

Individual Decision

The attached report(s) will be taken as Individual Portfolio Member Decision(s) on:

Thursday, 4th September, 2014

Ref:	Title	Portfolio Member(s)	Page No.
ID2799	West Berkshire Council Forward Plan - 8 October 2014 to 31 January 2015	Councillor Gordon Lundie	3 - 22
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ID2878	Adoption Statement of Purpose 2014/15	Councillor Irene Neill	39 - 64
ID2880	Fostering Annual Report 2013/14	Councillor Irene Neill	65 - 80
ID2877	Fostering Statement of Purpose 2014/15	Councillor Irene Neill	81 - 90



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Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	West Berkshire Council Forward Plan - 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	04 September 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2799

Purpose of Report: To advise Members and residents of items to be considered by West Berkshire Council over the next four months.

Recommended Action: That the Leader of the Council agrees and where appropriate amends the West Berkshire Council Forward Plan.

Reason for decision to be taken: It is a statutory requirement that a Forward Plan be produced.

Other options considered: Not applicable.

Key background documentation: Forward Plan.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Gordon Lundie
E-mail Address:	glundie@westberks.gov.uk

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Moira Fraser
Job Title:	Democratic Services Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 519045
E-mail Address:	mfraser@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	The Forward Plan details the Policies to be adopted by West Berkshire Council.
Financial:	The Forward Plan has no financial implications.
Personnel:	The Forward Plan has no personnel implications.
Legal/Procurement:	The Forward Plan has no legal or procurement implications.
Environmental:	The Forward Plan has no environmental implications.
Property:	The Forward Plan has no property implications.
Risk Management:	The Forward Plan has no risk management implications.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Councillor Gordon Lundie

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: Councillor Brian Bedwell.

Ward Members: All Members.

Opposition Spokesperson: Councillor Jeff Brooks.

Local Stakeholders: The West Berkshire Forward Plan will be published the first working day after the Individual Decision is signed.

Officers Consulted: Nick Carter, John Ashworth, Rachael Wardell, Heads of Service, Group Executives.

Trade Union: Not sought.

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:</p> <p>The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Item is Urgent Key Decision <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Report is to note only <input type="checkbox"/></p>		

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 West Berkshire Council's Forward Plan, which is published monthly, sets out the key decisions that the Executive (either collectively or by Individual Executive Members) are expected to take over the next four months.
- 1.2 Key decisions are defined by the Government (Regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2001) as:
- (1) Those which result in the Local Authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the Local Authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision is related.
 - (2) Those which are significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the Local Authority.
- 1.3 The introduction of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 in September 2012 included a requirement to publish 28 clear days' notice of any intended key decision. It should be noted that "clear days" means working days, from midnight to midnight, and excludes weekends and public holidays, so 28 clear days equates to around 5½ normal weeks.
- 1.4 On occasions, however, situations may arise where an urgent decision needs to be made in respect of an item that does not appear on the Forward Plan. There are two different ways in which this can be done:
- (i) the authority can take an urgent key decision without giving 28 days' notice where it is impracticable to give the full notice, provided that the authority gives at least five days' clear notice to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission, which can then call in the decision to check that it was genuinely urgent; or
 - (ii) where a key decision is so urgent there is not even time to give five clear days' notice, the authority can take the decision if the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission has agreed that the key decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.
- 1.5 In relation to paragraph 1.4 (i), it has been necessary to add one item to the Forward Plan for the Executive meeting on 04 September 2014 which did not meet the 28 day requirement. This item is:
- (i) Leisure Centre Contract -Extension
- 1.6 In addition The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 have introduced an entirely new requirement for the Council to publish 28 clear days' notice of the intention to hold a private meeting (or part of a meeting) of the Executive. This 28 day notice must be reinforced by a five day notice which sets out the reasons for the meeting to be held in private, details of any propositions received as to why the meeting should be open, and the Council's response. The response will be provided by the Monitoring

Officer. The regulations again provide for an urgency procedure, under which the Council can decide the matter with shorter than 28 or five days' notice, provided that it has first obtained the consent of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

1.7 There is currently one confidential item scheduled for the 09 October 2014 Executive meeting and the required notice is attached as an appendix and will be displayed at the Council. If any representations are received the five day notice will be issued on 01 October 2014. The item is:

- London Road Industrial Estate Development Agreement (EX2882)

1.8 The following items have been added to/deleted from the Forward Plan for the October 2014 Executive meeting or Individual decision in October, since it was last published:

- London Road Industrial Estate Development Agreement (EX2882)
- Newbury Wharf Development – Phase 1 Waterside (EX2892)
- LGA Corporate Peer Review (EX2893)
- Looked After Children – ‘Staying Put’ Policy (EX2894)
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children – Appeals Rights Exhausted (EX2895)
- School Formula Consultation (EX2891)
- Review of the Council’s Anti-Bribery Policy (GA2559)

1.9 Details of decisions that Full Council, the Governance and Audit Committee and the Personnel Committee are going to take are also included for ease of reference. It should, however, be noted that the new requirements only apply to Executive meetings.

1.10 Publication of the Forward Plan remains a statutory requirement of the Local Authority. The Forward Plan, any General Exception Decisions Notices and Notices of Private Decisions have to be available for inspection and also have to be published on the Council’s website.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Appendix B - Notice of confidential items for 09 October 2014 Executive meeting

West Berkshire Council Forward Plan



West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Reference	Decision and Purpose	Decision Body	Decision Path	Directorate	Contact	Lead Member (Porfolio Holder for . . .)	Part II	Date Report Published	Consultee(s)	Notes	Decision Month
OCTOBER 2014											
ID2807	Elective Home Education Policy <i>To seek approval for updated policy on Elective Home Education.</i>	ID	01/10/14	Communities	Rhian Ireland	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding					October 2014
ID2896	Winter Service Plan 2014-15 <i>To approve the Winter Service Plan 2014-15.</i>	ID	13/10/14	Environment	Melvyn May	Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning, Newbury Vision					October 2014
EX2848	Corporate Fraud Prevention <i>Arising out of the consequences of DWP Single Fraud Integration Service this report makes a case for the establishment of a Corporate Fraud Prevention Team.</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Resources	Sean Anderson	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					October 2014
EX2882	London Road Industrial Estate Development Agreement (Paragraph 3 - information relating to the business affairs of particular person; (Paragraph 5 - Information relating to legal privilege) <i>To approve the Development Agreement prior to signing</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Communities	Bill Bagnell	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property	Yes				October 2014

The items included in the Forward Plan were correct at the time of publication. The Forward Plan may, however, change and you are advised to contact Moira Fraser – Tel: 01635 519045 or e-mail: mfraser@westberks.gov.uk to confirm the contents of any agenda before attending a meeting.
Executive decisions may be taken by the Executive acting as a collective body or by officers acting under delegated powers.

KEY:	
ID =	Individual Executive Member Decision
EX =	Executive
C =	Council
GA =	Governance & Audit Committee
S =	Standards Committee
PC =	Personnel Committee

West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Reference	Decision and Purpose	Decision Body	Decision Path	Directorate	Contact	Lead Member (Porfolio Holder for . . .)	Part II	Date Report Published	Consultee(s)	Notes	Decision Month
EX2875	Treasury Management Annual Report 2013/14 <i>To inform Members of the treasury management activity and performance of the Council's investments for the financial year 2013/14</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Resources	Gabrielle Esplin	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					October 2014
EX2738	Proposal for Berkshire Shared Adoption Service <i>To explore the possible development of a Shared Adoption Service across the 6 Berkshire Local Authorities</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Communities	Sandra Dopson	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding	Yes	27/08/14	Five other Berkshire Unitaries		October 2014
EX2892	Newbury Wharf Development - Phase 1 Waterside Centre <i>To set out proposals for delivery of Phase 1 of the Newbury Wharf Development project</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Resources	Nick Carter	Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning, Newbury Vision					October 2014
EX2893	LGA Corporate Peer Review <i>To set out the final letter in relation to the review</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Resources	Nick Carter	Leader of the Council					October 2014
EX2894	Looked After Children - 'Staying Put' Policy <i>To establish a policy for Looked After Children who wish to remain in their foster care placement past the age of 18.</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Communities	Mark Evans	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding					October 2014
EX2895	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - Appeal Rights Exhausted <i>To clarify the Council's responsibilities in respect of young people who have no immigration status and to establish a clear policy for supporting them.</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Communities	Mark Evans	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding					October 2014

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West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

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EX2891	School Formula Consultation <i>To set out the Primary and Secondary Schools Proposed Funding Formula for 2015/16.</i>	EX	09/10/14 EX	Communities	Claire White	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding		01/10/14			October 2014
GA2559	Review of the Council's Anti-Bribery Policy <i>In accordance with the recommendation of the Governance and Audit Committee to revisit the Council's Bribery Policy adopted on the 10 September 2012 to ensure that it is fit for purpose.</i>	GA	24/10/14	Resources	Ian Priestley	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					October 2014
NOVEMBER 2014											
ID2885	Admissions Arrangements 2016/17 Consultation <i>To seek approval to consult on admission arrangements for 2016/17 (statutory requirement)</i>	ID	06/11/14	Communities	Vicky Pearce	Children and Young People, Youth Service, Education, Safeguarding					November 2014
ID2801	West Berkshire Forward Plan – 17 Dec 2014 – 31 March 2015 <i>To agree the Forward Plan for the next four months.</i>	ID	13/11/14	Resources	Moira Fraser	Leader of Council		05/11/14			November 2014

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ID2810	Approval of Local Transport Plan supporting strategy - Freight Strategy <i>To gain formal approval of the Freight Strategy which supports the delivery of the West Berkshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026</i>	ID	21/11/14	Environment	Jenny Graham	Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services, Countryside/Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning, Newbury Vision					November 2014
DECEMBER 2014											
ID2802	West Berkshire Forward Plan – 14 Jan 2015 – 30 April 2015 <i>To agree the Forward Plan for the next four months.</i>	ID	04/12/14	Resources	Moira Fraser	Leader of Council		26/11/14			December 2014
C2884	Council Tax Reduction Scheme <i>To determine the Council's scheme for 2014/15.</i>	C	11/12/14 C	Resources	Bill Blackett	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					December 2014
C2887	Changes to the Constitution - Part 10 Finance Rules of Procedure <i>To amend the Constitution in light of legislative changes.</i>	C	11/12/14 C 24/11/14 GA								December 2014
C2657	Health and Wellbeing Strategy	C	11/12/14 C	Resources	Lesley Wyman	Health and Wellbeing					December 2014

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West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Reference	Decision and Purpose	Decision Body	Decision Path	Directorate	Contact	Lead Member (Porfolio Holder for . . .)	Part II	Date Report Published	Consultee(s)	Notes	Decision Month
C2674	Polling Places and Polling District Review <i>To review Polling places and Polling Districts in accordance with the provisions of the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006</i>	C	11/12/14 C	Resources	Phil Runacres	Strategy & Performance, Housing, ICT & Corporate Support, Legal and Strategic Support					December 2014
C2822	Delivering Investment from Sustainable Development SPD - Adoption <i>To adopt the updated SPD for developer contributions</i>	C	11/12/14 C	Environment	Caroline Walsh	Planning, Transport (Policy), Culture, Customer Services, Countryside		03/12/14			December 2014
C2889	Activity Team West Berkshire Fees and Charges 2015/16 <i>To bring forward agreement on increases in fees and charges for the 2015/16 Adventure Dolphin activity programme: in line with fair market price; to maximise advance bookings and income in support of the drive for the service to become cost neutral.</i>	C	11/12/14 C	Environment	Jim Sweeting	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					December 2014
C2888	Leisure Centres' Fees and Charges 2015 <i>To implement the contractual requirement for an annual price review for 2014 for Parkwood Community Leisure to come into effect from 1st January 2014.</i>	C	11/12/14 C	Environment	Jim Sweeting	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					December 2014

