

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA PAPERS

Date of issue: 18th September 2009

MEETING	CABINET	
	Councillor Anderson	Leader of the Council - Finance & Strategy
	Councillor S Chaudhry	Community & Leisure
	Councillor S K Dhaliwal	Performance & Accountability
	Councillor Matloob	Opportunity & Skills
	Councillor Pantelic	Education and Children
	Councillor Parmar	Environment & Open Spaces
	Councillor Small	Health & Wellbeing
	Councillor Swindlehurst	Neighbourhoods & Renewal
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2009 AT 6.30 PM	
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, BATH ROAD, SLOUGH	
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER:	CATHERINE MEEK	
(for all enquiries)	(01753) 875011	

The following Papers have been added to the agenda for the above meeting:-

Items 8 and 13 were not available for publication with the rest of the agenda.
Item 12 is an additional contract to be added to the list of contracts to approve.
Item 17 is a Part II appendix to item 8.

PART I

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
8.	IT Computer Room - Proposed Way Forward	1 - 2	All
12.	Contracts in Excess of £250,000 – Additional Contract	3 - 4	All
13.	References from Overview and Scrutiny	5 - 54	All
17.	IT Computer Room - Proposed Way Forward (Part II Appendix)	55 - 80	All

This page is intentionally left blank

contractual arrangements which need to be concluded before any firm recommendation can be put to Cabinet for approval.

- 5.3 It is vital that the way forward in respect of these revised facilities dovetails in with the agreed way forward for LGSS. As this topic will be the subject of a report to Cabinet in October it is proposed to complete the outstanding procurement and contractual arrangements alongside the report recommending the way forward for LGSS.

6 **Comments of Other Committees**

None

7 **Conclusion**

Cabinet is asked to note the contents of this report and to note that a further report will be brought to Cabinet for approval in October

8 **Appendices Attached**

'A' Unisys Report – Exempt Information – Circulated separately to Cabinet Members

ADDITIONAL CONTRACT IN EXCESS OF £250,000 TO BE LET IN 2009/10

Please note that this contract is from the Community and Wellbeing Directorate.

Contract for Design and Build of Play Areas in Slough

This page is intentionally left blank

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 22nd September 2009
CONTACT OFFICER: Claire Gray, Democratic Services Officer
(For all enquiries) (01753) 875120
WARD(S): All
PORTFOLIO: Education and Children - Councillor Pantelic

PART I
NON-KEY DECISION

REFERENCES FROM EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the recommendations of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel on Slough's Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2009/10 and Slough's Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2009/10.

2 Recommendations

The Cabinet are requested to resolve:

- (a) That the comments of the Education and Children's Service's Scrutiny Panel in respect of the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (attached as Appendix A) and the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose (attached as Appendix B) be noted, and
- (b) That the Slough Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2009/10 be approved.
- (c) That the Slough Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2009/10 be approved.

3 Community Strategy Priorities

None arising from this administrative reference report.

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

None arising from this administrative reference report.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Slough Borough Council Fostering and Adoption Service's compliance with national fostering and adoption standards is the subject of external inspection by Ofsted (under the Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying fostering and Adoption National Minimum standards). The standards include a requirement that a statement of purpose for each service is approved by Members and reviewed annually.

There are no direct Human Rights Act implications.

5. Supporting Information

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

- 5.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 24th June 2009 considered a report concerning Slough's Fostering Service Statement of Purpose. Under the Local Authority Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2002 it is required that the Statement of Purpose be approved annually by Members. The Assistant Director, Children's Services detailed to the Panel the key aims of the Fostering Service as set out in the Statement of Purpose and the factors of particular influence to slough's fostering department at present. Further information was presented on the service provision, standards of care and achievements from the previous year.
- 5.2 Members asked a number of questions, in particular regarding the current pressures on the service due to increased child protection activity. The Panel noted the excellent service provided by the fostering team and agreed that the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2009/10 be recommended for approval.

Adoption Service Statement of Purpose

- 5.3 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 10th September, 2009 considered a report which detailed Slough's Adoption Service Statement of Purpose. The adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 require the Service to have a Statement of Purpose which is approved by Members and reviewed annually. The Group Manager, Services for Children in Care & Leaving Care outlined the main sections of the Statement. Member's noted the excellent work of the Adoption team in providing long term permanence to some of the most vulnerable members of society.

5. Appendices

Appendix A - Slough's Fostering Service Statement of Purpose
Appendix B - Slough's Adoption Service Statement of Purpose

6. Background Documents

1. Minutes of the Education and Children' Services Scrutiny Panel held on 24th June 2009

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010

1. Context

The Slough Borough Council Fostering Service is an integral part of Slough's Education and Children's Services. It operates within the legislative requirements of:

- The Children Act 1989 and 2004 and accompanying regulations.
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2001.
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- Other relevant legislation and Department of Health guidance, circulars and letters.

Slough Borough Council and its Fostering Service also have endorsed, and operate in line with the requirements and expectations of:

- UK National Standards for Foster Care.
- The Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carers 1999.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The current Slough Children and Young People's Plan.
- Other relevant interagency local strategies and plans required by statute.
- Slough Borough Council's internal policies and procedures.

2. Key Service Aims

- a) Slough's Fostering Service exists to provide substitute family care to meet the needs of Slough children and young people who are unable to live within their families of origin on a temporary/short or long term basis. The Service also supports children with disabilities within their families of origin when this can be achieved by regular periods of family-based short breaks.

- b) The Service aims to provide (directly or via work with partner agencies) services which meet the specific individual needs of children in the care of Slough, as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing processes of the Education and Children's Services Department's Looked After Children's system. The Service will seek to meet the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda and the aims of Care Matters for every child by providing appropriate support to foster carers. The Service is committed to consulting with children, young people, their parents and foster carers, and to ensuring that their views are taken into account in both individual care planning and service development.
- c) The Service regards foster carers as members of the professional care team. It is committed to providing carers with the support and training necessary to enable them to offer high quality care to all children and young people who receive family placement services.

3. Standards of Care

The standards of care within the Service are constantly monitored to ensure compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2002) and the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999).

The Service has a set of standards for use when commissioning services from external fostering agencies. These include a requirement that agencies are accredited, provide geographically appropriate placements (i.e. generally within 20 miles of Slough), provide adequate support to carers, have systems and services in place to ensure that children and young people have access to appropriate education, health and therapeutic provision and that they constitute a cost-effective use of financial resources. All such standards also are applied to the in-house fostering service.

4. Services Provided

The Fostering Service currently offers:

- a) A general fostering scheme, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, across the full range of short term, longer term and relief care placements.
- b) A specialist family-based short break scheme to support children and young people with disabilities and their families offering breaks during the day/evening and overnight stays.
- c) A supported lodgings scheme offering transitional semi-independent accommodation to young people over the age of sixteen where carers support them to gain practical skills to enable them to move on to full independence.
- d) Support to private foster carers, known to the service and the delivery of awareness-raising campaigns for carers or parents considering entering into a private fostering arrangement. (The receipt of notifications and the assessment of private foster carers is undertaken by the Children in Need Service.)

