

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families and Schools Sub-committee

Date: Monday 14 June 2004

Report of: Director Children, Families and 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 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 it's phased implementation, the National Adoption Standards for England, and the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate, and the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Local Adoption and Permanence activity and service developments during the year April 2003 – March 2004

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 amended panel constitution and terms of reference be endorsed.

3. National Developments

3.1 The Adoption and Children Act

- 3.2 The Adoption and Children Act 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.
- 3.2.1. In June 2003 regulations restricting adoption from overseas were implemented. The UK ratified the Hague Convention on ICA in 2003. These new regulations were issued to govern ICA, pending full implementation of the Adoption and Children Act.
- 3.2.2. On 31 October 2003 the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 came into force. These put a duty on local authorities to identify the support to be provided before matching a child with prospective adopters and also to assess adoption support needs after placement on request. This is the first phase of adoption support provisions for adoptive families and brings with it significant new responsibilities for local authorities. It is now the duty of every local authority to establish and maintain a service to meet the needs of adopted children and their birth families and adoptive families.
- 3.2.3. On 30 April 2004, the Independent Review mechanism (IRM) was introduced. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) were awarded the contract by the DfES to set up Independent Review Panels (IRP). The IRP's will review cases, as requested by prospective adopters, when the agency decision-maker is proposing not to approve them. The review panel will make a recommendation which will go back to the agency decision-maker for the final decision.
- 3.3 Full implementation of the Act is a major task and will not be achieved until September 2005. All related regulations and guidance is due to be finalised by the end of 2004. It is currently being published in draft form and BHCC are formally contributing to the consultation process.

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.
- 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. In the majority of cases these standards are being achieved. Where this is not so, reasons are being sought, recorded and fed back to the Agency Decision-Maker and Operational Managers.

5. National Care Standards Commission National Minimum Standards

- 5.1 The National Minimum Standards came into force on 30 April 2003. They guide the inspection process and complement rather than take the place of the National Adoption Standards. From 30.4.03 the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) assumed responsibility for inspecting both local authority and voluntary adoption services every

three years. In April 2004 the NCSC amalgamated with the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) to form a new inspection agency called the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). BHCC were due an adoption agency inspection early in 2004 but this was delayed and no indication has yet been given as to when the first inspection will now take place.

- 5.2 An audit of service provision against the standards and draft regulations had identified areas for development and a work programme was devised to address these. Much of the work has been completed and the department is now well placed to receive a positive inspection report. For example, children's guides to adoption have been obtained and circulated, a number of policy and practice guidance documents have been written or amended, and an adoption support service has been set up. The Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Agency (appendix one) and the Permanence Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference (appendix two) have been reviewed in conjunction with the permanence panel and permanence team and amended accordingly. The Children, Families and Schools Committee is required to review and endorse both of these documents annually.

6. Agency Activity /Service Developments April 2003–March 2004

6.1 Agency Activity 2003–2004

- 6.2 The agency statistics for April 2003 – March 2004 are attached (Appendix three). 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 30 children were approved for adoption and 8 were placed concurrently, experiencing minimal disruption to their early attachments and so increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome. 19 children were approved for long term fostering including 4 with a view to adoption and 4 whose plan had changed from adoption.
- 6.3.2 31 children were matched and placed with prospective adopters during the year. This represents 8.8% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more. Of these placements 7 were inter agency or consortium (22.6%) which is lower than last year. This indicates that a higher percentage of children are being placed in BHCC resources. 14 children were matched and placed for long term fostering.
- 6.3.3 31 children were adopted during the year which represents 8.8% of the population of children looked after for 6 months or more. This is an increase on last years 6.8%.
- 6.3.4 The number of prospective adopters approved during the year was 23, six of whom were concurrent foster/adopters (26% of all prospective adopters approved that year) and one intercountry adopter. This was achieved despite a number of recruitment difficulties throughout the year which resulted in significant staff shortages within the team.

