

**APPENDIX 1**

**Hampshire Adoption Service  
Annual Report  
1<sup>st</sup> April 2009-31<sup>st</sup> March 2010**

**1) Children looked after placed for adoption and adopted**

	<b>Total Orders Made</b>	<b>Children Placed/ (Matched)</b>	<b>Adoption Plans</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> April 1 2009 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2010	<b>60</b>	<b>49/(49)</b>	<b>64</b>

The position as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 is that 60 adoption orders have been made (in comparison with 34 adoption orders made last year), 64 children have had new plans for adoption agreed (in comparison with 66 last year) and 49 children were placed for adoption (including 3 children who were linked at the end of the previous year 2008/2009). The figures for last year were 39 children placed for adoption.

Of the 64 children who had plans for adoption agreed during 2009/2010 they consist of a total of 36 males and 28 females and include:

- 22 single male children (including two who were being placed with adopters who had previously adopted a sibling)
- 16 single female children (including one who was being placed with adopters who had previously taken a sibling)
- 12 sibling groups as follows:
  - 2 sets of two male siblings
  - 1 set of a two female siblings
  - 7 sets of mixed sibling pairs (male and female)
  - 2 sets of sibling groups of 3 children, both mixed: one comprising two boys and a girl
  - another two girls and a boy.

The 64 children include 6 (single) relinquished children: 2 females and 4 male.

There are 50 children who had plans agreed for adoption since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 who have not yet been placed for adoption. Of these children:

- 17 children are awaiting final hearings
- 17 children have possible identified adoptive placements
- 2 children for whom adoption was the plan are being relooked at for possible family placements

Currently there are 6 children who had plans agreed for adoption during 2008-2009 but who have not yet been placed for adoption: Of these:

- 3 children have families identified who are being explored.

- 2 of the children's plans are being reviewed
- 1 child's health needs are being reassessed.

There are 4 children with plans for adoption from 2007-2008: all four children have special needs and one is to have his plan for adoption rescinded as he is to remain with his foster carers on a permanent basis. Despite extensive advertising for two children, suitable families have not come forward. Their plans will be reviewed. The fourth child's developmental needs have progressed and further time is being allowed to see whether adoption can be achieved: this is being regularly reviewed.

In total there are 24 children currently waiting for placements but as stated above some of the children's plans are to be reviewed in light of their needs. For those children whose plans remain adoption family finding is being vigorously pursued both in-house and via the adoption consortium, the National Adoption Register, profile events throughout the south of the country and features in Be My Parent and Children Who Wait magazines.

There have been no adoption placement disruptions (pre-adoption order) since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. This builds on the same picture from the previous two years and is excellent news in terms of placement stability and given that the needs of the children being placed are more challenging.

Of the children who have been placed for adoption during the year 5 children (3 single children and one sibling pair) were placed with 4 sets of prospective adopters who were previously their foster carers. In addition one child, who had been relinquished for adoption had been able to be placed with approved adopter/foster carers (following a linking meeting) on discharge from hospital following birth at the age of one day.

During 2009-10 there have been 42 linking meetings attended by social workers seeking adoptive families for children.

**Appendix 1 attached shows figures for adoption panel activity within Hampshire for last 5 years (Table 1) and the age range of children whose plans for adoption were agreed during 2009-2010 (Table 2) and for the previous five years.**

### **National Timescales**

a) The statutory timescale laid down within the Adoption and Children Act 2002 for presenting children's plans for adoption, ie that the Child's Permanence Report is presented to the adoption panel within 6 weeks of completion was met in 97% of cases (ie 62 out of 64 cases) between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

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 (Independent Reviewing Officer) 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.

c) The statutory timescale that the Agency Decision is made within 7 days of the panel has been met in 100% of all cases (ie 64 out of 64 cases) with regards to decisions made on children's plans for adoption. In respect of linkings the figure is also 100% (ie 49 out of 49 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 49 children have been linked with prospective adopters. Of those 49 children 28 children were linked within the statutory timescale of 6 months. This equates to a performance of 57% The performance is undoubtedly a reflection of the increasing levels of complexity of the children we are placing.

There are also currently 29 children whose plan for adoption was agreed over 6 months ago and whose plan remains adoption but who have not yet been linked with prospective adopters.

### **National Indicator 61**

This indicator refers to the timeliness of children being placed for adoption following the Agency Decision. In Hampshire for 2009/10 the performance indicates that this target is being achieved in 83.3% of cases.

