



Northern Health
and Social Care Trust

Adoption Panel Annual Report

1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

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Introduction

This report provides a brief overview of the work of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) Adoption Panel during the year 2020-2021.

As an adoption agency, the NHSCT is required under the Adoption Agencies Regulations (NI) 1989 to establish an adoption panel of which membership and function are clearly defined in legislation.

Adoption Panel Membership as at 31st March 2021

Catherine Cassidy

Assistant Director for Social Care Governance

Chair Person

Mary Doherty

Social Work Service Manager

Social Work Representative

Michael Robinson

Social Work Manager

Social Work Representative

Patricia Barrett

Adoptive Parent

Independent Member

Nichola Cherry

Adoptive Parent

Independent Member

Lynda Graham

Adoptive Parent/Adoption Counsellor

Independent Member

Dr Feline Small/Dr Yvonne Doherty

Associate Specialists in Community Paediatrics

Medical Advisors

Gerard McGivern

Non-executive Trust Board Members

**Northern Trust Board
Representative**

Terry Brady

Solicitor with DLS

**Legal Advisor
(non-attending, non-voting)**

Eithne Daly

Adoption Services Manager

**Professional Advisor
(non-voting)**

Collette Campbell

Panel Administrator

Ms Graham and Ms Cherry attend alternate panels.

Summary of Panel Activity during 2020-2021

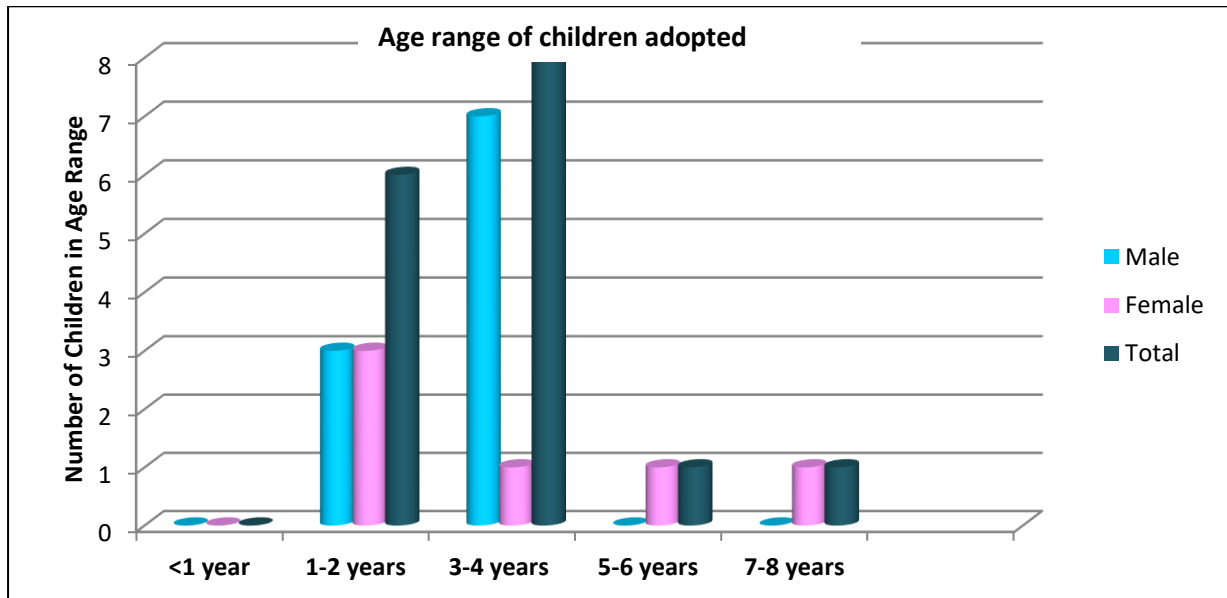
	2020/21	(2019/20)
• Best Interest for Adoption recommendations:	12	(20)
• Children adopted:	16	(32)
• Freeing Orders granted:	7	(25)
• Matching recommendations made:	7	(25)
• Domestic adoption applications recommended for approval:	11	(18)
• Intercountry adoption applications recommended for approval:	0	(0)
• Approvals to adopt rescinded:	5	(4)
• Best Interest Decisions rescinded	3	(1)
• Best Interest Decision reaffirmed	0	(1)
• Placement Disruption reports	0	(0)
• Adoption reviews:	46	(56)

As with previous years, **12** full panel meetings took place, all of which were facilitated via Zoom.