The Fostering Service is able to support these services by providing:

- i. A Family Placement Team with a wide range of skills, including specialist workers with skills relevant to developing and supporting services for children with disabilities, older young people and children from the Borough's ethnic communities in order to continue to develop services that are appropriate and accessible to all potential service users.
- ii. Close links with the Department's Children and Families Social Care Teams to ensure integrated planning and provision for individual children and young people and to ensure effective targeting of service development work.
- iii. Assessments of prospective carers in line with national standards, including preparation group work and individual assessments.
- iv. A Fostering Panel, constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new carers, matches children to long-term placements and advises on service development.
- v. Annual reviews of the registration and performance of all approved carers.
- vi. An out-of-hours telephone support service to carers.
- vii. A monthly drop-in service where foster carers can discuss any issues regarding their role or the emotional well-being of the children in their care with a therapist from the Wellbeing Service.
- viii. All foster carers are allocated a named Supervising Social Worker. These workers provide ongoing support, information and advice to all the Borough's carers while providing for their development and maintaining a supervisory and monitoring role.
- ix. A planned programme of training is provided for all foster carers which includes support to carers to achieve the new training and development standards by 2011.
- x. A clearly defined and effectively administered payments scheme which was reviewed in November 2008 and which meets the full maintenance costs of caring for children and young people, plus a professional fee payment which recognises the carers' skills and knowledge.
- xi. Children and young people in the care of Slough and their carers have access to specialist support, including Pathways Education Support and the Wellbeing Service which includes the provision of counselling, art therapy and play therapy for children in care. Foster carers are expected to attend all meetings where the education and welfare of children is discussed and to support the implementation of any recommendations.

5. Outcomes achieved in 2008/9

- It has been acknowledged that the local authority was not recruiting sufficient new foster carers to provide a full range of placements that meets the needs of children coming into care in Slough. However, the appointment of a part-time Recruitment Officer in 2008/9 facilitated a number of successful campaigns to recruit carers. (Please refer to attached Recruitment Strategy.)
- Following identification of the need to provide a semi-independent accommodation scheme for young people in care or leaving care, a successful recruitment campaign was held to obtain carers for a new supported lodgings scheme. Two carers have now been approved and a third is currently being assessed.
- Staff continued to hold workshops to support foster carers to comply with the new training, support and development standards for foster carers, which came into force in April 2008. All carers will need to have completed their portfolios by 2011.
- Ofsted inspected the Fostering Service twice in 2008/9 and awarded ratings of good for fostering and satisfactory for private fostering. Since then a review has taken place and private fostering has been reconfigured with a new policy and practice put into place.

6. Management Structure

The Family Placement Service recognises the differing needs of children and young people who require short-term, long-term and permanent alternative family placements and comprises of a Fostering Team and an Adoption & Legal Permanency Team. The Fostering Team and its managers provide specialist knowledge and skills in the provision of short-term fostering, long-term fostering, short breaks for disabled children and caring relative foster placements. The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team and its managers provide specialist knowledge and skills in the provision of adoptive placements and the assessment and support to a child's family members or friends seeking Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders.

The teams are co-located and share administrative, recruitment and other support systems. All staff are required to serve on a duty rota during the working day and have the opportunity to join the provision of an out-of-hours advice line for foster carers. The staff work closely together to provide a consistent, coherent and flexible service, which benefits from ring-fenced areas of specialist provision and management.

In order to make substantial savings in 2009/10 council budget, the post of Recruitment Officer was deleted, together with the equivalent of one full-time social worker post in the Fostering Team. The available advertising budget will enable the Service to have an additional member of staff for limited periods to support specific recruitment campaigns throughout the year.

The staffing structure is as follows:

7. Staff

The Fostering Service is part of the Education and Children's Service's integrated Children in Care and Leaving Care Services – managed by Ellis Rivers, Group Manager.

Fostering Team:

POST	RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS	EXPERIENCE
Team Manager	Qualified social worker GSCC registered NVQ4 in management	18 mths. in Fostering Team Previously team manager of fieldwork team.
Assistant Team Manager	Qualified social worker GSCC registered	22 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team.
Social Worker (MS)	Qualified social worker GSCC registered	5 years in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team.
Social Worker (MP)	Qualified social worker GSCC registered	20 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team.
Social Worker (SS)	Qualified social worker GSCC registered	6 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team.
Carer Co-ordinator, Home from Home Short Break Scheme	Occupational Therapist	17 years in Fostering Team
0.5 Social Worker, Home from Home Short Break Scheme	Qualified Social Worker GSCC registered	18 mths. in Fostering Team, following qualification.

Additional hours:

The establishment of the Fostering Team also contains 10 hours per week social work time to assess and support carers in the new supported lodgings service. Currently, these hours are being used to employ a sessional worker to undertake this role and to undertake assessments of other potential foster carers.

Adoption and Legal Permanence Team:

Team Manager	Julia Brown
Assistant Managers	1.5 full time
Expert Practitioner (Adoption Support)	1
Social Workers	4 posts

Shared staffing resources:

Social Work Assistant	1 post
Administrative support	2 posts

8. Foster Carers 2009/10

Statistical table attached.

9. Children Placed 2009/10

Statistical table attached.

10. Financial investment 2009/10

Slough Borough Council is committed to continuing to develop its Fostering Service and has sustained sufficient funding to achieve this. Funds are allocated from core and development funding to fund allowances to carers at the agreed rates and to support the activities detailed in the 2009/10 recruitment and retention strategy.

11. Complaints and Representation

All Foster Carers and Children and Young People in Care using the Service are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint. The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is issued to all children and young people in placement and includes contact details.

No complaints were received regarding foster carers for the year 2008/9.

12. Process for recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing carers

12.1. Recruiting

The Service produces an annual carer recruitment strategy designed to maximise capacity and meet identified need. This is attached.

12.2. Approving

Foster Carers are approved in line with the standards set out in the UK National Standards for Foster Care. These include expectations in all cases that:

- a) Assessments of foster carers will follow the British Association of Adoption and Fostering recommended Form F format.
- b) Carers' competencies will be assessed on their ability to provide appropriate care and educational, emotional and social skills support for children and young people who are in the care of the local authority.
- c) Each applicant will receive clear information about the process of assessment.
- d) Information to prospective carers will include a list of the competencies that they will be expected to demonstrate.
- e) Prospective carers will receive the fostering allowances document, which explains the payments scheme along with the other support provided and the expectations of anti-discriminatory practice required of registered foster carers.
- f) The assessment and approval process will involve and consider all members of the applicant's household.
- g) We aim to complete assessments within six months of application.
- h) Each assessment of a potential carer will be carried out by an appropriately qualified Social Worker.
- i) A range of verified employment, health and personal written references will be obtained on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and appropriate police, government and authority checks will be carried out.
- j) An assessment report will be prepared by the assessing social worker, including recommendation on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and recommendations as to appropriate types of placements in respect of the applicant's abilities, experience, training and support needs.
- k) Each applicant will have access to a copy of the non-confidential sections of his/her assessment report before a decision on approval is made and will have the opportunity to make written comment if they wish to do so. The confidential section of the report is confined to third party information (e.g. references).
- l) Slough Fostering Panel will consider all applications and applicants will be informed of outcomes both verbally and in writing.
- m) All prospective carers will be given the opportunity to attend Foster Panel when their application is being heard.
- n) All prospective carers will be given information about the Independent Review Mechanism. (The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), which has been in place for adoption was introduced in April 2009 for foster carers. This enables prospective foster carers to seek a review from the IRM if they are not approved as suitable to

foster a child. It also enables existing carers to seek a review if they have had their approval terminated or changed).

12.3. Training

In addition to regular Support Group Evenings and Saturday Conferences (see below), carers are able to access a wide range of training provided by the local authority and voluntary organisations (e.g. first aid).

Each carer has their own personal development plan which is reviewed annually.

The introduction of the Training Support and Development Standards from April 2008 has required all carers to complete a training programme in order to meet seven specific standards by April 2011. New carers have to complete this training within a year of their approval. Staff continue to hold workshops to support foster carers to achieve these standards and the local authority has recently bought an IT package to assist carers with achieving these standards and this will be rolled out in the early part of 2009. Training is also being provided by the Fostering Network to enable Supervising Social Workers to support carers to achieve these standards.