However when the number of final adoption orders (60) is added to the number of SGOs (Special Guardianship Orders) SGOs for the same period (25) and looked at in terms of the numbers of children who have been looked after for more than 6 months (897) Hampshire are achieving 9.4% of children being placed in permanent placements which is a higher rate than previously (2008-09 was 7%).

## **2) Children 'waiting'**

Currently the Adoption service are tracking 133 children where adoption may be the plan but care plans have not been finalised.

In tracking these children the Adoption Monitoring Group have noticed a significant cohort where members of the birth family have been identified as

potential carers. This cohort equates to 33% of the total number of children. This is an increase from the figure from the previous year (26%).

Despite case law, the judiciary, with the support of children’s guardians, are becoming more involved in the family finding process by exploring the county’s resources in respect of families suitable to meet the needs of the children within the proceedings. Since children’s guardians are being routinely invited to either submit their views on the child’s care plan or attend adoption panel there is an increasing understanding of their views and whether they support the local authority’s care plan. The current high number of active children’s proceedings coupled with the court continuing to allow extensions for witness reports places increasing pressures on Children In Need Teams and the Adoption Teams to achieve the desired outcomes in terms of court timescales ie care planning meetings and presentation to adoption panel. This places further delays on achieving desired outcomes in child time, for example one case has been in the court arena for over two years.

**Adopters**

There is a continuing interest in adoption from applicants. This is illustrated by the chart below showing the number of enquiries received by Hantsdirect over a two year period. It can be seen that there has been a small decrease in respect of enquiries made during 2009/10. The service recognises the importance of the adoption website in generating interest from potential applicants.

	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total	Average
08/09	84	51	39	56	51	77	50	106	36	71	71	55	747	62.25
09/10	60	73	60	45	43	56	64	81	32	58	37	48	657	54.75

However, there continues to be a mismatch between the needs of the children for placement and the expectations and parenting skills of applicants.

There are currently 9 sets of approved adopters available.

April – March 2010	North & East	South	West	Out of County	TOTAL
Approved Adopters	15	5	11	0	31
Adopters Being assessed	16	6	9	4	35

**National Timescales**

a) Of the approved adopters 35% (ie 11 cases out of 31) have been assessed and approved within the National Timescales ie from the date of their application to the Adoption Panel Recommendation to be 8 months. The

reason for the reduction in performance is a reflection of a) vacancies and staff sickness in the adoption service and b) circumstances relating to the applicants, which require further time to address, issues raised in the assessment (for example, counselling regarding loss, health factors and safeguarding matters).

From April 2010 there is urgent action to address recruitment and adjusting practice to ensure that assessments are completed within timescales i.e. applicants attending local offices and management of assessment via longer appointments.

b) Of the 31 sets of prospective adopters approved since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 the Agency Decision was made in 97% of cases (ie 30 cases out of 31 ) within the required 7 days of the adoption panel recommendation.

c) In 71% of cases (ie 22 cases out of 31) 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.

#### **4) Step Parent Adoptions**

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.

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.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 there have been 33 step parent adoption orders made. There are currently 94 step-parent adoption cases (of individual children) open to the step-parent workers and at various stages in the process.

#### **5) Inter Country Adoptions and Special Guardianship**

All inter-country adoption assessments are carried out within a Service Level Agreement with Parents And Children Together (PACT), Reading. PACT are also undertaking 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 three of these children within Hampshire whose cases are open: one

is held in the West and the welfare supervision for the other two are contracted to PACT.

## **6) Courts and CAFCASS**

There is significant pressure on the legal secretariat due to the number of proceedings throughout the county and this has placed increasing pressure on the workload of the team.

There have been issues raised in respect of the allocation of children's guardians and some difficulties continue to be addressed by the Area Director for Adoption with the CAFCASS (Child and Family Courts Advisory Service) Manager.

Following requests from the Judiciary in Hampshire, a briefing was held to share the remit of the Adoption panels, their membership, as well as incorporating the work of the adoption service and how the service supports the court processes in achieving successful outcomes for Looked After Children. This was a particularly successful event and it is hoped to hold further briefings on other aspects of the adoption service eg step parent work and contact.