- 6.3.5 The number of children awaiting an adoptive placement at 31.3.04 was 20 (11 placements; 4 individual and 7 sibling placements). This is a decrease on last year and represents strenuous family efforts by the permanence team.
- 6.3.6 There were four adoption disruptions reports presented to panel during the year. The latest national figure for disruptions is 20% for children aged up to 10 years of age rising to 50% for older children. Of these four disruptions, three children were under 10 years of age and one was aged 12.
- 6.3.7 There were ten disruptions reports presented to panel in respect of long term fostering placements. This continues to reflect 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.
- 6.3.8 The process of dealing with placement disruptions lacked clarity and this had led to inconsistency in practice. Practice was reviewed in conjunction with social work staff, managers, the reviewing officers and panels and detailed procedures have been implemented this year. This will ensure that all adoption and long term fostering placement disruptions will be dealt with in a timely and consistent manner.
- 6.3.9 In addition to the above the permanence team dealt with the following enquiry's: birth records information/counselling (87 of which 35 cases were allocated); ICA (12) and step-parent adoption (24).
- 6.3.10 The team continues to supervise 40 long-term foster carers, 30 prospective adopters and provide support to families post adoption order.

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 four)

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. 42 children were placed across the consortium this year which represents a 23% increase on last year.
- 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. Consortium Procedures have been produced. Joint training

(arranged and hosted by BHCC) and a joint recruitment strategy has also taken place. The Consortium also commissioned BAAF to undertake a 3-year review of the work of the Consortium, which was completed in September 2003. This report highlighted the year on year progress of the Consortium to enhance placement provision for children but also the value of collaboration in a number of operational areas.

9. Recruitment, Preparation and Family Finding

- 9.1 The Permanence/ Concurrency Teams ran four preparation groups for prospective adopters and long-term foster carers this year which was attended by 31 sets of prospective adopters/carers (i.e. single people or couples). 24 of these subsequently continued to the assessment stage (two were already approved but needed to attend update training and five decided not to proceed with their application)
- 9.2 Nationally it continues to be difficult to recruit adopters or permanent carers for larger siblings groups, children over four years (particularly boys) and children from black and minority ethnic groups. During 2004, BHCC will be launching an advertising campaign specifically for adopters/carers for these groups of children with the assistance of a marketing expert.
- 9.3 A major recruitment campaign for adopters and foster carers was launched in May 2003. The new fostering payment scheme and carer support package had a positive impact on the numbers of foster carers being recruited. However, this general recruitment campaign did not result directly in the recruitment of any long-term carers. It is our experience that the majority of long-term carers are recruited from existing foster carers who wish to make a permanent commitment to a specific child.
- 9.4 The Permanence Team continues to take 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 preventing drift.

10. Concurrency 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 and also fits with the new timescales for the conduct of care proceedings cases required by new Judicial Protocol introduced in November 2003.

- 10.3 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. There were particular difficulties in 2003 when, for a significant part of the year, the small staff team of 3 senior social workers was temporarily reduced in size by a third. However since Jan 2004 the team has been back to full strength.

11. Attachment Team

- 11.1 During the last year the Attachment Team provided an intensive therapeutic service to the families of children living permanently away from their birth families. These children were 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 Between April 2003 and March 2004, the Team worked with 39 children from 26 families. Of these 15 were fostered, 16 adopted, and 8 were placed with family and friends carers and/or were subject to Residence Orders. The number of children the team was able to work with this year was restricted by the decision to cease offering this service. Further, a considerable amount of support was needed by the team's service users to assist them in dealing with the cessation of the work of the team.
- 11.3 The Team was multi-disciplinary, and jointly managed, funded and staffed by South Downs Health (NHS) Trust and the Children, Families and Schools Directorate, with additional tapered grant funding from the Department of Health. However, the role of the Attachment Team was reviewed by all agencies involved due to anticipated changes in available funding and the new responsibilities of the local authority to provide comprehensive adoption support services. CAMHS had also established through grant funding a service for the provision of therapeutic work for looked after children [LAC]. Since Sept 2003 a multi agency, multi disciplinary triage meeting is held monthly at CAMHS to consider referrals for LAC and their carers or adopted children requiring therapeutic intervention. A decision was therefore made that it was no longer viable to continue to offer this specialised and intensive therapeutic support via a discrete team.
- 11.4 Since April 2004 the senior social workers within the Attachment team and the teacher therapist have moved to become part of the adoption support service within the Permanence team, the play therapist has returned to part of the team working with LAC and their families at CAMHS.

12. Adoption Support Services (ASS)

- 12.1 An Adoption Support Services Advisor, a post required under the new legislation, was recruited in October 2003 and has been reviewing our current service provision.
- 12.2 A number of new support provisions are being developed including a mentoring scheme, support groups, a drop-in advice service, a website and newsletter and a specialist library for adopters and their children. The ASS 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 post adoption contact.

