Adoption Friendship (Support) Group continues to be run by the Permanence Team. The team also operates an active and growing letterbox service to all parties to the adoption process.

- 12.5 The role of the Attachment Team within the Agency's future ASS is being reviewed. The Department of Health funding expires April 2004 hence the local authority alongside South Downs Health (NHS) Trust need to determine the future role of the Attachment Team within the ASS strategy.
- 12.6 Research indicates that education is a key concern for adoptive families. The teacher post within the Attachment Team has been particularly welcomed by adoptive parents and teaching staff alike and many adoptive families would benefit from greater access to this kind of service.

13. Adoption Allowances

- 13.1 Expenditure on Adoption Allowances 2002/2003 was £438,974.64. This related to the placement of 94 children, with an average weekly figure per child of £89.81. The allowances ranged from £3.15 to £416.71 (latter being an exceptionally high figure in relation to the placement of a sibling group of 5 children).
- 13.2 The figures for previous years are:
- | | | |
|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 2001/2002 | £329,555.00 | in relation to 68 children |
| 2000/2001 | £290,293.00 | in relation to 68 children |
| 1999/2000 | £239,268.00 | in relation to 57 children |
- 13.3 This confirms that a greater number of children 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.

14. Training

- 14.1 Training for staff this year has included: use of the new BAAF Preparation Group materials; attachment issues; recruitment; and working with infertility and loss issues.

15. Financial Information

- 15.1 The regulations are expected imminently in relation to the ASS requirements of the Adoption and Children Act, and will clarify the position in respect to Adoption Allowances. The draft regulations give prominence to financial support as part of an ASS package. This will raise financial issues for all local authorities particularly as adoptive parents of children under 18years will be able to request financial support from local authorities regardless of whether an Adoption Allowance was agreed by the Adoption Panel and irrespective of the placing agency.
- 15.2 The government has awarded a grant of £70m over three years. Many agencies are concerned

that the grant could be used simply to meet financial support requests from adopters, leaving little monies available for the development of ASS more generally. The grant for year one is £12m. The allocation for Brighton & Hove in 2003/2004 is £63k.

16. Legal Implications

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.

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.

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). This dictates that for the membership of the Panel to comply with the statutory regulations, it must include one member who sits on the relevant committee, in this case the Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee. Recommendation 2.2 of this report is therefore crucial to the functioning of the Adoption Agency.

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, 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 21years 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 9 th June 2003
Report of	David Hawker
Subject	Adoption Agency Annual Report 2003
Wards affected	All

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

Corporate/Citywide implications	Risk assessment
Adoption Services are provided citywide and support services do require a corporate Council approach.	None

This will be a key factor in planning the new services required by the Children & Adoption Act.	
Sustainability implications	Equalities implications
None	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 Implementing the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 NCSC (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003
Contact Officers Karen Devine Development, Officer, Adoption and Permanence 295378 Sharon Donnelly, Head of Service, Adoption and Fostering 295427

APPENDIX 1

NATIONAL ADOPTION STANDARDS

National Adoption Standards for England

The Adoption Standards have been written to ensure that looked after children, birth families, prospective adopters and the general public understand what they can expect from the adoption service.

The service will best meet its objectives if people know that they will be treated with courtesy and respect and receive a fair and equal service wherever they live. The values statement below explains the important principles which underpin these standards. The standards apply

only to domestic adoptions through adoption agencies, however similar standards will be developed for step-parent and inter-country adoptions.

Values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.
- Government will work in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered.

A. CHILDREN

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

1. Children whose birth family cannot provide them with a secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them.

2. Whenever plans for permanence are being considered, they will be made on the basis of the needs of each looked after child, and within the following timescales:

- a) The child's need for a permanent home will be addressed at the four month review and a plan for permanence made;
- b) Clear timescales will be set for achieving the plan, which will be appropriately monitored and considered at every subsequent review;
- c) Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a review, the adoption panel will make its recommendation within 2 months.

Where adoption is the plan:

3. The timescales below will be followed, taking account of the individual child's needs:

- a) A match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 6 months of the agency agreeing that adoption is in the child's best interest;
- b) In care proceedings, where the plan is adoption, a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 6 months of the court's decision;
- c) Where a parent has requested that a child aged under 6 months be placed for adoption, a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 3 months of the agency agreeing that adoption is in the child's best interest.

4. Every child will have his or her wishes and feelings listened to, recorded and taken into account. Where they are not acted upon, the reasons for not doing so will be explained to the child and properly recorded.

