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16th October 2012

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member (Children, Learning and Young People) - Councillor J. O'Boyle

**Director Approving Submission of the report**

Director of Children, Learning and Young People - Colin Green

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:**

Adoption Service Annual Report and Statement of Purpose

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

This report considers the work completed by Coventry Children, Learning & Young People's Directorate in respect of adoption during the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

Coventry's Adoption Service aims 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.

The council is committed to achieving the greatest number of adoptions with the best outcomes for the children concerned. In 2011-12, **25** children were adopted with **32** Adopters approved over this period.

The Adoption Service regulations require the Statement of Purpose to be reviewed, updated and modified where necessary at least annually. In the case of Local Authority Adoption Services it requires that the Statement of Purpose is formally approved by the elected members.

**Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That the Report 2011/2012 is accepted.
- 2.2 That the Statement of Purpose is approved.

**List of Appendices included:**

Appendix 1 – Coventry Adoption Service Annual Report

Appendix 2 – Adoption Statement of Purpose

Appendix 3 – Adoption Scorecard

**Other useful background papers:**

**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:**

**1. Context (or background)**

**The Adoption Service** involves the work of different teams. The Looked After Service Team recommend adoption plans and prepare and support children and families through the process of adoption.

**Coventry Adoption Service** is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of adopters and in home-finding for children with an adoption plan.

**Social workers** from the Looked After Service, Recruitment and Adoption Team are involved in linking children to specific adoptive families.

**Adoption Panel** is responsible for recommending and reviewing adoption plans for children, approving and terminating the approval of adopters and linking children to adopters. It also considers learning points from any disruptions in adoption placements.

## 2. Options considered and recommended proposal

That the Council is committed to achieving the greatest number of adoption placements compatible with achieving the best outcomes for the children concerned.

## 3. Results of consultation undertaken

### **Panel Feedback**

- 3.1 Feedback was received from **21 adopter couples** in relation to their experience of attending panel and being advised of the decision. The majority commented positively on their experience of attending panel and receiving the decision.

Comments included:

*“Questions were appropriate and non-threatening”*

*“Our experience was welcoming and supportive”*

*“It was a friendly and open experience and the questions were relevant and useful”*

*“The whole process has been extremely well managed. Thank you for a very professional experience”*

*“Very smooth and less scary when we were there”*

*“We were made to feel at ease and the process was explained”*

*“We felt all members of the panel put us at ease by laughing and thus relaxing any tension there might have been”*

- 3.2 Feedback was also received in relation to their experience of the timeliness of the appointment at panel. These were:

*“The waiting time from when we went into panel at 11.45 a.m. when we had a 10.30 appointment”*

*“We appreciate it is difficult to stick to exact appointment times, but waiting is the most difficult part of the experience so if you could improve this it would be beneficial for prospective adopters”*

Two comments were received about the time waiting for the final decision:

*“Decision maker took 3/4 weeks”*

*“I appreciate that our panel was near to Christmas but it is very frustrating to have to wait three weeks to receive confirmation and match from Head of Social Services”*

However other positive comments were received.

*“We were given the decision immediately on the same day”*

*“Informed of decision shortly after panel”*

This feedback will be considered by panel members and the Decision Maker to ensure there is a policy of continuous improvement.

## 4. Timetable for implementing this decision

The yearly review of the Statement of Purpose by the elected members of a Local Authority is a regulatory requirement under the Adoption Service Regulations.

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

### 5.1 Financial Support (previously Adoption Allowance)

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Adoption Support Actual Spends	£683,109	£690,858	£821,418	£806,400	£757,119	£722,313
Number of children	124	123	124	123	113	118

- The Adoption Allowance Budget for April 2011 – March 2012 was **£707,688** and expenditure was **£722,313** - an overspend of **£14,625**.
- This compares with an expenditure of **£757,119** in the previous year.
- **118** adopted children received ongoing financial support from Coventry in 2011/12 (compared with **113** 2010/11).

5.1.1 This budget is overspent because of historical financial packages to foster carers adopting. The Adoption Support Regulations 2003 and 2005 allow for flexibility, and following adjustments to new financial packages to adopters, on average, the cost per client reduced overall in 2011/12.

5.1.2 Proposals from the Fundamental Service Review (FSR) included further cost reductions in this area. In summary, for 2012/13, it is expected that the overall percentage of adopters receiving allowances will reduce from 44% of the cohort to 30%, and that better value post adoption support packages will be procured. The total part year saving for 2012/13 is £6,823. This budget is forecast to overspend by £38k at period 3 (July 2012). Further work is needed to review the current cohort and consider how this saving will be delivered.

5.1.3 Coventry is a member of the West Midlands Adoption consortium through which local authorities exchange resources when there is no suitable match for a child. The inter-agency budget for April 2011 – March 2012 was **£213,077**. The expenditure was **£257,330** but **£104,373** was received from other agencies who purchased our adopters, hence an underspend for 2011/12 of £60,120.

5.1.4 FSR proposals included an additional budget of **£111,202** for 2012/13, enabling the purchase of 7 new adoption placements from other Local authorities. Clearly, the plan was that this would reduce the number of looked after children more swiftly, enabling cost reductions in the placements budget. Spend at period 5 for this budget was only **£34,097**, indicating a significant shortfall on expectations. Further work is needed to ensure the purchase of adoption places is maximised by year end.

5.1.5 **5** other agency children were placed with **5** Coventry adopters. **11** Coventry children were placed with inter-agency adopters (4 single children, 2 sets of 2 and 1 set of 3 children). Of the **25** children adopted **4** were with inter-agency adopters. It is necessary to retain the existing level of inter-agency budget given the large increase in children with a plan for adoption.

