



### **Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)**

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**Time and Date**

2.00 pm on Tuesday, 15th October, 2013

**Place**

Committee Room 2 - Council House

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**Public Business**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 4)
  - (a) To agree the minutes of the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.
  - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Adoption Service Report 2012/13** (Pages 5 - 42)

Report of the Executive Director, People
5. **Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2012/13 - Children's Social Care Services** (Pages 43 - 60)

Report of the Executive Director, People
6. **Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board Recommendation on the CLYP Social Care & Early Intervention FSR** (Pages 61 - 62)

Briefing note
7. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There are no outstanding issues to report.
8. **Any Other Business**

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

**Private Business**

Nil

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Chris West, Executive Director, Resources, Council House Coventry

Monday, 7 October 2013

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Usha Patel  
Tel: 024 7683 3198

Membership: Councillor: G Duggins (Cabinet Member) and J Innes (Deputy Cabinet Member)

By invitation Councillor Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

**Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms**

If you require a British Sign Language interpreter for this meeting  
OR if you would like this information in another format or  
language please contact us.

**Usha Patel**

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# Agenda Item 3

## Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) held at 2.00pm 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2013

Present:

Cabinet Member: Councillor Duggins

Deputy Cabinet Member: Councillor Innes

Employees (by Directorate):

People: A. Pepper, L Ricketts

Resources: J. Newman, U. Patel

Apologies: Councillor Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

### **Public business**

#### **11. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **12. Minutes**

(a) The minutes of the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2013 were agreed as a true record.

(b) There were no matters arising.

#### **13. Update on Progress of Troubled Families Programme**

The Cabinet Member considered a joint report of the Directors of Children, Learning and Young People and Community Services which provided an update on progress on the Troubled Families Programme.

The Troubled Families programme based within Early Intervention and Prevention would be used as a platform to help Coventry transform how services are delivered into families with a range of defined needs which might also but not exclusively, be combined with complex needs. The approach would challenge traditional service delivery models, which some families experience as unresponsive and difficult to access at time of greatest need. The programme would provide families with timely access to co-ordinated and integrated services, and would work with families to define their individual needs in order to help them achieve positive and sustainable outcomes by increasing their resilience and opportunities.

The Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate would set out how agencies would work together, in a different way to deliver the Troubled Families Programme in Coventry. In Coventry, the Troubled Families programme would be called the "Children & Family First (CFF) Intensive Family Support Programme. The programme defined greater collaboration and integration between services. A whole family approach would be employed, with services taking account of the needs of each family member as

well as the wider family context. Families would identify the support needed and the services they required and plans would be developed around these specific set requirements.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People):**

- 1. Considered the briefing note submitted by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2).**
- 2. Endorsed the progress achieved to date on the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Troubled Families Programme within Coventry known locally as the Children & Family First Intensive Family Support Programme and acknowledged the challenges faced.**

**14. Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues to report.

**15. Any Other Public Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at: 2.30pm)



## Public report Cabinet Member Report

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Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)  
Cabinet Members (Children and Young People)

29 August 2013  
15 October 2013

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People) – Councillor Duggins  
Deputy Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People) – Councillor Innes

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Children, Learning and Young People

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:**

Adoption Service Report 2012/13

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**Is this a key decision**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

Coventry City Council's Adoption Service formed part of The Fundamental Service Review in 2011/12. The Adoption Service was integrated with the Fostering Service and Family Finding in July 2012. They were joined by the Permanence Team, from the Looked After Children Service (LAC) in March 2013 to form the Integrated Family Placements Services, all centrally located under the portfolio of services under the Head of Service for LAC.

The Service Manager of the newly formed Integrated Family Placements Service is also the Nominated Manager of the Coventry City Council's Registered Adoption Service and Fostering Service both of which are Regulated Services now provided within the integrated model.

The rationale for the integrated model is to provide a service for children that is designed around the child's timeline. A service which aims to secure a timely outcome of permanency for the wide range of children for whom this is needed at the earliest possible stage, whether this is via Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders or Long Term Fostering.

Located within the Integrated Family Placement Service the aim of the Adoption Service is to provide a comprehensive Adoption and Post-Adoption Service, including the provision of Adoption Support Services, to all parties affected by the adoption process that is consistent with Best Practice, National Standards, Guidance and Regulatory Requirements.

The Council is committed to achieving the greatest number of adoptions with the best outcomes for the children concerned and supports the recruitment of prospective adopters. In the period 2012-13, 40 Coventry children were adopted and 28 new prospective adopters were approved.

The Regulations require that a Statement of Purpose (SOP) is compiled and kept under regular review. The National Minimum Standards specify that that the SOP should be reviewed at least annually.

**Recommendations:**

The Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) is recommended to:

1. Note the contents of the Adoption Service Report 2012/13.
2. Forward any recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

The Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) is recommended to:

- 1) Consider any recommendations made by the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2).
- 2) Accept the Adoption Service Report 2012/13.
- 3) Approve the updated Statement of Purpose.
- 4) Approve that the Council remains committed to the new model in achieving the greatest number of adoptions compatible with achieving the best outcomes for the children concerned.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 – Statement of Purpose (updated June, July and August 2013)

**Other useful background papers:**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny**

Yes, the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 29.8.13

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body**

No

**Will this report go to Council**

No

**Report title:** Adoption Service Report 2012/13

**1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 In line with the Government reform of Adoption services the Adoption Service is now located within the new Integrated Family Placement Service to facilitate the work of different teams who all have a role in preparing and supporting both children and adults on their adoption journey to ensure that this progresses in a timely manner without undue delay.
- 1.2 The Permanence Team are responsible for children who have been identified as needing adoption. The Social Workers in the team work with birth families and adopters and with the children to prepare and support them up until they have been adopted by their new family and the Family Finders in the Team identify suitable matches for children with families and families with children. Permanence Social Workers and Family Finders work closely with the Neighbourhood Social Workers, Assessment and Support Social Workers to identify needs, make and sustain adoption placements.
- 1.3 The Assessment Team recruits, prepares and assesses prospective adopters, taking them up to Adoption Panel for consideration of their suitability to adopt. The Support Team then supports the adopters and their children post approval, through matching, introductions and placement through the rest of the adoption process and beyond. Support Social Workers also provide support for post adoption contact arrangements with birth family and adopted adults.
- 1.4 The development of the dedicated Family Finders within the Permanency Team means that the information about children needing adoptive placements will be available to the service at a much earlier point in a child's journey which will lead to the identification of suitable matches at a more timely stage whether these are in house or via external agencies.
- 1.5 The Adoption Panel is responsible for recommending and reviewing adoption plans for children whose parents have given consent for them to be adopted, recommending; the approval of prospective adopters, terminating the approval of adopters and matching children to adopters. It also considers learning points from any disruptions in adoption placements.
- 1.6 The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is responsible for making a formal decision that children Should be Placed for Adoption where there are children who are the subject of an adoption plan within Care Proceedings in the court process, have an adoption plan and for children being considered and recommended by the Adoption Panel where the parents have given their agreement to their child being adopted. The ADM is also responsible for deciding on approval and termination of approval of adopters and the approval of adoption placements.
- 1.7 The Agency Adoption Panel Advisor and Adoption Support Services Advisor is a formal role and it is a regulatory requirement for this to be undertaken by a suitability qualified social worker with sufficient specialist experience in adoption.
- 1.8 In bringing the services together it is anticipated that there is greater scope for processing assessments of Adopters more quickly so a stretch timescale of 6 months for adoption assessments from enquiry to approval has been agreed.
- 1.9 With regard to children, the Children, Learning and Young People Service as a whole has revised all its twin track and parallel planning processes to ensure that children who can be placed for adoption are placed as soon as possible.

- 1.10 Prospective Adopters have been approached to consider dual approval as Adopters and Foster Carers for very young children, so that in a small number of cases children have been placed before their Placement Order was made, under Foster Care Regulations, and while their permanence plan remains unresolved.
- 1.11 Over the past two years there have been several children adopted by their Foster Carers in Coventry which has led the service to review the decision not to recruit adopters from Coventry and to once again offer Adoption Assessments to those who live locally. Whilst it is anticipated that this change will assist with recruitment of Adopters it is acknowledged that this will have an impact on reducing numbers of fostering placements for children. The benefits and outcomes for the individual children in securing permanency, however, and subsequently exiting them from care are significant.
- 1.12 The Service has also reviewed and updated the Adoption web site and has improved the standard of information that is sent to initial enquirers, implementing the new 2 Stage Process for Prospective Adopters that became mandatory on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. Response times and other practices have also been reviewed in order to streamline the service and to bring Adopters through the process in a more timely way.

## Adopters

- 1.13 The following table sets out the performance of the Adoption Service with regard to activity in respect of Adopters and those interested in Adopting.

Key performance indicators	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Adoption enquiries received by Recruitment Team	162	221	224
Number of enquirers sent information packs	Packs are routinely sent but this info has not recorded for this year *	88	93
Initial visits made	46*	31	41
Applications received	39*	22	25
Numbers of Adopters Approved	28	33	26
Number of Adopters awaiting matching with children	31	22	23
Number of Coventry Adopters matched with children	19	Not collected	Not collected
Number of Coventry Adopters with Children Placed	20	Not collected	Not collected
Number of Coventry Adopters with Adoption Order	20	Not collected	Not collected

*\*Method of recording these figures changed 1<sup>st</sup> Aug 12 and do not include figs 1.4.12 – 31.7.12*



## **Referrals/Enquiries to the Adoption Service**

- 1.14 162 general adoption enquiries in total were received by the Assessment Team in 2012/3.
- 1.15 Of the 162 prospective adopters who wished to take their interest further, 112 of either chose not to pursue their application with us, or not to pursue at that time or were counselled out. The reasons were not recorded this year and are currently not recorded but a system for recording these reasons is being considered.
- 1.16 There were 95 initial enquiries from 1st August 12 to 31st March 13 and during the same period we undertook 46 initial visits. Of these visits there were 39 assessments that were started during this period, which is excellent conversion rate and demonstrates the assessing social workers skills in identifying strong candidates to take forward.

## **Recruitment**

- 1.17 Since August 2012 the new process for recruiting and assessing Prospective Adopters has become fully embedded. Adopters are now actively recruited from Coventry as well as surrounding areas. Specific assessments of Foster Carers or other Prospective Adopters for specific children are undertaken where ever possible. All assessments now have a target timescale of 6 months from enquiry to approval. The Government's new 2 Stage Adoption Process has required little change to implement from 1st July 2013.
- 1.18 The Integrated Family Placement Service has refreshed the Recruitment and Retention Group and an "Adopt for Coventry Campaign" has been launched across the city. Activities for the recruitment campaign include: Banners, posters and flags have been delivered in prominent areas of the City promoting adoption, 'Adopt for Coventry' leaflets and beer mats distributed to all local family pubs in Coventry and surrounding areas and bright pink tee-shirts have been worn by leaflet distributors, the Chief Executive, Senior Managers, Foster Carers and staff at local City half marathon event with lots of press coverage. An Adopt for Coventry advert has been established on the IT Helpline for the city council and radio interviews and press interviews took place by adopters and a care leaver promoting adoption in November 2012 as part of Adoption week.

