

BRACKNELL FOREST ADOPTION SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2011-2012

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annual report should be read in conjunction with the Annual Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose sets out the legislative and regulatory context in which Bracknell Forest Council acts as an Adoption Agency.
- 1.2 This report provides details of activity over the financial year April 2011-2012 and sets out the plans for development and improvement for the year ahead.
- 1.3 Bracknell Forest Adoption Agency was inspected by Ofsted in March 2012. The inspection identified areas of strength in the adoption service and concluded that many areas of the service are good or outstanding. However the timescales required to place children identified as in need of adoption and the length of time that some assessments of prospective foster carers took to become approved adopters did not meet the requirements set out in the regulations. The numbers of children and prospective adopters involved were very small (both under five) so the percentage of those who did not meet the criteria was significant. Although action had already been taken to address the timeliness of decisions, the numbers that fell within the specified timeframe of measurement (the previous twelve months) did not meet requirements so limited the overall judgement to satisfactory. The Ofsted definition of a satisfactory service is that the provision is sound. A copy of the inspection report is available on the Bracknell Forest Council website as well as the OFSTED website. Four recommendations were made which have all been appropriately addressed and resolved.
- 1.4 Children's Social Care's Family Placement Team provide most of the required functions of the Adoption Agency. Other functions are provided through the arrangement with the other five Berkshire Unitary Authorities acting as a Consortium and also through the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS), hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead who maintain the Adoption Panel.
- 1.5 The functions include:
 - Presenting reports to Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker for children who are looked after and adoption is their care plan.
 - Presenting reports to the Panel and the Agency Decision Maker on the prospective match of Bracknell children with adopters or other Local Authority children with Bracknell adopters.
 - Recruiting and assessing a pool of adopters as part of the Berkshire Consortium and presenting them to Adoption Panel for approval.
 - Supporting Bracknell adopters throughout the adoption process until Adoption Orders are made.
 - Providing post adoption support to any adoptive family living in Bracknell and for three years for those children who have been placed by Bracknell Forest.
 - Undertaking assessments of prospective adopters of children from overseas.

- Provide counselling for adopted adults.
- Provide mediation services for both adopted adults and birth family members.

2. Summary of Bracknell Forest Activity

2.1 For the year 01/04/2011 and 31/03/2012:

- Fourteen children were presented to Adoption Panel for consideration of adoption being in their best interests.
- Five children were matched with adopters.
- Four prospective adopters were approved.
- Three adoption orders were granted.
- No child was placed for adoption from overseas.
- Three step-family adoptions were completed.
- Two children from other local authorities were placed with Bracknell Forest approved adopters.
- Two adoption orders were granted on children placed from another local authority with Bracknell adopters.
- There were no disruptions to a child's placement with prospective adopters.

2.2 Four adoption preparation groups and six Information Days were available for prospective adopters over the year. These were arranged through the Berkshire Consortium, Bracknell Forest being responsible for one preparation group and two Information Days. These were well attended by prospective adopters from both Bracknell Forest and the other unitary authorities.

2.3 Currently three couples are in the process of being assessed as prospective adopters and a further six applications are anticipated in the near future.

3. Inter-country Adoption Arrangements

3.1 Bracknell Forest has a Service Level Agreement with a local voluntary agency PACT (Parents and Children Together) for that agency to provide an adoption service for those seeking to adopt from overseas. This service is currently renewed on an annual basis. PACT provides prospective inter country adopters with information about the overseas adoption process, including an enquiry service so that prospective adopters can make an informed decision as to whether inter country adoption is appropriate for them. In the past year PACT has sent out six information packs, carried out one initial interview and received one application for overseas adoption. PACT assess prospective adopters, who will be presented to the PACT adoption panel for consideration of their application. Post Adoption support is, however, provided by the local authority in the area in which the adopter resides. Currently there are no families matched with a child through PACT.

4. Post-adoption Support Services

4.1 The post-adoption service is provided by an experienced adoption worker assisted by other members of the family placement team.

