

## **Cabinet – March 18 2009**

### **Walsall Adoption Service Six Monthly Report**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's services

**Service:** Children's Services

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary of report**

- 1.1 It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Local Adoption Services (England) 2003, that the executive side of the Council receives written reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption agency, every six months. The Adoption Service report for the period April 2008 to September 2008, found at **appendix 1**, highlights the progress of the adoption service within this period.
- 1.2 Walsall adoption service has made good progress towards meeting its annual targets set for March 2009. Key successes are the re-structuring of the adoption service, implementation of all the key requirements from the Ofsted inspection of the adoption service in December 2007, and the increase in the numbers of children matched and placed for adoption.
- 1.3 The outcome of the inspection was a judgement of "satisfactory" and the service is aiming to be judged as "good" in the next inspection, which is scheduled for an unspecified date beyond April 2009.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to consider the contents of this report which describes the progress of Walsall adoption service, for the period April 2008 to September 2008.
- 2.2 Cabinet is recommended to note key management activity and service outcomes contained within this six monthly adoption service report.

#### **3. Background information**

- 3.1 The report summarises the work of Walsall Children's Services adoption service from April 2008 to September 2008.

- 3.2 All the requirements of the inspection in December 2007 have been fully implemented within this period.
- 3.3 The adoption service has been re-structured to integrate the adoption support functions into the work of the adoption team. This function was previously part of the remit of the permanency team.
- 3.4 There is clear evidence of improved adoption support services as a result of this change. No placement disruptions in families receiving an adoption support service, there have been improvements in securing contact arrangements and the number of contact arrangements that are supported has increased.
- 3.5 The report, found at **Appendix 1**, highlights the recruitment and training of adopters and the role provided by the Black Country Consortium (Adoption across the Black Country – ABC) partnership. This partnership has secured successful adoption placements for children and adoptive families from the Black Country Local Authorities (LA). The number of enquiries received during this period has remained high and at a similar level to last year. This has culminated in there being 15 families in assessment in January 2009 – including 3 families for black and dual heritage children. Analysis of outcomes shows that six adoptive families were approved between April 2008 and September 2008, as a result of this activity.
- 3.6 There has been an increase in the numbers of children matched and placed for adoption during this period and an increase in the number of children placed since September 2008. These two factors will support progress in achieving the target for the number of adoption orders granted by March 2009.
- 3.7 Adopters themselves attend panel for their approval and also attend when they are matched with children and find this a positive experience. The medical and legal advisors continue to support the activity of the panel by providing relevant advice and training.
- 3.8 The adoption panel is effective and members regularly attend training days on key subject areas such as the impact of neglect on children.
- 3.9 Partnership working and networking continues to develop for adoption and adoption support, within the Black Country Consortium, Adoption UK, Adoption Support across the West Midlands and the Birth Parents Advocacy Service.

#### **4. Resource considerations**

- 4.1 **Financial:** The financial implications for the council for managing effectiveness, outcomes for children and adoption agency services, are considered during the annual budget setting process and are in line with the medium term financial plan.
- 4.2 **Legal:** The report satisfies the requirement under standard 17(3) of the National Adoption Minimum Standards, which derive from sections 23(1) and 49(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000, for the Council Executive to receive written reports on

the management and outcomes of the services of the adoption agency, in order to monitor progress.

- 4.3 **Staffing:** The re-alignment of the Adoption Support Service was achieved within the existing staffing assignment and staff are able to utilise their extensive knowledge and skills to improve service delivery.

## 5. **Citizen impact**

The progress of the adoption service in providing services to Walsall children requiring adoption, birth families and adoptive families, is an integral aspect of the report found at **appendix 1**. The continued developments have ensured improved performance that is positively impacting on key indicators for local citizens. The improvements will ensure that more looked after children can be placed with suitable adoptive parents, and develop secure attachments in a permanent home. This is an integral aspect of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2009/2010.

## 6. **Community safety**

There are no specific issues that impact on community safety arising from this report.

## 7. **Environmental impact**

There are no specific issues that impact upon the environment from this report.

## 8. **Performance and risk management issues**

- 8.1 **Risk:** The key risks emerging from the Adoption Service Report (Appendix 1) include securing effective management systems for ensuring that the target for the number of children adopted by March 2009 is met. This report also refers to strategies to recruit more Walsall families for children with complex needs and those from specific religious and cultural backgrounds.