12.4. Supporting

The Service places a high priority on the support given to foster carers which is provided in the following ways:

- a) Each carer has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who visits the carer at least once every six weeks but more frequently if required.
- b) Fortnightly coffee mornings, including a drop-in consultation with a psychologist each month.
- c) Evening support groups every six to eight weeks, which provide a training session and an opportunity for networking.
- d) Fun days and trips for carers and children
- e) Two Saturday conferences per year for carers (with an activity day for the children) which usually include a presentation of long service awards.
- f) A Newsletter which provides the opportunity for express their views and for the service to pass on information and news.
- g) Membership of the National Fostering Network.
- h) Out of hours advice line.

12.5. Reviewing

Each foster carer has an annual review which is chaired by the Assistant Team Manager and signed off by the Team Manager. Prior to the review a report is prepared by the Supervising Social Worker which is shared with the foster carer. The views are also sought of the carer themselves, the children in placement, the carer's own children and the placing social workers.

All carers' first annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel.

13. Slough Borough Council Fostering Panel

The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches children to long-term placements, considers the assessments of private foster carers and generally advises upon and oversees the assessment and review of the Service's carers. It meets monthly (or more frequently if required).

In 2008/9 the Fostering Panel began to consider and, if appropriate, endorse the recommendations made in respect of the assessments of family members or friends seeking to care for children and young people under Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders. The local authority holds the view that care plans for these children and young people should be subject to the scrutiny of a panel, given that permanent care arrangements are being proposed.

The membership and practice conform to regulatory requirements. The Panel has 10 members who have been recruited to ensure that the Panel provides the necessary expertise and experience to fulfil its functions. These comprise of:

Independent Chair

Vice Chair

A Slough Borough Council Elected Member.

A representative from Pathways Education Support team.

A Looked After Children's Nurse.

A Foster Carer (from another local authority).

The Manager of the Family Group Conference Service

3 Social Work Members (with current Children & Families experience).

The Manager and Assistant Team Managers of the Fostering Team and the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team undertake the role of Panel Advisor as appropriate depending on the agenda items being considered by Panel.

Tina Ryan

Team Manager

Fostering, Short Break Scheme and Supported Lodgings

03.06.09

This page is intentionally left blank

Slough Borough Council Adoption Agency

Statement of Purpose 2009 - 2010

Prepared by:

Julia Brown, Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2009 – 2010

Contents

1. Context.....	3
2. The Aims and Objectives of the Agency	4
3. The Name and Address of the Registered Provider, the Responsible Individual and the Manager	5
4. Registration.....	6
5. Staffing.....	6
6. The Organisational Structure of the Agency	8
7. Links to Other Agencies	8
8. Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.....	11
9. Procedure for identifying the authority's Children in Care who would benefit from placement for adoption and for achieving their placement with appropriate adoptive families	14
10. Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters	25
11. Adoption Support Services	33
12. The Complaints Procedure	37
13. Details of the Registration Authority	37

1. Context

Slough Borough Council through the power delegated to the Director of Education and Children's Services, undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service. It seeks to operate within the requirements of:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (and all accompanying Regulations and Guidance not specifically mentioned below)
- The Children Act 1989 (and all accompanying Regulations and Guidance)
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying National Minimum Standards for Adoption
- The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- National Care Standards Commission Regulations 2003 – England
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Practice Guidance on Assessing the Support Needs of Adoptive Families (2005)
- The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2005
- The 1976 Adoption Act – Section 14
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (and associated child protection guidance)
- Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families
- Care Matters – Time for Change 2007

2. The Aims and Objectives of the Agency

The Adoption Service is part of a range of Local Authority services, which primarily seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/ her birth family a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. Where the needs of a child are such that placement for adoption is the preferred option for the child, the Adoption Agency undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances.

The priorities of the Adoption Agency are:

- i) To identify the children in the Care of Slough Borough Council who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child.
- ii) To prepare and assess prospective adopters applying to the Agency who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
- iii) To support approved and waiting adopters in achieving the placement of appropriately matched children.
- iv) To provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption by the agency and to their prospective or legal adopters during the pre-adoption period and for the first three years post-adoption, in order to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement.
- v) To provide appropriate support to the prospective adopters recruited by the Agency following the placement of children and to work effectively with placing authorities in order to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement.
- vi) To provide a range of Adoption Support Services in line with the Authority's responsibilities under the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and Section 14 of the 1976 Adoption Act and in order to minimise the risks of disruption.

The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (Regulation 4) prescribe the persons to whom the Local Authority must extend Adoption Support Services. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. where there is a significant risk of disruption) the Authority may provide services to other parties.

- vii) To fulfil its duty under The Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005 to provide, or arrange to provide, an Intercountry Adoption Service.

The Agency, by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (Reading), delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad. However once a child is placed with prospective or legal adoptive parents who reside within the borough of Slough, the Authority undertakes any required supervision of or support to these placements.

- viii) To maintain effective systems for recording, managing and keeping safe information about children placed for adoption and adopters and information received from people affected by adoption.

3. The Name and Address of the Registered Provider, the Responsible Individual and the Manger

The Registered Provider

Slough Borough Council Adoption Agency:
Slough Family Placement Service
Education and Children's Services
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
Berkshire SL1 3UQ

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker

Nicky Rayner, Assistant Director, Children and Families, Education and Children's Services, Slough Borough Council, Town Hall, Bath Road, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3UQ.

The Responsible Individual

The management of the work of the Adoption Agency is overseen by the Assistant Director, Children and Families, with day to day management of the

work of the Adoption Agency undertaken by the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager, in consultation with the Group Manager.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor is vested in the Expert Practitioner, Adoption Support, within the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team.

The Manager

The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager, together with the Assistant Team Manager, supervises the work of the Family Placement staff within the Authority who undertake adoption and permanency and adoption support work. She also provides specialist advice, information and assistance to other staff in the local authority on good practice in adoption and permanency work, in order to ensure timely and effective provision of services to service users. The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager works closely with the Fostering Team Manager within the Family Placement Service, to ensure provision of a consistent, coherent and flexible service.

4. Registration

The Agency is registered with OFSTED. No conditions are in force in relation to this registration.

5. Staffing

Qualifications and experience of the manager

Name:	Julia Brown
Date Appointed:	June 2001
Qualification:	C.Q.S.W. – Awarded 1980 With Diploma in Applied Social Studies Practice Teaching Award – Awarded 1996 Currently completing Post Graduate Diploma in Strategic Leadership
Relevant Experience:	Employed in the field of fostering and adoption since 1983. Appointed to a Senior Social Worker position in 1987. Team Manager in Slough since 2001.

Families setting. The service has generally been successful in recruiting staff with considerably more than the minimum experience required. Of the five social work staff currently in post, one has over twenty years' post qualifying experience in adoption work, and three others have between 6 and 17 years' experience of working within the specialist area of adoption. Of our two most recent recruits, one had 8 years' Children and Families fieldwork experience prior to her appointment and has now worked for two years in the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team; the other had 17 years' experience of working in a Children and Families setting including 7 years working in the Fostering Team, before joining the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team, where she has now been in post for one year.

The Team's specialist adoption support worker was appointed to the post of Expert Practitioner, Adoption Support in January 2004. She gained her CQSW in 1979, and has 20 years' experience working in Family Placement services.

Slough Borough Council is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve Post Qualifying Awards. At the current time the Assistant Team Manager has obtained the PQ Higher Specialist Award in Leadership and Management, two social workers within the team have achieved the PQ2, others have the PQ1 and also Practice Teaching Awards. One social worker is to undertake the PQ Specialist Family Placement Award in the coming year, one is undertaking a specialist Theraplay qualification and the Assistant Team Manager will be undertaking a Masters degree qualification.