## **Preparation Groups**

- 1.19 Training and Preparation Groups, run by the service are offered to all Prospective Adopters including approved foster carers and 2nd time adopters where appropriate. Groups were run in April, July, October 2012 and January 2013. The groups take place over 4 days, and include presentations and exercises for applicants on issues to consider when adopting a child from the care system.
- 1.20 There were, in total, 36 households who attended these groups in the period 2012/3. Of these households there were 6 who withdrew prior to approval (1 was due to medical reasons but the other reasons are not recorded) 8 households are still being assessed.
- 1.21 Of these who attended the groups there were 22 households who went on to be approved (although of those 22; 1 household experienced, a disruption and 1 experienced a foster placement breakdown and 3 simply decided to withdraw) thus there were 17 households who were approved following their preparation training. All 17 are either being considered for match, are at the linking stage or have children already placed.

## Approval and Matching of Adopters

- 1.22 Adoption Panel approved 28 Adopters during the reporting period of which 25 were general Adopters and 3 were approvals with specific children in mind. This is 5 less than 2011/12 and 2 more than 2010/11.
- 1.23 The Service seeks to recruit a pool of Adopters to meet the needs of a wide range of children. However, throughout the country there are numerous Prospective Adopters who are childless and generally seeking younger and single children and there have traditionally been fewer couples or single adopters who are prepared to consider older children and sibling groups.
- 1.24 Factors that militate against matching include; children often needing to be placed out of city for their welfare, a number of Adopters that are not able to take older children, sibling groups or children with complex needs. Often there is a mismatch between the aspirations of Adopters, their capacity to care for children with complex needs and the needs of children awaiting a family.
- 1.25 There were 31 Adopters waiting for a match at the end of March 2013 compared to 22 in 2011/12.

## Children

- 1.26 The following table sets out the performance of the Adoption Service with regard to activity in respect of Children

Key performance indicators	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
No of children with a Plan for Adoption (ADM decision that child should be placed for adoption ShoBPA) end of March 2013 (*no of decisions in period 2012/3)	96 (*73)	50	56
No of Children with a Placement Order	71	48	41
No Children Placed for Adoption in year	25	48	27
No of Children adopted during year	40	25	23
Disruptions of placement	1	1	1

## Children with a Plan for Adoption

- 1.27 There has been almost a 50% increase in children with an agency decision that supported the Plan of Adoption compared to 2011/12. It must be noted, however not all of these children will necessarily go on to an adoption placement. Adoption is often one of a range of options for the child including, rehabilitation where safe to do so, placement with family or other connected persons subject to a Residence or Special Guardianship Order. This does reflect the increased activity generally within children's services.
- 1.28 There were 71 children Subject of a Placement Order by the end of March 2013. Of those children: 29 children were placed with their adoptive family with 25 of these children being placed during the period. There were 5 children who had been matched but not yet placed by the end of March 2013. There were 11 children for whom their plan of adoption had changed and were to have their Placement Orders revoked. There were 31 children who were not yet matched with a family by end March 2013.

- 1.29 The number, profile and age of the children (including sibling groups) waiting for an adoptive placement and length of time they have been waiting has an impact on the Adoption Scorecard. This is in relation to the timeliness of the number of days between a child becoming Looked After and being placed with their adoptive family. Regular reports on the Adoption Scorecard are provided to the Leadership Team and Elected Members.
- 1.30 Of the children on a Placement Order and not placed as at end March 2013 there were 6 sibling groups of 3 and 6 sibling groups of 2. Of those sibling groups 1 sibling group of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2 are to have their Placement Orders revoked and all have an alternative plan of Long Term Foster Care with their current carers. There are 3 sibling groups of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2 for whom their current Foster Carers are being assessed to adopt or take an SGO (Special Guardianship Order). There are 1 sibling group of 3 and 1 sibling group of 2 who have since been placed with their adoptive family in June and July 2013 respectively. There is 1 sibling group of 3 and 2 sibling groups of 2 who are still waiting for an adoptive family. There is 1 sibling group of 2 who have been separated and their respective Foster Carers are in the process of being assessed to adopt them.
- 1.31 Of the single children remaining 6 were placed by July 2013. There are 3 single children for whom their foster carers plan to adopt or pursue an SGO. There is 1 single child whose Placement Order is being revoked and she will remain in long term foster care with her present carer and there is 1 single child still waiting for her permanent family.

### **Family Finding and Matching**

- 1.32 Family Finders are integrated as part of the Permanency Team and, together with the Children's Social Workers, are linked in to Neighbourhood Teams. They have begun to work proactively together to identify at an early stage children who may require adoptive placements and are starting to achieve success in identifying families for these children sooner so that matching and placements can be progressed immediately after the Placement Order is achieved.
- 1.33 Family Finding Evenings have been held on a quarterly basis and are attended by Prospective Adopters undergoing assessments, Approved Adopters, Children's Social Workers, Family Finders and Children's Foster Carers. The evening affords an opportunity to present and promote the profiles of children over 5 and siblings groups who are waiting for a family. A professional film maker has been commissioned to make DVD's and web profiles for those children for whom we need to recruit families.

### **Children Adopted During the Year**

- 1.34 There were 40 children adopted during 2012/3 and of those 29 children were placed with Coventry's own Adopters. There were 5 sibling groups who were placed comprising of 11 children of the total children placed.
- 1.35 There was 1 Disruption of a Placement for Adoption 8 weeks after placement. The Disrupted case was that of an older child with complex needs aged 6years, placed with Coventry adopters but living in Leicestershire. The child returned to the care of his previous foster carers with whom he had lived since 2008 and will remain there with a plan of long term fostering.
- 1.36 There were a number of factors contributing to the Disruption that could not have been anticipated however there were also learning experiences for Adoption Panel and the Adoption Service with regard to this placement.

- 1.37 Factors such as the age of child upon placement for adoption and capacity to attach as a result of early life experiences are risk factors in making placements for adoption. These were taken into account together with the child's complex health needs and the match appeared to be good and well informed. The Adoption Service is committed to careful matching, avoidance of drift and has excellent adoption support services for all placements for adoption but an issue in this case was the absence of information for the adopters about the support services available in their own authority.
- 1.38 There were other factors in the case that have contributed to and informed the learning and development of future practice of the Adoption Service with regard to practice. In summary these were in relation to assessing prospective adopters and the timing of the split between assessment and support functions of the service to adopters, the timing of placement moves and the clarity of information and planning particularly concerning future support and contact arrangements.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 The proposed option is for members to receive the Adoption Report 2012/13 together with the update to the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Services provided by Coventry City Council.
- 2.2 The implications of this are that this will ensure that the National Minimum Standards are met in that the Executive side of the Local Authority, receive a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency for 2012/3 and in so doing are able to monitor the management and outcomes of the services provided.
- 2.3 The proposal is that in so doing Members are able to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children, prospective adopters, adopters and other service users affected by Adoption.
- 2.4 In receiving the report and the updated Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Services provided by Coventry City Council Members are able to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 2.5 The alternative option would be to do nothing. The consequence of doing this would be that National Minimum Standards would not be met. On that basis, this option is not recommended.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 Although there has not been any specific consultation on this matter, continual review is undertaken through monitoring of the Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure.
- 3.2 There were **8** complaints received during the reporting period April 2012 – March 2013. Of these **2** concerned the lack of support for building works, **3** were in relation to delayed life story work, **1** was about the poor standard of work from their social worker, **1** was about the lack of support given in respect of adopting another agency child and **1** was with regard to their assessment being postponed for 2 years.
- 3.3 15 compliments were received during the reporting period April 2012 – March 2013. 14 were commenting on the quality of the support and work of individual staff in the Adoption/Support/Permanence Team and 1 was in relation the work of the birth records social worker.

3.4 Once an application has been accepted an Adopter now has the opportunity to access either the Council's Complaints and Representation Procedure– or the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) if they are not recommended to adopt. There were no requests made to either service during 2012/3

#### 4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 There are prescribed National Timescales for progressing plans for; Adoption for Children, Approving Prospective Adopters and Placing Children for Adoption. The following table indicates how Coventry City Council's Adoption Service is meeting these timescales.

<b>PROGRESSING PLANS FOR ADOPTION FOR CHILDREN</b>			
<b>Statutory Guidance</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Performance</b>
"Children's adoption plans are presented to the ADM or Adoption Panel within <b>2 months</b> of the review recommending adoption"	2 months	<b>73</b> children were subject to an adoption decision in 2012/3	<p><b>Declined</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% of children (24 out of 48) met the criteria in 2011/12</li> <li>• 34% of children (25 out of 73) met the criteria in 2012/13</li> </ul> <p><b>2012/13 story</b> 17 plans went to panel/ADM between two and three months from the review recommendation,</p> <p>20 plans went to panel/ADM between four and six months of the review recommendation</p> <p>9 plans went to panel/ADM between six months and one year of the review recommendation</p> <p>2 children went to panel/ADM between 12 and 13 months of panel.</p>
"National Minimum Standards (Standard 13) Timescale between agency decision for the plan for adoption to the date of placement – Standard is <b>12 months</b> "	12 months	<b>27</b> children placed with adopters	<p><b>Improved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 56.3% of children (27 out of 48) met the criteria in 2011/12</li> <li>• 70.3% of children (19 out of 27) met the criteria in 2012/13</li> </ul> <p><b>2012/13 Story</b> <b>19</b> children were placed within 12 months of the decision for adoption</p> <p><b>8</b> children were not placed within 12 months of the decision for adoption. Of these not placed there were 3 single children of those single children 1 was placed for adoption with her foster carer, 1 experienced a disruption and was successfully placed with his previous foster carer for adoption and 1 other was placed within 14months. The others not placed comprised of 1 sibling group of 2 children and 1 sibling group of 3.</p>