Measures to respond positively to these risks are integral to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and its risk register, which covers the priorities and work of the adoption service. This particularly relates to good management planning in anticipation of the forthcoming inspection of the service by Ofsted expected from April 2009.

- 8.2 **Performance management:** Continued high performance is achieved through effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of a wide range of adoptive parents, and through the provision of adoption support services to adopted children and adults and birth parents. In Walsall this is now achieved through an integrated adoption service with the adoption support service fully integrated within the adoption team.

- 8.3 The adoption service impacts positively on two key performance indicators. The first is C23, (the number of children adopted during the year) with a 2008/9 target of 11%. At the end of this period the out turn was 10% with corrective measures in place to increase this outcome in the second part of the year. The second is

D78 (the number of children placed for adoption or in the same placement for two years), and the target for this is 71% for 2008/9, with an outturn at the end of this period of 75.6% which exceed the target. Additionally, the provision of high quality adoption placements will contribute to the Every Child Matters Outcomes.

## **9. Equality implications**

These continued improvements will ensure that looked after children can be placed with suitable adoptive carers within timescales, which meet their long term needs and in a manner, which minimises the risk of placement breakdown. The report specifically reports on the number of children adopted in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and sibling group matches placements secured for children.

## **10. Consultation**

The annual reporting process has been informed by consultation and feedback from relevant stakeholders; most importantly adoptive children, adoptive parents and adoption panel members. This report is a public document, which can be accessed by anyone wishing to do so, and will be available on the council website.

### **Background papers**

Annual Report (**Appendix 1**)

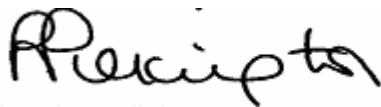
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Pauline Pilkington  
Interim Executive Director  
19 February 2009



Councillor Zahid Ali  
Portfolio holder  
6 March 2009



**Walsall Council**

## **WALSALL CHILDREN'S SERVICE**

### **ADOPTION SERVICE REPORT**

**1 APRIL 2008 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2008**

Author: Louise Watts  
Operations Manager  
Family Placement Service

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report details the work of Walsall Council Adoption Services for the period April 2008 to September 2008.
- 1.2 The report highlights the significant increase in the numbers of children matched and placed with adoptive families.
- 1.3 The reports sets out key developments following the inspection of the adoption service by Ofsted in December 2007
- 1.4 The report highlights the integration of adoption support with the adoption team on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007.

## **2. Regional and National Partnerships**

### **2.1 West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium**

- 2.1.1 Walsall continues to be a member of the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium (WMRFPC) along with 13 other West Midlands Local Authorities, and 3 voluntary agencies, namely Barnardo's, Father Hudson's and NCH Midlands Projects.
- 2.1.2 The Consortium continues to meet on a bi-monthly basis to develop policy, and practice issues. The Consortium group share policies and procedures and develop these on a regional basis. There is early sharing of case law in relation to adoption ensuring we follow best practice. Other topics have included discussions around the use of the internet in post adoption contact, adoption support payments post 18, inter-country adoptions, and the adoption contact register.

### **2.2 Adoption Support across the West Midlands (ASAWM)**

- 2.2.1 ASAWM continue to provide intermediary, and access to birth records services and independent social work support to birth parents and birth family members.
- 2.2.2 ASAWM continue to provide a smooth transition to a service provider following initial counselling and access to birth records intermediary services.
- 2.2.3 Permanency Planning meetings ensure the sharing of information regarding birth parent's rights to access independent support early on in the adoption process.

## **2.3    Adoption UK**

2.3.1 The partnership between Adoption UK and Walsall MBC continues to grow and meet the many new requirements of current legislation and regulations.

