

**ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S
SERVICES

Annual Report
Rotherham Adoption Panel

2014/15

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Slovak

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Slovensky

Kurdish Sorani

کوردی سۆرانی
نهگهر تو یان که سیک که تو دهیناسی پیویستی بهیارمتهی هه بیت بو نهوهی لهم بهنگهنامه به تیگات یان بیخوینتهوه،
تکایه په یوه ندیمان پیوه بکه له سهه نهو ژماره یه ی سهه وه دا یان بهو نیمه یله.

Arabic

عربي
إذا كنت أنت أو أي شخص تعرفه بحاجة إلى مساعدة لفهم أو قراءة هذه الوثيقة، الرجاء الاتصال على الرقم اعلاه، أو مراسلتنا عبر البريد الإلكتروني

Urdu

اُردو
اگر آپ یا آپ کے جاننے والے کسی شخص کو اس دستاویز کو سمجھنے یا پڑھنے کیلئے مدد کی ضرورت ہے تو
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا نمبر پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں یا ہمیں ای میل کریں۔

Farsi

فارسی
اگر جناب عالی یا شخص دیگری که شما اورا می شناسید برای خواندن یا فهمیدن این مدارک نیاز به کمک دارد لطفاً با
ما بوسیله شماره بالا یا ایمیل تماس حاصل فرمایید.

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1. Purpose of Report

This is a report to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Adoption Panel. It reports on the business of the panel and the Adoption Agency in 2014/15 and provides statistical information on Adoption Agency business in 2015/16 up to end of April 2015. As well as reporting on the activity of the panel and providing a brief summary of the work which is undertaken by the panel, it considers the feedback and monitoring completed by the panel and the quality of reports presented to it.

This report provides an opportunity for the panel, led by the panel chair, to reflect on the work of the panel and the Agency in the reporting period and to respond, either challenging the Agency where and if necessary and /or commending the Agency wherever it is felt good practice or quality improvements have been made. The agency will request a written response from the panel chair which will be shared with and considered by the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption.

2. Introduction

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Agency Adoption Panel has two primary functions, as follows:

- The panel is required to make recommendations regarding the suitability of prospective adopters
- The panel matches children who have a plan of adoption to suitable prospective adopters.

The panel works within the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services 2011.

3 Panel Composition

The panel manages its business in a professional and consistent manner with no significant skill gaps being identified by the panel or the agency. This is regularly reviewed through individual Professional Development Reviews.

The central list is currently made up of 10 members. These include an independent Chairperson who is not an employee of the children and young people's directorate, an independent Vice Chair, a Medical Advisor, 3 social care professionals and 4 independent members including 2 who have personal experience of adoption and one who is employed by a voluntary adoption agency. In addition the Agency Advisor attends each meeting but is not a member of the panel, and a Legal Adviser is available for written advice or consultation. There have been a number of changes to the central list of panel members in 2015, and we currently have 3 new panel members for whom we are undertaking DBS and reference checks in order for them to be available to sit on panel.

Name of Panel Member	Type of Member
Judith Longhill	Independent Chair
Dr Hashmi	Medical Advisor
Catherine Eshelby	LA social worker
Jacqueline Falvey	Independent Member
Ulla Trend	Independent Member
Esther Martin	Independent Member and Adoptive parent
Michael Connell	Independent Member and Adoptive parent
Elizabeth Bridges	Independent Member and Vice-Chair
Sadia Alam	LA social worker
Jerusha Firth	LA social worker
Maureen Connolly	LA social worker (references currently being undertaken)
Michele Beecham	Social Work member – Voluntary Adoption Agency (references currently being undertaken)
Michele Stevenson	Social Work Member – Independent social worker (references currently being undertaken)

The previously developed central list of panel members has been designed to ensure that panels are quorate and can be quickly arranged in order to avoid delay when planning for children's futures. Panel members are extremely supportive of this, and it continues to allow us to convene additional panels when appropriate, in order to prevent delay for both prospective adopters and children.

From April 2014/15 there were 22 meetings of the panel. So far since April, 2015 up to end of June, 2015 there have been 4 meetings of the panel.