<p>"Notification to Birth Parents of a Plan for Adoption, Linking with Adopters – orally within 48 hours of Decision and in writing within a further 5 days (<b>7 days</b>)"</p>		<p><b>73</b> children had a plan for adoption decision in 2012/3</p> <p><b>23</b> children had a match with adopters decision approved in 2012/3</p>	<p><b>This data was not collected in 2011/12</b></p> <p><b>In 2012/13 the Story</b>  <b>47</b> letters notifying of the plan for adoption were sent to the child's parent/s within 7 days  <b>Of the 26 parent/s who</b> were not sent a letter, there were 3 x parent/s addresses that were NK and there were <b>19</b> for whom it was decided not to send a letter where no reason was recorded. There were <b>4</b> parents for whom letters were simply not sent</p> <p>Of the <b>6</b> letters notifying parents of the match only 3 of these were within the timescales.</p> <p><i>Note. Birth Parents should be notified of these important decisions in respect of their children and the practice has been for social workers to orally tell the birth parents on or within 2 days of the decision. The system for recording notifying birth parents orally and in writing of the decision to place and match has been reviewed and a new system has been implemented from July 2013 to record performance in this area. The expectation is that this should improve feedback on performance in 2013/14.</i></p>
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## RECRUITMENT

Statutory Guidance	Measure	Baseline	Performance
<p>"Written information about the adoption process should be sent within 5 working days to the prospective adopter in response to their enquiry"</p>	<p><b>5 working days</b></p>	<p>162 general adoption enquiries were received in 2012/3</p>	<p><b>2011/12</b> 88 packs were sent out on the same day as the enquiry</p> <p><b>2012/13</b> Generally where it has been agreed that a pack is required these have been sent out on the same or next working day</p>
<p>"The prospective adopter should be invited to an adoption information evening meeting within 2 months of their enquiry or are visited to share information".</p> <p>The service has set a Coventry timescale whereby Prospective adopters will be offered an initial visit within 5 days (national timescale is 10 days)</p>	<p><b>2 months</b> from initial enquiry</p>	<p><b>46</b> families received an initial visit (since 1.8.12/13)</p>	<p><b>Not collected in 2011/12</b></p> <p><b>2012/13 The Story</b> Of the <b>46</b> families receiving an initial visit <b>20</b> were visited within 5 days <b>33</b> were visited within 10 days <b>44</b> were visited within 2 months of their enquiry. Just <b>2 families</b> were visited outside of the 2 month timescale due to the availability of the enquiry and the other were too recently finished a course of IVF treatment</p>
<p>"From receipt of the application – to be allocated within 5 days".</p>	<p><b>5 days</b></p>	<p>The service operates a duty system in that the worker who takes the initial enquiry is allocated the case for an initial visit unless their case load dictates otherwise.</p>	<p><b>Not collected in 2011/2 Or 2012/13</b></p> <p>Figures have not been kept on this performance indicator for this year. It is anticipated that Protocol (Electronic case management system) will capture this data going forward.</p>

<b>APPROVAL OF ADOPTERS</b>			
<b>Statutory Guidance</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Performance</b>
Adopters must be approved, 8 months from application to recommendation by Adoption Panel	<b>8 months</b>	<b>28</b> adopters were approved to adopt in 2012/3	<p><b>Improved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40% of approvals (13 out of 32) met the standard in 2011/2</li> <li>68% of approvals (19 out of 28) met the standard in 2012/13</li> </ul> <p><b>2012/13 Story</b>  <b>19</b> were completed within 8 months</p> <p><b>4</b> completed between 9-11 months</p> <p><b>5</b> took over 12 months</p>
6 weeks from completion of Adopters Report to Adoption Panel	<b>6 weeks</b>	<b>28</b>	<p><b>Not collected in 2011/12</b></p> <p><b>100%</b> Timescale was achieved in 2012/13</p>
<p>Notifying Adopters of Decision for Approval, within 24 hours of the Panel recommendation (National standards)</p> <p>Statutory Guidance = <b>48 hours</b>  Coventry – all adopters are notified of the Panel's recommendations within <b>24 hours</b> of attending panel by Social Worker &amp; Panel Chair, and receive letter</p>	<b>24 hours</b>	<b>28</b> letters of notification	<p><b>Improved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40.1% of letters (13 out of 32) were sent within 1 day in 2011/12</li> <li>42.8% of letters (12 out of 28) were sent within 1 day in 2012/13</li> </ul> <p><b>2012/13 Story</b>  Only 12 were sent letters same day or within 1 day</p> <p>The remaining <b>16</b> were sent within 2-7 working days All adopters were notified verbally the same day or the day after the decision by the social worker.</p>

## 5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

### 5.1 Financial implications

5.1.1 The following Table shows the budget and expenditure for financial support for adopters. This includes the actual number of children being supported throughout the financial year.

Financial Year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Adoption Support Budget	£644,319	£690,427	£707,688	£707,688	£707,688	£720,387
Adoption Support Actual Spends	£690,858	£821,418	£806,400	£757,119	£722,313	£723,679
Variation (Under) /Overspend	£46,539	£130,991	£98,712	£49,431	£14,625	£3,292
Number of Children	123	124	123	113	118	123

5.1.2 As part of the FSR proposals, it was expected that part of the forecast reduction in LAC would be as a result of increasing permanence, some of which would be children adopted. We need to review the support policy for post adoption (including financial) in the light of the Government's Action Plan for Adoption of April 2012 and their subsequent review of this in relation to the support provided to adopters published in 2013. We anticipate that this review will be completed by the end of October 2013. Any financial and other implications will need to form part of a further cabinet member report.

5.1.3 Coventry is a member of the West Midlands Adoption Consortium through which Local Authorities may exchange resources when there is no suitable match for a child. This has previously given a more competitive rate for placements between members than those placements provided by the independent sector and other local authority agencies.

5.1.4 The table below provides details of budget and spend over time.

Accounting Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Inter-Agency Budget	£213,077	£213,077	£389,644*
Inter-Agency Actual Spend	£158,669	£257,330	£177,002
Income Received from Other Agencies	(£139,952)	(£104,373)	(£21,897)
Variation(under)/overspend	(£194,360)	(£60,120)	(£234,539)

\* Additional 111k budget to support the Adoption Plan– this was 1-off resource allocated through the FSR in relation to a backlog of children

5.1.5 As part of the FSR proposals, the 2012/13 budget was increased for one-year only by £111k to enable the purchase of additional adoption places. The budget was due to be utilised in the main for hard to place children, however, it was not fully spent, and this contributes to the resulting underspend of £235k.



- 5.1.6 Due to changes in key personnel within the service it has not been possible to ascertain why this was not fully utilised given the number of children awaiting placements in 2012/13. Since June 2013 new processes have been put in place to ensure that the budget is fully utilised to secure timely placements for children in line with the Adoption Score Card expectations; to ensure that appropriate placements are provided as and when children require them.
- 5.1.7 Financial assistance through the Pathways to Care scheme. Additional financial assistance is also available for adopters through the Pathways to Care funding. This is provided for building alterations & extensions, and the purchase of a more suitable property or vehicle. Pathways funding has successfully enabled a number of children to be adopted who would otherwise not have been placed.
- 5.1.8 In 2012/13 there was an overall spend of £103K. There was a contribution of £10K towards the cost of a vehicle for foster carers adopting 3 children, and a contribution of £93K to carry out adaptations to accommodate 2 children with extensive health needs. See table below of spend since 2007/8.

	2007 - 08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Amount of grant	£82,495	£155,800	£56,896	Nil	£5,000	£102,600
Number of children assisted	8	13	3	-	2	5

- 5.2 Legal implications** - National Minimum Standards stipulate that the executive side of the local authority, receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months; Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users; satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

Regulations require that each local authority compiles a Statement of Purpose that must be kept under review. National minimum standards stipulate that the review must be at least undertaken annually.

## 6. Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy):

The Adoption Service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging for a permanent placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting – that of securing appropriate family placements for 'Looked After Children' (LAC), as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed

Failure to provide an effective and timely Adoption Service would lead to Coventry's Looked After Children staying in care longer, and/or potentially being placed further away from the city in costly other agency placements.

This risk is being managed through the delivery of the Fundamental Service Review of Fostering and Adoption, which is examining how to increase the number of children adopted each year effectively.

**6.3 What is the impact on the organisation**

The Adoption Service contributes to Children's Social Care Services performance (within the Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People) against key Indicators that are closely scrutinised both internally and externally on an ongoing basis.

**6.4 Equalities / EIA**

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment has been undertaken by the service.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations**

None

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# COVENTRY CITY ADOPTION SERVICE

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

August 2013 (updated)

# Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Pursuant to the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, as amended by the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005 every adoption agency has to produce a Statement of Purpose and is required to review the Statement of Purpose.
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose of the Agency is formally approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for Children, Learning and Young People and is available on the Coventry City Council Website to anyone seeking a copy.

## 2. The Statement of Purpose covers the following matters

- 2.1 The aims, values and principles of Coventry Adoption Services
- 2.2 The functions of the Adoption Services, including the service users, and activities of the agency
- 2.3 The name, qualification and experience of the manager of the service
- 2.4 Information about the organisation and staffing of the service
- 2.5 Systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the services provided
- 2.6 Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.
- 2.7 Information about the complaints procedure, referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and the Children's guide to Adoption
- 2.8 The address and telephone number of Ofsted and the Children's Rights Director Officer

## 3. The Aim of Coventry's Adoption Services

- 3.1 To provide a comprehensive adoption and post-adoption service, including the provision of Adoption Support Services to all parties affected by the adoption process consistent with best practice and national standards and requirements.
- 3.2 To provide services which are appropriate and tailored to the particular needs of service users and people affected by adoption, in particular potential service users are welcomed without prejudice and given clear information on the services provided by the agency.
- 3.3 Consistent with Coventry City Council's duty towards children who are Looked After, where adoption is the plan, to ensure that they are placed with families who can offer them safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood. In particular, the Adoption Service seeks to safeguard and promote the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services

## **Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose**

3.4 To find adoptive homes for all children looked after in Coventry who require a permanent family through adoption.

3.5 Where children cannot be placed within the agencies own resources the Service will seek to make arrangements with other Adoption Agencies to secure placements for children.

### **4. Values of the Adoption Service**

4.1 The Service;

- Believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond
- Affirms that where possible it is best that children are brought up by their own birth family
- Ensures the child's welfare, safety and needs are the paramount considerations and at the centre of the adoption process
- Considers the child's wishes and feelings and takes them into account at all stages.
- Seeks to avoid delays in adoption to minimise impact on the health and development of children
- Responds promptly to the requests of and work with people affected by adoption, being respectful of their ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexuality, gender and disability, and their experience and understanding of adoption.
- Takes account of and values children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language when decisions are made
- Aims to ensure the particular needs of disabled children are fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- Values and respects the role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family.
- Understands that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals.
- Works with others to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption
- Where the service provision involves an adopted adult and their birth relatives it is the wishes and feelings of the adopted adult that take precedence.
- Works in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered and that the needs of service users are met effectively

### **5. Principles of the Adoption Service**

5.1 The principles on which the service is based include;

- Respect for the confidentiality of all those involved.
- Children's needs are placed first in all decision-making and actions.
- Services will not discriminate against groups or individuals.
- Services will be delivered effectively, efficiently and with the avoidance of delay.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- There is a commitment to monitor and review services.
- There is a commitment to involve users in the ongoing review and development of the service. The service consults service users on decisions in relation to their service provision, seeking and welcoming feedback, using this feedback in its management and development of the service.
- The Agency, as a function of Coventry City Council, has written policies and procedures in place for working with service users with physical, sensory and learning impairments, for whom English is not the first language. There is a commitment to ensure that communications take due account of physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of children, birth parents/guardians, prospective/adoptive parents and staff.
- Arrangements are made through appropriate interpreters for those who are unable to understand a document to have it read, translated or explained to them.

