

**REPORT OF THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS  
SUB-COMMITTEE**

**HELD ON 9 JUNE 2003**

Present: Councillor Hawkes (Chair); Councillors McCaffery (Deputy Chair), Mrs Brown (OS), Burgess, Edmond-Smith, Giebeler, Pidgeon, Mallender, Turton and Young.

**1. Adoption Agency Annual Report.**

1.1 The Sub-Committee has considered a report in relation to the Adoption Agency Annual Report.

1.2 The work of the Adoption Agency (Brighton & Hove City Council) is governed by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, as amended by the Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997, Adoption (Bringing Children into the UK) Regulations 2003, Department of Health Circulars LAC (84) 3, LAC (97) 13, LAC (98) 20, LAC (99) 29 and LAC (2001) 21. The Agency is required by regulation to inform members, on an annual basis, of its activity.

1.3 The report informed members of:

- National Developments; the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the National Adoption Standards for England, and the National Care Standards Commission Minimum Adoption Standards;
- Local Adoption and Permanence activity and service developments during the year April 2002-March 2003.

**National Developments**

**1.4 The Adoption and Children Act 2002**

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

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

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

**National Adoption Standards for England**

- 1.8 The National Adoption Standards came into force 1 April 2003 and set ambitious standards for the assessment, approval and placement of children and prospective adopters.
- 1.9 The standards have been well publicised throughout the Agency. Procedures for monitoring performance against the standards have been developed and are overseen by the Adoption & Permanence Panel and Professional Advisor. It is anticipated that the standards will be extremely hard to achieve in some cases. Where this is so, reasons will be clearly recorded and fed back to the Agency Decision-Maker and Operational Managers.

### **National Care Standards Commission National Minimum Standards**

- 1.10 From 30 April 2003 the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) assumes responsibility for the inspection of local authorities adoption services under the Care Standards Act 2002. The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, and National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 set out clear and exacting requirements for the conduct of the Adoption Agency. The Agency will be inspected every three years. The first inspection will be in 2003-4.
- 1.11 The regulations require a considerable re-write of procedures, policies and written information for those connected with adoption; children, prospective adopters/adopters (including inter-country adopters), adopted people and birth relatives of adopted people.

### **Agency Activity/Service Developments April 2002-March 2003**

- 1.12 **Agency Activity 2002-2003**
- 1.13 The agency statistics for April 2002-March 2003 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.

### **Service Developments**

- 1.14 **The Adoption and Permanence Panel**
- 1.15 The Independent Chair of Panel has reported on the work of the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

### **The Adoption Consortium**

- 1.16 The South East Adoption Consortium comprises Brighton & Hove; Bexley, Bromley, East Sussex, Kent and Medway. The Consortium aims to maximise placement choice for children approved for adoption by sharing prospective adopters. There has been considerable activity during the year with matches

of 26 children in 18 placements. Brighton and Hove placed six children with other authorities and had three children placed with their adopters.

- 1.17 In addition to the family finding activity the Consortium meetings offer a valuable forum for discussing policy and practice issues at this time of significant legislative and procedural change. Joint recruitment and training events are planned.

## **Recruitment, Preparation and Family Finding**

- 1.18 The Permanence/Concurrency Teams run four preparation groups for prospective adopters and long-term foster carers each year with an average of 10 'units' (couples or single applicants) attending each group. The Permanence Team is developing a workshop to help prospective adopters look at issues of loss and infertility before participation on the preparation groups.
- 1.19 Generally, the teams recruit sufficient numbers of carers for concurrency and children under 5 years of age. The difficulties in recruitment reflect the national picture: insufficient long-term foster carers, carers for larger siblings groups and older children, particularly boys.
- 1.20 A major recruitment campaign for adopters and foster carers is being launched in May 2003 and the new fostering payment scheme and carer support package is hoped to have an impact on the numbers of long-term carers recruited.

## **Concurrency Team**

- 1.21 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.
- 1.22 The team has also provided consultation to consortium colleagues from Kent County Council who are in the process of setting up their own concurrency team.

## **Attachment Team**

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

## **Adoption Support Services**

- 1.26 A significant challenge to Adoption Agencies in the Adoption and Children Act is the requirement to develop a comprehensive adoption support service (ASS). Councils are required to plan and deliver ASS with local health and education bodies and other key stakeholder groups.
- 1.27 The Agency has audited services against the requirements of the new legislation, standards and draft regulations and is in the process of drawing up plans to develop an adoption support service strategy.
- 1.28 Current provision includes a service level agreement with the Post Adoption Centre to provide a helpline, local surgeries and workshops for adopters, prospective adopters, adopted adults and birth families.
- 1.29 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.
- 1.30 The role of the Attachment Team within the Agency's future ASS is being reviewed. The Department of Health funding expires April 2004 hence the local authority alongside South Downs Health (NHS) Trust need to determine the future role of the Attachment Team within the ASS strategy.

### **Adoption Allowances**

- 1.31 Expenditure on Adoption Allowances 2002/2003 was £438,974.64. This related to the placement of 94 children, with an average weekly figure per child of £89.81. The allowances ranged from £3.15 to £416.71 (latter being an exceptionally high figure in relation to the placement of a sibling group of 5 children).
- 1.32 The figures for previous years are:
- |           |                                        |
|-----------|----------------------------------------|
| 2001/2002 | £329,555.00 in relation to 68 children |
| 2000/2001 | £290,293.00 in relation to 68 children |
| 1999/2000 | £239,268.00 in relation to 57 children |
- 1.33 This confirms that a greater number of children are being adopted who would otherwise have remained in foster care for the duration of their childhood, costing the local authority considerably more in social work, foster care, education and associated resources.
- 1.34 The Sub-Committee has endorsed the report and the progress of the Agency in relation to adoption and permanence activity is noted and the Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose.
- 1.35 The Sub-Committee has agreed that Councillor McCaffery be elected to join the Permanence Panel as required by national standards and outlined in the Adoption and Permanence Panel Report by the Independent Chair.

Councillor Pat Hawkes

Chair, Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee  
June 2003

*(NB The report and the appendices referred to above are available on the Wave)*