

Notice of a Meeting

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Thursday, 17 May 2012 at 10.00 am County Hall

Membership

Chairman - Councillor Ann Bonner
Deputy Chairman – Councillor Dave Sexon

<i>Councillors:</i>	Janet Godden	Marilyn Badcock	Sarah Hutchinson
	Neil Owen	Anda Fitzgerald-	Nicholas P. Turner
	M. Altaf-Khan	O'Connor	Michael Waive
		Don Seale	

<i>Co-optees:</i>	Mr Chris Bevan	Mrs Sue Matthew
	2 Vacancies	

<i>By Invitation</i>	Carole Thomson	Brenda Williams
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N.B. Current membership is shown above; any changes will be confirmed at the Council meeting on 15th May 2012.

Notes:

Date of next meeting: 12 July 2012

What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

- Services for children, young people and families; preventative services; child protection; family support, educational policy; youth service; youth justice;
- Primary & secondary schools; special education; pupil services; school transport; music service

How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am on the working day before the date of the meeting.**

For more information about this Committee please contact:

Chairman	-	Councillor Ann Bonner E.Mail: ann.bonner@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Committee Officer	-	Lisa Michelson, Tel: (01865) 815673 lisa.michelson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Peter G. Clark.

Peter G. Clark
County Solicitor

May 2012

About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 74 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 630,000 residents. These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 6 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting

A hearing loop is available at County Hall.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**
2. **Declarations of Interest - see guidance note on the back page**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 1 - 6)
4. **Speaking to or petitioning the Committee**
5. **Adoption and Fostering Presentation and Q&A** (Pages 7 - 38)
10.15

The Committee will be joined by Noreen Collins, Deputy Director for Children's Social Care and YOS, as well as Teresa Rogers, Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption, for a presentation on adoption and fostering in Oxfordshire followed by a Q&A session. **(CH5a) (CH5b)**

6. **Young Carers Update** (Pages 39 - 48)
11.00

Deborah Parkhouse, Young Carers Manager will provide an update on the service. This will include a progress report **(CH6a)** on recommendations following the 2008 review. The original review can be found here:
http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s733/CH_NOV0509R05.pdf
Alternatively, a hard copy can be provided upon request.

In addition, the committee will receive an update report on the service's current position followed by a Q&A. **(CH6b)**

7. **Update on Recent Developments Regarding the Children's Trust**
(Pages 49 - 54)
11.30

Sara Livadeas, Deputy Director, Joint Commissioning, Sarah Breton, Lead Commissioner, Joint Commissioning, and Robyn Noonan, Strategy & Performance Service Manager, Joint Commissioning will provide an update on the Children's Trust in relation to the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and its connection with the Health and Wellbeing Board. **(CH7)**

8. Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duties (Pages 55 - 58)

12.15

Ben Threadgold, Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Chief Executive's Office, will provide a brief update on the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty, and will lead a discussion on the impact of these for the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

(CH8)

9. Forward Plan

12.35

INFORMATION SHARE

10. Close of Meeting

12.45

Declarations of Interest

This note briefly summarises the position on interests which you must declare at the meeting. Please refer to the Members' Code of Conduct in Part 9.1 of the Constitution for a fuller description.

The duty to declare ...

You must always declare any "personal interest" in a matter under consideration, i.e. where the matter affects (either positively or negatively):

- (i) any of the financial and other interests which you are required to notify for inclusion in the statutory Register of Members' Interests; or
- (ii) your own well-being or financial position or that of any member of your family or any person with whom you have a close association more than it would affect other people in the County.

Whose interests are included ...

"Member of your family" in (ii) above includes spouses and partners and other relatives' spouses and partners, and extends to the employment and investment interests of relatives and friends and their involvement in other bodies of various descriptions. For a full list of what "relative" covers, please see the Code of Conduct.

When and what to declare ...

The best time to make any declaration is under the agenda item "Declarations of Interest". Under the Code you must declare not later than at the start of the item concerned or (if different) as soon as the interest "becomes apparent".

In making a declaration you must state the nature of the interest.

Taking part if you have an interest ...

Having made a declaration you may still take part in the debate and vote on the matter unless your personal interest is also a "prejudicial" interest.

"Prejudicial" interests ...

A prejudicial interest is one which a member of the public knowing the relevant facts would think so significant as to be likely to affect your judgment of the public interest.

What to do if your interest is prejudicial ...

If you have a prejudicial interest in any matter under consideration, you may remain in the room but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the matter under consideration, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose, whether under a statutory right or otherwise.

Exceptions ...

There are a few circumstances where you may regard yourself as not having a prejudicial interest or may participate even though you may have one. These, together with other rules about participation in the case of a prejudicial interest, are set out in paragraphs 10 – 12 of the Code.

Seeking Advice ...

It is your responsibility to decide whether any of these provisions apply to you in particular circumstances, but you may wish to seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer before the meeting.

Agenda Item 3

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28 February 2012 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ann Bonner – in the Chair

Councillor Dave Sexon (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Neil Owen
Councillor Marilyn Badcock
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Don Seale
Councillor Sarah Hutchinson
Councillor Nicholas P. Turner
Councillor Michael Waine

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Melinda Tilley
Councillor Louise Chapman

Co-opted Members: Mr Chris Bevan
Mrs Sue Matthew

By Invitation: Carole Thomson
Brenda Williams

Officers: Lisa Michelson
Andy Roberts
Ruth Ashwell
Clare Dodwell
Noreen Collins
Sian Rodway

Whole of meeting

Part of meeting

Agenda Item Officer Attending

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.

183/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies from Councillor Altaf-Khan

184/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE

(Agenda No. 2)

None

185/12 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

No amendments.

186/12 SPEAKING TO OR PETITIONING THE COMMITTEE

(Agenda No. 4)

None

187/12 EDUCATION STRATEGY DISCUSSION

(Agenda No. 5)

Andy Roberts, Interim Deputy Director – Education and Early Intervention (AR), and Cllr Melinda Tilley, Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement lead a discussion with the Committee on the recently launched Education Strategy.

AR provided an update on the stages of the public consultation. He related that it was premature to discuss the progress and that he would be in a better position to discuss implementation details in six months' time.

The committee discussed the difficult issue of addressing schools with performance below the floor and that there were inherent challenges in coordinating the many stakeholder groups including national interests.

Brenda Williams (BW) relayed that the lack of communication between national government and the local authority caused unnecessary distress.

Cllr Tilley agreed stating that there were some national actions, by the Department for Education that were taken unilaterally and not in conjunction with the council. However, she disagreed on the point of general unrest in schools – based on her conversations and engagement.

The committee discussed leadership in schools and the difficulty in identifying and recruiting effective heads. Rather than heads being 'good' or 'bad' it is more likely the case that there is a wide range of leadership performance.

There was a view that the strategy unduly criticises schools and that a better approach would focus on building confidence.

Sue Matthew emphasised the importance of including deputy heads as much as possible and including them as a pool for leadership development. She continued that a strategy needs to exude confidence and that it needs to convince people that being a head teacher is one of the best jobs you can have.

Andy Roberts commented that a leadership programme was essential and that other authority's investment in schemes was effective (Surrey).

Carole Thomson stated that there was a duty to challenge (poor performance in schools), but that the council also had a duty to support. She agreed that there were needed efforts to 'swing the schools back' towards the authority and that there was a gap in the support network for schools.

Cllr Tilley was adamant that the challenge not be compromised. She emphasised that the committee needed to fully understand the serious situation in the county, around the slipping position of Oxfordshire schools against other authorities and in some cases the lack of basic skills in reading and writing for some students.

Cllr Turner commended officers saying that remarks had instilled confidence in the strategy and that he looked forward to seeing the implantation details.

Cllr Bonner stated that the education strategy and students' performance was probably the most important agenda item for the committee in the work programme. She agreed with suggestions that the committee needs to assist in disseminating messages to the community.

188/12 YOUTH CENTRES' ADMISSIONS POLICY

(Agenda No. 6)

This item was brought to the committee as a follow up on a review on youth centres policy that took place in the previous year's work programme.

Tan Lea, Interim Intervention Manager (Central), as well as Ruth Ashwell, Youth, Engagement and Opportunities Service Manager presented an updated picture of the implementation of the policies recommended as part of that review.

They reported that the policy is business as usual. A question was raised as to whether this policy was being taken up by partner groups who are running services. Officers confirmed that it was part of any contract the council entered into with other groups.

189/12 TEENAGE CONCEPTION UPDATE

(Agenda No. 7)

The committee had an update from Clare Dodwell, Project Manager on the latest data concerning teenage conception rates for the county. It had been expected that the data would be released from the national database in time to be relayed to the

committee. Unfortunately, delays nationally meant that officers received the data that morning and could only provide a verbal position.

The data indicates that the position for 2010 (the latest figures) has improved again. In the past 3 years' worth of results the number of conceptions has fallen from

347 in 2008
302 in 2009
251 in 2010

This calculates to a significant reduction over the past three years of approximately 30%, a major improvement.

Clare Dodwell went on to say that the strategy for the service was refreshed last year to include a particular focus on young men, a risky behaviours training programme for people working with young people, and additional partnering with schools around sex education.

Cllr Chapman commended the service on the positive trend in results saying that it is a significant accomplishment.

Cllr Turner agreed that the data was proof that the strategy was working.

The committee agreed that this item should remain on the work programme for the next year.

190/12 TROUBLED FAMILIES INITIATIVE

(Agenda No. 8)

Noreen Collins (NC) and Sian Rodway (SR) spoke to a presentation about the new national programme, Troubled Families.

There are many details of the programme which have not been clearly defined nationally, and officers are currently working to clarify some aspects.

Cllr Bonner stated that she agreed with the need for the initiative.

There was a discussion about how these families would be identified and that the criteria (as part of the presentation) was open to interpretation. There were concerns that the criteria might miss vital indicators, especially around domestic violence or challenges facing families just above some of the income criteria. The committee also suggested that the number of families identified for Oxfordshire might underestimate the impact of the recession; there may be a larger number of families who meet income eligibility than current assessments indicate.

Officers responded that the local authority has some discretion on how the list of eligible families is determined. They also reported that the criteria has been clarifying on a national level, already reflecting some of the committee's concerns.

Within a national context, the council is progressing proactively in comparison to other authorities. The data analysis to identify the families is well underway and the budget decision to allocate £1.6M means that the initiative can commence immediately.

A suggestion was made that the initiative ensure join up with schools, where possible – which the committee emphasised was a very important consideration.