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West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Reference	Decision and Purpose	Decision Body	Decision Path	Directorate	Contact	Lead Member (Porfolio Holder for . . .)	Part II	Date Report Published	Consultee(s)	Notes	Decision Month
EX2883	Staffing implications associated with savings put forward to deliver the 2015/16 revenue budget: approval to pay redundancy payments <i>To set out the staffing implications which are likely to result from the setting of the Council's 2015/16 revenue budget. To seek approval to make the redundancy payments associated with the required staffing implications</i>	EX	18/12/14 EX	Resources	Robert O'Reilly	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					December 2014
EX2830	Financial Performance Report - Quarter Two 2014/15 <i>To inform Members of the latest financial performance of the Council.</i>	EX	18/12/14 EX	Resources	Melanie Ellis	Finance, Economic Development, Health & Safety, Human Resources, Pensions, Property					December 2014
JANUARY 2015											
ID2890	Response to a petition - introduction of a 40mph speed limit from Thornford Road to the junction of Crookham Park Home site <i>To respond to a petition that has been submitted to the Council</i>	ID	01/01/15	Environment	Andrew Garratt	Highways, Transport (Operations), Emergency Planning, Newbury Vision					January 2015
ID2803	West Berkshire Forward Plan – 11 February 2015 – 31 May 2015 <i>To agree the Forward Plan for the next four months.</i>	ID	08/01/15	Resources	Moira Fraser	Leader of Council		31/12/14			January 2015

The items included in the Forward Plan were correct at the time of publication. The Forward Plan may, however, change and you are advised to contact Moira Fraser – Tel: 01635 519045 or e-mail: mfraser@westberks.gov.uk to confirm the contents of any agenda before attending a meeting.
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West Berkshire Council Forward Plan – 08 October 2014 to 31 January 2015

Reference	Decision and Purpose	Decision Body	Decision Path	Directorate	Contact	Lead Member (Porfolio Holder for . . .)	Part II	Date Report Published	Consultee(s)	Notes	Decision Month
EX2778	<p>Key Accountable Measures and Activities 2014/15. Update on progress: Q2 outturns</p> <p><i>To report Quarter 2 progress against the key accountable measures and activities for West Berkshire Council for 2014/15 and to report by exception those measures/activities not achieved/expected to be achieved and cite remedial action that is being taken.</i></p>	EX	15/01/15 EX	Resources	Jason Teal	Strategy & Performance, Housing, ICT & Corporate Support, Legal and Strategic Support					January 2015

The items included in the Forward Plan were correct at the time of publication. The Forward Plan may, however, change and you are advised to contact Moira Fraser – Tel: 01635 519045 or e-mail: mfraser@westberks.gov.uk to confirm the contents of any agenda before attending a meeting.
Executive decisions may be taken by the Executive acting as a collective body or by officers acting under delegated powers.

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NOTICE OF A PRIVATE MEETING OF A DECISION-MAKING BODY TO WHICH THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION HAS AGREED¹

Notice of an imminent occasion when the public may be excluded from a meeting due to the likelihood that if members of the public were present during an item of business confidential or exempt information would be disclosed to them and which the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission has agreed is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.

¹ In accordance with Regulation 5(7) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

1. At least 28 clear days before a private meeting² of a decision-making body, public notice³ must be given which must include a statement of reasons for the meeting to be held in private.
2. At least 5 clear days before a private meeting of a decision-making body, further public notice⁴ must be given which must include a statement of reasons for the meeting to be held in private, details of any representations received by the decision-making body about why the meeting should be open to the public and a statement of the Council's response to such representations.
3. Where the date by which a meeting must be held makes compliance with the above requirements impracticable, the meeting may only be held in private where the decision-making body has obtained agreement from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.
4. Compliance with the requirements for the giving of public notice has been impracticable in relation to the business detailed below.

Date of Decision or period within which the decision is to be made	Ref No:	Matter in respect of which the decision is to be made	Short Description	Decision maker	Executive Member & Lead Officer	List of documents to be submitted to decision maker	Public or Private meeting. Statement of reasons if private.
09 October 2014	EX2882	London Road Industrial Estate Development Agreement	To approve the Development Agreement prior to signing.	Executive	Councillor Alan Law Bill Bagnell	Report and associated appendices	Paragraph 3 and Paragraph 5

5. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the Executive may hold a private meeting to consider the business referred to in paragraph 4 above because the meeting is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred for the reasons stated below.

Date of Chair's agreement	Matter in respect of which the decision is to be made	Reasons why meeting urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred
30 July 2014	London Road Industrial Estate Development Agreement	Delays in Implementation could compromise the Council's position

² A 'private meeting' means a meeting or part of a meeting of a decision making body which is open to the public except to the extent that the public are excluded due to the confidential or exempt business to be transacted.

³ In accordance with Regulation 5(2) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

⁴ In accordance with Regulation 5(4) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Andy Day
Head of Strategic Support
West Berkshire Council

Date: 27 August 2014

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Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Annual Report and Statement of Purpose of the West Berkshire Adoption Service
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	4 September 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2878 and ID2879

Purpose of Report: To report on the work of the adoption team and to enable Members to scrutinise the operation of the Adoption Service

Recommended Action: To agree report

Reason for decision to be taken: To comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services 2003
The department has a statutory responsibility to report on the work of the adoption service to Elected Members on a six monthly basis and also to agree the Statement of Purpose for this service

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation: N/A

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill - Tel (0118) 971 2671
E-mail Address:	ineill@westberks.gov.uk
Contact Officer Details	
Name:	June Kemp
Job Title:	Team Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 503103
E-mail Address:	jkemp@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	The report is in line with the Council's policies regarding Looked After Children
Financial:	None arising from the report
Personnel:	N/A
Legal/Procurement:	The report complies with the legal requirements of the Care Standards Act
Property:	N/A
Risk Management:	N/A

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council:	Councillor Gordon Lundie
Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman:	Councillor Brian Bedwell
Ward Members:	All Members
Opposition Spokesperson:	Councillor David Allen

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted:

Trade Union:

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 This report has been produced in line with the Adoption Services Regulations 2011.
- 1.2 This is circulated on an annual basis to inform the Council of the team's activities regarding the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters. It also covers post adoption support services.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 2.1 There is no decision to be made therefore an Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 As this report meets the exception criteria set out in the Individual Decision making protocol this decision can be made by the Portfolio Holder under delegated authority.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Adoption Service Annual Report 2013-14

Appendix B – Adoption Statement of Purpose 2014-15

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WEST BERKSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

Introduction

West Berkshire Council seeks to promote the upbringing of children within their birth families in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. If it has been decided following a thorough assessment and intervention by the court that the child(ren) are unable to remain in the birth family then adoption is considered as one of a range of ways of achieving permanence for the child(ren).

The Adoption Service recruits adoptive families for children and works to appropriately match children needing adoptive placements with approved adopters. The needs of the children are the agency's paramount consideration.

The priorities of the Adoption Service are:

- To achieve the placement of children being looked after by West Berkshire Council, for whom adoption is part of their care plan, with appropriate approved adopters (whether approved by West Berkshire or another Adoption Agency), matched according to the children's specific needs and circumstances and within appropriate timescales.
- To recruit prospective adopters and prepare and assess adoptive applicants applying to the Service who will meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
- To provide a Post Adoption Support service where appropriate. This will include the counselling of adopted adults and support where appropriate to birth parents and others affected by adoption. (Adoption and Children Act 2002)

All members of the Family Placement Team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services. The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

1	Team Manager
2	Assistant Team Managers
1	Post-adoption Support Specialist Social Worker
8.5 FTE	Family Placement Social Workers
3.62 FTE	Family Support Workers
1	Publicity and Recruitment Worker
4.09 FTE	Support Services Staff

The Family Placement Team has had a number of changes in the team. June Kemp continues in the role of Team Manager and Keith Langley as Assistant Team Manager. Although we successfully recruited a new Assistant Team Manager and appointed Amanda Cornwall who was previously a social worker in the team she made the decision to stand down and return to a social work post. Amanda is now a senior practitioner within the team. We currently have an agency worker as a temporary Assistant Team Manager. This means we have a full complement in terms of management cover.

Mary Heslin has retired as the Post Adoption Support Worker and this position has been filled by Ananda Bodenstein who previously held the role of family finder. We

currently have an agency worker in the role of Family Finder for children for whom the care plan is adoption. We have one social worker and one family support worker on maternity leave. Two social workers have left the team in the past year. One moved on to a private fostering agency and the other to a neighbouring local authority. We currently have one agency worker in a social work post. We also have one social worker and one family support worker who plan to be off work for a significant period due to health issues.

All social work staff within the Family Placement Team who undertake adoption work hold a professional social work qualification and are registered with the HCPC. The level of experienced staff in adoption has reduced but we are addressing this through training and mentoring with more experienced staff members to extend the team's knowledge base and understanding of adoption.

The service was inspected in February 2011 when it was rated as "outstanding".

A copy of the inspection report is available on the West Berkshire website as well as the OFSTED website. As a result the adoption service has been granted permission to use the "outstanding" logo on its literature, advertising etc.

Summary of West Berkshire Activity between 01/04/2013 and 31/03/2014

This has again been a busy year in terms of all aspects of adoption and we have met our target in relation to the approval of 10 adopters.

Over the last year:

- Eight children have been to Adoption Panel or the Agency Decision Maker for best interests. Of these eight children, all eight permanency plans were made at the point of the fourth review. The adoption panel received all the permanency reports within six weeks of being completed. The average time between the decision for permanence and the adoption panel's recommendation on whether the child should be placed for adoption was two months.
- Seven children have been matched with adopters.
- Ten adopters have been approved.
- Three West Berkshire children were placed with other local authorities' adopters and four children were placed with West Berkshire Adopters.
- Six adoption orders were granted in respect of West Berkshire children.
- Five adoption orders have been granted on children placed from other local authorities with Berkshire adopters.
- There were no adoptions broken down/ disrupted with West Berkshire adopters or West Berkshire children.
- Five in-family adoption assessments were completed with two waiting for their applications to be submitted to court.

- Twelve SGO orders have been granted with seven cases still in proceedings.

In total 63 children have been referred to the Family Placement team for permanence. 19 children had a care plan for adoption considered as part of their care planning (some have been concurrent planning as part of the court care process) but not all of these children have or will be placed for adoption. Two children had a parallel plan with regards to an SGO. In total 12 children were granted SGOs with seven cases still in proceedings. 32 children have remained in long-term placements. In most of these cases these children have been seven years and over, however, two children were under seven years and remained in long-term fostering placements as part of their sibling group.

As part of the Berkshire Consortium rolling programme we completed one adoption information day and one adoption preparation group in the year.

We are currently assessing 10 families for adoption who will be presented to adoption panel for approval over the next six months. There are further families who are at different stages of the enquiry and recruitment process.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The West Berkshire Adoption Service is part of a consortium arrangement between the six Berkshire unitary authorities who jointly fund the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS). This was established in 1998 and operates from offices in Windsor.

The BAAS performs the following tasks on behalf of the six Berkshire authorities:-

- Manages and administers the Berkshire adoption panel – that includes West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Slough, Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead
- Recruits and trains adoption panel members
- Provides professional and administrative support for the adoption panels
- Manages the Berkshire Letter Box service between adoptive families and birth families
- Manages direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families
- Provides specialist training on adoption issues and advice and assistance on complex adoption matters for staff in the six unitary authorities
- Provides specialist counselling for adults seeking access to birth records
- Administers and provides a social work service to the closed looked after children's records and adoption records
- Provides independent support for birth family members when the plan for children is adoption
- Funds and provides support to specific adoption initiatives

The consortium arrangement enables adoptive placements to be made available at reduced cost to member agencies and also enhances opportunities for joint training, adoption support and for developing and improving practice.

In addition to the Adoption Panel activity the following resources have been available to the unitary authorities via the consortium:-

- Training for staff, panel members, adopters and their families
- Post-adoption support forum
- The Berkshire adoption exchange (this enables adopters to meet social workers and discuss children needing placement)
- Life appreciation days and disruption meetings
- The birth parent service
- The indirect contact service (Letterbox Exchange)
- The direct contact service
- Adoption and birth records workshops
- Birth mothers' group
- Birth fathers' group (this is a new development)
- Adoptive fathers' group
- Adopters' newsletter
- Adoption support handbook for workers
- Adopted children's group
- Membership of Adoption UK
- Adopters' conference
- Storage of and access to children's records

A detailed overview of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and its activities can be found in the BAAS Annual report 2013.

Inter-country Adoption Arrangements

West Berkshire has a contract 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 received three enquiries and sent out two information packs. No initial visits have been undertaken, no applications have been received and there are no approved adopters waiting for a placement. No placements have been made with West Berkshire adopters. PACT is continuing to oversee a Private Fostering arrangement for a child placed from Thailand.

