



**Warwickshire People Group,  
Safeguarding.**

# Adoption Services Annual Report 2011-2012

Adoption Services



## **ADOPTION SERVICES TEAM ACTIVITY REPORT**

**April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2012**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report will provide detail of the work of the Adoption Services Team in the year 2011- 2012. It will detail the work of the Service in the last twelve months and highlight positives in practice alongside areas that require on-going development. The work of Warwickshire County Council as an adoption agency is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

### **2. The Adoption Service Team**

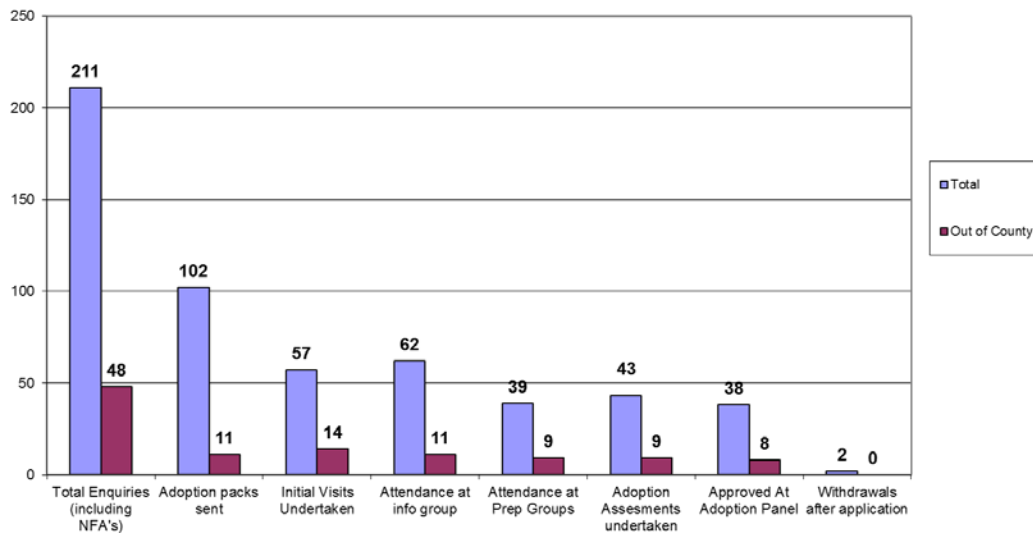
- 2.1 The Adoption Service Team has an establishment of eight FTE social workers and three Managers. The posts are filled by a combination of full time and part time social workers. One full time worker is currently on long term sick and one and half post are vacant with new workers due to start in July and August 2012. The management posts are filled by the Operations Manager (until November 2012) and two part time Practice Leaders. One Practice Leader is also the Adoption Support Service Advisor (ASSA) and the equivalent of one full time social work post is ring-fenced for providing adoption support.
- 2.2 The Service is supported by a dedicated clerical team.
- 2.3 The Adoption Services Team is based at Saltisford Office Park and works county wide, working closely with Children's Safeguarding Teams across the 5 districts. This requires a great deal of travelling time given the size of the county. Interagency placements also require high levels of travelling and 8 Warwickshire approved adopters were matched with children from other Local Authority areas during this period.
- 2.4 The core business of the Adoption Service Team is as follows
- An Adoption Duty System five days a week.
  - Recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters.
  - Completion of Non Agency Adoptions assessment and reports
  - Overseas Adoption Assessments and support post placement.
  - Family finding for all children with an Adoption Plan, (the majority during this period have been placed with Warwickshire adopters).