Panel Member Annual Performance and Development Reviews (PDR)

All panel members are required to have an annual Performance and Development Review looking at their progress as panel members. All panel members have had an annual appraisal in the last 12 months.

The panel chair, Judith Longhill, will be reviewed on 23/07/15, by the Agency Decision Maker and the Agency Advisor. Previous comments regarding her strengths as a panel chair have included the following:

- 'Good at including all panel members in discussions and gaining a wide range of views, keeping focus on discussing the key issues and maintaining timeliness.
- Excellent knowledge of tasks involved in delivering effective services for children and families, including excellent safeguarding knowledge.
- Has a good ability to understand and analyse complex issues.'

4 Panel Training

Panel training for panel members and the Adoption Team in 2015/16 will include a one day presentation on 03/09/15 facilitated by the Adoption Team's Early Permanence Champion. The training will focus on an up-date of Early Permanence and information regarding the Agency's progress in respect of EPP. A representative from the Legal Department will also provide an overview of the current legal framework.

5 Quality Assurance of Reports

The panel in its work considers the following written reports:

- Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)
- Child and Family Matching Report
- Child Permanence Report
- Adoption Support Plans

The Agency Advisor to the Adoption Panel receives the draft reports three weeks prior to panel and gives written feedback on the quality of the reports, where appropriate, as well as practice advice. Additionally, the reports are now quality assured for a second time after amendments have been made by the social worker, in order to try ensure that the information received by panel members is reflective of a high standard with good analysis and a clear recommendation. The quality of Prospective Adopter Reports is generally good with the majority being well written with positive analysis and reflection.

The quality of Child Permanence Reports submitted with the matching paperwork continues to vary widely. The Adoption Team Manager and Practice Consultant Manager continue to work to resolve this issue through advice, guidance, training and consultation with social workers and their team managers.

A new quality assurance measure has also been introduced which includes a rating for each report presented to Panel, ranging from outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate. A record of these ratings, scored 1-5, will be included in a quarterly report to Panel and the ADM, and only reports which meet the good or better standard should go before Panel and the ADM.

Matching reports also differ in quality with some being of a high standard and reflective of the reasons why a specific match meets the needs of a child or children, with good analysis provided and clear information from prospective adopters about why they feel they can meet the needs of a child. Some reports do not meet this standard and this is addressed through quality assurance and advice and guidance provided to social workers and their team managers to try and ensure that all paperwork provided to panel members is of a good standard.

The Adoption Panel are particularly aware of the child reading their Child Permanence Report and matching paperwork in later life, and therefore of the need to provide an accurate analysis regarding how the prospective adopters can meet the child's needs, what the potential risks are, how the placement will be supported, and very clear reasons why the child could not be cared for by the birth family, including information about the viability assessments undertaken in respect of birth family members.

The quality of Adoption Support Plans presented to panel shows some improvement with a number of them providing clear, well written evidence of good planning for specific services for children, and detailed information regarding contact arrangements. Panel members are clear that the reports need to address on-going and future support for a child including access to any specialist help identified, and who will be responsible for providing this. This has been addressed through quality assurance and written guidance to social workers, and also with support and advice from the Agency's Therapeutic Team (LAACST) who have a named worker who provides guidance to social workers regarding Post Adoption Support plans. Some plans still require further improvement in order to ensure a child's current and long-term needs are appropriately met in their adoptive placement, and social workers will continue to receive guidance and support in an effort to address this issue.

6 Adoption Panel and Agency Business 2013/14

	2013/14	2014/15
Number of adopter assessments considered	18	31
Number of adopter assessments approved	18	31
Number of matches considered	45	41
Number of matches approved	45	41
Number of children adopted	36	43
% of children who left care via adoption	26.7%	27%

7 Timeliness of Adoptions

Performance on timeliness of adoptions has been an area requiring significant improvement, although poor performance here is partly explained by the high number of children for whom the Agency secures adoption and the high number of difficult to place children for whom the Agency secures adoption.

However, the Agency has made significant improvements to all its processes and invested considerably in the Adoption Service to make improvements in this area. The tables below illustrate the significant improvement that has been made over the last year on timeliness.