The committee may consider a working group to track and evaluate progress on the initiative.

191/12 OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES

(Agenda No. 9)

Andy Roberts gave the latest position on Outdoor Centres to the committee. He reported that an expected report to the cabinet has been delayed. This report is now expected to go to Cabinet in May. The committee was disappointed to not have the report available for the meeting, but agreed to bring the item back once an update was available.

Cllr Waine particularly expressed that centre leaders were hamstrung by the bureaucracy which could be alleviated if they were to become trusts.

Cllr Turner agreed that centres do very important work and that the council should find a way to ensure that they have the greatest opportunity to succeed. He agreed that a new governance structure was needed and that they should have independent budgets.

The ensuing discussion resulted in the committee requesting to formally declare that they support a change in status for outdoor centres to become trusts. It was asked that the minutes reflect the following recommendations:

1. Officers need to ensure that property contracts do not restrict outdoor centres.
2. The committee has a preferred model to suggest for governance which is an arm's length trust.

192/12 FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 10)

None.

193/12 CLOSE OF MEETING

(Agenda No. 11)

The meeting finished at 13.00

CH3

..... in the Chair

Date of signing



■ FOSTERING
■ PANELS

ANNUAL REVIEW

April 2011 to April 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

This report refers to the sixth year of the functioning of Oxfordshire's two Fostering Panels. The Fostering Panels are constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

There are five Fostering Teams working to the Panels, including those of the North, South, City and Family Placement (Disabilities) plus the Multi Treatment Foster Care Programme (MTFC) team. During 2011 it was decided that the Family Placement (Disabilities) team would no longer stand as a specific team and its members have therefore joined the area Fostering teams.

2. ROLES/TASK OF PANEL

The Panel task includes addressing work presented as follows:

- Applications from prospective foster carers for a range of tasks
- Applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for children already or about to be placed with them
- Taking a view in Connected Persons cases where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is proposed in order for assessments to be completed
- First Annual Reviews of foster carers and other Reviews which discuss continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care
- De-Registration of carers
- Minutes of disruption meetings chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers, where a permanent placement has broken down
- Quality Assurance of work presented

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective carers or re-approve approved carers to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

3. OVERVIEW OF WORK PRESENTED TO PANELS

Foster Carer Approvals (unrelated carers) 1st April 2011 – March 31st 2012

Type	New carers
Long Term	3
Long term, Short term & Relief Care	2
Parent & Child & relief	1
Relief Care	5
Short Break Care	4
Short Break & Relief Care	2
Short term	6
Short Term & Long Term	1
Short term & Relief	10
MTFC, Short Term & Relief Care	1
Total	35 (41 previous year)

In addition to new carer approvals the fostering panel approved changes to approval for 21 approved carers, a significant increase on last year's figure (13) providing more in house foster placements.

The total number of unrelated carers has decreased by approximately 15% during the past year. It is important to note that a further 44 applications from prospective foster carers were either ongoing or taken up in 2011/12 but were not approved for a variety of reasons. Please see appendix 2 for further details. This figure is higher than that for 2010/11 when 36 applicants did not achieve approval. These cases often involve many weeks of work before the decision is taken not to proceed to panel. A further factor has been the time taken to developing the MTFC A programme due to the need to recruit and train staff before they were in a position to start recruiting carers.

a) Ethnicity of carers 1st April 2011 – March 31st 2012

Newly Approved Foster Carer Ethnicity (sub category of above)

Ethnicity	No of Households
White British	29
White/Any Other White	2
Black/Black British African	1
White/Irish	1
Asian or Asian British/ Any other Asian Background	1
Mixed	1
TOTAL	35

Efforts continue to recruit families from Black and Minority ethnic backgrounds and this remains an area of focus in the recruitment strategy.

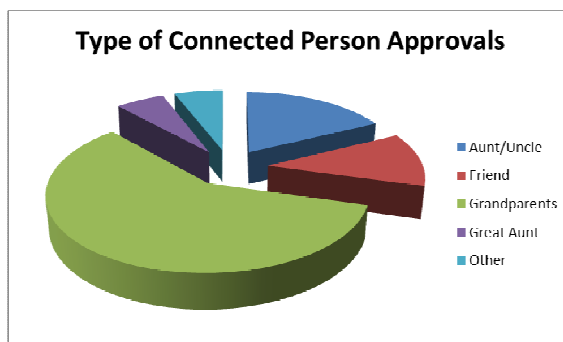
b) Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Approvals

Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Fostering Panel considers applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for specific children who are about to be placed with them or are already placed with them.

A Connected Person can be temporarily approved as a foster carer by the Agency Decision Maker so that an immediate placement can be made. This temporary approval lasts for a period of up to 16 weeks to enable the full assessment to be carried out.

During 2011-12, 17 Connected Persons approvals came to Panel covering 25 children. This represents a decrease of 12 carers when compared with the 29 approvals in the year before. The reduction may relate to the change in legislation and changes in timescales for presentation of assessments to panel and the way in which this was recorded previously.

A breakdown of these carers by their relationship to the child(ren) placed with them continues to show that Grandparents are key carers in these situations.



Connected Persons applications provoke much thought and debate because of the issues they throw up, alongside the significant needs of the children that they will be caring for. Panel has the task of balancing the needs of specific children, the complexities of the family and wider family relationships as well as any risk factors that there may be inherent in the situation. Panel gives due consideration to whether the placement is for the short, medium or long term. Panel also frequently needs to be mindful of any legal proceedings running alongside applications to Panel and on occasions Panel's work is superseded by legal decisions.

4. ANNUAL REVIEWS

35 First Annual Reviews and 8 other annual reviews were presented to Panel during the year representing an increase in first annual reviews of 60%. 81% of all the reviews presented to panel were first annual reviews; for the remaining percentage, the annual reviews were brought to Panel in the context of Standards of Care issues as well as changes of approval. Panel have continued to encourage carers to attend their first annual review and will be tracking this data moving forward.

Annual Reviews are essential in tracking the carers' development, necessary to meet Foster Carer Standards. The Training, Support and Development Standards implemented in April 2008 require all new carers to complete the standards in their first year of approval.

5. DISRUPTION MEETINGS

During 2011-12, one set of disruption meeting minutes have been presented to Panel and this represents a key area for development in 2012-13 so that Panel can review what has occurred in such situations and assist the Fostering Service in learning any lessons from the breakdown of permanent placements.

6. COMPLAINTS

Please see Appendix I.

7. OTHER TRENDS IN RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

- 2011/12 continued to be a period of uncertainty regarding funding for the MTFC programme and this is reflected in the low number of carers approved for this programme. Funding has now been agreed moving forward and Panel are optimistic that the number of carers recruited to this programme will increase in the coming year.
- 95% of new unrelated carers are non-smokers (compared to 85% in 2010/11) demonstrating the success of continuing efforts to recruit to the no smoking policy for the well-being of children.
- Panel have worked to their capacity during the year - including scheduling of extra panels - and are reviewing the membership and frequency of panels in order to ensure that the future needs of the service are met.

8. TERMINATION OF APPROVAL 1ST APRIL 2011 – 31ST MARCH 2012

a) De-registrations

Reasons for Carers Leaving: Apr 2011 - Mar 2012 (DfE Categories)

D2.1 Adoption	2
D2.2 Residence Order	1
D2.3 Special Guardianship Order	4
D2.4 Child (or children) no longer placed with the Family and Friends carer	9
D2.5 Approval terminated – carer unsuitable	1
D2.6 Approval terminated – carer no longer active	7
D2.7 Retirement or resignation (all grounds)	31
D2.7g Resignation to work for another fostering agency (IFA)	0
D2.7h Resignation to work for another Local Authority	0
TOTAL	55

De-registrations have decreased by 13% compared to last year. Family and Friends carers often care for children for short periods only which leads to a higher turnover of carers. Panel have been concerned by the level of resignations and, in their QA role, have imposed additional checks when these notifications are brought to Panel. It is hoped that moving forward this additional information will help qualify de-

registrations and give a greater understanding of the reasons people are ceasing to be Foster Carers with Oxfordshire.

The system to review the Foster Carers Register has been rigorously maintained in order to establish the most accurate version of the Register for effective use by Duty Placement Team especially for emergencies. Development work on this is still on-going in the Framework-i database and it is hoped in future that this additional data will be reported regularly to Panel and the management team.

Similar to 2010-11 13% of leavers have left fostering to take permanent placements under a legal order (adoption, residence orders and SGOs) – a positive outcome for children.

9. CONSULTATION

Where there are contentious factors that arise during assessment cases may be presented to Panel for an early interim view. This allows the Panel to steer the next stage of the assessment or provide a view as to whether to proceed with the assessment.

10. PANEL FUNCTIONING

a) Panel Attendance; frequency and number of meetings

The Service comprises two Panels, each sitting once a month. 29 Panels were held during the year which included a number of extra panels to accommodate the increase in recruitment and applicants attending. This year, quoracy has been sustained by members serving on alternative panels on occasions. Agendas have had to be regularly extended to accommodate work flow and the objective of tighter timescales. A challenge for agenda setting is the need to prioritise Connected Persons work and any Standards of Care issues in order to meet timeframes.

b) Membership

In accordance with the Fostering Regulations, Guidance and National Minimum Standards, a new Central List of Panel members has been drawn up, see Appendix II. New Panel membership agreement documents have been signed by all members and all members have been given a copy of the County Council Whistle-blowing policy in accordance with Standard 19.6.

Recruitment objectives have been met: from October 2011 a temporary Independent Chair was in place, a permanent Independent Chair has been in place since January 2012, following a period of induction. Both Panels have Vice Chairs. A new Panel Advisor started in February 2012, following induction. Panels comprise members with a mix of experience

required by legislation. A priority for the coming year is to review and extend the diversity of panel membership.

Panel members receive their papers 5 working days in advance. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to five hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared.

Panel members keep up-to-date with fostering matters: all are or soon will be members of *Fostering Network* and receive the *Foster Care* periodical. Once registered with *Fostering Network*, members have access to a considerable online resource. All members are provided with a copy of *Effective Fostering Panels, BAAF*, to enhance their understanding of the panel process. They have also received publications providing full details of changes to fostering regulations and NMS 2011.