- Identification of children awaiting adoption in other Local Authority areas and facilitating interagency placements with Warwickshire adopters
- Advice to social worker on the preparation of a child for adoption.
- Placement matching and careful planning and review of the child's move to adopters.
- Providing reports for the Court.
- Post approval support through individual work, training groups, workshops and support groups.
- Birth Records Counselling for adopted adults.
- A Letterbox Scheme to facilitate exchanges of information between adoptive and birth families.
- Advice to social workers and carers on adoption issues.
- Ongoing development of the service, which reflects legal and regulatory guidelines and standards including the implications of the recent Adoption Action Plan.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the service.
- Development work in partnership with other agencies.
- Provision of the Adoption Panel Advisor and support to the independently chaired Adoption Panel which approves adopters, make 'best interest' decisions in respect of children (up until 1.9.2012), and agree matches of specific children with specific adopters.
- An Adoption Support Service (as detailed in the report) for all adoptive families in Warwickshire.

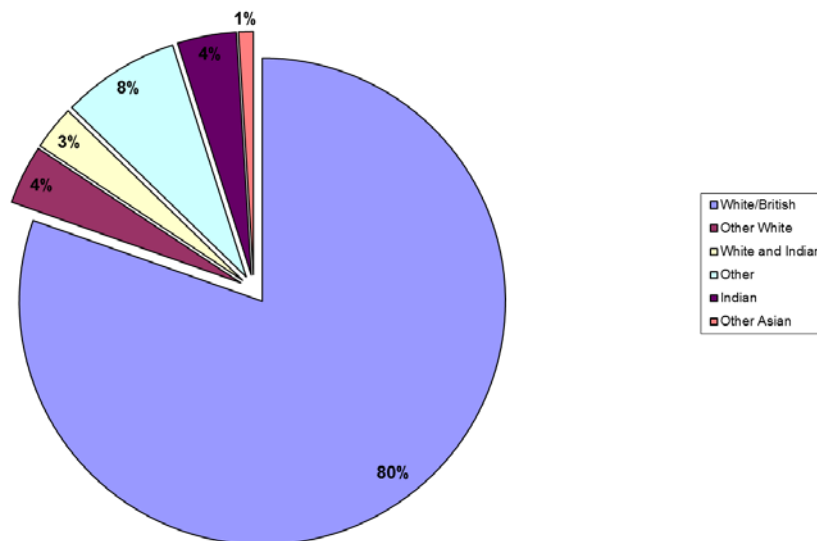
### **3. Recruitment, Adoption Preparation and Assessment**

- 3.1 In the last year the Service have dealt with 211 telephone and web enquiries. These covered a wide spectrum of adoption issues. This is an increase of 49 enquires from the previous year.
- 3.2 From this initial contact 102 Adoption Information Packs were sent, 62 households went on to attend our Adoption Information Meetings. The Team also held 4 sets of 3 day Adoption Preparation Groups that involved 39 households. Information Meetings and Preparation Groups are held on different days and at varying times including evenings and Saturdays in order to provide as much flexibility as possible.

Adoption Activity April 2011 - March 2012



Packs sent - Analysis of ethnicity April 2011 - March 2012



- 3.3 There has been an increase in the recruitment of prospective adopters, despite Warwickshire being 'targeted' by neighbouring authorities who have sought to recruit adopters from outside of their own area because of geographical/anonymity issues. Independent Adoption Agencies also have prominence across Warwickshire.
- 3.4 The Recruitment Strategy for the Service is reviewed annually and is based on the profile of the children in the care of Warwickshire that need to be placed for adoption. The current Recruitment Strategy details the priorities as applicants who are interested in sibling groups, older children and children with disabilities. The Service has continued

to advertise in local newspapers and display posters in public places. Specific recruitment adverts have been run for sibling groups of three children.

