

**RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY BOARD (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)**

**Proposed Action Plan**  
**Adoption Services in Leeds**

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Actions proposed</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 1</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children's Services informs us of the timetable and action plan for the third Adoption Panel to become fully operational, so that we can monitor progress.</b></p>	<p>The third Panel was due to start meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> May</p> <p>The appointment of a second elected member is still outstanding</p>	<p>Val Hales and Sarah Johal</p>	<p>Third Panel is operational. The first meeting was held on schedule in May</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 2</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children's Services reports back to us within three months on action that will be taken to reduce administrative delays throughout the adoption process.</b></p>	<p>Temporary arrangements will be put into place to ensure the efficient administration of the Adoption Panel</p> <p>Recommendations for administrative support to the Fostering &amp; Adoption Service will arise out of the full review of the service and will acted on later in the year</p>	<p>Elizabeth Shingler</p>	<p>May 2007</p> <p>October 2007</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 3</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children's Services considers whether a similar organisational approach to that taken in Liverpool would benefit adoption in Leeds, and reports back to us with a view within three months.</b></p>	<p>This proposal will be considered as part of the Service Review as it represents a significant change to current practice and has budgetary implications</p>	<p>Elizabeth Shingler</p>	<p>October 2007</p>

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 4</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the courts service advise us how a higher priority or additional resources can be allocated to redress the balance with private cases and improve performance against the targets for dealing with care orders. The Scrutiny Board will raise this issue at a national level with the Local Government Association.</b></p>	<p>This recommendation has been addressed to the court service.</p> <p>Councillor Bale wrote to the Chair of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board and has received the following response:</p> <p>"I have now been able to talk to the consultant who is leading our work in this area. Fortunately we are actually already seeking to progress the issues you raise with the Ministry of Justice and DFES. There is a Ministerial Stakeholder Group on Care Proceedings through which we working. This enables our office holders here - Councillor Les Lawrence Chair of the LGA Children and Young People's Board especially - to discuss these issues with both the relevant Minister, Harriet Harman, and her officials. So we are on the case! I have passed your report to my colleagues and they will undoubtedly find it helpful to have this extra ammunition.</p> <p>If and when there is a real breakthrough we will let you know."</p>	<p>Scrutiny Support in liaison with LGA</p>	

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 5</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services explores, with the inter-agency group, the case for change in adoption processes to make more effective use of combined resources, whilst protecting the integrity of decision-making in the child’s best interests. We request a report back within three months.</b></p>	<p>Steve Boorman to take this proposal to the next Family Justice Council (which includes Judge Hunt) to begin discussion on how the court process might be streamlined.</p>	<p>Steve Boorman Legal services</p>	<p>May 2007</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 6</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us within three months on the potential for the regional consortium to develop a more strategic role to complement its successful ‘marketplace’ function.</b></p>	<p>Rodger walker has attended a meeting of the Adoption Consortium to discuss this. The Consortium Executive has invited the Coordinator of Adoption 22 to come to one of their meetings to discuss the suitability of a more strategic approach by the local Consortium.</p> <p>There is likely to be a need for a more strategic approach to be taken within the region at a more senior officer level than the consortium currently operates. This will be explored further</p>	<p>Rodger Walker</p> <p>Elizabeth Shingler</p>	<p>March 2007</p> <p>October 2007</p>

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 7</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services develops arrangements for keeping prospective adopters engaged and informed whilst they await matching, and reports back to us within three months.</b></p>	<p>1 Introduce monthly contact with waiting adopters by adoption officers.</p> <p>2 Have written agreement with adopters after approval about the level of information they want on children waiting for matches.</p> <p>3 Circulate details of children awaiting a match (if wanted by the adopters) and have internal information days on children waiting.</p>	<p>Val Hales and Sarah Johal</p>	<p>September 2007</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 8</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Chief Officer – Human Resources reports back to us within three months on the potential for addressing the barriers to recruitment where staff face losing accrued employment benefits.</b></p>	<p>This issue has been considered. More details on how we might respond to this are in the separate attached sheet.</p>		

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 9</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services commissions appropriate activity to raise general awareness of the range of people who can adopt children and reports back to us on initiatives proposed within three months.</b></p>	<p>1 Consideration will be given to increasing the recruitment budget. The current budget has not been increased for several years and is probably insufficient. The Service review will report on this and make recommendations</p> <p>2 Continue current involvement with the Adoption Consortium on raising awareness about adoption at a regional level particularly about BME children needing adoption</p>	<p>Elizabeth Shingler</p> <p>Sarah Johal</p>	<p>April 2008</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 10</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services reports back to us regularly on the progress of the adoption recruitment strategy and the number of black and minority ethnic prospective adopters recruited.</b></p>	<p>The Local Authority is required by Adoption Regulations to provide a 6 monthly report on Adoption Agency activity. This will provide the Scrutiny Board with a regular update on progress on all these matters.</p>	<p>Sarah Johal</p>	

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 11</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services reviews the upper age limit policy and reports back to us on the outcome of that review within three months.</b></p>	<p>1 The current policy requires at least one of the adopters to be 60 or younger when the adopted child reaches 18. Consider increasing this age limit to 65.</p> <p>This age limit can be disregarded in special circumstances.</p> <p>2 Remove bar on adopting a child of 2 or younger if adopters already have children.</p> <p>3 Remove bar on adopted children needing to be younger than existing children in the family but maintain 2 year age difference.</p>	<p>Rodger walker</p>	<p>September 2007</p>
<p><b><u>Recommendation 12</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services considers the appointment of an independent reviewing officer for adoption, and reports back to us with a view within three months.</b></p>	<p>The manager of the Independent Reviewing Officers will consider this proposal and provide a report which explores the options and makes recommendations.</p>	<p>Keith Watson and Claire Cooke</p>	<p>July 2007</p>

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<p><b><u>Recommendation 13</u></b></p> <p><b>We recommend that the Director of Children’s Services, in conjunction with the Chief Executive of Education Leeds, produces an action plan within three months for improving the education support to adopted children, in order to ensure a more consistent quality of experience for adoptive families. This should cover awareness raising for schools; social services staff awareness of education resources; and adoptive parents’ awareness of education support particularly for special educational needs.</b></p>	<p>There is a piece of work currently being undertaken to develop practice in respect of the education of looked after children. The proposals regarding the education of adopted children will be similarly considered and added to the current piece of work</p>	<p>Elizabeth Shingler and Penny Richardson</p>	<p>April 2008</p>