5. All children will have a named social worker who will be responsible for them throughout the adoption process.

6. Children will be given clear explanations and information about adoption, covering what happens at each stage (including at court), and how long each stage is likely to take in their individual case.

7. Children will be well prepared before joining a new family. This will include clear appropriate information on their birth family and life before adoption, and information about the adopters and their family. Children are entitled to information provided by their birth families, which will be kept safe both by agencies and adopters. It will be provided to adopted children, or adults, at a time and in a manner that reflects their age and understanding, as well as the nature of the information concerned.

8. Children will be matched with families who can best meet their needs. They will not be left waiting indefinitely for a 'perfect family'.

9. Every effort will be made to recruit sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, so that each child can be found an adoptive family within the timescales in 3) above, which best meets their needs, and in particular:

a) which reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language;

b) which allows them to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs. Where this is the case, a clear explanation will be given to them and recorded.

10. The child's needs, wishes and feelings, and their welfare and safety are the most important concerns when considering links or contact with birth parents, wider birth family members and other people who are significant to them.

11. Adoption plans will include details of the arrangements for maintaining links (including contact) with birth parents, wider birth family members and other people who are significant to the child and how and when these arrangements will be reviewed.

12. Children are entitled to support services that meet their assessed needs. These include advice and counselling, health, education, leisure, and cultural services, and practical and financial help when needed. Information from agency records will be made available to the child when they are of an age and level of understanding to comprehend it.

13. Where there are difficulties arising from an adoption or a proposed adoption, or where an adoption or proposed adoption breaks down, a child will receive support and information without delay.

14. Children placed for adoption and adopted children will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints and will be helped to do so if this is required.

B. Prospective Adopters

People who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

1. Information on becoming an adoptive parent will be provided, including what is expected of adopters. Applicants will be given the opportunity to hear about preparation and support services available to adopters, and to talk to others who have adopted children.

2. Clear information will be given about children locally and across the country who need families to help prospective adopters decide whether to proceed further.

3. Written eligibility criteria and details of the assessment and approval process will be provided.

a) Applicants will be considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their developmental needs. Where agencies have specific eligibility criteria e.g. because the agency has particular religious beliefs, applicants will be told what these are and, if necessary, be referred to another agency. People will not be *automatically* excluded on the grounds of age, health or other factors, except in the case of certain criminal convictions.

b) The assessment and approval process will be comprehensive, thorough and fair. An explanation will be given of the need for status checks and enquiries to be made about prospective adopters and members of their household.

4. There will be clear written timescales for each stage. Applicants can expect:

a) Written information sent in response to their enquiry within 5 working days.

b) Follow up interviews/invitation to an information meeting within 2 months

c) Agencies will prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. Where agencies and applicants decide to proceed, a decision on the outcome will be made by the agency following the Adoption Panel within six months of the receipt of the formal application. Where the agency decides not to proceed applicants will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to them.

d) If b) and c) follow each other without a gap, the whole process from enquiry to decision should not take more than 8 months. Panels will record reasons for delays.

5. Foster carers who make a formal application to adopt children in their care will be entitled to the same information and preparation as other adopters and be assessed within four months.

6. Applicants will be kept informed of progress throughout. They will receive a copy of the assessment report at least 28 days before an adoption panel and have the opportunity to comment on the report, and, if they wish, to attend the adoption panel and be heard.

7. Prospective adopters will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

C. Adoptive Parents

Children will be matched with approved adopters who can offer them a stable and permanent home and help and support will be provided to achieve a successful and lasting placement.

1. Approved adopters will be given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this that they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.
2. Before a match is agreed, adopters will be given full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and an opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family.
3. There will be access to a range of multi-agency support services before, during and after adoption. Support services will include practical help, professional advice, financial assistance where needed and information about local and national support groups and services.
4. Adoptive parents will be involved in discussions as to how they can best maintain any links, including contact, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.
5. Adoptive parents will be encouraged to keep safe any information provided by birth families via agencies and to provide this to the adopted child on request, or as they feel appropriate.
6. Adoptive parents whose adopted child has decided to explore their birth heritage will be supported to deal with the impact of this decision.
7. Where there are difficulties with the placement or the adoption breaks down the agencies involved will cooperate to provide support and information to the adoptive parents and the child without delay.
8. Agencies will ask adoptive parents whether they are prepared to agree to notify the agency if an adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards.
9. Adoptive parents will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

D. Birth Parents and Birth Families (including grandparents, brothers, sisters and other people who are significant to the child)