PACT continues to provide the Berkshire Adoption Consortium Consultation Service. This service is available to adoptive families across Berkshire. The aim of the service is to provide consultation to parents experiencing difficulties within their adoptive family. The project has been developed jointly between Berkshire Adoption Consortium members and Parents and Children together PACT.

Post-adoption Support Services

During the past year there has been a focus on the continued development of post-adoption services for adoptive parents living in West Berkshire, their children and relatives.

Post adoption services also include the counselling of adopted adults and intermediary services for adopted adults and requests for these services have continued to increase significantly following the Adoption and Children Act 2002. This service continues to provide support to a very wide and varied population and includes clients who are in their 60s and 70s.

Post Adoption services continue to offer counselling, advice and information, family fun days, training and mediation regarding contact issues. More direct services such as therapeutic support and support with education are also available. The post adoption team may "signpost" to other specialist services, eg CAMHS, Occupational Therapy, including a consultation service with BACCS, a Berkshire Consortium resource for social workers and adopters, which can aid assessment and direct work with children and their carers.

Family fun days facilitate the relationship between professionals and carers and between the carers and can lead to carers arranging their own social events and giving informal support to each other. Activities for carers and their children generally occur outside of office hours to encourage attendance. A toddlers' group was introduced and the organisation of this has been taken over by the carers themselves. Attendance at this group is varied but will continue to run as it provides support to new adopters and enables sharing of experiences.

There are 74 families on the post adoption database with 61 of these families receiving information about events. Of these families approximately 15 are receiving some level of post adoption support services. Those receiving high level support are to prevent an adoption breakdown. The authority works with adoptive families to support placements and whilst this may on occasions require individual work the authority's ethos is to work with the family as a whole.

Adoption allowances are being paid in respect of 20 children.

The number of adults receiving a service in relation to access to birth records and intermediary services was 10 this year. 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.

Special Guardianship

The adoption service is involved in the preparation of reports for court in Special Guardianship applications along with the locality social workers (where the child is looked after) and in the provision of Special Guardian support services once the order has been granted. The support of Special Guardians is similar to that of adopters. Twelve Special Guardianship applications were completed this year and the adoption agency is supporting two Special Guardianship arrangements; we continue to offer advice on an ad hoc basis for another six arrangements.

A Special Guardianship allowance is being paid in respect of 34 children.

In-family adoptions

During the past year there were five in-family adoption assessments completed. 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'.

Due to competing priorities this work is managed via a "waiting list". There are currently five in-family adoption assessments being undertaken and six are on the waiting list for allocation. The waiting list is regularly reviewed by the management team and assessments are allocated when a social worker becomes available.

Complaints

One complaint has been received over the past year. This was from an adoptive parent in relation to post adoption support. The couple was visited by a Service Manager, followed by a response letter which led to no further action. There have been no complaints received in regarding to any West Berkshire adopters.

Summary of the past year

The six Adoption Teams from West Berkshire, Reading, Wokingham, Slough, Maidenhead and Windsor and Bracknell, hosted their first ever Adoption Activity Day on Saturday 15th February in conjunction with BAAF. An Adoption Activity Day is a 'fun' activity day that enables prospective adopters to directly meet a range of children waiting to be adopted in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment. Such days have been running successfully in the USA for more than 30 years and in the USA they have a match success rate of around 30%. This is higher than any other form of family finding.

At a time when an increasing number of children are waiting to be adopted and the Government is reviewing the effectiveness of existing services, it reflects well on an agency to keep itself involved in the most current family finding methods. The Department for Education announced that adoption activity days would be part of the government's adoption reform agenda: *Pilot Activity Days have proved very successful, finding families for almost one in five children and evidence suggests they could be particularly successful in matching harder to place children.*

On the day 21 adopters expressed an interest in one or more of the children who attended the day. This included children from across the age range of those attending, from the tiniest to the oldest, and children from all six of the host authorities. Six West Berkshire children attended. This included male twins aged four, one seven year old boy and three female siblings aged five, three and two where the plan is for them to be placed separately. Out of the six children who attended the two year old received three expressions of interest, and the seven year old received one expression of interest. The three year old also received one enquiry. One West Berkshire child was matched following the day. Five West Berkshire adopters attended; this included one single carer and two couples.

Early indicators are that while not all of the children who attended the day received any specific interest in terms of follow up from the adopters attending, all the children appeared to have a very enjoyable day and many of the older children (who were more aware of the purpose of the day and therefore more potentially open to feeling rebuffed if no 'match' is identified for them from the day) are likely to have benefitted from realising that other children are in the same position as themselves. Overall feedback reported that there was a 19% positive outcome for matches.

Adoption Activity Days are expected to prove to be a cost effective means of family finding, particularly when costs are shared with other local agencies. A second day is planned to take place in October this year.

Throughout the year we have seen a change in the age group of children referred for adoption; we are currently family finding for 14 children between the ages of 0 to seven years of age. Older children are now considered to be those over two years (as identified by BAAF) and it remains a challenge to find adopters for older children, black and minority children, sibling groups and those with additional needs. All of the children referred for adoption have had a difficult start in life having experienced abuse and neglect, or the effects of parental drug misuse while in the womb.

There continues to be a significant increase in the numbers of children being considered for Special Guardianship Orders and it is seen as a viable alternative option to children remaining in care; there has been an increase in the use of this order, with twelve orders being granted last year which is an increase of over 50% from the previous year. Special Guardianship is being used to provide a long-term care option which is similar to Adoption but allows the child or children to retain a legal relationship with the birth family that an adoption order would sever. It has features that relate to both Residence and Adoption Orders.

Enquiries from potential adopters in the West Berkshire area have remained consistent. Staffing changes have had an impact on the management of enquiries and assessments; however, we have employed agency workers to manage this better.

Timescales for children are being adhered to and all the children placed with their adoptive parents have been adopted within one year.

We are continuing to develop skills and knowledge amongst all the team in the area of adoption and we are achieving this by using the skills and knowledge of team members already in place, by providing appropriate training for workers, and by recruiting social workers with the necessary skills in adoption or who have transferable skills.

Challenges of the year ahead

The number of children in care continues to rise and stands at 68,000. At the end of March 2013, there were over 4,600 children waiting to move in with a new family. The Government has worked towards simplifying the adoption system to encourage more people to adopt and make sure children are placed swiftly with a family where this is in their best interests.

Our biggest challenge is to ensure that the adoption system works consistently well for children and adopters irrespective of where they live or what stage they have reached in the adoption process. The move to shorten assessment timescales to a total of six months for the majority of prospective adopters is challenging. We need to ensure that sufficient thought is given to how we can make the new system work well in practice and in the best interests of prospective adopters and children. It is likely that some assessments will need to take longer than six months depending on the individual circumstances of some prospective adopters and we will continue to ensure that assessments are robust and thorough. Another challenge will be the recruitment of people who positively want to adopt the children who we know wait longer. There is a chronic shortage of adopters for children in sibling groups, disabled children and older children. We also need to ensure that we invest in adoption support so that the necessary support is always there when needed.

Another challenge is the Children and Families Bill which takes forward the Coalition Government's commitments to improve services for vulnerable children and support strong families. It underpins wider reforms to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background. The Bill plans to reform the systems for adoption and supports the reforms set out in *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay* by promoting 'fostering for adoption' so that children are placed sooner with the families that are likely to adopt them; ensuring that searching for a perfect or partial ethnic match does not become a barrier to finding a child a parent; improving support for adoptive families and creating a new power for Ministers to drive an increase in adopter recruitment by requiring outsourcing if necessary.

Fostering for Adoption, is one of a range of new measures from the Department for Education to improve adoption; this allows those who want to adopt children to foster them while they are waiting for the court to decide if adoption is the right plan for the child. This will provide continuity of care for the child, as they would not have to be placed with temporary foster carers. We plan to implement 'Fostering for Adoption' with the aim of ensuring more children can live with their potential permanent carers at the earliest possible stage of the adoption process.

The Government continues to measure improvements in tackling delay through performance scorecards. The scorecard highlights key indicators for children in need of adoption and will assess how quickly children are placed.

The first scorecard indicator relates to the overall experience of a child who is adopted. It measures the average time it takes for a child who goes on to be adopted from entering care to moving in with their adoptive family. The threshold is set at 608 days. Our current timescale is 518 days

The second scorecard indicator measures the length of time between the court giving permission by virtue of a Placement Order for a child to be placed for adoption and the child being matched with an adoptive family. This will allow the Department for Education to act quickly if a large number of children seem to be "stuck" in the

system. This threshold is set at 182 days. Our current timescale is 91 days. West Berkshire is already achieving the required targets.

The six unitary authorities within the Berkshire Consortium have a good reputation in the field of adoption and the most recent OFSTED reports are testament to this. A proposal from the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is being considered in relation to establishing a shared adoption service under a joint arrangement with four of the agencies working together in providing recruitment, preparation, training, assessment and supervision of adopters. This would include a team of family finders and a team of assessing social workers, who would recruit, prepare, train and assess prospective adopters.

A shared adoption service will aim to recruit sufficient adopters for all the children who are referred and would aim for 100% of those children to be placed in a timely way. Most adopters are keen to have a child placed from within the consortium and it is only if there are ensuing delays that they seek a placement from the adoption register. Early access to information about children who need to be placed and consistent contact from a family finding team would retain many adopters for use by consortium agencies. The plans for a shared adoption service is picking up momentum and regular meeting are taking place to progress the arrangements. The project managers are working towards the service starting in September/October but this will be dependent on a number of factors and executive agreement.

The year ahead is likely to be a challenging one as indicated above as we continue to implement the changes as a result of the Government's reform of adoption services.

June Kemp
Team Manager

31 March 2014

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Section 1

Part II: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2014/15

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CONTEXT

West Berkshire District Council through the power delegated to the Director of Communities Services, undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service. It seeks to operate within the requirements of:-

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (and accompanying regulations and guidance) (Amendment 2011)
- The Children Act 1989 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
- The Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and
- The Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 – England
- National Care Standards Commission (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The 1976 Adoption Act – Section 14
- Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2005
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (and associated child protection guidance)

- The Framework for the Assessment of children in need and their families
- Other relevant legislation and regulations and guidance

1 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The Adoption Service is provided by the Family Placement Team of West Berkshire District Council. Other services provided by the Family Placement Team are:

- Post-adoption support services
- Special Guardianship services
- The Fostering Service
- Private Fostering services
- Supported accommodation (lodgings)
- Identification and oversight of placements with Independent Fostering Providers

The vision of the team is:-

That West Berkshire will be regarded as having one of the best family placement teams in the country, offering a range of high quality and innovative services that provide safe and stable placements for children and young people. This will be achieved by a skilled, dedicated and motivated team of staff, carers and adopters working together, in partnership with a range of service providers, to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and their families. The Family Placement Team will be a valuable source of specialist knowledge within Children's Services. It will continually evaluate effectiveness and involve users and carers in planning and development to make sure the highest standards are maintained.

The core values of the team are:-

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process
- Promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
- Work is undertaken to achieve the highest professional standards possible

- In determining a child's future through adoption the adoption service will work in partnership with the child, those with parental responsibility, prospective adopters and adoptive families

West Berkshire Council seeks to promote the upbringing of children by their birth families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family, a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. When adoption is being considered as part of the child's Care Plan, the Adoption Service undertakes to find a permanent alternative family. This family will give the child the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances. Where there is a plan for permanency for a child who is looked after the council's first consideration for a child under the age of 10 will be adoption.

The service is committed to ensuring that the adoption services provided for children and their families value diversity and promote equality. Each child and their family will have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The service seeks to ensure that all children are placed with adopters who provide an environment that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self worth.