- 12.3 Research indicates that education is a key concern for adoptive families. The adoption support teacher will therefore continue to offer input into schools with pupils who have been adopted and offer related training, support, advice and consultation to colleagues and parents.
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 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. A social work assistant has also been recruited to provide supervision and support to contact arrangements post adoption.

13. Adoption Allowances

- 13.1 Expenditure on Adoption Allowances during 2003/2004 was £470,309. This related to the placement of 98 children. The allowances ranged from £7.50 to £427.12 per week (the 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:
 - 2002/2003 £438,974.64 in relation to 94 children
 - 2001/2002 £329,555.00 in relation to 68 children
 - 2000/2001 £290,293.00 in relation to 68 children
- 13.3 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 rise.

14. Family and Friends Team

- 14.1 In July 2003 a small family and friends team, 1.5 workers was established as part of the adoption and permanence service to assess and support the growing number of family and friends carers. However, the size of the team has limited the amount of work that can be undertaken and a working party, due to report to the Departmental Management Team in June, will be making proposals about how to take this service forward. The

team has so far completed 20 assessments for court, 5 panel reports and established a support group for Families and Friends carers. A further 10 assessments are in progress.

15. Training

- 15.1 Training for staff this year has included: attachment issues; birth record counselling; adoption support services; contact; loss and bereavement; completing BAAF form F assessment; Total Respect; emotional abuse and neglect and child protection.

16. Financial Information

- 16.1 The ASS regulations will raise financial issues for all local authorities particularly as adoptive parents of children under 18 years will be 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.
- 16.2 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 2004/2005 (year 2) is £120k.
- 16.3 The 2004/2005 base budget for adoption allowances is £451,400 but this is managed as part of the whole fostering and adoption payments budget of £4.5m (including £1.2m investment in 2004/5 for increased payment to carers. This is because in the past, increased number of children being adopted resulted in fewer fostering placements and therefore overspends in one area were off-set by savings in another. 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 case are, by their nature, unknown but as the current fostering and adoption budget is already fully committed, any significant increase in requests for support would generate budgetary pressures within the service.

17. Legal Implications

- 17.1 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.
- 17.2 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.

- 17.3 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).

18. Environmental Implications

None

19. Implications for Prevention of Crime and Disorder

None

20. Equalities Implications

- 20.1 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
- 20.2 The adoption agency must ensure that it recruits prospective adopters who can parent children with special needs or disabilities.
- 20.3 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.
- 20.4 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.

21. Consultation

- 21.1 The Adoption and Permanence Panel
Permanence Management Team

Meeting/Date	Children Families & Schools 14 th June 2004
Report of	David Hawker

Subject	Adoption Agency Annual Report 2003
Wards affected	All

Financial implications		
As stated	David Ellis	May 2004
Legal implications		
As stated	Natasha Watson	May 2004

Corporate/Citywide implications	Risk assessment
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.	None
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
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

APPENDIX ONE



BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Fostering & Adoption Service
253 Preston Road
Brighton
May 2004**

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. 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 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 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 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 and look at the detail of the matching consideration 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 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** 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.
- 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 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 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 will provide access to a specific worker, skilled and experienced in inter- country adoption, 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. 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.
- 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.
- 6.2** 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 need to 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 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.
- 6.5** 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. The role of the Adoption Support Service Advisor will be explained to all adoptive families.
- 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 provide a helpline and a range of training courses for professionals and all parties in the adoption circle. Adopters will be encouraged to become members of Adoption UK and benefit from the various support services it provides.
- 12.6** 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 post adoption contact.
- 6.8** 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 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 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 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 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 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. Complaint procedures