### **Summary for the Adoption Service 2009/2010 and Issues for the Year Ahead**

- a) The performance of the adoption service continues to be one of high activity and having successful outcomes for children whose plans are adoption. 60 adoption orders reflects a significant increase from the previous year. It is pleasing to note that despite the complexity of the needs of children successful outcomes are still being achieved. This year we have seen the adoption of a sibling pair of girls aged 7 and 10 by Hampshire adopters. The family finding group which tracks the hard to place children has been particularly busy but provides an excellent picture of the activity involved in finding families and the time taken and provides accurate information for court when needed. This also enables timely decisions to be made when plans need to be changed as recruitment of adopters has not been successful.
- b) 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.
- c) Due to the significant staffing difficulties within the recruitment section of the adoption service throughout this year it has meant that the number of families assessed is lower than in the previous year. Although not significantly lower it has been necessary to ensure assessments are undertaken and this has been done by the assistance of children's social workers and independent social workers. There

have also been a higher number of inter-agency placements being sought. This has resulted in a budget pressure on the adoption service. During 2009/10 12 children were matched with inter-agency adopters out of 51 children matched this year. This represents 24% of the total children matched. 9 of those children were placed during 2009/10, the remaining 3 will be placed after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010.

- d) The numbers of looked after children have increased (currently 1117) 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, particularly children needing single placements. The numbers of children being placed continue to have complex needs which are a result of injuries sustained from parents, witnessing domestic violence and parental drug and alcohol abuse.
- e) The adoption service has noted that the increased complexity of children's needs continues to provide challenges for suitable placements.
- f) Hampshire continues to have a need for families seeking baby placements 0-12 months although even these children are likely to have some level of need.
- g) The service maintains 4 adoption panels which have been very active throughout the year: with 46 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.

Since January of this year the service has been active in recruiting for panel member vacancies and for a reserve list of people who can be called upon as and when suitable vacancies arise. An advertisement was featured in the winter and spring editions of 'Hampshire Now' to which there has been a good response and interviews are to take place shortly. It is hoped to make the membership of each adoption panel more diverse in the future.

Following two briefings to elected members in November 2009 one elected member was recruited to fill one of two vacancies on the adoption panels. There remains a vacancy on the North Adoption Panel for an elected member.

- h) The National Minimum Standards require that every child understands why they are being placed for adoption and has a life story book which explains about their birth family and the circumstances surrounding their adoption. This work requires skilled direct work with children as well as telling the story in appropriate language for the child. It also requires technical expertise to produce the book. When the Adoption Service was inspected in January 2009 Ofsted raised the need for Hampshire to ensure that children's life story books were produced in a timely manner. To date the picture still remains inconsistent and some life story books are outstanding and not available to the child/family at the time of placement.
- i) The service is looking to introduce a web-based newsletter for staff within the Service to assist and promote communication across the service and to spread good news.

**Recommendations**

That the Children and Families Advisory Panel approves the Hampshire Adoption Service Annual Report.

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April 2010

**Appendix 1**

**TABLE 1**

**Comparative Summary of Panel Activity 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010**

	<b>2005-2006</b>	<b>2006-2007</b>	<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>
<b>2009-2010</b>				
<b>Children's Plans 64</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Approved Adopters 31</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Children Placed 49</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Adoption Orders Made 60</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>34</b>

**TABLE 2**

**i) Children's Adoption Plans Agreed 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010  
Age Range of Children**

0-12 months	12-24 months	2-5 years	5-10 years	10+	Total
26*	9	20**	9	0	64

\*Includes 5 relinquished babies

\*\*Includes 1 relinquished child

The children include:

- 10 sets of sibling groups of 2 children (1 x F; 2 x M and 6 x Mixed)
- 2 sets of sibling groups of 3 children (both mixed)
- 22 single males (2 to be joining a sibling already placed/adopted)
- 16 single females (1 to be joining a sibling already placed)

(Total 36 males and 28 females with agreed plans for adoption)

**ii) Children's Adoption Plans Agreed 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009  
Age Range of Children**

0-12 months	12-24 months	2-5 years	5-10 years	10+	Total
25*	14	20	7	0	66

\* Includes 5 relinquished babies

The children include:

- 9 sets of sibling groups of 2 children (1 x F; 5 x M and 3 x Mixed)
- 1 set of a sibling group of 3 children (2 x M and 1 x F)
- 3 sets of sibling groups of 4 children (only 1 set being placed together)
- 19 single males (2 to be joining a sibling already adopted)
- 14 single females

(Total of 43 males and 23 females with agreed plans for adoption)