- 4.2 Post adoption services include the counselling of adopted adults and mediation services for both adopted adults and birth family members and requests for these services have continued to increase significantly following the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The service continues to provide information and support to a wide and varied population. Post Adoption services range from low level provision such as regular newsletters and support groups to more specialised or individual services, such as financial support; support over contact; direct work; therapeutic provision and liaison with schools. Where further specialist services are required the post adoption support worker can “signpost” adopters to the most suitable resource, such as CAMHS, the Post Adoption Centre and other provision.

Following a period of development and planning the post-adoption worker has launched a new service for adopters and their children. Called the ‘Berkshire Adoption Advice and Consultation Service’ (BAACS) this is a collaboration between the post-adoption workers from Bracknell and Wokingham and a clinical psychologist funded by PACT. This Berkshire wide service began in February 2012 and offers families a place to discuss issues and receive advice.

- 4.3 Approximately 30 children and families will, at any time, be receiving a post adoption support service involving social work support from Bracknell Forest. Some families are given a high level of support to prevent adoption breakdown. The authority works with adoptive families to support placements and whilst this may on occasions require individual work the general approach is to work with the family as a whole. The details of adoptive families who are not directly receiving a service are held on the post adoption database and these receive regular invites to training, groups and events. Adoption allowances are being paid in respect of 24 children.
- 4.4 Around fifteen adults received a service in relation to access to birth records or mediation, with ten families active at any one time. Several of these cases are quite complex and the agency continues to support people who have only recently found out that they are adopted, often with quite devastating feelings of loss for the adoptees.

5. Special Guardianship

- 5.1 The family placement service is involved in the preparation of reports for court in Special Guardianship applications along with the children’s social workers (where the child is looked after), and in the provision of special guardian support services once the order has been granted. Four Special Guardianship applications were completed this year and we are currently working with applications from two families regarding two children. The adoption agency is supporting another three Special Guardianship arrangements all at low levels after a period of quite high activity.

6. In-family adoptions

- 6.1 Work with in family adoptions has been steady over the past year. This is an area which relates primarily to the preparation of reports to court following an application to adopt a specific child who is already living within a family who

wish to change their legal status in order to acquire parental responsibility for the child. The child is not “looked after”.

- 6.2 Three adoption orders have been granted to in family adopters this year. Currently work is being undertaken on behalf of three families (three children) which are likely to result in the making of three adoption orders within the next six months.

7. Complaints

- 7.1 No complaints have been received in respect of post adoption support over the last year. .

8. Summary

- 8.1 The adoption service has seen a significant increase in work over the period of 2011/2012. As the number of younger children becoming looked after has risen there has been a consequential increase in the need for adoptive families, rising this year from a maximum of three a year to fourteen children with plans for adoption.
- 8.2 Adoption has become a national concern; the increased number of children needing adoptive families has led to a shortfall in the number of prospective adoptive families able to meet their needs. The greatest impact of this shortfall is for children who are over three years old, and for those children with complex needs. National initiatives are being taken to promote adoption and the family placement team have a proactive recruitment plan, alongside of initiatives being developed with the Berkshire Consortium.
- 8.3 The national focus is also on the timescales for children to be placed with adoptive families and greater scrutiny of all aspects of the ‘child’s journey’ from the point of becoming looked after until placed with an adoptive family. A ‘scorecard’ for adoption is to be introduced to openly track the impact of local authorities’ in meeting children’s needs.

Changes in the Family Court proceedings and, new legislation to be introduced this year, will also have an impact on the capacity of the team.

- 8.4 In order to meet the increase in demands, the establishment of the family placement team has been increased by one social worker and another post changed to allow the appointment of a part time assistant team manager. This, together with other developments in process and training, has enabled to team to grow in confidence and competence. This is evidenced in the quality of assessment reports; number of children placed very quickly after the Court order and feedback from adopters themselves.

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