### 6. Who Receives Adoption Services

#### 6.1 Adoption Services are provided to;

- Children who are to be adopted.
- Birth parents or guardians.
- Prospective and approved adopters and adoptive siblings including advice to those who are seeking to adopt from overseas.
- Children and their adoptive parents who require Adoption Support Services.
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families.
- Step-parents wishing to adopt.
- Private adoption applicants.

### 7. Overview of the Work of the Adoption Service

- To provide a child/children/young person with a permanent family by adoption, which will meet the child's need for stability, security, love and a resource into their adulthood and beyond
- Recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a range of prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of Coventry children.
- Assistance to locality social workers in counselling pregnant women who wish to place their baby for adoption.
- Making available counselling and support either within the service or by external referral for all birth families with an adoption plan for their children.
- Ensuring children are supported throughout the adoption process, appropriately engaged, involved, prepared and offered counselling commensurate with their age and understanding.
- Schedule 2 counselling for adopted adults and advice regarding Intermediary Services.
- Assessment, preparation, training and support for people who wish to adopt a child from abroad whether in-house or via referral to other agencies.



## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- Providing advice and consultation to locality workers working with a child and family where adoption is the plan.
- Preparing reports for Adoption Panel and courts on aspects of adoption work.
- Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels and courts regarding aspects of adoption work.
- Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels where a match has been recommended for a Coventry approved family.
- Offering of an Adoption Support Service after placement and after an order has been made in accordance with Adoption Support Regulations 2005.
- Participation in the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium including the exchange of approved applicants to facilitate the placement of children.
- Joint working and partnership arrangements with other local authorities/agencies to maximise the aims of Coventry Adoption Service.

### **8. The Name, Qualifications and Experience of the Manager**

#### 8.1 Nominated Manager of the Adoption service:

Alison Talheth

Integrated Service Manager Family Placements

Coventry Children Learning and Young People Directorate

Adoption Service

Civic Centre 1

Earl Street

Coventry

CV1 5Rs

Tel no: 02476 831873 Fax 02476 294660

8.2 Professional qualifications: BA in Applied Social Sciences and Certificate Qualified Social Worker (CQSW) (Nottingham Trent Polytechnic 1988)

Certificate in Management Studies (Open University 1998)

Diploma in Public Services Management Studies (Nottingham Trent University 2001)

8.3 Experience: Alison Talheth has worked in various local authorities in England in the field of Social Work since 1988. Her posts include those of Social Worker, undertaking the full range of Statutory children and families' work including assessment of adopters, matching and placing children for adoption and post adoption support, Team Manager Reception and Assessment, Operational Manager Emergency Duty Team and Service Manager Child Care Operation's

8.4 Most Recent Experience in Adoption: Responsible Person and Agency Decision Maker, SSAFA Forces Help Adoption Agency 2009 – 2012

Interim Service Manager Adoption, Sheffield City Council 7.5.12 – 1.10.12

8.5 Nominated Manager from 29.5.13

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### 9. Structure of the Adoption Service

9.1 Looked After Service Teams are responsible for the arrangements for children and undertake all case management including discussion with birth family members where adoption is the plan for the child. Independent counselling and support of birth parents is available through a commissioned service offered by St Francis' Children's Society in line with the Adoption Regulations. Children's Case management is initiated within the Neighbourhood Teams with the practice of joint working with the 'Looked After' Service to progress adoption plans once rehabilitation is ruled out.

9.2 The Adoption Service has 3 teams, Assessment, Support and Permanency who work as an integrated service with the Family Placements Service. The Assessment Team is responsible for recruiting foster carers and adopters. This team works with adoption enquirers to determine initial eligibility, delivers pre application training, and helps those who confirm their interest in adoption to complete their application undertaking pre approval assessment and training and booking Panel. The Support Team provides the ongoing support of adopters and foster carers. They make arrangements for adoptive placements and support new families through to adoption. The Permanency Team includes the Social Workers responsible for the children with an adoption plan and the Family Finders who oversee home-finding for all children who require permanent placements.

9.3 Currently the Assessment, Support Teams and Permanency Teams are each led by the equivalent of 2 full time Team Managers responsible to the Nominated Manager of the Adoption Service who has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service within the Integrated Family Placements Service.

9.4 Team Managers are responsible for supervising the work of the teams' social workers, all of whom are qualified and registered with the HCPC. The majority of social workers are Senior Caseworkers who satisfy the requirements within the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 (which includes 3 years post qualification experience in child care social work, including direct experience of adoption work). Staff who have not yet achieved that level of qualification are supervised by a staff member who has met the requirement.

9.5 The staff involved in the service have a wide range of experience of working in the field of child-care and family placement, including international experience. Staff are representative of the diverse backgrounds in Coventry, including White British and Asian heritage.

### 10. Staffing of the Adoption Service

10.1 The Adoption Service consists of the following staff

The Head of Service LAC

The Nominated Manager who is the Integrated Service Manager, Family Placements Service

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### The Assessment Team

(Who also cover Fostering) consisting of:

- 2 Full Time Team Managers
- 2 Part Time Senior Practitioners
- 8 Full Time Social Worker posts
- 4 Part Time Social worker posts

### The Support Team

(Who also cover Fostering) consisting of:

- 2 Full Time Team Managers
- 1 Senior Practitioner Post
- 6 Full Time Social Worker posts
- 8 Part Time Social Worker post
- 2 Child and Family Support Workers
- 1 Part Time Birth Records Social Worker

### The Permanency Team

(Who also cover Family Finding for Long Term Fostering) consisting of:

- 1 Full Time Team Manager
- 2 Part Time Team Managers
- 1 Senior Practitioner Child Care Social Work Post
- 8 Full time Child Care Social Work Posts
- 1 Part Time Child Care Social Work Post
- 3 full time Family Finding Social Worker Posts
- 1 part time Social Worker Family Finding Post

1 x Adoption Panel Administrator/Senior Administrator

Access to part of Joint Business Support Hub:

- 2 part time Team leaders
- 5 full time senior administrators
- 6 part time senior administrators

1 Full Time Agency Advisor and ASSA – Gail Helfet who is responsible for providing Professional Advice to the Adoption Panel and Agency Adoption Support Services Advice. Gail has over 30 years experience in the field of adoption and holds a BA Soc.Sci (social work) and CQSW qualification. Gail has undertaken specialist training in Adoption and Attachment with family Futures

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### 11. Monitoring Arrangements to ensure effectiveness and quality

11.1 Arrangements are in place to ensure that the service provided by the Adoption Service is effective and that the quality of the service is of an appropriate standard. These include the following;

- The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report are considered by the Cabinet Member for Social Care each year and are subject to Cabinet Scrutiny
- A summary of progress against adoption targets is contained within the quarterly report of the Directorate and considered by Cabinet each quarter
- Managers provide monthly performance information in respect of their team
- Adoption Service targets are reported on within the Quality Improvement Framework for the Directorate
- All staff have regular supervision provided within the framework of a supervision agreement
- There is an annual performance appraisal system in place
- Information about children and prospective adoptive families is contained within the CHARMS database and the Teams Adoption Tracking Database and on Protocol
- The Annual Report covering the activity and performance of the Adoption Team is presented each year to the Adoption Panel
- Prospective adopters are interviewed at the end of the preparation groups to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the training and provide information for the home study assessment
- Prospective adoptive parents are invited to give written feedback after the training sessions to enable the trainers to evaluate the effectiveness of the course
- Prospective and approved adopters are asked for written feedback at all stages of service provision
- Managers from the Placement Service meet with relevant managers in the Neighbourhood and Looked After Service to progress children's plans for adoption
- A fortnightly review meeting is held following every Adoption Panel to track the progress of approved adopters, children waiting adoption, proposed matches and children linked with new adopters. The database is updated regularly and a copy is made available to relevant staff including the Service Manager for monitoring purposes. Prospective adopters who do not have placements are identified through this process and made available where appropriate to other agencies seeking adoptive parents
- The policy and procedures of the Adoption Agency are in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures, "Working together to Safeguard children" and "What to do if you're worried a child is being abused". These procedures include a written child protection policy that includes the management and reporting of child protection issues.
- Service Level Agreements with other Agencies are reviewed at a minimum annually

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### **12. Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.**

#### **Recruitment and Preparation to Adopt**

- 12.1 The main consideration of the Adoption Service is to provide adoptive families for children that will allow them to grow up in a secure and positive environment and reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.
- 12.2 The needs of children requiring adoptive placements are complex and diverse. In order to meet these needs the Adoption Service will work flexibly and be willing to consider options that offer the potential to provide a suitable adoptive home for a child.
- 12.3 The Adoption Service accepts applications to become adopters from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion. Accordingly promotional material for recruitment states clearly that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- 12.4 The agency does not discriminate against people on the grounds of weight, smoking, health or other lifestyle issues but adopts a common sense approach that considers the specific needs of children and applicants likely ability to meet those needs through a child's developing years. All prospective applicants have a medical and on occasion medical opinion may advise an applicant is not fit to proceed.
- 12.5 The agency has a clear system in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive parents, publishes the priority statement with its information pack and reviews it regularly in the light of changing patterns of need. Where those enquiring are unlikely to meet the needs of local children needing adoption they are referred to other agencies.
- 12.6 A copy of the written eligibility criteria, information on becoming an adoptive parent and what is expected of adopters is provided on request.
- 12.7 Information is given about children who need families locally at the initial visit and there are preparation groups and information provided to help prospective adopters decide whether to proceed further.
- 12.8 Those wishing to adopt from another country are also given information about adopting from other countries. They are informed of the processes that they must follow, the countries they may adopt from, and the eligibility criteria of those countries whether this is directly or through referral to other agencies.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- 12.9 The Adoption Service continually seeks to improve its service and actively seeks user experience feedback from enquirers at different stages through the recruitment, preparation and assessment process.
- 12.10 The Adoption Service will provide training, preparation and support to its adopters. Applicants are given information about the preparation and support services available to adopters, and given the opportunity to talk to others who have adopted children.
- 12.11 Enquirers are sent an Adoption Information Pack within 5 days of their enquiry, giving comprehensive information on the adoption process, criteria for preparation, acceptance, prioritisation, and information on the range of children seeking adoption placements. Enquirers are invited to confirm their interest in adoption by returning a form to the Recruitment Team who will then undertake a local authority check. Those who fail to reply are followed up by letter. The new stage 2 adoption preparation and assessment was started on 1<sup>st</sup> July in accordance with the regulations and there is information about this on the agency website.
- 12.12 Home Visits are made to all who confirm their interest to give enquirers additional information and to offer preliminary advice as to the eligibility of applicants to adopt. Enquirers who seem likely to be able to offer an adoption placement are invited to submit an application form and attend training. When this is received Agency checks and references are taken up.
- 12.13 Pre Adoption Training Courses are held 4 times per year, ensuring that potential applicants do not have to wait too long for a place on the course. The course is designed to offer applicants an opportunity to explore adoption and its implications in a non-threatening way and to decide whether or not adoption is for them from an informed perspective.
- 12.14 Adoption Training Courses include the experience of adopters as well as inputs from a range of professionals. Potential applicants are invited to reflect on their own learning and a brief interview is held at the end of the course to summarise the key learning points.