6. The Organisational Structure of the Agency

See organisational chart attached.

7. Links to Other Agencies

The other consortium agencies & local voluntary agencies

The Agency is part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies Consortium and as such works in close co-operation with the other five Unitary Authority Adoption Agencies within Berkshire, together with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and with the Catholic Children's Society (Reading) which is an honorary member of the Consortium.

The Agency by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (Reading) delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

Where there is a need for any specific piece of work relating to the recruitment of applicants or the placing of children to be carried out by staff independent of the Agency, or where specific expertise is required in relation to a particular case, the Agency seeks to make arrangements for this to be undertaken or provided by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, a neighbouring local authority Adoption Agency or by a Voluntary Adoption Agency, such as PACT (Reading) or by a suitably qualified independent worker on a contractual basis, without undue delay.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by Slough Borough Council together with the five other Berkshire Unitary Authorities (The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (the host Authority), Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham District Council).

The service currently comprises of a Service Manager, an Adoption Consultant, a Direct Contact and Birth Parent Project Worker, a Letterbox Co-ordinator, a Records Officer (1 day per week based at Darwin Close, Reading) and administrative staff.

The Contract between Slough Borough Council and the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service sets out the main roles and responsibilities of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service as follows:-

- Management, training, recruitment and co-ordination of Berkshire Joint Adoption Panels.
- Management of the Berkshire Letterbox Service, including relevant administrative and professional tasks as required.
- Telephone advice on enquiries covering all aspects of adoption.
- Quality practice and procedural advice to unitary staff, managers and Adoption Panel Members on complex adoption issues including the dissemination of information.
- Management of the Berkshire database of closed Looked After and Adopted Children files pre 1992, supported by a social work service.
- Assistance with staff, carer and panel members training needs.
- Assistance with complaints relating to adoption.
- Chairing Disruption Meetings.
- Co-ordination of information regarding waiting adopters and children needing families.

- Management of the Birth Parent Project including relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption.
- Manage the post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement.
- Provide support and financial assistance to specific pan Berkshire adoption support initiatives where each unitary takes the lead on one shared aspect of adoption support. These may change according to need and in agreement with the Consortium adoption teams.
- Fund and organise the following:
 - Three years membership of Adoption UK for all prospective adopters approved by Berkshire Consortium adoption agencies.
 - Arrange and fund annual adopter's conference or equivalent.

The National Adoption Register

The National Adoption Register is a national database of information of children waiting to be placed for adoption and approved adopters who await linking. The Register is operated by BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) and generates suggested links between children and prospective adopters.

All approved adopters who are not linked or being actively considered for a potential match within three months of their approval are required to at that stage to be referred to the Register so that they can be made available for consideration by other Placing Authorities (subject to the adopters' consent). Placing Authorities are likewise required to refer children needing placement to the Register, if prospective adopters have not been identified for them via other sources within three months of their adoption plan having been considered by the Placing Authority's Adoption Panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

Slough Borough Council seeks to be proactive in seeking to achieve appropriate placements for children needing placement for adoption both within the Authority, within the Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium and nationally. Therefore, while all approved adopters are firstly considered for children originating from within the Consortium, where a suitable link is not identified within the first three months of applicants being approved they are advised to agree to their details being included on the Register. Likewise while approved and waiting families available from within the Consortium are

firstly considered for any Slough child needing placement, if a suitable match cannot be identified within a few weeks of adoption becoming the plan for a child an early referral to the Register will be considered alongside other placement options being pursued.

If the range of approved and prospective adopters or the identified placement needs of a child are such that it is unlikely that a suitable 'match' will be identified within the Consortium, referral to the Register will be considered immediately following Agency approval (of the prospective adopter(s) or the adoption plan for the child) in order to maximise the chances of an appropriate link being identified without undue delay.

8. Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard

The Agency is committed to seeking feedback from service users in order to inform future service provision.

At the current time a fairly robust system is in place to seek feedback from prospective and legal adopters at key points in the adoption process.

Systems are also in place to seek feedback from birth parents who use the services of the Birth Parent Project Worker at the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service.

The Agency is committed to putting in place systems for seeking feedback from children being placed for adoption, however many are not of an age and understanding at the time of placement to express an informed view.

As part of the adoption support service, systems are in place to seek and monitor feedback on the services provided to adoptive parents, following adoption order, and adult adoptees, following birth records counselling. We are currently introducing systems for feedback from birth relatives, following enquiries about tracing adopted relatives

In addition feedback is obtained and collated from adopters who attend the Adoption Support Group meetings; adopters following Life Appreciation Days; birth mothers who attend the Birth Mothers Support Group and from foster carers, after children have been moved on to adoption placements, regarding their views on this process.

Feedback from the Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service provides annual information about the feedback received from the birth parents/ relatives and adopters to whom it provides services on behalf of Slough Borough Council's Adoption Agency. Feedback can additionally be sought in relation to a specific case and/ or will be provided on specific issues arising if there appears to be reasons for concern about the nature or quality of any service offered or provided.

Feedback from adoptive parents

Adoptive parents are consulted on their views at several stages of the adoption process as well as having the opportunity to attend the Agency's Adoption Panel when their application to be approved to adopt is considered, and to give feedback on how they experience the Adoption Panel.

Applicants receive a visit from a worker and/ or a facilitator responsible for running the preparation groups that they attend, and feedback is sought on how applicants have experienced the content, structure and facilitation of the group. All applicants receive a 'second opinion' visit from the Adoption & Legal Permanence Assistant Team Manager at the end of the home study process, prior to their application being considered by the Agency's Adoption Panel. This interview serves a number of purposes, one of which is to invite applicants to share their views about how the preparation and assessment process has been managed by the Agency and experienced by them.

All applicants who are engaged with the Agency are also asked to complete a questionnaire after an Adoption Order has been granted.

A 'year on' letter is sent to adopters by the Adoption Support Worker one year after the adoption order has been granted, in order to review their adoption experience and to take up any issues with regard to adoption support. The letter offers a visit to discuss issues in more detail if necessary.

In addition the Adoption Advisory Service, which manages the Adoption Panel on behalf of the Agency, requests feed-back from all applicants who attend the panel, via a questionnaire, after their application and any proposed 'match' has been considered at panel.

Post- approval Reviews are also undertaken with all approved and waiting adopters in line with regulations. Reviews take place:

- Whenever the agency considers it necessary

- Not more than one year following approval and afterwards at intervals of not more than one year
- Until a child is placed with the prospective adopters or they formally withdraw from the adoption process

Reviews are carried out by the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team's Assistant Team Manager, who meets with the prospective adopters and their link worker. Their views are elicited and taken into account in the Review process. If the prospective adopters wish to continue to be approved to adopt, a Review report is compiled which is shared with them, and they have the opportunity to comment on its contents.

At the current time prospective applicants who request an information pack but who do not subsequently take their enquiry further are not followed up. If they attend an Information Meeting but do not proceed further, feedback is sought to understand the reason for this and whether the reasons can inform the Agency's processes, although follow-up may be limited.

Where applicants decide not to proceed after attending preparation groups, this will be after a formal application has been made, and their reasons will always be discussed and recorded, as for approved adopters who decide to withdraw from the adoption process prior to achieving a placement

Feedback from birth parents

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service has a designated staff member who undertakes Birth Parent Counselling on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, thus removing the role from staff who have any involvement in placing their child. This separation of roles appears to have assisted a number of the birth parents of children that the Authority has placed for adoption in accessing appropriate counselling and support, and engaging with the provision of background information for their child.

