

Appendix 1

Hampshire Adoption Service Annual Report 1st April 2010-31st March 2011

1) Children looked after placed for adoption and adopted

	Total Orders Made	Children Matched	Adoption Plans
1 st April 2010 – 31 st March 2011	37	58*	66**

***This figure does not include 3 children who were matched with prospective adopters within the previous year (2009-10) but who have been placed within this current year 2010-2011.**

****This figure does not include adoption plans for 3 children which were agreed in the previous year (2009-2010) but re-presented to adoption panel since 1st April 2010 at the request of the court following additional assessments being carried out.**

1. Summary

1.1 The position as of 31st March 2011 is that 37 adoption orders have been made (in comparison with 60 adoption orders made in 2009/10), 66 children have had new plans for adoption agreed (in comparison with 64 in 2009/10) and 58 children were matched with prospective adopters (in comparison with 49 children in 2009/10).

1.2 The national picture as at 31.3.2010 was that 64,400 children were in the care of local authorities within England with 3,200 children being adopted from care.

1.3 The fall in the number of adoption orders within Hampshire's adoption service may be due to the complex nature of some children's care proceedings leading to protracted proceedings which are delaying the making of Placement Orders which the Local Authority requires before being able to place a child for adoption. The effect of this is that the figures for adoption orders for next year are likely to be much higher.

1.4 Whilst 66 children had new plans for adoption agreed in the last year we know that at least 5 of these children will need their plans for adoption rescinding due to family members coming forward during proceedings or successfully contesting the proposed plan for adoption.

1.5 The numbers of children matched for adoption during 2010-11 has risen by 9 from the preceding year. Of the 58 children who have been matched for adoption during 2010/2011, 19 of these children have been matched with prospective adopters from other adoption agencies, including one child who was matched with prospective adopters from within Hampshire's adoption consortium – this equates to 32.7% of the children placed during the year. This has had significant financial implications for Hampshire County Council's adoption service budget. In one case a child was joining a sibling who had already been adopted by other agency adopters: both children were of dual heritage and at the time the first sibling was ready to be matched Hampshire County Council had no approved adopters to match the child's heritage. However, with regard to the other 18 children who were placed in inter-agency placements no prospective adopters could be found for them within Hampshire's pool of resources. As well as a

need for more approved adopters within Hampshire, there is a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoptive placements and applicants coming forward to Hampshire interested in adopting:- see below

a) Plans for adoption

1.6 Of the 66 children who had plans for adoption agreed during 2010/2011 they consist of :

- 20 single male children
- 18 single female children
- 13 sibling groups as follows:
 - 3 sets of two male siblings
 - 1 set of a two female siblings
 - 7 sets of mixed sibling pairs
 - 2 sets of sibling groups of 3 children, one all female and one mixed (one boy and two girls)

The 66 children include 3 (single) children - 2 females and 1 male – who have been relinquished for adoption by their birth parent(s).

1.7 Of the 66 children who had plans agreed for adoption since 1st April 2010:

- 15 children are awaiting final hearings
- A sibling group of 2 children had Special Guardianship Orders made to grandparents at the end of care proceedings, and their plans for adoption are to be rescinded
- A sibling group of 2 children were placed with their birth father during care proceedings, and their plans for adoption are to be rescinded
- One child is to be placed within the family, and his plan for adoption rescinded
- One child has been matched and now adopted
- 15 children have been matched and placed for adoption
- 4 children have been matched with prospective adopters but not yet placed
- 9 children have possible prospective adopters identified

Family finding is being vigorously pursued for the remainder of the children (17).

b) Children awaiting adoptive placements

1.8 With regard to children with plans for adoption from previous years, there are currently 12 children who had plans for adoption agreed during 2009-10. Of these 2 children (siblings) have had prospective adopters identified, the foster carers of another child are being assessed as possible prospective adopters, one child has returned to birth father and their plan for adoption is to be rescinded. This leaves two sibling groups of three children and two single children who are still awaiting adoptive placements. Family finding for one of the sibling groups of three had been postponed following the end of their care proceedings in order to carry out work with the children. Within the other sibling group of three one of the children has some special needs and consideration is being given to placing this child separately from his two siblings. Both of the two single children awaiting adoptive placements have some emotional and/or behavioural issues or special needs.