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

1. Agencies will work with birth parents and significant birth family members to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their child(ren).
2. Every effort will be made to ensure that birth parents and significant birth family members have a full understanding of the adoption process, the legal implications, and their rights.
3. Birth parents will have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child.
4. Birth parents and birth families (including siblings) will have access to a range of support services both before and after adoption, including information about local and national support groups and services.
5. Birth parents will have the opportunity to give their account of events, and to see and comment on what is written about them in reports for the adoption panel, and in information passed to the adopters.
6. Birth parents and families will be supported to provide information that the adopted child needs. This will include information about the adopted child's birth and early life, the birth family's views about adoption and contact and up-to-date information about themselves and their situation.
7. Where it is in the child's best interest for there to be ongoing links, including contact, with birth parents and families (including siblings separated by adoption), birth families will be involved in discussions about how best to achieve this and helped to fulfil agreed plans, e.g. through practical or financial support.
8. Where adoptive parents have agreed to inform the agency of the death of the adopted child or the breakdown of the adoption, birth parents or the 'next of kin' at adoption will, if they wish, be informed by the adoption agency.
9. Birth parents and birth families will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

E. Councils

Corporate and senior management responsibilities

A comprehensive adoption service to meet the needs of children, birth families, adoptive parents and adopted adults will be planned corporately and provided in collaboration with other relevant agencies.

1. Councils will plan and deliver adoption services with local health and education bodies (including schools), voluntary adoption agencies, the local courts and other relevant agencies, including, where applicable, other councils.

2. There will be clear policies for adoption, including post-adoption services, which are set out in Children and Young People's Strategic Plans or equivalent local plans.

3. Councillors will carry out their responsibilities as corporate parents and receive regular information on the management and outcomes of the service they are responsible for providing.

4. Senior managers, with a clear management link to Director level, will ensure that adoption is an integral part of the council services for children, and will be involved in the strategic planning, delivery and monitoring of the adoption service.

5. A senior manager will have direct operational responsibility for all parts of the adoption service including planning, management and delivery of the adoption service, and performance management through quality assurance systems. This includes making sure that:
 - a) Each child has a named social worker and an agreed care plan;
 - b) Timescales for planning, decision making and adoptive placements are met;
 - c) Staff are subject to the necessary safeguard checks;
 - d) Staff have the necessary skills and knowledge, or access to them, and are supervised;
 - e) Managers, councillors and panel members have access to necessary training and skills development;
 - f) Procedures, guidance and sound professional practice are followed;
 - g) Quality standards are set and consistently maintained;
 - h) Management information systems inform service provision.

6. Councils, with the relevant agencies listed in 1), will provide or commission a comprehensive range of pre- and post-adoption services consistent with any national framework or regulation. These will facilitate and support adoption and meet the needs of children who move

between local authority areas. Criteria for access to services will be clear, concise and understandable.

F. Adoption Agencies and Services – Council and Voluntary

Each council and voluntary adoption agency will provide a high quality adoption service.

1. Children's welfare and safety will be put first, and their rights, needs and wishes, elicited, recorded and taken into account at all times.
2. Agencies will agree, and follow, policies and procedures for adoption which are clear, concise and easily understood. They will be made available to those affected by adoption, staff and the general public.
3. Councils and voluntary adoption agencies will work together to plan and deliver a co-ordinated package of services to meet the needs of the child.
4. The second and every subsequent review of a looked after child will consider permanence. Where adoption is the plan, reviews will evaluate the success of the plan in meeting the child's needs and specify any new objectives required to meet those needs.
5. Timescales will be met, taking account of the individual child's needs. The senior manager will monitor performance against timescales.
6. Agencies will plan, implement and evaluate effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption locally and nationally, especially those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and disabled children.
7. Agencies will have thorough and timely assessment processes in accordance with Sections A, B and C using the dimensions in the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*. Children and adults will be prepared for adoption in accordance with Sections A and C.
8. Careful and thorough checks will be made on prospective adopters, members of their households and agency staff.

Adoption panels:

9. Agencies will arrange enough adoption panels to avoid any delays in considering children for adoption, approval of adopters and matching, and to meet the following timescales:

a) Panels will receive all necessary information from agencies no later than 6 weeks from the completion of the assessment report;

b) Where a review has agreed that adoption is the plan, the adoption panel will make its recommendation within 2 months;

c) Panel recommendations will be conveyed orally to applicants, children and birth parents within 24 hours.

Agency decision making:

10. Agencies will ensure that timely decisions are taken on panel recommendations and to meet the following timescales:

a) Decisions will be taken within 7 working days of the adoption panel recommendation;

b) Decisions will be conveyed orally to the applicants, the child and the birth parents within 24 hours;

c) Decisions will be confirmed in writing within 7 working days.

