

REPORT OF THE ADOPTION PANEL TO THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON ADOPTION AGENCY.

Period 30/09/2018 - 1/4/2019

Introduction

All Adoption Agencies have to set up an Adoption Panel. The Agency has to create a 'Central List' of people who have experience, expertise and knowledge about adoption matters who will make up the Adoption Panel. The three main functions of the Adoption Panel are to make recommendations to the Agency about the suitability of potential adopters, to recommend the placement of a child with specific adopters and to recommend an adoption plan for a relinquished child. The Adoption Panel has an independent status and a role to assure good standards of practice, consistency of approach and fairness in the adoption service. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption require a report to be made by the Adoption Panel to the Agency on the local authority's adoption service.

The Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panel has functioned well and efficiently during this period. The panel members are committed to ensure that the work of the panel is conducted with due care and professionalism. I would like to thank my colleagues for their commitment to complete the duties required of them. The contribution of panel member's to the consideration of the cases shows the importance with which they approach the business of the panel. The level of attendance by members is excellent and their attention to the reports they are required to read and consider is worth mentioning. The panel meets twice a month and there is always a willingness to convene quickly or in addition if delay needs to be avoided. The varied skills and experience of panel members strengthen the contribution of the panel to the adoption service.

The Agency Adviser to the panel is diligent to ensure that the reports to the panel are prepared correctly and that he exercises an active quality assurance function.. Legal advice is available should an issue arise on a particular case and this has been available when needed or when a particularly complex case is being considered. The Medical Adviser to the Agency attends the panel meetings and Health Summaries on the child or potential adopters are provided.

The Panel Administrator continues to provide an efficient standard of administration of the panel business. The reports arrive with members in good time and the production of the minutes is timely and accurate.

Panel Statistics

During this period there were ten meetings of the Adoption Panel. There was one extra panel meeting needing to be convened to avoid delays.

Applicants Data	
Panel Meetings	10 + 1 urgent extra meeting
Suitable to Adopt Recommendations	11
Not Suitable to Adopt Recommendation	0
Recommendation to Terminate Approval	0
Brief Reports	0
Applicant's Ethnicity	
Number of White British Applicants	5

Number of Asian – Dual (Filipino/ Singaporean Applicants	1
Number of Mixed White/Anglo Indian Applicants	1
Number of White European Applicants	3
Number of Caribbean Applicants	1

There were five couples and one single person approved as suitable to adopt in this period.

Children's Data	
Number of Children Recommended to be Placed	14
Number of placements made with Croydon adopters	7
Number of Disruptions	0
Number of Relinquished Children	1
Number of Sibling Groups	2
Number of children placed in foster to adopt scheme	3
<i>Ages of Children at the time of Placement</i>	
Number of Children Placed Aged 0-2 years	11
Number of Children Placed Aged 2-5 years	2
Number of Children Placed Aged 5+	1
<i>Ethnicity of Children Placed</i>	
Number of White UK	7
Number of White British/ Black Caribbean	3
Number of Romanian Heritage	1
Number of White and Spanish Heritage	1
White British/Other Heritage	1
White Irish Heritage	1

Panel Feedback

The Adoption Panel has to monitor the quality of the agency's work and pay attention to the issues of delay in the placement of children. There are requirements to prescribe those who may write adoption reports and the agency has ensured that these are met.

The standard and quality of the Prospective Adopters Report is consistently good. The quality of the Child Permanence Report is generally adequate to good and where the panel has comments for improvement these are positively received and acted upon. In an effort to improve the quality and standard of these Reports specific training has been provided in the past and it may be appropriate to provide it again as the workforce has changed and those social workers likely to have to complete them may benefit..

When asked by panel to comment on their experience of the assessment many adopters comment constructively on their experience. The adopters value the commitment and professional relationship

they have received from their assessing social worker. Many consider they have been well prepared to be adopters. It is perhaps an indication of the level of approval that adopters hold the agency in that the annual Adoption Fun Day is very well attended by adopters and their children.

National Minimum Timescales

The Adoption Panel has to measure some aspects of the work against the Adoption National Minimum Standards to see how far the standards are met. The National Standard for the assessment and approval of adopters is six months.