2.3.2 A new service level agreement, commissioned jointly with the other Black County agencies has extended the partnership with Adoption UK. Adoption UK now provides support, information, advice and encouragement to adopters, carers and practitioners as follows:

- Telephone Helpline, offering up to date information on all aspects of adoption and the adoption process
- Local Support Groups, run by adoptive parents, regular meeting and events, both locally and nationwide
- Adoption Today Magazine, 10 editions per year
- Information Leaflets and Publications
- Contact Networks, databases of over 800 adoptive parents willing to speak to others about specific aspects of adoption
- Lending Library, over 400 books and videos
- Adoption UK's on-line community inter-active website
- Training Courses, for parents and practitioners, including "A Piece of Cake" training
- Buddy Schemes

2.3.3 Walsall Council has continued to have an increase in its membership of Adoption UK as all newly approved adopters are automatically given one year's free membership. Adopters receive up to date information on new research and development in the arena of adoption. All adopters, once members are invited to Adoption UK support group meetings.

## **2.4    Birth Parent's Advocacy Service**

2.4.1 This service provides birth parents that have learning difficulties support, advice and advocacy regarding adoption processes and adoption contact arrangements. Adoption support workers provide Mencap with a workshop/briefing on making and promoting positive adoption contact.

## **2.5    Midlands ASSA Group.**

2.5.1 The midlands region ASSA group meets quarterly at BAAF's offices in Birmingham. The group has become an invaluable forum to be able to consider common adoption support difficulties, issues and to share information and ideas.

## **2.6    The Black Country Consortium (ABC)**

2.6.1 Adoption in the Black Country is now in its sixth year and the partnership between the four authorities involved continues to grow.

- 2.6.2 The partnership provides a shared annual programme of adoption preparation training; eight courses are facilitated per annum, each authority providing two courses. Feedback from attendees and facilitators indicate that the course is positively received by prospective adopters. Adoption team social workers continue to network effectively to ensure the course reflects any new changes to law, policy and practice.
- 2.6.3 Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Walsall and Dudley are continuing to take a consistent approach in terms of financial support to adoptive families.
- 2.6.4 Meet the children events continue to prove an effective means of placing children for adoption. The events are organised to meet the needs of older children, children with more complex needs, children who are part of sibling groups and children from minority ethnic backgrounds by raising their profile with approved adopters.

### **3. Adoption Marketing**

- 3.1 Walsall benefits from the work of the Adoption Black Country (ABC) project and its own internal marketing strategy.
- 3.2 Enquiries from some prospective adopters who live in certain areas of Walsall are not pursued by Walsall Adoption Service.
- 3.3 Alternatively, those enquiries are passed onto the ABC project for consideration by our other partners and in return we receive enquiries back from the ABC project that are more able to meet the identified placement needs of Walsall children.
- 3.4 During the period of April to September 2008 Walsall customer services officers received 34 adoption enquiries, 9 of which came from the ABC project.

### **4. Number of children suitable to be placed for adoption**

- 4.1 During the period April 2008 to September 2008, 11 children were assessed as being suitable to be placed for adoption.
- 4.2 The breakdown in terms of gender was 3 female to 8 male, and in terms of age, all these children were less than 2 years of age, and were all single children.
- 4.3 Their ethnicity was as follows:
  - 7 White European,
  - 1 White British/Black African,
  - 1 Pakistani/Muslim,
  - 1 White British/Black African/Asian
  - 1 Slovakian/Iraqi/Kurdish.



## **5. Children Matched**

- 5.1 Panel recommended twenty matches for this period, in comparison to thirty matches for the whole of the previous 12 months. It is likely that adoption orders will be made quickly in respect of these children as they are all very young. Twelve children aged between 0-2 years and the remaining eight, aged between 3–5 years.
- 5.2 Of these matches, eleven were made with Walsall approved families and nine with inter-agency families. The reasons for using inter-agency families were as follows:
- 5 had complex ethnic backgrounds,
  - 1 was placed with his sibling,
  - 1 had complex health needs,
  - 2 had complex emotional needs
- The current recruitment strategy and the ABC project, is actively seeking to recruit Walsall families who can meet the more complex placement needs of children.

## **6. Children placed for adoption**

- 6.1 Twenty one children were placed for adoption during this 6 month period, which compares favourably to the number of twenty six who were placed during the previous 12 months.
- 6.2 Of these twenty one, seventeen were placed within 12 months of the agency decision that they were suitable to be placed for adoption.

## **7. Children Adopted**

- 7.1 An analysis of children currently placed or awaiting placement show a younger cohort of single children with less complex needs. They are likely to be easier to place and the adoption orders are likely to be made more quickly. This will improve the overall performance for the number of children adopted by the year end.

## **8. Adopters**

- 8.1 Six families were approved as adopters during this period and they are all White British. One family adopted the sixth sibling of the family where they had adopted the other five children and, two other families were interested in adopting two children (siblings).
- 8.2 The marketing strategy strives to recruit adoptive families from black and minority ethnic groups. It is positive to note that in December 2008, there were fifteen families in assessment and of these families the breakdown in terms of ethnicity is as follows:

White British - 9  
Black Caribbean – 1  
Black Caribbean/White British – 3  
Asian-Sikh – 1  
White British/German – 1

## **9. The Adoption Panel**

### **9.1. Membership**

- 9.1.1 The adoption panel continued to be busy during this period and a total of seven panels were held. Panel membership over this period was as follows

Janet Topliss - Independent Chair  
Lisa Ainsworth - Vice Chair (independent member)  
Councillor Alan Paul  
Alan Velvett – Social worker  
Karen Grandison - Independent member  
Dr Rao – Medical Advisor  
Diane Browne – Independent member  
Dawn Warrington - Social worker  
David Bovell - Social worker (replaced by Bob Heighway in September 2008)

### **9.2. Attendance and Performance**

- 9.2.1 All panel members are in the process of being reviewed in line with the date their tenure commenced.
- 9.2.2 Regular attendance is clearly one the most important objectives which is monitored. (See monitoring sheet attached)

### **9.3. The role of the medical advisor**

- 9.3.1 The medical adviser undertakes a key function in the work of panel. Indeed this is the only membership that is not subject to tenure.
- 9.3.2 Dr Vidya Rao is now into the sixth year as medical adviser. She continues to make an extremely valuable contribution to the effective decision making processes of the panel, through her ability to contextualise medical issues within the framework of adoption.

### **9.4. Significant Issues and Developments Affecting Legal Services**

- 9.4.1 Panel has received advice and assistance from Legal Services throughout from Lynn Levesley. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 continues to impact significantly upon the court process. There continues to be some legal

challenges brought against the making of Placement Orders from birth family relatives.

#### **9.5. Adoption Panel Functions**

- 9.5.1 Tenure for all members, with the exception of the medical adviser, has been extended to 3 consecutive terms, each with duration of 3 years.
- 9.5.2 Independent panel chair.
- 9.5.3 New structure to reports presented; child permanence report; prospective adopters report; adoption placement report.
- 9.5.4 Panel quoracy is now 5 members previously this was 6 members.
- 9.5.5 No 'in principal' recommendations can be made.
- 9.5.6 Considering the plan for the child is now referred to as 'whether a child is suitable to be placed for adoption'.
- 9.5.7 Suitability of prospective adopters – when recommending the suitability of prospective adopters panel can only advise regarding numbers of children their ages, genders and background factors prospective adopters can consider. (This excludes inter-country adoption approvals).
- 9.5.8 Brief reports should be presented to panel where following an application the assessing social worker is not minded to recommend approval. Applicants can access the independent review mechanism.
- 9.5.9 Prospective adopters have 40 days (previously 28 days) to decide whether to accept a decision made by the agency, or consider making representations to the agency or apply to the independent review mechanism.
- 9.5.10 Panel will monitor arrangements for informing the prospective adopters, the child and, where appropriate, the parents of panel's recommendation and decision.

#### **9.6. Adopters Attending Panel**

- 9.6.1 Feedback from applicants indicates that they have welcomed the opportunity to attend and on the whole have given positive feedback on their experience. There are no issues in relation to panel members' interaction with prospective adopters. Of the six families approved by Walsall, all but one attended panel for their approval as they were held up in traffic.
- 9.6.2 Approved families have been given the opportunity to attend panel when the match is being presented and for this period all but one adoptive family attended. The exception was the same family mentioned above – it was for approval and match.

## **9.7. Training and Development**

- 9.7.1 The next panel training day is booked for February 2009 the subject is the impact of early neglect upon the placement needs of children. The panel requested this as a follow up to last year's very successful session on attachment.

## **9.8. Information**

- 9.8.1 A number of consultation, skills and knowledge information/articles have been distributed to panel members who continue to help panel members stay abreast of changes in law, practice and research.

## **9.9. Miscellaneous Figures**

Number of approved adopters who have been deregistered 1  
Number of children subject to best interest decision which was subsequently rescinded 3 (one sibling group)  
Number of adopters in representation process 0.  
Number of non-agency adoption orders 0.  
Number of adoptions of children from other agency placed with Walsall approved adopter's 2

## **10. Disruptions following placement**

- 10.1 One placement (a sibling group of two) disrupted in the period April 2008 to September 2008 and a further one disrupted during introductions.
- 10.2 Disruption reports are presented to panel and issues for practice have been highlighted as follows: -
- the particular difficulties in the placement of older children as part of a sibling group;
  - despite rigorous adoption assessments some adoptive parents seemed unprepared for the life changes that having children placed would bring.
- 10.3 The sibling group of two have been matched with a family and the single child has been placed with another adoptive family.
- 10.4 Child appreciation days are now undertaken for all children 18 months and older in an attempt to better prepare adopters for the realities of caring for a child.

## **11. Adoption Agency**

- 11.1 Pauline Pilkington, Assistant Director for Children's Services, continues to act as the agency decision maker. In Pauline's absence, Kay Child, Operations Manager Safeguarding, will act in this role.
- 11.2 The significant change in relation to the agency decision making role is where the decision maker is minded not to ratify panel's recommendation to approve prospective adopter/s. The decision maker must consult a senior manager who is not a member of panel and record the reasons for that decision on the agency file.

## **12. The Adoption Team**

- 12.1 There have been some staffing changes in this period. A social worker from the team was appointed as a senior practitioner in the Adoption Team. The team manager is currently on maternity leave from June 2008 and another senior practitioner has been acting up very effectively, in the interim role of team manager.
- 12.2 The team continues to be supported in its activities by a family support officer and a customer service officer who undertakes all initial enquiry work for those seeking information about adoption.

## **13. Complaints and Representations**

- 13.1 There has been one complaint received from a prospective adoptive parent in relation to the levels of support she received from the children's social worker and delay in receiving the life story books.
- 13.2 A second complaint from a 20 year old person who has indirect contact with her younger siblings and was requesting increased contact. The complainant had previously made the same complaint on numerous occasions and this complaint was not upheld.
- 13.3 A user feedback form has been introduced and distributed at key stages of the enquiry, approval and placement process. Information gained will be used to develop practice/policy and improve service delivery.

## **14. Statement of Purpose**

- 14.1 This was amended and updated in December 2006 and will be updated in April 2009

## **15. Adoption Support Services**

### **15.1 Introduction**

15.1.1 The Family Placement Service was re-structured in July 2008, in response to requirements and good practice recommendations in the adoption and fostering services Ofsted report in December 2007. Since July 2008, the adoption support services are located back with the adoption team.

15.1.2 The staff composition is as follows:  
A part time (21 hours) Adoption support team leader  
A full time adoption support co-ordinator  
A full time social worker  
A full time life story worker

### **15.2 Support to Families and Children under 18 years of age**

15.2.1 The number of adoptive families eligible for an Annual Adoption Support Service Review grows proportionate to the number of pre-adoption/adoption placements made each year. There has been no increase in the numbers of adoptive parents agreeing to or requesting that reviews take place. The greatest number of requests for adoption support services is for assessment for financial support as a result of adoptive parents having to adjust their working patterns to meet the unanticipated needs of the children or for therapeutic input.

15.2.2 The electronic system alerting adoption support service reviews is currently under development.

15.2.3 Adoption support services reviews elicit the co-operation and involvement of partner agencies and relevant universal services.

15.2.4 A loan/grant scheme for families applying for permanence orders is in place and new procedures will include guidance for permanence financial support.

15.2.5 The "Excellence for Adoption" service user group meets quarterly and their contributions feed into all aspects of service planning and delivery.

15.2.6 The Telling Training was successfully run in June 2008 offering adoptive families training on Life Story work.

15.2.7 All Adoption Support Services Information leaflets have been updated now that the service is realigned within the Adoption Team.

15.2.8 The Adoption Connections Newsletter continues to develop and to be valued by adoptive families.

- 15.2.9 In March 2008 we introduced an Adoption Support Duty system offering a faster response to service user enquiries; completing verification of Schedule 2 and Sec 98 applications and identifying of locations of adoption records more rapidly.

### **15.3**     Disruptions

- 15.3.1 There have been no disruptions of adoptive placements receiving support from Walsall Adoption support services in this period.

### **15.4**     Contact

- 15.4.1 There have been considerable improvements in obtaining completed contact agreements from adoptive parents once a pre-adoptive placement has been made, since the adoption support service has become part of the adoption team.
- 15.4.2 Operational guidance for use by the Adoption service is being formatted for inclusion on the Childrens procedure manual
- 15.4.3 An electronic data base for all contact has now been established which operates a reminder system, and standard reminder letters are sent to birth parents and adoptive parents just before contact is due.
- 15.4.4 Adoption Support workers have prepared a course for adoptive parents and potentially social care staff on Promoting Adoption Contact and this will be run in 2009

### **15.5**     Section 98 and Schedule 2

- 15.5.1 The number of referrals for Section 98 and Schedule 2 services has now started to reduce from the high numbers we received following national publication of the changes in Access to Birth Records Information regulations.
- 15.5.2 In accordance with legislation the service continues to prioritise applications in respects of pre 1975 adoptions.
- 15.5.3 Initial verification of applications and obtaining of relevant information is complete we are now immediately passing referrals to Adoption Support Across the West Midlands who can provide Schedule 2 counselling, access to birth records, assistance with tracing, reunification and for ongoing counselling.
- 15.5.4 The service also retains those cases where the adopted person is requesting access to LAC records as well as to Adoption records.

## **15.6**     Contact Activity

15.6.1     Between 1.4.08 and 30.9.08 the analysis of contact activity is as follows:

New Referrals: 15 (20) for adopted children  
Direct Contact: 8(10) Post Adoption

15.6.2     Total numbers of indirect contact arrangements supported as of 30 September 2008 are 631 (284). This figure is made up of 211 exchanges from adopted children and 420 exchanges from birth relatives.

(Figures in brackets refer to the previous 12 month period)

15.6.3     There are several other direct contact arrangements within existing contact agreements which are managed by the respective adoptive parents and for which no support service is required.

15.6.4     There is evidence of increased activity on all aspects of adoption support services which is to be expected with the steady increase of the numbers of adopted families eligible for support and the increasing complexity of the needs of the children being placed.

## **16**       Ofsted inspection December 2007

16.1       Overall this was based on a combined judgement arising from 4 themed areas inspected. Although results included 1 "good" and 3"satisfactories", the combined judgement was only satisfactory.

### **16.2**       Summary:

16.2.1     "The service had made some progress since the last inspection. The restructuring of the provision of child care services has allowed for a more comprehensive approach to the placement of children. The work of assessment and support of adopters continues to work well. Adopters viewed the work of the agency very positively.

16.2.2     The separation of adoption support staff and those involved in letter box exchanges and contact is a cause for concern. There are areas of development needed within the panel system and for the allocation of roles within the service. The lack of current CRB checks in place on some personnel files, confirms the need for a robust renewal system. There is a need to ensure appropriate employment checks are undertaken in relation to the use of specialist staff."

16.2.3     "Helping children to be healthy" was not judged.

16.2.4     "Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe" was judged as satisfactory.



- 16.2.5 The inspectors noted effected recruitment locally and through ABC consortium, and the value of the jointly run preparation courses. The service must take up applications from prospective adopters prior to the preparation course. Assessments are full and well ordered.
- 16.2.6 The panel process is effective, but on one occasion when the panel was inquorate. There is a need to record discussions on individual siblings. It is not appropriate for the nominated manager to be a panel member and the inspectors queried the independence of the panel advisor being the adoption team manager.
- 16.2.7 The agency decision is made well within timescales, and there must be clarity about who deputises in the absence of the decision maker.
- 16.2.8 Matching of children and adopters is given due weight.
- 16.2.9 Concerns were expressed about the rigour of process in relation to CRB checks.
- 16.2.10 Some panel members files did not contain all the relevant information.
- 16.2.11 The safeguarding procedures for adopters needs to focus on children placed for adoption.
- 16.3** “Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do” was judged as being satisfactory. On an individual level there is support for adopters and their families. There is effective use of specialist services, including the medical and legal advisors, and CAMHS and a specific psychotherapist provides positive support. There is however a lack of strategic overview, which the senior managers anticipated the review of CAMHS will assist.
- 16.3.1 “Helping children make a positive contribution” was judged as satisfactory. There was a variation in response from birth parents about how they see this service. Managers are keen to develop this aspect of service delivery. Workshops with children’s social workers have improved the quality of the Child’s Permanence Reports. The use of “treasure boxes” by carers was noted. The quality of life story books is variable. Life appreciation days are well established. There is the need to establish an electronic system for the letterbox contact.
- 16.4** “Achieving economic well being” was not judged.
- 16.5** “Organisation” was judged as good. The statement of purpose is in place. The children’s guide for younger children is not compliant. Written information for adopters is good. Managers and systems are good. The adoption support service should be located within the adoption team. The service needs to consider the location of the role of the Adoption Support Service Advisor (ASSA). There is sufficient skilled and experienced staff in the adoption service. As an employer, Walsall is viewed positively – good personal support, access to training etc. The councillor seen is well