11. Where an adoption is at risk of breaking down, all agencies involved in the placement will cooperate to provide support and information to all parties without delay.

12. When an adoption has broken down all agencies involved will cooperate to provide support to the child and the adoptive parents, and ensure that the birth parents are informed.

13. Agencies will have effective systems for managing and keeping safe information from all the people affected by adoption.

14. Agencies will have representations and complaints procedures that comply with regulations and guidance.

APPENDIX 2

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Accommodation Service
253 Preston Road
Brighton
June 2003**

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** An appendix to the Statement of Purpose will include details of the staffing and organisational structure of the service, management arrangements, complaint procedures and the details of National Care Standards Commission.
- 1.3** The Accommodation Service runs a permanence and adoption service and this statement of purpose should be read in conjunction with the fostering statement of purpose.
- 1.4** The principles within the statement of purpose apply to placements made with other adoption agencies and also non agency placements such as step parent 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. Developing a coherent family support strategy remains a key aim of the Children, Families and Schools Department.
- 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 develop and enhance the service provided to kinship 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, enabling their voice to be heard. If adoption is agreed as the plan a child will have his or her wishes and feelings recorded and taken into account. An age appropriate children's guide to adoption will be produced and made available to children.
- 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 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 are key aims of the service. The background circumstances and needs of children and their birth families will be fully assessed so that clear matching considerations can be drawn up to ensure children are matched with adopters best placed to meet their needs.
- 2.11** A range of adoption support services will be considered for children and adoptive families including access to specialist therapeutic services. If placements do disrupt in spite of intensive placement support, disruption meetings chaired by an officer that has not been involved in the care planning process to date will be convened. All parties to the placement will be invited to attend and express their views. The views of the child will also be presented. The disruption meeting will address the future needs of the child and inform the subsequent care plan. 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 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, preparation and support of new adoptive families and will continue to work to facilitate this.
- 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 who are unable to return to live with their birth parents or be placed with family or friends carers. In accordance with the welfare checklist of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the lifelong impact of severance of relationships with the birth family will be carefully considered in formulating an adoption plan.
- 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 requiring 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 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 that will be drawn up at a care-planning meeting that must take place either before or within 7 working days of the child becoming looked after. 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 by return to birth family or through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up to expedite the permanence plan, 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 will be developed and made 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. The guide for children will give details of the complaint procedure, the Children's Rights Service and the Children's Rights Director for the National Care Standards Commission.
- 3.8** The National Adoption Standards in respect to planning for children will be followed. Any delay in achieving the required timescales will be monitored by fieldwork managers, Permanence Panel and the Agency Decision-Maker. A tracking tool will be used to plot the child's progress towards achieving permanence with an adoptive family against the timescales required by the new standards. This information will be kept on the child's case file and will accompany the BAAF Form E for the child when it is presented to Panel.
- 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 mementos 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 organise a Permanence Planning meeting with the child's social worker and foster carers to consider the plans for the child and look at the detail of the matching requirements and devise a family finding strategy.
- 3.13** A social worker from the Permanence Team will undertake 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, 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.

- 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, of which Brighton and Hove is a member, 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 social worker for the prospective adopter and accompanying the child's social worker to 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 an expectation 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. The Permanence Panel will also consider these plans when the adoption plan for the child is presented to Panel. When direct contact arrangements are to continue post adoption the aim should be to promote a positive sense of identity for the child, not maintaining relationships in order to facilitate 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 need for contact and information about their birth family develop and change throughout their childhood. The adoption support social worker will facilitate this or organise access to specialist services to review contact plans 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 specialist multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption. Adoption support needs for the child will be identified when the plan for the child is presented to Panel and kept under review. Children may need access to ongoing therapeutic and health services and specific support within their school.
- 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 of adoption 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 with 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, 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** Birth parents and families will be advised of the complaint procedure and their right to make representation and complaint.

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** Priority will usually be given to prospective adoptive families offering placements for children with disabilities and special needs, sibling groups, and children over 2 years of age.
- 5.3** Prospective adopters will be advised that there are few babies available for adoption and that most babies in Brighton and Hove are placed with concurrency carers (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.
- 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, usually at least 3 years. 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 a conflict of interest policy which details that certain staff groups within children services, and elected members of the authority are not eligible for assessment by the authority because of the potential for conflict of interest.