The aims of the Adoption Service are:-

- To ensure that all children in West Berkshire who require permanency by adoption are provided with an adoptive family who can meet all their identified needs and offer a secure, stable and loving environment throughout their childhood, into adolescence and beyond
- To ensure that there are sufficient numbers of adoptive families approved by West Berkshire to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption
- To ensure that a high standard of post placement support is provided for all West Berkshire children placed with adoptive families and children placed with adopters living in West Berkshire, to ensure the maximum success of the placement
- To ensure that there are effective and reliable systems in place for recording, managing and storing information about children placed for adoption and all those affected by the adoption process

The objectives of the Adoption Service are:

- To prepare and assess prospective adoptive applicants applying to the Service who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
- To achieve the placement of the children being looked after by West Berkshire Council for whom adoption is part of their Care Plan, with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child.
- To support approved and waiting adopters in achieving the placement of appropriately matched children.
- To provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption by the agency and to their prospective or legal adopters during the pre adoption period and for the first three years post adoption.
- To provide a high standard of post adoption support to all children placed with adopters approved by, and/or living in, West Berkshire where the qualifying requirements for support are met.
- To provide a range of adoption support services in line with the authority's responsibilities under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and Section 14 of the Adoption Act 1976, in order to minimise the risk of disruption. These support services will look at adoptive families holistically.
- To fulfil the authority's duty under the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999 to provide or arrange to provide an inter-country adoption service.
- To provide post adoption support services to adults affected by adoption, including birth family members.
- To provide Schedule 2 counselling services to adopted adults in line with legislation.
- To provide effective and efficient systems for recording and storing information about West Berkshire children placed for adoption, their birth families and others affected by the adoption process.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The Adoption Service operates as part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies Consortium together with the other five unitary authority adoption agencies in Berkshire: Wokingham, Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough and Bracknell Forest. Catholic Children's Society (Reading) is also an honorary

member. The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded proportionately by all six unitary authorities in order to provide a range of resources relating to adoption for the individual unitary authorities.

The Advisory Service currently comprises a Service Manager, an Adoption Consultant, a Project Worker, a Letterbox Co-ordinator, a Records Officer one day per week, (based at Darwin Close in Reading) and administrative staff.

The original Contract of Quality Standards set out for the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service was as follows:-

- Manage and service the two Berkshire Panels (including attendance by adoption applicants)
- Recruit and train Adoption Panel members
- Provide professional and administrative support for the two Adoption Panels
- Manage the Berkshire Letter Box service which facilitates the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families
- Provide specialist training on adoption issues for staff in the six Unitary Authorities
- Provide specialist advice and assistance on complex adoption matters to staff in the six unitary authorities
- Provide specialist counselling for adults seeking access to birth records
- Administer the closed children's records and adoption records
- Provide a social work service to the closed children's records and adoption records

These original areas of responsibility have been maintained and many have been further developed, particularly in the light of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

In addition the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service now:-

- Manages the 'Berkshire Adoption Exchange' – twice yearly events that bring together social workers from across the region in an effort to achieve the matching of children with approved adopters

- Facilitates 'Life Appreciation' meetings for children being placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities
- In the event of placement breakdown, chairs disruption meetings for children placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities
- Co-ordinates development of some pan-Berkshire Adoption Support Services to which all teams have access eg Birth Mothers' Support Group, Birth Fathers' Support Group and Birth Records Workshops
- Supervises direct contact arrangements that are set-up for children placed with adoptive families (pre and post Order)
- Facilitates the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Post Adoption Forum
- Organises the adopters' conference
- Hosts a birth parent project (aim – to offer both integrated independent approaches alongside consistent support and information to significant birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for a child)

The Adoption Panels for East and West Berkshire are shared with Reading Borough Council, Wokingham District Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council, Bracknell Forest Council and Slough Borough Council.

Post placement and post adoption services

The Adoption Service is committed to providing post placement support services to all West Berkshire Council approved adopters who achieve the placement of a child(ren). Where children are placed from another local authority this will be at an advice level initially, and will include support in working with the placing authority.

The Adoption Service is similarly committed to providing Post Adoption services for all those living in the West Berkshire area whose lives have been affected by adoption, recognising the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees.

The Adoption Service is also committed to providing a counselling and support service to:-

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records

- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

Intercountry Adoption

The Adoption Service is committed to fulfilling its duty under The Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999, to provide, or arrange to provide, an Inter-country Adoption Service. The Service, by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (PACT Reading), delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad. This service is reviewed on an annual basis.

2 NAME AND ADDRESS OF NOMINATED MANAGER:

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
West Berkshire Council
Family Placement Team
West Street House
West Street, Newbury
Berkshire, RG14 1BZ

The nominated manager reports to Sandra Dopson, Children's Services Manager. The Adoption Service Decision Maker is the Head of Children's Services.

3 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MANAGER

-

In the process of completing ILM level 5

4 STAFFING OF THE ADOPTION AGENCY

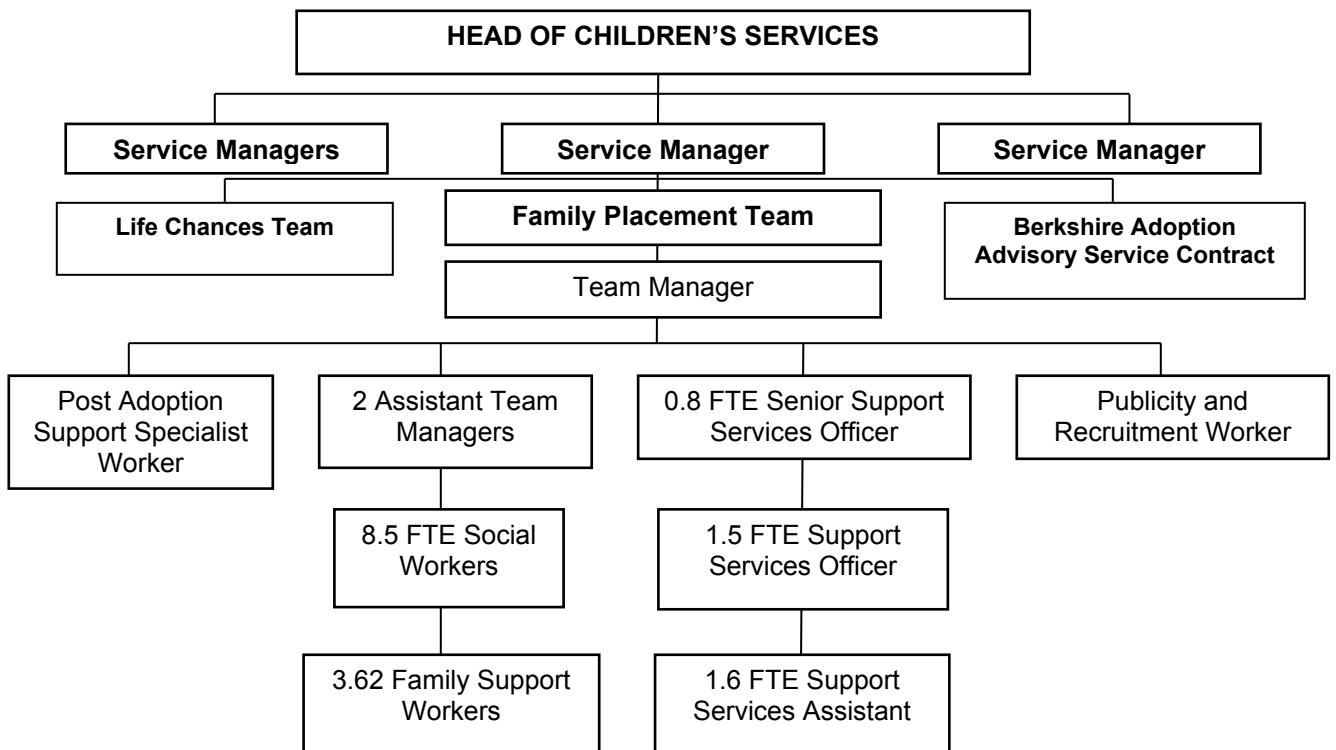
The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

- 1 Team Manager
- 2 Assistant Team Managers
- 1 Specialist Post Adoption Support Social Worker

- 8.5 FTE Family Placement Social Workers
- 3.62 FTE Family Support Workers
- 1 Publicity and Recruitment Worker
- 4.09 FTE Support Services Staff

All members of the team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services and other Family Placement Team responsibilities. All Social Workers within the Family Placement Team who undertake adoption work hold a professional social work qualification ie CQSW, CSS, DipSw, and are registered by the HCPC. They have a good understanding of adoption issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service



5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SERVICES PROVIDED

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of systems being in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided

are effective and the quality is of an appropriate standard. The Service is committed to seeking feedback from all users of the Service including users of the post-adoption support services in order to inform future provision.

The Authority is currently looking at how we deliver post adoption support services to include the involvement of the Family Resource Team (FRS). This will include a Post Adoption Champion within FRS who attends conferences and shares info/resources with the wider team. They will be involved in early intervention to assist families who are struggling and avoid potential adoptions breakdowns.

Workers will be provided with training in Dan Hughes, Margo Sutherland, and Trauma Recovery to so will be better equipped then to deal with issues relating to adoption.

We are hoping to develop more specific training after the preparation group and more direct work before and after matching. We are planning to put systems in place to seek and monitor feed-back on the services provided.

Feedback from the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service provides annual information about the feedback received from the birth parents/relatives and adopters to whom it provides services on behalf of West Berkshire District Council's Adoption Agency. Feedback can additionally be sought in relation to a specific case and/or will be provided on specific issues arising if there appear to be reasons for concern about the nature or quality of any service offered or provided.

Feedback from prospective applicants and adoptive parents

Feedback from prospective applicants is obtained at various stages during the assessment process:

- Following attendance at the initial information session
- Following an initial visit
- Following attendance at the preparation training group (three days)
- During the Second Opinion Visit (if deemed necessary) at the conclusion of the home study assessment.
- Following approval at Adoption Panel
- Following the placement of a child with the adopters

- Following the granting of an Adoption Order

Adoptive parents attend Adoption Panel both at the time of their initial approval and when being matched with a child/ren.

Some applicants receive a visit from the Team Manager or one of the Assistant Team Managers at the end of the home study process, prior to their application being considered by the Authority's Adoption Panel. This interview is not a statutory requirement but may be necessary in some cases if issues need further exploration.

Post approval reviews are also undertaken with all approved and waiting adopters in line with the regulations.

Reviews take place:-

- Whenever the agency considers it necessary
- Not more than one year following approval
- At intervals of not more than one year until a child is placed with the prospective adopters or the period of time for which approval was originally given expires, or they formally withdraw from the adoption process

Reviews are carried out by the Family Placement Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager and involve a meeting with the prospective adopters. The views of the prospective adopters are always elicited and taken into account. If the prospective adopters wish to continue to be approved to adopt, a review report is compiled which is shared with them and they have the opportunity to comment on its contents.

After the Adoption Order has been made, the Post Adoption Support Plan which is developed for the Adoption Panel at the time of matching the child and prospective family is reviewed annually. This annual review is conducted by the post adoption support worker and feedback on the post adoption services delivered is gathered at this time.

Feedback from birth parents

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service has a designated staff member who undertakes Birth Parent Counselling on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, thus removing the role from staff who have any level of involvement in placing the child(ren). This separation of roles appears to have assisted a number of the birth parents of children that the Authority has placed for adoption in accessing appropriate counselling and support.

When the Birth Parents' Project Worker has concluded her involvement, birth parents are asked to give their views on the service that they have received via a questionnaire.

Where birth parents are able to engage with the Authority or with the Birth Parent Project at the stage that plans are being made to place their child(ren) for adoption, their thoughts and wishes are proactively sought, both in terms of the adoption plan and in terms of the type of family in which they would wish their child(ren) to be placed. This information is included in the Child Placement Report which should be signed by the birth family.

Except where birth parents sever all links with the Agency, contact is maintained with birth parents until the adoption of their child(ren) is legally concluded.

The Birth Parent Project Worker re-contacts all birth parents with whom he/she has been engaged once the legal adoption of their child(ren) has been concluded in order to advise them of the Adoption Support Services available for birth parents both locally and nationally. This provides a further forum for obtaining feedback on services provided which is then formally recorded/monitored.

Adoption inspection

An Ofsted inspection was completed in February 2011. The outcome of this inspection was "Outstanding."

Evaluating and responding to feedback

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Authority, this is referred to/checked out by the relevant Team Manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaison with external agencies/organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Authority to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be referred to the Authority's Complaints Officer (see section 8 below).

Statistical information is maintained on feedback from Service Users.

6 PROCEDURES IN RELATION TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Recruitment of adopters

In January 2013 the Government published Further Action on Adoption: *Finding More Loving Homes* which further details plans to speed up the adoption process

by increasing the number of adopters. In July 2013 a new two stage assessment process was introduced by the Government.

As a result there have been a number of changes that the Family Placement Team needed to implement over the past year in order to comply with and improve this process.