## Financial Assistance for Adopters

- 5.1.6 Financial assistance for adopters is available through the Pathways to Care funding – for building alterations/extensions, 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.
- 5.1.7 In this reporting period there was a spend of **£5,000** towards the cost of a vehicle for foster carers adopting **2** children with extensive health needs.

## 5.2 Legal implications

- 5.2.1 The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and the 2011 Adoption Minimum Standards place a requirement on local authority adoption services to ensure that the executive side of the Council receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the adoption agency every 6 months to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.
- 5.2.2 They must also satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration (Minimum Standard 25.6; Statutory Adoption Guidance 3.3, and 5.39).
- 5.2.3 The Statement of Purpose should fulfil the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011, Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003, Adoption support agencies (England) and adoption agencies regulations 2005 and the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

## 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)?

- 6.1.1 The work of the Adoption Service supports the key priority outcome in the Council Plan for "*Coventry, proud to be a city that works... to support and celebrate our young people*" in particular in the objective "*Children are supported to live safe from harm*".
- 6.1.2 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 role that the Local Authority plays as a Corporate Parent, of securing appropriate family placements for Looked After Children, as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

- 6.2.1 Failure to provide an effective Adoption Service would lead to Coventry's Looked After Children staying in care longer, and potentially being placed further away from the city.
- 6.2.2 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.

An OFSTED Inspection provides a robust critical analysis of the performance of the Adoption Service, and in setting requirements and recommendations for improvement assists the Service to focus on continuous improvement.

### **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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Colin Green	Director of Children, Learning & Young People	CLYP	25.09.12	1.10.12
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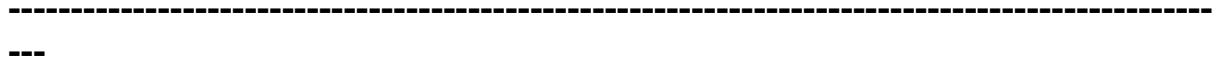
This report is published on the council's website:

[www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings)

## Appendix 1



## Public report



### Adoption Service Annual Report 2011-2012

October 2012

#### Authors:

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James Lawrence, Programmes and Projects Manager

#### 3. Introduction

- 3.1 This report considers the work completed by Coventry Children, Learning & Young People's Directorate in respect of Adoption during the year 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.
- 3.2 The Coventry Adoption Service is responsible for the recruitment, training, assessment and support of adopters and in home-finding for children with an adoption plan.
- 3.3 The Adoption Panel is responsible for recommending and reviewing adoption plans for children, approving and terminating the approval of adopters and linking children to adopters. It also considers learning points from any disruptions in adoption placements.
- 3.4 During 2011/12, there were **22** applications received from perspective adopters and **25** children were adopted during the year. Furthermore, **48** children were placed for adoption during the year.

#### 4. Annexes

**Annex 1 – Adoption Case study**

**Annex 2 – Coventry Adoption Panel**



## 5. Overall Performance

The following table sets out the performance of the Adoption Service

Key performance indicators	2011-2012
<b>ADOPTION APPLICATIONS</b>	
General Adoption enquiries received by Recruitment Team	<b>221</b> (224 in 2010/11)
From telephone discussions, number of enquirers sent information packs	<b>88</b>
Initial visits made	<b>31</b> (41 in 2010/11)
Applications received	<b>22</b> (25 in 2010/11)
<b>ADOPTERS</b>	
Number of Adopters approved over the period	<b>32</b> (26 in 2010/11)
Number of Adopters awaiting matching with children	<b>22</b> by March 2012 (21 in 2010/11)
<b>CHILDREN'S PROGRESS</b>	
Children's plans taken to panel	<b>50</b> (61 in 2010/11)
Children confirmed with adoption need	<b>48</b> (56 in 2010/11)
Children placed for adoption in year	<b>48</b> (27 in 2010/11)
Children adopted during year	<b>25</b> (23 in 2010/11)
Disruptions of placement	1

## 6. Referrals/enquiries to the agency

**6.1** **221** general adoption enquiries were received by the Recruitment Team, Coventry Fostering & Adoption Service. After initial telephone discussions, **88** requested and received an information pack.

**6.2** **46** prospective adopters wished to take their interest further, but **7** of these were counselled out before the initial visit and a further 8 after the initial visit. **31** initial visits were made.

- 6.3** There were a number of reasons for counselling out prospective adopters with some choosing to withdraw, others circumstances changing and others choosing to pursue other options. Reasons include:

Before initial visit	After initial visit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns regarding mental health</li> <li>• Pursuing adoption in Warwickshire</li> <li>• Going to university, couple withdrew</li> <li>• Not living together for 2 years</li> <li>• Couple withdrew – made redundant</li> <li>• Moved out of area</li> <li>• Counselling out – concerns regarding the needs of their own children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Couple withdrew</li> <li>• Decided not to proceed for specific child</li> <li>• Withdrew</li> <li>• Counselling out – work and other commitments, lack of support network</li> <li>• Language difficulties</li> <li>• Lack of accommodation</li> <li>• More fertility treatment</li> <li>• Mental health issues</li> </ul>

## 7. Recruitment

### Targeting

- 7.1** Key target areas for adoption recruitment this year continued to be sibling groups, older children, black children and those of mixed heritage. These target groups are also the hardest to place children throughout the UK.
- 7.2** Recruitment activity for adoptive parents continued to be targeted outside the immediate Coventry City area, as there is an ongoing request from social workers for out of area placements to maintain the safety and anonymity of children.
- 7.3** During 2011-12, Adoption Information Evenings were held in May 2011, November 2011, and February 2012. **45** prospective adopters were invited and **35** attended.