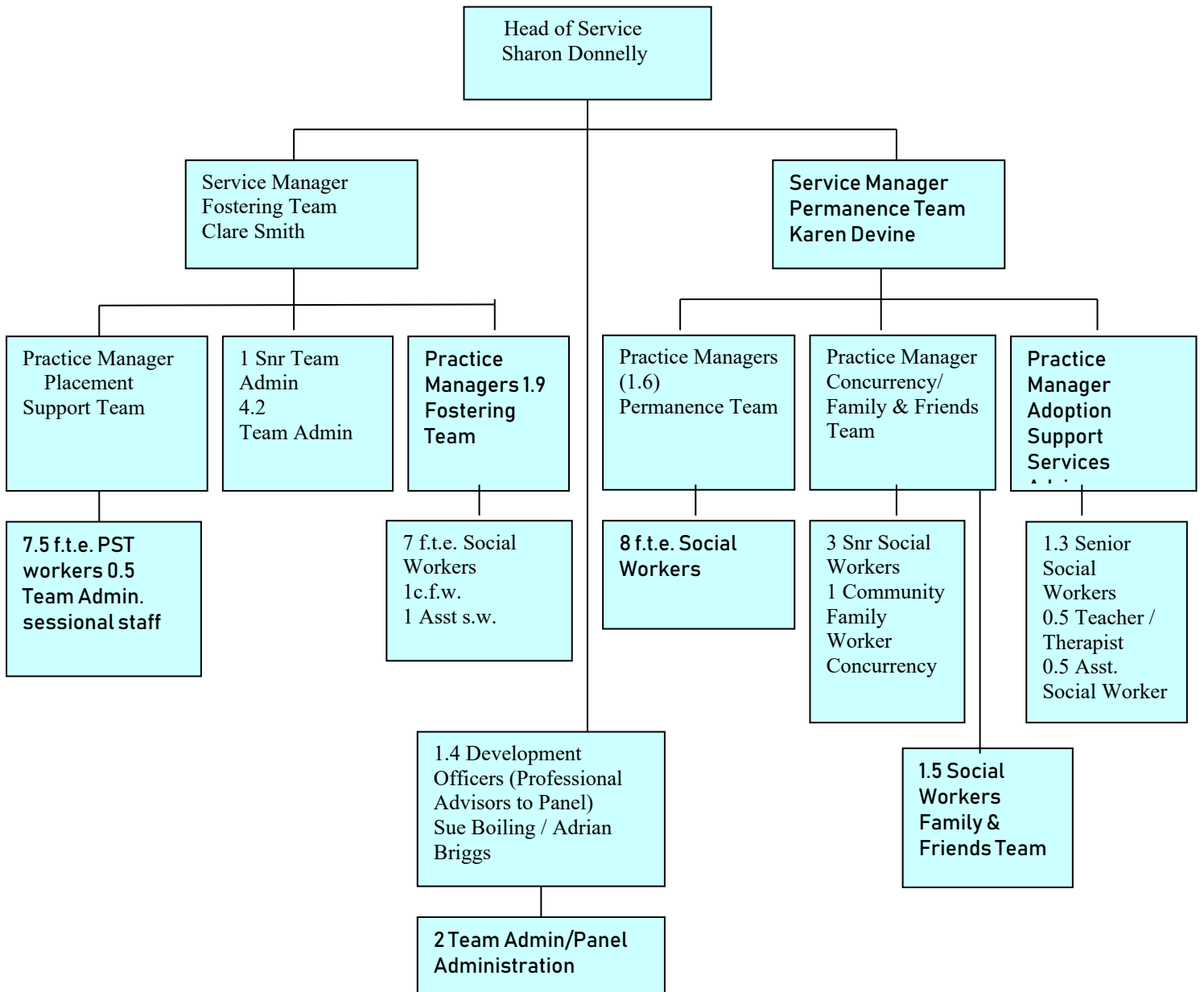
Users of our Adoption Services, including children, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and adopted adults, are provided with copies of the complaints procedure, advised how to access the procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with services provided. Service users are advised 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:

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

11. Commission for Social Care Inspection

11.1 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.

11.2 The Commission can be contacted at East Sussex Area Office,
Ivy House,
3 Ivy Terrace,
Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 4QT.
Telephone – 01323 636200



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 its 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 (i.e. in relation to race, culture or inter-country adoption) 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. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- 13.1 It is possible for a panel member to have some knowledge, either in a professional or personal capacity, of a case under consideration.
- 13.2 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.
- 13.3 Professional knowledge should be declared at the panel meeting.

- 13.4 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.
- 13.5 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 made via the booking process held by the Panel Administrator. 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 its 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.