- 5.8** Prospective adopters will be informed about the fact that Brighton and Hove is part of the South East Adoption 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 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 appropriately linked with a child.
- 5.10** Prospective adopters who decide to proceed with their application having received the information pack, will be offered an initial home assessment visit. If the Adoption service is of the view that 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 procedure. 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 at this stage.
- 5.11** Initial home assessment visits to applicants wishing to adopt a child under 2 years old will be made by a social worker from the Concurrency Team who will explain the particular challenges and expectations of concurrency carers. Priority for progression to the preparation group stage will be given to prospective adopters for under 2 year olds interested in concurrency.
- 5.12** The Permanence team will provide access to a specific worker skilled and experienced in inter- country adoption assessments to respond to enquiries from prospective applicants interested in adopting a child from overseas. The Adoption service subscribes to the Overseas Adoption Helpline to keep up to date on inter-country adoption issues and to access specialist services as needed for inter-country adoptive applicants. Applicants will be given full information about the fees charged by the service to assess inter-country applicants.
- 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 as prospective adopters. 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 second opinion report. This report will be appended to the BAAF Form F and made available to the applicants.
- 5.19** 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 encouraged to attend. Panel will comment on the strengths and possible risk factors in the application and applicants are informed about Panel's recommendation. The decision of the Agency Decision-Maker will be conveyed to applicants verbally on the day that it is made and followed up in writing within 7 working days.
- 5.20** Prospective adopters will be advised about the services provided by the Post Adoption Centre and Adoption UK.

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.
- 6.2** Brighton and Hove has detailed procedures for staff to follow in respect to the matching, placement and introduction process. Guidance for other authorities and agencies when a match is being considered for children with inter agency adopters is always provided.
- 6.2** 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 be made available to the family.

- 6.3** 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.
- 6.4** The Adoption service will develop the practice of 'child appreciation days' so that adopters have the opportunity to meet key people from the child's past and learn more about them prior to placement.
- 6.5** 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.
- 6.6** 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.
- 6.7** The Adoption service currently provides adoption support groups including a specific group for gay and lesbian foster carers and adopters. It has 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 provides a helpline and a range of training courses for professionals and all parties to the adoption circle. Adopters will be encouraged to become members of Adoption UK and benefit from the various support services this provides.
- 6.8** Brighton and Hove also have managerial responsibility for the Attachment team that provides intensive treatment services for adoptive and permanent families. The Attachment team can also provide consultation to staff and training input to adopters. The team is multi-disciplinary and part funded by the Health Trust. The team has the services of a teacher/ counsellor who can provide training and advocacy services within schools as appropriate for families that are receiving a service from the team.
- 6.9** 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.

7 Adopted Adults

- 7.1** The Adoption service will provide a service to adopted adults seeking to obtain information about their past from case records or to trace their birth family.
- 7.2** Adopted adults will also be given information about services available to them from Brighton and Hove's contract 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 continue to involve adopted adults in the preparation and training groups for prospective adopters, recognising the importance of adopters understanding the lifelong impact of adoption for any child placed.
- 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, 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 employ 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 have 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. It will also monitor compliance with the National Adoption Standards 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 in the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.9** Panel will also monitor compliance with the National Adoption Standards in relation to the assessment of adopters. Panel will receive progress reports on approved adopters until a child is placed and Adoption Order is made. If prospective adopters have not had a child placed within 3 years they will have to be re-assessed.
- 8.10** Panel members will receive all documentation for Panel in good time to allow for reading and full consideration of the issues.
- 8.11** Panel will make a recommendation, which will be conveyed, to the staff member and adoptive applicant at Panel. They will be informed of the date of the meeting with the Agency Decision maker which will be within 5 working days of the Panel recommendation. 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 detail of the Panel discussion and recommendations are available to inform decision-making. The Agency Decision-Maker will liaise directly with the independent chair of Panel as appropriate.

9 Staff within the Permanence team

- 9.1** Brighton and Hove employ sufficient staff to work within the Accommodation service and the staffing structure is kept under review.
- 9.2** All staff undertaking assessments of adoptive applicants are social work qualified 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 in the other Accommodation and 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 Team, Family and Friends Team and the Attachment Team.

9.6 The Concurrency Team recruits, assesses and supervises concurrency carers, undertakes the direct assessment work with the birth families for children placed concurrently and acts as key worker for the child. The Concurrency Team also runs a monthly support group for all concurrency carers. Experienced concurrency carers always provide input into the preparation training course run for prospective adopters of children 0-2 years.

9.7 Managers within the service are sufficiently experienced social worker practitioners and have access to managerial training courses. The Head of Service is an experienced manager and social work practitioner. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service.