Panel members are aware of what constitutes a conflict of interest and declare this at the beginning of a case slot; this is then recorded in the minutes.

c) Appraisal of Panel Members

The appraisal of all members takes place annually. All involved valued this opportunity to consider Panel functioning, outside the day to day work of panel.

d) Panel Training

In May 2011, there was a training day specifically for Panel members on aspects of Panel functioning. Panel members attended training on the National Minimum Standards and associated regulatory changes in June 2011. A further training day for panel members and staff took place in October 2011 on the subject of Contact and Permanence: creating a practice framework for the 21st century. The day was led by John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development at BAAF. Sessions were led by Claire Jerram, County Solicitor, who gave an overview of the legal framework and Bruce Newman, adopter and panel member.

The Panel Chair is a member of the Independent Chairs Group for Fostering associated with the Fostering Network, which meets several times per annum. The Panel adviser attends a monthly management meeting with fostering team managers, fostering service meetings and fostering consortium meetings with a group of other local authorities.

e) Working with the Agency Decision Maker

Shaun Hanks has continued to be the Agency Decision Maker alongside his Safeguarding & Quality Assurance role. Hannah Farncombe, Safeguarding Manager, is responsible for covering the ADM role when Shaun Hanks is unavailable.

There have been a few occasions when the panel recommendations were not supported by the Agency Decision Maker. These have related to complex cases and included a case where the Panel were unable to reach a clear majority decision and the case was referred to the ADM for review.

f) **Transparency and openness**

- Carers attending Panel - Of the 37 unrelated carers approved 78% attended panel (an increase of 12% on 2010/11). Of the 17 Connected Persons applicants, 53% (as compared to 25% in the previous year) have chosen to accept the invitation.
- Observers - Student social workers, members of staff on induction, members of Senior Management and prospective panel members, have all joined panel to observe. Panel welcomes observing at meetings. It is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process, particularly for those who will present cases to Panel for the first time.
- Panel Evaluation - both applicants and social workers attending panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form - this information is fed back to Panel and helps to shape panel direction moving forward. Comments from applicants vary:

We found everyone very welcoming & supportive

A bit intimidating with set-up very formal - I was nervous

The panel experience was a good one and we were made to feel at ease.

Many attending social workers have also taken the opportunity to comment on their panel experience:

A very positive experience

Unfortunate use of words when referring to living arrangements, which could be interpreted as prejudicial

Panel were extremely helpful ... particularly when seeking advice

- Panel brochure - This has been re-written to give those attending Panel a greater level of detail about what to expect in advance of panel, it includes details of those who make up the Central List and is attached at Appendix II.

g) **Quality Assurance**

Panel fulfils this function in the following ways:

- Working with the service on policy changes
- Introduction of the Fostering Panel Quarterly Bulletin, providing 'Top Ten' messages back to the Fostering Service

- Chair and Vice Chair meet regularly with the Fostering Manager
- Evaluation Forms for feedback from Applicants and Social workers
- Plans to bring every third Annual Review to Panel
- Providing feedback to presenting social workers and their managers
- Requesting further information on decision-making where necessary.

h) Medical Advisors Liaison

Panel has designated Medical Advisors who do not attend panel but who comment on applicants' medicals. The Panel Chair and Advisor attend quarterly liaison meetings with Oxfordshire's Medical and Legal Advisors. Panel refers to the OCC Smoking Policy which indicates that ideally applicants and carers should be non-smokers. This aim has been achieved in part - 95% of newly approved carers were none smokers this year compared with 85% last year. Panel also draws on new Guidance issued by BAAF regarding weight levels for good health. It is the current policy of the authority to recommend that all approved carers are immunised against Hepatitis B. Full medicals will be required from 1 April 2012 for all prospective carers including short break and relief carers.

i) Panel Administration

Ensuring that Framework-i tasks are completed and that the system provides all the information needed continues to be a challenge. Since December 2011 a new Panel Administrator has been in post and throughout this transition the administration of panel has continued to be of a high standard. Following a positive decision, no placements are made until a foster carer agreement has been completed by the agency and signed by the carer.

j) New Fostering Regulations/National Minimum Standards 2011

The Chair of Panel has assisted panel with their understanding of the New Fostering Regulations/National Minimum Standards 2011. An audit has been carried out of panel's compliance to them and an action plan put in place.

k) Independent Review Mechanism

2 carers did not agree with Panel's recommendations and the ADM's decision and went to the IRM. The IRM endorsed the recommendation of Panel on the first case referred to them. The IRM report was shared with the Panels to consider the learning points that had been identified and action plans were prepared. The other case referred to the IRM has not yet been heard.

l) Budgets

A small budget is available to pay panel members' allowances, travel expenses and meeting refreshments.

m) **Accommodation**

Panel meets at Nash Court on Oxford Business Park. The venue comprises of a large Conference Room and waiting rooms on the ground floor. It provides a welcoming setting, with parking for panel members, applicants and presenting staff.

n) **Fostering Inspection**

Ofsted carried out its long anticipated inspection of Oxfordshire's Fostering Service in the first week of March 2012. The outcome of this inspection was good, with outstanding features in three out of six categories. The report is still awaited at the time of writing.

11. OBJECTIVES FOR 2012/2013

- **Ensure all minutes from disruptions meetings of permanent placement come to panel.**
- **Respond to the objectives of 2010/13 Recruitment Strategy and process 50 applications for unrelated carers within the new timescale of 8 months**
- **All third Foster carer annual reviews to be presented to the fostering panel in addition to first annual reviews to improve quality assurance**
- **Review and extend the diversity of panel membership.**
- **Review of the Evaluation forms to include feedback from prospective and approved carers attending Panel.**
- **Continue work to improve reporting from the Framework-I database.**

Wendy Gill
Independent Chair: Fostering Panels

March 2012

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Complaints received by the Fostering Service

1st April 2011 to 31 March 2012

Complaint made by child/young person: 10 (3 upheld, 5 not upheld, 2 partly upheld).

Complaint made by parent of child/young person: 3(none upheld)

Complaints made by Foster Carer: 4(none upheld).

Complaints made by member of public/MP: 3(2 partly upheld, 3rd ongoing).

Complaints made by other professionals: 8 (6 upheld, 2 not upheld).

Appendix 2

Reasons prospective foster carers who withdrew /were counselled out in 2011/12

Reason	Number
Applicant withdrew due to concerns about the impact of fostering on her own children	1
Applicant withdrew due to medical issues in the wider family	1
Applicant withdrew due to medical reasons	4
Applicant withdrew due to work commitments	1
Applicant withdrew felt not the right time	9
Applicant withdrew not the right time for own children	1
Applicant withdrew to go to other LA: felt distance for contact would be better managed	1
Applicant withdrew: adoption assessment started	1
Applicant withdrew: pregnant	2
Applicants withdrew felt not the right time	4
Applicants withdrew to go to an IFA	1
Applicants withdrew: moving house	1
Counselled out due to issues with references	4
Counselled out due to lack of communication from applicants	6
Counselled out due to medical issues	1
Counselled out health and safety concerns in the home	1
Counselled out: Carers both work full time and want to take on child under 6 years.	1
Counselled out: no longer have spare room for fostering	2
Future of job uncertain. Applicant felt was not the right time to proceed	2
Total	44

APPENDICES

Appendix 3 - Panel Brochure

A Guide to Oxfordshire's Fostering Panels

This guide has been prepared to give you information about Oxfordshire's Fostering Panel. It provides details about what you can expect to happen when you attend the panel, either as a prospective or existing approved foster carer.

About the Panels

All Fostering Panels are required to have at least 5 members, although in practice there may be more, who meet to make recommendations about the approval of prospective carers or their continuation in the service after approval through reviews. The panels are constituted under the Fostering Services Regulations (England) 2011.

Panels meet every two weeks, on a Wednesday, and are chaired by an independent person. Other members of Panel are drawn from a central list and may include a Panel Advisor, Children's Services representatives, an elected Councillor and independent members who have experience of fostering or working with children. Members receive regular training. All members are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau.

Panel Procedure

The Panel does not make decisions: it makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker about the cases it considers. The Agency Decision maker is the Service Manager with responsibility for safeguarding and quality control.

To enable Panel members to carry out their work effectively they receive and read, well in advance of the meeting, detailed reports written by the Social Worker.

Attending Panel

All people who wish to become foster carers and all foster carers who are having a review will be invited to Panel. The Panel believe that it is of central importance that you attend so that you have an opportunity to give feedback and ask questions about any aspect of the fostering service. You will always receive the paperwork in advance and have a chance to read, comment and sign it if you agree with its contents. The Panel will give you feedback about your application or review and by attending we believe that your attendance at Panel symbolises your commitment to the teamwork that is so crucial to make fostering work. We strongly encourage you to come to Panel.

The Day of the Panel

Members will have a discussion about your case, before you join us. This is an opportunity for the Panel to raise issues they want clarified.

The Panel Chair will then come to meet you and bring you into the meeting. Members will introduce themselves and tell you their role. Every effort will be made to put you at your ease and although the Panel is a formal meeting it is hoped that there is an open, friendly atmosphere.

Individual Panel Members will ask you questions. You may feel that some questions are unnecessary or intrusive, however, it is the responsibility of the Panel to satisfy themselves of your suitability and the most important factor in their deliberations is protecting the best interests of the children in Oxfordshire's care. We will always treat Applicants/Carers with respect and consideration.

You will be asked if you wish to make any further comments before being asked to leave the meeting. Your social worker will stay in Panel for any remaining questions. The Panel will have further discussion based on what they have heard and read to reach its recommendation by putting it to a vote.

Your social worker will inform you of Panel's recommendation and a summary of the reasons, either directly after your slot in Panel or shortly afterwards.

The recommendation may be one of the following:

- Agree the recommendation of the Fostering Service
- Not agree the recommendation of the Fostering Service
- Defer a recommendation for more information

All recommendations are passed to the Agency Decision Maker who will write to you within seven working days with the decision.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the panel last?

The Panel normally meets between 9.45am – 2.30pm and considers several cases during that period. Timescales vary depending on the type of case being presented. If you are attending for an approval of your application as Carers you should allow at least one hour although the Panel may only see you for about 20 minutes of that time. Annual reviews are scheduled for about 30 minutes.

You will be asked to come at a specific time and will be asked to wait in another room whilst Panel discuss your case. If you have a strong preference for a particular time of the day, perhaps for child care reasons, please let your social worker know and the Panel Administrator will do all she can to accommodate this. We do our best to keep to time but due to the complexity of cases we can overrun. Please be patient with us as we need to be sure that we have addressed every case fully and thoroughly.

Where is the Panel held?