### Marketing

- 7.4** The Governance Board approved a Marcoms budget for adoption of **£16,599** of the £30,000 in 2010-2011. The spend was **£16,395**. It had been hoped to expand out of City advertising following the success of, for example, advertising on buses across Warwickshire in 2009 – 2010. The focus would have been to expand on attracting prospective adopters who had already raised a birth family in order to place sibling groups and older children.
- 7.5** All Marcoms activity currently takes place in areas outside Coventry but within an hour's drive. This includes Leamington, Warwick, Stratford, Rugby, Solihull, Hinckley and surrounding areas. The number of towns within the catchment area provides a wider choice of media – particularly local newspapers and magazines – but also means that the budget has to stretch further to reach prospective adopters.
- 7.6** By advertising in these areas Coventry Adoption Service is in direct competition with neighbouring local authorities/voluntary agencies. Media relations are also more challenging because local newspapers see Coventry stories as less relevant to their readership than adoption stories from their own council. Adoption enquiries increased in November as is usual with the increased publicity of National Adoption Week.

**7.7** The website continued to generate the largest number of responses however many of these are generated by adverts which promote the adoption web address and drive visitors to the site.

## **8. Preparation Groups**

**8.1** Preparation Groups, run by the Recruitment and Adoption Support Teams, are offered to prospective adopters and 4 sets were run in May, June, October 2011 and January 2012. The groups take place over 4 days, and include presentations and exercises for applicants on issues to consider in adoption, including anxieties for adopters about contact with birth relatives.

**8.2** A total of **29** sets of applicants attended these groups. Of these

Ethnicity	<b>26</b> sets of applicants were White British 1 WB / Irish 1 WB / African Caribbean 1 WB / Pakistani
Sexuality	<b>27</b> were heterosexual couples (of whom <b>4</b> sets were foster carers wishing to adopt children already in placement with them), <b>1</b> single heterosexual woman <b>1</b> female same sex couple
Location	All live outside the city
Parental status	<b>22</b> sets of applicants were childless couples <b>7</b> sets of applicants were already parents / step-parents

Of the **29** who went to groups **2** couples withdrew (leaving a pool of 27 couples)

## **9. Adopters**

**9.1** The Service seeks to recruit a pool of adopters to meet the needs of a wide range of children. However, throughout the country there is an over supply of potential adopters who are childless seeking younger children. 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. Annex 1 has a case study of adopters of two boys with complex needs.

**9.2** Other factors that mitigate against matching include:

- Children often needing to be placed out of City for their welfare.
- A number of adopters not able to take older children, sibling groups.
- The ethnic mix of children and adopters being diverse.
- Adopters being able to refer themselves to the National Adoption Register as soon as approved.
- Adopters not necessarily being available at the exact time we wish to place a child for adoption, as recruitment is constant and we cannot delay plans for children.

**9.3** Adoption Panel approved **32** Adopters during the reporting period of which **25** were general adopters and **7** were approvals with specific children in mind. This is **6** more than 2010/11. Annex 2 includes details about the Coventry Adoption Panel.

**9.4** **22** Adopters were awaiting matching at the end of March 2012, **1** less than 2010/11.

## **10. Children**

### **Children placed for Adoption**

**10.1** **48** children were placed for adoption in the year, compared to **27** in 2010/11.

**10.2** **50** children had their adoption plans recommended by Panel. Of these:

- **5** plans changed to long-term fostering (some in the next reporting period)
- **5** returned to grandparents
- **3** were rehabilitated to their mother
- **3** remained with the foster carer on Special Guardianship Orders
- **2** moved abroad with their grandmother
- **2** returned home and **1** is possibly being placed with a grandparent

**10.3** This left **29** children with an adoption plan for family finding.

### **Children Adopted during the year**

**10.4** **25** children were adopted during 2011/12 including 21 White British children, 1 White Asian and 1 White Caribbean child.

**10.5** Of the **25** children, **4** were placed with interagency adopters and **21** with Coventry adopters.

<b>Type of adoption</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
<b>4</b> with Interagency adopters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 White British children placed with 3 White British couples</li> <li>• 1 White/Caribbean child placed with a White British couple</li> </ul>
<b>21</b> with Coventry adopters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 White/Asian child placed with a W/B couple</li> <li>• 17 WB children placed with W/B couples</li> <li>• 1 White British child placed with a WB/Irish/Spanish couple</li> <li>• 2 White/Caribbean children placed with a WB couple</li> </ul>

**10.6** There was 1 disruption of a placement for adoption 8 weeks after placement in the reporting period, and child matched with adopters who withdrew just prior to linking.

**10.7** The Disrupted case was of a child of nearly 2 years old, placed with Coventry adopters. There was good preparation for this placement, adopters were managed well but one of the adopters was not able to make the adjustment to adoption. There were also difficulties in reconciling the needs of the adopted child compared to their

birth children.

**10.8** In the other case the female adopter did not attach to the child despite full preparation and large amounts of support. The Adopters were fully briefed but changed their minds.

**10.9** There were no particular learning experiences for Adoption Panel with regard to this placement which disrupted or the one that did not go ahead. 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. However the Adoption Service is committed to careful matching, avoidance of drift and has excellent adoption support services for all placements for adoption. Coventry has a good record of minimal disruptions and higher risk placements are identified and well supported

## **11. Financial Issues**

See Cabinet Report 16 October 2012 for details.