**ADOPTION AND
PERMANENCE ACTIVITY 1
APRIL 03 - 31 MARCH 04**

FULL YEAR 02/03**APRIL 03 – MARCH
04**

31	Approved for adoption	30
7	Approved concurrent care plan	8
4	Approved for Long-term Foster care	19
	Change of plan - from adoption	4
	Approved for Long-term Foster care (with a view to adoption)	4
	Approved for Long-term Foster care (with a view to Special Guardianship)	1
37	Placed for adoption	31
	Concurrence	8
6	Consortium	3
8	Inter-agency	4
15	Placed with Long-term Foster carers	14
	BHCC	7
	IFA	7
22	Adoption Orders	31
34	Prospective Adopters	23
11	Concurrence	6
	Inter-Country	1
	Variation of approval	3
7	Prospective Long-term Foster carers	5
3	Children from other agencies placed with BHCC carers	4 (2 placements consortium)
	Deregistration of prospective adopters	4
32	Awaiting placement - adoption	20
21	Placements	11
[8]	[siblings]	7
[13]	[individuals]	4

No direct comparison available	Disruptions reports (no of children)	15
As above	LTF disruption	10
As above	Adoption disruptions	4
0	Concurrency disruptions	1
	Progress reports	12
	Items deferred	7
	Reviews	2

BRIGHTON & HOVE PERMANENCE PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2003 – 2004

Introduction

This report covers the period from 1st April 2003 to 31st March 2004. This report briefly summarises the work of the panel over this period including any policy and practice matters.

Composition of the Panel

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

The following members have left the panel for a variety of reasons:

Andy Whippey, Brighton & Hove council officer member and Vice Chair
Councillor Betty Walsh, Brighton & Hove elected member
Lesley Burgess, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
Roger Lippin, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare

Natasha Watson has ceased to be a panel member but continues to attend panel meetings as legal adviser.

New members to panel during this period are:

Councillor Juliet McCaffery, Brighton & Hove elected member
Samantha Adams, independent member and adopter
Julia Ridgeway, independent member
Sharon Donnelly, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
Chris Jackson, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare

The current panel membership is:

- Gill Harris, Independent Chair
- Dr. Sian Bennett, Medical Adviser and Vice Chair
- Councillor Juliet McCaffery, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Christine Cook, independent member, adopted person
- Tina Henderson, independent member, foster carer
- 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

The panel is now at its full membership of ten and meets both the requirements of the Adoption Regulations and the Fostering Regulations. The panel unfortunately remains imbalanced in respect of gender and particularly race and ethnicity. It was not possible to address this fully in the recruitment of new panel members.

Brighton & Hove continue to pay expenses for independent members to attend.

There has been a change in the professional adviser to the panel following Karen Devine's appointment as Service Manager for Adoption in June 2003. The professional adviser from July 2003 has been Sue Boiling. Marie Campbell, the former panel administrator left the council on 11.6.03 and Andrea Critcher has been the panel administrator since that date.

Work of the Panel

The panel normally meets every two weeks from 9.30am usually for a whole day. No panels have needed to be cancelled over the year. Only one panel meeting took place in November to enable time for panel training and the December panel dates were re-arranged to ensure that two meetings were fitted in before the Christmas holiday. Since January 2004 four of the seven meetings have only needed to be half day meetings due to lack of work to be presented to the panel. This is in marked contrast to the extremely busy all day panels of the previous eighteen months. It would be helpful to identify the causes of this for example whether this is due to other work pressures taking precedent as panel time is now over-booked until August, placing pressure to get cases to panel before final hearing dates in court. Panel has had some discussion as to whether the present booking system is the best way to plan the work of panel or whether a system that is based on a "first come first served" basis might avoid cases being booked into panel and then withdrawn leaving panel time empty. This remains an area for further discussion.

During this period the panel met on 26 occasions. The panel also met on 12.11.03 for a training day on the Adoption and Children Act 2002 run by Sarah Borthwick and Natasha Watson. This has been the only training for the panel during this period.

During this period the panel has dealt with and made recommendations on 173 cases. This represents a 26% increase in panel business. The panel has made recommendations in respect of:

30 children for adoption and 8 for a concurrent care plan.

This level of activity is the same as last years.

15 children for long term fostering including 4 with a view to adoption and 1 with a view to Special Guardianship]. In addition 4 children's care plans were changed from adoption to long term fostering.

This is a significant increase of 150% on last year's figures

23 new adopters including 6 concurrency foster-adopters and 1 intercountry adopter

This is a significant reduction of 32% on last year's figures.

5 new long term foster carers and 3 variations to approvals
4 de-registrations of adopters

31 children matched for adoption including 8 children in concurrency placements, 3 via the consortium and 4 in inter-agency placements

This is a reduction of 19% on last year's work

14 children matched for long term fostering including 7 in Independent Fostering Agency placements

Again this is slight reduction of 7% on last year.