1.9 There are 4 children who had plans for adoption agreed during 2008-2009 who have not yet been placed for adoption. One (single) child has had prospective adopters

identified and this plan for matching will be presented to adoption panel in the coming weeks. Another single child, with some special needs, who had been placed for adoption but where the placement disrupted before the adoption order and early into the placement, has had interest expressed from prospective adopters and this is being investigated. This leaves a sibling pair whose plans for adoption are to be reconsidered.

1.10 In total there are 41 children currently waiting for placements, with 13 of these children having had prospective adopters identified and with some of the children's plans to be reviewed in light of their needs. The 27 children still waiting placements consist of children with complex needs which are the challenges that increasingly face the service in finding adoptive placements. The children will have complex birth family histories including inheritable mental health conditions, e.g. schizophrenia and bi-polar disorders. Many of the children will also have come from birth families where alcohol and drug abuse have been a key feature and the unknown impact of this on the child's health and progress can be a deterrent for prospective adopters; e.g. the diagnosis and later development of foetal alcohol syndrome. Increasingly children being placed for adoption can have developmental delay where their future prognosis is also uncertain. Children awaiting placement also include those that have been sexually abused or are exhibiting sexualised behaviour. Other children that may wait are those with quite specific diagnosed medical conditions such as cystic fibrosis. Of the 27 children awaiting adoptive placements, 55% have developmental delay, learning difficulties or medical conditions and 25% require a placement with a sibling.

1.11 In addition to the above it can be anticipated that many of the children awaiting adoptive placements will also have attachment difficulties as a result of poor early parenting experiences. Adoptive parents, whilst prepared vigorously for the adoption task, can and do struggle with unknown factors associated with the future of the children once they are approached and presented with a specific child. In addition adopters can and do change their minds about the gender of the child they would like, and this in itself can reduce choice, amongst the available pool of approved adopters, for social workers

1.12 For those Hampshire children whose plan is for adoption, family finding is being vigorously pursued both in-house and via the adoption consortium, the National Adoption Register (including at their profile events throughout the south of the country) and features in Be My Parent and Children Who Wait magazines and their secure websites.

c) Adoption disruptions (post-placement and pre-adoption order)

1.13 There has been one adoption placement disruption (pre-adoption order) since 1st April 2010. This involved a male child who was placed with approved adopters from another adoption agency (SSAFA). He was aged two years at the time of placement in March 2010 and had some special needs. Sadly the placement disrupted within one month of placement, as there were difficulties within the prospective adopters' relationship which only became apparent after the child was placed. The couple separated and are now in the process of divorcing. Fortunately the child was able to return to his previous Hampshire foster carers where he has been receiving an excellent standard of physical and emotional care and has settled well. A disruption meeting was held to gain more of an understanding about why the placement failed. The report from this meeting is to be presented to adoption panel. It is hoped that another adoptive placement will be found for this child.

d) Children matched/placed

1.14 Of the 58 children who have been matched/placed for adoption during the year 3 children (one sibling pair and one single child) were placed with 2 sets of prospective adopters who were previously their foster carers. In addition 4 children with plans for adoption were placed, under foster regulations, with prospective adopters who had been identified as the children's adoptive families but had also been approved as foster carers specifically for these children, to avoid the children having to move to respite foster placements prior to the proposed adoption linking being presented to adoption panel.

1.15 It is of note that one particular child aged 5, with developmental delay with speech and language problems, who had had a plan for adoption since March 2008 was successfully matched after the tenacious family finding efforts of the child's Adoption Social Worker.

1.16 National Timescales

a) The statutory timescale laid down within the Adoption and Children Act 2002 for presenting children's plans for adoption, i.e. that the Child's Permanence Report is presented to the adoption panel within 6 weeks of completion was met in 100% of cases.

b) The statutory timescale laid down within the Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires that a panel recommendation should be made within two months of a review where adoption has been identified as the permanence plan.