The Berkshire Consortium of unitaries has worked hard in standardising the process for adoption recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters and they continue to work closely together to deliver information sessions, preparation training and providing each other with prospective adopters who live outside of the immediate local authority area from whence the children originate.

The Adoption Service has always been mindful of the period of time that children with special placement needs may wait for placements. In order to prevent 'undue delay' in placing such children, the Service has always pursued specific initiatives in order to attract interest from appropriate families. Where children are unlikely to be able to be linked via the Berkshire Adoption Consortium, agreement is sought at an early stage for these children to be featured in national journals and publications, and fliers detailing the child(ren)'s specific placement needs are sent to other agencies.

The Adoption Service's decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application will be based on:-

- The minimum legal and Service criteria
- The Service's priority areas for recruitment applicable at the time

Applications from prospective adopters will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:-

- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Children from minority ethnic groups
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability

- Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties
- Children aged five years or over
- Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged five years or over

All applicants will be expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex histories and children who have incomplete background and/or health information.

The Service seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, detailed within the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR). The 'home study' assessment is usually undertaken by a family placement social worker, with a 'second opinion' being provided by one of the managers if this is deemed necessary. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

While the Adoption Service does not subscribe to the pure model of competency based assessments, prospective adopters are assisted, through the two stage assessment process and preparation group to provide evidence to support their application. This helps to consider/identify the competences and strengths that they have, and those that they will need to develop, if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.

Prospective adopters are kept informed of their progress throughout. The Adoption Service seeks to balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays. The Service seeks to present the applicants to the Service's adoption panel for consideration within six months of receiving their Registration of Interest.

All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and the subsequent matching and placing process. The authority's information pack is reviewed on an annual basis.

The Agency is part of the Berkshire Adoption Consortium which for the purposes of recruitment and training involves the areas of Bracknell, Wokingham, Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough. These authorities jointly run Information Sessions for adopters ensuring that there is a session every month. It is not compulsory that potential adopters attend Information Sessions, however all those enquiring

about adoption are encouraged to attend as it provides an opportunity for them to meet with other potential adopters.

Regardless of whether the potential adopter/s have attended an Information Session they must be offered the opportunity to meet with a social worker in their own home to discuss their interest in adoption and their individual situation. The Regulations require that this visit takes place within 10 working days of the potential adopter/s returning the completed Adoption Enquiry Progression Form or otherwise requesting further information.

At the initial visit the worker explains the adoption process in detail and responds to any questions that the potential adopter/s have about adoption or the adoption process. Discussions take place to ascertain if there is any reason to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed at this time.

Where there is nothing to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed a Registration of Interest Form is provided to the potential adopter/s. On receipt of the Registration of Interest Form the Agency must decide within five working days whether or not to accept it.

Assessment of applicants

Stage One – Pre-assessment process - this stage starts from the day that the agency accepts the Registration of Interest Form and it should usually take no more than two months to complete. A worker must be identified at this stage to support the applicant/s through Stage One and complete with the Prospective Adopters a Stage One Plan. .

A Stage One visit should be completed within five working days. A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all prospective adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards. All information provided by prospective adopters is verified where possible in line with good practice.

Stage One must include: DBS on applicant/s and anyone else over the age of 16 years living within the household, an Adoption medical, Local authority checks, Ofsted, NSPCC, Probation and Overseas checks, Personal references (written references only at this stage), A preparation group and any other preparation/training. All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend a preparation group. The material used is designed to provide prospective applicants with information about the adoption process, information on children both within Berkshire and nationally who need adoptive parents, and about the potential issues involved in raising adopted children. It was revised in 2005 in the light of new training material which became available from British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The Adoption Service works in co-operation with

five other Berkshire Unitary Authorities regarding preparation groups. All prospective applicants are given the opportunity to meet with existing adopters during the preparation groups.

A review meeting with the prospective adopter(s) takes place towards the end of the two month period to review the prospective adopter(s)' progress and their readiness to progress to Stage Two of the process. The prospective adopters will be encouraged to complete a Self-Evaluation and Reflection form.

If the Agency considers, during Stage One, that an application needs to be put on hold whilst issues arising are addressed, or the Agency considers that the prospective adopter(s) are unsuitable to continue with the process, applicants are informed in writing. If the prospective adopter(s) wish to take a break between Stage One and Stage Two or the Agency recommends a break (eg bereavement, finance issue, illness etc.) this is subject to a maximum of six months.

If prospective adopter(s) complete Stage One satisfactorily (as agreed in the Stage One Plan) they notify the Agency that they wish to proceed to Stage Two. Before Stage Two can be started the applicants must have completed chronologies, family trees, eco-map, financial statement, an Experian Statement (one for each applicant if a couple) which details the applicant's financial history and County Court Judgements (if any), completed prompt sheets and a completed self-evaluation and reflection form.

Stage Two - following receipt of the notification that the prospective adopter(s) wish to progress to Stage Two the Team Manager confirms the Agency's decision regarding their progression. The Agency then has four months to complete the assessment including the Adoption Panel hearing the case and the Agency Decision Maker making the Agency Decision. In exceptional circumstances this can be extended but this should be agreed with the Team Manager and the reasons for the extension must be recorded on the case file. Stage Two includes Intensive training and completion of a Home Study assessment.

The prospective adopter(s) should be given five working days to read their report/s to enable them to consider the report/s and to make any comments. These views are incorporated into the report that is presented to the panel.

The prospective adopter(s) must be notified in writing of the panel decision within five working days following receipt of the final panel minutes.

If during the completion of Stage Two the prospective adopter(s) are assessed to be unsuitable then they will be able to make representation to the Agency or to request a review by the IRM. The prospective adopter(s) will also be able to raise general concerns about the process with the National Gateway.

Approval processes

All prospective adoptive applicants seeking approval will have their application presented to the Adoption Service's Adoption Panel for consideration. The Service shares a joint Adoption Panel with Wokingham District and Reading Borough Councils (in accordance with Regulation 3.5 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005). The composition of the Panel is in line with Regulations and is held monthly. Additional Panels are arranged if needed. The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the professional adviser (Senior Adoption Consultant, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service).

Panel members and the Adoption Service's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the panel meeting. The supervising social worker for the applicants or, in her/his absence, her/his family placement line manager, will be present when an application is considered to answer the panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend the panel at which their application is to be heard. Adopters are also able to attend the panel which hears the match between themselves and a child/ren.

The recommendation of the panel is conveyed to the applicants verbally on the day of panel by the Panel Chair and to the Adoption Service Decision Maker by Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service within 24 hours (draft minutes will be forwarded within four working days). The Decision Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven days after receipt of the final panel minutes.

The Adoption Service Decision Maker will convey their decision in writing (e-mail, fax or memo) to the applicants' supervising social worker and the Family Placement Team Manager. The Team Manager ensures that letters confirming the Service's decision are sent to the adoptive applicants. In the event of an application being deferred or turned down, prospective adopters are informed of their right to make representation. This can be either to their own agency or to the Independent Review Mechanism operated by BAAF.

Adopters are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they remain suitable to adopt and relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover placement of children from abroad. Adopters are not approved for a specific age range but must meet the general criteria for adoption. Panel may give advice as to the age range and numbers of children they consider most suitable for the adopters.

All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of a child(ren) via the Berkshire Adoption Consortium. However, if a suitable placement is not

identified within the first three months of the applicants' approval, approved adopters will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing agencies via the National Adoption Register. This is a national database, operated by BAAF, and contains information both about children waiting to be placed for adoption and approved prospective adopters who are waiting for a match.

Approved applicants whose range of approval suggests that they are unlikely to be 'matched' to a child(ren) via the consortium within the first three months of their approval will be referred to the register at an earlier stage to be 'made live' (subject to the agreement of the other member agencies).

Second or Subsequent Adoption Applications and applications from Foster Carers - will be fast tracked and completed within four months. Applicants who do qualify for fast tracking bypass Stage One of the process but must receive a tailored assessment to take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of any children in their family.

Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care will be welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster carers who are interested in adopting children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters. Foster carers who wish to be approved as agency adopters must complete the same preparation and assessment as any other adoptive applicant. It is expected that such an application would be discussed in full with the appropriate supervising social worker. Generally it is expected that such an application would not be considered where a child had been in placement for less than a year (this is the period of time that courts consider appropriate before they will consider an application from a foster carer to adopt).

Fostering for adoption (including concurrency) - Discussions should take place with the prospective adopter(s) around whether they may be interested in considering the placement of a child for whom adoption is thought to be the likely outcome, but where the placing authority has not yet ruled out other possible placement options for the child. Such placements are known as Fostering for Adoption and include practices such as concurrent planning.

The Prospective Adopter's Report should include details of whether the prospective adopter(s) may consider this option and if so what the parameters are around this.

People Who Wish to Adopt from Overseas - If an enquiry is received from prospective applicant/s who indicate that they wish to adopt a child/ren from overseas they will still be offered the opportunity to receive information about domestic adoption from the Agency. If the prospective applicant/s remain clear

that they wish to adopt from abroad then they are referred to a voluntary agency called PACT.

At the current time the Adoption Service delegates the preparation and assessment of Inter-country Adoption applicants to a local voluntary adoption agency. The contract in place with this agency is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the work undertaken is in line with the requirements of the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999 and the Inter-country Adoption Agency (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003 and accompanying guidance.

Support to prospective adopters

Approved adopters are given clear information about the matching, introduction and placement process. All approved and waiting adopters have a named supervising social worker who will provide regular support throughout the post approval period. This social worker will assist applicants in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and will objectively evaluate whether it is appropriate to pursue possible matches.

Where information about a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate its implications the Adoption Service will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision about whether or not to proceed. The Agency makes arrangements for adopters to meet with the Medical Adviser prior to the match at panel as well as the current foster carer of the child, ensuring that the adopters receive all the information that they need prior to the matching panel, in addition to the comprehensive written information that they also receive.

The Adoption Service will assess the risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these. The Service will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption.

Where adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Adoption Service will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to promote the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about and connection to their origins. The Service will seek to assist adopters to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.

The Adoption Service will ensure that adoptive parents are informed, prior to a placement, about support services that are available within the area and how they

might access these services, should they or the child require specialist support after the Adoption Order has been made. The Service will also ensure that prospective adopters are aware of what (if any) Adoption Allowances may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. The Service will ensure that adopters are aware of any benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.

Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Adoption Service will continue to receive supervising social worker support from an identified social worker within the Family Placement Team, until such time as the legal adoption is concluded.

It is the expectation of the Adoption Service that all children placed with West Berkshire Council approved adopters will have a named social worker who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting her/him within the placement. Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive situation within the family.

The Adoption Service will encourage adopters to formally sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members if this was agreed at the time of placement and will support them in facilitating these arrangements. The Service will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on progressing the application to adopt to the appropriate court at the appropriate time. (The Service will negotiate whether the court application fee is to be met by the applicants or by the placing agency.)

The Adoption Service recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid placement breakdowns. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or maltreatment and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten placements, whatever services have been made available.

Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity, the Service will seek to ensure that:-

- Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child
- The child's welfare remains the first consideration
- The review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports, focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child

- The possibility of placement breakdown is acknowledged and planned appropriately
- If a disruption occurs, a disruption meeting is held, chaired by the BAAS, in order to assist the responsible agency in gathering as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future

7 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

The Agency recognises that the Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on every Local Authority to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs in relation to adoption of:-

- Children who have been or may be adopted
- The birth relatives of such children (ie relatives within the meaning of Section 14.4 (1) of the Act)
- Any person with whom the adopted child has a relationship which appears to the Local Authority to be beneficial to the welfare of the child
- Persons who have adopted or may adopt a child
- Any children of such persons (whether by birth or adoption)

In addition, the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2005, require Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of a range of Adoption Support Services and places duties on Local Authorities to carry out assessments of need for Adoption Support Services and having carried out an assessment to decide whether to provide any services. Moreover, Local Authorities must act reasonably in deciding whether to provide Adoption Support Services following an assessment, although there is an assumption that an assessment of need for a service will not automatically result in the provision of that service.

While the Agency recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees, in reaching any decision as to what services to provide the Authority will take into account both the circumstances of each individual case and the resources that are available locally.