### Assessment and Approval

- 12.15 Assessments are completed using the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their development needs. Assessors seek evidence throughout the assessment process to focus on the issues they are likely to encounter and identify the competencies and strengths they have or will need to develop.
- 12.16 Where the prospective adopters are already foster carers of the child they wish to adopt, they are invited to participate in the same preparation groups as other prospective adopters or are provided with alternative training.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- 12.17 Status, health and enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about prospective adopters. Enhanced CRB checks are undertaken on members of their household aged 18 or over and an explanation is given to prospective adopters as to why the checks are undertaken.
- 12.18 In addition, where applicants have worked with children or are employed in the caring professions references are taken up from those employers. A current employer reference is required for all applicants. Where applicants have been in a previous relationship where children have been born efforts are made to contact the previous partner, except where this is contra-indicated on safety grounds, to establish their view of the applicant.
- 12.19 Birth children of the applicants are also contacted where practical to establish their view of the applicants desire to extend their family through adoption. The assessor interviews at least two personal referees and one family member. Written accounts of the referee's views of the applicant are obtained and presented to Adoption Panel. The agency has a checklist of issues to be addressed by assessors interviewing referees.
- 12.20 Following completion of the Adopter's Report, including a brief account of training and preparation undertaken, reports of referee visits (confidential unless referee wishes the reference to be shared with adopters), and all other relevant reports these are sent to members of the Adoption Panel in the week preceding the Panel. The application also includes a questionnaire to advise Panel if adoptive parents are prepared to agree to notify the adoption agency if their adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards, the applicant/s views on contact and their willingness to pass on information to the birth parents if they wish to have it.
- 12.21 Applicants are invited to attend if they wish to present their views to Panel. There is an explanatory leaflet available to applicants explaining the Panel process and another leaflet introduces Panel members. Panel meets on every second Wednesday. There is a private room available for applicants waiting to speak with Panel.
- 12.22 Panel Members will have had the opportunity to consider the written reports in advance of Panel and identified any salient issues. (The Adoption Decision Maker is also sent a copy of the papers to enable these to be read prior to the minute from Panel being sent.) Prior to considering an application the Assessing Social Worker is invited to join the Panel.

## **Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose**

- 12.23 The Chair of Panel will briefly introduce the application and identify key strengths in the application. The Medical Advisor is invited to comment on the applicant/s' health background and any necessary points affecting the application are clarified. Any relevant legal issues are raised with the Legal Adviser.
- 12.24 Panel members are then invited to comment on the application and the Chair formulates these comments into issues to address either to the assessor or to the applicant/s. The applicant/s and the assessor are then invited to join the Panel. Applicants are welcomed and then any agreed questions are put to them. The applicant/s are invited to ask any questions of Panel and then to leave after Panel discussion.
- 12.25 The applicants are invited back into Panel to hear the recommendation of Panel following Panel discussion and this will be confirmed in writing once the Agency Decision Maker has considered the matter.
- 12.26 Following Panel the minute of the meeting is completed by the Adoption Administrator and is circulated to the Members of the Panel for approval. The minutes are then given to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker reflects on the papers and Panel recommendation and then returns his decision to the named Manager of the Adoption Service for transmission to applicants within 7 working days of Adoption Panel recommendation.
- 12.27 Approved Adopters are allocated a named Support Social Worker to give them on-going support and guidance throughout their adoption journey from placement through to adoption and beyond.
- 12.28 Approved adopters who are waiting for a placement match are reviewed each year by the Adoption Service. If the review suggests a change is required in their approval a report is presented to Panel. Adopters are invited to comment on any report and have a right to be heard by Panel, as with their initial report. Any subsequent change recommended by Panel is subject to the same process of confirmation by the Agency Decision Maker as their original recommendation.

### **13 Matching and Placement of Adopters and Children**

- 13.1 The Recruitment Team prepares an annual plan containing the agency's strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.
- 13.2 The Family Finding Team, whose principle task is overseeing home-finding for children, receives information on all children with adoption plans, advises the Assessment Team of emerging trends and needs, seeks authority for specific child advertising, maintains the links with the National and Local Consortium Adoption Registers and takes a principle role in arranging for possible links between adopters and children waiting.



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- 13.3 Children are matched with adopters who best meet their assessed needs. Wherever possible this will be with a family which
- (a) Reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language; and
  - (b) Allows them to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- 13.4 Where the child cannot be matched with a family which reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language, every effort is made to find an alternative suitable family within a realistic timescale to ensure the child is not left waiting indefinitely in the care system. Where children cannot live with a family as set out in (a) and (b) above, the children's social worker will explain and record this, having regard to their age and understanding.
- 13.5 In matching children with approved adopters, the agency seeks to ensure that it takes into account the views and feelings of the child as far as these can be ascertained based on age and understanding, the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and the birth family, potential adoptive parents and their children.
- 13.6 There is a clear procedure for matching children with potential adopters. Children's Social Workers complete BAAF Children's Permanence Report along with a Checklist of Needs and a profile of the child. This is used to inform the Home-finding process. Suitable matches are identified and passed to the social worker to consider. The Social Worker, Family Finder and/or the Prospective Adopters support Worker will visit the Prospective adopters to explore further.
- 13.7 If the prospective adopters express interest in going forward then an Adoption Placement Report is prepared and considered by Adoption Panel along with the relevant Child's Placement Report, the Adopter's Report and the relevant minutes of any Adoption Panel that has considered the child or applicant. The Panel recommendations are conveyed to the Agency Decision maker for a formal decision.
- 13.8 Adopters are invited to prepare a folder of information for the child about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
- 13.9 A Planning Meeting is held, chaired by a Team Manager, to consider in detail the transition of the child from the foster placement to the new adoptive home. Planning Meetings are attended by the appropriate representatives from the Children's Neighbourhood or Looked After Service, the Adoption Team, the prospective adopters and the foster carers. There is an agreed format for the Adoption Planning Meeting which is completed and signed by all parties (Adoption Placement Plan).

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### Adoptive parents - Support

- 13.10 All successful applicants are allocated an adoption link worker whose task it is to support the adopters through the waiting period, consider any potential matches and discuss appropriate matches with applicants prior to formal matching meetings.
- 13.11 Opportunities are taken to use the waiting period to assist adopters continue to prepare for the placement of a child. Where necessary the adopters will be helped to increase their childcare experience. Additional training is offered as necessary. There is an Adopters' Support Group that applicants are invited to attend. All waiting and approved adopters receive a regular newsletter from the Adoption Team.
- 13.12 Following a Placement, support in the form of paid travel expenses, a means tested settling in allowance and additional financial help is agreed subject to eligibility criteria to assist adopters in the introductions period.
- 13.13 The Agency operates a means tested Financial Support Adoption Scheme to assist adopters of limited means and those where the children are likely to cause greater than normal expense. Where the adopters are foster carers there is a transitional period during which adopters may receive an enhanced financial support adoption allowance.
- 13.14 The Adoption Support Worker will continue to support the adopters before and during the placement of a child to ensure they are well prepared in advance of the child coming to live with them. Adopters are fully involved in planning meetings around the introductions of the child and care is taken over the timing of the introductions and a number of review meetings built in to ensure that the placement is progressing in a satisfactory way and to give all parties, including the adopters an opportunity to withdraw if they are not confident about the success of the placement. Adopters confirm in writing their acceptance of the placement before the child is placed.
- 13.15 The Adoption Agency has arrangements in place to offer information, support and advice to prospective adopters who receive a proposed match with a child from an overseas authority.
- 13.16 Throughout the preparation, assessment, and support stages of adoption the agency emphasises to parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and encourages them to provide this to the adopted child at appropriate stages of their development.
- 13.17 The initial screening, preparation/training, assessment/home study and support strategies of the agency are designed to assist adopters to understand and combat the effects of racism and any other form of discrimination.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- 13.18 At all stages in the adoption process the agency seeks to ensure that the adoptive parents are assisted to understand the need for the child to develop and maintain a positive self-identity and their role in assisting the child to reflect on and understand her/his history, in an age appropriate way, and to keep appropriate memorabilia.
- 13.19 Where there are difficulties in the placement or the adoption disrupts the adopters' link worker and the child's social worker will provide information and support to the adopters and to the child. Where there is an adoption breakdown a disruption meeting is held involving all parties to assist in understanding the issues and identify any learning in moving forward.
- 13.20 The purpose of this meeting is not to apportion blame but to understand the relevant factors and assist all parties to come to terms with the facts and to move on, and most importantly to inform the process of finding a new more appropriate placement for the child.
- 13.21 Where the disruption occurs during introduction then the meeting is chaired by a Team Manager from the Adoption Service. Where the adoption disrupts post placement an independent consultant is employed to chair the meeting. A short report from the Disruption Meeting is presented to the Adoption Panel to assist the Panel in its own learning.
- 13.22 In line with the Adoption Support Regulations and Guidance the Adoption Service revises and updates its procedures and practices to take account of new regulations. In particular adopters and others affected by regulations who are entitled to a review of their support needs, including a review of their financial support, may access the Adoption Support section of the Adoption Team to initiate a review. The Agency Advisor undertakes the role of designated Adoption Support Services Advisor.
- 13.23 The range of Adoption Support Services to be offered includes access to the full range of statutory and non statutory services offered by the local authority and partner agencies to children and families in Coventry, within the same framework of eligibility as other children and families. In addition the agency will provide, following assessment, and in line with the criteria in the Regulations and Guidance the following services:
- Financial support (ASR 3.1.a)
  - Support groups / Activity Days for adoptive parents and adoptive children (ASR 3.1.6)
  - Support for contact arrangements between adoptive children and their birth relatives or with other people with whom they share significant relationships (ASR 3.1.c)
  - Therapeutic services (ASR 3.1.d)
  - Services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement or adoption, including respite care (ASR 3.1.e)
  - Counselling, advice and information (S2(6) (a) of the 2002 Act)