The Statutory Review should be held after the final Care Planning Meeting and prior to the Adoption Panel. Due to the very tight timescales which in most cases made holding a Statutory Review prior to Adoption Panel unachievable, it was agreed with the Service Manager of the Reviewing Service that the Team Manager will inform the IRO of the outcome of the Final Care Plan. The IRO would then either ratify the significant changes proposed by the Team Manager, or an urgent review would be held if there were any issues raised at the planning meeting which would result in the IRO not feeling able to ratify the decision. It would be an exception for this to happen.

c) The statutory timescale that the Agency Decision is made within 7 days of the panel has been met in 98% of all cases (i.e. 65 out of 66 cases) with regards to decisions made on children's plans for adoption. In respect of linkings the figure is 100% (i.e. 58 out of 58 cases).

d) The statutory timescales around linking children with prospective adopters state that children should be linked and that linking approved at adoption panel within 6 months of the Agency Decision being made that a child should be placed for adoption. Between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011 58 children have been linked with prospective adopters. Of those 58 children 23 children were linked within the statutory timescale of 6 months. This equates to a performance of 39.6% which is much lower than last year's figure which was 57%. The figure is undoubtedly a reflection of the levels of complexity of the children we are placing but also the complexity of care proceedings. There have been some cases where the courts have requested that children's plans for adoption are re-presented to adoption panel following further expert reports/opinions being sought

after the child's plan has been initially presented to adoption panel and the recommendation and agency decision made.

1.17 National Indicator 61

This indicator refers to the timeliness of children being placed for adoption following the Agency Decision – within 12 months of the Agency Decision. In Hampshire for 2010-11 the total number of children placed for adoption within 12 months of the Agency Decision was 31 – that is 83.8% (compared to 83.3% for the previous year 2009-10).

1.18 When the number of final adoption orders (37) for 2010-11 is added to the number of SGOs for the same period (39) and looked at in terms of the numbers of children who have been looked after for more than 6 months (876) Hampshire are achieving 8.7% of children being placed in permanent placements (slightly lower than 9.4% for the previous year 2009-10).

2) Children with a potential plan for Adoption

2.1 Currently the Adoption service are tracking approximately 91 children where adoption may be the plan for these children in the future, but care plans have not been finalised: this is done within a monthly Adoption Monitoring Meeting attended by the adoption service management group.

2.2 In tracking these children the Adoption Monitoring Group have continued to notice a significant cohort where members of the birth family have been identified as potential carers. This cohort equates to 24% of the total number of children: this is a decrease from the figure from the previous year (33%). However, it is still a significant number and whilst family members coming forward may be positive in terms of the possibility of the child being placed with family members, there are cases where the local authority have instituted costly proceedings which may have been prevented had family members been explored earlier.

2.3 The judiciary, with the support of children's guardians, continue to show interest in the family finding process and the resources available in respect of families suitable to meet the needs of the children within the proceedings. Children's guardians are routinely invited to either submit their views to adoption panel on the child's proposed care plan or attend adoption panel and there is an increasing understanding of their views and whether they support the local authority's care plan..

2.4 Within children's proceedings the court continues to agree to the appointment of experts to carry out additional assessments within care cases. In some cases it is felt that these add very little to the reports already submitted by social workers and staff within the local authority. In many cases the timescales allowed for the completion and submission of expert reports places increasing pressures on Children In Need Teams and the Adoption Teams to achieve the desired outcomes in terms of court timescales i.e. care planning meetings and presentation to adoption panel.

2.5 As has been stated above, in a small number of cases, further experts have been appointed after a child's plan has already been presented to adoption panel with the court requesting that the plan is re-presented to panel following completion of the additional report(s).

2.6 Earlier in the year (April 2010) the adoption service presented a briefing to a number of the judiciary at Portsmouth Magistrates Court to highlight the work of the adoption panels, the regulations governing these and how they inevitably impact on the outcome of the proceedings. This was found to be a very positive session from the point of view of both parties: the adoption service was able to use a helpful suggestion from the judiciary regarding their wish to have information about family finding for the child/children and incorporate this into its revision of panel/court paperwork: it is hoped this will mean that social workers do not have to submit separate statements to court about family finding activity in the future.