Table 1 below shows how performance on Adoption Scorecard Measure 1, the number of days between a child becoming looked after and the child being placed with its adoptive family has improved.

The table shows that it took 661 days from a child becoming looked after to placement with adopters between 2011 and 2014 for children who had been adopted. This had improved to 385 days for the group of 24 children placed in adoptive families as at 31st March 2015, an improvement of 276 days.

Table 1: Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 – Improvement Trend

Period and children measured	Rotherham Performance (Days)	Adoption Scorecard Threshold Target
3 year average 2011-14 for children adopted	661	2014 Target = 547
2013/14 performance for all children adopted	634	2013/14 Target = 547
2014/15 performance for all children adopted	393	2014/15 Target = 487
Performance for the 24 children placed in adoptive families as of 31 st March 2015	385	2015/16 Target is 426

Table 2 below shows how performance on Adoption Scorecard Measure 2 has improved.

The three year average for the number of days between a child being made subject to a Placement Order and the Agency decision on a match with an adoptive family from 2011 to 2014 for children adopted was 315 days. This has improved for all children who were matched and placed with adoptive families in 2014/15 had reduced considerably to 121 days. This is a reduction of 194 days and therefore excellent progress.

Table 2: Adoptive Scorecard Measure 2 – Improvement Trend

Period and children measured	Days	Target
3 year average 2011-14 for children adopted	315	2014 Target = 152
Performance for the 24 children placed in adoptive families as of 31 st March 2015	179	2014/15 Target = 121
2014/15 performance for all children adopted	170	2014/15 Target = 121
Performance for all children matched and placed in 2014/15	121	2014/15 Target = 121

8. Family Finding Activity

The Agency has been very successful at finding families for children needing adoption, as evidenced by the high number and percentage of children leaving care via adoption in Rotherham. The Agency has two full time social workers dedicated to family finding activity as well as a support worker, and has enthusiastically implemented new and innovative family finding initiatives including exchange days, profiling events and activity days.

In July 2014 the Agency co-hosted its own activity day for the Yorkshire and Humber Consortium Adoption Agencies and this was successful in linking one harder to place sibling group with a suitable adoptive family.

The Agency used 7 interagency placements in 2014/15 and 19 in-house adoptive placements. The Agency wants to provide more of its own adoptive families for children and to provide adoptive families for other local authorities, working in partnership to ensure more children are enabled to be placed with adoptive families without unnecessary delay.

With this aim in mind, the Agency wants to continue to reduce inter-agency placements and increase the number of adoptive families the Agency provides for other local authorities in 2015/16.

9. Early Permanence Planning

The Agency has further developed its procedure and process for establishing and implementing Early Permanence (EPP) planning in 2014/15. In 2014/15 the Agency succeeded in placing 4 children in Early Permanence Placements. This has enabled these 4 children and their adoptive families to begin the attaching and bonding process considerably earlier than would have been the case without the implementation of Early Permanence. This is a very positive development which provides the children with consistency of care from a very young age. So

far in 2015/16 the Agency has placed 5 children in Early Permanence Placements. The Adoption Team has an EPP champion who is able to provide advice and support to Locality social workers, and promotes this process with social work teams and other Agencies by leading presentations on Early Permanence.

10. Staffing in the Adoption Team

The Adoption Team expanded in 2013/14 as a result of additional funding from the Adoption Reform Grant. This funding enabled the team to create several new temporary posts, as follows:

- 1 Additional Team Manager
- 2 full-time Social workers
- 1 Support worker

These posts have been made permanent in 2015, in recognition of the positive impact the extra capacity has had on the service and the overall performance of the Agency.

The team is now made up of:

- 2 full-time Team Managers
- 2 full - time family finding social workers
- 4 full - time assessing social workers
- 1 full-time Recruitment/Initial contact social worker
- 4 part – time assessing social workers (equivalent of 2.5 posts)
- 1 Letterbox Co-ordinator
- 2 Support workers
- Vacancies – 1 three day post following retirement.