The Panel is normally held at Nash Court, 4440 Oxford Business Park, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2RU and there is a reserved car park in front of the building for people attending Panel or further spaces are available to the rear of the building. A map and directions to the office is attached with this brochure. If you are running late the reception phone number is 01865 897670. On arrival you will be advised about the waiting area and refreshments will be available.

What if my application is turned down or my approval discontinued and I don't agree with this?

If your case has not been approved the Chair of Panel will advise you on the day with reasons. This will be followed up by a letter of confirmation. If you are unhappy with the decision or believe that you have been unfairly treated you should discuss this with your Social Worker who will advise you of the review procedure. In summary, you have the right to, either, write to the Agency Decision Maker to make a representation of your case within 28 days. Alternatively, you may apply within 28 days to the Secretary of State for an independent review panel. The Regulations covering this are within the Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

What if I know someone on the Panel or they know me?

All Panel members have signed a confidentiality statement that binds them not to discuss any information they read in the Panel outside of its remit.

Below is some written information about the Panel members on the Central List. If you know a Panel member please let your Social Worker know in advance. Similarly, Panel members are required to declare an interest before a discussion takes place, if they know the applicant. A decision will then be taken by the Chair about whether they should be involved in any discussions or recommendations about your case.

We hope that this booklet has answered some of your questions and given you some idea of what to expect if you decide to attend Panel. Inevitably there will be some questions that we have not covered. Please raise these with your Social Worker. Remember that your attendance at the Panel will give you the opportunity to meet the people who will be making the recommendations about you and your family. It is also the chance to be part of the decision making process.

**If you have any queries about the Fostering Panel please
contact Joy Vincent, Fostering Panel Adviser on
01865 323011 or e-mail: joy.vincent@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Who are we?

WENDY GILL, Independent Chair of Panel



Wendy has over 30 years' experience as a registered social worker. She has worked in several local authority Children's Services, in practitioner and management roles, and for a voluntary fostering and adoption agency called "Parents for Children". For the past 7 years she has chaired the Fostering Panel for a London Borough. She also works as a consultant for a national organisation in Ireland, putting in place a framework for intervening in the lives of children with school attendance problems. In 2006 she had a paper published in a book called the "Health of Looked after Children and Young People", based on research into the factors that lead to the breakdown of foster placements and adoptions.

JOY VINCENT, Fostering Panel Adviser



Joy, a registered social worker, qualified in 1990 and on moving to Oxfordshire in 1994, specialized in child care and has worked as a practitioner and then as a manager for the Looked After Children team in the south of the county. In recent years she has managed the children's social care training team and latterly the children's social care complaints and resolutions service. In addition she has served on Oxfordshire's adoption panel for five years.

HELEN SMITH, Fostering Panel Administrator



Helen is degree and post graduate qualified and has over 20 years of administrative experience with a wide range of organisations including work for local universities, hospitals and recently for an adoption support charity. For the past two years she has worked for Oxfordshire County Council on the Children's Safeguarding Team and joined the Fostering Panel at the end of 2011.

Oxfordshire's Fostering Panel 2011-12

County Councillor Janet Godden, Elected Member

Janet has recently re-joined panel having originally served from 1998-2005 on one of the County's three Adoption and Fostering panels. From 2000-2004 she served as Chair of the Oxfordshire Learning Disability Partnership Board and was also Chair of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire NHS Mental Health Foundation Trust (2005-2010). She is a member of North Hinksey Parish Council since 2007. Janet is a parent and now enjoys being a grandparent!

County Councillor Anda Fitzgerald O'Connor, Elected Member

Anda is a County Councillor serving on the Children's Panel as well as other committees to do with youth work and children. She is on the executive board of a small charity 'Oxfordshire Play Association' that promotes play for play's sake for children throughout the county.

Deborah Backhaus, Independent Member

Deborah is a retired children's nurse. She has been a Panel member of an Independent Fostering Agency since 2004, and is a governor at a non-maintained special school run by Action for Children. She is a magistrate in Oxfordshire, sitting in both the Adult and Family Courts.

Ron Hart MBE Independent Member

Ron has been a foster carer for another authority, Buckinghamshire, for many years and he and his wife are now permanently committed to raising a child with special needs. He has fostered healthy as well as special needs children and therefore has a good understanding of what is required of foster carers and the issues they will face. Ron is an experienced Panel member.

Maggie Mackenzie, Independent Member

Maggie is the Designated Nurse Looked After Children for Oxfordshire. She is a Registered Nurse, Midwife and Health Visitor.

Julie Marcks, Independent Member

Julie was adopted as a child and therefore has been a service user. Her subsequent career in nursing included extensive management responsibilities at a major Oxfordshire teaching hospital. Following early retirement, Julie has contributed her many skills to panel and has also been able to enjoy her interests including walking. Julie is married and has relished her role parenting her step daughter.

Nigel Pullan, Independent Member

Nigel is developing his career in foster care with Buckinghamshire and loving it! His earlier life included an extensive international career in business following the award of a degree from Oxford. Nigel is married and is a parent himself.

Val Sheldon, Independent Member

Valerie, a Registered Social Worker, has worked as a social worker for over 35 years. She has worked on a busy frontline duty team in a very deprived area in North West London. She then specialized in children & families work and became a Paediatric Social Worker at Great Ormond Street Hospital and then the Paediatric Dept. at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, as a Senior Practitioner. Val is now retired.

Bob Wheeler, Independent Member

Bob is a foster carer with an Independent Fostering Agency and is experienced at fostering teenagers. Previously Bob worked for 4 years at the Mulberry Bush School in Standlake with children who had a high level of need. Bob recently completed his first year on panel and is an enthusiastic member.

Claire Ainsworth, Staff Member

Claire, a well-established member of panel, is a Supervising Social Worker in the Fostering Team South, who has many years of social work experience which includes working with adolescents, family support and family placement (both fostering and adoption). Claire has achieved the Child Care Award, is a Registered Social Worker and has also been a foster carer herself. She also has a degree in the arts field.

Denise Allen, Staff Member

Denise, a Registered Social Worker, has until recently been working in the Fostering Team (Disabilities) and is now in the Fostering Team (North) focusing on carers in the Short Break scheme. She has previously served on a Fostering Panel in the independent sector and is looking forward to contributing to Oxfordshire's panels.

Michele Howe, Staff Member

Michele, a Registered Social Worker, has recently transferred from the City Fostering Team where she was a Senior Practitioner, to the MTFC Team in Nash Court; Michele is a Supervising Social Worker and contributes to the training of Foster Carers in the KEEP programme which offers on-going development after approval. Michele's background lies in journalism.

Annie Stockford, Staff Member

Annie is a Senior Practitioner in the Family Support Team in Witney. She is a Registered Social Worker who qualified in 1990 and contributes her extensive knowledge of the court process and child protection conferences to panel. Annie is undertaking the Child Care Award. Annie has also been a school governor for 4 years!

Wendy Queralt, Staff Member, Vice Chair

Wendy is a Snr Practitioner in the Fostering Team (City). She qualified as a social worker in 2005 at Edinburgh, having previously gained a BA in Psychology at Swansea. She recently did a 6 months stint in the Duty Placement Team and currently works on the foster carers recruitment initiative.

Christine Warriner, Staff Member

Christine, a Registered Social Worker, is a Supervising Social Worker in the Fostering Team (South). Christine has experience on the Practice Assessment Panel of the Social Work Course at Oxford Brookes University in relation to evaluating students` standards. She has an interest in mental health practice as an ASW and undertaken work as a Complaints Officer for Oxfordshire County Council; she is a Trustee of the Mulberry Bush School.

Jenny Wiles, Staff Member, Vice Chair

Jenny has been involved in practice in Fostering and Adoption for 20 years. Her current Senior Practitioner role with Oxfordshire`s Children, Young People and Families is based in the Family Placement Team (N) leading in Kinship Care. Jenny has also been a manager with Duty and Assessment Teams for two other Local Authorities, for 7 years. She had achieved the Child Care Award.

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OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Adoption & Permanency Panel April 2011- March 2012

1. Panel Workload

Oxfordshire continues to run three Adoption and Permanency Panels which each meet once a month, at County Hall Oxford.

During the past 12 months, 35 panel meetings have been held, with the workload of cases coming to the three panels being quite variable in quantity.

Very tight time frames continue to be operational in court, into which panel hearings must fit. Timely panel hearings remain crucial in avoiding delay for young children with care plans for permanency.

Care Proceedings

The number of Care Proceedings being issued over the past 12 months has remained high and led to a continued rise in the number of children in the looked after system. This has led to a subsequent rise in the number of children needing to be placed for adoption over the year.

This rise in numbers has continued to cause pressure on resources and a rapid use of the bank of waiting approved adopters in the county.

Panel Membership

In April 2011 the government introduced new regulations for adoption.

Panel members now join a Central List and panels can be configured with any member from the central list. This has ensured greater flexibility in terms of running panels when panel members are absent, however there are still regulations on the makeup of each panel with rules remaining regarding quoracy.

There have been some changes to panel membership since April 2011.

Social Workers Kim Brown, Natalie Allen, Anne McKay and Helen Cox-Bolder have joined the Central List to replace departing social work members. Catherine Lloyd has joined the Central List as an independent member and is a specialist in education and mental health.

All our panel members remain very committed to their roles and attendance levels are good, Donald McPhail, our Independent Panel Chair since April 2006 has continued chairing all three panels.

Panel Training

A training day for staff and panel members took place in October 2011 on the subject of: Contact and Permanence: creating a practice framework for the 21st Century

The day was led by John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development at BAAF. Sessions were also led by Claire Jerram from the Legal Department who gave an overview of the legal framework, and Bruce Newman, adopter and panel member. The day was well received by staff and panel members.

Quality Assurance

A regular 'Adoption Strategy Meeting' held with senior managers in the department, including the Agency Decision Maker, Legal advisors to panel and the Panel Chair and Advisor, continues to address any issues in the work of the panel and wider matters regarding quality assurance.

In addition, the panel requests six monthly update reports on all cases presented at panel to inform panel of the progress of agreed plans and to highlight any cases that may not have proceeded to plan.

To comply with new adoption regulations, panel now reports on the quality of written panel reports provided by staff and must record in the panel minutes the reasons given for cases which are not reaching panel in the desired timeframes as laid down in the regulations.