- 3.5 When the agency is unable to identify appropriate placements within Warwickshire, details of children are added to the West Midlands Family Finding data base and the National Adoption Register. In addition to this the details of children seeking placements are sent to all registered adoption agencies on a 3 monthly basis.
- 3.6 The Adoption Service Team is represented on Children's Panels which ensures that the Service can track and identify early in the planning process those children who are likely to need adoption. Being alerted to children who may need adopting shortly after they are accommodated, and certainly by the four month review enables the Service to take positive action to recruit families for potentially "hard-to-place" children and thus minimise delay for them.
- 3.7 Preparation Groups are held every 3 months and the waiting times for adopters' mean that most applicants can be offered places on either the next set of groups or the ones after that. Warwickshire County Council applies a rigorous and thorough assessment of adopters in order to safeguard and promote children's welfare. Priorities are set to ensure that the service recruits adopters for the types of children needing placements and priority will be given to prospective adopters who can meet the needs of children who are waiting for adoption. The longest that any applicant should wait to attend a group is approximately 5-6 months. This will need to be reduced to comply with the proposals contained within the Adoption Action Plan.
- 3.8 38 households were approved as potential adopters during April 2011 and March 2012, with only 1 family withdrawing from the assessment process. This was an increase of 12 from the year 2010/11.
  - 1 family was not recommended as suitable to adopt and this recommendation was endorsed by the agency decision maker.
  - 3 couples approved during this period were of Indian ethnicity, and one couple was of White British/Indian ethnicity. The remaining households were of White European origin. This is in line with the children who are waiting for adoption within Warwickshire where again the majority of children are of White British origin.
  - 5 of the households approved were recruited from out of county, and 2 overseas assessments were completed. This is a slight increase from the previous year however approved adopters continue to wait longer for a child from overseas.
- 3.9 The average time taken to complete assessments from receipt of the application form to Adoption Panel is months this is 8.2 months slightly increased from the previous year which was 7.2 months, however this is due to staff shortages and long term sickness of two workers with

their work having to be reallocated to remaining workers. The shortest assessment was 3 months (2<sup>nd</sup> time adopters) and the longest was 21 months, this was due to bereavement and the family moving home.

- 3.10 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 there were 17 households approved and waiting for a placement. A further 25 were under assessment and a further 1 household was awaiting allocation. There were 10 households waiting for Preparation Groups and 11 for Information Meetings.

#### **4. Family Finding**

- 4.1 There were 31 Adoption Orders made in respect of Warwickshire children in the year April 2010 to March 2011. This was 6 more than the previous year.

- 4.2 Of the children adopted, 20 were single children, and 4 sibling groups of two and one sibling group of three. The ages of the children at adoption were:

0	2	8	13	1	1	1	4	0	1
Under 1 year	Under 2 years	Under 3 years	Under 4 years	Under 5 years	Under 6 years	Under 7 years	Under 8 years	Under 9 years	Under 10 years

- 4.3 1 child was of Indian/ British ethnicity, and the remaining children were of White European ethnicity.

- 4.4 In line with national trends the Service experiences difficulties in recruiting adopters for large sibling groups, and children with disabilities. The Adoption Recruitment Strategy continues to attempt to address this with specific advertising in local publications and newspapers and stands in local shopping centres and libraries.

- 4.5 These efforts have led to the Service being successful in placing a nine year old female child and four children aged between seven and eight years. We also successfully placed 2 children with disabilities.

- 4.6 The number of children placed within 12 months of their adoption decision was 79%, an increase on the 2010/11 figure. This is the result of internal processes such as regular attendance at Children's Panels, 'tracking and chasing', identifying children's needs sooner in the permanency planning process, effective joint working with children's social workers and their early attendance at the Placement Allocation Group.

- 4.7 A further 26 children are placed in adoptive homes with an adoption application pending and as of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. 27 children had an approved adoption plan, but were not yet placed in an adoptive home as on 31.3.12. For some of these children this was due to on-going

court issues that had resulted in the delay of Placement Orders being made.