When the Birth Parents Project Worker has concluded her involvement, birth parents are asked to give their views on the service that they have received via a questionnaire.

Where birth parents are able to engage with the Agency or with the Birth Parent Project at the stage that plans are being made to place their child for adoption, their thoughts and wishes are proactively sought, both regarding the adoption plan and the type of family with whom they would wish their child to be placed.

Except where birth parents sever all links with the Agency, contact is maintained with birth parents until the adoption of their child is legally concluded.

The Birth Parent Project Worker re-contacts all birth parents with whom she has been engaged once the legal adoption of their child has been concluded, in order to advise them of the Adoption Support Services available for birth parents both locally and nationally. This provides a further forum for obtaining feedback on services provided which is then formally recorded/ monitored.

Evaluating and responding to feedback

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Authority, this is referred to/ considered by the relevant Team Manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaising with external agencies/ organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Agency to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be dealt with via Slough Borough Council's Complaints Procedure (see section 12 below).

Statistical correlation of the feedback from service users is an area for development.

9. Procedure for identifying the authority's children in Care who would benefit from placement for adoption and for achieving their placement with appropriate adoptive families

Slough Borough Council supports the basic principles that:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/ her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children, whenever possible, to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe, secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process

- Children's views should be listened to, recorded and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs

Making the plan for adoption

In line with adoption Guidance, all children in the Care of the local authority have a Plan for Permanence considered at the four-month review (or sooner if return to the care of their birth parent(s) is clearly not an appropriate or achievable option).

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that all children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. A spectrum of options exists ranging from rehabilitation to adoption and the planning process serves to identify which option is most likely to meet each child's individual needs.

The Authority, while making all reasonable efforts to rehabilitate children in Care with their families (unless this is clearly inappropriate for the child) is mindful of the need to balance the benefits of rehabilitation against recognition of the importance of timescales in a child's life.

Where the care plan for the child is to attempt rehabilitation but the outcome is uncertain, contingency plans will be identified. This can mean that a parallel plan for adoption runs alongside the plan for rehabilitation and/ or exploration of the extended family as permanent carers. If this is the case then some preparatory work in relation to adoption will begin, in order to avoid later delay for the child if a return to the birth family is not achieved.

If the assessments of the birth parent(s) and the known extended family members indicate that the child should not be returned to their care then permanence outside of the family will become the care plan. Whether adoption is the preferred placement option will depend on the child's age and an assessment of the child's needs, his/ her wishes and feelings and his/ her likely ability to attach to future carers/ prospective adopters. The level of contact that the child needs or would benefit from maintaining with various birth family members may also influence the decision.

The process following the decision that adoption is the plan for the child

Once the care plan for a child becomes adoption, ongoing permanency planning meetings are held, chaired by a manager from the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team. The purpose of these meetings is to agree and

track the work that needs to be done, including timescales and who is responsible for completing the required actions.

The work that needs to be done with or for the child will be identified. As far as is reasonably practicable, appropriate counselling will be provided for the child to explain the adoption process and the legal implications of adoption and to explore his/ her wishes and feelings.

The work that needs to be done with the birth parent(s) and/ or extended family members will also be identified and consideration given to contact arrangements both pre- and post-placement.

Arrangements will be made for the child to have an Adoption Agency Medical unless he/ she is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to have one.

Timescales for presentation to the Adoption Panel will be considered alongside any court proceedings and appropriately dovetailed. Where Care Proceedings are on-going it is usual to present to the Adoption Panel during the month prior to the final hearing. However, if all assessments have been completed, presentation to panel can happen at an earlier stage.

Reports for panel

The Child's Permanence Report (CPR) is written in line with the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 using the exemplar provided by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The completion of the report will be undertaken and supervised by appropriately qualified staff, in line with regulations.

Where the child is of an age to express an informed view on the adoption plan this will be recorded.

The birth parents' views are ascertained where possible, they are given the opportunity to see what has been written about them in the CPR and receive a copy of the report or the parts that are relevant to them.

Preparation for panel

Children who are being considered by panel with a view to adoption may wish to make a submission to the panel and will be supported in doing so. If an older child requests to attend panel, positive encouragement and support will be provided for him/ her to do so.

Panel

The social worker for the child and his/ her supervisor or line manager, as appropriate, attend the Adoption Panel and respond to any questions/ issues/ concerns that the panel may raise in relation to the case and/ or the adoption plan.

The panel will make a recommendation as to whether a child should be placed for adoption following consideration of the reports presented, the legal advice and any other information provided.

Where the panel makes a recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption it will consider, and may give advice to the agency about, contact arrangements and whether an application should be made by the authority for a Placement Order. (The Authority can only place a child for adoption if it has either the consent of the birth parent(s) or a Placement Order).

The Agency Decision Maker will then make the agency decision within 7 working days of the panel meeting.

Relinquished babies

The Agency has specific procedures to deal with situations where birth mothers request that their unborn baby or young infant/ child be placed for adoption.

Whilst these cases may appear to be relatively straightforward they often prove to be highly complex and legally fraught and this is taken into account when allocation is considered.

Providing the child's parent(s) with practical and/ or emotional support and appropriate information will often enable the parent to reconsider the long term implications of adoption for both the child and themselves, and may lead to the child remaining with them or returning to their care, rather than a premature decision being made at a time of crisis.

If the child is accommodated by the authority every effort will be made to maintain an appropriate level of contact between the birth parent(s) and the child until a final decision about adoption is reached.

If it is not possible for the child to be appropriately placed within the extended family and the birth parent(s) maintain the view that adoption is the preferred option for their child, then a plan for adoption outside of the family will be agreed and the child presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration.

The matching and linking process

The agency is always mindful of the detrimental impact of delay on children and will seek to ensure that appropriate placements are achieved for each child within six months of the Agency deciding that the child should be placed for adoption or the granting of a Care Order. (If the child is aged under six months and the birth parent(s) request that the child be placed, this should be achieved within 3 months) provided that doing so is not likely to be against the best interests of the child.

The matching criteria

When adoption becomes the plan for a child his/ her individual placement needs will be identified and written 'matching criteria' drawn up.

Where at all possible, and if consistent with their individual assessed needs and welfare, the Agency will always seek to place siblings together. However the individual needs of different children within sibling pairs/ groups will be assessed and given due consideration in reaching decisions as to whether they should be placed together or separately for adoption - where siblings are to be placed together it is recognised that each child will still have different needs and the matching criteria will reflect this.

A Family Finder will be allocated from the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team, who will assist the child's social worker in focusing on the child's background, earlier life experiences and presenting placement needs, and in assessing what the longer-term implications of these are likely to be both for the child and for his/ her future carers.

Consideration is given to what adoption support may be needed in order for the prospective adopter(s) to parent the child, and this will include consideration of financial support.

Applications from current foster carer(s) or anyone with an established relationship with the child

If a child's current carer(s) or anyone else with an established relationship with the child indicate that they wish to be considered as potential adopter(s) for the child, their application may be considered alongside other approved and waiting adopters available within the consortium and, depending on the placement needs of the child, approved and waiting adopters available outside the consortium.

Whilst acknowledging that the established relationship(s) and associated attachments may be significant, the agency must make sure that the family selected is the one that is likely to be best able to meet the child's identified short and long-term needs throughout childhood and into adult life.

The matching process

In addressing the process of matching, the Agency will look at each child's needs holistically. No one aspect of their needs will take precedence over another where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all.

The Agency is proactive in seeking to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of each child's ethnic origins, culture, language and religion. However no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be identified.