These timescales are as follows:

- Adoption plans should be presented within 6 weeks of the statutory review where adoption was identified as the permanence plan for the child.
- Panels should make a recommendation on the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt within eight months of receipt of the prospective adopter's application to be assessed.
- Panels make a recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular adopters within six months of the adoption agency's decision maker deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

The Panel records the reasons in the written minutes of the panel meeting when the above timescales are not met. This year's report on Oxfordshire's compliance with these time frames is reported on in the next section.

Issues Identified by Panel Chair

- There is a need to ensure that documentation for children's plans includes the rationale for the removal of the child from the birth parents, especially when the plan relates to a new child of the family whose siblings had been removed previously.
- There is a need to develop shared principles on both face to face contact and letterbox contact after adoption.
- Together or apart assessments need to be available to panel at the time of considering the plan for adoption.

OFSTED Inspection July 2011

In July 2011, the Adoption Service was inspected by OFSTED. The outcome of this inspection was a quality rating of good, with outstanding features in two categories:

- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do. This refers to support available to help children develop positive relationships with their adopters.
- Helping children make a positive contribution. This broadly covers the way the Adoption Service engages with children and listens to their views.

In terms of recommendations for further improvement, the inspectors suggested that Child Permanence Reports are improved, specifically to take into account the wishes and feelings of younger children.

This issue has now been addressed with training for staff who write Child Permanence Reports on this subject and workshops for teams working on adoption planning.

The lead inspector observed Panel B during the inspection and the inspection report stated that 'There is very thorough scrutiny of assessments presented to panel and the panel's role in monitoring the agency's progress regarding their own recommendations is a key strength.'

Panel Feedback

All those attending panel, both staff and applicants are encouraged to complete feedback forms to inform panel and the service of any issues to be addressed to improve the experience of those attending panel. It is encouraging that the majority of responses from panel users are very positive and a high percentage of returned feedback forms reported general satisfaction with the experience of attending panel.

In addition, all panel members have an annual appraisal of their performance and an opportunity to give feedback on their experience of the service and to identify any development needs.

Disruptions

There have been no disruptions in adoption placements over the past year (disruption being defined as children returned to Local Authority care after placement with adopters, before an adoption order is made).

Oxfordshire now has well-structured training and support in place for adopters in the early years of a new placement until a child reaches independence.

Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care Project

Oxfordshire's Multi -Dimensional Treatment Foster Care project (MTFC) is now in its fourth year and has included some children with a plan for adoption moving to MTFC foster carers in preparation for an eventual adoption placement.

There are plans for a new 16 week training programme for adopters with young children already in placement, to be introduced in the autumn of 2012.

A new 'Adopt' training programme for adoptive parents with placements of children aged 2-8 years is currently in development and due to be introduced in the autumn of 2012.

Three children during the last year have moved to adoptive placements from the MTFC scheme (a sibling group of two and a single child).

An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay

In March 2012, the government published their Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay, which sets out a range of proposals to speed up the process for children; to overhaul the service for prospective adopters and to strengthen local accountability for the timeliness of adoption services.

Further changes to the Adoption legislation and guidance are expected in October 2012.

In order to track each local authority's accountability and performance, the government will publish Adoption Scorecards for each local authority which will then be updated annually. The scorecards will highlight key indicators for how rapidly local authorities place children in need of adoption and how swiftly deal with prospective adopters.

The government plans to revise the Adoption system in order to encourage a broader range of prospective adopters and will be introducing a new training and assessment process, which will be completed within 6 months rather than the current 8 months.

The role of Adoption Panels will also change as a result of the new regulations to be introduced this summer. The action plan states that panels will continue to hear cases for approving adoption applicants and linking children for adoption but will no longer hear cases regarding adoption plans for children in court proceedings. In these cases the courts alone will agree the adoption plans.

These changes have major implications for the way Oxfordshire runs its adoption service and adoption panels in future months and a local action plan is now being set in motion.

There will be a need to establish the form of information to be presented to the panel on the child, as the only time the panel will address the needs of the child will be at the matching panel when the child is considered for linking with specific adopters.

2. Adoption Panel Business: April 2011 - March 2012

Plans for Adoption

52 children had plans for adoption recommended by panel over the past 12 months. This is a significant increase compared with the total of 44 children with adoption plans made in the year 2010-11.

27 of these children were boys, and 25 were girls.

This group of children was made up of:-

- 7 pairs of siblings
- 3 groups of three siblings
- 23 single children

All of these children were subject to Care Proceedings.

30 out of these 52 cases were not presented to panel within 6 weeks of the plan for adoption.

Reasons for Delay were as follows:

- 24 due to court delay
- 4 due to staff pressures
- 1 due to request for further information from the agency decision maker
- 1 due to child's inclusion in MTFC programme

Change of plan from adoption during 2011-12

One child with a severe disability who had a previous plan for long term fostering had his plan changed to adoption, as his foster carer has applied to adopt him. This is a very positive outcome for this child, who has complex needs but will now have the long term security of an adoptive placement.

One child had her plan changed in court from one of adoption to Special Guardianship by her current foster carers.

Age range and Ethnic Origin of children with adoption plans

The age range of these children was:-

- 22 aged under 2 years
- 17 aged 2-5 years
- 13 aged 5 and over

The oldest child to have an adoption plan agreed over the past year was aged 7 years.

The ethnic origin of these children was:-

- 42 White
- 9 Mixed ethnicity
- 1 Asian

Approvals of Adopters

21 couples were recommended for approval as adopters during the past twelve months, together with 2 single adopters, giving a total of 23 households approved.

Of the 23 approvals, 17 met the 8 month time period from adoption application to approval, the period of time set down in the Adoption Standards for home studies to be presented to panel leaving 5 which did not meet this time frame.

Of those applications which did not meet the 8 month timeframe, all were due in part to circumstances related to the applicants and in one case the reason was also due to staff pressure.

Reasons for Delay for applications not meeting the 8 month time frame:

- 1 for the applicants' work/study plans
- 4 for medical issues relating to the applicants

There were no applicants turned down at panel and thus no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism (I.R.M.)

Of those approved, two sets of foster carers were approved to adopt children who were already in their care.

Children Linked for Adoption

41 children were linked for adoption during the past twelve months – of this group 23 were girls and 19 boys.

Of these children:

- 18 children were linked within 6 months of their plans being agreed.
- 23 children were linked outside this time scale
- This group not meeting the time scales included 5 sibling groups of two children, 1 sibling group of three children and 5 single child

Children not placed within 6 months of plan for adoption- Reasons for Delay were as follows:

23 cases did not meet the timescale:

- 13 were in sibling groups
- 3 children have complex needs
- 2 children had a prior placement that broke down during introductions
- 2 children had a potential linking with adopters who subsequently changed their minds
- 3 children are of dual heritage and an ethnic match was searched for in the first instance.

Panel recommended the linking of three mixed race children, including a sibling group of two, over the past year, with white adopters, after searches for adopters who could provide an ethnic match for these children was unsuccessful. One mixed race child joined a half sibling already placed with white adopters.

Location of Adoption Placements

31 children were linked with Oxfordshire approved adopters and 10 children were placed in out of county placements.

These 10 children consisted of:

- one set of three siblings who moved to adopters with family connections
- two siblings with challenging behaviour who moved to a placement with a voluntary agency
- five single children; four of whom have disabilities and special needs
- one child joined the adoptive family of an older adopted half sibling.

General trends for adoption over the past year

There is a trend continuing from the previous year of a large number of children under 2 years with plans for adoption-this year the figure was 42% of all children with an adoption plan.

Children under two years are usually relatively straightforward to place and the only children in this age range who were not linked with Oxfordshire adopters were children of ethnic minority heritage.

In order to meet the requirements of the government's adoption action plan, there will need to be an increase in the pool of Oxfordshire adopters to give enough choice of placements in the coming months.

32 Adoption Orders have been made in court over the past year which is an increase of 8 over the 2010-11 figure of 24.

3. Permanency Panel (Fostering) Business March 2011 – April 2012

The Adoption and Permanency Panels have a dual function and in addition to adoption cases, make recommendations regarding plans for children up to the age of twelve years needing permanence in the form of long term fostering.

Oxfordshire's Permanency Panels also go on to make recommendations regarding the linking of these children with approved long term foster carers. Foster carers are invited to attend Panel when long term fostering linkings are heard.

Plans for long term Fostering

17 children had plans for long term fostering recommended by Panel. 8 of these children were boys, 9 were girls.

This group of children was made up of:-

- 3 pairs of siblings
- 2 group of 3 siblings
- 5 single children

The age range of these children was:-

- 9 aged 5-9 years
- 8 aged 10 years and over

The ethnic origin of these children was:-

- 11 white
- 6 mixed

Children linked for long term Fostering

6 children were linked with long term foster carers over the past 12 months.

One older child with was placed out of county with his grandparents who were approved as his long term foster carers.

Resources for long term Fostering

There continues to be a nationwide shortage of long term foster carers, with little choice available for children needing placements and this is reflected in Oxfordshire, particularly for older children and children with special needs.

4. Positive Achievements 2011-2012

- Frequency of panel meetings and careful planning of agendas has ensured children's plans for permanence are agreed in a timely manner to avoid any unnecessary delay.
- There has been no delay to any court proceedings caused by panel.
- Continuous recruitment of new panel members to the Central List to fill vacancies has ensured panels have remained quorate and able to operate smoothly.
- Training days and staff workshops have ensured both panel members and staff are kept well informed and up to date with new research findings and government priorities regarding planning for children in the Looked After System.

Objectives for 2012/2013

- To implement the new Adoption Action Plan as it relates to adoption panel process.
- To ensure the panels provide a quality assurance function to the department in respect of reports received and cases heard.
- To continue to improve panel performance through future planned training and panel member appraisals.