- 4.8 When potential placements cannot be identified within Warwickshire's pool of approved adopters the next step is for social workers to refer their child to the West Midlands Consortium and the National Adoption Register. A social worker from the Adoption Team will accompany a child's social worker on all out of county visits to prospective adopters and will encourage the making of a DVD for prospective adopters to view.
- 4.9 If following these visits potential adopters are still not identified a family finding advisor will be allocated from the Adoption Services Team to spearhead any advertising required. In addition to featuring children in national adoption publications such as Be My Parent or Children Who Wait, the Team has designed a quarterly booklet featuring children and adopters who are awaiting placements and sent this out to all Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. We have received several enquiries from this.
- 4.10 If potential adopters are identified out of county the social worker from the Adoption Services Team will remain involved in an advisory capacity until the match is presented to the Adoption Panel. The Operations Manager of the Adoption Services Team assumes a quality assurance role in all out of county adoption placements, and pre placement support meetings are held to identify immediate and future placement support needs.
- 4.11 In 2011-2012 the service made 1 inter agency placement involving a Warwickshire child being placed within a neighbouring Authority, and a further 9 Warwickshire families were matched with 9 children from other Local Authority areas.
- 4.12 The over-riding difficulty with out of county placements continues to be the provision of appropriate support to the adoptive families especially when Children Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are required.
- 4.12 The Service has continued to successfully facilitate a regular support group for adopters and children based in Warwick. In addition to this we host an annual picnic and Adoption Fun day in conjunction with Coventry Adoption Service; this is open to anyone who has adopted.
- 4.13 The Service continues to run a duty service on a daily basis which supports many adopters who are facing difficulties and need telephone support and guidance.

## **5. Training**

- 5.1 Social Workers within the Service continue to attend relevant training with three members of the Service undertaking training with Kim Golding and Dan Hughes regarding attachment. Managers within the Service have kept abreast of managerial courses offered through the Group. The Operations Manager has presented training to foster carers in respect of Moving Children onto Adoption and to social workers undertaking training regarding the court and legal process.
- 5.2 A Practice Leader from the Service met with first year student social workers at Coventry University to discuss adoption and adoption issues. This was well received and the Service has been asked to present this again this year. This was thought to be very beneficial to the Service in helping potential social workers understand where adoption fits with safeguarding children, and current issues facing adoption practice.
- 5.3 The service has also offered a placement to a second year social work student.

## **6. Non- agency adoptions**

- 6.1 18 Non agency adoption assessments were allocated during 2011-12. These continue to be intricate pieces of work.

## **7. Summary**

- 7.1 This period has seen improvements in the following
- An increase in the number of enquiries regarding adoption
  - Improving timescales for applicants attending Information Groups.
  - Improving timescales for applicants attending preparation groups
  - Timescales in matching children following the adoption 'best interest' decision being made.
  - The number of Adoption Orders granted

## **8. Plans for the Service**

- 8.1 The priorities for the Adoption Services Team during 2012-2013 are:
- To continue to recruit adopters for those children deemed harder to place i.e. older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities.
  - To continue to facilitate and increase the amount of workshops/training available for approved adopters.



- To review the Preparation Groups in line with the Guidance issued by the Department of Education, to ensure that adopters are fully prepared for adoption.
- To maintain effective partnership working with Children's Safeguarding Teams – ensuring that adoption plans are progressed appropriately and in timely manner.
- To contribute to the development of best practice across the West Midlands through membership of the West Midlands Consortium.
- To develop a support groups for adopters in the 'north' of the County.
- To respond to and implement changes required arising the Adoption Action Plan.
- To work with Fostering Services in the development on concurrent planning scheme, whereby young babies are placed with foster carers who are then in a position to adopt them should this be the plan.

# **Adoption Support Services Annual Review**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report is to review the Adoption Support Work undertaken during the period April 2011 to March 2012.
- 1.2 The Adoption Services Team have one part time Practice Leader/ASSA, whose hours have increased from 18.5 to 25 hours in April 2012. 37 hours are ring fenced for adoption support work; these hours are divided between two part time social workers. A further 15 hours post will commence in August 2012. 1 letterbox coordinator works 15 hours a week. When the need arises other members of staff will also carry out adoption support duties.
- 1.3 As the nominated ASSA for Warwickshire I have been unable to attend the quarterly ASSA meetings during this period due to other work commitments.

## **2. Adoption Support**

- 2.1 162 adoption support referrals have been receive regarding the following issues.
  - Life story work
  - Educational concerns
  - Disruptive/volatile/threatening behaviour
  - Requesting the child to be accommodated
  - Support and advice
  - Counselling request
- 2.2 Support has been provided by providing 'one to one' session with adoptive parents, time limited work with children, attendance at training groups, or by signposting or making referrals to other services i.e Journeys.
- 2.3 Difficulties have been encountered in coordinating joint home visits with some Children's Safeguarding Teams. This is presently being monitored.
- 2.4 The Adoption Support social workers have attended CAF meetings as consultants/advisors.

## **3. Adoptive Parents Attachment Group**

- 3.1 The adoptive parents' 18 week 'fostering attachment' training group has been completed during this period. The course material is based on Clinical Psychologist's, Kim Golding's work. This year's the course was run in partnership with Journeys (Mind /Relate), Coventry Adoption

Team and Warwickshire Adoption Team. Adopters reside in both Authorities. 7 Warwickshire Adopters attended this training and now attend a monthly support group.

- 3.2 The Adoption Services Team recognises that an 18 week course is a huge commitment for adopters and therefore the training material has been condensed in order to offer a 3 evening course. Two groups have been run this year and attended by 25 adopters.
- 3.3 The 18 week 'fostering attachments' course is to be run again in the Autumn 2012 and at this stage clarification is being sought on which agencies/ authorities will co - run the programme. The 3 evening attachment course to be run during July 2012 with future dates being confirmed for the rest of the year thereafter.

#### **4. Attachment Support Group**

- 4.1 On the completion of the 'fostering attachment' group, adopters are invited to join the once a month support group. 4 groups presently run. The groups provide a forum for adopters to meet without their children, share how their month has been, time to "off load" in a safe environment, reflect on how they have dealt with situations, feel supported and valued. The groups also discuss agreed topics, i.e. managing difficult behaviour, transition into school. 23 parents actively use these groups, some members travelling over an hour in order to attend.
- 4.2 This support groups serve an invaluable role and they are to be reviewed and consideration given to whether they can be amalgamated.

#### **5. Letterbox Exchange Scheme**

- 5.1 A Letterbox Coordinator, works Tuesday and Thursdays a total of 15 hours a week. The Letterbox Coordinator is responsible for the 240 active children's letterbox exchanges, which equates to approx 1500 exchanges a year. Within the year the coordinator has made/received 658 calls or emails, 652 letters sent and 490 contacts.
- 5.2 Sensitivity and support is constantly required to manage emotionally charged parents and adopter's demands.

#### **6. Section 98 – Birth Records Counselling**

- 6.1 54 referrals have been received for Birth Records Counselling an increase of 19 (54%) from the previous period 2010-2011. As a result there is currently a 3 month waiting list for this service.
- 6.2 Feedback from adopted adults continues to be extremely positive. The information received, sensitivity and time provided by the Service is valued by the service user.

Feedback:

*"I cannot praise Linda high enough. I felt incredibly supported, safe and given lots of time"*

*"The sensitivity, skill and professionalism shown in revealing my file, and the follow up made me feel anything but standard."*

*"Excellent service"*

*"Really helpful and supportive from start to finish"*

6.3 A new Information Pack has been collated for all those receiving this service.

6.4 It is hoped that waiting times will reduce once a new member of staff joins the Service in August.

## **7. Other agencies referrals**

7.1 38 referrals were received from other Local Authorities and agencies requesting information from adoption archived files. This work is entered onto Care First and with assistance from the Wedgnock Resources Management Office and County Records files are being identified and located swiftly.

## **8. Independent Service for Birth Parents and Relatives**

8.1 In partnership, Warwickshire and Coventry have recently commissioned Birth Connections (St Francis) to provide an Independent Service for birth parents and relatives. Funding is for 7 hours a week. There are currently 10 birth relatives receiving a service and 10 are showing on the database as either being on the waiting list (8) or on hold (2). This is predominately due to the increasing number of referrals as more children have adoption plans in Warwickshire.

8.2 Quarterly meetings are arranged with the Birth Connections to review the work undertaken and address any outstanding issues. Consideration is currently being given to increasing the contracted in hours in view of waiting list.

## **9. Support Groups and Family Days**

9.1 The Leamington Support Group has moved venue which has resulted an increase in numbers attending. The North Group is due to be re-launched and will only be run during half terms and holidays. The Support Groups have no fixed agenda and members welcome the opportunity to make new, and maintain, friendships.

- 9.2 The annual picnic at Coombe Abbey in August was extremely successful despite the awful weather. In partnership with Coventry, the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Fun Day was held in November 2011 at Tile Hill School, Coventry. 247 people attended the event previously.

Feedback from children:

*"Very good day family day out, best ever"*

*"Had great fun, 7<sup>th</sup> year coming, great day"*

*"Today's been fun"*

*"I think that your fun days are great and I enjoy them"*

*"I think your activities are great"*

## **10. Coventry and Warwickshire Training Group.**

- 10.1 In partnership with Coventry, Warwickshire Adoption Services commissioned "Transitions during school" by Eileen Kell, Educational psychologist. 18 families attended the course held in June.

Coventry Adoption Services have recently experienced departmental changes and therefore inter agency working has been put on hold until this has settled.

## **11. Warwickshire training**

- 11.1 The following training has been provided to adoptive parents and their families

- ½ day "Building a bond with your child through play" a successful course based on theraplay techniques. The course will be re-run in the Autumn

- 11.2 The following training is planned

- ½ day workshop for friends and family members of prospective adopters and adopters. "Adoption and supporting the adoptive family"
- 1/2 day workshop for new adopters on 'introductions' This is planned September for 2012

## **12. Adopter Mentoring Scheme**

- 12.1 In partnership with Relate an Adopter's Mentoring Scheme provides a low level peer group support for adopters in the early days of introductions and placement. The scheme now has 8 mentors and

has supported 19 new adoptive families in the past year.

- 12.2 The scheme proves to be extremely successful and mentee's are accessing the service for as long as they need it, (roughly a year). The disadvantage of this is that it causes difficulty in allocating new cases.
- 12.3 The Mentors are volunteers and attend six weekly supervision. They determine how many mentees they support depending on their availability.
- 12.4 The recruitment of new mentors will be started circulated in November / December and mentor training will be planned for January 2013.

### **13. Summary**

- 13.1 Warwickshire Adoption Services has a named Adoption Support Service Advisor in post that carries out the duties laid down in the Adoption Support Regulations 2005. A number of services in the area of adoption support are provided by the Adoption Services Team and these have a direct and positive impact on adopters and their families. The Adoptive Parents Attachment Group has enabled adoptive parents to have an understanding of how a child's formative relationships and experiences can have an impact on their later relationships and how they can bring this experience with them into the adoptive family; they have also learned techniques to help deal with some of the resulting behaviours.
- 13.2 162 referrals were logged as adoption support with an additional 658 phone calls regarding letterbox arrangements.
- 13.3 All newly matched prospective adopters are offered the Adopter's Mentoring Service and feedback is excellent and welcomed and valued by new adoptive families. The mentors have now increased to 8.
- 13.4 The Letterbox Exchange remains the largest part of post adoption work, with over 240 children receiving one or more letters a year.
- 13.5 Support groups and activity days continue to expand and are well attended by both parents and children. Working in partnership with Coventry has enabled a range of training events to be offered.
- 13.6 It is important to highlight that all of the work identified in this report has been undertaken by a Practice Leader ( 25 hours ) 2 adoption support social workers ( each 18.5 hours) and the Letterbox Coordinator ( 15 hours). An additional 15 hour social worker post will be added to the service from August 2012

**Louise Hathaway**  
**Adoption Practice Leader /ASSA**  
**July 2012**

## **Warwickshire Adoption Panel, Annual Review April 2011– March 2012**

### **1. Membership**

Adoption Agencies Statutory Guidance [AAR 3] updated 2011 requires that each agency must maintain a list of persons whom it considers suitable to be a member of an Adoption Panel. The Panel's business can only be conducted if at least 5 members are present, including the chair or vice chair and a social worker with at least three years relevant post qualifying experience.

In summary, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, panel membership is constituted as follows: -

- **Rose Ruddick:** Independent Chair, Social Worker with background in family court welfare, independent evaluation and youth justice
- **Maria Barnes:** Vice - Chair, Assistant Head of Children's Services
- **Peter Follett:** Independent Member, Adoptive Parent
- **Dr Lucy Coker:** Medical Adviser
- **Maggie King:** Independent Member, previously an adoption social worker
- **Margaret Luthert:** Independent Member, Adoptive Parent
- **Kit Leck:** Independent Member, Drug and Alcohol Strategy Manager
- **Dawn Preece:** Independent Member, Educational Psychologist
- **Chris Williams:** Elected County Councillor, Adoptive Parent
- **Jo Davies;** Children's Services Operations Manager

In addition to this core group Panel is able to draw on 4 additional pool members.

Panel continues to benefit from members with personal adoption experience.

#### **Non-Voting Panel Advisers:**

- **Sharon Shaw:** Adoption Panel Adviser, Operations Manager (Adoption Services)
- **Sarah Trundley:** Legal Adviser to Panel, Senior Solicitor
- **Sylvia Harvey:** Secretary to Adoption Panel, Team Administrator (Fostering and Adoption Team)

The current Panel has an excellent mix of skills and experience, and all Panel members have a strong commitment to improving Adoption Services in Warwickshire.

As always, Sylvia Harvey's secretarial support to Panel is excellent.

## 2. Summary of Adoption Panel Activity

- The Adoption Panel met on 22 occasions,
- The work of the Adoption Panel has increased during this period, and considered 117 items compared with 104 items of business in 2010/11, 85 items of business in 2009/10, 83 items of business in 2008/9, and 100 items of business in 2007/8 and 108 in 2006/7.

Panel considered

- 42 recommendations for children to be adopted (sibling groups counted as one business item)
- 30 recommendations for children to be matched with prospective adopters (involving 35 children)
- 37 recommendations for approval of adoptive parents
- Change of plans for children (involving 14 children)
- 3 resignations of approved adopters
- 3 change of approval categories
- 0 disruption reports

**Adoption Panel activities and trends are summarised below**

Year	No of children approved for adoption	No of matches	No of families approved to adopt
2005 – 6	39	23	35
2006 – 7	33	30	23
2007 – 8	38	26	29
2008 - 9	33	19	31 + 1 overseas
2009-10	34	22	24 + 1 overseas
2010-11	36	21	28
2011-12	62	30	35 + 2 overseas

## 3. Children Approved for Adoption

62 children had an adoption plan approved during this period however 3 children have had a change of plan noted, the majority of whom were approved for adoption in the previous year. All 3 children remained with foster carers

Of these children with an approved plan;

- 27 are single children
- 15 sibling groups of 2 children
- 2 sibling groups of 3 children
- 29 are male



- 33 are female
- 60 are White European
- 1 dual heritage , White/Asian
- 1 black African Caribbean

#### Ages of children

- 15 - under 1 year
- 13 - under 2 years
- 25 - 2–5 years
- 15 - 5+ years

#### 4. Children matched with Adopters

The Adoption Panel considered 25 matches including 30 children. Of these matches, 1 involved an out of county placements involving a single placement.

##### i. Ages of children matched

Age	0	Under 1	Under 2	Under 3	Under 4	Under 5	Under 6	Under 7	Under 8	9
		15	13	12	7	6	5	4	0	0

- 3 children were matched with foster carers
- 1 child was matched with a single carer

##### ii. Ethnicity of children matched

28 White/UK  
1 White/Indian  
1 Black African Caribbean

##### iii. Sibling Groups

5 sibling groups of 2 children placed together

#### 5. Approval of Prospective Adopters

Of the 37 households approved as adopters for Warwickshire

- 3 were foster carers
- 1 was a single applicant
- 2 were 2<sup>nd</sup> time adopters

## **6. Training and Development Events**

During the year Panel welcomed a number of new social workers and social work student observers, the chair and adviser providing an opportunity for informal discussions and feedback at the end of the morning.

Panel continues to benefit from opportunities at the end of meetings to reflect together on emerging areas for procedure and/or practice development and for being updated on new research and policy developments.

Panel members attended half day development training regarding the use of social media sites.

## **7. Appraisals and Feedback**

During 2011/12 the Chair and Advisor conducted annual appraisals with each Panel member. The Decision Maker and Panel Advisor also completed the Panel Chair's annual appraisal, which included drawing on feedback from Panel members. This provides the opportunity for Panel members to receive feedback about their contributions in Panel, but also for the chair and advisor to look at the functioning of the Panel as a whole and to look for on-going development opportunities.

Arrangements are also in place to ensure on-going feedback from professionals and prospective adopters to Panel. Everyone who attends Panel is provided with an evaluation form. If there are comments on the form about a particular Panel member's contribution, this will be followed through by the panel advisor. Comments received this year have been extremely positive.

## **8. Practice developments during the year**

- The number of Adoption Panels has increased during the year, to meet the increased demand for Panel time. Warwickshire have Panel members who are committed to attending Panel, and always come prepared. It has been necessary to increase Panels from once a month to twice a month to manage the work demands and this has been managed by developing a pool of Panel members who can support the core group of Panel members. It is acknowledge that Panel attendance has needed a huge commitment from its members.
- Panel continues to find ways of stressing its commitment to ensuring that children's own feelings and views are represented and heard. Panel does this through regular 'challenging' of social workers and Panel itself around practice and expectations. Panel has observed a number of times that social workers attending Panel often share much more about the child/ren's feelings and wishes than is represented in the written reports. A new Child Permanency Report has been developed to ensure that children's needs are detailed and considered.

- Panel is keen to keep abreast of on-going developments within Adoption Services. Articles from BAAF, newspapers etc. are shared with Panel members and if time allows they are discussed. The Panel is keen to participate in any training regarding the changes to the Adoption Service following the Nearey Report and arising from the Adoption Action Plan.
- Panel chair in discussion with Panel members establishes early on the extent to which Panel needs to explore the strength of evidence to support the adoption plans for the child. This enables Panel members to focus on the relevant areas of the report.
- Panel minutes now record any actions requested regarding amendments, or additions to the paperwork. This is extremely helpful when children and adopters return to Panel for matching.

## **9. Future Developments**

- Panel is keen to make the most of all opportunities during the next year to train / develop alongside wider social work staff and stakeholders, finding this a valuable experience. They particularly recognise the importance of this with the many changes that the adoption service is facing.
- Panel members will need to work with the Registered Manager to ensure that the new Regulations and Guidance are implemented, in particular the changes that will be made to adoption as the Adoption Action Plan becomes implemented. The focus is on reducing delay across the spectrum of adoption related activity
- To review the information required by the Adoption Panel when considering the matching recommendation.
- To provide feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of the reports presented to Panel.
- To give consideration to having prospective adopters attend the Adoption Panel when the matching decision is being made

Rose Ruddick Independent Chair  
Sharon Shaw Operations Manager