## **12. Complaints, compliments and comments**

- No complaints were received during the reporting period April 2011 – March 2012.
- 12 compliments were received during the reporting period April 2011 – March 2012. 10 were in relation to the work of individual staff in the Adoption Team and 2 were general compliments for the Adoption Team and Post Adoption Team.

### 13. Statutory guidance timescales

There are prescribed timescales for progressing plans for adoption for children, approving prospective adopters and placing children for adoption. The table below indicates how Coventry is meeting these timescales:

#### Statutory Guidance Targets

<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 Adoption Panel within <b>2 months</b> of the review recommending adoption"	2 months	<b>48</b> children  50 children brought to Panel, 2 children recommended for long term fostering	<b>24</b> children out of <b>48</b> within 2 months (50%)  <b>Note</b> <b>35</b> out of <b>48</b> within 3 months <b>46</b> out of <b>48</b> within 6 months <b>All</b> within 10 months
"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>48</b> children placed with adopters	<b>27</b> children placed within 12 months of the decision for adoption (56%)
"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> )"	-	-	LAC Social workers have responsibility for informing Birth Parents orally following the Panel meeting
Decision maker – Adoption decisions	Notification 7 days from decision	Adoption decisions  <b>50</b> plans for adoption	<b>56%</b> adoptions decisions communicated within 7 working days
Decision maker – Matching decisions	Notification 7 days from decision	Matching decisions  <b>50</b> plans for adoption	<b>61%</b> of matching decisions communicated within 7 working days
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>			
<b>Statutory Guidance</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Performance</b>

<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><b>221</b> general adoption enquiries</p> <p>After telephone discussion, <b>88</b> families requested an information pack</p>	<p><b>88</b> packs sent out same day as the enquiry</p>
<p>"The prospective adopter should be invited to an adoption information evening meeting within 2 months of their enquiry".</p> <p>&gt; Information evening held every 3 months &gt; Prospective adopters offered initial visit within 10 days (internal timescale)</p>	<p><b>2 months</b> from initial enquiry</p>	<p><b>33</b> families who requested a visit (initially <b>46</b> families were interested in pursuing their interest)</p>	<p><b>33</b> families who requested a visit were visited within 10 days</p>
<p>"From receipt of an initial enquiry form being received (after receiving an information pack) – to be allocated within 5 days".</p>	<p><b>5 days</b></p>	<p>none</p>	<p>Target was met</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>32</b> adopters approved to adopt	<b>15</b> completed within 8 months (47%)  <b>9</b> completed between 9-11 months  <b>8</b> took over 12 months
6 weeks from completion of Adopters Report to Adoption Panel	<b>6 weeks</b>	<b>none</b>	Timescale was achieved
Notifying Adopters of Decision for Approval, within 24 hours of the Panel recommendation (National standards)  Statutory Guidance = <b>48 hours</b> Coventry – all adopters notified of the Panel's recommendations within <b>24 hours</b> of attending panel by Social Worker & Panel Chair, and receive letter	<b>24 hours</b>	<b>32</b> letters of notification	<b>17</b> sent out letters same day or within 1 day  <b>15</b> within 2-7 days  All adopters notified verbally.

### **Progressing Plans for Adoption for Children**

**13.1** **50** children were brought to Panel with a plan for adoption, **2** of which were recommended as long-term fostering. Approximately half (**24**) of children's adoption plans were presented to Adoption Panel within **2** months of the review recommending adoption. Over three-quarters of children's plans (81%) for adoption were presented to Adoption Panel within 4 months. This is a better outcome than 2010 – 2011 when **68%** of children's plans were presented to Adoption Panel within 4 months of the review.

**13.2** Adoption Panel monitor the reasons for delay and the most common are delays in receiving background medical information, time taken to transfer cases to the Looked After Service Teams (this has been substantially helped by the co-working between the Neighbourhood and Looked After Children Teams) and the complex needs of children and sibling groups. The latter often require further work to establish whether adoption is the right plan and whether siblings should be separated or not. Sometimes family and friends come forward for assessment late in the process. All of these reasons pertain to this group of children.

**13.3** Of the **48** children placed with adopters, **27** (56%) were placed within 12 months of the decision for adoption. The **21** that took longer were for a variety of reasons including the complex needs of the child, children requiring therapy prior to placement, breakdowns and financial issues. The specific challenges are included below:



<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
12 – 20 months	3 lots of 2 siblings 1 placed with sibling's adopters in Wales, delay in finalising the plans and linking 1 complex needs 1 initial identified adopter requested further information, said no to child and was ruled out
20 – 30 months	1 sibling group of 2 required therapy prior to placement Single child disrupted 3 weeks into adoptive placement and second adopter withdrew Single child 1 year delay to achieve Placement Order
30 – 40 months	Sibling group of 3 breakdown in introductions at the point of placement when this group was being placed as part of a group of 5 children Sibling group of 2 children with considerable health needs. Problems with funding and arrangements for extension/house move
40 + months	1 child placed for adoption later went on to be made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order. 1 sibling group of 2, older children harder to identify adopters

### **Statutory Guidelines - Recruitment**

**13.4** Recruitment operates a duty system and an information pack is usually sent out the same day as the enquiry. Of the **221** initial enquiries, following telephone discussion **88** information packs were sent out within the statutory guidelines of 5 working days. Of the **46** families who, on being contacted, wished to pursue their interest, **33** requested a visit and were visited within 10 days of receipt of Local Authority checks.