The panel has also discussed 12 progress reports on children with a plan for adoption, 15 disruption reports, 2 reviews of long term foster carers and deferred 7 items.

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 is a very confident and competent panel and overall operates in an open and effective manner. Over the past year the panel has changed its procedures in respect of applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers attending panel meetings to enable it to become more inclusive and to allow them to be as fully involved as possible in the process. The panel feels that its current practice is flexible enough to allow time alone with the social workers to check out any third party information or aspects of the assessment that would not be appropriate to discuss with the applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers present, if necessary. However, panel aims to include the applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers if not in all the discussion then in the majority of it. The feedback from applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers and social workers has been very positive about this change, seeing it as a more meaningful and transparent process. The panel still has time on its own at the beginning of each item for discussion of the issues and also has the opportunity for time on its own at the end of the discussion if it feels it is necessary. There was concern from some panel members that this new process might impact upon the panel's ability to reach safe recommendations for children; however, to date the panel has not found this to be so and is reassured that safeguards are in place to prevent this from happening. The panel has had to develop the way that it poses questions for applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers and is hopefully undertaking this now in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

The panel still continues to structure its discussion of the paperwork as follows:

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

The positive and risk factors are fully shared with the social workers, applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers. The panel will continue to use this structure as it has proved very effective.

There is now a laminated sheet of photographs and brief profiles of panel members available in the waiting room for applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers attending panel. This, along with the up-dated leaflet on the panel, hopefully helps those attending the panel meetings.

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, applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers and to identify positive aspects and risk factors
3. The social worker/s, applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers join the meeting
4. Panel members ask the social worker/s, applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers questions on the areas for clarification
5. Applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers have the opportunity to ask any questions or to give any further information or make a statement to the panel
6. The panel asks the applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers to leave the meeting while the panel reaches its recommendations
7. The panel has the opportunity to discuss with the social worker/s any third party information or other issues if necessary before it comes to its recommendations
8. The panel has the opportunity for a further discussion without the social workers if this is thought to be necessary
9. The applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers re-join the meeting
10. The chair shares with the applicants/prospective adopters/foster carers the panel's recommendations and the positive aspects and risk factors of the application/match as identified by the panel and advises them when the agency decision maker will make the final decision

The process appears to work well. Panel over the past year has made progress in relation to time keeping and has noted that it now only tends to over- run time slots if paperwork is not of a sufficient quality or when disruption reports are presented to panel. The professional adviser to the panel will continue to monitor the former and it is hoped that new disruption procedures will help panel focus on its role in the disruption process.

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants/prospective adopters/ 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 has been positive.

Panel Terms of Reference and Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose

Both of the above documents have been reviewed and up-dated by the professional adviser and Head of Service in consultation with the panel.

Practice

The panel takes its role of quality assurance very seriously, particularly in respect of planning for children. In general panel continues to feel that permanence planning for children in Brighton & Hove is undertaken in a timely and appropriate manner. However, panel has been aware over this past period of the pressure of work on the fieldwork teams and feels that this has been reflected at times in the work presented to panel. Panel continues to highlight its concerns in relation to individual cases and also to feed back to social workers when reports have been completed well and when care planning for children has been timely and proactive.

In general the quality of the BAAF Form E reports on children presented to the panel continues to be of a reasonable standard. Panel has continued to take 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 comments noted in last year's panel report remain valid in relation to self reported evidence and BAAF Form Fs presented by other 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 continues to complete a feed-back form for the Agency Decision Maker on every case presented to the panel alerting the agency to issues in respect of reports, social work practice and general training areas and whether the agency is meeting the National Adoption Standards time-scales. This has been adapted to include comments from the Agency Decision Maker. This process has worked well and has been valued by the agency. It has now been agreed that the Agency Decision Maker will be invited to all panel training and also to meet with panel annually for two way direct feed - back. With the introduction of the National Adoption Standards the panel has formally monitored the time-scales also within the panel minutes.

Service developments continues to be a standing item to the panel's agenda and has been successful in ensuring 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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) during their inspection of Brighton & Hove's Fostering Services observed an emergency meeting of the Permanence panel and fed back that they were impressed by the organization and functioning of the panel. The authority was awarded by

the NCSC a “four” in respect of its panel work, the highest possible mark, which means that the work of the panels exceeds the requirements of the Regulations and Standards. However, the panel is not complacent and 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
30th April 2004