Liz Gilkes

Adoption Adviser and Professional Adviser to Panel

Donald McPhail

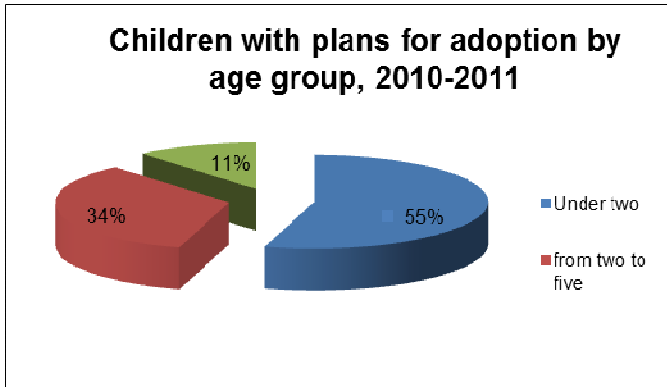
Independent Panel Chair

March 2012

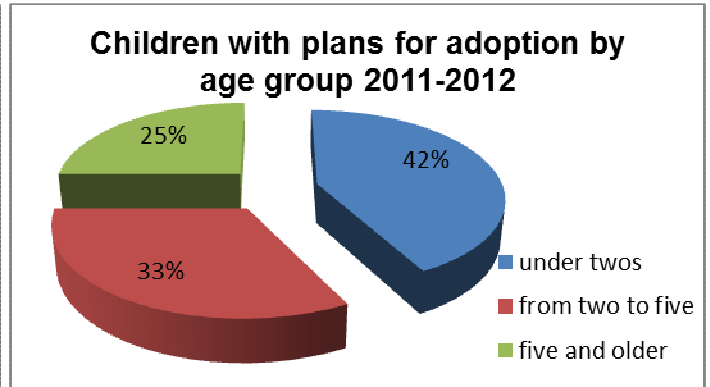
Appendix - charts

Children with Plans for Adoption by Age Group

2010-2011

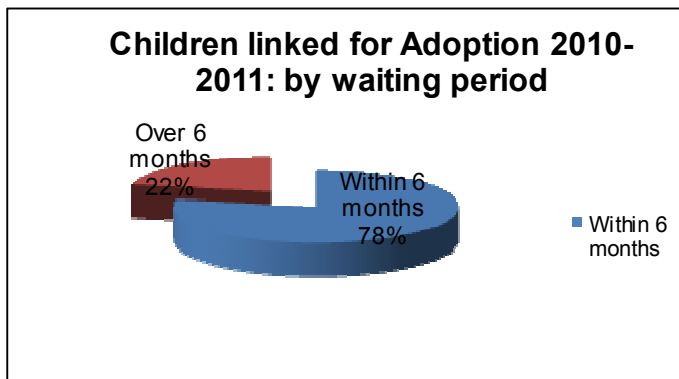


2011-2012

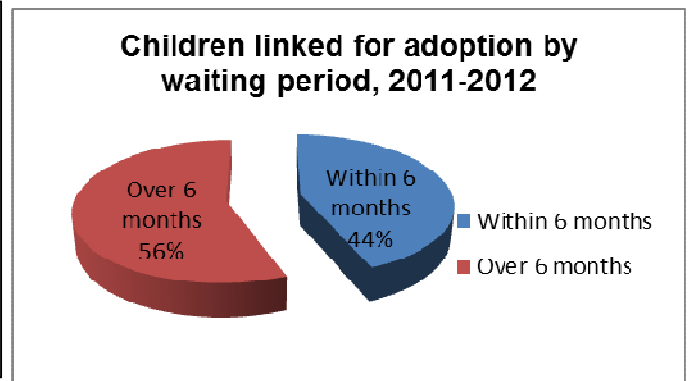


Children linked for Adoption by Waiting Period

2010-2011



2011-2012



Progress update relating to Cabinet recommendations following Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, Scrutiny Review of Young Carers undertaken in July 2008

Report - May 2012 – Deborah Parkhouse, Young Carers Manager OCC

Recommendation	Progress
1. That Annex 2 to the Review is sent to all schools and linked to the Young Carers Strategy.	Completed 2009
2. That Oxfordshire's revised 2008 -13 Young Carers' Strategy when issued, is widely disseminated and adhered to and that the specific educational needs of young carers are addressed.	Completed 2009 Currently working with adult services to refresh the Oxfordshire Carers Strategy 2012 - 2015
3. That the principle of a discreet single point of contact in schools is accepted and that each school in Oxfordshire should be advised to nominate a single contact member of staff with responsibility for identifying and supporting young carers and that means, such as a "Toolkit" or School Guidance pack should ensure that training, internet accessible material etc are in place to assist them in this role.	Work continues to support schools in identifying and supporting young carers. OCC hold a list of all the nominated school staff who have a lead for young carers. Support and information is regularly disseminated to schools via schools news. OCC Young Carers Development Worker and Spurgeons take a coordinated approach to working with targeted schools. Training via L&D will be offered to all school staff in 2012/13
4. That a guide/protocol is developed for schools, modelled on the practices elsewhere including Gloucestershire and the Children's Society.	We have a number of resources that are used across the county by OCC and Spurgeons to support schools. A model for awarding schools for their progress in supporting young carers is in development - the intention is that young carers are involved in the audit and presentation of the award to their school.
5. That given the rural nature of Oxfordshire and that many Young Carers have no access to rural transport, resources are made available to ensure that YCs are able to access support services.	Young carers' groups in each of the Early Intervention Service Hubs. Rural isolation addressed via the development young carers groups in targeting schools and in some satellite areas where need is identified.

<p>6. That with specific reference to the dichotomy in the legislative position referred to in paragraph 49, to lobby Central Government via the Local Government Association to consider a review of legislative requirements and resources around assessments for young carers.</p>	<p>Spurgeons (our contracted voluntary sector provider) are part of the National Young Carers Coalition. The Coalition is made up of a numbers of children's and carers' organisations which lobby government relating to young carers' issues. LAs are not part of the coalition however OCC questions and concerns can be fed into the coalition via Spurgeons.</p>
<p>7. To consider the priority accorded by the Council to young carers; does it aspire to provide better identification of, support for and resources for young carers to make Oxfordshire the leader among its peers?</p>	<p>Oxfordshire County Council has commissioned young carers services across the county for more than 10 years, with considerable investment since 2009, and in this time the provision and support for young carers has significantly changed and developed. OCC has employed dedicated young carers' staff since 2004 and continues in its strong commitment to work, together with partner agencies, to identify and support this large vulnerable group of children and young people, and their families.</p> <p>Nationally we are seen as a leader among our peers in relation to our service model and the understanding we have of our population of young carers.</p>
<p>8. That based on the Oxfordshire PCT's experience, to work more closely with GPs to identify previously unidentified Young Carers and ensure that they and their families receive the appropriate support.</p>	<p>Funding from the PCT for young carers in 2011/12 and again available this year.</p> <p>GP information cards developed and disseminated. Increase seen in number of referrals from primary care teams seen.</p>
<p>9. To explore the benefits of different staffing models for YCs such as in Hertfordshire, where they have 4 Professional Assistants for YC's centrally based and working on a locality basis, in Children, Schools and Families (the equivalent in Oxfordshire being the CYP&F Directorate).</p>	<p>OCC have a Young Carers Staff Team that includes a manager, a development worker, two support workers and administrative support.</p> <p>The PRTC (Princess Royal Trust for Carers; lead national charity for developing work with young carers) state that a good young carers' service needs to cover the following 6 elements to ensure positive outcomes;</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities • Carers shaping development of policy and service (participation) • Changes and transitions • Education • Emotional support and counselling • Whole family support <p>These six elements form the basis for our service plan and delivery.</p>
<p>10. To:</p> <p>(a) endorse in principle and enable the Children’s Society (by arranging a formal event), to launch the Key Principles and the Whole Family Pathway within Oxfordshire, and that both are adopted, the latter as a tool for practitioners working with YCs;</p> <p>(b) bid to become one of the authorities involved in The Children’s Society’s roll out of the development of the Key Principles of Practice – Guidance for Practitioners and the Whole-Family Pathway;</p> <p>(c) endorse the roll out of development to local authorities.</p>	<p>a) Completed in 2009 b) Not possible at the time c) We consistently look for opportunities to endorse and share our good practice</p> <p>OCC Young Carers Team worked very closely with the Think Family Champion in the mental health trust last year to develop understanding around young carers within the trust</p>
<p>11. To consider in detail the key features of the Children’s Society work as described in this evidence and in the publications listed in the bibliography, as good strategy and practice that the County Council should wish to adhere to.</p>	<p>Current model of service based on the 6 elements outlined above and uses all the information, feedback and data collected and analysed over the previous four years and has been informed by current national research and pathfinder evaluations. Along with this, we regularly consult with groups of Oxfordshire’s young carers and their parents; and their views and opinions form the foundations of service planning for young carers in the county.</p>
<p>12. That the Review Group RECOMMENDS joint working</p>	<p>Completed in 2009</p>

<p>protocols between adult and children's services (alongside the Schools protocol referred to earlier) for Oxfordshire.</p>	<p>Additional joint OCC Social Care Protocol developed and signed off in 2010.</p>
<p>13. It is desirable to achieve a link up of all the direct and indirect funding streams available on behalf of YCs, especially support from Adult Services; this is what the Children's Society seeks to do and on a local basis this is RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet from the Review.</p>	<p>OCC Young Carers Budget is a combination of monies from children's services, and adult service carers' budgets. PCT funding for young carers has been available to OCC for 11/12 and 12/13.</p>
<p>14. That following the example of Nottinghamshire, a "critical friend", likely to be The Children's Society, is invited to evaluate the progress in implementing the new Young Carers Strategy and the impact of the initiatives.</p>	<p>Visit from the Princess Royal Trust for Carers (PRTC) in Feb 2012 - commented that Oxfordshire has the perfect model for delivering positive outcomes for young carers. PRTC are looking to recommend our work nationally as examples of best practice.</p>

Young Carers in Oxfordshire – Update to Scrutiny Committee

May 2012

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to bring the committee up to date on the work happening in the county to identify and support children and young people who have caring responsibilities (Young Carers) and their families. The report will then go on to look at our outcomes for young carers and our anticipated challenges in the future.

Oxfordshire County Council have commissioned young carers services across the county for more than 10 years, with considerable investment since 2009, and in this time the provision and support for young carers has significantly changed and developed. The Oxfordshire Young Carers Strategy 2008 - 2013 continues to be our guiding document for service delivery.

OCC has employed dedicated young carers staff since 2004 and continues in its strong commitment to work, together with partner agencies, to identify and support this large (working estimate of between 8'000 and 16'000 children in Oxfordshire) vulnerable group of children and young people, and their families.