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or threatened disruption is in danger of occurring. Organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)

### **14 Birth Parents and Birth Families**

- 14.1 The Agency recognises that birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. The Agency seeks to ensure they are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- 14.2 Children's Social Workers are committed to a partnership approach towards planning with birth parents over children's futures and wherever possible birth parents are fully involved in planning for the child's future placement. Parents are consulted over the plan for adoption, the type of family to be considered, issues around contact, religious preferences, and any other matters of importance to the birth parent.
- 14.3 The views of the birth parents on adoption and contact are obtained by the Permanency Social Worker for the child and included in the BAAF Child's Permanence Report presented to Panel.
- 14.4 The child's Permanency Social Worker is required to seek to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth parents and birth families about themselves and life before the child's adoption to assist the child to maintain his heritage. This will include information about the child's birth and early life, the birth family's view about adoption and contact and provide up-to-date information about themselves and their situation. This information is contained within the BAAF Child's Permanence Report and in a "later life" letter prepared by the worker for the adopters. A copy is also included in the child's adoption file.
- 14.5 Children's Permanency Social Workers are expected to share information about the content of the Child's Permanence Report with the birth parents and to record their view on the contents of the report.
- 14.6 When adoption is considered as the plan for a child, or where the agency considers that "twin tracking" is required because of doubt over a parent's ability to achieve the changes required to parent a child safely, Regulations require that an opportunity for independent counselling and support is to be offered to birth parents. The agency has made arrangements for the appointment of a worker independent of the child's social worker to support birth parents where adoption has been identified as the plan. This service is provided under contract from another agency who seeks to offer a proactive service to all birth parents, including an element to ensure that the birth parent's views are sought on what has been written about them and their circumstances in the Child's Permanence Report for Adoption Panel. This information is then made available to Adoption Panel when considering a plan for adoption or a match with prospective adopters.

## **Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose**

- 14.7 Additional information on local and national support groups is made available in a leaflet provided through the Adoption Team.
- 14.8 Post adoption contact arrangements, including letterbox contact between birth families, adopted children and their new families, are facilitated by the Adoption Support Team.

### **15 Adoption Panel**

- 15.1 The function of Coventry's Adoption Panel is to make quality and appropriate recommendations about the suitability of prospective adopters, and their continuing suitability, and the matching of children and of approved adopters. The Panel seeks to promote the welfare of children at all times. Where disruptions occur, the Panel receive a report and discuss this to see what lessons may need to be learned.
- 15.2 The Policies, procedures and functions of the Panel are contained within the Department's Procedures Manual. Copies of these are given to every Panel member.
- 15.3 Membership of the Adoption Panel is in line with the National Minimum Standard, Regulations and Guidance.
- 15.4 There is an annual training day organised for Panel members and including members of the Adoption Team. Panel members are able to attend individual courses when felt to be beneficial to their role on Panel. New Panel members receive a full induction and all Panel members are appraised annually.

### **16 Agency decisions**

- 16.1 The Adoption Agency's decision will be made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the Adoption Panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.
- 16.2 The Decision Maker will take into account all the information surrounding the case and the Panel's recommendation before making a considered and professional decision. The agency decision will be made within 7 days of the Adoption Panel and given to the Agency Advisor who arranges for formal notification to be given to the relevant parties.
- 16.3 Immediately following the Adoption Panel the recommendations of the Panel are passed on orally to the parents or guardian of the child and prospective/approved adopters, as appropriate by the relevant social worker or adoption link worker. The formal decisions of the Panel are conveyed orally to the child by the child's social worker in an age appropriate way and in writing by the Decision Maker to the parents and to the adopters if birth parents do not wish to be informed a case note explanation is placed on file.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### 17 Work with Children

- 17.1 There is a Children's Guide to Adoption that is suitable for all children for whom adoption is the plan. This is given to the child as soon as that decision has been taken. It includes a summary of what happens at each stage (including at court), and how long each stage is likely to take.
- 17.2 The Children's Guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate, how to make a complaint and how to contact the Children's Rights Director or Ofsted, along with a shortened version of the Statement of Purpose. Where necessary, arrangements can be made for the Children's Guide to be reproduced in a variety of formats suitable for the needs of specific children.
- 17.3 Children's Social Workers prepare children for adoption by direct counselling, life story work and work around their wishes and feelings.
- 17.4 Clear and appropriate information is obtained for the child from the prospective adopters about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
- 17.5 At all stages in the adoption process the wishes and feelings of the child are considered by the child's social worker, properly represented at planning meetings, and taken fully into account during all stages of the adoption process.

### 18 Information about the Complaints Procedure, and Independent Review Mechanism

- 18.1 Prospective adopters are advised of the Department's complaints procedure and given information on how to make a complaint. They are also given information about the Council's representations procedure and the Independent Review Mechanism.
- 18.2 There is a leaflet available explaining the Independent Review Mechanism and this is made available to all applicants whose application is recommended for refusal.
- 18.3 The Department operates a system known as the 3 "C's", -"Comments Compliments, Complaints"
- 18.4 There is a Children's Complaints Officer who oversees the operation of the Complaints system and arranges for them to be investigated. The name and address of the Children's Complaints Officer is;

David Wilson  
Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate,  
Room 250  
Civic Centre 1,  
Little Park Street,  
Coventry  
CV1 5RS

## **Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose**

Telephone: 024 7683 3462;  
Fax: 024 7683 2451

### **What happens following a Complaint**

- 18.5 The complaint is registered and action taken to investigate any concerns. The Children's Complaints Officer will monitor the outcome. In most instances, complaints will be followed up by the manager with direct responsibility for the service. This is because local managers are usually best placed to sort things out quickly, and in most cases a speedy resolution is the most appropriate response.
- 18.6 If the complaint is very complicated, involves a number of service areas or has not been resolved at a local level, a more senior Manager or an independent investigator may investigate it.
- 18.7 If the complaint is about a registered service, an Inspector from Ofsted may investigate it.

### **Timescales and Outcomes**

- 18.8 Complainants should be contacted by letter or phone, within 3 working days of the complaint being received to let the complainant know what is happening, who is dealing with the complaint and how to contact them. Complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible, ideally within 10 working days.
- 18.9 Occasionally it is not possible to resolve complaints within the period. This may be due to the complexity of the complaint and the number of people who need to be interviewed. If this is the case, then the person dealing with the complaint will keep the complainant informed.
- 18.10 When work on the complaint is complete, the complainant will be informed of the outcome. If the complaint has required a formal investigation, the outcome will be reported fully and in writing. This will include the action taken to investigate the complaint, how any conclusions have been drawn and details of any action that has been or will be taken to rectify problems or make improvements.
- 18.11 However, if the investigation has involved the use of Human Resources procedures, there will be details that cannot be shared as they must remain confidential. Similarly, if the complaint has been on behalf of someone else, their personal information is protected by the Data Protection Act and so the level of detailed information provided will be limited. Anyone not satisfied with the way Coventry Adoption Service has investigated a complaint can contact the Children's Complaints Officer to ask for further investigation.

## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

### Further Complaints

18.12 If a complaint was subject to a formal investigation and the complainant is not satisfied with the process, there is an option of writing to the Director of Children, Learning and Young People to request an independent review of the process.

18.13 The complaint will be reviewed by a Panel chaired by an independent person. Details of how to do this will be included in the complaint outcome letter.

### 19 Independent Review Mechanism

19.1 Adopters are given a leaflet in respect of the Independent Review Mechanism in their initial information pack. They are made aware of their capacity to make presentations to the agency, or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of the adoption agency's qualifying determination (which is that it considers a prospective adopter not suitable to adopt a child). Adopters are also given information about the Complaints Procedure.

### 20 The address and telephone number of OFSTED

20.1 Ofsted regulates social care services in England, such as children's homes, residential family centres and fostering and adoption services. All Adoption Agencies must meet national minimum standards and the associated regulations, set by the Government, in order to qualify for registration.

20.2 From time to time parents, and others with an interest in children's social care, have concerns about the quality of these care services. When considering complaints, Ofsted do not act as a complaint adjudicator. They do not decide if complaints are upheld, partially upheld or are unsubstantiated. Instead they will investigate concerns to make sure that the social care provider continues to meet the national minimum standards and associated regulations and remains suitable for registration.

20.3 You can make a complaint by letter (see address below) or email ([enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)) or by telephone (0300 123 1231) or in person.  
Ofsted National Business Unit  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

### 21 The address of The Office of Children's Rights Director (OCD)

21.1 The OCD has responsibility for 'Looked after children' and listening to what children and young people who live away from home have to say about how they are looked after.



## Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

21.2 They can advise children in care and children adopted on how to voice a complaint about a Local authority. Visit: [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org)

Roger Morgan,  
Office of the Children's Rights Director  
Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
Manchester  
WC2B 6SE  
08456 404040 Freephone: 0800 528 0731

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15 October 2013

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) - Councillor Duggins

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Executive Director, People

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

**Title:**

Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2012/13 – Children's Social Care Services

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

The report provides details of the comments, compliments and complaints received during 2012/13, the themes that arise from them and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet Member is asked to endorse and approve the publishing of this report on the Council's website

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 - Children's Social Care Services Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2012/13.

**Other useful background papers:**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

**Report title:**

Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2012/13 – Children's Social Care Services

**1. Context (or background)**

1.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty, arising from the Children Act 1989, to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission and to produce an Annual Report about the operation of the complaints procedure. The procedure used for receiving representations under the statutory procedure is linked to the corporate complaints process. The report covers representations dealt with under both procedures.

**2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

2.1 The Cabinet Member is asked to endorse and approve the publishing of this report.

**3. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 No consultation was undertaken specifically about this report.

**4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 If approved, the report will be published on the City Council's internet site on 25 October 2013.

**5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services**

5.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are three different complaints procedures relating to local authority decisions:

- Complaint to the local authority under Children Act 1989, s26 (3) (support for families and children)
- Complaint in relation to children's homes or voluntary organisations within their procedure, or
- Complaint to the local authority under LASSA 1970 (matters not falling under Children Act s26).

In practice the procedures are likely to be administratively similar and merge.

The procedure for the local authority to deal with representations and complaints is contained within the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

The local authority must monitor arrangements made in accordance with the regulations by keeping a record of each representation received, and compiling a report every 12 months on the operation of its procedure.