3) Prospective Adopters

	April 2010 – March 2011
Approved Adopters	36
Adopters Being assessed as of 31st March 2011	39

3.1 There continues to be an interest in adoption from the general public. Figures for adoption enquiries received by Hampshire via Hantsdirect show that between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011 a total of 522 enquiries were received. This is lower than the previous two years when there were 660 enquiries (2009-2010) and 747 enquiries (2008-2009). There has been an increase in enquiries during the month of November, as this is the month in which National Adoption Week has been occurring, when the issue of adoption and children awaiting adoptive placements is promoted in local and national media. The decrease in the number of enquiries may be in part due to the current uncertain economic situation. We have had assessments of prospective adopters placed on hold due to the possibility of redundancy and financial uncertainty about the future.

3.2 However, as stated above there also continues to be a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoptive placements and the expectations and parenting skills of applicants approaching Hampshire County Council. This is in part due to a combination of the complex needs of the children requiring adoption and the lack of parenting experience in prospective adopters coming forward, many of whom are in their mid thirties following extensive fertility treatment. A lot of the people coming forward to adopt are looking for children with uncomplicated needs and backgrounds and often there is a lack of understanding about the impact of a child's pre care experiences in relation to their future development, and therefore the sort of parenting these children will require. This very much reflects the experience of other local

authorities. For Hampshire, this has led, particularly over the last two years, to a very high number of children being placed with prospective adopters from other agencies. Because of this we are proactively reviewing our marketing strategy to ensure we are reaching as wide a population as possible, in order to provide the diverse pool of adopters needed for children with a plan for adoption.

3.3 The increased number of assessments of prospective adopters during the year – 36 - compared to 31 for the previous year has been made possible through the use of independent social workers and also through the use of children's social workers within the adoption teams who, to assist with their own professional development, have come forward to carry out prospective adopter assessments in addition to holding their own caseloads of children's work. 16 of the 36 assessments of approved adopters were carried out by independent social workers or children's social workers: this equates to 44%. The use of independent social workers and children's social workers was necessary to cover staff vacancies and staff sickness within the recruitment (adult assessment) side of the service.

3.4 Although 36 sets of prospective adopters were approved during 2010-11, a further two completed prospective adopter assessments were presented to adoption panel. In one case panel deferred the case requesting further information on a number of issues; the couple then withdrew from the process due to relationship difficulties. In the second case panel recommended that the prospective adopters were not suitable to adopt. This recommendation was agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. The case has been referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (see below) at the request of the prospective adopters.

3.5 Two of the 36 sets of prospective adopters approved during 2010-11 were unable to be matched with Hampshire children and wished to look outside of the agency for children. Both sets of prospective adopters were matched with children from other agencies.

3.6 There are currently 8 sets of approved adopters available, with 2 sets of prospective adopters approved this year who are on hold, at their own request, due to changes in their family circumstances. In addition one set of prospective adopters who have been approved since 2002 have had their approval withdrawn (see below).

3.7 During 2010-11 there were 6 Information Sessions to which those members of the public who enquired about adoption were invited – a total of 225 people attended these sessions.

3.8 The Preparation and Training courses for applicants wishing to be assessed and approved as prospective adopters were held on 8 occasions throughout 2010-11: 54 sets of prospective adopters attended over the year (this figure included 13 sets of second time prospective adopters).

3.9 National Timescales

a) Of the approved adopters 58% (i.e. 21 cases out of 36) have been assessed and approved within the National Timescales i.e. from the date of their application to the Adoption Panel Recommendation to be 8 months.

Reasons for assessments not being completed within the statutory timescales include: health issues needing to be addressed; family illness, a smoking issue that arose during assessment which required the assessment to be put on hold; an overseas check which delayed matters, further work requiring to be done with applicants and staff sickness which in some cases meant that cases had to be transferred to other social workers.

b) Of the 36 sets of prospective adopters approved since 1st April 2010 the Agency Decision was made in 100% of cases within the required 7 days of the adoption panel recommendation.

c) In 61% of cases (i.e. 22 cases out of 36) the Adopter's Report was presented to Adoption Panel within 6 weeks of its completion which is the national timescale.

d) In all cases applicants were sent an information pack within the national timescale of 5 working days of their enquiry: packs are sent from the Fulfilment Centre following a request through Hantsdirect.

e) Applicants are invited to attend adoption information days within 2 months of their enquiry which meets the national timescale.

