

6. FUNCTIONS OF THE ADOPTION PANEL

6.1 Leeds has three Adoption Panels and each meets monthly.

6.2 Membership of each Panel comprises :

Chair (an Independent Person)

Vice Chair (social worker at a senior level)

1 social worker

2 Elected members

1 Medical Adviser

3 persons independent of the local authority (e.g. an adoptive parent, an adopted adult, a social worker from a voluntary agency or a representative from the community)

1 Education representative

6.3 Advisory Roles

6.3.1 Duties of the Medical Advisor

The Medical Advisor (who is a panel member) is a qualified medical practitioner and offers advice in relation to medical aspects of adoption. They evaluate health information available to the panel about children, their birth parents and adoptive applicants and advise about its implications in relation to adoption.

6.3.2 The Medical Advisor advises staff on arrangements for access to and disclosure of medical information which is required or permitted. They will seek further medical information if they consider it necessary and will give a full report in writing to the panel.

6.3.3 The Medical Advisor will guide the agency on the information about the child's health, which should be provided to the prospective family prior to placement. The Medical Advisor is available to discuss the child's health personally with any prospective adopters. They will also advise on the extent to which the child's health should be monitored.

6.3.4 Duties of the Legal Advisor

The Legal Advisor is a practising solicitor in child & family law and is provided by Legal Services. They will receive reports of all cases presented to the Adoption panel relating to children, prospective adopters and matches and will provide advice to the panel. A Legal Advisor should be available to attend each panel meeting, but is not a member of the panel.

6.3.5 Duties of the Professional Advisor

The professional advisor is a social worker with at least five years' relevant post qualifying experience and management experience. However, the professional advisor is not a panel member.

The professional advisor's role is to

- Assist the agency with the appointment, termination and review of members of the panel.
- Be responsible for the induction and training of panel members
- Give such advice to the panel as it may request in relation to any case or generally.
- Be responsible for liaison between the agency and the panel, monitoring the performance of panel members and the administration of the panel.
- The agency advisor should maintain an overview of the quality of the agency's reports to the panel and liaise with team managers to quality assure all reports to panel. Where there are concerns about a report, the agency advisor and the panel chair should consider whether it is adequate for submission to the panel. It is recommended that the professional advisor also update the panel on the general progress of the cases it has considered.

6.4 Quoracy

6.4.1 The panel is quorate when at least five panel members, including the chair or vice chair, one of the social workers and one of the independent members are present.

6.5 Appointment of Panel Members

6.5.1 Recruitment of new panel members should be gender balanced and representative of the community they serve.

6.5.2 Prospective independent panel members should

- Declare any convictions or cautions or criminal offences and authorise a CRB check if a valid one is not already in existence,
- Provide details of two reliable referees
- Be in agreement with the policies of Leeds adoption agency
- Sign the protocol (see Appendix 4) for panel members, including a confidentiality undertaking.

6.5.3 Prospective social worker panel members should

- Be in agreement with the policies of the Leeds adoption agency
- Sign the protocol for panel members, including a confidentiality undertaking

- 6.5.4 Prospective Councillor panel members should
- Declare any convictions or cautions or criminal offences and authorise a CRB check if a valid one is not already in existence
 - Be in agreement with the policies of the Leeds adoption agency
 - Sign the protocol for panel members, including a confidentiality undertaking

6.5.5 Approval of new panel members will be via a report to the agency decision maker.

6.6 Scope of Recommendations

Regulations prescribe the functions of the Panel to include a decision on:

- a) whether adoption is in the best interests of the child and, if so, to recommend that the child should be placed for adoption. It must consider and may give advice about contact issues and also whether an application should be made for a Placement Order.
- b) whether a prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent.
- c) whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable parent for a particular child.
- d) the brief adopter's report.

6.6.1 The Adoption Panel must also consider matters relating to adoption support, contact and the delegation of parental responsibility.

6.6.2 The Panel can only make a recommendation to the adoption agency.

6.7 Continuity of the Panel

6.7.1 It is important that the panel runs smoothly and is able to finish business without interruption.

6.7.2 Any interruption by a person at the panel will be dealt with at the time, by the Chair of the panel requesting that they wait their turn to be heard. Exceptionally, a person may be asked to leave the panel and the Chair and the advisor should give reasons for such a suggestion.

6.7.3 If the disruption is caused by a panel member the panel chair and advisor will review their membership in private and attempt to resolve any concerns. Where issues have not been resolved the chair may recommend that the panel member's appointment end with the agency. Written reasons will be given for any decision to end a panel member's appointment.

6.8 Duties of the Agency Decision Maker

6.8.1 The Chief Officer, Children is currently delegated to be the decision maker for the local authority.

- 6.8.2 It is for the agency to make decisions after taking into account the Panel's recommendation(s)
- 6.8.3 Following participating in the adoption panel's recommendation, no member of the adoption panel should take part in any decision made by the adoption agency.
- 6.8.3 The adoption agency must, if their whereabouts are known to the agency, notify in writing the parent or guardian and, where it is appropriate, the father of the child, of its decision.
- 6.8.4 The agency decision maker's decision, the reason for that decision and any view the decision maker provides on the panel's advice should be recorded on the child's case record and on the adopter's case record.
- 6.8.5 Where the decision maker is minded not to accept the adoption panel's recommendation, he or she should discuss this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of the panel. The outcome of that discussion should also be recorded on the child's case record.

6.9 The Reports for the Panel

- 6.9.1 The Reports consist of a combination of:
- The Child Permanency Report (to secure the panel acceptance as a child who should be placed for adoption).
 - Form F/ Prospective Adopters Report (to approve the family as suitable to adopt).
 - The Adoption Placement Report (which is used in considering matching)
 - Any additional health assessment other than the summary from the medical advisor (which is attached to the CPR).
- 6.9.2 All papers must be received by the Fostering and Adoption Section at least 10 working days before a Panel meeting. Thirteen copies of all forms and reports are required.

6.10 Minutes of the Adoption Panel

- 6.10.1 The minutes (which should be written by someone who is not part of the adoption panel) should be checked by the panel chair.
- 6.10.2 The minutes of the adoption panel should be passed on to the agency decision maker as soon as possible
- 6.10.3 The agency decision maker must make the decision within seven working days of the panel's recommendation.

6.11 Conveying Agency Decisions

- 6.11.1 It is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that the prospective adopter is told of the final decision orally within two working days and in writing within five working days.
- 6.11.2 Following the panel's recommendations, if the agency decision maker is

mind not to approve the prospective adopter as suitable to adopt a child, they must write to them giving reasons and also giving the adoption panel's recommendation, if that recommendation is different.

- 6.11.3 The prospective adopter has forty days to decide whether to accept the decision, to make representations to the agency or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for a view from one of its panels.

6.12 Reviewing and Reporting Activities

- 6.12.1 An annual report is prepared for panel members and staff. This is sent to the Executive Board of the council each year.
- 6.12.2 The adoption agency will review the approval of prospective adopters, with whom no match has been made, after one year and annually thereafter.
- 6.12.3 The adoption panel will review disruption reports to identify learning points and monitor the progress of permanency through adoption for the child.

See the Adoption Panel Protocol (Appendix 4) for further information