National Minimum Timescales – Approval of Adopter’s	
Number of adopters approved	5 couples and 1 singleton
Number of adopters approved within the timescales	1 couple

There is a National Standard that prospective adopters need to be approved within six months of their application.

The reasons for the delays were; a couple’s availability and the availability of necessary preparation groups, taking longer to explore an interest in the foster for adopt scheme, delays in receipt of checks during Stage 1 and then subsequent health follow ups, a bereavement, needing to do some extra work with a previously adopted child and a change in the assessing social worker. These were understandable reasons for the delays and the agency has always to endeavour to complete the assessments of adopters within the National Minimum Standards timescales.

The National Standard for the placement of children with adopters is six months from the date of the decision that the plan for the child is adoption to the date when the decision to match the child with a new family is made.

National Minimum Timescales – Placement of Children	
Number of Children Recommended to be Placed	14
Number of Children Placed within timescales	5

It is important to avoid delay in the placement of children for whom the plan is adoption. Among the reasons for the delays in the nine Matches were; delays in assessing other adopters for the children, families selected withdrawing x 5, difficulties in finding adopters for a black, male child, delay in pre-selecting families for visits, delays updating CPR, change of social worker and holidays. The agency may wish to review these outcomes and establish whether there needs to be any changes made to the monitoring process or the family finding activity.

Quality Assurance Monitoring.

The agency and the panel introduced a system in May 2017 to collect and monitor feedback in a more systematic manner. Comments were elicited from adopters and social workers about their experience of attending the panel. Panel member's views about the quality and content of the Child Permanence report (CPR) and the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) were also collected. The panel members provide detailed feedback on the reports so that improvements can be made.

Panel Feedback on the Quality of PAR's Presented	
Excellent	1
Good	3
Adequate	1

The PARs were generally of a good standard and some analyses of the adopter's strengths and vulnerabilities were very well covered in the report.

Panel Feedback on the Quality of CPR's Presented	
Excellent	3
Good	7
Adequate	
Poor	

The CPRs generally require a little more attention and consideration to create a document that will be of value to the adoptee in the future. There is a need to review the contents, update the information and ensure the document is presentable from its first presentation to the ADM to when it is provided to the panel for a matching recommendation. The descriptions of the birth parents could benefit from more attention to not portray the parents, their histories and personalities in too harsh a light. Most of the CPRs provided the child with a coherent account of his/her early life and the reasons why he/she could not remain with the birth family. They did set out the child's needs well and the child's identity needs were also well addressed. Most of the descriptions of the child were seen to bring him/her alive. The CPRs were considered to have fully summarised the child's current and future needs very well.

It is good to note that the majority of Adoption Placement Reports provided good or excellent evidence of the child's current needs, and evidence that the adopters were able to meet the child's needs.

Prospective Adopter and Social Worker feedback

Four prospective adopters gave feedback on their experience of attending the panel. They felt positive about their experience of attending and being interviewed. Their evaluation of the process was that it was excellent. There were no critical comments.

Feedback on the panel from seven social workers attending to present cases was received. Their evaluation was that one rated their experience as excellent and six as good. Generally, they felt the questions put were clear, relevant and that the panel listened to them. Most considered that the adopters found the experience to be excellent or good.

During this period, the number of children for whom the Agency Decision Maker decided that the preferred plan for them was adoption was eleven.

The Agency is currently looking for new adoptive families for ten children.

Currently, the Agency has eleven approved adopters waiting for a placement.

For those adopters approved and awaiting a placement a number of training courses and groups have been provided to support and enhance their skills in parenting adopted children.

There were no training sessions for panel members during this period.

The Government's adoption reform agenda continues. There are plans progressing for Croydon to join Adopt London South which is a Regional Adoption Agency required to be set up by the Government. This is planned to become operational in the summer of 2019. This will mean that the current arrangements for the adoption panel and the adoption service in Croydon will cease and be replaced by the new organisation.

As this may be the final Panel Report to the Agency, I need to acknowledge the consistent commitment of the adoption panel members, over the years, to the work of the panel and their contribution to achieving new permanent families for a significant number of children.



Bernard Monaghan.
Independent Chair Adoption Panel