All newly approved adopters are provided with one year's free membership of Adoption UK, an independent support organisation for adopters. In addition all Hampshire adopters have access to post-approval and post-adoption training provided by the adoption service.

4) Independent Review Mechanism

4.1 In March 2011 Hampshire Adoption Agency had its first case referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM came into being in April 2004. It provides adoptive applicants in England with the option of applying to an independent body to review the adoption agency's determination not to approve them as adopters or to withdraw their approval. It is operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department for Education.

4.2 The case involved prospective adopters who had been approved since 2002 without any potential link and who the agency felt, following an internal review, were no longer suitable to adopt. Following this review, the case to withdraw the prospective adopters' suitability to adopt was presented to one of Hampshire's adoption panels which recommended that they were no longer suitable to adopt. Hampshire's Agency Decision Maker agreed with this recommendation. Before the final decision was made, however, the prospective adopters were given the choice of either making representations to the adoption agency or having their case referred to the IRM. The prospective adopters chose the latter option. The IRM's independent panel considered the case and recommended to Hampshire Adoption Agency that the couple were no longer suitable to adopt.

4.3 A second case (referred to above) has also been referred to the IRM and a date for the case to be presented is awaited.

5) Adoption Support Service Team

5.1 The County has an Adoption Support Service team that provides services for adoptive families and adopted children, post adoption order. They also provide services for adopted adults, birth parents and relatives. The service runs the Adoption Information Exchange service (AIE) which deals with both indirect and direct contact arrangements for children who have been adopted..

5.2 In 2010-11 the AIE service saw indirect exchanges increase to over a thousand a year and noticeably a growth to more than fifty direct contact arrangements between either siblings or with birth family. During the last year investment has been made in improving the AIE electronic database to make it more efficient and 'fit for purpose' especially in data collection and monitoring arrangements. The new system went live at the end of March 2011.

5.3 In March 2011 the adoption support team were supporting 110 children and families and 64 adults. The team have seen an increase in the numbers of families requesting Adoption Support services post order, due to the complex needs of their children, associated with attachment issues and severe difficulties in education. The team work closely with the CAMHS and education services. Joint working with Education this year has focussed on school transitions.

6) Adoption consortium

6.1 Hampshire remains a member of an adoption consortium with Surrey and Oxfordshire County Councils and Parents And Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption and fostering agency. Hampshire adoption agency has valued the consortium as a safe and professional forum in which to discuss policy and practice issues and new legislation and has also benefitted from the opportunity to attend training events in other consortium agencies. The family finding aspect of the consortium has been less satisfactory.

6.2 Hampshire placed 19 children with approved adopters from other agencies during 2010-11 but only one of these placements was with approved adopters from within the consortium. This one placement was, however, a welcome link as the child was of Nepalese origin and whilst the prospective adopters did not reflect the child's ethnicity they were able to meet the child's religious needs as expressed by the child's birth mother and they had already adopted a son of Nepalese origin.

6.3 Hampshire would welcome further discussion around how family finding/matching within the consortium can be made more effective.

7) Step Parent Adoptions

7.1 There is a continual number of enquiries in respect of step-parent adoption. The three 0.5 step parent workers all manage the current level of enquiries, assessments and reports needed for court.

7.2 Cases are generally dealt with in order of referral date. Where an applicant has notified the department of their intention to adopt they have been allocated a social worker within one month of referral date in order to comply with court procedures for submission of an assessment report.

7.3 Since 1st April 2010 there have been 41 step parent adoption orders made. Following criticism in a previous Ofsted inspection that step parent work was not being given sufficient priority, the Adoption service recruited dedicated workers to undertake this statutory task. This decision may now be reflected in the apparent higher number of step parent orders being made in Hampshire, than in comparable Local Authorities. The Adoption service are analysing the figures to determine the reason for the differential.