West Berkshire District Council is committed to providing the full range of Adoption Support Services that Local Authorities are required by Regulations to provide, following an assessment. These services are:-

- Financial support (ASR 3.1.a)
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption (ASR 3.1.b)
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child (ASR 3.1.c)
- Therapeutic services for adoptive children (ASR 3.1.d)
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care (ASR 3.1.e)
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)
- Counselling, advice and information

While the Council seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Authority may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either other Local Authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, Voluntary Adoption Agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Authority's full range of Adoption Support Services is not available to those involved in adoptions by a step-parent or intercountry adopter. In these cases, services provided are limited to counselling, advice and information.

The Authority is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all child(ren) and families who are engaged with the Children's Services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted child(ren) and their families also have access to mainstream services available to child(ren) and families with particular needs.

The Agency is also committed to providing counselling and support service to:-

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support

- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

Adult adoptees

The Local Authority is responsible for providing a birth records counselling service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing, on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records. In the case of persons adopted before 12th November 1975, the Agency provides counselling in line with relevant legal requirements before sharing any information available. Counselling is also provided for adult adoptees adopted after that date if this is requested and the Agency encourages adoptees to make use of this service.

Where an adult adoptee who does not live in the West Berkshire District Council area is seeking information from his/her adoption records and West Berkshire District Council is the Appropriate Adoption Agency, advice and counselling about the process is provided and the Authority co-operates in providing information from its records to any Adoption Support Agency involved or to the Local Authority in whose area the adoptee lives, in order to facilitate him/her accessing his/her adoption records.

When the Agency is approached by another Adoption Agency seeking information from the adoption case records for an adoptee who remains under the age of 18 the Agency will only release information if there are clear reasons to suggest that this would be in keeping with the best interests of the young person and with the consent of the adoptive parent(s).

If an adoptee is seeking to trace a birth relative(s) he/she is informed that the Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, however, if he/she is able to provide the name and address of the person whom he/she wishes to contact the agency will, where staffing permits, provide an intermediary service. Alternatively the Agency will provide details of other agencies and organisations that provide tracing and/or intermediary services or that might be able to offer additional support appropriate to the individual's needs. All adoptees are provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

Intermediary services for birth relatives

Where a birth parent, sibling or grandparent of an adopted person lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area and is wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling/grand-child he/she is offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not generally in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted him/herself. Birth relatives are provided with a list of Registered Adoption Support Agencies and encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General.

The Agency only routinely provides intermediary services where the following criteria are met:

- The birth relative lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area
- The birth relative is able to provide the name and address of the person with whom they wish to make contact
- The birth relative is able to provide evidence of their relationship to the adoptee
- The adopted person is over the age of 18 and lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area

If the Agency is acting as an intermediary, if contact with the adopted person is established and if he/she wishes to have contact with his/her birth relative(s) all parties are offered support prior to and following any reunion. While the Agency is acting as an intermediary, support will be made available to any involved party if their circumstances suggest that this would be helpful.

8 THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

All prospective adopters engaging with the Adoption Service and all birth parents of children for whom the Service is planning adoption are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details for accessing the Complaints and Public Information Manager for Children and Young People's Services. All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedures and of the role of West Berkshire Council's Children's Rights Officer, and how they can contact her/him should they wish to do so.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process on engagement.

The Family Placement Team Manager monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Family Placement Team.

9 DETAILS OF THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel 0300 123 1231

June Kemp
Team Manager
Family Placement Team
31 March 2014

Individual Executive Member Decision

Title of Report:	Annual Report and Statement of Purpose of the West Berkshire Fostering Service
Report to be considered by:	Individual Executive Member Decision
Date on which Decision is to be taken:	4 September 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	ID2877 and ID2880

Purpose of Report: To report on the work of the adoption team and to enable Members to scrutinise the operation of the Fostering Service.

Recommended Action: To agree report.

Reason for decision to be taken: To comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2003. The department has a statutory responsibility to report on the work of the Fostering service to Elected Members on a six monthly basis and also to agree the Statement of Purpose for this service.

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation: N/A

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill - Tel (0118) 971 2671
E-mail Address:	ineill@westberks.gov.uk

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	June Kemp
Job Title:	Team Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 503103
E-mail Address:	jkemp@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	The report is in line with the Council's policies regarding Looked After Children
Financial:	None
Personnel:	N/A
Legal/Procurement:	The report complies with the legal requirements of the Care Standards Act
Property:	N/A
Risk Management:	N/A

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council:	Councillor Gordon Lundie
Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman:	Councillor Brian Bedwell
Ward Members:	All Members
Opposition Spokesperson:	Councillor David Allen

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted:

Trade Union:

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
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Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 This report has been produced in line with the Fostering Services Regulations.
- 1.2 This is circulated on an annual basis to inform the Council of the team's activities regarding the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 2.1 There is no decision to be made and therefore no Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 As this report meets the exception criteria set out in the Individual Decision making protocol this decision can be made by the Portfolio Holder under delegated authority.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Fostering Service Annual Report – April 2013 to March 2014

Appendix B – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2014-2015

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WEST BERKSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

Annual Report – April 2013 to March 2014

Introduction

Membership of panels and their functions in respect of approving, reviewing and terminating approvals are now set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Children Act Guidance Volume 4 Fostering Services 2011. Fostering panels have a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care for children.

The Fostering Panel has various functions, including responsibility for approving foster carers and the numbers and ages of children they are approved for. Approval can be as follows: Short Term, Long Term/Specific Respite, Relief Care, Short Breaks Care, Mother and Baby Placements, Supported Lodging, Emergency Placements as well as Temporary Approvals. Panel oversees the foster carers' first reviews and any subsequent reviews that may need panel's consideration. Panel also has a role in permanency planning where long term fostering is considered the best option.

The panel has continued to meet on a monthly basis, usually on the second Thursday morning of each month. Eleven panels were held throughout the year dealing with a variety of business with one Training/Business panel taking place.

Panel Membership

Panel membership this year has been as follows:

Name	Role	Start date	Resignation Date
Ros Whittaker	Independent Panel Chair	Oct 2008	Continuing
Gwen Mason	Elected Councillor Rep	July 1012	Continuing
Sue Tarrant	Fostering Service Rep	June 2012	Continuing
Clare Minchin	Children and Families (inc Disabled Children) Rep	May 2003	Continuing
Sarah Holderness	Children and Families Rep	Feb 2011	Continuing
Kate Pike	Education Service Rep	Jan 2009	Continuing
Keith Langley	Fostering Service Rep Central List from June 2012	Sept 2008	Continuing
Charlotte Inglis	Care Leaver	Oct 2012	
June Kemp	Panel Adviser	Oct 2009	Continuing
Helen Benn	Panel Administrator	Feb 2003	Continuing

There is no requirement for the fostering panel to have a fixed membership, although the ability of the panel to function cohesively and with a level of consistency must be taken into account. This is best achieved by having core membership. The new guidance and regulations allow panel members to remain on the panel with no maximum or minimum tenure. This will enable

those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Panel members are drawn from a 'central list' maintained by the fostering service of people who have the appropriate qualifications and/or skills to serve as panel members. All panel members receive annual appraisals.

The panel membership continues to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2002 and 2011. Changes to panel procedures are now in place to meet the new Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011.

We have lost a panel member who was able to provide ethnicity and diversity expertise. We have a panel member with care experience. Recruitment to the panel is ongoing with an emphasis on recruiting an independent foster carer, a member to provide ethnicity and diversity and a health representative.

All panel members approach the task conscientiously, studying the papers in advance and preparing thoroughly for the meetings. The proceedings are ably chaired by Ros Whittaker and excellently organised and recorded by Helen Benn.

Panel members attended one business/training meeting this year. Panel members also have the opportunity to access social care training and attend lunchtime seminars or conferences run by the department.

PANEL BUSINESS

Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 13 to March 14)

There have been 11 panel meetings this year.

Fostering Panel Business	
Cases Heard	
Short term approval	7
Short Breaks approval	2 (1 S/T approval also)
Full Approval Family Friends/Connected Person	5
Temporary Approval of Connected Person	14
Temporary Approval that went on to SGO	6
Temporary Approval that went on to RO	1
Temporary Approval arrangements that ended	8
Temporary Approval extensions	6
Long Term Matches non Kinship	3
Long Term Connected Person	3
First or Subsequent Reviews	13
Changes of Approval	5
Issues of Concern/CP	1
Updates	2
Private Fostering Arrangements	2
Relief Carers	2
Exemptions	2

Qualifying Determinations	5
Cases Deferred	1
Resignations	8
Applicants not approved	0
Representations	1
Total Number of newly approved carers including Family, Friends and Connected persons full approval	12
Total number of items considered	97

Summary of Foster Carer Resignations and De-registrations (April 13 to March 14)

Number of Resignations and De-registrations	11	
Temporary approval placements became permanent	3	Special Guardianship Orders granted
Change in carers' circumstances	8	Separation/resigned to devote time to family/placements ended

Placement and carer Information

On 31st March 2014 we had a total of 131 fostering placements. 99 of these placements were filled with four remaining vacant. Where carers are not full this was due to discrepancy in the "fit" between carers' availability and the needs of children already placed. 11 placements were not available due the current needs of the children already in placement. An additional 17 placements were unavailable due to the personal; circumstances of the foster carers. The number of the overall children/young people in placement within the fostering service (excluding short breaks) at any point between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014 was 181.

114 of these children were of compulsory school age. The number of children/young people with a disability was 11.

There were 23 permanent long term placements. 57 children were in short term care including pre-adoption and pre-permanence. We had 18 Family, Friends and Connected persons placement and one Parent and child placement and there were five children currently in short breaks care.

During this period there were nine sibling groups involving 17 children. Eight of the sibling groups were assessed as being placed together with their siblings and this was achieved in all cases. One sibling group of five was assessed as being placed separately or with one of their siblings and this was also achieved.

Nine young people reached the age of 18 years during with period with four remaining in foster care under the 'Staying Put' arrangements. One young person remained in foster post 19 although this was only for a short period.

The number of children requiring fostering placement has continued to increase. This significant increase is putting a lot of pressure on placement availability and this will put additional pressure on current placements.

Fostering Household Information

On 31st March 2014 we had 142 approved foster carers of which 13 households were family and friends carers with 16 households provided short breaks care and 4 households exclusively for short breaks. Of the 142 carers 139 were white British, with one Irish and two Black African.

The 142 carers comprised of 62 fostering households, eight of which were family and friends households assessed under the fostering services regulation. There were also 6 Connected Persons households who had children places under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations 2010. Six of these households were specifically for short breaks.

There were eight complaints received from foster carers within the last year.

One in relation to lack of communication, poor organisation and delay in paperwork from the children's team. This complaint was justified.

One in relation to lack of involvement of the foster carer in decision making and planning. This complaint was partially upheld.

One in relation to payments for a placement post 18 years which was partly justified.

One in relation to the complexities of an adoption breakdown and access to funds. This was addressed by a meeting with the foster carer and the children's team.

One in relation to the attitude of the child's social worker and lack of support. This was addressed by a meeting with the foster carer and the children's team followed by an apology letter.

One in relation to the professionalism of the child's social worker and contact issues. This was addressed by a meeting with the foster carer and the children's team and a response letter.

One in relation to confidential information being shared at training. This was addressed with the parties involved.

One in relation to communication regarding a child protection investigation, lack of social visits and staffing issues. This complaint is still in process.

We had one complaint about a foster carer from a young person around issues of contact which was upheld.

There has been one issue of concern regarding the registration of one foster care whereby the fostering panel recommended de-registration; this matter has yet to be concluded.

There were two allegations regarding foster carers that met the threshold to be investigated by the Local Authority Designated Officer. Both were unsubstantiated.

Fostering Reviews

The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations. The reviews are chaired by the off-line Family Placement Assistant Team Manager to give increased independence and scrutiny to the process. All the completed reviews are further scrutinised by the Team Manager who monitors compliance with the regulations via both monthly spreadsheets and scrutiny of the overall report before final sign off.

The total number of foster carers' reviews completed this year is 72, 19 of which were completed with 13 months and 12 of which were first reviews. Six took place within 14 months and four within 15 months. Ten took 20 months with a remaining 5 taking 26 months. Where there was a delay these related to specific issues within the foster care household which needed to be resolved in order to offer a meaningful review eg change of household composition, medical issues and addressing issues of concern.