9.8 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

9.9 A structure chart for the Accommodation service is appended to this statement of purpose.

10 Complaint procedure

10.1 Users of our Adoption Services, including children, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and adopted adults, are provided with copies of the complaint 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 complaint procedure can be contacted at:

Royal York Buildings,
Old Steine,
Brighton BN1 1NH
Freephone 0800 072 9960

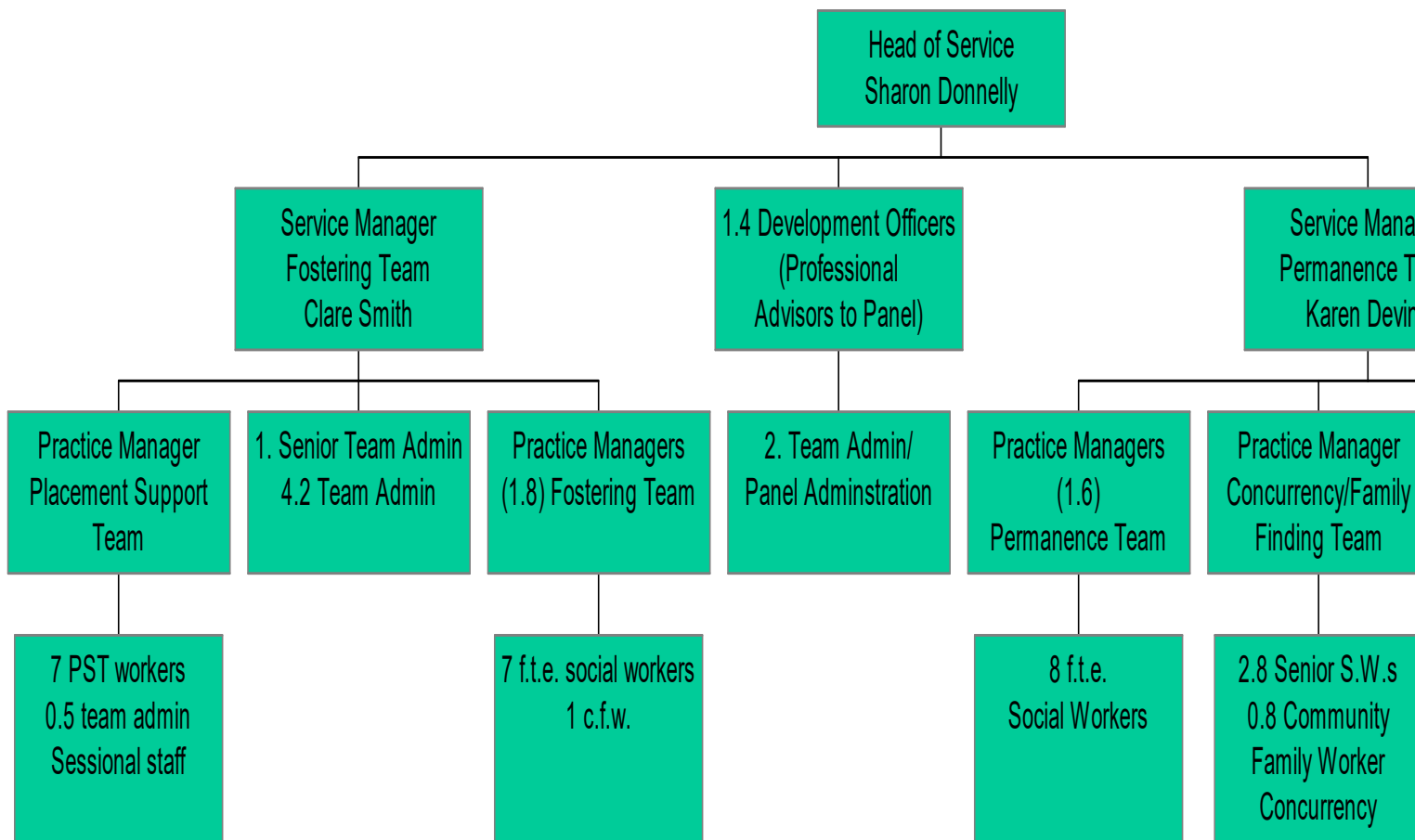
11 National Care Standards Commission

11.1 The Adoption Service will be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission in accordance with the Regulations of the National Adoption Minimum Standards. These inspections will take place on a 3 yearly basis. Inspection reports are public documents.

11.2 The National Care Standards Commission office responsible for inspecting fostering services provided by Brighton and Hove City Council can be contacted at:

East Sussex Area Office,
Ivy House,
3 Ivy Terrace,

Eastbourne,
 East Sussex BN21 4QT.
 Telephone – 01323 636200



APPENDIX 4

ADOPTION & PERMANENCE PANEL REPORT

BRIGHTON & HOVE PERMANENCE PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2002 – 2003

Introduction

This report covers the period from 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003. During this period the panel has had to prepare for the introduction of the new National Adoption Standards and the new Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The panel has also had changes of panel personnel. This report briefly summarises the work of the panel over this period including any policy and practice matters.