Once the matching criteria have been written and the first draft of the Child's Permanence Report is available the Family Finder will consult the list of approved adopters available within the Consortium and access appropriate prospective adopters' reports.

At the same time the child's profile will be circulated within the Consortium - this will not only identify approved and waiting adopters but also those still under assessment who it may be appropriate to consider.

If a child's placement needs are such that it appears unlikely that prospective adopter(s) will be identified from within the consortium, wider distribution of the profile will be progressed and the possibility of national advertising considered. Consideration will be given to whether the child's name should be placed on the National Adoption Register at an early stage. In such circumstances the viability of matching to available families is considered as an on-going process, in order to reduce the risk of losing potential families who may be suitable.

The Family Finder reads all prospective adopters' reports received alongside the matching criteria and eliminates those which are obviously unsuitable. The remaining prospective adopters' reports are shared in full with the child's social worker.

Having both read the appropriate prospective adopters' reports, the family finder and the child's social worker will agree a shortlist of families who appear to have the potential to meet the child's placement needs.

At this stage the Child's Permanence Report will be shared with the link workers of any families shortlisted, if this has not already happened.

When potential matches have been identified

In the event of a large number of potential families being available to meet the needs of a child, an initial linking meeting will be held, in order to shortlist those most suitable.

Once a list of potentially suitable families has been identified the family finder for the child will contact the link worker(s) for each of the families under consideration to confirm the way forward, including arranging visits to the families.

The matching meeting

A formal matching meeting is held for the placement of every child in relation to a proposed adoptive placement, chaired by a manager from the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team.

In addition to the Chair, the meeting should be attended by the child's social worker; the family finder and the link workers for the shortlisted adoptive families, together with any of their supervisors/ managers as appropriate.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the likely capacity of each family to meet the child's current and anticipated longer term needs is carefully and objectively considered. The needs of the child requiring placement take absolute priority.

Process following the matching meeting and prior to presentation at the adoption panel

The decision to proceed to Adoption Panel with a match is made formally at a matching meeting, at which the family's ability to meet the child's identified needs will be considered in detail.

Where the matching meeting identifies that no family being considered is likely to meet the needs of the child family finding will continue.

Where the meeting identifies one or more families as being a potentially suitable match for the child, the necessary visits will be arranged.

Following the meeting and any subsequent visit(s) a family of first choice will usually be identified. Once prospective adopters are identified, full written information will be shared with them including the Child's Permanence Report,

medical information, any psychological assessment(s) and any other information that the agency considers relevant.

Where information on a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to Professionals and other relevant people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision about whether to proceed. A meeting with the agency's medical adviser and the child's current foster carer will be arranged prior to any proposed match being presented to the Adoption Panel.

The Adoption Placement Report will be written by an appropriately qualified and experienced worker (or where this is not possible the worker will be closely supervised by someone who has the required level of qualification and experience).

The Adoption Placement Report will detail the reasons for proposing the placement and the views of the prospective adopter(s). It will be shared with the prospective adopters at least 10 days prior to the papers being submitted for the Adoption Panel's consideration.

Note – except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. the placement of a profoundly disabled child) it is not usual practice for the prospective adopter(s) to meet the child prior to the adoption panel considering the proposed match and the Agency Decision Maker subsequently reaching his/ her decision.

The Adoption Support Plan will be drawn up and presented to the Adoption Panel alongside the Adoption Placement Report. The Adoption Support Plan identifies the child and the prospective adopter(s)' anticipated support needs both in the immediate post-placement period and in the longer term, and how these will be addressed by both the Placing Authority and the Agency which approved the prospective adopter(s). The local authority in whose area the prospective adopters live may also have a role in supporting the placement, if different from the prospective adopter(s)' approving agency, and could be consulted in drawing up the Support Plan, but should be sent a copy of it following the Agency Decision.

The Support Plan also details any arrangements necessary to assist any direct or indirect contact between the prospective adopter(s) on behalf of the child, and members of the birth family. The child's needs, welfare, wishes and safety will be the most important concern when considering the possibility of

maintaining links between the child and his/ her birth family members post-placement, whether by indirect or direct contact.

The prospective adopter(s) will be consulted and their likely support needs discussed, in the preparation of the Adoption Support Plan. The Plan will include the process by which the adoption support arrangements will be reviewed.

Panel

The social worker for the child and the link worker for the prospective adopter(s) will both attend the adoption panel, together with the family finder. The prospective adopters are also invited to attend. Workers will be prepared to respond to any questions/ issues/ concerns that the panel members may wish to raise in relation to the proposed match.

The panel will make a recommendation following consideration of all the information available. The panel can recommend that a proposed match is approved, that it is deferred, or that it is not approved.

Panel may also give advice about the proposals for adoption support services, contact arrangements and whether the parental responsibility of any parent(s) or guardian(s) or the prospective adopter(s) should be restricted and if so the extent of any such restriction.

The final decision in respect of any proposed match rests with the Adoption Agency Decision Maker. If the panel recommends that a match is approved and this is endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker then the placement planning and introductory process can proceed.

Process following the approval of a proposed match

Following the approval of a proposed match the child will be informed in a way appropriate to his/ her age and level of understanding.

Before introductions begin, work will be undertaken with the child to fully prepare him/ her for joining the particular family with whom he/ she has been matched. Each child will be offered support by a named social worker in preparing to move and in managing the impact of the changes that placement will necessitate, which might also include termination of previous direct contact with birth parent(s), sibling(s) and/ or other family members as well as the loss of their previous carer(s).

It is expected that similar work will also be undertaken with the prospective adopter(s) by their approving agency. Consideration will always be given to holding a Life Appreciation Day to assist the prospective adopter(s) in becoming fully aware of the child's history, needs, behaviours and potential areas of difficulty. If the prospective adopter(s) decide to withdraw, it is preferable that they do so at this stage, rather than later which would expose the child to further rejection.

Planning the introductions

A placement planning meeting is held following the necessary preparations, and a formal inter-agency meeting will also take place if the child is being placed with prospective adopter(s) approved by another agency.

The planning meeting will agree a plan of introductions between the child and the prospective adopter(s) which will include a minimum of one formal review of the introductions before placement. It will also identify what other meetings should take place during the introductory period and what information may be outstanding. Arrangements will usually be made for the prospective adopter(s) to meet significant members of the child's birth family if appropriate, and other meetings will be scheduled with any other significant people, such as teacher(s) or therapist(s).

In agreeing the programme of introductions between the child and the prospective adopter(s) the length and pace of the introductions will be primarily dictated by the needs and responses of the child.

Prior to the placement proceeding the prospective adopter(s) are provided with full written information in respect of the child including the Adoption Placement Plan and a written statement by the Authority detailing how Parental Responsibility for the child is to be shared. The agency may only place the child with the prospective adopter(s) when the prospective adopter(s) have notified the agency that they wish to proceed with the placement, therefore a letter detailing the terms of the placement is sent to the prospective adopter(s) and they are required to respond to the authority before the placement is effected.

Before the agency places the child formal notifications are sent to the prospective adopter(s)' G.P, their Local Authority, the Primary Care Trust in whose area they reside and where necessary to the prospective adopter(s)' Local Education Authority.

The prospective adopter(s) are also given written details of how and where to access support following the placement of the child including details of who to contact for advice/ support outside of normal office hours.

On the day that the child is placed the transfer of care is supervised by a worker, usually from the placing authority.

Support and actions following placement

Following a placement being effected the child's social worker retains responsibility for monitoring the child's welfare, whilst the prospective adopter(s)' link worker is primarily responsible for supporting them.

The Placing Authority is legally required to visit and see any child placed under Adoption Regulations within one week of placement and at least once a week until the first review. The child's social worker will usually undertake these visits. Where this is not possible arrangements are made for another worker to undertake the visits on his/ her behalf.