Outcome of Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted. The most recent inspection, in January 2013, rated the overall effectiveness of the service as "Good". The outcome for Children and Young People was "Outstanding" and we were rated "Good" for the Quality of the Service, Safeguarding Children and Young People, Leadership and Management.

To improve the quality and standard of care further Ofsted made the following recommendations:

Children have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including specialist services (in conjunction with the responsible authority), when they need these services. Standard 6.4. We now have a monitoring system to ensure health checks are maintained.

In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed. Standard 10.6

Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. Standard 20.

A letter went out to all foster carers reminding them that the TSD standards are a requirement and need for them to be completed by each foster carer. The standards have been included in the annual foster carer's review paperwork and it is now monitored by the fostering panel.

However this is still an area requiring further work; despite holding regular workshops there are a number of carers who have still not completed their training.

Support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. Standard 20.8. Carers have the opportunity to attend Research in Practice training by attending training sessions or via the website.

Recruitment

Recruitment of foster carers will continue to be targeted at those able to consider taking placements of children across all age ranges and across varying timescales with specific consideration to the availability of placement choice. With a new West Berkshire web site facility live on the 19th May 2014 the focus will be very much on generating web and telephone based enquiries driven by radio, press and social media based advertising activities, covering all fostering requirements including an extended campaign on the recruitment of intensive foster carers. To facilitate the rapid and effective processing of enquirers a new two stage process, mapping the updated regulations, will feed interested parties into a monthly programme of information days, where the role and approval process of fostering will be explained in depth before ongoing assessment and training is scheduled in the second stage. A full listing of these information days is published on the new web-site facility.

The new web site resources (including an on-line response form) and targeted newspaper advertisements for information days are specifically aimed at including Intensive fostering, Long term fostering, Teenage fostering and Short Breaks Carers. Short Breaks Care is an integral part of the overall Fostering Advertising and Promotional Plan for the period and the foreseeable future and continues to produce a regular number of enquiries.

Recruitment activity has also been used to produce enquiries for Supportive Lodgings Placement Hosts in conjunction with our service provider Step by Step. This has involved minimal extra effort and cost but has greatly added to the number of hosts available to add to the leaving care and vulnerable young person accommodation options.

Advertising continues to be targeted throughout West Berkshire with particular attention paid to the different requirements of the eastern and central/west regions of the area. Specific radio and press advertising for the eastern region has been run with Reading based resources and these campaigns will continue to be run throughout the coming timescales.

County wide collaboration on fostering advertising has ceased for the moment as providers refocus on the challenges of the new regulatory framework but communications are still ongoing around future opportunities to collaborate.

In the past year (April 2013 to March 2014) 85 fostering enquiries were received with 60 information packs sent out. During that period 31 prospective foster carers requested an initial visit and 27 took place. 4 who requested a visit that didn't take place either withdrew or failed to respond; 13 carers were assessed and subsequently approved

Two fostering preparation groups were organised over the year and we held three recruitment information evenings.

The average time taken for a fostering assessment, from formal application to approval following consideration by Fostering Panel, is approximately six months which compares favourably with the Governments time scales of eight months.

There is a need to recruit foster carers to meet the needs of separated children who are currently arriving from areas such as Albania, Ethiopia, Syria and Afghanistan. We engage with members of the local Black and Minority Ethnic Forum who provide mentors for foster carers who look after children who are a different ethnicity from themselves.

The Fostering Service operates an equal opportunities policy in relation to all its work with carers, children and their families. Matching procedures attempt first to meet as many of a child's needs as possible and second to identify any unmet needs and to put in place measures to address any shortfall in provision. Carers are strongly encouraged to attend training on valuing diversity. As part of preparation for the foster carers' annual reviews we always seek the views of the foster carers, the children in placement, their parents, and foster carers' own children, regarding the service provided by the Fostering Service and ways that the Service can improve further.

Performance of the team is monitored in a variety of ways, via departmental management information (The Red Book), via team generated spreadsheets and databases which are updated and circulated on a monthly basis, through staff supervision and regular file audits, in addition to the foster carers' annual reviews mentioned above.

The Family Placement Team proposes to recruit an additional six foster carers for an intensive fostering placement scheme, based on a '3 tier' foster carer model. This will involve intensively trained foster carers, who would be retained by the Council, together with a wrap around support network to ensure that a high level of placement support is available at all times. The 3 tier method is tried and tested and the work represents a major investment in the support of the most vulnerable children currently placed outside of our community.

Recruiting more foster carers with these specialist skills to meet the needs of the most challenging children will help to place more children locally and enable them to stay in contact with their family and friends.

Placement Factors

Our placement stability figures continue to be exceptionally good.

We are continuing to concert our efforts on keeping all young people needing placements 'in house' and living close to where their birth families live but this is becoming increasingly challenging given the number of children and young people requiring placements. Our use of independent fostering providers is steadily increasing.

The Temporary Approval of Connected Persons has increased, many of which are progressing on to a Special Guardianship Orders. Five Special Guardianship Orders have been granted with eight still in proceedings.

Parent and child placements are continuing to be considered a safe setting for both mother and baby to assess and support them in care. We now have a policy and procedures to meet the requirement of these placements. The Parent and Child Placement Policy has been designed and written to ensure that all foster carers, Family Placement Social Workers, Parents and Child's Social Workers receive the same information about the placement task they are going to undertake. The policy provides clear guidance and synopsis for each professional / individual involved and enables guidelines for co-ordinating such placements.

West Berkshire Council is committed to improving outcomes for care leavers and to prevent them from experiencing social exclusion; it has therefore developed the a policy in order to ensure that young people 18+ can have the opportunity to 'Stay Put' in their foster placement thus providing them with continuity of support to improve their life chances.

Fostering Support

The Life Chances Team of workers from different disciplines (education, education welfare, educational psychology, youth work, health and early intervention) continues to have a key impact both on the recruitment of more locally based carers for formerly 'hard to place' young people. This multi-agency team focuses on improving the life chances of looked after and adopted children and has collectively been very successful in supporting both the young people and their foster carers.

The Life Chances Team focuses on the needs of the looked after child and is a very important aspect of the fostering services support strategy. All carers have direct access to members of this team.

We have a home study handbook for foster carers who are in the assessment stage of the process.

We are introducing induction training for newly approved foster carers and we run workshops for carers to complete their TSD standards training.

We have an established working relationship with the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association and use this as a forum for consultation and working collaboratively to develop the service.

Foster carers are involved with the preparation training and where possible we link new carers at an early stage with more experienced foster carers.

Panel continues to seek and receive feedback from panel users, both carers and staff, on the panel process and how it is experienced by users, together with suggestions for improvement.

Summary

The Government's programme of reform for fostering and adoption aims to address key issues such as the shortage of foster carers. Given that more than two-thirds of looked-after children (71%) are now placed with foster carers, ensuring that these placements offer the very best possible opportunities for children to thrive is critical and we are doing our best to achieve this. However finding suitable foster carers to look after older children particularly teenagers is proving difficult and it is with this in mind that West Berkshire Council is looking to recruit intensive foster carers to meet the needs of these children.

In July 2013 the Department of Education published amendment to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations volume 4 of the Fostering Service regarding the assessment and approval of foster carers. It outlined the move to a new two stage assessment process for assessing a person's suitability to foster. Stage 1 of the assessment process is intended to provide the decision maker with basic information about the applicant to enable clearly unsuitable applicants to be sifted out without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource by the fostering service or the applicant. More detailed information is collected in stage 2 of the assessment.

The Children's Minister, Edward Timpson MP, wrote to all foster carers in February this year in regards to proposals relating to the arrangements for 'Staying Put', Pupil Premium for children in care, their role with regards to Delegated Authority, the Housing Reform, and a New Statutory Framework for Long Term Foster Care.

Fostering is a challenging role and requires skills and dedication. We want to encourage more people to become foster carers and make sure that they have the support and skills to meet the varied and complex needs of looked after children.

The fostering panel continues to have a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster carers for children. The panel also has responsibility for making decisions about approval and terms of approval and assessing the continuing ability of foster carers and their households to meet the complex needs of children. The Fostering Service has an efficient and effective fostering panel that ensures that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of Looked After Children. We are pleased to have recruited a foster carer from a neighbouring authority as an independent panel member.

The Family Placement Team continues to remain busy in terms of placements for Looked After Children. There continues to be an increase in the number of Connected Persons Assessments and a rise in Special Guardianship Orders. The team has worked hard to keep young people in local, in-house

placements thereby enabling them to maintain the links with their families and communities.

Performance of the team is monitored in a variety of ways, via departmental management information (The Red Book), via team generated spreadsheets and data bases which are updated and circulated on a monthly basis, through staff supervision and regular file audits, in addition to the foster carer annual reviews mentioned above.

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
Fostering Panel Adviser

10 May 2014

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WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2014 – 2015

Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The West Berkshire Fostering Service is run in accordance with the National Minimum Standards which are underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000. Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services – Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review sets out the wider context for local authorities as providers and commissioners of fostering services. It also strives to follow the best practice guidance outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice (1999).

The Fostering Service exists to provide high quality locally based substitute family care, on either a short or long term basis; to meet the needs of looked after children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents. The service also supports some children within their families of origin by providing regular periods of family-based short breaks care.

The service is committed to ensuring that the foster care services provided for children and young people and their families value diversity and promote equality. Each child and their family will have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The service seeks to ensure that foster carers provide care that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self worth.

The service aims to provide (either directly or via work with partner agencies) services which meet the individual needs of Looked After Children, as identified through the assessment, care planning, pathway planning and reviewing processes. This includes the identification and provision of necessary additional services and support eg education, health, psychotherapeutic and youth work services. The service aims to maximise young people's life chances by providing them with positive childhood experiences and the opportunity to reach their full potential as they move towards adulthood. This work is supported by the new Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations that came into force on 1st April 2011.

West Berkshire Council is committed to improving outcomes for care leavers and to prevent them from experiencing social exclusion, it has therefore developed a policy in order to ensure that young people 18+ can have the opportunity to 'Stay Put' in their foster placement thus providing them with continuity of support to improve their life chances

The service is committed to consulting with children, young people, their parents, foster carers and carers' birth children, and to ensuring that the views of all relevant parties are taken into account in both individual care planning and in service development. Wherever possible people within the child or young person's network of family and friends are assessed and supported in the same way as stranger foster carers.

The service regards foster carers as members of the professional care team. It is committed to providing foster carers with the support and training necessary to enable them to offer high quality care to all children and young people who are in receipt of family placement services. The service endorses the Foster Carers' Charter putting foster carers at the heart of arrangements for looked after children.

The Family Placement Team

The Fostering Service is provided by the Family Placement Team of West Berkshire District Council.

Other services provided by the Family Placement Team are:

- The Adoption service
- Post-adoption support services
- Special Guardianship services
- Private fostering services
- Identification and oversight of placements with Independent Fostering Providers

The vision of the team is:

That West Berkshire will be regarded as having one of the best Family Placement Teams in the country, offering a range of high quality and innovative services that provide safe and stable placements for children and young people. This will be achieved by a skilled, dedicated and motivated team of staff and carers working together, in partnership with a range of service providers, to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. The Family Placement Team will be a valuable source of specialist knowledge within Children's Services. It will continually evaluate effectiveness and involve users and carers in planning and development to make sure the highest standards are maintained.

The core values of the team are:

- The needs of the children and young people are always paramount
- Promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
- Work is undertaken to achieve the highest professional standards

- To work in partnership with children, birth families and other professionals involved with the care of the children

Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service currently offers:

Planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, including specialist care for disabled children, across the full range of short and long term placements, and relief care when necessary for established placements.

Planned and emergency family and friends foster care for individual children and siblings of all ages across the full range of long and short term placements.

Family based day and overnight short breaks care for children and young people and their families including specialist care to meet the needs of disabled children.

Parent and Child Placements. The fostering Service have a Parent and Child Placement Policy which has been designed and written to ensure that all foster carers, Family Placement Social Workers, Parents and Child's Social Workers receive the same information about the placement task they are going to undertake. The policy also provides clear guidance and synopsis for each professional / individual involved and enable guidelines for co-ordinating such placements.

The Fostering Service supports this by providing:

Close links with the Department's children and families' teams to ensure integrated planning and provision of services for individual service users and effective service development work.

Skilled staff with the knowledge and experience to help ensure that the service provided is safe and appropriate for all potential service users.

Appropriately trained and experienced social work and support staff to provide all foster carers' with a named supervising social worker. These social workers provide ongoing supervision, support, information and advice to foster carers. They also promote foster carers' training and professional development needs.

A proactive recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers that seeks to maximise the number and range of foster carers available locally and thus ensure that there is appropriate local placement choice wherever possible so that children are able to remain close to their home areas.

An effectively administered payments scheme that covers the financial costs of caring for children and young people.

A training programme for all new and existing foster carers, including the NVQ social care programme, an on-line diploma programme for experienced foster carers and an on-line short course programme designed to enable foster carers to meet the relevant CWDC standards for all foster carers. Foster carers are also encouraged to complete

the CWDC standards both as part of the initial approval and in the form of ongoing assessment.

The assessments of prospective foster carers that are in line with national standards, including preparatory training in groups and individual assessments of prospective foster carers and their households.

A properly constituted fostering panel with an independent chairperson, administered in line with regulatory requirements. This panel, which meets at least monthly, considers and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker about:

- the approval of all new fostering applicants including family and friends foster care and the approval of connected people;
- first reviews after approval;
- requests for changes to the approval status of existing foster carers;
- matches of children and foster carers for long term fostering placements;
- allegations, complaints and issues of serious concern relating to foster carers;
- Panel also offers advice in relation to safeguarding arrangements to support approved foster carers;
- it also considers the acceptance of private fostering arrangements.

Management and Staffing Structure – 2013

The Manager of the Fostering Service is the Family Placement Team Manager, June Kemp, who reports to the Children’s Services Manager, Sandra Dopson.

The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children and Young People’s Services, Mark Evans.

All members of the team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services and have other Family Placement Team responsibilities. All Social Workers within the Family Placement Team hold a professional social work qualification ie CQSW, CSS, Dip Sw, Social work degree and are registered by the HCPC. In addition to this they have a good understanding of fostering issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

1	Team Manager
2	Assistant Team Managers
1	Specialist Post-adoption support social worker
8.5 FTE	Family Placement Social Workers
3.62 FTE	Family Support Workers
1	Publicity and Recruitment Worker
4.09 FTE	Support Services Staff

Staffing Position as at March 2013

Position	Name	FT/PT
Team Manager	June Kemp	FT
Assistant Team Managers	Keith Langley	FT
Assistant Team Managers Agency	Katie Ratcliffe	FT
Senior Social Worker	Amanada Cornwall	FT
Social Workers	Peter Field	FT
Agency	Tina Williams	FT
	Alex Wickens	FT
	Susan Tarrant	FT
	Selina Beety	PT
	Trudi Vickery	PT
Maternity Leave	-	FT
Agecny	Connie Ojong	FT
Post-adoption Support Social Worker	Ananada Bodenstein	FT
Family Placement Support Workers	Sandra Bailey	PT
	Andy Blackwood	FT
	Ann Athawes	PT
Maternity Leave	Vera Lizunova	FT
Publicity and Recruitment Worker	John North	FT
Snr Support Services Officer	Helen Benn	PT
Support Services Officers	Andrea Martin	PT
	Vacant Post	PT
	Alexandra Steward	PT
Support Services Assistant	Karen Hugo	PT
	Linda Burry	PT

Complaints

All foster carers and looked after children and young people and their parents are encouraged to make effective representations about any aspect of the fostering service. They are provided with written information about complaint procedures, including contact details for the Complaints and Public Information Manager for Children and Young People's Services. All complaints and their outcomes are monitored by both the Complaints Manager and the Family Placement Team Manager.

The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all children and young people at the start of their placement and foster carers also have copies. This includes contact details for the Complaints Manager, the Rights for You service and Ofsted. The West Berkshire Independent Visitor's Scheme is available to all looked after children and young people at their own or their social worker's request.

Evaluation

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted. The most recent inspection, in January 2011, rated the overall effectiveness of the service as “Good”. The outcome for Children and Young People was “Outstanding” and we were rated “Good” for the Quality of the Service, Safeguarding Children and Young People, Leadership and Management.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy designed to maximise capacity, retain foster carers, meet current identified needs, plan for future projected requirements and place children and young people locally wherever possible. This strategy is reviewed annually.

The Fostering Service proposes to recruit additional foster carers for an intensive fostering placement scheme. This will be based on a '3 tier' foster carer's model. This will involve intensively trained foster carers, who would be retained by the Council, together with a wrap around support network to ensure that a high level of placement support is available at all times. Recruiting more foster carers with these specialist skills will meet the needs of the most challenging children will help to place more children locally and enable them to stay in contact with their family and friends.

There is a Publicity and Recruitment Worker within the team who has specific responsibility for raising local awareness of the on-going need for foster carers and supported accommodation (lodgings) carers and developing and implementing a targeted recruitment strategy. In particular this focuses on the placement of children and young people aged 11 years and over for whom there is currently a shortage of short and long term placements.

Additionally, in line with the Department's broader strategy of maintaining children and young people within their birth family networks whenever possible, the fostering service works to promote and enable the use of families and friends carers wherever appropriate. To achieve this the fostering service takes into account the pre-existing relationships inherent in family and friends fostering arrangements and recognises the particular contribution that family and friends foster carers can make. These factors are taken into account in the assessment process whilst ensuring adherence to the fostering minimum standards and that care planning, placement and review regulations are maintained.

Approval of Foster Carers

The approval process for foster carers meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011. The Assessment and approval of foster carers; Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulation Volume 4: Fostering Services was introduced in July 2013. This introduced a new two part process for assessing a person's suitability to foster.

When a person applies to foster, the fostering service should assess their suitability in accordance with Regulation 26. The information required in stage one of the assessment process must be sought as soon as possible, the decision about whether the applicant has successfully completed stage one must be made within 10 working days of all the information required in stage one being received. If it is decided to undertake stage two of the assessment, Regulation 26(2) requires the fostering service to obtain information about the applicant as set out in Part 2 of Schedule 3.

Assessments of foster carers follow the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Prospective Foster Carers format. The assessment and approval process involves and considers all members of the applicant's household plus significant others (eg birth children living elsewhere) as appropriate.

A range of employment, health and personal references are obtained and verified regarding the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) and other government and local authority checks are made. Personal references are obtained and referees are interviewed.

A report is prepared by the assessing Social Worker, with recommendations on the applicant's suitability to be a foster carer(s) and whether s/he should be approved for named children only, or more generally for between one and three children or four if siblings within a particular age range, sex, area of need etc having regard to her/his assessed abilities, experience and the accommodation available.

Applicants are provided with a copy of the non-confidential sections (ie everything except the references) of the assessment reports before they are submitted to the Fostering Panel and have the opportunity to make written comments if they wish to do so. The Panel provides information leaflets for new applicants and existing carers whose approval is being considered by Panel, including details of panel membership and processes.

The West Berkshire Fostering Panel considers every application that is presented to it. All applicant(s) are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel meeting that considers their application, and are informed of the Panel's recommendation and Head of Service's decision both verbally and in writing. A copy of the relevant extract from the Panel minutes is sent to all applicants and carers. A Foster Care Agreement is drawn up and signed with all foster carers both at initial approval and following any changes to their approval.

Training of Foster Carers

The Department arranges and provides training for all foster carers in order to promote the development of foster carers' skills and knowledge, to help them meet the needs of the children and young people placed in their care.

A training programme for foster carers is provided to cover both the basic requirements of new carers, pre- and post-approval, and further training to develop and extend the skills of experienced foster carers, and to address their specific needs relevant to certain situations. This training programme is reviewed annually and foster carers are asked, via contact with their supervising social workers and via the review process, to identify training which they would like the agency to incorporate

into its annual programme. There are financial incentives in order to encourage attendance. Wherever possible, training is provided for staff and foster carers together so that learning and understanding is mutually enhanced. Individual training needs are met as far as is practicable within existing budgets. Attendance on this training programme is monitored by supervising social workers via the review process.

Discussion of a foster carer's future training needs forms a key part of the foster carer annual review. Where there are two adults in one household applying or approved as joint carers, both must successfully complete all mandatory training. There is a clear expectation that foster carers will regularly attend training sessions.

CWDC, the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care are being implemented by the service. We do, however, need to be more robust in ensuring that foster carers meet this requirement. The Standards are accompanied by a Guide for Foster Carers, a Workbook and Guidance for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers. The fostering team is implementing the standards and has developed a tool for assessing competency and planning appropriate training for carers in conjunction with an independent contractor.

Support for Foster Carers

Supervision and support for individual foster carers is provided by the allocated Family Placement Team supervising social worker, who visits the foster carer(s) at regular intervals, and additionally when required (visits or telephones) at other times. Family Placement Team staff liaises closely with placing social workers and their managers. A Foster Placement Agreement is drawn up with all relevant parties at the start of every placement and a safer caring and risk management agreement is also made in relation to all placements. A new placement plan has recently been introduced to cover delegated authority.

A regular newsletter is produced by foster carers and circulated by the Publicity and Recruitment Worker. A telephone support service for all approved foster carers and adopters is provided by members of the team outside of office hours in addition to the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team. Foster carers are also supported by the work of the placing social workers and their managers; and the members of the multi agency Life Chances Team for Looked After Children.

Financial support is provided by the Department through the Fostering Placement Allowance Scheme, details of which are provided separately. All foster carers receive payment at rates that are one and a half times the Fostering Network recommended minimum. Financial assistance for 'child sitting' is provided to enable foster carers to attend training and have occasional evenings out.

All foster carers are automatically enrolled as members of Fostering Network, membership fees being paid by the Department. West Berkshire also actively supports and works in partnership with the local West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association.

Foster carers have access to an out of office hours telephone support service operated by the Family Placement Team, in addition to the services of the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team.

There is support and guidance from Members of the Life Chances Team for Looked After Children and Young People. This is a multi agency team which includes staff whose job is either working full time with Looked After Children or where part of their role is allocated to this work. Membership includes a nurse, teachers, a youth worker, education welfare, an educational psychologist, YOT, CAMHS, Family Resource Service, the Family Placement Team, Connexions, Early Years and the locality teams.

The Department supports 'back up' care to assist carers attending training and meetings.

There is support from and close liaison with the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association.

Reviewing of Foster Carers

All approved foster carers have annual reviews of their performance, training needs, terms of approval and continued registration of their approval as foster carers and their households.

Reviews of a foster carer's approval take place within the first six months of approval and annually thereafter, unless for some reason it is considered appropriate to hold an earlier review. The supervising social worker visits the carer in preparation for the review, and the views of placing social workers, placed children and their families and the LAC Reviewing Officer are also sought. Health and safety checks are repeated annually, and DBS (formerly CRB) and medical checks are repeated every three years in accordance with regulatory requirements. All reviews are attended by the foster carer(s) and the supervising social worker, and are chaired by a manager from the Family Placement Team. The review form is completed during the review.

The completed review report is signed by the supervising social worker and the review chair before being passed to the Registered Person for West Berkshire Fostering Service (ie the Family Placement Team Manager) who considers the report and decides whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable. The carers are notified in writing of this decision which is attached to the review report and forwarded to the carers to sign and add their comments.

The first review after approval is always considered by the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews may be referred to the Fostering Panel at the discretion of the Family Placement Team Manager and as directed by the regulations.

If the Fostering Service is no longer satisfied that a foster carer and/or the fostering household continue to be suitable for fostering the issue is referred for consideration by the Fostering Panel. Following a recommendation by the Fostering Panel to terminate approval, written notice is given to the foster carer(s) that termination of approval is proposed. The foster carer(s) are invited to make representations to the Panel at a subsequent meeting, following which the decision maker, taking into

account any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel, makes a decision and written notice is given to the foster carer(s).

Prospective foster carers who are not being recommended for approval and foster carers whose approval is being recommended for termination or variation are able to **either** make representation to the fostering agency **or** the Independent Review Mechanism.

Documentation

The Fostering Service regularly reviews the Fostering Procedures Manual for Staff and the Foster Carers Handbook to take account of updates in practice issues and legislative changes where appropriate. Both meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011, accurately reflect the statement of purpose and are in line with current expectations of good practice.

The statement of purpose will be made available to all staff working for the Fostering Service; a copy will be given to all approved and prospective foster carers and it will be available upon request to all parents of children and young people looked after by the Fostering Service.

Members are regularly apprised of performance via annual reports at the Corporate Parent Panel where membership includes two foster carers.

Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel 0300 123 1231

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
April 2014