Composition of the Panel

From April 2002 to July 2002 the panel was chaired by a Brighton & Hove Service Manager (Head of Service Fieldwork). In June a decision was taken by the Council to move to a system of independent chairs for both its Permanence and Fostering panels and therefore an independent chair, Gill Harris, was appointed in June 2002. There has been a change in the council officer representation on panel with Judy Leigh and Caroline Reid leaving the panel and Lesley Burgess and Roger Lippin joining. A new independent member, Tina Henderson has also joined the panel this year. The current panel membership is:

- Gill Harris, Independent Chair
- Andy Whippey, Brighton & Hove council officer, Vice-Chair
- Dr Sian Bennett, Medical Adviser

- Councillor Betty Walsh, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Christine Cook, independent member, adopted person
- Tina Henderson, independent member, foster carer
- Lesley Burgess, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
- Roger Lippin, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare
- Stephen Healey, Brighton & Hove council officer, education
- Natasha Watson, Brighton & Hove council officer, Legal Adviser

Brighton & Hove has advertised for new independent members and attempts to recruit an independent adopter member for the panel are on-going. Brighton & Hove now pay a fee for independent members to attend. Recruitment of independent members to panels is a problem shared by many other agencies. The panel remains imbalanced in respect of gender and particularly race and ethnicity. This has been addressed when looking for new panel members and will continue to be so. When a new independent member is recruited to the panel, Natasha Watson will cease to be a panel member but will continue to attend panel meetings as legal adviser.

The panel will need a new elected member representative as Councillor. Walsh will be retiring at the end of April. This is a legal requirement and the professional adviser has already alerted the lead councillor to this.

The professional adviser to the panel has continued to be Karen Devine. Marie Campbell has been the panel administrator for the whole of this period.

Work of the Panel

The panel has met on 24 occasions every 2 weeks over the year with only two panels needing to be cancelled – one due to venue difficulties, the other in the summer holidays. From April to July panel was meeting alternatively for half a day then a full day. However, since August the pressure of work from the department has necessitated that every panel meeting requires a full day. This indicates the volume of work that is undertaken within the department in respect of adoption and long term fostering for children. The panel is therefore always very busy and social workers continue to need to book cases in to panel well in advance.

The panel also met on 11th April 2002 for a training day with an outside facilitator, Helen Cossis-Brown. The panel meeting on 19th March 2003 was also used as a training day for panel members to discuss applicants attending panel as well as up-dating panel in respect of the National Adoption Standards and Brighton & Hove's Adoption Support strategy.

During this period the panel has made recommendations in respect of:

38 children for adoption
4 children for long term fostering

34 new adopters
7 new long term foster carers

1 termination of foster carers' approval
1 de-registration of adopters

37 children matched for adoption
15 children matched for long term fostering

The agency decision maker has endorsed all of the panel's recommendations.

The panel can also be used to offer consultation and guidance in respect of problematic cases before a formal presentation.

Functioning of the Panel

The panel has been very keen to develop the way that it operates to help it function in a more effective and open manner.

At the present time applicants attend panel both for the approval and matching stages. They are invited in to the meeting at the end of the discussion with the social worker/s and are able to make any comments they wish to the panel or ask questions. The panel also has the opportunity, with the applicants' permission to ask them any questions directly. The panel has recently discussed whether this feels the right balance between transparency for the applicants and sufficient privacy for panel members to reach appropriate and safe recommendations. The panel decided that it would like to make some changes in respect of applicants attending panel but felt that it did not want to move to a model of applicants being in attendance for the whole time the social workers were being questioned. However, it was felt that it would be more appropriate and be seen to be more of a part of the process if applicants were invited in to the meeting at the beginning of the discussion to meet panel members, to make any further statement and ask any questions and be asked any questions by the panel and then asked to leave whilst panel had a further discussion with the social workers and reached their recommendations. This proposed change has been presented to the Council by the professional adviser and panel is awaiting a response.

From October 2002 the panel agreed a structure for the discussion of the paperwork which is:

Areas for clarification
Positive aspects of the application/match
Risk factors in the application/match

This is proving very useful in helping panel focus on the relevant issues and therefore be more efficient in the use of panel time. The positive and risk factors are fully shared with the social workers, applicants, adopters and foster carers. The feed-back so far from all parties indicates that they are finding this a more understandable, helpful and open way of dealing with the case presentations.