11. Key Performance Statistics in the 12 month period as at 31st March 2015:

Timeliness of Adoptions

Of the 43 children adopted between April 1st 2014 and 31st March 2015:

- 31 met the Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 target of 487 days between becoming looked after and being placed with adoptive family, and
- 16 met the Adoption Scorecard Measure 2 target of 121 days between being made subject to a Placement Order and the Agency Decision on a match.

Of the 24 children placed with families as of 31st March 2015:

- 18 met the Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 target of 487 days between becoming looked after and placement with adoptive family, and

- 12 met the Adoption Scorecard Measure 2 target of 121 days between being made subject to a Placement Order and the Agency Decision on a match.
- 12 met both Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 and Adoption Scorecard Measure 2.

For the 18 children placed with their adoptive families as at 31st March 2015 who met the measure 1 target of 487 days, the average number of days between being looked after and being placed with adopters was **271 days**.

For the 12 children placed with their adoptive families as at 31st March 2015 who met the measure 2 target of 121 days, the average number of days between being made subject to a Placement Order and an Agency Decision on a match was **69 days**.

12. Developments and Targets for 2015/16

The Agency has an Adoption Service Development Plan setting out its development aims and objectives for 2015/16.

These include:

- Increasing the number of adoptive families the Agency approves
- Reduced numbers of inter-agency adoptive placements it is required to use
- Increasing the number of adoptive families we provide for other local authorities
- Embedding Early Permanence planning
- Recruiting more adoptive families able to adopt sibling groups
- Continuing to improve timeliness of adoptions as measured against Adoption Scorecard Measures 1 and 2.

With regards to the functioning of the panel the Agency will be looking to:

- Provide further training and workshops for panel members to improve panel performance and understanding of new legislation and guidance.
- Ensure panel provides a robust quality assurance function to the Agency in respect of reports received and matches made.

13. Summary and Conclusions

In summary, 2014/15 has been a time of development and positive change for the Adoption Panel and the Adoption Agency.

There have been more adoptive families approved, more children adopted in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14, and the Agency is succeeding in improving the timeliness of adoptions, as follows.

- Adoptive families recruited increased from 18 to 32.
- Children placed decreased from 45 to 32 .

- Children adopted increased from 36 to 43.
- The percentage of children leaving care via adoption increased from 26.7% to 27%.
- The number of days between a child becoming looked after and placement with adopters reduced from 661 days for children adopted in the three years to 2014 to 385 days for the group of 24 children placed in adoptive families as at 31st March 2015.
- The number of days between a child becoming subject to a Placement Order and the Agency Decision on a match reduced from 315 days for children adopted in the three years up to 2014 to 121 days for the group of 24 children placed in adoptive families as at 31st March 2015

Other positive developments surrounding the panel have included:

- Continued frequency of Panel Meetings and careful planning of agenda's has ensured children's plans for permanence are agreed in a timely manner to avoid any unnecessary delay.
- Current recruitment of new panel members to the central list to fill vacancies has ensured panels are quorate and able to function appropriately.
- Continuing to ensure that panel is a positive experience for everyone attending by providing a welcoming atmosphere, and support for prospective adopters from their assessing social worker and the Adoption Support Worker.

In addition, a very positive development has been the continued progress of the Early Permanence initiative in Rotherham, which has so far seen the placing of 5 children in 2015/16 in Early Permanence Placements.

The Agency has permanent additional staffing in the Adoption Service for 2015/16 and has set itself ambitious targets to improve performance further in 2015/16.

On reflection then, 2014/15 has been a productive year for the Adoption Agency, with a focus on new initiatives such as Early Permanence Placements. The improved performance detailed above has resulted from investment in additional staffing capacity, the on-going enthusiasm, commitment and hard work of the staff and panel members, and the Agency's continued pro-active approach to streamlining the adoption process and using new and innovative family finding initiatives such as exchange days, profiling events and activity days.

The Agency invites the Adoption Panel Chair, on behalf of the panel, to comment on the work of the panel and the Agency as detailed in this report and to make any other comments relating to quality assurance and the performance of the Agency so that the Agency can take account of this in its future development.

Jill Stanley

Adoption Team Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.A. Stanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Signed:

Jill A Stanley
Adoption Panel Advisor

Dated: 18.06.15