informed and aware of corporate parenting responsibilities. The report on the adoption service must be presented to the council on a six monthly basis. Records kept are well ordered and current. Systems to record complaints against the service must be developed. The premises are suitable and appropriate.

#### **16.6     Statutory Requirements – All Implemented**

- 16.6.1    Ensure that the panel only meets when properly constituted, that its independent of the service and therefore that the nominated manager does not continue as a panel member.
- 16.6.2    Ensure that CRB checks are in place before staff start work and that there is an effective system in place for the renewal of these checks.
- 16.6.3    Ensure that employment checks are undertaken in relation to the work of an independent psychologist.
- 16.6.4    Ensure that recording of complaints complies with the standards and regulations.

#### **16.7     Good Practice Recommendations**

Those implemented are as follows:

- 16.7.1    Ensure applications from prospective adopters are taken before attendance at the preparation groups.
- 16.7.2    Ensure that adopters are involved in a comprehensive assessment, including seeking references from all previous partners.
- 16.7.3    Ensure that panel members have an opportunity to ask sensitive questions of applicants and provide feedback on recommendations in appropriate privacy.
- 16.7.4    Panel minutes should reflect clear separate consideration of the needs of each sibling in a family and give reasons for the recommendation in relation to each individual (National Minimum Standard 10).
- 16.7.5    Ensure there is clarity about who deputise for the agency decision maker and who is available for consultation, should the need arise, about matters presented to panel.
- 16.7.6    Review the safeguarding policy for children placed for adoption to ensure it complies with Reg 9 of the A C Act 2002 and focuses on children placed for adoption

16.7.7 Enable birth parents and families to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage through the development and support of the letter box contact exchange; reconsider the use of reminders and follow-up of anticipated contacts which are not received.

**16.8** Statutory Requirements not fully implemented and included in the Action Plan

16.8.1 Undertake reports to the council on the progress of the adoption service at least every six months

Action: This report constitutes the six monthly reports to the Executive.

16.8.2 Consider the roles and positions within the service of the adoption support service adviser (ASSA) and the panel advisor

Action: The role of ASSA will be assigned to the post of operations Manager Family Placement Service and consideration given to the location of the role of panel advisor

16.8.3 Ensure both the children's guides are compliant with the Standards and develop the guides into tools for direct work with children

Action: A family support officer will undertake this work by March 2009

# ADOPTION PANEL ATTENDANCE 2008/09

	April	May	Jun	July (15th)	July (22nd)	Aug	Sep t	Oct (21 <sup>st</sup> )	Oct (28 <sup>th</sup> )	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar		
Jan Toplis	X	X	X	X	A	X	X									
Lisa Ainsworth	X	X	A	X	X	A	X									
Cllr Alan Paul	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									
Alan Velvett	A	X	X	X	X	X	A									
Karen Grandison	A	X	A	A	A	A	-					-	-	-		
Dr Rao	X	X	X	X	A	X	A*									
Diane Browne	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									
David Bovell	A	A	A	A	-	-	-					-	-	-		
Dawn Warrington	X	X	X	X	X	A	X					-	-	-		
Bob Heighway	O	O	O	-	X	X	A									
Dr Anand	-	-	-	-	-	-	X									

Key:

**X - Attended**

**A - Apologies**

**A\* - Apologies (ill)**

**O - Observing**