**6. Other implications**

None

**6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?**

Ensuring that children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution

Children, young people and others acting on their behalf, are encouraged to report any concerns about the care and services they are receiving so that these can be addressed quickly.

The feedback that is received from complaints and other representations is reported to managers on a regular basis to inform service planning and improvements.

**6.2 How is risk being managed?**

No risk has been identified.

**6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None.

**6.4 Equalities / EIA**

Local Authorities are required to monitor equalities information with regard to representations received. This is intended to provide an accurate picture of the use of the procedure by minority groups and to ensure that it is accessible to them and does not inadvertently discriminate against them.

The complaints service for Children's Social Care Services was the subject of an Equalities Impact Assessment during 2010/11. This concluded that the service was having a positive equalities impact.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

None.

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None.

**Report author(s):**

**Name and job title:**

David Wilson – Principal Analyst

**Directorate:**

People

**Tel and email contact:**

024 7683 3462

CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

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Isabel Merrifield	Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning & Policy	People	26.09.2013	27.09.2013
Susan Johnson	Business and Performance Manager	People	26.09.2013	27.09.2013
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Resources	24.09.2013	24.09.2013
Other members				
<b>Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)</b>				
Finance: Paul Whitmore	Lead Accountant	Resources	26.09.2013	01.10.2013
Legal: Julie Newman	Children and Adults Legal Services Manager	Resources	02.10.2013	02.10.2013
Human Resources: Neelesh Sutaria	H.R. Manager	Resources	26.09.2013	01.10.2013
Director: Brian Walsh	Director	People	26.09.2013	02.10.2013
Mark Godfrey	Deputy Director, Early Intervention and Social Care	People	26.09.2013	02.10.2013
Members: Councillor Duggins	Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)			

This report is published on the council's website:  
[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendices

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**Annual Report  
2012/13**

People Directorate

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# **Children's Social Care Services Comments, Compliments & Complaints**

**COMMENTS  
& COMPLIMENTS  
& COMPLAINTS**

## **CONTENTS**

**SECTION 1      INTRODUCTION**

**SECTION 2      SUMMARY**

**SECTION 3      RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK**

**SECTION 4      IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS**

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989) to have a system for receiving representations made by or on behalf of children who use the social care services they provide or commission. These include: social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law. Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

On 1 September 2006, changes were made to the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. These changes aimed to improve the speed of response to representations, to enhance the level of independence in judgements made at Stages 2 and 3 of the procedure and to improve access to and learning from the representations process. The changes also required Local Authorities to appoint a Complaints Manager to oversee all aspects of the procedure. Other significant changes included extending the scope of the procedure to include services provided under other parts of the Children Act, certain Adoption Services and Special Guardianship Support Services. A time limit of one year for making representations was also introduced as were new timescales for responding to complaints at Stages 1 and 2.

Some complaints received do not meet the criteria to be dealt with under the statutory procedure. When this is the case, these are registered under the City Council's corporate complaints procedure. The arrangements for handling these complaints are different from the statutory process in terms of timescales and the independence of the people who investigate and review the complaints.

In Coventry, Children's Social Care has a nominated officer assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on Children's Social Care Services.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard.
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice.
- Things that have gone wrong are put right.
- The organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback.
- The organisation sustains its customer focus.

As part of the Directorate's commitment to openness, quality assurance, service development and listening and learning from service users, this report provides summary information from comments, compliments and complaints received under the statutory and corporate procedures in relation to Children's Social Care Services, during the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013.

Particular reference is made to:

- ***The range of representations received and responses to them.***
- ***Specific trends and issues that emerged in the reporting period.***

## SECTION 2: SUMMARY

During the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, Children's Social Care Services dealt with 4657 referrals and at 31 March 2013 were providing services to 3085 children and young people.

The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2012/13 was 133. This represents a 15% increase in comparison to the previous year (116). By comparison there has been a 16% increase in the number of children receiving services. 126 compliments were also received, a 3% increase.

Almost half of the complaints (47.8%) were in relation to children and young people who were being looked after by the Local Authority.

The complaints received tended to refer to matters affecting the individual, rather than a number of complaints being received about the same issue or a specific service.

Nevertheless, three main themes could be identified as arising from the complaints by and on behalf of users in 2012/13.

- *Criticism of professional conduct and how users were treated by some staff.*
- *Concerns about standards of service provided.*
- *Issues regarding poor communication with users.*

Conversely, staff helpfulness and standards of service were the two main reasons for compliments in the year.

51% of complaints were either upheld or partially upheld by the officer that investigated the complaint. 44% were not upheld and 4% were withdrawn

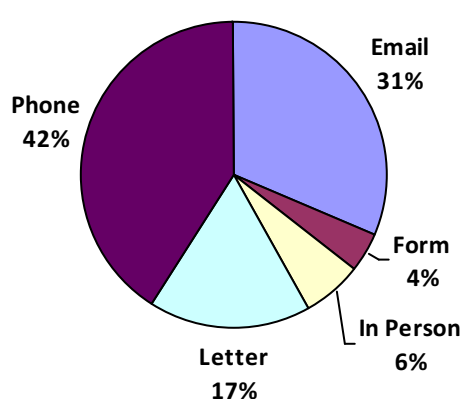
## SECTION 3: RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

Comments, compliments and complaints can tell us a great deal about the service users' experiences of service delivery, professional practice and the outcome of management decisions. Children's Social Care Services welcome this feedback and encourages children, their advocates and anyone who uses the service or who is affected by it, to make their views known.

### 3.1 Promoting Feedback

Accessibility to the system is of vital importance if the Directorate is to maximise the opportunities for individuals to make their views known. Contact can be made by letter, telephone, fax, e-mail, in person, in the corporate "Getting in Touch" leaflet, by the Council's free phone number or the web-site link.

Contact methods for complaints were as follows



42% of complainants chose to complain via telephone, with a further 6% requesting a face to face meeting. 4% chose to use the council's "Getting In Touch" leaflet.

Of particular importance is the need to inform children of their opportunity to make representations and to find methods that they can easily use. Accessibility for children is undergoing continuous development. Advocates from Barnardo's have also continued to make regular visits to the children's residential units in Coventry. For the last eight years a "texting" facility has also been available so that children and young people can make their views known.

As a result 31 representations were received from children themselves this year (21 complaints and 10 compliments). This is consistent with the number received last year (31), although the breakdown is significantly different (30 complaints and 1 compliment in 2011/12). Children tended to present their feedback by letter or in person.

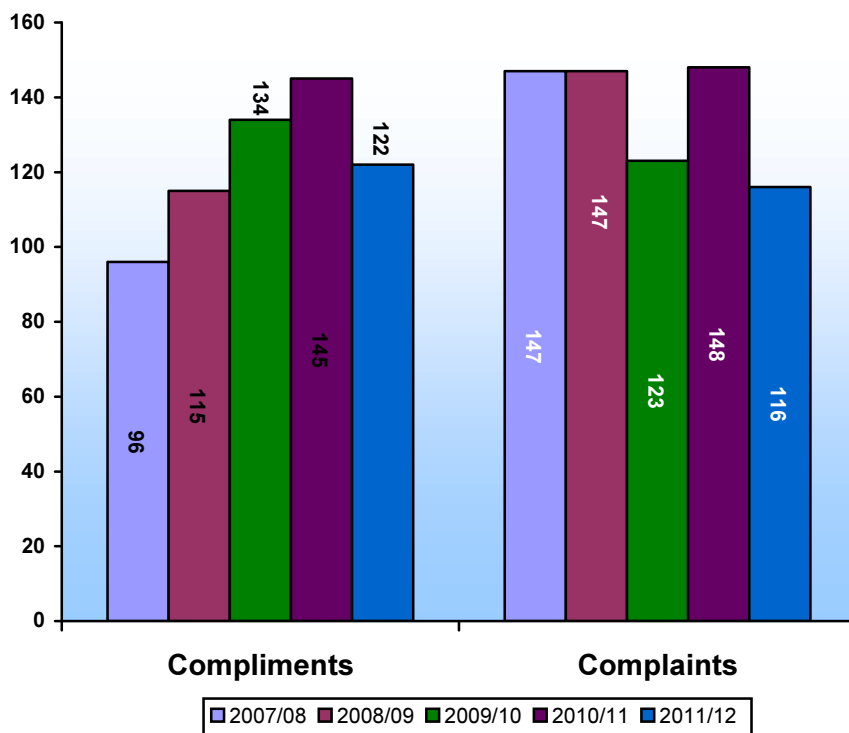
### 3.2 Advocacy

Since 1 April 2004, the Advocacy Services and Representations Regulations 2004, have required Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy to children and young people making representations under the Children Act 1989. Of the 21 children and young people making complaints during the year, four decided to have an advocate to support them in making their complaint.

Prior to the implementation of the Regulations, the Directorate already had a well-established arrangement for the provision of advocacy services to children and young people through the NCH Children's Rights Project. Since April 2006, this service has been commissioned from Barnardo's.

### 3.3 Representations Received 2012/13

Comments	Compliments	Complaints
0	126	133



The total number of complaints received about Children's Social Care Services in 2012/13 was 133. This represents a 15% increase in comparison to the previous year (116). By comparison there has been a 16% increase in the number of children receiving services. 126 compliments were also received, a 3% increase.

### 3.4 Comments

Relatively few comments are received in comparison to the number of complaints and compliments in any year. They usually take the form of suggestions or criticisms and as such they can encourage action to improve quality of services. No comments were received this year.

### 3.5 Compliments

Compliments provide a perspective on satisfaction and they tell us what people appreciate about services and the way they are provided. Positive feedback also encourages and motivates staff and enables them to celebrate their good performance. Every compliment received is shared with the individual or team to whom it refers and copied to the relevant managers.

### 3.6 Complaints

Listening to service users' complaints helps managers to focus on service improvement and customer care, increasing the Directorate's capacity for identifying changes that are required. The statutory procedures offer a three-stage process, and the corporate procedures offer a two stage process, both of which aim to provide a satisfactory resolution to any complaint brought to the Directorate, preferably as quickly as possible. The lessons learned from complaints form the basis for improving services.

### 3.6.1 Stage 1 - Local Resolution

The Directorate's aim within both the statutory and corporate procedures is to resolve problems, whenever possible, informally at Stage 1. At this stage, the complaint will usually be dealt with by the local manager who is responsible for the service provided. This is because local managers are in the best position to sort problems out quickly.

When things have gone wrong, an apology, an explanation and an indication of the action to be taken to put things right, has been provided in most cases. The majority, (98%) of complaints were resolved at this stage including all of the complaints brought by children and young people themselves.