### **Statutory Guidelines - Approval of Adopters**

**13.5** In 2011-12, **32** adopters were approved to adopt, **15** within the 8 month statutory timescale, **9** within 9-11 months and **9** over 12 months. There were a variety of reasons for delay including Social worker absence (due to personal circumstances, sickness or annual leave), delays in accessing medical information, and Police checks.

**13.6** Once an application has been accepted an adopter now has the opportunity to access either the Council's Representative Procedure (if they are not recommended) – or the Independent Reviewing Mechanism. One set of adopters requested a review of this Agency's "Qualifying Determination" by the Independent Review Panel. This Panel made the same recommendation as this Agency.

## **14. Future direction of the Adoption Service**

**14.1** In July 2012 the Adoption teams amalgamated with the Fostering teams in line with the recommendations made by the full service review completed earlier this year. The 'Adoption Service now forms part of the larger 'Family Placement service'. This service has been divided in to functional groups:

- Recruitment and Assessment
- Family Finding
- Placement Support

These three teams will carry out all the functions of the previously split service.

**14.2** In bringing the service together it is anticipated that there is greater scope for processing assessments more quickly, 6 months for adoption assessments from enquiry to approval.

**14.3** The development of a Family Finding team will mean that the information about children needing adoptive placements will be available to the service at a much earlier point in a child's journey this will influence recruitment strategies and lead to greater number of specific assessments.

**14.4** The service as a whole has revised all its twin track and parallel planning processes following Coventry's apparent low adoption score card in order to ensure that children who can be placed as soon as possible are.

**14.5** All prospective adopters are now being approached to consider dual approval as adopters and foster carers for very young children, so that in a small number of cases children will be placed before their placement order is made, under foster care regulations, and while their permanence plan remains unresolved.

**14.6** Over the past two years there have been several children adopted by their foster carers in Coventry, the service has therefore reviewed the decision not to recruit adopters from Coventry and decided to once again offer adoption assessments to those who live locally. The service anticipates that this should assist with recruitment.

**14.7** In line with national figures the number of children needing adoption placements has continue to rise. The service will continue to focus recruitment activity on sibling groups and older children.

**14.8** The service has identified a number of immediate recruitment issues including the need to review and update the web site and to improve the standard of information that is sent to initial enquirers. Response times and other practices have been reviewed to stream line the service and bring applicants through in a more timely manner.

**Annex 1 – Adoption Case Study of two boys under 5, with an application from their Foster Carers**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White British</b>
<b>Legal status</b>	<b>Made subject of Placement orders Dec 2008</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>Both boys have complex needs</b>
<b>History</b>	<p>The boys have been placed with their current Foster Carers a White British couple in their 40's, since discharge from hospital following their birth.</p> <p>Both boys have complex needs with significant disabilities for which they receive co-ordinated care packages and the dedicated care of their Foster Carers.</p> <p>The Panel were asked to decide whether the boys should be linked to their current Foster Carers who had looked after the boys for around 3 years, with a view to Adoption.</p>
<b>Panel decision</b>	<p><b>Medical issues</b></p> <p>The Panel considered the medical prognosis for the boys who had a range of complex medical issues that require constant attention. They also have mobility issues. The Board heard of the support package that the boys are receiving from the NHS and Social Care.</p> <p><b>The Foster Carers</b></p> <p>The Board considered the Fosters Carer's suitability as Adopters. The Panel noted that there was a strong relationship between the boys, they interacted naturally with the foster care's own children and were very much part of the family.</p> <p>The Foster carers were meeting medical needs of the children well and were aware of potential future medical challenges. They had been supported well by their family and others organisations.</p> <p>The Panel asked the Foster Carers what they found most rewarding and challenging about caring for the boys and were told that it was seeing them grow and progress.</p> <p>After the foster carers left the Panel, Panel Members noted what a pleasure it was to meet the foster carers – they clearly had a very strong relationship, knew the boys well and their dedication, skills and care of the them was exceptional. They were committed to supporting contact with boy's siblings, had a remarkable amount of resilience which had helped them with the medical challenges.</p> <p><b>Other options</b></p> <p>Viability assessments had been undertaken on the birth parents and members of the paternal family and these people were ruled out as potential carers.</p>

	<p><b>Decision</b></p> <p>The Foster carers were recommended by the Panel for approval as adopters on the basis that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- they were experienced parents and can cope with complex needs as required</li><li>- they were resilient and realistic about what may lie ahead</li><li>- they had a long standing supportive relationship</li><li>- the children were already an integral part of the family</li><li>- they were very committed to these specific children</li></ul>
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## **Annex 2 – Coventry Adoption Panel**

### **Frequency**

Adoption Panel meets every two weeks throughout the year with occasional additional panels due to the volume of work.

### **Chair and Vice chair**

Julian Cunningham was appointed as Independent Chair in May 2011. Julian has brought a wealth of experience from his Senior Manager experience with other NHS and Children's Social Care agencies and as Chair of a wide range of children's meetings.

Andrew Bell, currently Coventry's Children's Complaints Officer, continues as Vice Chair of Adoption Panel. He has significant experience of adoption work as a panel member, former manager of children's social work teams and through chairing the panel when required.

### **Composition of Panel**

The composition of Adoption Panel is a mix of professional, independent, medical and legal persons. This is a requirement by regulation and enables Panel business to be conducted with the benefit of a range of perspectives. This includes the views of a former foster carer, social workers with a very wide variety of experience and a City Councillor in addition to a Medical, Legal and Panel Adviser.