The PRTC (Princess Royal Trust for Carers; lead national charity for developing work with young carers) state that a good young carer's service needs to cover the following 6 elements to ensure the potential outcomes outlined below;

- **Activities**
 - Outcomes: young carers have a break from caring; are less isolated; have fun; and access peer support
- **Carers shaping development of policy and service (participation)**
 - Outcomes: young carers plan, shape and manage services and inform local/national policy
- **Changes and transitions**
 - Outcomes: Young adult carers receive specific advice and guidance; less young adult carers are NEET
- **Education**
 - Outcomes: Young carers attendance and attainment is increased; staff understanding of young carers' issues and needs is increased; all pupils understanding of young carers' and wider disability is increased
- **Emotional support and counselling**
 - Outcomes: Young carers have someone to talk to; emotional and mental health is improved
- **Whole family support**
 - Outcomes: Fewer young carers have inappropriate caring roles;

increased support in place for the whole family; parents and families supported to access other services

In Oxfordshire, our service model is based on the 6 elements outlined above and uses all the information, feedback and data collected and analysed over the previous four years and has been informed by current national research and pathfinder evaluations. Along with this, we regularly consult with groups of Oxfordshire's young carers and their parents; and their views and opinions form the foundations of service planning for young carers in the county.

The Young Carers Team from OCC are proud that the PRTC have recently commented that Oxfordshire has the **perfect model for delivering positive outcomes for young carers**. PRTC are looking to recommend our work nationally as examples of best practice.

Main Body of the Report

Oxfordshire's Model for Young Carers Service delivery

Since 2009 there has been an **Oxfordshire County Council's Young Carers Team** as part of the Children's Social Care Division under the Children, Education and Families Directorate (CEF). The strategic development, leadership and management work is part of the core work of children's services delivered by the Young Carers Manager and the Young Carers Team. The Young Carers Team includes a dedicated development worker and support workers to raise awareness with children's services and relevant adult services, (e.g. social care teams, health services, etc.), push forward the whole family and think family agenda, support schools in the delivery of our Core Education Offer (a support package to schools to enable a whole school approach in the identification and support for young carers with a view to addressing issues of poor attainment and attendance), to support staff to initiate CAF assessments with more vulnerable young carers and offer short term case work to vulnerable young carers.

As of September 2011, the County Council also provides for young carers via its **Early Intervention Service (EIS)**. Support to young carers and their families are part of the core offer of the EIS, providing:

- A dedicated tier-2 casework service in local areas delivered from the 7 EIS Hub bases, assessing and providing support to the individual child and family, acting as the lead professional and ensuring a team around the family comprised of appropriate adult and children's services.
- Identification and recording of young carers across agencies and settings.

The Early intervention Service has a manager with a lead responsibility for young carers and each of the seven Hubs has a young carers lead or champion within its staff team.

Our current **third sector young carer's service** contract has been held by

Spurgeons since 1st October 2011 providing countywide provision. Taking into account the demographic and geographic make up of Oxfordshire it aims to enable young carers to benefit from one of the following options:

- support within their local school or community
- support via their local hub
- support via the internet

The current commissioned contract for young carers' services is ending on the 31st May 2012. Re-procurement of this service for 2012 – 2015 has been completed and the awarded to Spurgeons. Our model of delivery for this contract remains largely the same.

The current young carers service provider also holds the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) contract for one full time county wide **Specialist NEET worker for young carers**. This contract ends in June 2012 and re-procurement is underway via OCC Early Intervention Service.

Since 2011 OCC have received additional funding from **NHS Oxfordshire** for young carers. Working in partnership, this funding is being used in two ways. A large proportion of the monies have been made available directly to young people. The Young Carers Support Fund (YCSF) aims to support the health and wellbeing of young carers in the county. The purpose of this fund is a) to relieve the impact of the caring/ improve health outcomes b) is a means by which we are able to promote identification and support of young carers amongst professionals in all services c) helps workers to gain consent from families and overcome unwillingness of parents to admit that caring is taking place in families. Additionally, part of the funding is being used to better understand the health needs of young carers in the county, improve young carer identification and referrals from NHS staff and develop a young carers health screening tool so we can then address health concerns and improve health outcomes to this group of vulnerable children and young people.

Since January 2009 we have been collecting and analysing **data on young carers** in the county. Our database of young carers currently shows that OCC and OCC funded services have identified and supported **over 1200 young carers** (April 2012). The findings of this data are now, and will continue to be, instrumental in guiding the focus of young carers' services across the county.

Young Carers Service - our vision for the future

The County Council's **vision** is for ***every single child to be successful and to reach their potential.***

For young carers this means that we need to ensure awareness and recognition of young carers as a vulnerable group within all universal and targeted services and provide appropriate support to children with caring responsibilities and their families.

The Oxfordshire Young Carers Strategy (2008 – 2013) tells us the outcomes we are trying to achieve for children with caring responsibilities and our service action plan

tells us how these outcomes will be delivered. Delivery of all young carers services are measured against the set of performance targets below.

Performance targets	Measures or Progress to date	Future Challenges
Increase in number of young carers identified and offered a service	2009 – approx. 350 young carers known of in county 2012 – data held on 1200 young carers who have received support or a service	Steady increase in number of young carers identified – currently approx. 30 - 40 new young carers identified per month Capacity issues
Increase in number of young carers identified and offered a service from: -black and minority ethnic groups, including travellers - other vulnerable groups, e.g. mental health, substance and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse, etc - Rural areas	Data from Dec.2010 - Young carers services are representative of ethnicity figures for Oxfordshire. - Mental health is the commonest single cause of caring: 25.8%. Of these young carers, 83.2% are caring for parents - Using 'known to social care' as an indicator, between 1/3 and 1/2 of children and families across all types of young carers services are in high need	Work to be developed to ensure that vulnerable groups remain a targeted area Rural areas remain a challenge – this is being addressed in some ways by focusing work in schools communities Work during the last year with the Think Family Champion for mental health services has highlighted a number of barriers within adult services and the challenge is now to address these.
Increase in number of activities linked to emotional and physical health	Young Carers Support Fund Oct 2011 – March 2012 206 young carers received the grant	Funding for 12/13 is looking positive however with the changes in NHS commissioning there may be sustainability issues more long term
Increase in range of activities and groups	This has been addressed via the significant change in service model from Oct 2011- provision via hub's and schools The compass program via Oxford University	Targeting the most vulnerable young carers Continuing to look at mainstream opportunities for young carers
Evidence of young carers using the service who express overall satisfaction	In 2010 we ran a young reporters project – overall positive feedback from young people about their	We think we have a more work to do – Particularly around the young carers support fund and the EIS

with the service	young carers projects Core element of all work is to listen to young carers – asking for regular feedback	Hub groups.
Evidence that a positive impact is made on the lives of young carers in relation to education outcomes	Using the findings from the data concerning GCSE rates - we have set up a 2 year pilot project with 3 schools investing in specific staff who have responsibility for young carers within their school.	Measurements will be critical to demonstrating improved outcomes. A schools model and a more targeted approach are in development.
Evidence of young carers who feel they have been able to influence the delivery of young carers services	Consultation in Autumn 2011 to inform service plan and new YC contract service specification. Young carers CYPIN – Nov 2011 YC had 50% share of the final decision for the provider of the YC service 2012 – 15.	Include a more diverse group of young carers in consultation exercises – targeting hard to engage children and young people.
Percentage of primary school aged young carers who have a persistent absence rate: 20%+ absence Percentage of secondary school aged young carers who have a persistent absence rate: 20%+ absence	Young carers are much more likely to be persistently absent than county average – in 2009/2010 12.4% were persistently absent where the county absence rate for secondary school was 6.7% Young carers are no more likely than other children and young people to receive fixed term exclusions from school	This is an area for future focus - The data needs updating and we need to gain more understanding about this integrating it into the work we do with schools.
Percentage of young carers aged 16 & over who are NEET - not in education, employment or	% NEET figures for identified young carers over school age Jan 2011 – 26% Jan 2012 – 17.74%	The YC data base provides the identification of young carers which is then matched against profile – identification needs to improve from all children facing

training		staff
Percentage of young carers who gain 5+ GCSE A*-C including English and Maths	3 years of data 2009 YC 13.5% vs. county 52.9% 2010 YC 29.3% vs. county 57.3% 2011 YC 30.4% vs. county 57.4%	Collecting and analyzing data presents challenges and we are working to ensure that young carers data is integrated into all the OCC systems. We are told that we are the only county that holds data of this nature – so the challenge is to ensure that we use it in a meaningful way, locally and nationally.
Percentage of young carers who gain 5+ GCSE A*-G including English and Maths	3 years of data 2009 YC 86.5% vs. county 92.8% 2010 YC 81% vs. county 93.9% 2011 YC 75% vs. county 94.3%	We have used this data to revise the way we work with schools. We are hoping that our pilot project will help us uncover ways in which this gap might be narrowed in the future.

If you have any queries or comments about this report, please contact:
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Update on Health and Wellbeing Boards and the Children's Trust arrangements in Oxfordshire.

Introduction:

The aim of this paper is twofold:

- To update members on arrangements for the new Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board
- To examine the challenges and opportunities for children's partnership working post children's trusts.

Background:

In 2006 Oxfordshire established the first Children and Young People's Trust under the legislation in the Children Act 2004. Over the next few years the Children and Young People's Trust developed into a multi-agency strategic partnership that had oversight of all the major developments in children's services across Oxfordshire. It developed strong and robust involvement mechanisms through 'Sounding Boards' and had a formal protocol for working with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board.

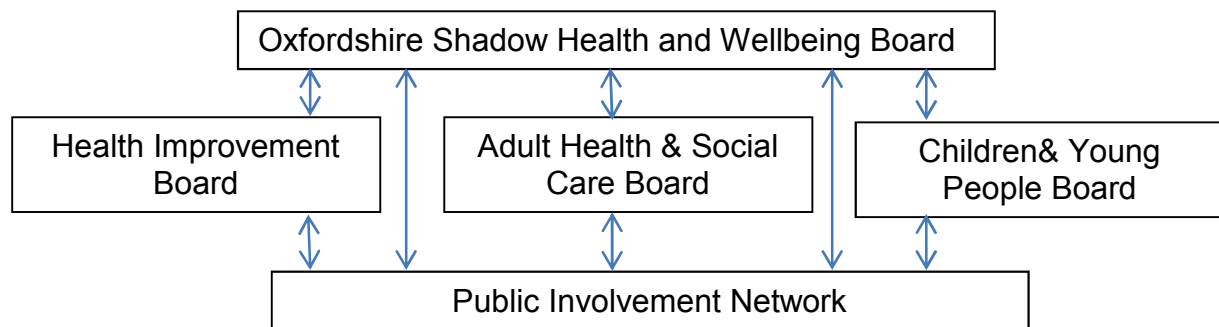
In 2010 the coalition government announced that it would be retracting the legislation that made local children's trusts a statutory body, along with the legislative requirement for a local Children and Young People's Plan. It was proposed that in future, local authorities could decide locally what arrangements best suited their local needs.