Visits by the child's social worker are usually dovetailed with those made by the prospective adopter(s)' link worker. In some instances joint visits will be made.

As part of each visit the child's social worker will usually ensure that the child is seen without the prospective adopter(s) being present unless the child is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to see the social worker alone.

While supervision of the child's welfare rests with the Placing Authority, it can, by agreement, be delegated to the prospective adopter(s)' approving agency. However, good practice suggests that the placing authority should always retain a significant role in the supervision of the placement, and Slough Borough Council never routinely asks another local authority or adoption agency to undertake Welfare Supervision of a child's pre-adoption placement on the authority's behalf.

All Placing Authorities are legally required to review the placements of all children placed for adoption within certain time frames:

1st review not more than 4 weeks after the date of placement

2nd review not more than 3 months after the first review

3rd and subsequent reviews within 6 months of the previous review.

Slough Borough Council ensures that reviews are held in line with regulations, and maintains 3-monthly intervals between reviews for all children identified as requiring adoption, and placed for adoption, in line with best practice. All reviews are independently chaired and every effort is made to ensure that the prospective adopter(s), the child's social worker and the prospective adopter(s)' link worker are all present. Reviews will always focus on the child's welfare within the placement.

When it is apparent that adoption by the prospective adopter(s) is in the best interests of the child, the authority will support an adoption application being progressed.

10. Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

Recruitment of adopters

The Family Placement Service no longer has a joint Recruitment and Retention Officer post, which will potentially reduce our levels of recruitment by adversely impacting on recruitment activity.

An annual recruitment and retention strategy for the Family Placement Service is drawn up, with certain activities geared to the recruitment of adoptive parents for Slough. Recruitment may be specifically focussed to meet the needs of children in Care from the diverse ethnic communities of Slough. We work closely with the borough's Communications and Marketing Department to ensure maximum impact of recruitment efforts, which include a variety of advertising in publications, press and radio, editorial features in local press, and running information stalls at local venues and events. The Agency has co-operated with consortium-wide initiatives, and seeks to maintain a level of public awareness of the wider national need for adopters, for example by undertaking recruitment campaigns linked to National Adoption Week in the Autumn of each year. We have also taken advantage of opportunities to use the national press, TV features and BAAF's Be My Parent website to profile specific children for whom it has proved difficult to identify adoptive families.

All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice and responded to promptly and impartially. They are given/ sent clear written information about adoption in general, children who need adoptive families, the agency's expectations of adopters, the recruitment, preparation,

assessment and approval process and the subsequent matching and placing process.

While the Agency is committed to providing a service to adults within the Slough community who are wishing to adopt, this service has to be managed within the financial constraints under which the Authority operates and balanced against the needs of other service users. The Agency may not always be able to accept/ process applications from all those who wish to be considered as prospective adopters. Any decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application is based on:

- The minimum legal and Agency criteria
- The Agency's priority areas for recruitment

Applications are prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of the type of children for whom we are likely to be seeking adoptive families. This will include:

- Single children aged 4 years or over
- Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged 4 years or over
- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Children from minority ethnic groups
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/ medical care
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability
- Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties

All applicants are expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there may be incomplete background and/ or health information, and future uncertainty.

Preparation of Applicants

All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an Information Meeting and an Adopters' Preparation Group if they have not previously adopted a child through the Agency. The material used is designed to provide prospective adopters with information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children, both within Berkshire and nationally, who need adoptive parents. The training material used is based on BAAF's 'Preparing to Adopt' course, and is kept under review.

The purpose of the information meeting and preparation group is to meet the legal requirement to provide prospective adopters with the information that they need about adoption in general, the Adoption Agency and the profile and needs of children requiring placement, in order to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to proceed with their adoption application and to prepare them for the assessment and approval process and the adoption task. Prospective applicants understand that attending the information meeting imposes no commitment on either side to proceed. A formal application is made and accepted prior to attendance at a preparation group.

The Agency works in co-operation with three of the other five unitary authorities within the Berkshire Consortium (Windsor & Maidenhead, Bracknell and West Berkshire) to run a rolling programme of information meetings every two months, and preparation group meetings three times a year. In addition, Wokingham and Reading run their own information meetings and preparation groups, and can offer unfilled places to the other unitary authorities, if needed to avoid a particular delay for applicants to attend a preparation group. All applicants are given the opportunity to meet with existing adopters during the preparation programme.

Assessment of Applicants

Applicants wishing to be assessed by the Agency as prospective adopters are invited to make a full application after attending an information meeting and having a home visit to discuss their particular circumstances with a social worker from the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team. Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau and Local Authority checks are taken up prior to preparation group attendance.

The Agency will prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.

When the Agency decides not to proceed with an application, applicants will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to them.

The Agency seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, as addressed within the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report home study format.

The 'home study' assessment is undertaken by a specific worker, with a 'second opinion' being provided by a manager of the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team, usually the Assistant Team Manager. Social workers undertaking the assessment of prospective adopters will usually have experience of adoption and family placement work and be trained and experienced in assessment. Where this is not the case they will be closely supervised and supported by a worker with the appropriate level of knowledge, experience and training.

Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

While the Agency does not subscribe to the pure model of competency based assessments, prospective adopters are assisted, through both the preparation groups and the homestudy process, to consider/ identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.

A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations and Guidance.

In working with adoptive applicants the Agency seeks to balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays. Applicants are kept informed of the progress of their application throughout.

Wherever possible the Agency seeks to present applicants to the Agency's Adoption Panel for consideration within eight months of accepting their formal application, in line with Adoption Guidance.

Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care are welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster carers who make application to

adopt children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters.

All adoptive applicants receive a copy of both their assessment report and the second opinion report in respect of their application, at least 10 days prior to the reports being submitted to the Adoption Panel and they are invited to send their views on the report in writing to the agency. Any comments are then considered by the Adoption Panel at the time that the application is considered.

At the current time the Agency delegates the preparation and assessment of inter-country adoption applicants to a local Voluntary Adoption Agency. (Please see Section 8 above). The Agency regularly reviews the contract in place with this Agency to ensure that the work undertaken with enquirers and applicants is in line with the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005 and accompanying guidance.

Approval processes

All adoptive applicants seeking approval have their application presented to the Agency's Adoption Panel for consideration.

The Agency shares a joint Adoption Panel with the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest Borough Council (in accordance with Regulation 3.5 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005)

The composition of the Panel is in line with Regulations. Panel is held monthly. Additional Panels are arranged if needed.

The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the Adoption Panel Adviser (Service Manager, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service).

Panel members and the Adoption Agency's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the Panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the Panel meeting.

The link worker for the applicants, or in her/ his absence, their manager will be present when an application is considered, to answer the Panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend Panel.

The recommendation of the Panel is conveyed verbally to the applicants on the day of Panel and to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker by the Berkshire

Adoption Advisory Service within 24 working hours (draft minutes are forwarded within four working days).

The Decision Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven working days of the Panel meeting. The Decision Maker will convey her decision in writing to the applicants' link worker and the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager. The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager ensures letters confirming the Agency's decision, signed by the Agency Decision Maker, are sent to the applicants.

In the event of an application being deferred or turned down, adoptive applicants are informed of their right to make representation or complaint, including the process for referral to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Approval relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover placement of children from abroad.

All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of children via the Berkshire Local Authorities Adoption Consortium. However, if a suitable placement is not identified within the first three months of their approval, prospective adopters will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing agencies via the National Adoption Register (see section 8 above).