The Elected Member on Adoption Panel provides a link between the council and the needs of adopted children in Coventry.

Adoption Panel has implemented plans to put into practice the changed Regulations regarding Panel Membership. This includes affording Adoption Panels greater flexibility in the way they operate to avoid delay, for example, the introduction of a Central List of Panel Members.

### **Adopters**

Adopters are invited to attend Adoption Panel for approval and matching with a child. This has really helped in forming recommendations.

### **Feedback from Adopters**

All adopters are invited to feedback their comments and about half the feedback forms sent out were received in this reporting period. These are consistently complimentary about the experience of Panel and the adoption process. Sometimes adopters acknowledge how daunting attending Panel is but they are appreciative of meeting the Chair beforehand and generally do not feel anymore can be done to prepare them.

### **Communication**

A leaflet about the Panel is given to adopters prior to the meeting by their social worker and great efforts are made to avoid keeping prospective adopters waiting. Inevitably on occasions an item will take longer than expected and Panel Adviser / Chair will keep prospective adopters updated during the Panel about this.





## Children, Learning & Young People's Directorate

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF COVENTRY CITY ADOPTION SERVICE**

#### **1.00 Background:**

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. It is against these key documents that the Adoption Service is inspected by Ofsted. The Statement of Purpose of the Agency is considered and formally approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for Children, Learning and Young People.

The Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the policies, procedures and guidance of the Adoption Agency and is available to anyone seeking a copy. Staff working in the Agency each receive a copy of the Statement of Purpose.

#### **2.00 The Statement of Purpose covers the following matters**

- The aims, values and principles of Coventry Adoption Service
- The functions of the Adoption Service, including the service users, and activities of the agency.
- The name, qualification and experience of the manager of the service.
- Information about the organisation and staffing of the service.
- Systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the services provided.
- Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.
- Information about the complaints procedure.
- The address and telephone number of Ofsted.

#### **3.00 The Aim of Coventry's Adoption Service**

Coventry's Adoption Service aims 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.

The Adoption Service aims to provide services that 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.

The aim of the Adoption Service is consistent with Coventry City Council's duty towards children who are looked after, where adoption is the plan, by ensuring 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 Service aims to find adoptive homes for all children looked after in Coventry who require a permanent family through adoption.

To achieve this aim Coventry Adoption Service aims to recruit at least 25 adopters each year. 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.

#### **4.00 Values of the Adoption Service**

- 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.
- The Service affirms that where possible it is best that children are brought up by their own birth family
- The Service will consider the child's welfare, safety and needs as the paramount considerations and at the centre of the adoption process.
- The Service considers the child's wishes and feelings and takes them into account at all stages.
- The Service seeks to avoid delays in adoption to minimise impact on the health and development of children.
- The Service aims to respond 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.
- The Service takes account of and values children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language when decisions are made.
- The Service aims to ensure the particular needs of disabled children are fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The Service values and respects the role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family.
- The Service understands that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. The Service 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.
- The Service 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.

#### **5.00 Principles of the Adoption Service**

- 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.
- 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 and both seeks and welcomes feedback, and considers 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.

## **6.00 Who Receives Adoption Services**

Adoption Services are provided to: -

- Children who are to be adopted.
- Birth parents or guardians.
- Prospective and approved adopters and adoptive siblings including 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.

## **7.00 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 access to Section 98 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.
- 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.

## **8.00 The Name, Qualifications and Experience of the Manager**

**Manager:** Sue Goy  
Responsible Manager of the Adoption Service

Coventry Children Learning and Young People Directorate  
Adoption Service  
Stoke House  
Lloyd Crescent  
Coventry  
CV2 5NY

Tel no: 024 76785636/38

**Qualifications:** B.A.(Hons) Social Science 1975  
PGCE 1977  
Awarded CQSW in 1980.  
MA 1981  
NVQ4 Completion date December 2008

**Experience:** Sue Goy has worked in various authorities in England in the field of social work since 1974. Her posts include those of Social Worker, Education Social Worker, Senior Caseworker, Practice Teacher, Guardian–ad-Litem and Manager in Coventry Fostering and Adoption Service from January 2000. Sue also has experience as a Lecturer and Tutor in social work courses for 8 years.

**Most recent Experience in Fostering and Adoption - Coventry City Council Family Placement Service 1992-2000**

1. Senior Caseworker Fostering and Adoption Service including specific responsibility for respite projects.
2. Manager – Special Projects Coordinator – 2000-2003
3. Adoption Team Manager – 2003-01.04.2008
4. Responsible Manager from 01.04.2008

### **9.00 Structure of the Adoption Service.**

- 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.
- The Adoption Service has 3 teams, Recruitment, Adoption and Adoption Support. The Recruitment 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. The Adoption Team arranges for the assessment, any additional training and support of adopters, arranges Adoption Panel activity, makes arrangements for adoptive placements, supports new families through to adoption.
- Currently the Adoption Teams are led by 2 Team Managers responsible to the named Manager of the Adoption Service who has overall responsibility for the Recruitment, Adoption and Adoption Support Teams. Managers are responsible for supervising the work of the teams' social workers, all of whom are qualified. 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.

- 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 come from diverse backgrounds, including White British and Asian heritage.

### **10.00 Staffing of the Adoption Service**

The Adoption Service consists of the following staff:

**Responsible Manager** who is the overall Manager of the Adoption Service.

**Recruitment Team** (who also cover Fostering Recruitment) consisting of a

0.5 Team Manager

1 x Senior Practitioner (p/t)

3 x FTE Social Worker posts

1 x p/t Publicity/Assistant Communications Officer (access to)

**Adoption Team** consisting of

1 x Team Manager

4 x FTE Social Worker posts

1 x P/t Social Work post

1 Senior Practitioner (p/t)

**Adoption Support Team**

1 0.5 Team Manager

1 0.4 Senior Practitioner

3 x FTE Social Work posts

1 x p/t Social Worker post

1 x p/t (10 hrs) – Birth Records Counselling

**Adoption Admin Support section**

1 x Adoption Panel Administrator	} <u>Access to but part of joint hub with the Fostering Service</u>
3 x f/t Clerical Officers	
<u>2</u> x p/t (18.5 hrs) Clerical Officers	

One Team Manager acts as Professional Adviser to the Adoption Panel when the Manager of the Adoption Service is unable to.

### **11.00 Monitoring Arrangements to ensure effectiveness and quality**

- 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.
- The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report are considered by the Cabinet Member for Social Care each year and subject to Cabinet Scrutiny process.
- 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 Board (formerly ACPC) 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. All staff and service users have access to the agencies child protection policy, upon request.
- Service Level Agreements with other Agencies are reviewed at a minimum annually.

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

### **12.01 Recruitment**

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 are referred to other agencies.

- A copy of the written eligibility criteria, information on becoming an adoptive parent and what is expected of adopters is provided on request.
- Information is given about children who need families locally at the initial visit and preparation groups to help prospective adopters decide whether to proceed further.
- 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.
- The Adoption Service continually seeks to improve its service and actively seeks user experience feedback from enquirers at different stages through the recruitment and assessment process.
- 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.
- The Adoption Service will provide information about its services as an adoption agency and will work in an open and fair way with all users of the service.
- In line with the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and associated regulations and guidance, the Service regularly reviews and updates its policies and procedures, its Statement of Purpose and its Children's Guide. The Statement of Purpose is considered and approved each year by the Cabinet member for Children, Learning and Young People.
- The Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide of Coventry City Adoption Service are made available, upon request, to service users, other organisations, the general public, social workers working with children and families concerned with adoption. In addition, every service user, or adult representing the interests of a child, is given a copy of the Children's Guide.
- The Recruitment Team do not advertise in Coventry as most children require adoptive placements outside Coventry. Enquiries are accepted or not according to the needs of children waiting for an adoptive placement and the availability of suitable adopters as some children can be placed in City. In addition the needs of specific children are advertised in the adoption press whenever it is known that there may be difficulty in finding a local placement. There is an out of hours answering service to facilitate enquiries.
- Enquirers are sent an Adoption Information Pack within 5 days of their enquiry, giving comprehensive information on the adoption process, criteria for 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## **12.02 Assessment and preparation**

- Assessments are completed using the BAAF 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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. 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.
- Prospective adopters are kept informed of progress throughout.

### **12.03 Approval of Applicants**

- Following completion of the Adopter's Report, including a brief account of training 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 applicants views on contact and their willingness to pass on information to the birth parents if they wish to have it.
- 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 comfortable room available for applicants waiting to speak with Panel.
- 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. 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 applicants' health background and any necessary points affecting the application are clarified. Any relevant legal issues are raised with the Legal Adviser. 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 couple. A short discussion follows with the assessor. The applicants are then invited to join the Panel. Applicants are welcomed and then any agreed questions are put to them. Applicants are invited to ask any questions of Panel and then to leave after Panel discussion.

The recommendation of Panel is communicated to them following Panel discussion and confirmed in writing once the Agency Decision Maker has considered the matter.

- Prospective Adopters are invited to wait whilst Adoption Panel are forming their recommendation so that the Chair and Adoption Social Worker can communicate this immediately. Where necessary the assessor will arrange to visit the applicant to explain a Panel recommendation.
- Following Panel the minute of the meeting is completed by the Adoption Administrator and given to the Chair or Panel Advisor for interim approval, (in advance of formal approval at a subsequent Panel). The minute is 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. If the Decision Maker is minded not to accept the Panels' recommendations s/he discusses this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of the Panel, before indicating s/he is minded not to accept the recommendation. It is likely that the decision and informing prospective adopters will exceed 7 working days.
- On the day following Panel the agency holds a Resource Meeting to update the Adoption Resource database, begin to consider potential links, and initiate referral to the Consortium and National Adoption Register.
- The progress of adopters during their waiting period is tracked each fortnight through the Resource Meeting.
- 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.

#### **12.04 Matching**

- 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.
- The Recruitment Team has a member whose principle task is overseeing home-finding for children. She receives information on all children with adoption plans, advises the Recruitment 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. A Team Manager then convenes a

formal matching meeting and the most promising are identified and then visited by the children's worker and the adopters' link worker. Where possible a further meeting is then held to agree the most suitable match to be put forward to the Panel. Only one meeting is held if one family is being considered or more than one meeting would cause undue delay. If the prospective adopters express interest 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.

## **12.05 Introductions**

- 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.
- A planning meeting is held, chaired by an Adoption 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).

## **13.00 Adoptive parents - support**

- 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.
- 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.
- Support in the form of paid travel expenses, a settling in allowance and additional financial help is agreed subject to criteria to assist adopters in the introductions period.
- 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.
- The adoption link 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.
- 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.
- Throughout the assessment, training 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.



- The initial screening, pre approval training, assessment home study and support strategies of the agency aim to assist adopters to understand and combat the effects of racism and any other form of discrimination.
- 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.
- 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 identifying what went wrong. 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. 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.
- 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. There is a designated Adoption Support Services Advisor within the Adoption Support Section of the Adoption Team.
- 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)
  - 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)

#### **14.00 Birth Parents and Birth Families**

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.

- Children's social workers are committed to a partnership approach towards planning with birth parents over children's futures. 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.
- The views of the birth parents on adoption and contact are obtained by the social worker for the child and included in the BAAF Child's Permanence Report presented to Panel.

- The child's 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.
- Children's social workers are expected to share information about the content of reports for Adoption Panel with birth parents prior to this being presented to Panel.
- 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 parents 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 seek 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.
- Birth parents and birth families (including siblings) are entitled to support both before and after adoption. In addition to the independent support to be offered to birth parents Coventry maintains a contract with Adoption Support (based in Birmingham) to offer an intermediary service of information, tracing and support, including group work to children and families affected by adoption.
- Additional information on local and national support groups is made available in a leaflet provided through the Adoption Team.
- Post adoption contact arrangements, including letterbox contact between birth families, adopted children and their new families, are facilitated by the Adoption Support Team.

## 15.00 Adoption Panels

The function of Coventry's Adoption Panel is to make quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters, and their continuing suitability, and the matching of children and approved adopters. The Panel seeks to promote the welfare of children at all times. Where disruptions of occur, the Panel receive a report and discuss this to see what lessons may need to be learned.

- 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.
- Membership of the Adoption Panel is in line with the National Minimum Standard, Regulations and Guidance.
- Panel meets every two weeks.
- There is an annual training day organised for Panel members and including members of the Adoption Team.
- Prospective adopters and those being linked with a child are given an opportunity to be heard by means of invitation to attend Panel.
- There is a leaflet introducing the work of the Panel, and the role of its members, and this is given to all service users attending Panel. A display board in the waiting room contains pictures of each Panel Member.
- 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.

## **16.00 Agency decisions**

- 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.
- 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 papers available to Panel are sent to the Decision Maker at the same time as to members of Panel to minimise delay. The draft minute and a brief note outlining the situation will be available to the Decision Maker as soon as practicable after each Panel.
- The agency decision will be made within 7 days of the Adoption Panel and given to the Service Manager who arranges for formal notification to be given to the relevant parties.
- 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.

## **17.00 Work with Children**

- 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. 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 Guide to be reproduced in a variety of formats suitable for the needs of specific children.
- Children's social workers prepare children for adoption by direct counselling, life story work and work around their wishes and feelings.
- 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.
- 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.

## **18.00 Information about the Complaints Procedure, and Independent Review Mechanism.**

- 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.
- There is a leaflet available explaining the Independent Review Mechanism and this is made available to all applicants whose application is recommended for refusal.
- The Department operates a system known as the 3 "C's", - "Comments Compliments, Complaints"
- There is a Children's Complaints Officer who oversees the operation of the Complaints system and either personally investigates serious complaints or arranges for them to be independently investigated.

The name and address of the Children's Complaints Officer is

**Andrew Bell, Children's Complaints Officer**  
**Directorate of Children, Learning and Young People,**  
**Civic Centre 1, Little Park Street, Coventry CV1 5RS**  
**Telephone: 024 7683 3462; fax: 024 7683 2451**

### **18.01 What happens following a Complaint?**

- 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.
- If the complaint is very complicated, involves a number of service areas or has not been resolved at a local level, the Children's Complaints Officer or a Service Manager may investigate it.
- If the complaint is about a registered service, an Inspector from Ofsted may investigate it.

### **18.03 Timescales and outcomes**

- 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.
- Complaint will be dealt with as quickly as possible, ideally within 14 days.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

### **18.04 Further Complaints**

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. 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.

### **18.05 Independent Review Mechanism**

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 representations 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.

**19.00 The address and telephone number of OFSTED**

**The address of Office of Children's Rights Director and OFSTED is**

<b>Office of Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director)</b>  Office of the Children's Rights Director OFSTED Aviation House 125 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE  Freephone: 0800 528 0731	<b>OFSTED</b>  Adoption Inspectorate Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD  08456 404040
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September 2011



# Appendix 3 – Coventry Adoption Scorecard

Coventry							
Children							
	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	<p><b>Average Time Threshold In Progress</b></p> <p>The chart displays 'Days' on the y-axis (0 to 1000) and 'Threshold' periods on the x-axis. A blue dashed line represents the Coventry LA 3-year average, starting at 835 days for the 2010-13 threshold and decreasing to approximately 480 days for the 2012-15 threshold. A green dashed line represents the England 3-year average, starting at 213 days for the 2010-13 threshold and decreasing to approximately 150 days for the 2012-15 threshold. A red dot at 639 days and a green square at 210 days are also marked.</p>			
LA 3 year average (2008-11)	835	210	45 (30%)				
Trend - Improvement from previous year (2010)	↓	↓	n/a				
England 3 year average (2008-11)	625	171	9440 (58%)				
Distance from 2010-13 performance threshold	196 days	Threshold met	n/a				
Prospective Adopters				Related Information			
	The time taken from registration of interest to decision of suitability to adopt (days)	The time taken from receipt of application form to decision of suitability to adopt (days)	The time taken from decision of suitability to adopt to matching with child (days)	Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)	Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of BME children leaving care who are adopted)	Adoptions of children over (number adopted and % of children aged 5 years and over who are adopted)
LA 3 year average (2008-11)	Data not available until 2014			80 (11%)	x (x%)	10 (5%)	25 (5%)
England 3 year average (2008-11)				9570 (12%)	1030 (7%)	1590 (7%)	2560 (7%)