8) Inter Country Adoptions

Although all inter country adoption assessments are carried out within a Service Level Agreement with Parents And Children Together (PACT), Reading currently PACT undertake the welfare supervision of those children whose adoption orders made in their country of origin are not recognised in the UK and who therefore need to go through the adoption process in the UK. There are currently four of these children within Hampshire whose cases are open.

9) Special Guardianship Orders

The service is also involved in the assessment of adults wishing to apply for Special Guardianship Orders: there are currently 8 Special Guardianship assessments ongoing.

10. Summary for the Adoption Service 2011/2012

10.1 The performance of the adoption service continues to be one of high activity and having successful outcomes for children whose plans are adoption. Whilst 37 adoption orders for the last year (2010-11) is much lower than the previous year, the numbers of children being placed during the year (58) was high and this will have an impact on the numbers of orders for the coming year. It is pleasing to note that despite the complexity of the needs of children successful outcomes are still being achieved. The family finding group which tracks the hard to place children has provided a good picture of the activity involved in finding families for individual children. In order to make this activity more efficient the family finding activity has recently been incorporated into the monthly Adoption Monitoring meetings.

10.2 The adoption service maintains 4 adoption panels which have been very active throughout the year: with 48 meetings. There are arrangements in place for emergency panels to be convened should this be necessary to fit in with court timescales for children's plans for adoption. The panel service is responding to new regulations introduced on 1st April 2011 governing the structure and constitution of adoption panels.

10.3 There is a perception nationally that adoption panels are the cause of delay in matching and placing children and cause a 'bottleneck' in the process. This is a misconception as a key delay in placing children for adoption is in the Court process itself where there are often protracted proceedings with delays for example for 'expert' reports. In HCC there are 52 adoption panels a year and the service will always convene an additional panel when required to meet the needs in planning for children. The training undertaken by the Adoption Service for the Courts in 2010-11 was received well and it is the intention of the service to repeat this as a way of maintaining good communication between the service and the Courts.

10.4 Challenges for the Year Ahead:

Children:

- a) In tracking the children for whom adoption is the plan it has been noticed that there is a growing tendency for courts not to be making orders and for children to be remaining within their birth family whilst proceedings are ongoing. This creates a number of challenges for the adoption service whose work is focussed on helping children understand their future placement.
- b) The numbers of looked after children continues to be high: the figure for children looked after full-time as at 31st March 2011 is 1083 and this has impacted on the numbers of children whose care plan is adoption. The numbers of children placed for adoption this year has increased and the children themselves continue to have complex emotional, behavioural and health needs as a result of for example, injuries sustained from parents, witnessing domestic violence and parental drug and alcohol abuse.

In-house and Out of County Placements/Voluntary Sector Adoption Agencies (VAAs)

10.5 HCC have historically managed to place most of their children in house but over the last two to three years this has become more difficult due in part to the complex needs of the children. Last year, 2010-11, 58 children were placed for adoption and 32.7% of these placements were outside of HCC's own resources. HCC has made good use of resources available across a mixed economy but this does have implications for the service's inter-agency budget. Often VAAs are good at finding particular 'niche' placements e.g. faith based, disabilities etc

10.6 There is a view nationally that Local Authorities do not want to use VAAs because of the cost. Whilst this has not been the case for HCC there will be implications for Hampshire's inter-agency budget this year as, recently, Voluntary Adoption Agencies have agreed a significant increase in their fees for placements. As of 1st April 2011 fees for inter-agency placements with Voluntary Organisations rose to £27,000 for one child, with ongoing support charged at £750 per month when an adoption order is not made after 12 months and the VAA continues to support the placement. (Previous rates have been £20,640 for one child plus £3,440 for adoption support.) In addition all adoption agencies in London, both local authority and voluntary, charge an additional 10% on all fees. Two siblings placed together are charged at 150% and three siblings placed together at 200% of the price for one child.