Following discussion at the Children and Young People's Trust and at this Scrutiny Committee (July 2010), it was agreed that the current arrangements for a children's trust should continue unless and until alternative suitable arrangements were in place.

In fact the last Children and Young People's meeting was held in September 2011 and following a workshop in January 2012, a new Children and Young People's Partnership Board was established and held the first meeting in February.

Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board:

The Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board was established in November 2011. This is the overarching partnership Board established under the new Health and Social Care Act (2012). It will become a full Board and sub-committee of the Council from April 2013. As part of the arrangements the HWB Board has set up three working partnership boards – Adult Health and Social Care, Children and Young People, Health Improvement. The Chair and Vice Chair of each partnership board sits on the Health and Wellbeing Board.



The priorities of the HWB Board are informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which has been updated and a summary report will be available soon. A full revision of the JSNA will be undertaken during 2012-13 to ensure that as much information as possible is available from all partners and can be used by everyone.

Each partnership board has met and agreed priorities for the year ahead. These priorities were discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board in March 2012 and, with some amendments to the original proposals, will form the basis of the draft Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Consultation on this draft strategy is currently being planned and will take place in May-June 2012.

1. Adult Health and Social Care

- Integration of Health and Social Care
- Support older people to live independently with dignity by reducing the need for care and support
- Adults with long-term conditions, physical or learning disability or mental health problems living independently and achieving their full potential

2. Children and Young People

- Keeping all children and young people safe
- Raising achievement for all children and young people
- Narrowing the gap for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- All children have a healthy start in life and stay healthy into adulthood.

3. Health Improvement

- Preventing early death and improving quality of life in later years
- Preventing chronic disease through tackling obesity
- Tackling the broader determinants of health through better housing
- Preventing infectious disease through immunisation

The priorities for Children and Young People have been based on Year 3 of the Children and Young People's Plan and have been updated and expanded to identify the key areas for action. In particular there is now a new key priority around health, ensuring a healthy start and also healthy transition into adulthood. In 2012-13 the focus for this priority is going to be on mental health transitions,

The Public Involvement Network underpins all the partnership boards and will be managed by a steering group that will ensure that all parts of the H&WB can ask for views to inform their discussions and also hear from members of the public and advocacy groups on matters of concern. The Public Involvement Network (PIN) will

underpin the work of the H&WB by sharing opinion and views from a wide range of people. The PIN will be a transitional arrangement pending the setup of local Healthwatch. Subject to further guidance, which is expected from the Department of Health, Local Health Watch (LHW) will be set up by 2013. LHW will be an independent organisation that will support the right of all citizens (including children and young people) to social care and health care and to monitor the quality of that care. The Chairman of LHW will be a member of the H&WB.

In summary, the new Health and Wellbeing Board arrangements replace all the previous Children's Trust arrangements including the Area Trust Boards. Accountability of local authorities will come through their overview and scrutiny function and through local HealthWatch. Health and Wellbeing Boards in their entirety will be accountable to communities, service users and overview and scrutiny committees.

Function of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board

The Terms of Reference for each partnership board were agreed at the March 2012 meeting. For the Children and Young People's Partnership Board the main responsibilities are to:

- To demonstrate effective partnership working across Oxfordshire to meet peoples' health and social care needs and to achieve effective use of resources
- To deliver the priorities and objectives arising from the Joint Health and Wellbeing Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Oxfordshire, in particular to:
 - Contribute to the overall joint strategy and make specific recommendations on the key outcomes for children and young people in Oxfordshire and as they move into adulthood.
 - Report on the delivery of joint existing key performance targets for children and young people for the NHS and County Council
 - Be responsible for holding the Joint Management Group (JMG) to account in relation to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and comment on the joint governance of pooled budgets for children
 - Contribute to the development of pooled budgets where they will enable delivery of key outcomes
- To meet the performance measures agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The performance measures for 2012/13 are outlined in appendix 1.

Challenges post children's trusts

The Health and Social Care Act places Local Authorities at the centre of partnership working in a local area. This is the first time there has been a single statutory board, responsible for joining up the work of the Council and NHS. It gives the opportunity to bring the key strategic leaders and local politicians around the table to discuss big

strategic priorities for different client groups. The new focus on 'health and wellbeing' will be driven through the Health Improvement Board with leadership from the District Councils and with the mandate to address the cross-cutting public health issues – for example housing. The agenda is potentially huge and therefore it has been important to identify the eleven key priorities that the partnership boards will deliver during 2012/13. Four of these priorities relate to specifically to children and young people.

There is more work to do on ensuring that wider partners e.g. voluntary sector organisations, can engage with the new arrangements. This is currently expected to take place through the wider Public Involvement Network. The Children and Young People's Board will be meeting in public three times per year but will also host three partnership 'workshops' to engage wider stakeholders in the core business of the partnership board. It is worth noting that unlike the Children's Trust the new Children and Young People's Partnership Board is not a statutory body. Only the Health and Wellbeing Board is statutory.

It is clear that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy will replace the current Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) when it finishes in 2013. Based on the JSNA, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy will identify key priorities but will not cover the depth and breadth of areas covered by the CYPP. However, the Children and Young People's Board will still be responsible for keeping an overview of all the outcomes for children, young people and families. In order to manage this, a Performance Dashboard will be developed covering the twenty or more Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will enable members to understand and challenge how the system as a whole is performing. For the first time this dashboard will now include key NHS data around hospital admissions and mental health services.

In summary the new Health and Wellbeing Board will be responsible for monitoring the delivery of the key strategic priorities, identified in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Children and Young People's Partnership Board will be responsible for making sure these priorities are delivered and will also be responsible for keeping an overview of the wider set of performance indicators that will demonstrate how the whole system is working together to improve outcomes.

Appendix 1

Keeping all children and young people safe

- No more than 15% of children who become subject to a child protection plan have previously had a plan
- A regular pattern of quality assurance audits undertaken in the following agencies and reviewed through the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Childrens Board: children's social care; children and adult health services; early intervention; police. Over 50% of interventions showing good or above overall impact in all agencies' audit reports

Raising achievement for all children and young people

- 63% (3900) of young people achieve 5 GCSEs at A*-C including English and maths
- 80% (4880) of children achieve Level 4 or above in English and maths at the end of Key Stage 2
- 76% (5000) children achieve Level 2b or above in reading at the end of Key Stage 1
- Reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training to 5.5% (950)
- 88% (204) primary schools and 86% (28) secondary schools with be judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding

Narrowing the gap for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups

- A sustainable decrease in the teenage conception rate¹
- Targets as required in the new Department of Communities and Local Government framework when published

Having a healthy start in life and staying healthy into adulthood

- Reduce the number of young people admitted to hospital for episodes of self-harm by 5% year on year. This means reducing by approximately 10 young people every year
- Reduce the number of young children admitted to hospital with infections by 10% year on year. This means reducing emergency admissions from approximately 3100 to 2890 children
- Review and redesign transition services for young people with mental health problems. This would mean there would be a new service in place from 1st April 2013

¹ Further work needed on understand how the HWB Board can measure progress when data is released with a 14 month delay.

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Equality Act and Equality Duty - Briefing for Scrutiny Chairmen

Purpose

This note is to provide the Committee with information about the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty, and the possible impacts of these for the Committee.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) replaces the previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies the law, removing inconsistencies and making it easier for people to understand and comply with it. It also strengthens the law to help tackle discrimination and inequality. The majority of the Act came into force on 1 October 2010.

The Equality Duty

The new Equality Duty is a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions. The Equality Duty is designed to reduce bureaucracy while ensuring public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all. It ensures that public bodies consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees.

The new Equality Duty supports good decision-making – it encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people's needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people's opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective. The Equality Duty therefore helps public bodies to deliver the Government's overall objectives for public services.

The new Equality Duty replaces the three previous public sector equality duties – for race, disability and gender. The new Equality Duty covers the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

It also applies to marriage and civil partnership, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

The Equality Duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have **due regard** to the need to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Having **due regard** means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions reached by public bodies – such as in how they act as employers; how they develop, evaluate and review policy; how they design, deliver and evaluate services, and how they commission and procure from others.

Having due regard to the need to **advance equality of opportunity** involves considering the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- meet the needs of people with protected characteristics; and
- encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is low.

Fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and others.

Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve making use of an exception or the positive action provisions in order to provide a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic – such as providing computer training to older people to help them access information and services.

Service and Community Impact Assessments

The Equality Act 2010 requires all public authorities to assess the impact of their policies on communities. In this context, 'policies' is a general term that could include strategies, projects or contracts.

In Oxfordshire County Council, this process is termed Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIA). A SCIA is intended to ensure policies meet the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

- Assessments are available to Councillors when making a decision on whether to agree a new policy or not.

- Any new or amended policies, strategies, projects and contracts should have an initial assessment. This should be proportionate to the significance of the change and the potential impact.
- For example, a small change in procedure may require only one page, whereas a significant budgetary decision should have a full assessment. This must demonstrate what data or research has been used, feedback from consultations with affected groups and an action plan to mitigate any impacts. Partners, staff or stakeholders should also be involved to check the assumptions match the experience on-the-ground.
- Assessments should demonstrate that the impact on groups has been considered, identify risks and any explain mitigating actions that will be taken if the policy is implemented.
- We assess the impact of decisions on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on:
 - Groups that share the nine protected characteristics
 - Rural communities
 - Areas of deprivation
- We also assess the impact on:
 - Staff
 - Other council services
 - Other providers of council services
- Once a decision is made the assessments are updated and then reviewed on a regular basis over the implementation of the project or policy or contract to ensure that the initial assessments were accurate, and that the impact of any changes in approach and learning from implementation are included.
- Completed Service and Community Impact Assessments are published on the public website at: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/equality-and-cohesion

Key Points for Consideration

- Meeting the Equality Duty does not mean difficult decisions can't be taken, or mean that impacts on particular groups can always be avoided.
- However, we must be able to demonstrate we have considered the impact as part of decision-making, and that proportionate actions are being taken to mitigate the potential impact as much as possible.
- All reports should include information about how they contribute to meeting the three aims of the Equality Duty.
- Significant changes in policy should be accompanied by a Service and Community Impact Assessment that demonstrates that consideration has been given to the potential impact and mitigating actions.

Ben Threadgold
Senior Policy and Performance Officer
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