Support to prospective adopters approved by the agency

Approved adopters are given an information pack which gives clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.

All approved and waiting adopters have a named social worker from the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team (link worker) who provides them with regular support throughout the post approval period and assists them in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and to objectively evaluate whether it is appropriate to pursue possible links.

When prospective adopters are considering a child/children the Agency will seek to ensure that they are provided with as much written information as is available to help them to understand the needs and background of the child and will provide the opportunity for them to discuss the details and the implications for them and their family. Where information about a child is shared either verbally or in writing prospective adopters will be informed of the need to keep all information confidential and not to share details with anyone

outside of their immediate family, unless they are ultimately matched with the child. Where prospective adopters are identified as being an appropriate match for a child/children the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan will be discussed with them, and their views obtained prior to the reports being finalised for presentation to panel. The Agency will seek to ensure that they are provided with the Adoption Placement Report at least 10 days prior to the papers being submitted to the Placing Authority's Adoption Panel for consideration of the proposed match, and that they are invited to give their views on it in writing.

Where information on a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision about whether to proceed. An appointment to discuss any medical issues will always be sought with the Placing Authority's Medical Adviser.

The Agency will assess the risks there may be to the prospective adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these.

The Agency will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and the future adoption of a child.

Where prospective adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Agency will provide advice, support and training, as appropriate, to enable the prospective adopters to promote the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about, and connection to, his origins. The Agency will seek to help prospective adopters to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.

The Agency will ensure that prospective adoptive parents are informed prior to a placement about support services that are available within their area, should they or the child require specialist support after placement or after an adoption order has been made, and how they might access these services. The Agency will seek to contribute to the Placement Support Plan drawn up by the Placing Authority.

The Agency will ensure that prospective adopters are aware of what (if any) financial support, such as an adoption allowance, may be payable in respect

of the child and the process by which the payment of any allowance will be reviewed. The Agency will also seek to ensure that prospective adopters are aware of any benefits to which they or the child might be entitled, and how they might claim them.

Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Agency will continue to receive link-work support from an identified social worker within the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team, until such time as the legal adoption is concluded.

All adopters within the Slough Borough Council area will also have access to the Adoption Support Services Adviser, who can assist with referral to the Psychology Service/ Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Team should they require specific advice/ support in relation to the emotional and/or behavioural development of any child placed with them.

It is the expectation of the Agency that all children placed with adopters approved by Slough Borough Council will have a named social worker who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting him within the placement.

The Agency will encourage adopters to formally sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members that is agreed at the time of placement, and will support them in facilitating these arrangements.

Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive status and history within the family.

The Agency will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on making an adoption application to Court at the appropriate time. (The Agency will expect the Court Application Fee to be met by the Placing Authority).

The Agency recognises that timely and effective support can help to avoid placement disruptions. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or harm and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten a placement, whatever services have been made available.

Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity, the Agency will seek to ensure that:

- Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child

- The child's welfare remains the first consideration
- The Review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child
- The possibility of placement disruption is acknowledged and planned appropriately
- If a disruption occurs a Disruption Meeting is held in order to assist the responsible Agency in gathering as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future.

11. Adoption Support Services

The Agency recognises that the Adoption & Children Act 2002 places a duty on every Local Authority to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs in relation to adoption of:

- Children who have been or may be adopted
- The birth relatives of such children (i.e. relatives within the meaning of Section 14.4 (1) of the Act)
- Any person with whom the adopted child has a relationship which appears to the Local Authority to be beneficial to the welfare of the child
- Persons who have adopted or may adopt a child
- Any children of such persons (whether by birth or adoption)

In addition, the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005, require Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of a range of Adoption Support Services and places duties on Local Authorities to carry out assessments of need for Adoption Support Services and having carried out an assessment to decide whether to provide any services. Moreover, Local Authorities must act reasonably in deciding whether to provide Adoption Support Services following an assessment, although there is a presumption that an assessment of need for a service will not automatically result in the provision of that service

While the Agency recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees, in reaching any decision as to what services to provide the Authority will take into account both the

circumstances of each individual case and the resources that are available locally.

Slough Borough Council is committed to providing the full range of Adoption Support Services that Local Authorities are required by Regulations to provide. These services are:

- Counselling, advice and information
- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child
- Services in relation to therapeutic needs of an adoptive child
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, including making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions

While Slough Borough Council seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Authority may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either other Local Authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, Voluntary Adoption Agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Authority's full range of Adoption Support Services are not available to those involved in adoptions by:

- A child's birth parent
- The partner of a child's birth parent

In these cases services provided are limited to counselling, advice and information.

The Authority is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all children and families who are engaged with Children's Services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted children and their families also have access to mainstream services available to children and families with particular needs.

The Agency is also committed to providing counselling and support services to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

Adult adoptees

The Local Authority is responsible for providing a birth records counselling service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing on request, advice and counselling about their adoption, together with any information that is available from adoption records. In the case of persons adopted before 12 November 1975, the Agency provides counselling in line with relevant legal requirements before sharing any information available.

Counselling is also provided for adult adoptees adopted after 12/11/75 if this is requested, and the Agency encourages adoptees to make use of this service.

Where an adult adoptee who does not live in the Slough Borough Council area is seeking information from his/ her adoption records and Slough Borough Council is the Appropriate Adoption Agency, advice and counselling about the process is provided and the Authority co-operates in providing information from its records to any Adoption Support Agency involved or to the Local Authority in whose area the adoptee lives, in order to facilitate that person accessing his/ her adoption records.

When the Agency is approached by another Adoption Agency seeking information from the adoption case records for an adoptee who remains under the age of 18 the Agency will only release information if there are clear reasons to suggest that this would be in keeping with the best interests of the young person and with the consent of the adoptive parent(s).

If an adoptee is seeking to trace a birth relative he/ she is informed that the Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, however if the adoptee is able to provide the name and address of the person who he/she wishes to contact the Agency will, where staffing permits, provide an intermediary service. Alternatively the Agency will provide details of other agencies and organisations that provide tracing and/or intermediary services or that might be able to offer additional support appropriate to the individual's needs.

All adoptees are provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

Intermediary services for birth relatives

Where a birth parent or sibling or grandparent of an adopted person lives within the Slough Borough Council area and is wishing to establish contact with his/ her birth child/ sibling/ grandchild he/ she is offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not generally in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted him/ herself.

Birth relatives are provided with a list of Registered Adoption Support Agencies and encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General.

The Agency only routinely provides intermediary services where the following criteria are met:

- The birth relative lives within the Slough Borough Council Area
- The birth relative is able to provide the name and address of the person who they wish to make contact with
- The birth relative is able to provide evidence of their relationship to the adoptee

- The adopted person is over the age of 18 and was originally placed for adoption by Slough Borough Council

All birth relatives seeking to achieve a reunion are advised of the services of Adults Affected by Adoption National Organisation for the Reunion of Child and Parent (AAA-NORCAP).

Where the Agency is acting as an intermediary, if contact with the adopted person is established and if he/ she wishes to have contact with his/ her birth relative(s) all parties are offered support prior to and following any reunion. Intermediary work normally involves collaborative work with other appropriate adoption agencies. While the Agency is acting as an intermediary, support will be made available to any involved party if their circumstances suggest that this would be helpful.

12. The Complaints Procedure

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of children for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about the local authority's Complaints Procedure.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the Complaints Procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services and other relevant organisations.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process as appropriate.

The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager, together with the Team Manager for the Fostering service, monitor all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Family Placement Service.

13. Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED

National Business Unit

Royal Exchange Buildings

St. Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Julia Brown

Adoption and Legal Permanence Team Manager

July 2009

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

AGENDA ITEM 17

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank