



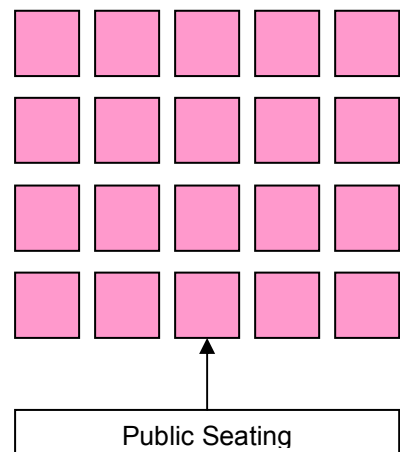
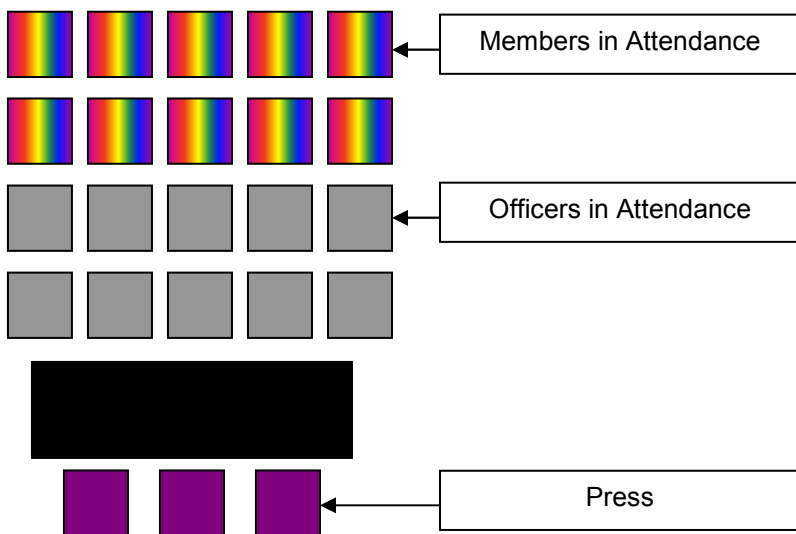
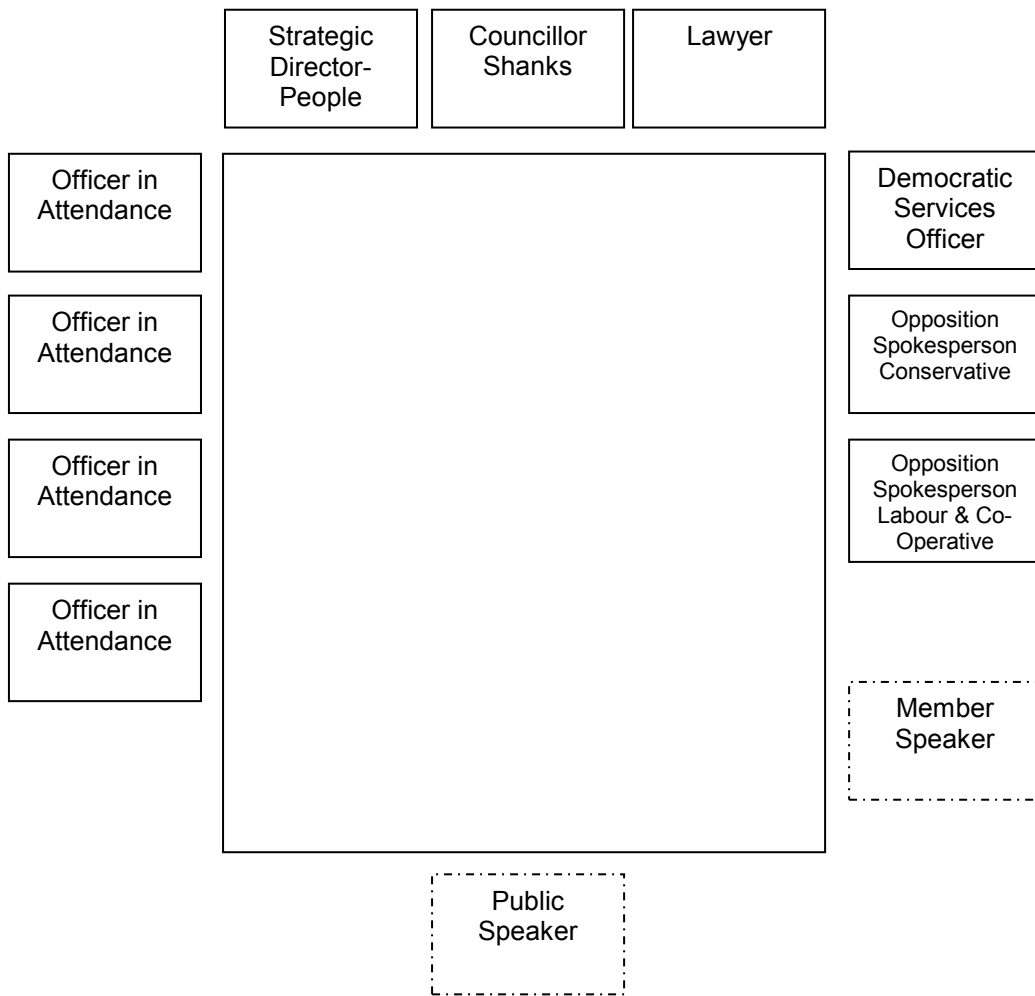
Brighton & Hove  
City Council

# Cabinet Member Meeting

Title:	<b>Children &amp; Young People Cabinet Member Meeting</b>
Date:	<b>12 September 2011</b>
Time:	<b>4.00pm</b>
Venue	<b>Committee Room 3, Hove Town Hall</b>
Members:	<b>Councillor:</b> Shanks (Cabinet Member)
Contact:	<b>John Peel</b> Democratic Services Officer 01273 291058 john.peel@brighton-hove.gov.uk

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	An Induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter and infra red hearing aids are available for use during the meeting. If you require any further information or assistance, please contact the receptionist on arrival.
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# Democratic Services: Meeting Layout



**AGENDA**

**1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

- (a) Declarations of Interest by all Members present of any personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- (b) Exclusion of Press and Public - To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

*NOTE: Any item appearing in Part 2 of the Agenda states in its heading either that it is confidential or the category under which the information disclosed in the report is exempt from disclosure and therefore not available to the public.*

*A list and description of the categories of exempt information is available for public inspection at Brighton and Hove Town Halls.*

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 March 2011 (copy attached).

**3. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS**

**4. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION**

- (a) Items reserved by the Cabinet Member
- (b) Items reserved by the Opposition Spokespersons
- (c) Items reserved by Members, with the agreement of the Cabinet Member.

*NOTE: Public Questions, Written Questions from Councillors, Petitions, Deputations, Letters from Councillors and Notices of Motion will be reserved automatically.*

**5. PETITIONS**

**1 - 2**

Report of the Strategic Director, Resources (copy attached).

**6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**3 - 4**

(The closing date for receipt of public questions is 12 noon on 5 September 2011)

## CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING

1) One question received from the Carers' Centre (copy attached).

### 7. DEPUTATIONS

(The closing date for receipt of deputations is 12 noon on 5 September 2011)

No deputations received by date of publication.

### 8. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

No letters have been received.

### 9. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No written questions have been received.

### 10. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

No Notices of Motion have been received by the date of publication.

### 11. ANNUAL FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT 5 - 34

Report of the Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

*Contact Officer: Sharon Donnelly Tel: 01273 295549*

### 12. ANNUAL ADOPTION SERVICE REPORT 35 - 66

Report of the Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

*Contact Officer: Sharon Donnelly Tel: 01273 295549*

### 13. COMMISSIONING STRATEGY FOR SERVICES, ASSESSMENTS AND PLACEMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CHILDREN IN NEED WHO ARE AT RISK OF CARE OR CUSTODY 67 - 76

Report of the Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

*Contact Officer: Steve Barton Tel: 29-6105*

### 14. YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN 77 - 84

Report of the Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

*Contact Officer: Nigel Andain Tel: 29-6167*

### 15. TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS TO VOLUNTARY AIDED CHURCH SCHOOLS IN BRIGHTON AND HOVE 85 - 90

Report of the Strategic Director, People (copy attached).

*Contact Officer: Steve Healey Tel: 29-3444*

*Ward Affected: All Wards*

## CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING

The City Council actively welcomes members of the public and the press to attend its meetings and holds as many of its meetings as possible in public. Provision is also made on the agendas for public questions to committees and details of how questions can be raised can be found on the website and/or on agendas for the meetings.

The closing date for receipt of public questions and deputations for the next meeting is 12 noon on the fifth working day before the meeting.

Agendas and minutes are published on the council's website [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk). Agendas are available to view five working days prior to the meeting date.

Meeting papers can be provided, on request, in large print, in Braille, on audio tape or on disc, or translated into any other language as requested.

For further details and general enquiries about this meeting contact John Peel, (01273 291058, email [john.peel@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:john.peel@brighton-hove.gov.uk)) or email [democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Date of Publication - Friday, 2 September 2011



# CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 5

Brighton & Hove City Council

**Subject:** Petitions  
**Date of Meeting:** 12 September 2011  
**Report of:** Strategic Director, Resources  
**Contact Officer:** Name: John Peel Tel: 29-1058  
E-mail: john.peel@brighton-hove.gov.uk  
**Key Decision:** No  
**Wards Affected:** Various

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 To receive any petitions presented at Council, any petitions submitted directly to Democratic Services or any e-Petition submitted via the council's website.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.2 That the Cabinet Member/Committee responds to the petition either by noting it or writing to the petition organiser setting out the Council's views, or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter which may give consideration to a range of options, including the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- considering the petition at a council meeting
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- calling a referendum

#### 3. PETITIONS

##### Petition title

3. (i) To receive the following e-Petition submitted via the council's website by Mark Locke and signed by 10 people:

*We the undersigned petition the Council to reconsider demolishing the Whitehawk Youth and Community centre and instead reinvest in the structure that is already standing.*





# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CABINET MEMBER MEETING**

## **Agenda Item 6**

Brighton & Hove City Council

### **WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting for questions submitted by a member of the public who either lives or works in the area of the authority.

The question will be answered without discussion. The person who asked the question may ask one relevant supplementary question, which shall be put and answered without discussion. The person to whom a question, or supplementary question, has been put may decline to answer it.

The following written questions have been received from members of the public.

#### **(i) The Carers' Centre**

'In 2001, it was estimated that there were around 500 carers aged 8-17 years old in Brighton & Hove and 800 young adult carers. This is an old estimate, and it is believed numbers have increased significantly over the last decade, particularly in supporting those with mental health and substance misuse issues.

Currently there are 130 Young Carers supported by the Brighton and Hove Young Carers Project which obviously falls short of the numbers of potential Young Carers in need of support in our city.

Research has shown that a significant proportion of young carers suffer significant educational disadvantage. They are more likely to be bullied and find it more difficult to attend school and complete their homework because of their caring responsibilities. They often, therefore, underachieve in exams and struggle in the labour market. Research commissioned by Manchester Metropolitan University has highlighted the significant benefits to society, the individual and to the economy, from investment in services for young carers.

Please will you give priority to work to more accurately understand the number of and location of young carers in Brighton & Hove, to ensure Council and voluntary sector services are able to reach out to all or as many young carers as possible, and that appropriate resources are forthcoming to support young carers in their lives in general and in the often challenging roles they undertake, which is of enormous benefit to their families and to our society.'



# **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING**

## **Agenda Item 11**

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Annual Fostering Service Report 2010/11</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, People</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Sharon Donnelly</b>	<b>Tel:</b> <b>29-5549</b>
	<b>E-mail:</b>	sharon.donnelly@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Forward Plan No: N/A</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

#### **1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 Fostering regulations require that an annual fostering report be provided to be received by the Council Executive. The annual report for 2010/11 found in Appendix 1 provides full information about fostering activity within Children & Families and a profile of the work of the Fostering teams with the Fostering & Adoption Service.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATION:**

- 2.1 That the Annual Fostering Service Report and the progress of the Fostering & Adoption Service in relation to fostering activity is noted.

#### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 See Annual Fostering Service Report

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The Annual Fostering Service report has been compiled in collaboration with managers from the Adoption and Fostering service and the report of the Independent Chair of Panel has been compiled in consultation with Fostering Panel members. The Brighton & Hove Foster Care association also provided input into the report.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The spending on in-house fostering allowances and other expenses during 2010/2011 totalled £4.603m. This was an increase of 7.4% on the spend in 2009/10. This rise was predominantly the result of increased numbers of placements with relatives, which rose from 46.35 FTE in 2009/10 to 54.81 FTE in 2010/11, with a subsequent growth in spend of £0.111m. Spending on Residence Orders Allowances fell slightly from £1.211m in 2009/10 to £1.164m in 2010/11. Spending on Special Guardianship amounted to £0.332m in 2010/11.

Spend on agency fostering rose by 23% in 2010/2011 to £7.167m. The numbers of placements started to rise considerably at the end of 2008 and have continued to grow during the last two years. There were 186 children in an IFA placement on 31/3/11 compared with just 153 twelve months previously. There has been considerable effort to control the costs of IFAs and this was reflected in the average direct cost of an IFA falling in 2010/11 by 0.4% to £835.44 per week.

The average direct unit cost for agency foster care of £835 per week compares to £494 per week for children placed with in-house carers.

Finance Officer Consulted: David Ellis

Date: 13/02/2011

### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The legal and regulatory context of fostering services are referred to in the body of the report. These services are essential to fulfilling the statutory obligations of the Trust to otherwise vulnerable children under both the Children Act 1989 & 2004. Children can only be placed into care with the express agreement of their parents or the approval of the Court. Fostering services should reflect the right of children to a family life, which is defined in law so as to include foster carers with whom they have formed a family like attachment, as well as to their birth family.

Lawyer Consulted: Sandra O'Brien

Date: 06/07/2011

### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 There is a legal requirement for the local authority to provide foster carers who can reflect a child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. BHCC actively encourages foster carer applications from citizens from a wide range of backgrounds and has an explicitly inclusive recruitment strategy.

An Equalities impact assessment was undertaken in 2009/10.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7 The annual report focuses on the work of a city wide service within the Children & Families Delivery Unit.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

6.1 None

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 Required by fostering regulations

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Annual Report

**Documents In Members' Rooms**

1. None

## **Background Documents**

1. None



# **Annual Fostering Service report**

## **2010-2011**

**Fostering and Adoption Service  
253 Preston Road  
Brighton  
BN1 6SE**

**[www.fosteringinbrightonandhove.org.uk](http://www.fosteringinbrightonandhove.org.uk)**

## **1. Introduction**

The report will detail the work undertaken by the Fostering Service within Children & Families from April 2010 – March 2011, including information on fostering recruitment activity, the work of the Fostering Panel and developments within the Service.

The report will also highlight national developments in fostering practice and provide information on the profile of the children in care population within Brighton & Hove.

A key priority of the work of Children & Families is to ensure children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network if at all possible. The Fostering and Adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the city in line with the priorities outlined in the Brighton & Hove City Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2009-12 that was agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves through their consultative forums.

When a child does come into care foster carers play a pivotal role in the multi agency team around the child. Foster carers take children and young people into their homes often at very short notice and work to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child in care. Ideally that child will be able to return to their birth family but if that is not possible achieve permanence either through adoption or another legal order or through permanent foster care.

Fostering is a highly regulated area of social work practice and there has been a range of new regulations and statutory guidance issued by the Department of Education earlier this year. The new regulations and National Minimum Standards took effect from April 2011 and have been informed by the views of children and young people. The National Minimum Standards provide the framework against which Ofsted inspect local authority fostering services and fostering agencies.

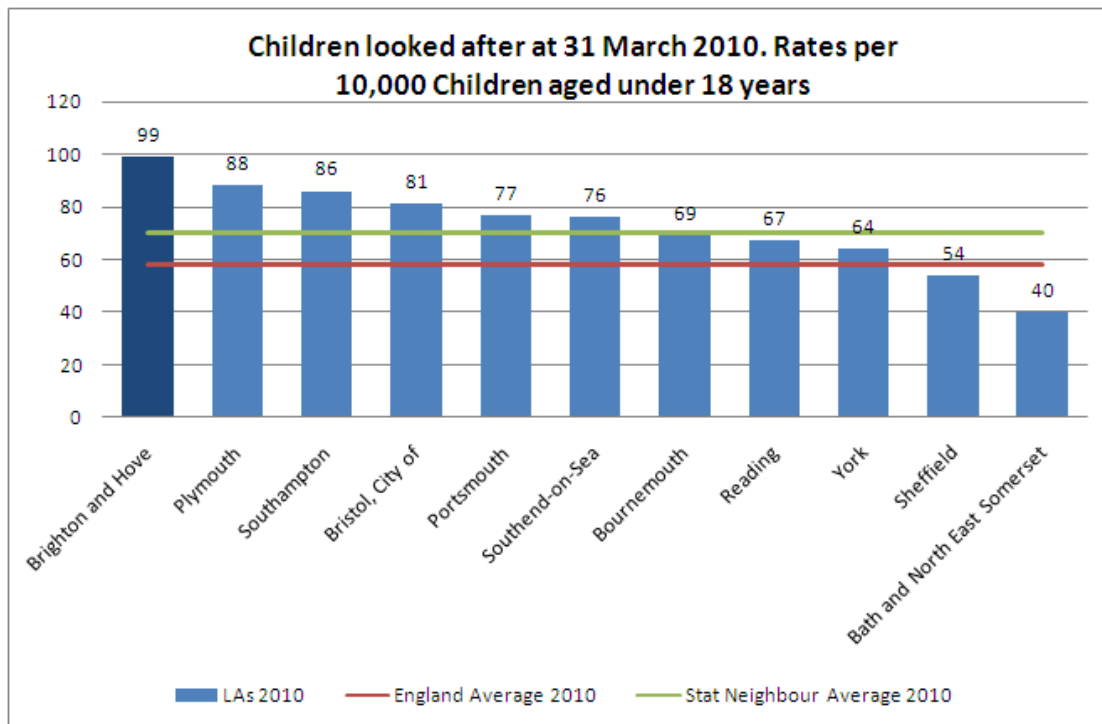
The national profile of fostering remains very high. There was a 6% increase in the numbers of children in care in England at end March 2010 with a total of 64,400 children looked after by local authorities, a rate of 58 per 10,000 children under 18 years. The majority of looked after children (73%) were in foster care placements. The number of children looked after in foster placements has increased by 13% since 2006 (from 41,700 to 47,200). Within Brighton & Hove 82% of children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 were in foster care.

Within Brighton and Hove there was a significant rise in the numbers of children coming into care from December 2008 which has remained high but stabilised over the last twelve months. The number of children in care over the last 12 months has ranged from 468 in May 2010 to 490 in December 2010. However the number of children looked after in Brighton & Hove at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 increased by 17.7% from the number at 31 March 2009 compared to a



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6% increase nationally. The rate of children looked after per 10,000 children aged under 18 is 99 per 10,000 at March 2010, higher than the national average (58 per 10,000) and the average for our statistical neighbours (70.2 per 10,000).



The new Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 also came into force in April 2011. The aim of these revised regulations and guidance is to streamline processes to increase the emphasis on more effective care planning for children in care. These regulations highlight permanence as the underpinning concept for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. Permanence is defined as the framework for emotional, physical and legal permanence which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Achieving permanence is the key consideration from the point the child becomes looked after.

Within Children & Families a corporate parent strategy group has continued to meet as has the corporate parenting board which has representation from young people in care and care leavers as well as from the Brighton & Hove Foster Care Association. The corporate parenting board will continue to receive update reports in relation to progress against the key aspects of Brighton & Hove's pledge to children in care.

## 2. Fostering Service

The Service comprises the Fostering Team and the Intensive Placement Team and has retained a very stable and experienced management team. The Service Manager also has responsibility for the administrative team and for line managing the Independent Visitor Co-ordinator that is now located

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within the Fostering & Adoption Service. The Fostering Service has 3.8 Practice Manager posts and there is very close liaison between the Fostering & Adoption & Permanence teams given the overlap in the work with some children moving through from fostering to adoption. Foster carers are also supervised and supported within the Family and Friends team and Adoption & Permanence team and the work of those teams is reported on within the annual adoption agency report.

The Practice Managers within the Fostering Team take lead responsibility for different aspects of the service namely; recruitment and foster carer training, the placement finding duty service and parent and baby carers and carers for unaccompanied asylum seekers. The Intensive Fostering Team is managed by 1.2 Practice Managers and they both also play a role in supervising staff in the Fostering team and providing management cover to the duty service. The Intensive Placement Team was formed in 2006 and works to enhance placement stability and provide an increased level of support to intensive fostering placements.

The teams are made up of a number of experienced social work practitioners and social work resource officers plus a recruitment and publicity officer. As well as the placement finding duty service the service also runs a recruitment duty service to prospective foster carers.

The Fostering Agency Advisor, plays a key role in ensuring the effective running of the Fostering Panel, providing a quality assurance role in relation to reports being prepared for panel and for providing specialist advice to staff within the Children and Families in relation to fostering work. A separate report on the work of the Panel written by the Independent chair of Panel is appended to this report.

The Fostering Service Manager attends the quarterly meetings of the South East Local Authority Regional Foster Carer group which meets to share practice and policy issues.

The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2009 when the service was rated as 'outstanding'. Ofsted have now moved to a 3 yearly cycle for fostering service inspections unless there is a reason to inspect more frequently. Ofsted also now require an annual fostering dataset from all local authorities and fostering agencies which gives a comprehensive picture of fostering provision nationally.

### **3. Fostering Recruitment Activity 2010/11**

The recruitment strategy for the service is updated annually and is developed in response to the profile of children in care and the trends in the demand for placements considered alongside the profile of Brighton & Hove's foster carers. At the end of March 2011 there were 160 fostering households approved by Brighton and Hove including family and friends foster carers with 207 filled placements. Foster carers can be approved for up to 3 children if appropriate but there may be many reasons where decisions are made that carers need a short break from fostering or that it is not appropriate to have

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another child in placement alongside a child with particular complex needs. Of these fostering households; 256 carers were White/ British and 22 were from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds. The service recruits within a 20 mile radius of the city and just over half of Brighton & Hove approved carers live within the city.

The age profile of current foster carers show that the majority of carers are aged 50+. Whereas there is no upper age limit for foster carers, the requirement is that carers need to be fit enough to foster. As some foster carers approach 60 there are a number that do consider retiring or scaling down their fostering. The 50 – 59 age range do bring benefits in that they are less likely to have children of their own living at home and hence provide greater degree of freedom in matching them with children in care. Infact the service ran a successful 'empty nester campaign' in 2009-10 profiling the opportunities of fostering once your birth children have left home.

The Fostering Service during the year has maintained a profile on the need to recruit more carers for older children (10 years+), Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] carers and parent and baby carers and for children under 5. It has continued to broaden the recruitment activity in acknowledgement of the very high numbers of children coming into care and the fact that it has not always been possible to place younger children under 10 years with in-house foster carers.

During 2010/11 there were 227 enquiries received by the Fostering team from prospective carers. There were 7 information sessions held during the year and 3 preparation training groups. Regular recruitment meetings are held to review progress with the recruitment strategy and work has been undertaken to streamline the recruitment processes. Recruitment practice is also informed by feedback and input from applicants and experienced carers as well as learning any lessons from good practice guidance published by Fostering Network or from sharing experiences with other local authorities that are part of the SE fostering regional group. Work undertaken by Fostering Network on recruitment activity comments on the high drop out rate from initial enquiry to approval and Brighton & Hove is not out of step on this. The decision to become a foster carer is a major event not only in the foster carer's life but also in the lives of their family and there are a number of applicants that make initial enquiries without understanding the full implications of the role and potential impact for their own birth children. However the service is striving to improve the ratio of initial enquiries that convert to approval and one aspect of this is setting up systems to keep in touch with potential applicants that may have enquired at a very early stage of their thinking about fostering and perhaps have not followed this up by attending an information session.

There were eleven new sets of foster carers [excluding family and friends] approved in the year. These new carers included one supported lodgings carers for young people over 16 years and all the other foster carers had approval ranges that extended to include teenage children reflecting the needs of the service. There were in addition 3 sets of concurrent carers approved via the Adoption & Permanence Panel; concurrent carers are approved as both foster carers and adopters and the child is placed on a

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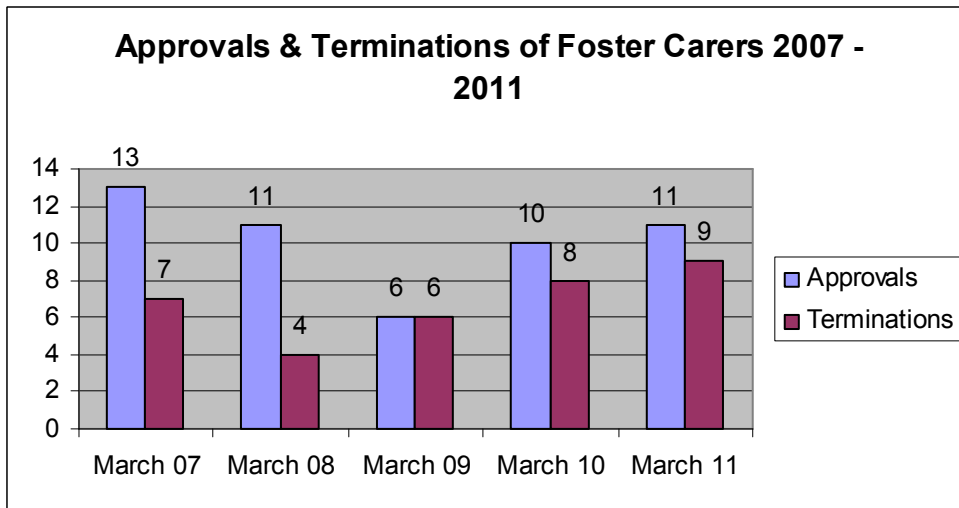
fostering basis but with the plan that the carers are able to offer adoption to that child if rehabilitation work with the birth family is not successful.

The total number of fostering resources [excluding family and friends foster carers] has for the last three years remained relatively stable with just a very slight increase each year as the number of new carers approved has been broadly balanced with the number of carers that were lost to the service through resignation or termination of approval. Managers within the service continually work to review the recruitment strategy and the way the service is configured to ensure recruitment and assessment activity is given a high priority alongside the other areas of work.

However without an increase in staffing into the service there is limited capacity to expand further as it is essential that all foster carers and particularly those newly recruited receive a high level of support from the service with the fostering task. The service has used 2 regular freelance social workers to assist with undertaking assessment work and has recently recruited a further two workers to undertake this work. Once carers are approved they have then to develop a new relationship with their supervising social worker so the use of freelance social workers to assist with recruitment and assessment work can only have a limited role.

There is a turnover of carers every year as fostering can be a very challenging and demanding task and some carers decide that it no longer fits with their family life or retire due to health issues or due to the fact that they move some distance from Brighton & Hove. In 2010/11 there were 9 resignations or terminations of approval including 1 supported lodgings carer. There were also 7 assessments that were discontinued during the year for a variety of reasons including unexpected health issues or changes in lifestyle such as starting new relationships or jobs that effected decision making about wanting to pursue fostering. Many people are counselled out at the initial enquiry stage when more information is given about the fostering role. Some people have very limited experience of childcare and may be encouraged to gain further experience and contact the service at a later stage.

The service always works hard to ensure foster carers are retained and the service currently does not lose foster carers to the independent sector. In the past few years there have been some approved foster carers from the independent sector wanting to move over to Brighton and Hove. They have been attracted by both the support offered by Brighton and Hove and the broader range of children they can foster. However the national increase in numbers of children in the care system has resulted in all the local fostering agencies being much busier and being able to offer their carers a wider range of children needing placements. There has been a slight uptake of interest in carers from the independent sector enquiring about transferring to Brighton and Hove since the beginning of 2011. One social worker within the team takes a lead on liaising with these carers.



As of July 2011 there are 12 further assessments that are ongoing with panel dates booked through the year and a preparation training groups taking place in July and October 2011.

**Recruitment strategy**

The Fostering Service works closely with the council press office and there have again been a number of features in the local press over the year presenting ‘good news’ stories which profile fostering households. There are regular advertisements in the local press and a significant campaign for National Foster Care Fortnight which is in May each year. This year the service ran a number of stalls at local supermarkets during fostering fortnight as well as attending other key community events during the year. Information events held during the evening and on Saturdays are held at different venues around the city. A Brighton & Hove foster carer was also featured positively in an item on a local TV news programme.

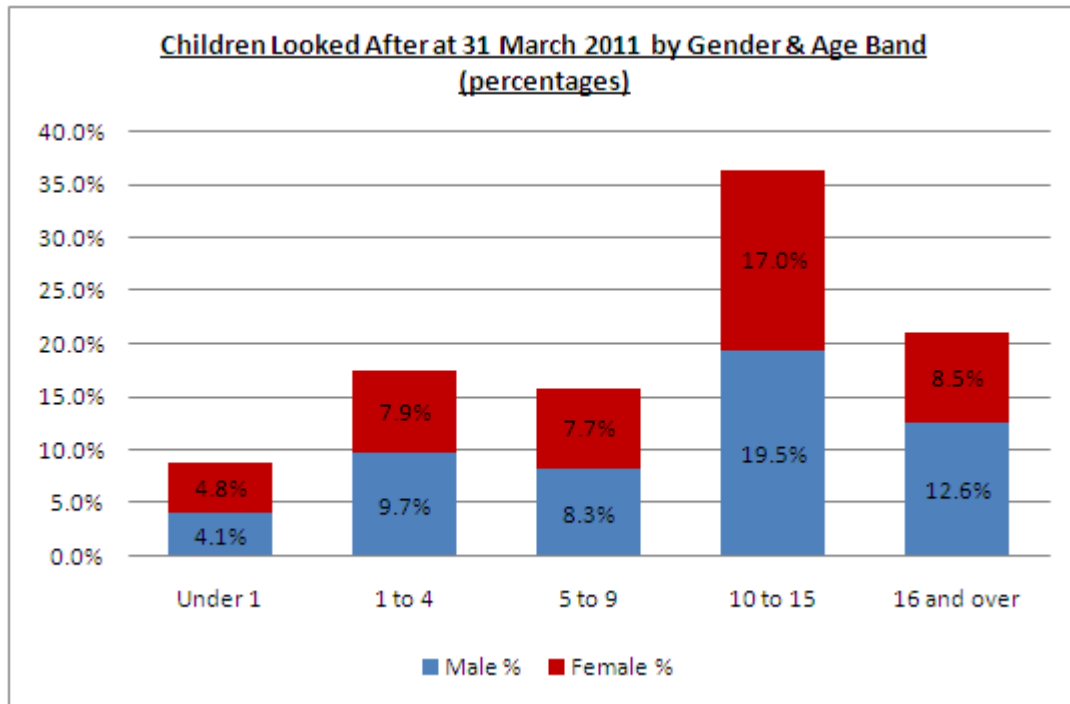
Many prospective foster carers seek out information about the service on-line before they make contact and the service has a dedicated website which is kept updated with information about recruitment events. The service is also developing the use of social media and linking with the council facebook and twitter pages to advertise recruitment events. New advertisements have also been developed in line with the council’s corporate image and reflecting different fostering tasks.

Foster carers and young people continue to play a role in recruitment events by attending information sessions and talking to prospective carers about their experience of fostering and the fostering task. The lead Practice Manager maintains an oversight of the recruitment activity and provides regular performance reports.

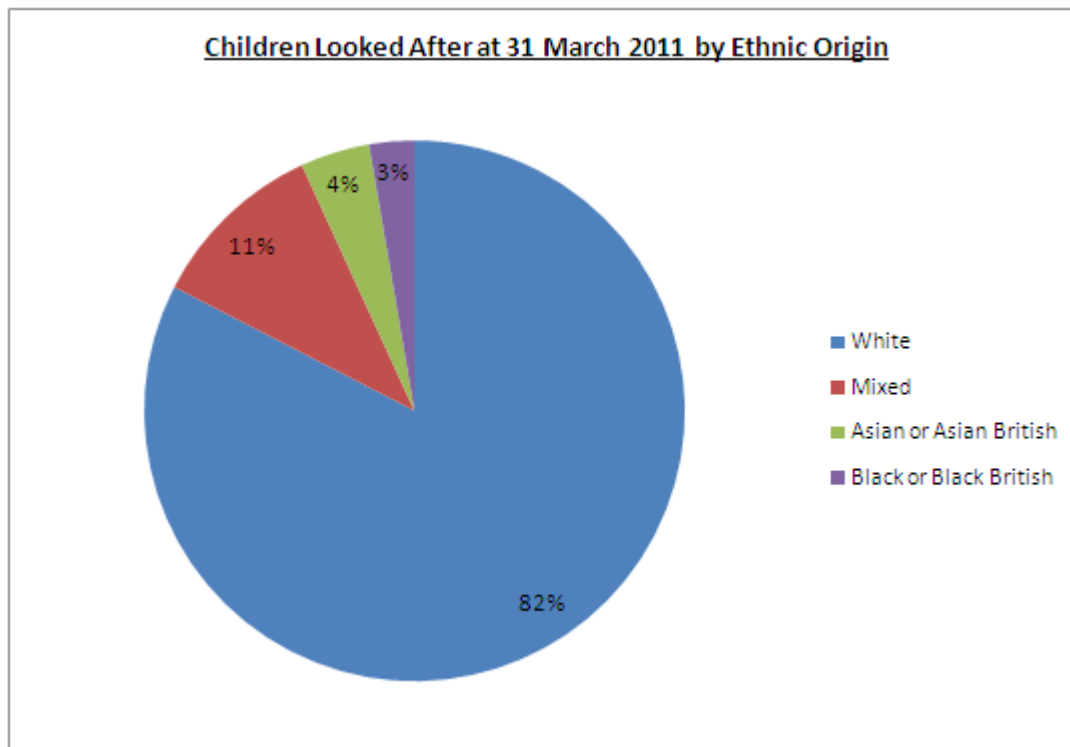
**Profile of children in care 10/11**

The following graphs give information on the age breakdown, gender and ethnicity as a snapshot at end March 2011.

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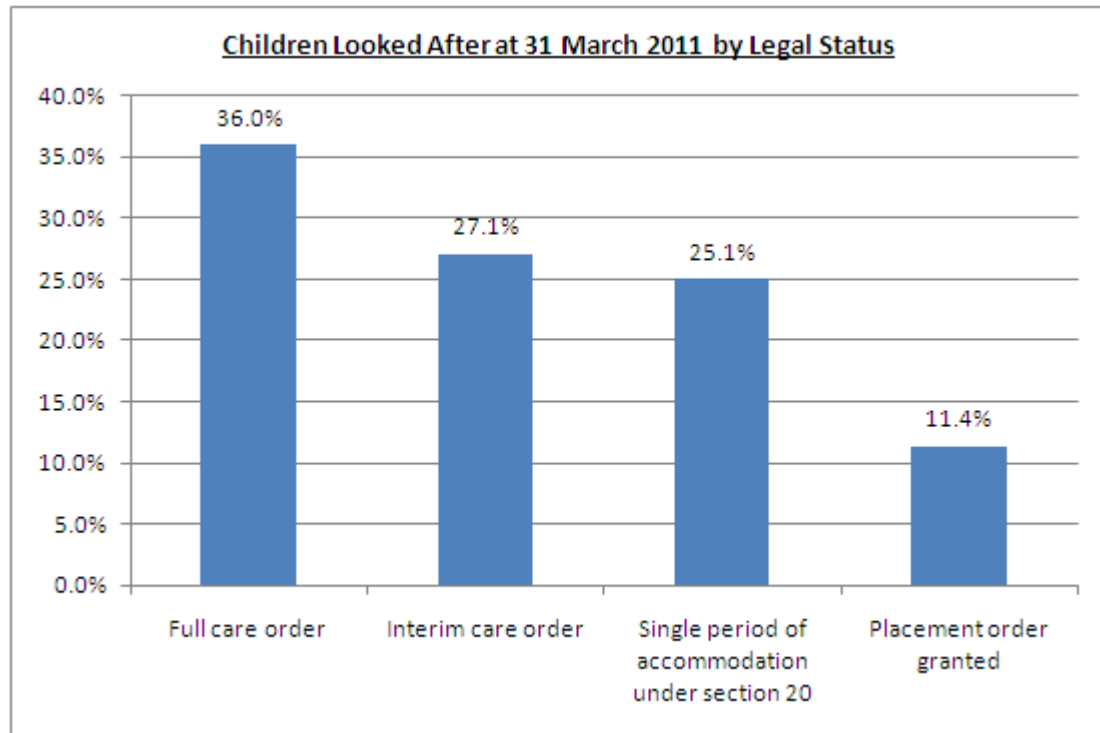


The gender split in the care population was 54% (262) male and 46% (221) female as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

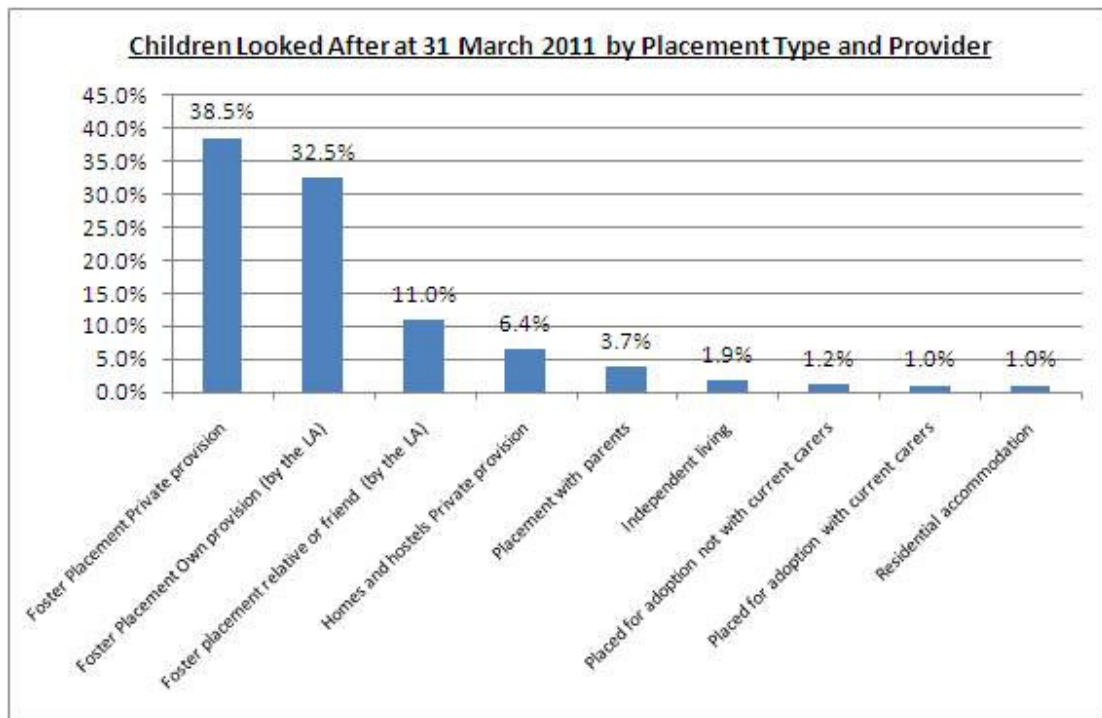


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In terms of legal status the majority of children in care are subject to a legal order, either full Care Order or Interim Care Order. Analysis of the figures show that it is more likely for younger children in care to be subject to legal orders than older children who are more heavily represented in the cohort of children that are voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of Children & Young People's Act 1989.



Over a third of children in care are on a Full Care Order, with 27% under an Interim Care Order, 25% of children were looked after under Section 20, a slight fall from 30% last year, and 11% under a Placement Order which is an increase from 7% last year reflecting the rise in adoption activity.



Of the 82% children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 that were in foster placements, 38.5% were placed with independent agency providers and 43.5% were in foster placements provided by Brighton & Hove which includes 11% in foster placements with relatives or friends.

## 5. Placement Activity

The Fostering Service runs a duty service for social workers needing to find a foster placement for a child. This service is overseen by a Practice Manager and is supported by other staff within the team.

The duty service has had a sustained high demand for placements with continued pressure on resources over the last year in particular referrals for parent and baby foster placements and placements for teenagers and sibling groups and other children with complex needs.

This high demand for placements has continued to have an impact on the capacity of the service to consider the detail of the matching requirements of the child and to find placements that fit with the matching needs. As the increase in numbers of children in care is a national issue and neighbouring authorities have also experienced rising numbers of children coming into care there continues to be pressure on available fostering or residential resources across the south east. There have at times been very limited availability of placements and although both the fostering duty team and agency placement team have worked very hard to find appropriate matches for children there has sometimes been a need to place children or young people at some distance from Brighton and Hove or to place more challenging children with carers that were newly approved. If appropriate a variation to a carer's approval range will be given or an exemption to the normal fostering limit if



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following a risk assessment that is considered appropriate to enable children to be placed with in-house carers.

### **Agency placements**

The Fostering Duty service works to place children with in house foster carers that meet their needs where ever possible and referrals are passed to the Agency Placement Team when there are no appropriate in-house placements available. All referrals are received by the fostering duty team and there is close liaison with the social workers in the fieldwork teams to try and ensure that referrals are completed to give a clear picture of the matching requirements of the specific child and the outcomes required from a placement. Many of the referrals still come to the duty service with requests for placements to be found at very short notice which limits the capacity at times to focus on finding placements that fully meet the matching needs. For some children a dual search is carried out between both teams given the limited timescales available to find an available placement.

There is a close working relationship between the duty service and the agency placement team who oversee the contracts with the independent providers and the volume of placement activity require frequent liaison and discussion between the teams about practice issues. The duty team will organise planning meetings to consider care plans and matching needs where there is more time available for placement finding or where the child has particularly complex needs.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 there were 186 children and young people in agency foster placements. This is a further significant increase from the same time last year when 153 placements were being purchased. This obviously has significant financial consequences given the higher unit costs of agency placements; however it reflects the rise in numbers of children in care and the lack of capacity to expand in-house fostering resources. A business case to expand the fostering service to enable more children to be placed with in-house carers has been developed through the value for money programme.

### **Parent and baby placements**

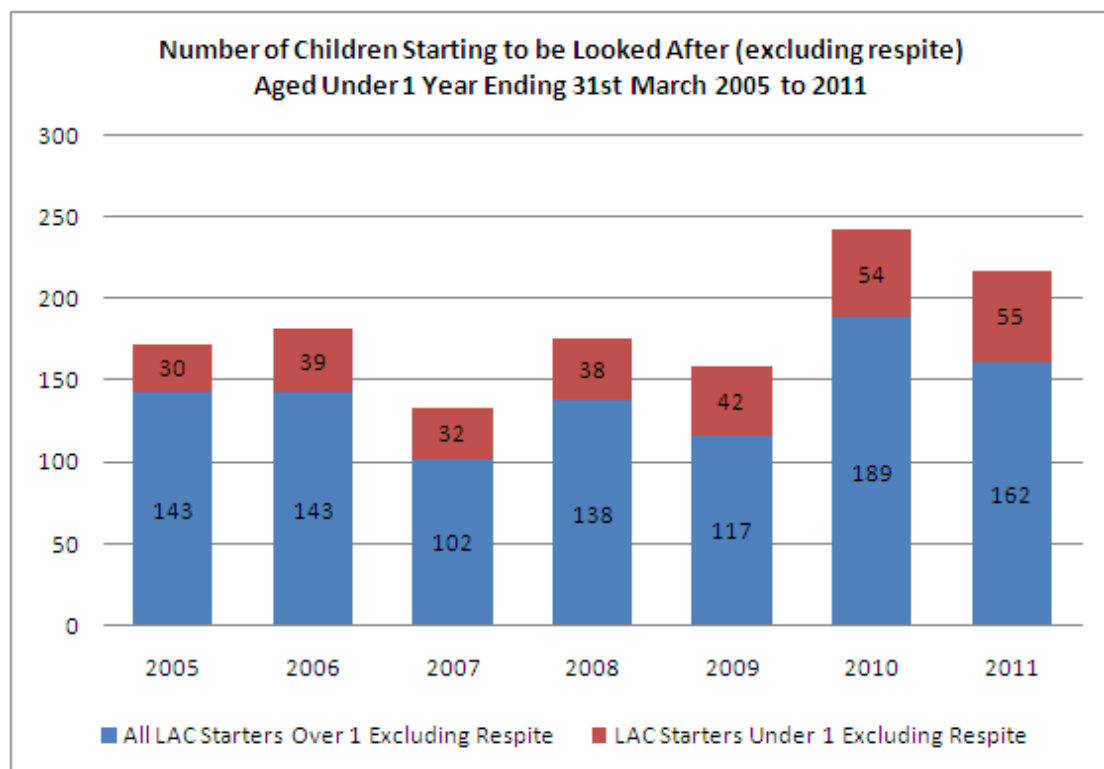
During the year there has continued to be a sustained high demand for parent and baby or parent and child foster placements. Most of these placements are made at birth and as part of a care plan within proceedings.

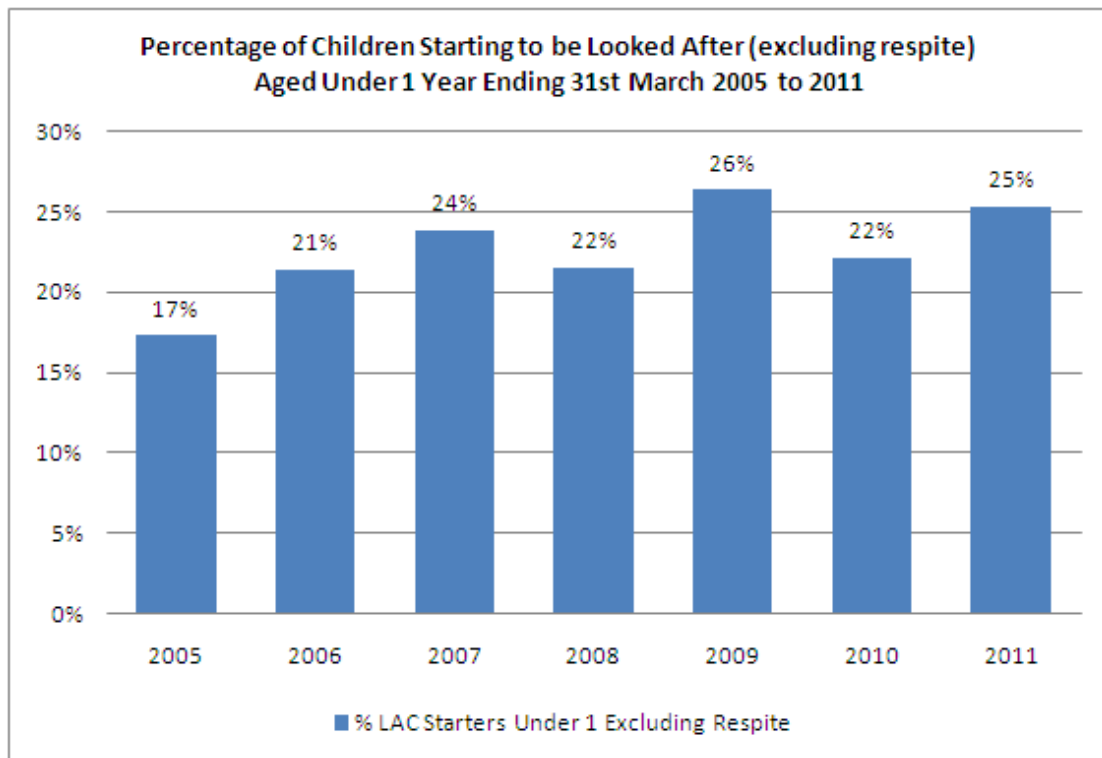
There has been considerable activity during the year to progress actions agreed as part of a work stream to improve early permanence planning for babies and infants in the care system. Brighton & Hove have a high number of referrals in relation to vulnerable babies and many of the referrals relate to concerns about the parents' substance misuse. The high numbers of under 1s in the care system demonstrate the need to give priority to ensuring that services are effectively co-ordinated pre birth and that timely assessments are undertaken to ensure that there is minimal delay in achieving early permanence for the most vulnerable babies

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This work has been reported on within the Children & Families value for money work programme. As part of that the Fostering & Adoption Service has been involved in organising a 2 day training programme for staff and carers in February 2011 on early permanence planning. This involved input from the midwifery and children in care health team plus a dedicated session on the impact of substance misuse in pregnancy from the specialist midwife and consultant neonatologist. One of Brighton & Hove's parent and baby foster carers also contributed with a presentation on her and her family's experience of this challenging fostering task. The British Association for Adoption & Fostering [BAAF] is now developing a resource handbook and training on parent and child foster placements and Brighton & Hove foster carers and practitioners have contributed significantly to this.

Within Children & Families there has also been very positive progress on establishing a new early permanence team which will be staffed by health visitors and early years visitors. The team will have specialist support from the Clermont child protection unit and will be open to undertake pre birth and post birth assessments with families from July 2011. It is envisaged that parents in parent and baby foster placements will be able to be part of a 2 day parenting assessment and support programme which will dovetail with the work undertaken by the foster carer in placement.





## 6 Fostering support services

The provision of a range of support services from the individual work provided by the supervising social worker to training and support groups, an out of hours service, support with respite arrangements and an extensive school holiday activity programme for children in placement all play a key role in ensuring carers are enabled and supported to meet the needs of the children in their care. It is also a significant factor in the retention of foster carers and enables the service not only to ensure carers are well supported in line with the fostering minimum standards but also enables Brighton and Hove to compete with the better independent fostering agencies locally.

The Fostering Service has continued to work hard over the year to review and develop the support services provided to carers, the central component of which is the supervisory relationship. The service has a stable staff group of experienced social workers and all carers have an allocated social worker.

The on-line version of the Foster Carers' Handbook has been well received by carers and the Fostering Agency Advisor has the lead role to update and expand this handbook.

### Training and Support groups

There is a general monthly support group open to all carers which is long standing and well attended. There are also regular support groups focusing on the CWDC TSD Standards for foster carers throughout the year to support carers with their work to complete their workbook.

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A specific group for parent and baby foster carers is now well established which has a clear training element with a programme of different speakers. There is also a group for the intensive placement foster carers and it is an expectation of being part of the scheme that they meet together regularly with the two dedicated workers who supervise the placements.

The service continues to offer a comprehensive training programme to foster carers that builds on the basic training they receive during the preparation group and assessment process. A working group is held with staff and foster carer representatives to review and develop the training programme.

There are 9 mandatory courses that carers are expected to take up over the course of their first two years post approval. Carers also have the opportunity to take up additional training provided within the training programme for foster carers or the wider training programme offered within Children & Families and through the NVQ Level 3 award.

### **Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers**

The sons and daughters of foster carers play a vital role in the fostering task and the service has continued to provide them with dedicated support services. Fostering is very much a family activity and research has shown that placements are more successful and less likely to break down when there is a positive framework of support in place that includes the sons and daughters of carers.

Supervising social workers will meet with these children to ascertain their views during the year. The Intensive Placement Team provide specific activity days within the school holidays for these children which are well attended; 41 different young people attended specific activity days for the sons and daughters of carers during the year.

### **7 Foster Care Association**

The Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association has been in existence for 7 years and plays an important role in supporting foster carers by providing a buddy scheme and monthly coffee mornings and inputting into the development of the service. The secretary of the association has provided this section for the annual report.

'The Brighton & Hove Foster Care Association, an independent registered charity, has continued to support and encourage our foster carers in 2010/11.

They have held social activities to bring carers and their families together and held fundraising events such as the Christmas Fair and a sponsored sky dive by the Chair and Treasurer!

They are committed to working in partnership with the Fostering Department in an effort to improve the service to foster carers. This year they have successfully lobbied for parking vouchers to be made available to those

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carers who most need them and they are currently in the process of introducing regular foster carer 'surgeries' whereby carers will be able to meet with managers directly to put forward any concerns, worries or suggestions in an effort to improve provision.'

### **8 Children in Care Health and Virtual School teams**

The Consultant Nurse for children in care and her colleagues continue to work very closely with the service. They provide training input to foster carers as part of their mandatory training but also run additional workshops for staff and carers as needed. Over the last year the Nurse Consultant organised with her colleague the Nurse for 16+ team, a training event for staff to update on sexual health and protective behaviours and provided additional training for staff and carers on early attachment.

The nurses for children in care also provide additional individual support and advice to foster carers as required about any health issues related to their children in placement. Since 2008 there has been a national requirement to report on the emotional well being of children in care and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire are sent to carers to complete on an annual basis with input from the young person as appropriate. The results of these are analysed and for children that are shown to have scored highly follow up support and advice is provided to carers and social workers by the health team.

There are also plans now to re-establish the regular liaison group with CAMHS clinicians that work with children in care which is a very positive development.

The Virtual School team for children in care also work closely with the service and provide input to the training programme for carers. The Educational Psychologist within the team has developed very good links with the service and has worked during the year to provide additional support and advice to carers on a range of educational issues including for example supporting children with reading. She holds regular drop in surgeries for carers.

### **9 Intensive Placement Team**

The Intensive Placement Team (IPT) works to support the general development and placement stability of children and young people aged between 7 and 16 years living in Brighton and Hove foster placements including Family and Friends placements.

The remit of the team also includes the supervision of a limited number of Intensive Foster Placements where enhanced levels of placement support are required to sustain ongoing placement stability. IPT staff are also allocated to provide direct work to children and young people individually and in groups.

The work of the team has changed during the year in response to the need to make savings within the service and ensure that staff time is prioritised to maximise the capacity of the service to recruit and support foster carers. All

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staff within the team now also undertake the supervision of carers and take part in recruitment and duty tasks. The morning unit which had been running to support young people return to school where there is a break in education and to help support placement stability closed in October 2010. In part this reflected the small number of children that were involved in the unit but also the fact that the Virtual School team works closely with schools to try and maximise the engagement of young people in care within the education system. Since the closure of the morning unit there have still been occasions when the team has been able to respond to a particular need for a young person in care to be engaged in an activity during the day.

### Activity programme

An integral part of the team's work continues to be the provision of activity programmes for children and young people during each school holiday. The number of children and young people reached the activity programme has remained consistently high. The programme provides respite for carers and opportunities for children in care to share and enjoy different experiences together.

Holiday Period	Places offered	Places filled	No. of individual young people
Easter 10	85	82	48
June half-term 10	45	39	35
Summer 10	216	192	61
Oct half-term 10	27	19	19
Feb half-term 11	27	25	23
Total	400	357	

### Direct work

The child or young person is allocated an individual social work resource officer who will work with them on a weekly basis addressing specific areas of need such as life story work; protective behaviours; anger management or assisting young people and their carers to access appropriate recourses in the community. The work aims to support the healthy development of the young person's self esteem and sense of identity. Over the past year IPT have worked with 42 young people which is an increase from last year despite having a reduced staff team.

### Therapeutic Art Group

An IPT social work resource officer also jointly facilitates a therapeutic art group for children in care with CAMHS workers throughout the year and alongside the IPT summer activity programme. In the past year the summer art group worked with 8 young people and the weekly group working with 6 young people.

### Listen up-scheme

IPT administer this scheme which provides free access to leisure activities in the city children and young people in care. IPT has liaised with Brighton and

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Hove Albion FC to provide 152 free tickets for looked after young children and young people and 85 free tickets to accompanying adults to attend matches this season.

### **Music workshops**

IPT staff have retained a close working relationship with the Music and Performing Arts Service and have worked alongside the Cre8tive Sounds Project successfully facilitating music workshops during the holidays.

IPT staff also work alongside specialist external music tutors providing young people the opportunity to learn and play music together. Feedback from the young people and foster carers is always very enthusiastic.

### **Arts Award**

The arts award is a national qualification offered under the National Qualifications Framework to support young people and the team has three staff members qualified to assess this award.

### **Intensive Foster Placements**

Intensive Foster Placements aim to provide stability and continuity ideally as a permanent placement but certainly beyond the short-term. It is not the child's needs or the capacities of the foster carers alone but a close fitting match between the two that defines an IFP and there are clear expectations of the support provided to carers and of the level of care provided by the carers to the child or young person. Three social workers within the team supervise a limited number of Intensive Foster Placements where enhanced levels of placement support are required to sustain ongoing placement stability. The enhanced package of support to carers includes intensive supervision an enhanced fostering rate and regular respite.

IFP carers will also have access to the activity programme and the allocation of an IPT social work resource officer for direct work with a young person. IFP supervising social workers also facilitate the IFP development group in order to support carers with their professional development, share common challenges and strategies to resolve them and to help develop a coherent identity.

There has been an increase in the matching of IFP placements with carers and there are currently 15 young people in placement with 11 IFP carers.

### **Future Projects:**

#### **Bike Club**

Funding has been awarded to IPT alongside other local organisations working with young people. This is to enable the team to facilitate cycling and bicycle maintenance workshops for young people in care via jointly funded equipment and bikes based at Sussex University. These activities are planned to start in July 2011.

## **Children in Care Celebrations**

IPT are developing and organising the Children in Care award celebrations for 2011. As a part of the preparation for this event IPT will be facilitating a music Group for young people that will work towards performing on the day of the event.

## **10 Fostering Panel**

It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels and the Agency Advisors manage the panel administration team and take a lead in the recruitment of panel members. A report on the activity of the fostering panel prepared by the Independent Chair is appended to this report.

## **11 Complaints and allegations**

During the year there have been 13 incidents investigated either as child protection allegations or as 'standards of care' issues in relation to Brighton & Hove foster carers including family and friends carers.

Of these, 4 were started as child protection referrals but following further investigation 3 were concluded as not being substantiated and no further action was required. The 4<sup>th</sup> was opened as a child protection enquiry but revised to a standards of care investigation.

The other remaining 9 were investigated under the standards of care procedures. The Fostering Service has endeavoured to conclude these investigations in a timely fashion and 9 investigations were concluded in under 2 months, 3 were completed in under 4 months, 1 was concluded in under 6 months due to specific personal circumstances for the family involved.

Of the 13 investigations, 4 resulted in no further action being taken, 6 have concluded with some amendment to practice or increased support to the foster carers and 2 investigations concluded with the decision to end the child's placement with the carers and a further investigation concluded with the recommendation to amend the carers' terms of approval.

In addition there has been 1 referral to the Independent Review Mechanism which has also resulted in a Stage 2 complaint which was not upheld. This matter is still ongoing.

Fostering Network in conjunction with the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York completed a report in 2010 on maltreatment and allegations of maltreatment in foster care. The report outlines the fact that unfounded allegations of maltreatment in foster care are profoundly upsetting and stressful for the foster carers and children and may lead to some carers giving up fostering. The evidence in relation to the prevalence of allegations and substantiated maltreatment is limited and sometimes conflicting. Only 2 UK studies have reported and found 3.5-4% of foster carers were subject to



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allegations in a single year and that the proportion of foster families with substantiated reports of maltreatment during that year was less than 1%.

### **12 Service Planning 2011/12**

During 2010/11 the service has continued to give a high priority to ensuring that support services for young people and carers are sustained given the significance of this in terms of good outcomes for children in care, placement stability and successful recruitment and retention of foster carers. The Intensive Placement Team has continued to review and develop their group and individual support programme with young people and have sustained an activity programme which not only is a support to carers but also enables young people to have the opportunity to be part of a range of different fun, creative and therapeutic activities during the school holidays. This in part recognises the fact that some young people in care do struggle to access mainstream services and can gain a great deal from being part of a very safe and focused activity programme which takes account of their specific needs.

The Intensive Fostering Scheme has also continued to develop and be successful in contributing to placement stability by providing a high level of individual support to carers and an intensive team around the placement. Likewise the service has maintained and developed the support to parent and baby foster carers and improved our capacity to expedite permanence plans for some of the most vulnerable babies in the care system. Brighton & Hove has been profiled within a good practice guide on these placements and one of our foster carers will be speaking about her experiences at a national conference in September 2011. This will continue to be an ongoing area of work for the forthcoming year and close links will be developed with the new early permanence team within Children & Families.

The service continues to focus on ensuring recruitment work is given a high priority and a business case has been put together as part of the value for money work programme for additional staff to focus on recruitment activity with the aim of reducing the spend in 2012/13 on high cost agency foster placements. A stretch target for recruitment for 2012/13 has been agreed which if the numbers of children coming into care remains stable will enable the service to increase the percentage of children that are placed with Brighton & Hove in-house approved foster carers. In summary this equates to £162,000 investment into the in-house fostering service to enable the appointment of additional staff to set up a dedicated recruitment team within the Fostering service in order to be able to run more frequent recruitment events and preparation training groups and fast-track assessments as appropriate. The stretch target is to be able to place an additional 18 full time equivalent children with in-house foster carers by the end of 2012/13. The service will continue to recruit a range of carers but will endeavour to work towards improving capacity to place all children under 10 years with in-house carers.

There are, however, a significant percentage of children placed with independent fostering providers that have lived with their carers for many years and their placement has been confirmed through the panel or review

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process as a permanent placement. There would be no intention to disrupt any foster placement for a child or young person that is a permanent or long term placement and is clearly meeting their needs. The aim of the value for money business case is to develop the in-house fostering resource base to enable more children to be placed in-house when children are coming into care or when a placement disrupts for whatever reason and a new placement for a child already in care is needed. Progress in relation to this new recruitment initiative within the Fostering service will be monitored carefully and reported on at regular intervals.

Considerable work is being undertaken currently to develop practice and procedures to ensure compliance with the new fostering standards and regulations. The new fostering minimum standards were developed in part in response to feedback nationally from young people in care and there is an increased commitment to consulting and involving children. The standards also profile the central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer and the need for foster carers to be recognised as core members of the team working with the child. There is a recognition that foster carers need to be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting and the notion of the 'good parent' yardstick is referred to. A briefing on the new standards has been provided to carers and work is underway on for example developing a new placement agreement and scheme of delegation for carers.

There is also now a requirement for each local authority and fostering agency to develop a foster carers' charter. The Foster Carers' Charter was launched in March 2011 which was jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, charities and children. The new charter sets out clear principles on how foster carers should be treated, recognises their invaluable work and also profiles the expectations of carers. Within Brighton & Hove initial work has been undertaken to consult carers on the content of a charter and a small working group of staff and carers is being established to take this work forward which will be reported on further within the Corporate Parenting board.

Other aspects of work to comply with the new guidance and standards involves the updating of the children's guide to fostering which will involve input from young people and the development of profiles of all Brighton & Hove carers that can be provided to children and young people prior to placement.

The Fostering & Adoption service contributed to the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and services to looked after children that was undertaken in March 2011. However the service will be due a dedicated Fostering inspection against the framework of new fostering minimum standards in 2012.

Sharon Donnelly  
Head of Service, Fostering & Adoption  
July 2011

## Appendix 1

### **BRIGHTON & HOVE FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT (1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011)**

#### **1. Introduction**

This report briefly summarises the work of Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus Fostering Panel over the last year. It has been a really busy year and the workload of the Panel has continued to increase. This is in line with the higher demand locally for placements for children both in foster care and family and friends' care and it reflects the national picture.

I have now been the Independent Chair of the Panel for over two years and I continue to be impressed by the quality of much of the work that has been presented. The Panel has continued to function effectively although we have experienced a number of changes to membership over the year.

#### **2. Composition of the Panel**

Over the last year, the Panel was constituted in line with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2002 and the Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

Members in 2010/11 were:

- Sarah Borthwick, independent Chair
- Jacqueline Stillwell, Barnardo's officer, vice chair
- Coun Jayne Bennett, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Miriam Patrick, independent member, ex foster carer
- Andy Gay, Barnardo's officer, childcare **(rejoined in February 2011)**
- Kay Woodley, independent member, ex service user **(left in December 2010)**
- Amanda Freeman, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, fostering
- Gerry Brandon, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, childcare **(left in December 2010)**
- Vanessa Wright, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, health
- David Noble, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, education
- Andy Hill, independent member, foster carer
- Lisa Giles, Barnardos officer, child care **(temporary cover from December 2010)**
- Seb Burton, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, childcare **(started in January 2011)**

Graham Whitaker was Fostering Agency Adviser to the Panel and Wendy Kenyon was Panel Administrator.

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Unfortunately the Panel continues to have no black and/or minority ethnic representation and this is a priority in the recruitment of new Panel members over the next few months.

Panel members and staff worked very hard over the year. The Panel members who left during the year had been longstanding and committed members.

### 3. Work of the Panel

The Panel met on a monthly basis over the year. It met on **13** occasions from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. One additional Panel meeting was needed due to the volume of work being presented.

The Panel dealt with and made recommendations on **118** case presentations. Brighton & Hove presented **93** cases and Barnardo's Link Plus presented **25** cases. Most notably over the year, **1** more family was approved for fostering than in the previous year and the work around family and friends' carers continued to be in significant numbers.

The Panel recommended approval of **16** new carers:  
**11** were Brighton & Hove foster carers (1 was a supported lodgings carer) 6 of these were couples and 5 were single women, two of whom were black British/African/Caribbean  
**5** were Link Plus carers

The Panel did not recommend approval of **1** Link Plus Contract carer.

The Panel dealt with first annual reviews for **20** carers:

**13** were Brighton & Hove foster carers

**7** were Link Plus carers

The Panel dealt with reviews and variation of terms of approvals for **8** carers

**6** were Brighton & Hove foster carers

**2** were Link Plus carers

There were **29** terminations of approval of foster carers:

**9** were Brighton & Hove foster carers (including 1 supported lodgings carer)

**10** were Link Plus carers

**10** were family and friends' carers

The vast majority of these terminations of approval were resignations of carers following a number of years' service. Many of the family and friends' carers went on to obtain Special Guardianship Orders for the children they were fostering.

The Panel made **35** recommendations in relation to family and friends' care this year, which represents **16** new family and friends' fostering households:

There were **14** initial (interim) approvals

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There were **10** continued initial (further interim) approvals

There were **11** full assessments

In addition, the Panel endorsed an exemption to the usual fostering limit of three children in **4** cases [only 1 related to a Brighton & Hove carer]. It did not defer any items over the year.

The Agency Decision Makers for both Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus endorsed nearly all of the Panel's recommendations. After obtaining further information, the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove did not agree to the 1<sup>st</sup> interim approval of **1** family and friends' carer.

### **4. Functioning of the Panel**

#### **Process**

The Panel works well. It is friendly and welcoming to those attending and it is able to praise and challenge practice appropriately. The business is conducted in a thorough way and all Panel members participate and ask questions. The Panel sees applicants and carers with social workers and it sees social workers on their own when additional questions need to be asked about assessment practice or about confidential references. The Panel also met with a number of children and young people when considering approvals and matches with family and friends' carers.

#### **Feedback**

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants and foster carers attending the Panel. The Panel received **26** feedback forms for this year. **22** were from applicants and carers and **4** were from social workers. These were mainly positive about the experience of attending Panel and this was reinforced by informal feedback from other social workers and managers. Many comment that, although it is daunting to meet with such a large number of Panel members, they are quickly put at ease and enabled to participate. The practice of introducing myself and outlining the questions that will be raised prior to people coming into the room continues to be received very positively.

However, a number of people commented on having to wait for their cases to be heard. We have therefore recently reviewed our processes and agreed a more focused pre-discussion prior to the attendance of carers and social workers so that it is possible to keep to time more effectively.

One written feedback was negative about the applicants' experience at the Panel. This concerned a very difficult application where the Panel was unable to recommend their approval. The Panel has considered their feedback very carefully.

#### **Information about the Panel**

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Applicants and foster carers should have information available to them in respect of Panel members and the Agency Decision Makers in the waiting room. This is being updated in line with changing membership. A booklet is sent to them about the Panel and they have discussions with their assessing social worker or supervising social worker to prepare them for attending Panel.

### **Liaison with the Service**

For every case presented to the Panel, I complete feedback forms for the Agency Decision Makers. This arrangement works well. We have also started to hold quarterly meetings to discuss practice issues. These are held with the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove, the Panel Chair and Agency Advisers to both the Adoption and Permanence Panel and Fostering Panel. In addition Brighton & Hove's Agency Decision Maker and the Head of Safeguarding met with Panel members over the last year and this was valued by Panel members. The Panel meets on occasion with the Head of Service, Service Manager and Practice Managers for the fostering service in Brighton & Hove to discuss developments. The Panel also meets with Barnardos' managers on occasion. A consultation was held with Panel members to obtain their views about government's proposed changes to the membership and functioning of Panels. These views were incorporated into Brighton & Hove's response in November 2010.

### **Reviews and training**

Panel members have continued to develop their roles and responsibilities over the last year. The Agency Adviser and I met with Panel members individually over the year and completed annual appraisals. This was a very useful exercise and it reinforced people's commitment and ability to contribute to the Panel process. I also had an appraisal with the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove and the Agency Adviser. A Panel training day was held in March 2011 and this was a useful opportunity to reflect on what members bring to Panel and the work with family and friends' foster carers. It was unfortunate that not all Panel members were able to attend. It is planned to hold a training day with the Fostering Service over the next year.

## **5. Practice**

### **Foster carer assessments and reviews of approval**

In general the assessments and reviews presented to the Panel continue to be of a high standard. A number of Independent Social Workers have undertaken the assessments of Brighton & Hove carers and these have generally been of a good standard. All Brighton & Hove assessments are completed using the BAAF format. Barnardo's Link Plus use the format produced by the Fostering Network and these are generally of a very good standard too.

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One family approved for fostering last year did not foster for very long. This was clearly of concern to both Brighton & Hove's fostering service and to the Panel as the assessment had appeared to be very promising. It is important that the Panel and the Team are able to reflect on whether there are any lessons to be learnt for the future as ideally carers need to be able to foster with confidence and support for some time.

The Panel considered a significant number of first annual reviews of new carers and was very impressed at the work undertaken. Panel is keen that carers are invited to attend Panel to talk about their first year of fostering so that we are able to acknowledge and value their work.

The Panel dealt with one contested termination of approval over the year. It mirrored the process followed by the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism) Panel. The IRM Panel hears cases afresh where it is being proposed that carers should not be approved or that the terms of their approval should be changed. The new process allows both the carer concerned and social workers into the Panel together for individual questions and all leave the Panel meeting whilst the Panel reaches its recommendation.

One family applied for their case to be reviewed by the IRM Panel over the year.

### **Family and Friends' carers**

The Panel's work continued to be very busy in relation to dealing with family and friends' carers and we were impressed at the high level of commitment offered. Some family and friends' carers are offering very good care in highly challenging circumstances. However some of the work remains difficult for Panel both in respect of the nature of the cases and the paperwork. There was improvement in respect of most initial reports but there were some reports which were not adequate and further information was required. In one case, approval was not agreed after further information had been gathered. The format of the reports has been improved and it allows better assessment of complex relationships and dynamics within the families concerned. Guidance to staff has clarified social workers' responsibilities in the field work and family and friends' teams. The new report format has allowed more focus on how the family and friends' carers specifically meet the needs of the child or children concerned. The Agency Adviser continues to work very hard to check the quality of reports and to advise staff of any additional information required prior to the Panel meeting.

### **Link Plus Carers and Contract Carers**

The Panel considered the first annual reviews of 1 Contract Carer over the last year. It did not recommend approval of any new Contract Carers. Panel noted from the review that the Contract Carer was able to provide a considerable number of short breaks to disabled children and the Panel was impressed at the high level of skill and experience evidenced.

## **AGENDA ITEM 11- APPENDIX 1**

Link Plus assessments and annual reviews have continued generally to be of high quality. However Panel noted two resignations of Link Plus carers over the last year where the carers had been recently approved and unable to foster for a reasonable length of time. Again it is important to understand why resignations have occurred early so that any lessons can be taken on board both for the Panel and staff when considering future assessments.

### **6. Conclusion**

The organisation and functioning of the Panel has worked well over the year. It remains an effective Fostering Panel and I am looking forward to our continuing consolidation of membership and practice over the next year.

Sarah Borthwick  
Independent Chair, Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus Fostering  
Panel (2 June 2011)



# **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING**

## **Agenda Item 12**

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Annual Adoption Agency Report 2010/11</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, People</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Sharon Donnelly</b>	<b>Tel:</b> <b>29-5549</b>
	<b>E-mail:</b>	sharon.donnelly@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Forward Plan No: N/A</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

#### **1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 Standard 25.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption requires the Adoption Agency to produce a 6 monthly report to be received by the Council Executive. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption are issued under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The standard states that the report should include information on the management and outcomes of the service. The annual report for 2010/11 found in Appendix 1 provides full information about adoption activity and compliance with the national adoption standards within Children & Families and a profile of the work of the Adoption and Permanence teams with the Fostering & Adoption Service.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATION:**

- 2.1 That the Annual Adoption Agency Report and the progress of the Agency in relation to adoption and permanence activity is noted.

#### **3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 See Annual Adoption Agency Report

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The Annual Adoption Agency report has been compiled in collaboration with managers from the Adoption and Fostering service and the report of the Independent Chair of Panel has been compiled in consultation with Panel members

## 5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Spending on Adoption Allowances in 2010-11 totalled £554,254. This represented a reduction of 2.75% when compared to the 2009-10 outturn figure. In addition, expenditure in the sum of £31,023 was incurred in respect of a number of 'one off' costs such as Post Adoption Centre services, Setting Up Allowances, Contact, Prospective Adopters allowances and Therapy.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Brian McGonigle Date: 10/06/2011

### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The work of the Adoption Agency (Brighton & Hove City Council) is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and accompanying statutory regulations and guidance. The Adoption and Permanence Panel is required as a matter of law to make recommendations to the Adoption Agency regarding the approval or otherwise of prospective adopters and children for adoption, and also to approve matches with particular adopters. The membership of the Panel is governed by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005.

Children can only be adopted or made the subject of Special Guardianship orders with the approval of the Court, after rigorous analysis, which now includes consideration of whether or not there should be continuing contact facilitated with any member of the birth family post adoption.

The authority is required to plan and provide support services to children and families involved in adoption or Special Guardianship, and under the Children Act 2004, this should be with the active assistance of all the partners under the Trust.

The developments in legislation are all compatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which upholds the right to respect for family and private life, except where an interference is in accordance with the law and is necessary for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Sandra O'Brien Date: 06/07/ 2011

### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 aligns adoption law with the relevant provisions of the Children Act 1989 to ensure that a child's welfare is the paramount consideration in decisions relating to adoption. The 'welfare' of the child includes having regard to a child's age, sex, religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background

The adoption agency has an explicitly inclusive recruitment strategy and also employs a recruitment officer for BME carers and adopters.

An Equalities impact assessment in relation to the Fostering & Adoption service was completed in 2009/10

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 None

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The annual report focuses on the work of a city wide service within the Children & Families Delivery Unit.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 6.1 None

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 Required by adoption regulations

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Annual Report

**Documents In Members' Rooms**

1. None

**Background Documents**

1. None



# Annual Adoption and Permanence Report

## 2010-2011

Fostering and Adoption Service  
253 Preston Road  
Brighton  
BN1 6SE

[www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk](http://www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk)

## **1. Introduction**

The report will provide detail of the adoption and permanence work undertaken within Children & Families from April 2010-March 2011, including information on adoption activity and compliance with the national adoption standards. The Fostering and Adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the city in line with the priorities outlined in the Brighton & Hove City Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2009-12 that was agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves through their consultative forums.

A child's welfare is of paramount consideration and the adoption and permanence activity is part of the critical pathway of work with vulnerable families. A key priority of the work within Children & Families is to ensure children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network if at all possible. If that is not possible then children are entitled to grow up within a family that can provide a legally secure and stable family placement ideally through adoption or if that is not appropriate via another legal order that secures permanence such as special guardianship or through a permanent foster placement.

The work of Brighton and Hove City Council as an adoption agency is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 [ACA 2002] which was fully implemented in December 2005. A full revision of the statutory adoption guidance was issued by the Department for Education in February 2011. Statutory guidance does not have the full force of statute but should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation. There was also a further amendment to adoption regulations that came into force from April 2011 which dealt with the regulations governing the constitution of adoption panels. New adoption National Minimum Standards were also published at the end of March 2011 and together with the adoption regulations form the basis of the regulatory framework which governs the conduct of adoption agencies.

There has been considerable national focus on adoption activity as the government has raised concerns about the reduction nationally in children in care being placed for adoption. Since 1999 the number of children adopted from care has increased substantially but these figures have fallen slightly in the last 2 years; in 2009-10 the numbers of children placed for adoption in England fell from 2,700 to 2,300. However the picture is different locally with a sustained increase in adoption activity over the last two years which in part reflects the increased numbers of children in the care system in Brighton & Hove and the profile of our children in care with high numbers of younger children under 5 in care locally. The number of children in care has been relatively stable over the last 12 months, ranging from 468 in May 2010 to 490 in December 2010. However the number of children looked after at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 increased by 17.7% locally from the number at 31 March 2009 compared to a 6% increase nationally. The rate of children looked after per 10,000 children aged under 18 is 99 per 10,000 at March 2010, higher than

the national average (58 per 10,000) and the average for our statistical neighbours (70.2 per 10,000).

A separate report from the Independent chair of Brighton and Hove's Adoption and Permanence panel is appended to this report.

## **2. Adoption and Permanence Service**

The Adoption and Permanence Service comprises the adoption and permanence team and the family and friends team and has retained a very stable and experienced management team.

The practice managers within the adoption and permanence service take lead responsibility for different aspects of the work, namely adoption support services, family finding, and the recruitment and preparation of prospective adopters. Two part time practice managers have responsibility for the work of the family and friends team. The teams are made up of a number of experienced social work practitioners, social work resource officers and an adoption support teacher. The teams provide a duty service for prospective adopters and for adoptive families and birth parents, kinship carers with special guardianship or residence orders that are not currently receiving a service from the teams. Team members take a lead role in providing other services such as birth records counselling, adoption support work and step-parent adoption. The practice manager who acts for the authority as the Adoption Support Services Advisor manages staff that have a dedicated role in providing post adoption support including letterbox and direct contact arrangements.

The Adoption Agency Advisor plays a key role in ensuring the effective running of the Adoption and Permanence Panel, providing a quality assurance role in relation to reports being prepared for panel and for providing specialist advice to staff within Children & Families in relation to adoption and permanence work.

Staff within the service provide consultation on all aspects of practice relating to permanence planning or family and friends care to the fieldwork social work teams. The services take a lead role in developing policy and practice and ensuring social work staff within Children & Families are kept up to date on key changes to the legal and regulatory framework as well as providing updates on aspects of research work in this area. Occasional training events are also provided for fieldwork social workers and managers and staff also deliver training in relation to adoption and permanence planning issues within the Children & Families core skills training programme.

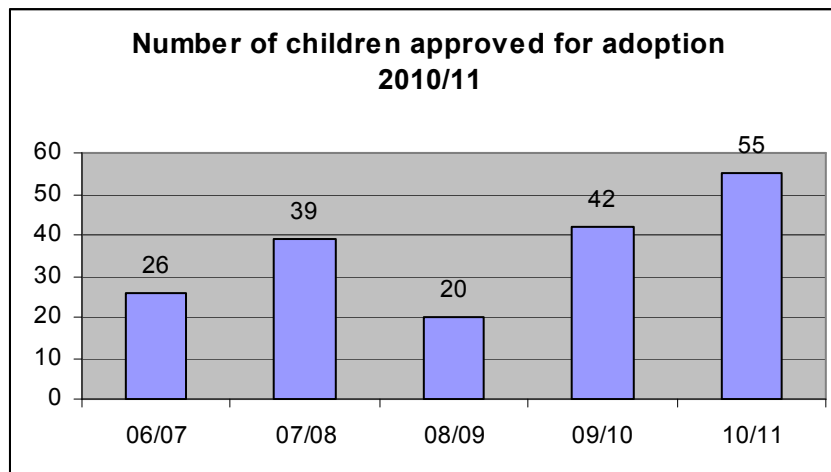
Brighton and Hove continues to be a member of the South East Adoption Consortium and the Service Manager attends the quarterly meetings of the Consortium Managers as well representing Brighton and Hove at the British Agencies of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) quarterly meetings of the South East adoption agencies.

The Adoption service was last inspected along with the Fostering Service by Ofsted in January 2009. The outcome of both of those inspections was very positive with the service being judged overall as 'good' for adoption and 'outstanding' for fostering. It is not anticipated that the service will be inspected again until 2012 as it is a requirement that adoption and fostering services are inspected on a 3 yearly cycle. Aspects of the work of the service were considered as part of the Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in March 2011. Inspectors met with staff from within the service but also groups of foster carers, adopters and family and friends carers. Positive comments were made about the work of the service within the inspection report as a result of these meetings and focus groups.

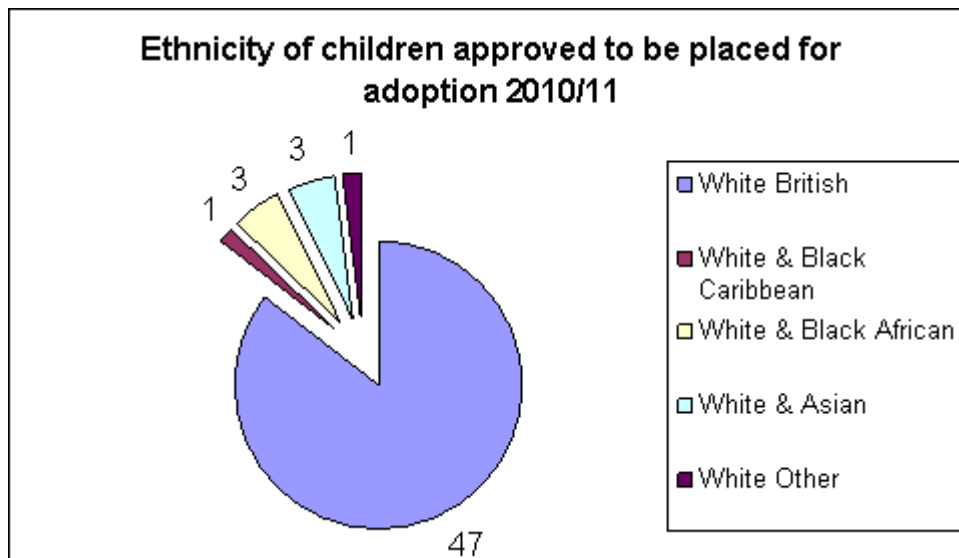
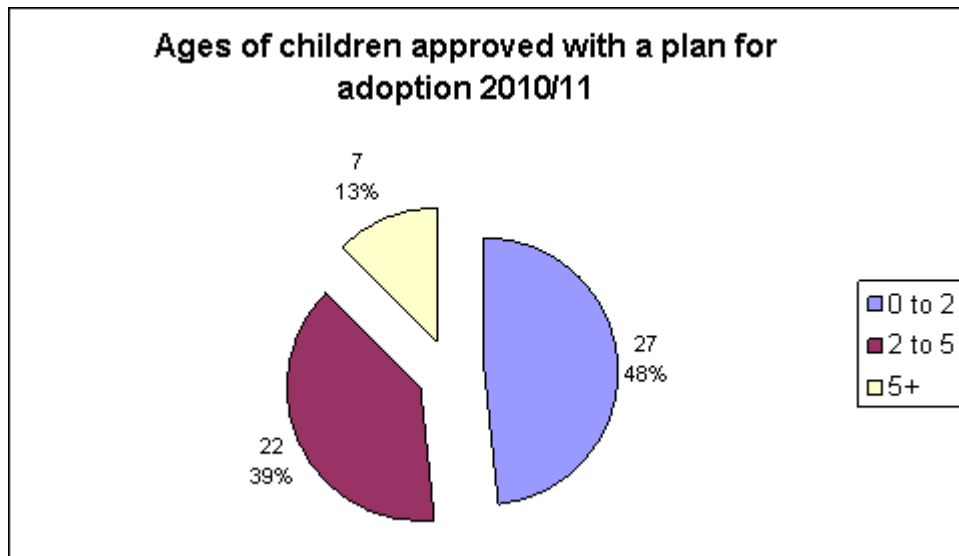
### **3. Adoption Agency Activity 2010/11**

#### **Children approved for adoption**

There were 55 children identified as needing to be placed for adoption in 2010/11. This is a further significant increase from the figures for 2009/10. Panel also considers plans for permanence for children under 9 years through permanent fostering and there were 5 children within the year that were approved at panel with a plan for permanent fostering. Children over 9 years with a plan for permanent fostering have their plans and any subsequent decisions related to permanent fostering placements endorsed via the Children in Care review process. All of the children with a plan for permanent fostering approved via the Panel process were over 5 years and decisions about plans for permanent fostering for children of this age rather than adoption usually reflect their specific special needs or the fact that they are part of a sibling group with older children and the plan is to place the children together.







This cohort of children with plans for adoption in 2010/11 include 4 sibling groups of 2 children, 3 sibling groups of 3 children and 1 sibling group of 4 children. As a general principle the potential for siblings to be placed together is always actively considered. Social workers undertake an assessment of the sibling relationship which is informed by views of other key people involved with the children to determine the care plan for siblings within adoptive placements. The graphs above also give a breakdown in terms of age and ethnicity profile of children with plans for adoption approved within 2010/11.

As of end March 2011 there were 43 children with a plan for adoption approved at panel that were still waiting to be placed with an adoptive family [34 of those children had plans for adoption approved in 2010/11]. Of these 43 children, 6 were still subject to outstanding court proceedings as the plan had been agreed at panel but a Placement Order had not yet been made. It is not possible to advertise these children or expedite placement plans until a Placement Order has been made and this can sometimes be 2 months or

## **AGENDA ITEM 12- APPENDIX 1**

more following the panel decision. Of the remaining 37 children, 11 children have been linked with prospective adopters with matches booked into panel from April – June 2011, a further 4 children are in placements with carers that are being assessed to provide permanence either through adoption or permanent fostering. There were 22 children that the Adoption & Permanence team were actively family finding for that had not yet been linked to a prospective adoptive family. The reasons for the delay related primarily to the profile of the children; the need to place siblings together, the age of the children or their particular special needs or complexity.

It also has to be acknowledged that the increasing volume of children with plans for adoption is putting considerable strain on all parts of the system including the capacity of the Fostering & Adoption service to allocate a family finding social worker in a timely way, the pressures on panel availability and the need to convene additional panels. There has also been considerable pressure on the Adoption Medical Advisor as there is a requirement that all children have a pre adoption medical prior to their plan for adoption being considered at Panel. The Medical Advisor also meets with prospective adopters prior to panel when a match is being considered to provide adopters with the opportunity to discuss any aspect of the child's development or medical history.

Although the numbers of children in care have now appeared to stabilise the numbers of children with plans for adoption are still rising in part this reflecting the time between children entering the care system and their plan for permanence being determined but also the continued high numbers of children under 5 in the care system. During the first quarter of 2011/12 there have been a further 23 children with plans for adoption approved.

### **Profile of Children placed for adoption**

There were 31 children, 17 boys and 14 girls, matched with adopters during 2010/11 with 26 adopters. The 26 adopters comprised 17 Brighton & Hove approved adopters, 4 adopters from within the South East Adoption Consortium and 5 from other adoption agencies including 2 from a Voluntary adoption agency. Of the 17 Brighton & Hove adopters 6 were formerly the child's foster carers including 2 carers that were approved as concurrent carers. Concurrent carers are approved as foster carers and adoptive parents and children are placed with them on a fostering basis whilst rehabilitation work is undertaken with the birth family. If rehabilitation is not achieved and adoption becomes the plan then the child does not have to move again and the match with their carers would come to panel for approval in the normal way. Of the 31 children placed for adoption there were 5 sibling groups of two.

The lead Practice Manager for family finding for children has responsibility for convening permanence planning meetings or consultation sessions to consider in detail the needs of the child, the preparation work that needs to be undertaken to support that child for a move and the family finding strategy.

## AGENDA ITEM 12- APPENDIX 1

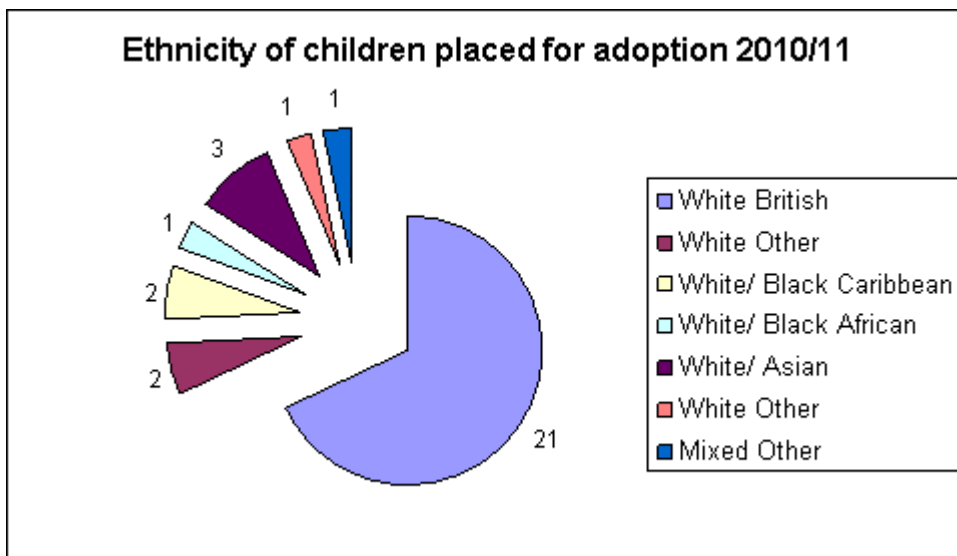
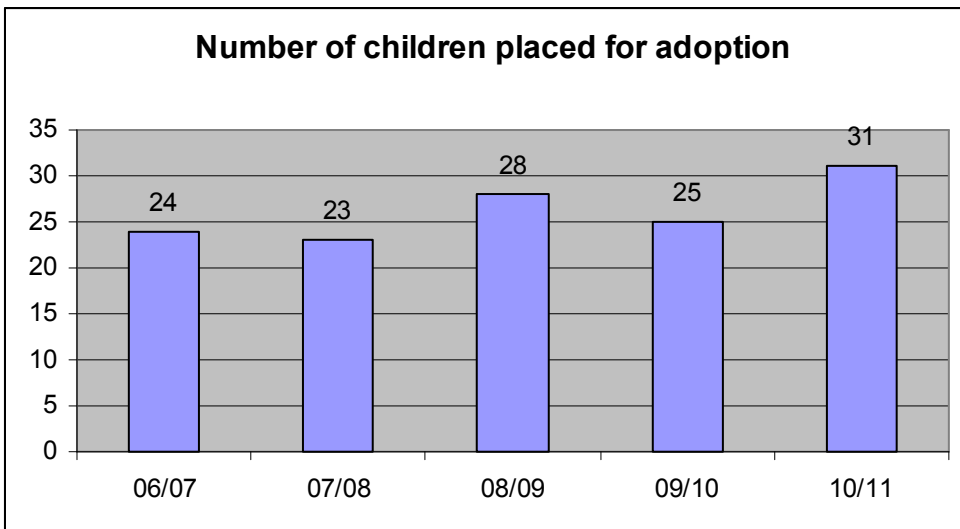
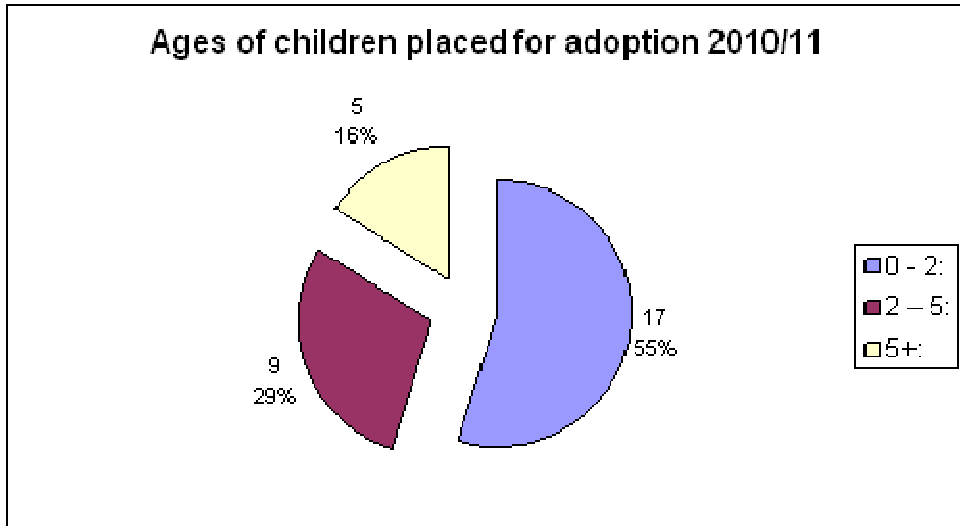
She maintains an oversight of all the children that need placements and the potential for them to be placed with adopters from Brighton & Hove that are either approved or are nearing the end of their assessment process.

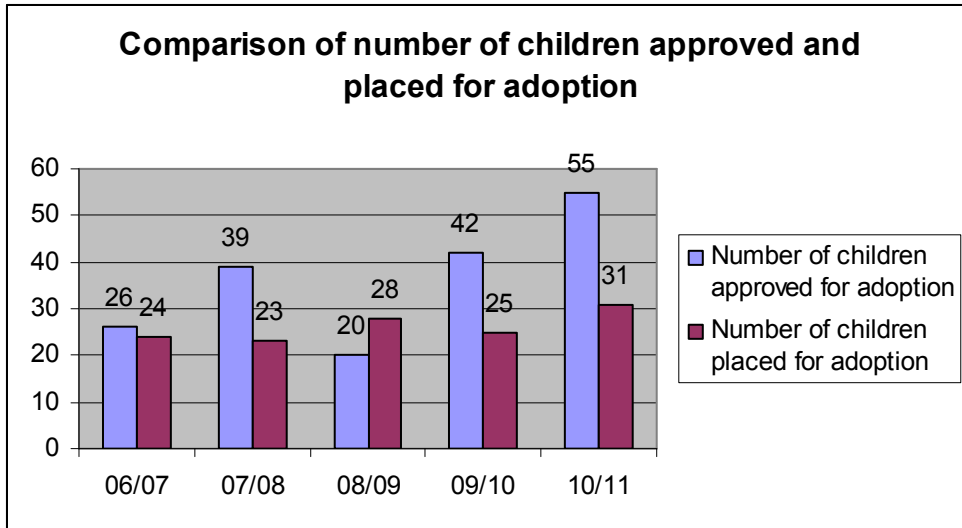
Social workers from within the team are allocated to take the lead role in expediting the family finding process. It is the responsibility of the social worker for the child to ensure that there is early notification to the Adoption & Permanence team of children with a potential plan for adoption. This early notification helps inform the recruitment activity and enables early discussion about the detail of the plan for the child and their background information and matching needs. It is not possible to start the detailed family finding work until a Placement Order has been granted and most Placement Orders are made at the time of the conclusion of care proceedings.

It is to the team's credit that they have managed to successfully place an increasing number of children with adoptive families during 2010/11 but the increasing volume of family finding work has impacted on the capacity to allocate a family finding social worker to all children with a plan for adoption prior to Placement Order. Family finding particularly for slightly older children, children that are part of sibling groups or children with significant complex needs often as a result of their history of experience of neglect or trauma can take much longer to family find for.

Considerable work is undertaken when considering a potential match to ensure the prospective family have full information about the child and their background, have met with key people involved with the child including carers, teachers, therapists prior to any decision being made to proceed to take the match to panel. The search for prospective adopters may have to extend beyond the consortium to other local authorities and agencies and includes profiling children with the National Adoption Register. Some children are repeatedly featured in adoption publications before a suitable match can be identified. There are also a small number of children that because of their age and profile may either have a dual plan for adoption and permanent fostering or may have their plan for adoption changed to permanent fostering as the potential for achieving permanence through fostering is greater.

The age profile of the children placed for adoption is reflected in the graph below which shows that there remain a high number of children under 2 with a plan for adoption.

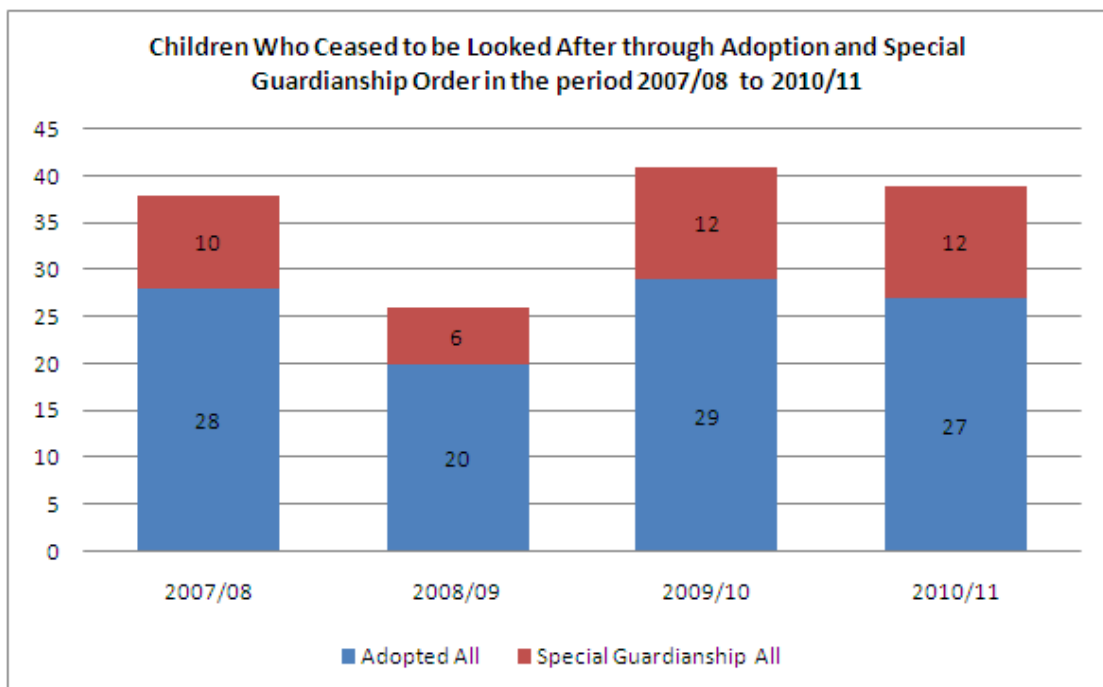




There continues to be a high number of children with plans for adoption that have been profoundly affected by their exposure to alcohol or drugs in utero and there is now a great deal more known about Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Further training has been provided to staff and carers on this issue in 2010/11 including a 2 day conference organised on early permanence planning which included specific input from the specialist substance misuse midwife and the consultant neonatologist.

**Children adopted**

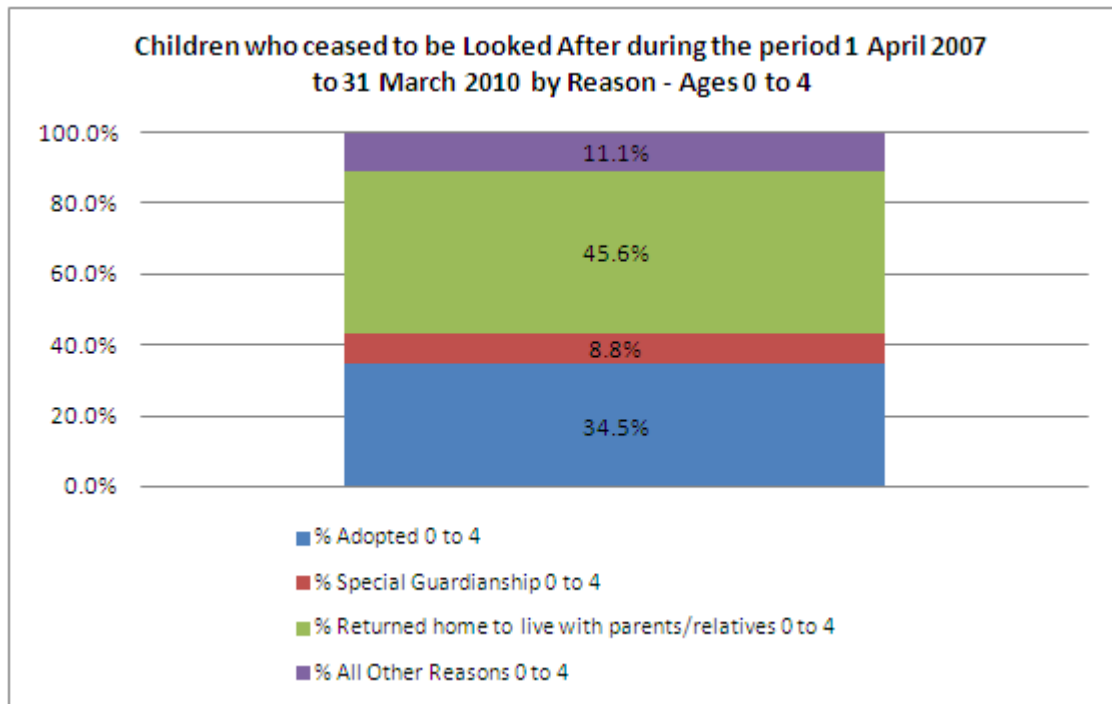
There were 27 children adopted from care during 2010/11 and 24 of those children [88.9%] of children in care adopted during the year were placed within 12 months of the decision that the child should be placed for adoption. There were also 12 children that were made subject to a Special Guardianship Order that had previously been in care.



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The DfE have produced a range of comparative adoption statistics which have been used to consider performance activity in Brighton & Hove.

This graph profiles the fact that over this 3 year period in Brighton and Hove, 34.5% of children who left care aged 0 to 4 did so through adoption compared to 33% nationally, and 8.8% through special guardianship compared to 9% nationally. There is however considerable variation amongst different local authorities.



There were no disruptions of adoptive placements pre adoption order during 2010/11.

### Profile of adopters

There were 27 adopter assessments undertaken within 2010/11 and of those 16 new adopter households were approved. There were 4 assessments that were discontinued for a number of reasons and 3 that were put on hold which have subsequently recommenced. There were a further 4 households that were presented to panel in April/May 2011.

The Practice Manager within the service that takes the lead role in terms of recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters has oversight of all the recruitment and preparation processes for prospective adopters.

Although there is no longer a specialist concurrency team the service still endeavours to provide concurrent placements for the very small number of children where that may be an appropriate care plan. The profile of concurrency is still featured at recruitment events and experienced concurrent carers are supportive in terms of attending these events or meeting with

## AGENDA ITEM 12- APPENDIX 1

prospective concurrent carers to discuss their experiences and the particular challenges of the concurrency process.

Of the 16 approved adoptive households 14 were White/British and the remaining 2 of mixed heritage. The service has continued to profile the need for more Black and mixed heritage adopters and foster carers to meet the needs of the children in our care.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 there were 8 Brighton & Hove approved adopters that had not yet been formally matched with a child or children, however of these five were in early discussion about a potential placement. The remaining 3 were on hold for a period due to specific personal reasons.

There were 3 Brighton & Hove adopters that had children placed from other authorities during the year, two had placements from within the consortium and one had 2 children placed from another local authority.

### **Step parent adoptions**

There have been 6 step parent adoptions completed in 2010/11 with a further 12 in the process of assessment as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. A further 7 assessments were discontinued for a variety of reasons. The volume of work is equivalent to that undertaken last year but with an increase in numbers of potential applicants opting for a parental responsibility agreement thereby negating the need for social work assessment and court hearing.

## **4. National Adoption Standards Timescales**

The adoption agency is required to monitor its performance against a range of timescales. The timescales relate to the decision to place a child for adoption, assessing and approving prospective adopters and the proposal to place a child with particular adopters.

Of the 31 children placed for adoption it is a very positive achievement that 21 of these children were matched within 6 months or less of the plan for adoption being approved at panel. Of the remaining 10 children the delay in identifying appropriate adopters related to the age of the child, plan to place as part of a sibling group or particular complexities relating to the child's special needs. Three of the 10 children that were not placed within 6 months of the plan for adoption being agreed were placed within 12 months. It is also of note that for some children there can be delay between the plan for adoption being agreed at panel and the conclusion of care proceedings and granting of a Placement Order at final hearing.

All agency decisions and notifications were made within the required timescale.

All of the 55 children identified as needing to be placed for adoption had a permanence plan agreed at the 4 month child in care review [some of which included adoption as part of a concurrent or twin track care plan]. Of these 17

children, were presented to panel within 2 months of the plan for adoption being agreed at the child in care review and a further 16 within 4 months of the review decision. The delay in coming to panel for other children often reflects the fact that adoption is part of a parallel planning process and could not be presented to panel until all the experts had reported within care proceedings and alternatives to adoption had been clearly ruled out. However there has also been discussion with the Independent Reviewing Officer team and agreement made that a full review does not have to be convened to consider the plan following submission of all the expert reports; rather the IRO should be consulted and the date of that consultation and IRO endorsement of the care plan for adoption needs to be recorded with the expectation that the plan for adoption should be considered by Panel within 2 months of that IRO endorsement of the care plan. Compliance with these timescales is now being recorded clearly on panel minutes in line with new expectations within the Adoption Guidance 2011.

The agency met the timescales of all applicants in relation to the sending out of written information and inviting prospective adopters to an information session. Of the 16 adopter assessments, 10 were completed within the required 8 month period. Of the remaining; 4 took between 9 months and 12 months and the remaining 2 took between 14 and 16 months. The delay in progressing these assessments resulted either from specific life events within the prospective adopter household or decisions being made to halt the assessment for a period or the assessments taking longer to ensure that the applicants were fully prepared for the adoption task. In a few situations there were delays in allocating the assessment which reflected the need to prioritise other tasks or due to staff sickness. The continued high volume of children's cases needing to come to panel during the year has also resulted in very busy panels and the need to constantly prioritise items for panel. As a consequence decisions have had to be made at times to delay bringing an assessment of a new adopter to panel to enable a plan for a child or a match with prospective adopters to take priority.

### **5. The Adoption Consortium**

The Adoption South East Consortium comprises Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Kent, Bromley, Bexley and Medway. The 6 Local Authorities work closely to maximise placement choice for children and to minimise delay in family finding by sharing prospective adopters. There is nil cost to the Local Authority if the number of placements made equals the number received. The cost thereafter is the standard Local Authority Inter Agency Fee of £14,452. per placement. This contrasts with the cost of placements with a voluntary adoption agency which for 2010/11 were £23,179.

The quarterly management meetings attended by the Service Manager are used to clarify and develop policy and practice issues across the consortium. This year particular focus has been given to recruitment and matching with work now underway to develop a consortium website. Managers have also been working together to consider the practice implications of the new

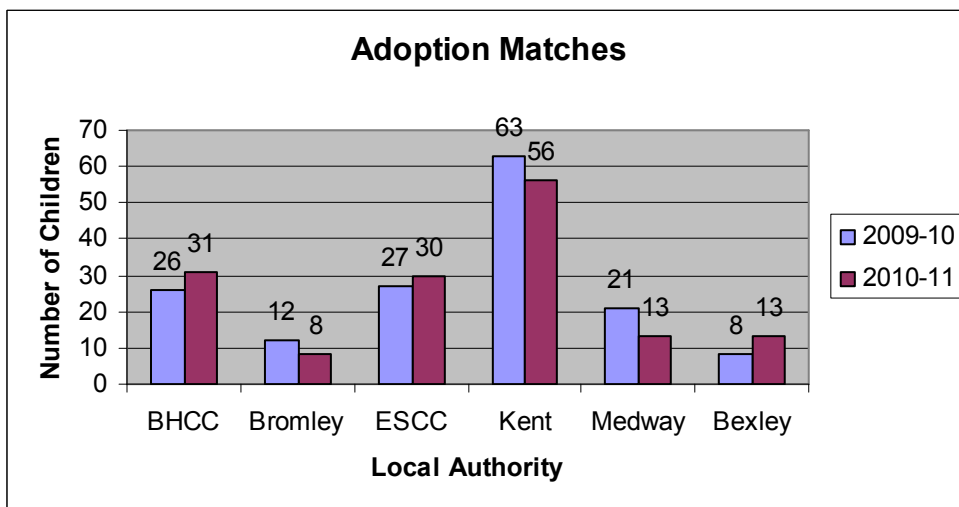
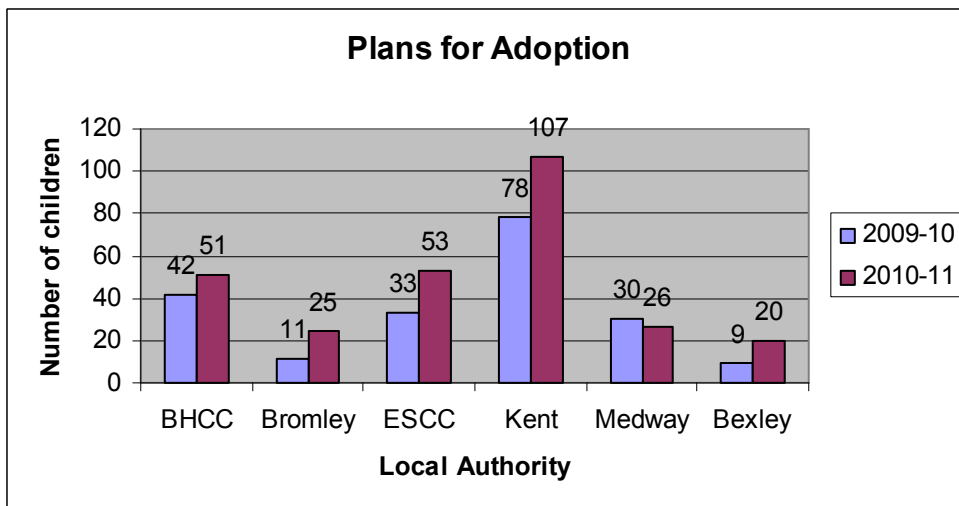


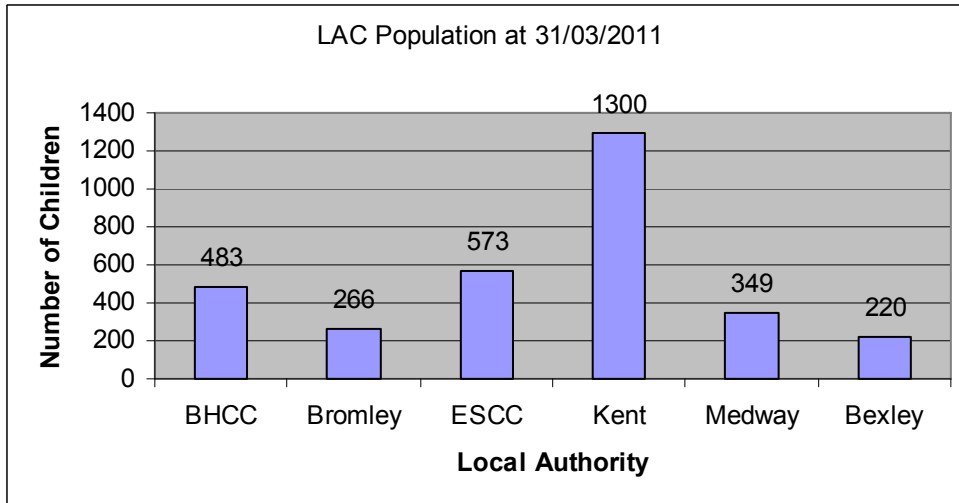
## AGENDA ITEM 12- APPENDIX 1

adoption minimum standards. Brighton & Hove co-ordinated a very successful 10<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration conference for the Consortium which was held in November 2010; the theme was 'adolescence and adoption' and the event was attended by adopters and staff from across the 6 authorities.

There have been 4 Consortium Practitioners meetings during the year with a variety of topics being covered including neonatal substance abuse and its impact; post placement depression and the impact of neglect on early brain development.

There has also been work within the Consortium considering benchmarking information in relation to numbers of children with plans for adoption and adoption matches. The 3<sup>rd</sup> graph provides information on the numbers of children in full time care in each authority as of 31<sup>st</sup> march 2011 to set the adoption activity figures into context. All of the authorities apart from Medway have seen an upward growth in terms of the numbers of children with plans for adoption and there is variable success in terms of keeping pace with the capacity to place those children for adoption.





This chart provides information on the number of placements made across the consortium authorities for 2010/11.

	<b>Children Placed</b>	<b>Adopters Provided</b>
<b>Bexley</b>	1	1
<b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b>	5	2
<b>Bromley</b>	0	4
<b>East Sussex</b>	3	0
<b>Kent</b>	4	2
<b>Medway</b>	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>

## **6. Recruitment & Preparation**

The Adoption and Permanence Service received 204 enquiries to the duty service throughout the year, very slightly up on the previous year and 83 people attended information sessions held during the year including another very successful information day that was held as part of National Adoption week in November 2010. These events receive considerable support from Brighton & Hove's experienced adopters who attend to ensure that all prospective adopters have the opportunity for individual discussion not only with a member of staff but also with experienced adopters. There were two preparation groups including the additional 'motivation and loss' days held during the year for prospective adopters.

There are always a range of people making initial enquiries to the service; some people are at the very early stage of their thinking about adoption and other people are much further on and clear about their wish to parent through adoption and ready to proceed with the next stage. Hence there are high numbers of enquiries and a considerable drop of rate in relation to people then progressing on to making an application. It is very important that potential applicants have time to consider all the issues thoroughly and

enabled to proceed at a pace which is right for them. The issue of recruitment and conversion rate from initial enquiry through to approval is one that is considered within the Consortium and practice issues shared amongst the Consortium agencies.

The recruitment strategy for the service continues to be reviewed annually and there is a target for 2011/12 to approve a further 20 adopter households and the dates of three preparation groups during the year have been planned. There has also been further consideration of the duty response to prospective adopters in an effort to streamline the process and information sessions are planned throughout the year.

The Recruitment and Publicity Officer for BME foster carers and adopters has continued to profile the work of the service with key local community and faith groups.

The Fostering & Adoption service continues to give priority to keeping their dedicated website up to date with comprehensive information for prospective and approved adopters reflecting the fact that most applicants research information on line before making direct contact with an agency.

### **Inter country adoption**

Since 2005 Brighton & Hove has had a contract with Parents and Children Together [PACT], a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter country adopters. PACT has considerable specialist experience in this area of work and provides a dedicated service to people from Brighton & Hove that wish to adopt from abroad. Brighton & Hove pay for PACT to provide the initial information and follow up to prospective applicants. Once applicants decide to proceed they are required to meet the costs of the assessment themselves.

During 2010/2011, PACT sent out 6 information packs to prospective adopters, and carried out 2 initial interviews. They received no applications and no adopter households were approved. Two children were placed with an approved adopter and there is one couple approved and still waiting to adopt.

## **7. Adoption Support Services**

Since the implementation of the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 there has been a legal duty on the local authority to provide adoption support services to adoptive families, adopted children and birth families. This continues to remain an area of considerable growth and pressure within the service. There is a requirement within the regulations to have an Adoption Support Service Advisor which in Brighton & Hove is undertaken by one of the Practice Managers who maintains oversight of the range of adoption support services provided to all parties in the adoption process.

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All staff within the Adoption and Permanence team are involved in some way with adoption support work. Social workers within the team continue to offer support to families pre and post adoption. The duty service also responds to calls requesting information about adoption support services and requests for adoption support assessments. The nature of support requested varies considerably but frequently includes requests for advice on strategies for managing behaviour; help and advice for children in school where their attachment difficulties may be making it hard for them to settle and learn and assistance with talking to children about adoption and making sense of their sometimes very troubled backgrounds.

The service also has responsibility for providing an assessment of support needs to families living in Brighton and Hove whose children were placed by a different Agency and it is more than 3 years post Adoption Order.

Many adopted children struggle at some point with achieving their educational potential and there is increasing acknowledgement of how their attachment difficulties and early trauma affect their ability to make the most of school. Brighton and Hove continue to employ a part time teacher to offer advice and support from an attachment perspective to professionals in schools where there is an adopted child. She also offers training to schools and runs support groups and training for individual members of staff who are working with adopted children in a 'key worker' role.

Brighton and Hove no longer have a contract with the Post Adoption Centre to provide adoption support services as this contract was brought to an end in September 2010 as part of the budget savings measures required for 2010/11.

### **Support groups**

There are currently two evening adoption support groups facilitated by adoption social workers. One of these groups has been running so long that a number of members are now grandparents, a role that can be both rewarding and challenging and where peer support is invaluable. The team run a weekly parent and toddler group which has been very well received by those adopters with preschool children.

The group for Brighton and Hove lesbian and gay adopters and foster carers continues to thrive. It is run by its members with a link through to the service provided by the Adoption Support Services Advisor. They combine evening support groups for the adults with additional activities to include the children.

The service facilitates an annual picnic and activity fun day which are opportunities for adoptive parents and children to get together and renew old acquaintances and develop new supportive networks. Both events are very well attended.

There have also been workshops provided for adopters during the year on talking about adoption and attachment difficulties in the classroom.

A bi-annual newsletter is produced and circulated to approved adopters to advise them of any events and share adoption related information including signposting other training events.

## **Post Adoption Contact**

Almost all children now being placed for adoption retain some form of contact with their birth families and the Adoption & Children Act 2002 emphasises the importance of supporting such arrangements.

The team manages around 200 'letterbox' contacts where there is an exchange of letters or photos between the adoptive family and the birth family. Additionally there are a growing number of adoptive families where there is some form of face to face contact between the adopted child and their birth relatives. The nature of this contact will vary from an annual meeting to very complex arrangements involving a number of birth family members (siblings, grandparents and parents).

Dedicated workers offer support and advice to all parties and keep arrangements under review to ensure that they continue to meet the adopted child's needs over time. This year the team has also started to send out feedback forms to all parties to seek their views on how the contact has gone and contribute to the review process. Careful preparation to all parties, feedback afterwards and mediation when there is a need to change arrangements are all essential to maintain beneficial contact. It is very encouraging that birth family members in particular, who may previously have been in conflict with the Local Authority over plans for their children, have been able to work productively with staff in the team in relation to the maintenance of contact.

Staff within the service are also involved in providing a high level of consultation and support to area social work staff in considering the adoption support plans for children. This can involve the preparation of statements and giving evidence at final hearings in relation to contact plans. Practice Managers from within the team also gave a very highly commended key presentation at the local Family Justice Council training event in June 2011. This presentation highlighted current research in this area but also profiled important practice lessons from the experience of providing this model of post adoption contact within the service over the last 8 years.

## **Work with birth families of adopted adults**

The ACA 2002 brought with it an opportunity for the birth relatives of adopted adults to request an intermediary service, which would trace the adoptee and seek their views on contact. Only agencies that are specifically registered to carry out this work may do so and the Adoption and Permanence team continue not to have sufficient resources to offer this service. Any birth relative

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who requests an intermediary service is provided with support and advice and given the details of providers of intermediary services.

Birth family members have a legal right to receive counselling regarding the proposal to place their child for adoption and to receive this service from a social work practitioner who is not involved in their child's care or the adoption services. Leaflets are produced about this service, which are provided to birth parents when adoption is agreed as a potential plan at the children in care review and also again when it is agreed at Panel. The worker running this 'Birth Parent Support and Information Service' endeavours to be proactive in following up families that have been referred to the service. The Adoption Agency Advisor has oversight of this service and meets at regular intervals with the worker to provide consultation and advice as required.

The take up of this service remains low as this to a large extent reflects the fact that birth families are often still in dispute with the local authority about the plans for adoption at the time they are referred. Birth families are provided with details of agencies other than the local authority who can offer support but experience suggests that some birth family members only feel able to take up this type of support sometimes years after the adoption has concluded.

### **Birth Records Counselling**

The local authority has a legal responsibility to provide a birth records counselling service. The team has continued to receive regular requests for birth records counselling and there is currently a wait of 3-6 months for this service. There has been an increase in the number of enquiries from younger adoptees whose histories can be more complex, coming as many do from a background of abuse and neglect.

The team has also recently started to send out feedback forms to those they have been working with to seek their views on the service they have received.

A social worker within the team takes a lead role in providing a duty service in relation to enquiries from adopted adults. As an adoption agency the service is also required to provide information from adoption files for other local authorities offering birth records counselling or intermediary work with birth relatives.

### **Adoption Allowances**

Expenditure on Adoption Allowances during 2010/11 was £554,254 in relation to 63 children. There were also a number of one off payments made for example towards the costs of introductions and settling in expenses. There are a number of very complex adoptive placements which require considerable ongoing support including at times funding of therapeutic services. The adoption team gives robust consideration to a request for an adoption allowance ensuring that all other options such as state benefits, including disability living allowance is considered, and a financial assessment of the adopter's means is undertaken before agreement is given to an ongoing

allowance. In line with the Adoption Support Regulations one off lump sum payments are often considered where appropriate to provide support to an adoptive family rather than an ongoing allowance. Allowances are only agreed in cases where the child/ren would be unlikely to be adopted without it.

## **9. Family and Friends Team**

The work of the Family and Friends team has continued to expand in line with the sustained high numbers of children in care or on the cusp of the care system. There is a clear regulatory requirement to ensure that at all relevant stages of the care planning process the potential for children that are not able to live with their birth parents to be placed within their wider family or friendship network is thoroughly explored.

The introduction of Special Guardianship at the end of 2005 to provide permanence for children where adoption was not appropriate, has also continued to be used in a number of family and friends foster placements where the carers are able to provide permanence to that child. Special Guardianship brings with it responsibilities to provide support services to those families in line with those provided to adoptive families.

There are two part time Practice Managers in the Family and Friends team who take responsibility for the oversight of referrals into the team from the fieldwork teams. Care planning in relation to family and friends care can be complex with the need for careful risk assessment work and the Practice Managers along with the Agency Advisors and Service Manager play a key role in terms of providing consultation to the social work teams on family and friends practice and quality assurance of viability and assessment work. The team has also revised the assessment tool and guidance during the year in line with the new regulatory framework for the placement and assessment of prospective family and friends carers as detailed within the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 that came into force in April 2011.

New national statutory guidance in relation to Family and Friends care was published in April 2011 and work is underway to ensure compliance with the requirements of the new guidance. This guidance sets out the framework for support to family and friends carers and requires the local authority to publish a policy setting out its approach towards meeting the needs of children living with family and friends carers.

Within the year there were 25 approvals of new Family and Friends foster carers. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 there were 52 children placed within 36 different family and friends foster placements.

Support needs post placement can often be high as these carers do not have the opportunity for the same in depth preparation training and assessment provided to stranger carers. Family and friends carers are also more likely to be older and on a lower income and may need considerable support with for

example managing contact issues and divided loyalties within the family in order to provide a placement for a child. In a significant number of situations additional financial support has had to be provided to support accommodation or other needs.

Once approved as foster carers family and friends carers have access to the same range of support services and training programmes as other carers. In addition the team provides specific training workshops plus a regular support group, advice service and newsletter. Once carers have gone on to Special Guardianship or Residence Order the team can remain involved providing some specific support as required or responding to particular requests for advice relating to for example housing, finance or the emotional and behavioural issues of the child in placement.

There remains a wide age span of children and young people being placed with family and friends carers including babies as well as older teenagers in care that have found placements for themselves within the wider family or friendship network.

### **10. Adoption & Permanence Panel**

It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels and the Adoption Agency Advisor manages the panel administration team and takes a lead in the recruitment of panel members. The Agency Advisor also undertakes a significant role in providing consultation and advice to social workers on aspects of adoption and permanence planning and plays a quality assurance role in terms of the oversight of the papers being presented to panel. Panel makes a recommendation about the cases that are presented at panel and the final decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker which in Brighton & Hove is the Lead Commissioner for Children, Youth and Families, a senior social work manager who does not have direct management responsibility for either fieldwork social work services or the Fostering & Adoption service.

There has been a sustained significant increase in the workload of panel over the last year which reflects the upturn in adoption activity in Brighton & Hove.

The current independent chair of panel Sarah Borthwick took up this role in January 2009. A report on the activity of the adoption and permanence panel is appended to this report.

### **12. Complaints**

There were 5 complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during the year. The complaints included concerns about the decision making in relation to a viability assessment and a prospective match as well as a delay in receiving letterbox contact information. The Service Manager maintains an



oversight of all complaints and disseminates any learning to the team as appropriate.

### **13. Strategic issues and forward plans**

The Adoption and Permanence service has continued to be affected by the significant rise in the children in care population since 2009. The impact has been shown in the sustained increase particularly in the numbers of children with plans for adoption but also in relation to the volume of family and friends work. At times it has been difficult to manage the many competing priorities and to allocate family finding work within the team and ensure that this work is given priority alongside the need to ensure recruitment activity is maintained. Clearly it is vital for children that there is minimal delay in expediting plans for permanence but family finding and matching is a complex and specialist area of work. Children need to be prepared carefully for a move and foster carers play a very important role in supporting children with these transitions. Staff within the team advise social work staff on all aspects of adoption planning and provide training to social workers as part of their core training programme. There are also considerable financial consequences of not being able to place children in a timely way with either in-house adopters or adopters from within the Consortium. However it is a significant achievement that the Service has continued to work to maximise the opportunity for children with plans for adoption to be placed in a timely way with a further increase in the number of children matched with adopters in 2010/11. The Adoption & Permanence Panel has also continued to operate very effectively and flexibly managing to prioritise the agenda and to organise additional panels were required in order to endeavour to keep pace with the volume of work and to ensure that the panel processes do not result in any delay in progressing permanence plans for children as appropriate.

A new lifestory strategy was developed and implemented within the last year which complies with the new Adoption Guidance. Life story work is a vital area for all children that are adopted or permanently fostered. It provides children with a structure and an understandable way of talking about themselves and their life history and this capacity is clearly associated with better functioning and better outcomes in adult life in part because it assists in resolving trauma. Children need to revisit their past at key points in their development and the team work with adoptive parents to assist them in developing the confidence to support their children with this process. Considerable amount of work has gone into this strategy taking account of evidence from best practice and additional training has been provided by the service to fieldwork staff to understand the significance of this critical area of work for children. The Adoption & Permanence staff team have also now had the opportunity to share learning and experience in this area and plans are in place now for this to be embedded as a key area of adoption supervision and support work both through individual and group work with adoptive parents.

Work is currently underway to ensure compliance with the new adoption minimum standards, guidance and regulations. Some of this work is being

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undertaken in collaboration with Consortium colleagues as all local authorities are going through similar processes of updating and developing new guidance and procedures.

The service will also continue to take a lead on policy and practice guidance in relation to Family and Friends work across Children and Families social work teams. Managers and staff within the Family and Friends team continue to provide specialist advice and consultation to social work staff on this complex area of practice. The team has also worked very hard to provide ongoing specialist support to family and friends carers and there is an effective peer support system in place. The service undertook significant work to develop a new assessment tool which has now been reviewed and updated and work is ongoing to develop a Family and Friends policy document in line with the new statutory requirements. Family and friends carers and other key stakeholders will be consulted as part of this development work.

Sharon Donnelly  
Head of Service, Fostering & Adoption  
July 2011

## Appendix 1

### **BRIGHTON & HOVE ADOPTION & PERMANENCE PANEL ANNUAL REPORT (1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011)**

#### **1. Introduction**

This report briefly summarises the work of Brighton & Hove Adoption and Permanence Panel over the last year. It has been a really busy year and the number of children needing to be adopted continues to rise. This is in line with higher numbers of children being looked after in Brighton & Hove and it reflects the emphasis by the Local Authority on achieving successful adoption placements for children who require them.

I have now been the Independent Chair of the Panel for over two years and I continue to be impressed by the quality of much of the work that is presented. The Panel has continued to function effectively and we have consolidated the adjustments to our processes that we made in the previous year.

#### **2. Composition of the Panel**

Over the past year, the Panel was constituted in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009 and National Minimum Standards.

The Panel has had mostly full and stable membership over the year. Members n 2010/11 were:

- Sarah Borthwick, independent Chair
- Sophie Heiser, independent member, adopter and Vice Chair
- Dr. Sian Bennett, Medical Adviser
- Councillor Juliet McCaffery, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Chris Thornton, independent member, foster carer
- Juni Parkhurst, independent member, adopted person, ex foster carer
- Sharon Donnelly, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering and adoption
- Carl Campbell, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare, fieldwork
- Jacqueline Coe, Brighton & Hove council officer, education
- Tina Darby, independent member, foster carer and adopter (**joined February 2011**)

Michael Wilson was Agency Adviser to the Panel.

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Natasha Watson, Hilary Priestley, Sandra O'Brien, Lucy Ditchburn and Andrew Pack shared the role of Legal Adviser to the Panel.

Andrea Critcher, Rachel Robertson, and Jess Freegard were the Panel Administrators. Jess Freegard left in January 2011.

Sophie Heiser took on the role of Vice Chair from Dr Bennett in June 2010.

Panel members and officers continued to demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Panel's work over the year.

### 3. Work of the Panel

The Panel met on a two weekly basis over the year. From 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, it met on **25** occasions. This included **1** additional Panel meeting. All meetings were full days.

The Panel recommended that **55** children should be placed for adoption. This was a further increase in the numbers of children with adoption plans from previous years. (41 children were recommended in 2009/10). Out of the **55**, Placement Orders were advised for **54** children. For **1** child, a dual plan of both adoption and permanent fostering was recommended. **31** children were placed with adoptive families, including **2** placed with concurrent carers. This also represented a higher figure for placements than in the previous year.

The Panel recommended that **5** children should be placed in permanent foster care and it recommended **1** match of a child with permanent foster carers. This was a lower figure than in the previous year.

The Panel recommended **16** new families as suitable to adopt. This was a slightly lower figure than the previous year. **15** were couples and **1** was a single carer. Of the **16**, there were **3** sets of concurrent carers. **14** households were white/British. In **1** household, one applicant was black British/African/Caribbean and the other applicant was white British/Australian. **1** household was a same sex male couple, **1** household was a same sex female couple and the remaining households were heterosexual couples.

Only **9** new family and friends' carers were recommended over the year as the majority of family and friends' carers in Brighton & Hove were considered by the Fostering Panel. Of these **9**, there were **2** full approvals, **4** 1<sup>st</sup> interim approvals and **3** 2<sup>nd</sup> interim approvals. The Panel did not recommend approval in **1** family and friends' case.

The Panel considered **6** progress reports on children and it deferred items on **3** occasions for further information to be provided.

The Panel recommended termination of approval for **1** prospective adopter.

The Agency Decision Maker endorsed all of the Panel's recommendations during this period.

## **4. Functioning of the Panel**

### **Preparation and reading**

Panel members continue to read lengthy and complex reports about children and their birth parents before making important recommendations about their lives. This is time-consuming work and requires great commitment and analytical skills in making sense of the material presented. Over the last year, the increase in the number and size of reports have continued to place considerable demands on Panel members' time, on Panel administration and on legal and social work input. In response to the workload, agreed summaries of expert reports regarding children and their birth families are increasingly being provided. Full reports are always made available for consultation at the Panel and are provided beforehand in particular cases where there is disagreement regarding the adoption plan or where they can provide advice on family finding for children.

### **Process**

The Panel continues to work effectively. The business is conducted thoroughly and all Panel members participate and ask questions. It sees applicants, prospective adopters and carers with social workers and it sees social workers on their own when additional questions need to be asked about assessment practice or about confidential references. It sees social workers together with practice managers for many of the children's cases. All children and young people, where it is thought appropriate due to their age and the circumstances, are able to attend Panel if they wish. Social workers and managers usually remain in the meeting to observe the recommendation being made. On one occasion, the Panel saw an adopter on their own and in this case, the adopter and practice manager were asked to leave prior to the Panel's recommendation to allow the Panel some discussion time alone.

The Panel has consolidated the changes to the process of how it makes its recommendations having taken account of social worker feedback over previous years. The process appears to work well.

### **Feedback**

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants, prospective adopters, foster carers and young people attending the Panel. Over the year, the Panel received **6** forms from prospective adopters and **1** form from a social worker.

The written feedback from applicants and prospective adopters continued to be very positive about the experience of attending Panel. People feel they are treated with warmth, empathy and respect. Many comment too that they are quickly put at ease and enabled to participate. The practice of introducing

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myself as the chair of the Panel and outlining the questions that will be raised prior to people coming into the room continues to be received very positively.

One couple whose case was deferred were understandably upset that their case was not heard by the Panel and they provided written feedback about this. It was clearly a very difficult experience and it remains very unusual for the Panel to defer such cases.

### **Information**

Applicants, prospective adopters and foster carers should have information available to them in respect of Panel members and the Agency Decision Maker in the waiting room. This is being updated in line with changing membership over the next few months. A booklet is sent to them about attending Panel and they have discussions with their assessing social worker or supervising social worker to prepare them for attending the Panel.

### **Liaison with the Service**

For every case presented to the Panel, I complete feedback forms for the Agency Decision Maker. This arrangement seems to work well. We have also started to hold quarterly meetings to discuss practice issues. These are held with the Agency Decision Maker, the Panel Chair and Agency Advisers to both the Adoption and Permanence Panel and Fostering Panel. In addition, the Agency Decision Maker and Head of Safeguarding met with the Panel and the Head of Adoption and Fostering and Agency Adviser provided Panel members with regular updates about developments in the service. A consultation was held with Panel members to obtain their views about government's proposed changes to the membership and functioning of Panels. These views were incorporated into Brighton & Hove's response in November 2010.

### **Reviews and training**

The Agency Adviser and I met with Panel members individually over the year and completed annual appraisals. This was a very useful exercise and it reinforced people's commitment and ability to contribute to the Panel process. I also had an appraisal with the Agency Decision Maker for Brighton & Hove and the Agency Adviser. A training course was provided to Panel members on the impact on children and families of drug and alcohol misuse and on the experience of post adoption contact. This was a very valuable and productive day.

## **5. Practice**

A number of practice issues have been raised by Panel members over the year. Some of these relate very specifically to individual cases where Panel members were concerned about practice and feedback has been provided

directly and confidentially. Other practice issues are general and are outlined in this report.

### **Reports**

In general the work presented to Panel has continued to be of a high standard over the year. As in previous years, the Panel has seen some excellent reports provided when matching children to families. The assessment reports about prospective adopters generally have been comprehensive and well evidenced. Child Permanence Reports have also been of good quality in many cases. More focus on children's birth fathers has been in evidence and the Panel has highlighted the importance of this. The Agency Adviser has continued to work very hard to monitor and to advise staff on the requirements for reports. Given the continued increase in the work, it will be very important for the agency to ensure that the high standards continue to be met and staff are well supported in undertaking the work.

### **Work with children**

The Panel has been very impressed with the preparation work undertaken with many of the children requiring adoption. This has often involved direct and therapeutic work with children as well as support to foster families and adopters. A new life story work strategy has been introduced. This is innovative and involves adoptive families much more in the process. Health advice continues to be excellent and support in education has usually been explored carefully. Nevertheless, the Panel is aware of the pressure of work on social workers who are responsible for visiting children in foster care and this can mean that some children may only be visited at the statutory minimum. This is of concern as it is crucial to get to know children well when making critical decisions about their lives. In addition, Panel has seen a rise in the number of older children and sibling groups who have experienced significant neglect over a period of time. Panel has raised its concerns individually with the Agency Decision Maker as appropriate.

### **Childrens' Guardians**

It has become clear to Panel members over the year that a number of children in care proceedings have been without Childrens' Guardians due to staff turnover and sickness rates. This remains a significant concern and has been highlighted within the court process.

### **Contact arrangements pre-adoption**

When children are in foster care prior to plans for adoption being agreed, the Panel is made aware of the contact children are having with their birth parents, siblings and other members of their birth family. Many arrangements are supervised and occur several times a week and have been agreed at court. These often continue throughout the proceedings whilst assessments are being completed. For some children the arrangements appear to be in their best interests and are planned well but for others, in the Panel's view,

there have been concerns about the frequency and distressing impact on children. The Panel has therefore raised a number of concerns around the practice and process of supervision of contact. A management meeting was held to look at issues raised.

**Family and friends' carers**

Panel members considered a small number of family and friends' carers over the past year and were impressed at the high level of commitment offered. Reports and assessments are continuing to develop and they demonstrate the complexity of some of these cases. The format of reports has improved and allows a better understanding about the complexity of relationships and dynamics within families. It provides more focus on how the family and friends' carers specifically meet the needs of the child or children concerned. However in some cases, care continues to be needed in ensuring an accurate and balanced assessment.

**6. Conclusion**

The quality of adoption and permanence work and care planning for children in general has remained good in Brighton & Hove and there has been evidence of excellent practice in a significant number of cases. The Panel continues to work effectively and we will continue to develop our practice over the next year as new Adoption Statutory Guidance comes into force from 1 April 2011.

Sarah Borthwick  
Independent Chair, Brighton & Hove Adoption and Permanence Panel, 2 June  
2011



# CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 13

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Commissioning Strategy for services, assessments and placements for looked after children and children in need who are at risk of care or custody</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director People</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Steve Barton</b>	<b>Tel:</b> 29-6105
	<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:steve.barton@brighton-hove.gov.uk">steve.barton@brighton-hove.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No	Forward Plan No. N/A	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All		

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to be in a position to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area. The sufficiency duty is a general duty that applies to strategic arrangements rather than to the provision of accommodation for a particular individual child and applies to children “whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the authority’s area.”
- 1.2 The Commissioning Strategy for services, assessments and placements for looked after children and children in need (the Commissioning Strategy) summarised in section 3 of this report describes:
  - the council’s current commissioning and procurement arrangements to ensure sufficient high quality, value for money accommodation and support services are provided for children who are, or at risk of becoming, looked after; and
  - the strategic plan to improve those arrangements to ensure sufficiency in the future as part of the council’s value for money and commissioning programmes.
- 1.3. This agenda item is directly related to agenda item 11 (Annual Fostering Service report 2010/11) and agenda item 12 (Annual Adoption Agency Report 2010/11).

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Commissioning Strategy for services, assessments and placements for looked after children and children in need is agreed.

- 2.2 That the arrangements for monitoring the development plan through the Children's Services Value for Money Project are noted.

**3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:**

- 3.1 The full Commissioning Strategy document summarised here was produced by an officer Task Group established by the Value for Money (VFM) Project Board.

**Vision and Outcomes:**

Brighton & Hove City Council's vision for all children is set out in the Children & Young People's Plan 2009-12 agreed with partners and with children and young people themselves through their consultative forums:

"Brighton & Hove should be the best place in the country for children and young people to grow up. We want to ensure all children and young people have the best possible start in life, so that everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, what ever that may be"

For young people in care:

"Our aspirations for children being cared for reflect those aspirations we would have for them as if they were our own. We know that children in care are often in much greater need than other children and we must ensure they obtain all the help they require. We aim to create a home and community environment that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to fulfil their full potential"

(Taken from Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care 2008).

**Current commissioning and procurement arrangements:**

Brighton and Hove can evidence that there are effective arrangements in place to ensure high quality accommodation and support services are provided and that an adequate number of placements are available to meet the needs of looked after children. The 2011 Ofsted inspection recognised that the council has worked hard to reduce the number of placements that are out of city and, for those placements that are within the boundaries of neighbouring authorities, the quality of provision is good and there are good interagency working relationships.

Brighton & Hove covers a small geographical area where 89% of all LAC children are placed within 20 miles of the boundary of Brighton and Hove. A placement outside of the local area is appropriate for 4% of those children placed further way (for example it provides necessary safety or facilitates placement with family and friends or prospective adopters).

The local authority continues to work with providers (both in-house and via the independent sector) to provide services and accommodation as locally as

possible and aims to ensure that all children who wish/need to be placed in the local area can be.

### **Needs analysis:**

The Task Group collected and evaluated detailed data and information including:

- a profile of the city's looked after children population, current placement type and benchmark information
- Young people's views.
- a baseline analysis of current processes and systems

The Task Group found that Brighton & Hove has a higher Looked after Children population than the national average and our statistical neighbours. Also, the proportion of children requiring a Child Protection or Children In Need Plan in Brighton & Hove is higher than the national average and statistical neighbours.

### **Commissioning Strategy:**

The commissioning strategy is organised around the six Standards for Commissioning Practice set out in the Sufficiency Statutory Guidance which includes a comprehensive set of best practice standards (see Appendix 1).

The council's commissioning strategy is to:

- be a good corporate parent
- reduce the need for children to come into the care by enabling and supporting families experiencing difficulties to care for their children
- commission and procure assessments, services and placements that are value for money and comply with statutory commissioning standards prioritising in house fostering provision where that can meet a child's needs

As a result the council will take a commissioning led approach to meeting the requirements of the sufficiency duty in the future. This is in line with its new commissioning and delivery structure and builds on the partnership and commissioning arrangements established by the Children and Young People's Trust and the Section 75 agreement with the PCT.

Following the comprehensive needs analysis and review of current arrangements the Task Group identified three improvement priorities:

#### Individual assessment, care planning, strategic needs assessment and commissioning decisions:

- the decision making pathway for commissioning, matching and procuring assessments, services and/or placements to deliver care plans for individual children

#### Market management and collaboration:

- the balance of arrangements for the in house provision of fostering and adoption placements and the procurement of fostering, adoption and residential placements from the independent sector

- arrangements for the provision of support services to children and young people and/or their families or carers including health, education and other specialist services
- arrangements for pre-birth assessments and the provision of parent and baby assessments and placements

Securing Services:

- establishing consistent evidence based performance management arrangements for both the in house provision of services by the Delivery Unit, through the council's Compact, and through external contract and service specification arrangements for the collection, reporting and analysis of activity and financial data

See Appendix 2 for the Commissioning Strategy Development Plan.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The strategy was jointly produced by senior managers from the Children's Services Commissioning Team and Delivery Unit.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are no specific additional financial resources required to implement the commissioning strategy, however it could have significant financial implications. The commissioning strategy is an integral part of the children's services value for money (VFM) programme and the overall progress of VFM will rely on the successful implementation of the plans stated in the commissioning strategy. The VFM programme forms part of the children's services budget strategy for which detailed financial information is available in numerous other reports.

*Finance Officer Consulted:* David Ellis

*Date:* 28/7/11

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The report and accompanying Commissioning Strategy set out how Brighton and Hove City Council will continue to meet its statutory duties under The Children Act 1989 to provide sufficient accommodation for children in their area, whose welfare requires it. The authority is required to consider the need for a range of accommodation and providers as evidenced by the Strategy.

*Lawyer Consulted:* Hilary Priestley Senior Lawyer

*Date:* 15/08 /11

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The Commissioning Strategy is compliant with the principles and standards set out in the Statutory Guidance underpinning the Sufficiency Duty which includes

that: 'each individual child or young person should be provided with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes'.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 None

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 In line with the Statutory Guidance this strategy is concerned with services, assessment and placements for looked after children and children in need who are at risk of care or custody.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6 This strategy is central to the Value for Money Programme which underpins Children's Services budget and risk management planning.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7 The strategy directly addresses corporate critical budgets.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

6.1 None

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 Required by Section 22G of the Children Act 1989

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1: Principles and Standards: the Sufficiency Duty**

Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities from April 2011, so far as is reasonable, to be in a position to secure sufficient accommodation and support services for looked after children that meets their needs and is within their local authority area.

The sufficiency duty is a general duty that applies to strategic arrangements rather than to the provision of accommodation for a particular individual child and applies to children in need whose welfare requires it.

The Statutory Guidance sets out the principles and standards which underpin this commissioning strategy i.e.

### Principles:

The overriding principle of the statutory guidance can be summarised as:

- Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time. This is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.

The key supporting principles are:

- Each individual child or young person should be provided with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes through: quality assessment, care planning and placement decisions.
- The local authority should give preference to a placement with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent

### Best practice standards:

- all children are placed in appropriate placements with access to the support and services they require in their local authority area, except where this is not consistent with their welfare;
- the full range of universal, targeted and specialist services work together to meet children's needs in an integrated way in the local area, including children who are already looked after, as well as those at risk of care or custody;
- where it is not reasonably practicable for a child to be placed within his/her local authority area, there are mechanisms in place to widen the range of provision in neighbouring areas, the sub-region or region which is still within an accessible distance (i.e. based on transport links and community boundaries), while still being able to provide the full range of services required to meet identified needs;
- all children with adoption recommendations are placed with an adoptive family within 12 months of that recommendation;
- Children's Trust partners, including housing, work together to secure a range of provision to meet the needs of those who become looked after at the age of 16 and 17, and support the continuity of accommodation beyond the age of 18;
- services are available in adequate quantity to respond to children, including predicted demand for a range of needs, and emergencies;
- in addition to meeting relevant national minimum standards, services are of high enough quality to secure the specific outcomes identified in the care plans of looked after children;
- services are situated across the local authority area to reflect geographical distribution of need;
- all placement providers (including private, voluntary and public sector providers) are linked into the wider network of services and work with these services to offer appropriate support to deliver identified outcomes for looked after children;
- universal services know when a child is looked after and have good links with the range of targeted and specialist services which support him/her, including placement providers;

- there are mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals involved in placement decisions have sufficient knowledge and information about the supply and quality of placements and availability of all specialist, targeted and universal support services within the local authority area;
- The local authority and its Children Trust partners collaborate with neighbouring Children's Trusts to plan the market for services for looked after children and commission in regional or sub-regional arrangements.

The needs analysis has taken account of the definition of sufficiency in the Statutory Guidance i.e. that local authorities must do more than simply ensure that accommodation is 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds provided and that consideration is given to:

- The potential benefits of securing a range of accommodation through a number of providers, to meet the diverse needs of looked after children and children in need who are at risk of care or custody.
- Providing services and accommodation at the right time in the right place
- Taking a whole systems approach which includes early intervention and preventive services to support children in their families, as well as better services for children if they do become looked after.

(Statutory Guidance 2.9 and 2.10).

## **Appendix 2: Commissioning Strategy: Development Plan 2011/12**

The development plan sets out the timetable for the work on each of the above issues. The work will be underpinned by the following governance and performance management arrangements:

- Implementation of the Commissioning Strategy will be managed by the VfM Project Board and overseen by the Section 75 Joint Commissioning and Management Group
- Outcomes for Looked After Children will be monitored and managed by the Corporate Parenting Group

Ref	Action	Lead	By when?
<b>Individual Assessment, care planning, strategic needs assessment and commissioning decisions</b>			
1.	Analyse the current decision making pathway for commissioning placements for LAC and if required, develop a business case for changes	Sharon/Sue	Sept-11
2.	Analysis the current decision making pathway for commissioning assessments for LAC/CP/CIN cases and if required, develop a business case	Jane/Tony / Rima/And	Sept-11

Ref	Action	Lead	By when?
	for changes	y	
3.	Analysis the current decision making pathway for commissioning support services for LAC/CP/CIN cases and if required, develop a business case for changes	Richard/ Andy/Sue	Dec-11
4.	Strengthen early permanence planning and care planning of parent/baby placements.	Sharon Richard Celia	Sept-11
5.	Increase range of placement options for 16+ e.g. supported lodging	Andy/Sue	Dec-11
6.	Aggregate data, regarding type and number of in-house placements and agency placements for analysis to determine future commissioning and procurement activity.	Daryl/Rob	Sept -11
7.	Clarifying and if necessary change finance coding of sectional workers to differentiate between preventative and contact costs	David Rima	Sept -11
<b>Market management and collaboration</b>			
8.	Review of the framework contract (including evaluation of strengths & weaknesses of the current system and evaluation of alternative options)	Sue	Dec-11
9.	Review the current balance and projected trends of the LAC numbers between in-house and agency placements and if required, develop a business case to expand and/or clarify the focus of the internal fostering provision (spend to save).	Sharon/Su e	Dec-11
10.	Review health contracts which are currently agreed on an annual basis	Vanessa	Sept-11
11.	Review commissioning implications for the need to charge for health checks for every looked after child placed outside Brighton. Options include - pay other LA or outreach in-house	Vanessa	Sept-11



Ref	Action	Lead	By when?
	service.		
12.	Involvement of providers and stakeholders in discussions about future service delivery/commissioning options	Sue/Sharon	On-going
13.	Review joint working arrangements with education and health to pool budgets (CISP)	Steve	Sept -11
14.	Review Barnados contract for securing long term placements for disabled children as per the disability commissioning strategy	Alison/Jenny	Dec-11
<b>Securing Services</b>			
15.	Review the implications of Southwark judgement	Andy	Sept - 11
16.	Review of IRO services	Jane	Sept -11
17.	Develop a costed menu of evidence based interventions	Ellen Rima	Dec-11
18.	Work with adult services more effectively to ensure that staff prioritises child protection issues and that parents of vulnerable children are fast tracked into services	Steve	Dec-11
19.	Implement and review pathway from social work to CAF	Ellen Rima	Sept-11
20.	Review systems to secure respite placements for disabled children as per the disability commissioning strategy	Alison/Jenny	Dec-11

### Documents In Members' Rooms

None

### Background Documents

None.



# CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 14

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Youth Offending Service Improvement Action Plan</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, People</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Nigel Andain</b>	<b>Tel: 29-6167</b>
	<b>Email:</b>	<b>Nigel.andain@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b>	
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Forward Plan No:</b>	
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 As a result of the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection the YOS was required to develop an Improvement Action Plan in order to address the issues arising from the Inspection. Members are requested to agree to the content of the Improvement Action Plan

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member consider and approve the YOS Improvement Action Plan

### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove YOS was inspected by HMIP at the end of March 2011 and the report was published at the beginning of July 2011. The Inspection raised some valid points relating to our practice, which will be addressed through the YOS Improvement Action Plan.
- 3.2 The Improvement Action Plan has 15 recommendations which comprehensively address not just the issues raised by the Inspectorate, but improvements which we have been aware of and have been introducing incrementally. However, the Inspection has given us the opportunity to combine our improvements into one coherent process.
- 3.3 The recommendations cover the whole process from initial Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) for court, to the initial assessment of the young person and through to the Intervention Plan and including the 'extras' such as Risk Management Plans and Vulnerability Management Plans. The motif throughout the Plan is to ensure that workers are sufficiently trained and confident in the analytical assessment of young people.

- 3.4 The Action Plan includes a training programme for practitioners, which has been agreed by the YOS Management Board. The training will cost £2,600 for 4 days (4 modules x 2) training up to 24 practitioners. This money was within the existing budget.

#### **4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 The Improvement Action Plan has been signed off by the HMIP and the YJB and has been agreed by the YOS Management Board and the Strategic Director for People, Terry Parkin.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of the recommendations of this report. All actions in the improvement plan must be fully costed and funded from within current available resources.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Name: David Ellis Date: 22/08/11*

##### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The action plan aims to address the concerns raised by the inspection report and so improve the services so as to meet the authority's statutory and regulatory duties in respect of youth justice.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name: Natasha Watson Date: 22/08/11*

##### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The YOS adheres to the Council's Equalities principles and as we address the needs of some of the most socially excluded young people in Brighton & Hove. We therefore contribute to the reduction of poor outcomes.

##### Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 The YOS supports the sustainable community's goal as well as climate change and energy. The location of a multi agency team as a one stop shop facilitates the support of vulnerable clients without recourse to multiple visits and assessments

##### Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The YOS works with young offenders from the ages of 10 – 17 (and up to 20 in some instances) with a target to reduce re-offending, custody and First Time Entrants. We have also brought the Targeted Youth Support youth crime prevention team into our structure and so have a strategic oversight into youth crime from prevention to detention (custody).

##### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6 Financial and Legal risks are set out above

Public Health Implications:

5.7 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.8 The YOS is a multi agency team located within the Children & Families Delivery Unit. Also, as a criminal justice agency we work closely with our partners in criminal justice, including the Community Safety Partnership, the courts, Surrey and Sussex Probation Trust and Sussex Police. This ensures that the cross council priorities of working with those vulnerable and at risk young people are adhered to and that young people get the best service available.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

6.1 There are no alternative options

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 To agree the YOS Improvement Action Plan in order to ensure that youth justice practitioners are fully trained to deliver the best interventions for young people and achieve the best possible outcomes.

7.2

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. The YOS Improvement Action Plan

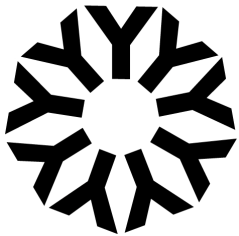
**Documents in Members' Rooms**

1. None

**Background Documents**

1. None





**BRIGHTON & HOVE IMPROVEMENT PLAN** Report Publication Date: 29/06/2011

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>What will be done?</b>	<b>Who will do it?</b>	<b>Timetable for completion:</b>	<b>Review date and progress:</b>
1 Ensure Intervention Plan is fit for purpose	The new Intervention Plan to be completed and rolled out to staff. To include criminogenic and safeguarding factors and clear outcomes	YOS Managers	The new plan is in place and being used, but there is still room for improvement and the Management Team are working on it	October 2011
2 Identify training needs	Training needs identified from HMIP report and cases reviewed by YOS Practice Managers	YOS Practice Managers: Laura Campbell and Alex Cooter	July 2011	Already done. Training needs to be reviewed every 6 months
3 ASSET analysis and Planning training	Training on: ASSET Core Profile ROSH & RMP VMP Intervention Planning Diary Entries	Independent trainer: to be agreed by YOS Management Board	September/October 2011	The impact of the training to be assessed via the quality assurance processes identified in Recommendations 7 & 13
4 Training on a structured system for diary entries	Training of caseworkers on how to input diary entries to introduce more clarity as to the work being done	Independent trainer: to be agreed by YOS Management Board	September/October 2011	The impact of the training to be assessed via the quality assurance processes identified in Recommendations 7 & 13
5 Define structure for recording on the	Training on offence analysis and how to record the relevant	Independent trainer: to be agreed by YOS	September/October 2011	The impact of the training to be assessed via the quality assurance processes identified in

AGENDA ITEM 14- APPENDIX 1

ASSET front sheet	information in a uniform and relevant way	Management Board		Recommendations 7 & 13
6 Implement Assessment Intervention Planning and Recording Contacts	ASSET front sheet recording and Diary contacts to be entered according to the agreed structure	All case workers	October 2011	Implementation to be assessed via the quality assurance processes identified in Recommendations 7 & 13
7 QA of Assessments, Intervention Planning and Recording	All intervention plans and diary entries to be quality assured to ensure that the work is being done sequentially and according to agreed outcomes.	YOS Managers	November 2011	QA sessions to take place on a fortnightly basis, but to include (on a rota basis) ASSETs, Intervention Plans, Diary entries, RMPs, VMPS
8 Young people to be actively involved in Assessment, planning and review	The Intervention Plan has already been refined to include the views and direct comments from young people, but needs further work. Young people and families are already involved from initial assessment to plan, review and exit strategy, this to	YOS Managers	November 2011	To be monitored via the QA processes



AGENDA ITEM 14- APPENDIX 1

	continue				
9 Gaps analysis of Offending Behaviour programmes	A worker is currently updating our resource library and sourcing offender behaviour programmes and others	Practice Managers: Laura Campbell and Alex Cooter	July 2011	To be reviewed every 6 months.	
10 Create menu of options for structured interventions and identify new interventions to fill gaps	Create a resource of programmes and to ensure that Intervention Plans make it clear what programmes are being used to support the stated outcomes	Practice Managers: Laura Campbell and Alex Cooter	September 2011	To be reviewed every 6 months. A resource library is currently being put together.	
11 Review Management of Risk (MoR) policy	Review policy to capture ongoing changes in processes – including police referrals to the MoR	Practice Manager: Laura Campbell	October 2011	To be reviewed annually	
12 Agree risk policy with partners	Consultation with partners	Practice Manager: Laura Campbell	November 2011	To be reviewed annually	
13 Implement new MoR policy	New policy to be implemented	Practice Manager: Laura Campbell	December 2011	To be reviewed annually	

AGENDA ITEM 14- APPENDIX 1

14 QA MoR	All MoR cases to be quality assured against the MoR policy and the new recording arrangements	Practice Manager: Laura Campbell	January 2011	Quality sessions will take place fortnightly on a rota basis – see above
15 A restructuring of the YOS Management Board	Strategic Director for People as DCS (Terry Parkin) to submit a paper to the Strategic Leadership Board re the reconstitution of the YOS Management Board which will report to the Safe in the City Partnership	Strategic Director for People: Terry Parkin	Paper already submitted and awaiting outcome	To be reviewed annually
Name of person completing this plan: Nigel Andain		Designation: YOS Service Manager		Date: 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2011

*This template is for guidance only - you are welcome to use your own template, or include these actions in other plans.*

# CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET MEMBER MEETING

## Agenda Item 15

Brighton & Hove City Council

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Transport Arrangements to Voluntary Aided Church Schools in Brighton &amp; Hove</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, People</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name: Steve Healey</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 293444</b>	
	<b>E-mail: steve.healey@brighton-hove.gov.uk</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Forward Plan No:</b>	
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

### FOR GENERAL RELEASE

#### 1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Brighton & Hove City Council provides transport support in the form of a bus pass to a number of children who attend the nearest voluntary aided school of a religious character (also known as a denominational school) of their own faith. This assistance has been provided where that school has been beyond the statutory home to school distance (3 miles for secondary schools and 2 miles for primary age children under 8 years old or 3 miles if over 8). In cases where the school has no religious affiliation transport assistance is only provided where the nearest school to the pupil's home address or the catchment area school is above the statutory distance. In Brighton & Hove that is extremely rare and in practice only denominational school pupils and some pupils with special needs are given a bus pass. In most cases this is for pupils attending Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic Secondary School, and currently 7 pupils attending Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Primary School. Many other Councils have had similar schemes for denominational transport. Given the pressure on budgets some have removed the subsidy and others are planning to do so. The total cost of denominational transport in Brighton & Hove is currently £74,209 pa.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Council should take forward a consultation with schools, parents and carers and the Diocesan authorities on the possible withdrawal of denominational transport.
- 2.2 That following that consultation a further report should be made to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young people setting out the results and recommendations arising from the consultation.

#### 3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council has a responsibility under Section 508B of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006) to provide free transport to "eligible" children to the nearest "qualifying" school.

Eligible means:

- Those pupils with special needs sufficient to require travel assistance,
- To those where the route is unsafe,
- the child lives beyond the statutory distance (see above) or
- those on a low income (defined in terms of qualification for certain benefits, mainly free school meals) living more than 2 miles from a qualifying school. Secondary pupils on a low income can claim support for transport to any of the three nearest schools *or* the nearest denominational school on the grounds of religion or belief beyond 2 and less than 15 miles away.

A qualifying school is:

- a community, foundation or voluntary aided school
- a community or foundation special school
- a non-maintained special school
- a pupil referral unit
- an academy or free school.

3.2 Section 508C gives councils discretion to make transport arrangements for others who are not eligible as the council considers necessary. This is the section under which denominational transport has been provided in Brighton & Hove. Any arrangements under this section do not have to be free of charge. Those under Section 508B must be free of charge. Section 509A requires councils to have regard to parental wishes for their child to be educated at a particular school on the grounds of religion or belief. "Have regard to" does not mean that assistance must be provided, simply that their wishes are considered. A parent's wish for their child not to be educated at a church school would have the same weight. If Brighton & Hove removes support for denominational transport it would be as provided under Section 508C, discretionary transport. Transport would not be removed from any category of legally eligible pupil.

3.3 The savings to Brighton & Hove of withdrawing the scheme would be less than the total shown above as a proportion of those currently receiving assistance to attend a denominational school would be eligible pupils on a low income. This is currently 24 pupils at a cost of £ 6,271.20pa. At current costs in a full year and not including any special protections that might be agreed that makes the saving £67,937.80 pa.

3.4 As mentioned at 1.1 above the majority of pupils qualifying for transport assistance to a denominational school attend Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic Secondary School. The financial breakdown above is based upon the numbers of pupils who qualified for assistance in the 2010/11 school year. The breakdown by year group is as follows:

- Year 11- 59
- Year 10 - 54
- Year 9 - 53
- Year 8 – 53

- Year 7 – 58

3.5 One key reason for considering the removal of denominational transport is the perception of inequality. Whilst faith based schools are legally allowed to prioritise admissions on religious criteria, the additional benefit to pupils of a bus pass, even where there is a non-denominational school closer to their home, can be seen as unfair. Children without that same faith commitment are not entitled to help except where the nearest school is more than 3 miles away, or 2 miles for those with a low income. It therefore seems reasonable that those who wish to attend a faith based school should be entitled to do so, but should not be given assistance with transport beyond that available to children attending other schools. Some Councils have already taken the view that they saw special support for denominational travel as inherently unfair, as it supports one group of children more than others. Whilst we would recognise and support faith schools as providers of good quality education, this should be balanced against the cost to the taxpayer of denominational transport and the perception of inequality.

3.6 If Brighton & Hove wishes to consider withdrawing denominational transport it should take the following actions.

- Consult with all schools (faith based and other), diocesan authorities and parents.
- Undertake an equalities impact assessment.
- Consider protection for Year 11 pupils in the first year following withdrawal of transport funding, and whether any other aspects of the change should be introduced over a period of time rather than immediately. Those pupils already committed to examination courses should not be affected by the change.
- Following consultation take a further report to the Cabinet Member meeting.

This course of action would ensure that before a decision is taken to change the Council's home to school transport policy, the views of all interested parties have been sought and the impact of the proposed change identified. Some protection for older pupils at Cardinal Newman School who have bus passes and who have already started an examination course would seem reasonable, as their families would not have anticipated the withdrawal of bus passes when they started at the school. It would be difficult for pupils to transfer to an alternative closer school at that stage in their school career.

3.7 A number of scheduled bus services to schools are supported by the Council's Public Transport Team including services, the 95, 95A and 91 (morning only) service run to Cardinal Newman School. The Council also financially supports routes to some other schools in the City. These services can be used by pupils with an entitlement to a bus pass, but they also transport many who are paying passengers. The effect of withdrawing denominational transport support would mean that the supported services routes, which are on revenue guarantee contracts, would become more cost effective for the Council as they would have

more paying customers. The Council is currently consulting on supported bus services as the current contracts expire in a year's time. Brighton & Hove has a good public transport infrastructure and whilst in future they might have to pay, current denominational travellers should not have difficulty in accessing scheduled services, including the supported services mentioned above. Should any of the supported services be changed or withdrawn then travel to Cardinal Newman and to non-denominational schools might become more difficult for some pupils.

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 A full consultation will take place with all interested parties. This will include all schools, parents whose children are of school age, and the Church of England and Roman Catholic diocesan authorities.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The current cost of denominational transport is £74,209 (at current prices and pupil numbers). If the right to support with transport to denominational is withdrawn a saving of £67,938 pa (at current prices and pupil numbers) will be made. The ongoing cost of £6,271 (at current prices and pupil numbers) will be ongoing as these are for pupils who are eligible for FSM due to parents on low income and this may change depending upon the economic climate.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Andy Moore*

*Date: 31/08/11*

##### Legal Implications:

- 5.2 The council has responsibilities under section 508B of the Education Act 1996 to provide free transport to "eligible" children to the nearest "qualifying" school. It also currently provides support to some pupils at denominational schools under section 508C of the same Act, but that is a discretionary arrangement for pupils who are not eligible under section 508B, and can be withdrawn without contravening the requirements of the Act. Before any changes to the current scheme are made the consultation and equalities impact assessment provided for in the report will be needed.

*Lawyer Consulted: Natasha Watson*

*Date: 2 September*

##### Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 It could be taken that the provision of denominational transport gives an unfair advantage to one group of pupils in gaining transport access to a preferred school. At the same time pupils who do not have a religious affiliation to the denominations of the church voluntary aided schools in the City could be seen as disadvantaged as they have no right to transport beyond the statutory requirements under section 508B of the Education Act 1996. The rights of those on a low income to receive transport assistance to attend a denominational school would be preserved. An impact assessment would identify whether the

effect of a change in policy would be disproportionate or unfair in its affect on any group, and whether the current policy was inherently fair or unfair.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 It is not currently proposed that the supported bus services to schools should be withdrawn, so the means of access to schools by public transport will be sustained, albeit that pupils previously supported under the denominational transport policy would have to pay. Any changes to supported services should take into account the whole range of pupil travel needs. Schools will be consulted about future supported bus services.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no direct implications for crime and disorder.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 An equality impact assessment will identify any undue impact on of a change in policy on any part of the population and any resultant risk to the Council.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 It is possible that school attendance patterns in the City could change if the denominational transport support is withdrawn. However, this is unlikely to be a major change as the policy only applies to those living beyond the statutory walking distance.

**6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 6.1 The Council could decide to retain the current transport policy for denominational transport at a cost of £74,209.20 pa. This should be balanced against the financial pressures facing the Council and the perceived inequality arising from the current policy.

**7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 The City Council must review its policies, in this case an aspect of home to school transport policy, with regard to cost effectiveness and equalities matters. The financial pressures facing the Council and the need to make long term savings in the home to school transport budget suggest that it is appropriate to undertake a consultation on denominational school transport. On the conclusion of that consultation the Council can make an informed decision about the policy.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices**

1. None

**Documents in the Members Room**

1. None

## **Background Documents**

1. Current home to school transport policy for Brighton & Hove.