Where complaints are unsubstantiated, managers will usually respond with an explanation of the Directorate's policy or procedures and this alone can provide a satisfactory resolution in many cases. When complainants remain unhappy, they can take their complaint to the next stage of the Complaint Procedure.

### 3.6.2 Stage 2 - Formal Investigation/Senior Management Review

In certain circumstances a formal investigation of the circumstances leading to a complaint is a more appropriate response, although this tends to be a lengthier process. This may be required when complainants remain dissatisfied with the conclusion reached at Stage 1 or when the complaint is particularly complex or involves a number of service areas. These investigations are always conducted by someone outside the direct line management of the service and the person about whom the complaint is being made. During the year there were six investigations carried out at Stage 2. All the investigations were undertaken by external investigators. Two were successfully resolved and four complainants requested progression to Stage 3. At the conclusion of all Stage 2 investigations and after the response has been made to the complainant, the Investigating Officers' reports are read by senior managers for them to consider and act upon.

### 3.6.3 Stage 3 - Review Panel/Corporate Review

Within the **statutory** complaints procedure, where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal investigation at Stage 2, they can request that a review panel of three independent people be convened to examine the investigation. Review panels can make recommendations to the Director if they conclude that the complaint is justified, or that more could be done to resolve the matter, or if they feel the Directorate should take action to prevent similar situations arising in the future. Four complaints were considered by a Review Panel this year. All four panels upheld the findings of the stage two investigations.

There is no stage three under the **corporate** procedure.

## 3.7 Outcomes

All of the complaints received this year had been responded to by the time this report was prepared. 17% of complaints were fully substantiated, 35% of complaints were partially substantiated and 44% of complaints were not upheld. 4% of complaints were withdrawn by the complainants after being received.

As a comparison, in 2011/12, 15% of complaints were fully substantiated, 37% were partially substantiated and 41% were not upheld.

### 3.8 Time-scales

The legislation and corporate procedures set out timescales for dealing with complaints at each stage of the process. From 1 September 2006 these became:

	Legislation	Corporate
Stage 1	10 working days (can be extended to 20 working days)	10 working days
Stage 2	25 working days (can be extended to 65 working days)	20 working days
Stage 3	Within 30 working days of complainant's request	Not Applicable

However, the complexity of social care issues means that complaint resolution can sometimes be protracted and achievement of the time-scales can suffer as a result.

The Children's Complaints Officer, therefore, undertakes rigorous monitoring of progress in relation to responding to complaints.

In 2012/13, just 49% of Stage 1 complaints were responded to on time, compared to 77% in the previous year.

Investigations of Stage 2 complaints under the statutory procedure often need to be extended beyond the 25 working days timescale due to the complexity of the issues being considered. In these situations the importance of keeping the complainant informed and securing their agreement to an extension of the time-scale, is recognised and addressed. As a result, all complaints dealt with at Stage 2 were all completed within a timescale agreed with the complainant and within 65 working days

The Independent Review Panels that considered the Stage 3 complaints were convened in accordance with the timescales and the Directorate's response to their recommendations were also completed within time.

### 3.9 Satisfaction with Complaints Handling

Satisfaction with how complaints are managed is measured by sending evaluation questionnaires to complainants about their experience of the process. This year, 22 questionnaires were sent to complainants but only 5 were returned. This low number of returns gives an unreliable perception of the quality of the service. Nevertheless, the way in which complaints are dealt with will be reviewed and further consideration given to how to measure satisfaction levels to better evaluate performance in complaints handling.

### 3.10 The Local Government Ombudsman

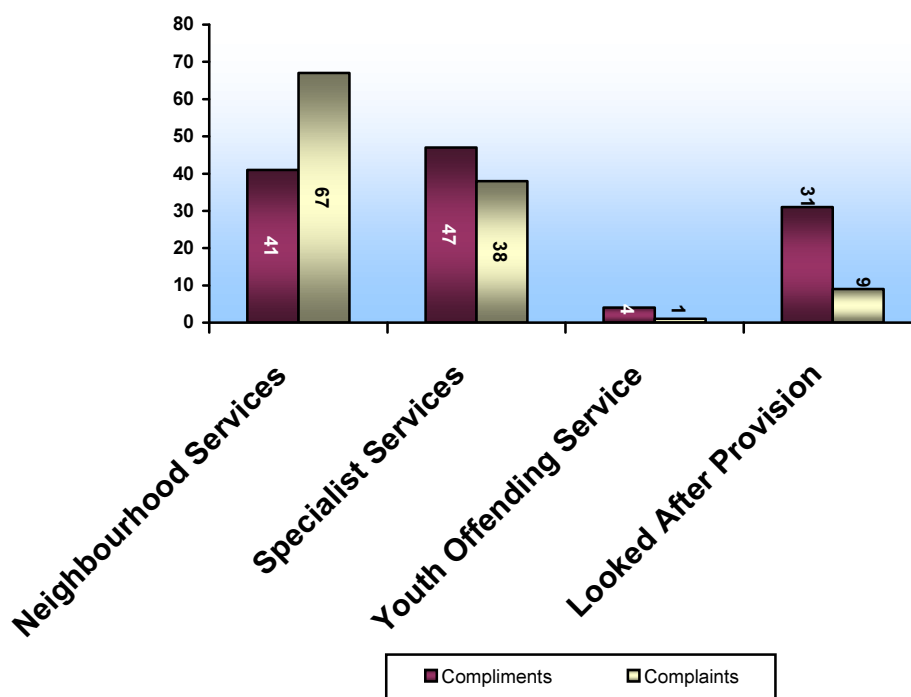
If the complainant remains unhappy following the outcome of the City Council's process, they have the option of taking their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

During 2012/13, the Local Government Ombudsman began to investigate one complaint regarding Children's Social Care Services in Coventry. However the investigation was discontinued after the complaint was remedied by the Social Care Team.



## SECTION 4: IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS

### 4.1 Compliments and Complaints by Service Type



The majority of complaints received about Children’s Social Care are about the Neighbourhood Social Care Teams. More compliments were received than complaints for Specialist Services (e.g Looked after and disability teams), Youth Offending, and Looked After Provision (e.g Foster carers and children’s residential placements.).

### 4.2 Compliments By Category

(Please note that compliments can cover more than one category)

	Total
Staff Helpfulness	57
Standards Of Service	48
Good Communication	21
Good Child Focus	14
Specific Provision	11
Good Partnership Working	7

The large majority of compliments were regarding Staff Conduct and Standards of Service.

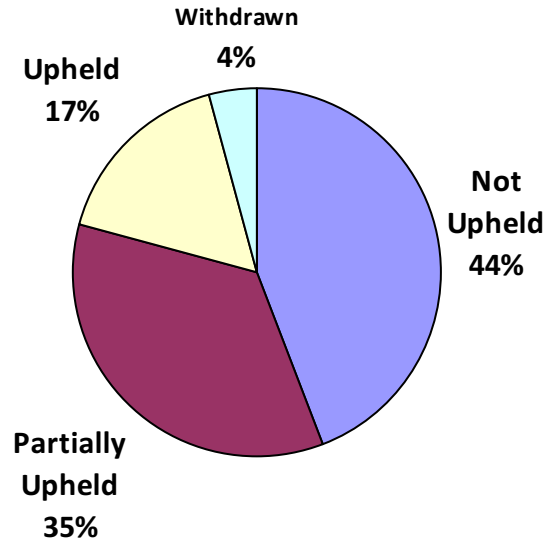
### 4.3 Complaints By Category

(Please note that complaints can cover more than one category)

	Total
Staff Conduct	59
Standards Of Service	35
Poor Communication	26
Management Decisions	7
Confidentiality	4
Financial Issues	4
Environment/Property	2
Child Protection Issues	1

The large majority of complaints were regarding Staff Conduct, Standard of Service, or Poor Communication.

### 4.4 Complaint Outcomes



51% of complaints were either upheld or partially upheld by the officer that investigated the complaint. 44% were not upheld and 4% were withdrawn

## 4.5 Resolutions

(Please note that complaints can have more than one resolution)

	Total
Explanation	95
Apology	42
Improved Communication	30
Information Provided	23
Change of Worker	8
Financial Support	5
Additional Monitoring Of Performance	4
Re-Assessment	4
Provision of Expert Service	3
Change Of Decision	2
Other	14

Even if a complaint is not upheld, there may still be resolution possible. For example further information can be provided or an explanation given.

Other resolutions include amendments to records or changes in external provision.

## 4.6 Service Improvements

Upon completion of the complaint investigation, officers are asked to identify specific service improvements as a result of the complaint. Examples of some of these improvements are:-

- Better transitions to adult services
- Improvements in Case Recording
- Improved communication to staff regarding correct use systems.
- Ensure quicker decision making
- Revise systems in respect of booking short break activities
- Advise staff of need to ensure they are not vulnerable to allegations from residents.
- Reissuing of guidance and training regarding working at home
- Amendments to Protocol Social Care Recording System
- Greater attempts to contact family members for cases in court.
- Ensure that purpose of visits are explained to families beforehand and in writing
- Ensure that families are aware of what checks will be undertaken on them
- Ensure that court reports assessments are shared with relevant people prior to filing
- Ensure that parents are involved in decision making for children who are looked after especially in relation to health and education.
- Memo to all staff reinforcing expectation of communicating effectively with parents
- Advice given to Foster Carers about dealing with stressful situations
- Fathers of children to be involved in any assessment even when they are not living in the family home.

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Coventry City Council

## Briefing note

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**To: Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)**

**Date: 15 October 2013**

**Subject: Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board Recommendation on the CLYP Social Care & Early Intervention FSR**

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### **1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) of the outcome of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board discussion on CLYP Social Care & Early Intervention FSR at their meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

### **2 Recommendation**

1) That Cabinet Member (Children and Young People) works with Officers and the Chair of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board to review the model on which financial targets are based in order to seek assurance that the model is accurate and targets achievable. This review should take into account relevant contextual information from the original review raised by the project team and external partners, as well as information from the recent Peer Reviews. If the Cabinet Member is not satisfied, then he should consider referring the issue to the Audit Committee.

### **3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board identified the CLYP FSR as an area for scrutiny from the Transformation Programme Progress Board report which they took at their meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013.
- 3.2 The Board raised concerns that the financial targets had not been met and wanted to explore the reasons behind this and whether lessons could be learnt for future reviews.
- 3.3 As well as the recommendation to Cabinet Member, the Board are also recommending the following;
  - 1) That an accurate report is created detailing how many children have been prevented from entering care due to early intervention work and this report is circulated to members of the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board and the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board.
  - 2) That a report is brought to SB1 with an update on progress and action being taken to deliver the financial targets and savings in January 2014.

These recommendations will be managed by the Scrutiny Board as part of their work programme.

**Victoria Castree, Scrutiny Co-ordinator, 024 7683 1122**

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