The following is the current panel process:

1. Panel members receive the reports before the panel meeting
2. At the panel meeting members discuss areas that they would like to discuss with the social worker/s
3. The social worker/s join the meeting
4. Panel members ask the social worker/s questions on the areas for clarification
5. Social worker/s have the opportunity to give any further information to the panel
6. The panel identify the risk factors in the application/match and invite the social worker/s to comment
7. The applicants, adopters, foster carers join the meeting
8. The chair shares with the applicants, adopters foster carers the positive aspects and risk factors of the application/match as seen by the panel
9. The panel asks the applicants, adopters, foster carers any questions it might have
10. The applicants, adopters, foster carers have the opportunity to add any further information they wish or to ask the panel questions
11. The applicants, adopters, foster carers to leave the meeting while the panel reaches its recommendations
12. The panel comes to a recommendation with the social worker/s present and advises the worker/s when the agency decision maker will make the final decision
13. The chair informs the applicants, adopters, foster carers of the panel recommendations and when the final decision will be made.

The panel has adapted this process recently in that if it is clear before the applicants, adopters, foster carers join the meeting that panel is agreed in making a positive recommendation then they are informed by the chair of this before sharing the positive aspects and risk factors with them.

The process will be adapted if the recommendations regarding applicants attending at the start of the meeting is agreed by the Council.

The process appears to work reasonably well. However, there is sometimes an issue of timing, with panel on occasions running over time and therefore keeping social workers, applicants, adopters and foster carers waiting. This is something which the panel is very aware of and continues to monitor to identify where extra time may need to be allowed or panel processes need to be tighter.

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants, 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. Feed-back forms are now a standing item on the agenda to ensure that the panel is routinely informed regarding any issues it should be aware of.

In general the feed-back from applicants, adopters, and foster carers has been positive. The main issue that has arisen has been of the time spent waiting before coming in to the panel

meeting. This has been addressed in part by setting later arrival times to minimize this. However, the panel will continue to monitor this.

The general feed-back from social workers presenting to panel has been that they find the process thorough and challenging. This would appear to indicate that the panel is carrying out its function of quality assurance correctly. However, on-going monitoring and evaluation is required to ensure that panel is operating and presenting appropriately in this area.

Panel Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the panel need to be reviewed and up-dated. This will be done by the professional adviser to the panel in consultation with the chair.

Practice

The panel takes its role of quality assurance very seriously, particularly in respect of planning for children. In general panel has felt that permanence planning for children in Brighton & Hove is undertaken in a timely and appropriate manner. Where this has not been the case the panel has highlighted its concerns to the agency decision maker via the professional adviser. Panel has also fed back to social workers when reports have been completed well and when care planning for children has been timely and pro-active.

In general the quality of the BAAF Form E reports on children presented to the panel has been of a reasonable standard. Panel has systematically taken up concerns in relation to individual reports requesting amendments and additions to the paperwork. The quality of the BAAF Form F reports submitted to panel has generally been of a high standard. The JAS requirements have made a considerable difference to the amount of information prepared and presented to the panel. Although verification of key important aspects of information is now routinely obtained it is interesting to note that the majority of the information in the reports remains largely self reported. Panel has noted a significant difference in the BAAF Form Fs presented by other agencies, notably in the amount and detail of the information and the lack of an evidence based approach from some agencies. The matching reports presented to the panel again in general are thorough and contain the necessary information for panel to reach a recommendation.

The chair completes a feed-back form for the Agency Decision Maker on every case presented to the panel. This alerts the agency to issues in respect of reports, social work practice and whether the agency is meeting the National Adoption Standards time-scales. This has been in use since September 2002 and has enabled the panel to have a more formal monitoring and feed-back process than previously. It has also enabled the panel to highlight areas of general practice training for social work staff as well as individual practice issues. With the introduction of the National Adoption Standards from April 2003 the panel will need to formally monitor the time-scales also within the panel minutes.

Service developments has been added as a standing item to the panel's agenda to ensure that members are kept up to date with plans for the service and the impact that these might have in respect of the work of the panel.

Conclusion

The panel is very mindful of the role it plays in ensuring the provision of a quality adoption and fostering service to children and its part in making appropriate and safe decisions in respect of children and adopters and foster carers. The panel is aware of the need to routinely review the way in which it operates in order to continue to make an effective, fair and positive contribution to the work of Brighton & Hove council and will continue to do this over the next period.

Gill Harris
Independent Chair
Brighton & Hove Permanence Panel
22nd April 2003