Recruitment of prospective adopters:

10.7 HCC's experience is that there are plenty of people coming forward for adoption but that there is a mismatch between the sorts of children prospective adopters would like to adopt and the needs of the children seeking adoptive placements. Many adoptive parents are seeking very young children (under the age of one year) who have straightforward early histories. As identified, the challenge is that the children who are to be placed for adoption often have complex needs from an early age including many who have been damaged pre-birth due to drug and alcohol related abuse by the birth mother. Whilst the assessment of adoptive parents is a skilled and detailed process it is often not until adopters are approached to take a specific child that the reality of what they wish accept becomes clearer for them.

10.8 Hampshire's policy has always reflected what is now the current Government's vision and thinking, in that no child should be denied the opportunity to be placed in a loving adoptive home because it is not the right ethnic match. In Hampshire whilst we recognise the importance of identity and would therefore initially try to find a family that reflected the child's cultural and ethnic heritage, including widening the search nationwide via Hampshire's adoption consortium, the NAR and VAAs, we would always take account of the need for timeliness when planning for children and their need to have a permanent family above all else. HCC would look at ethnicity as a matching consideration but this would not delay unduly the potential matching of a child to a family. We would seek to demonstrate how the adoptive parent could address the ethnicity issue in other ways if a direct ethnic and cultural match could not be found. There is more evidence today that for some children who had been placed in transracial placements in the past, whilst they may have experienced a positive upbringing, they have always felt that in terms of their identity part of them was missing.

10.9 In the coming year, 2011-12 the Adoption Service will be actively seeking to recruit a more diverse range of adopters who can also better understand the needs of the children. This will be a challenge and needs to be considered alongside the range of support services available for these complex children, including therapeutic support.

With this in mind Hampshire continues to have a need to recruit families who are willing to take on the types and needs of children as identified above in section 1b):

- a) Babies 0-12 months: although even these children are likely to have some level of need;
- b) Sibling groups of two and three children;
- c) Children with medical conditions and developmental uncertainty;
- d) Children with birth parents who have drug, alcohol and/or mental health issues in their history with the ensuing uncertain prognosis for the children's development that is associated with this.

Therapeutic support

10.10 There remains a critical issue for pre and post adoptive families in receiving appropriate and timely interventions for therapeutic support for their adoptive children through specialist services including the CAMHS. The majority of children placed for adoption will have some attachment issues regardless of the age they were placed for adoption due to their early pre-care experiences which would have led to the removal from birth family in the first place. Their early poor parenting experience will have laid the foundation for these issues. The majority of CAMHS services do not recognise the need for intervention with children with attachment issues- many with diagnosed attachment disorders, but those CAMHS services that do, provide an invaluable service to adoptive families and in the prevention of disruption. More work around this issue on both a local and country- wide basis would be a real step forward in supporting these families.

Integrated Recruitment and Assessment Teams and Adoption and Fostering Panels Restructure

- a) On 1st March 2011 the adoption recruitment, assessment, and panel services joined with the fostering recruitment, assessment and panel services under a revised management structure. Whilst there will be challenges for all concerned during the coming year, there are positive feelings in terms of learning from each other's best practice and the rewards that working more closely together should bring to each service and ultimately to the children of Hampshire.
- a) Both the adoption and fostering services have been affected by new legislation, regulations and guidance which came into being on 1st April 2011. With regard to adoption the legislation has changed the way that Adoption Panels are constituted and operate, including the establishment of a 'Central List' . This gives a large county like Hampshire more flexibility when putting a Panel together and in responding to issues relating to quoracy on its four Panels through out the County.

Adoption Support

10.11 There are an increasing number of families using the County Adoption Support Service. Following an intensive tendering process new independent contracting arrangements have been agreed to provide a number of support services which will compliment the County services and will be in place as from 1st April 2011. These arrangements include the provision of regular support groups and monthly surgeries to be provided by the Post-Adoption Centre and an independent counselling service for birth parents to be provided by Barnardos.

10.12 The adoption service will continue to provide newly approved Hampshire adopters with one-year's free membership of Adoption UK and during this year approved adopters will be able to access Adoption UK's services, including any support groups they are running.

Ofsted Inspection

10.13 It is anticipated that the County Adoption Service will be formally inspected in 2011-12. It is felt that evidence of delivering services in partnership with other agencies will be viewed positively by Ofsted.

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(Version 2)