The total number of reviews completed was **46**; **43** of these were considered by the Adoption panel, the other **3** all intercountry reviews were considered by the Review Panel to enable them to transfer to their respective Trusts.

Adoption Orders – 16 granted during the year

The age of children adopted during the year ranged from **2 years 4 months** to **7 years 1 month**.



Key messages

- The numbers of both Adoption Orders and Freeing Orders were significantly reduced this year given the COVID-19 pandemic. The Courts did not sit for a number of months at the beginning of lockdown.
- Two groups of two siblings, including a set of twins were adopted together and one other child joined an older sibling who had already been adopted.
- Five children were adopted apart from their siblings.
- Of the 16 children adopted, all but one were placed concurrently. This child was adopted by his foster carers.
- There were no kinship adoptions.

Timeframes

Given the pandemic timeframes are unlikely to be a true reflection. Time taken from Best Interests recommendation to Freeing Order ranged from **4 months** up to **2 years 7 months**. The delay in this particular situation was in the Court arena, with evidence heard some 2 years before the Freeing Order was made. The average time was approximately **11 months**.

This is a slight increase from last year's average which was **9 months**.

The time taken from Freeing Order to Adoption ranged from **6 months** to **14 months**, the average being **10 months**, the same as last year.

All but 2 of 16 children (88%) were adopted within one year of their Freeing Order being granted.

Adoption Allowances

Of the **16** children adopted during 2020-2021, adoption allowances were agreed in respect of **4** children.

Placement Moves

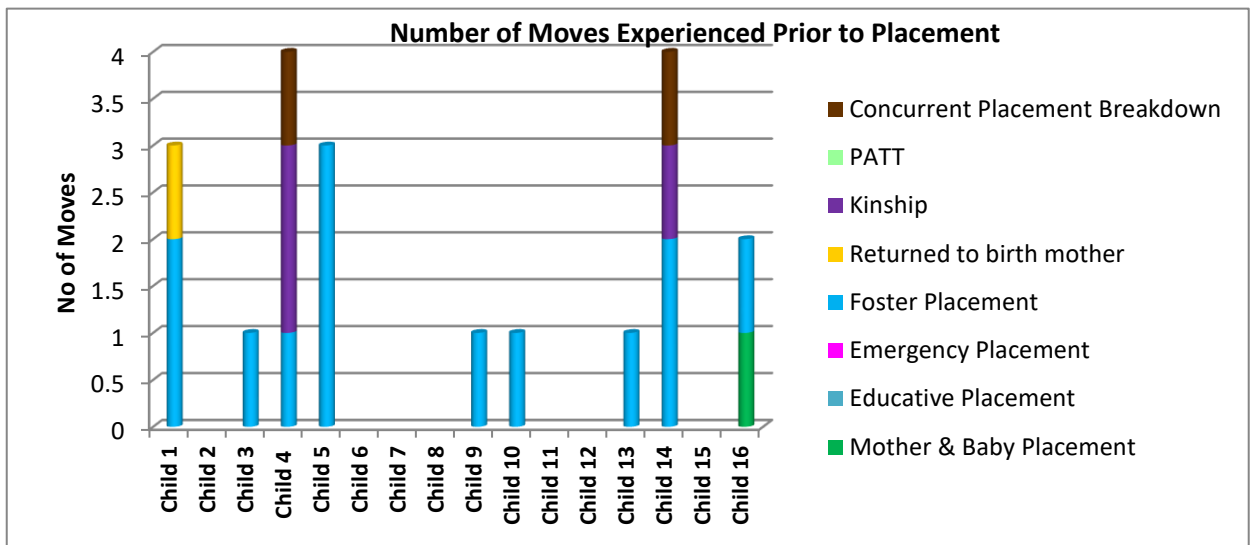
6 children were placed directly from hospital with concurrent carers who went on to adopt them.

3 children had just **1** placement prior to their permanent one.

1 child had **2** placements

4 children had **3** placements

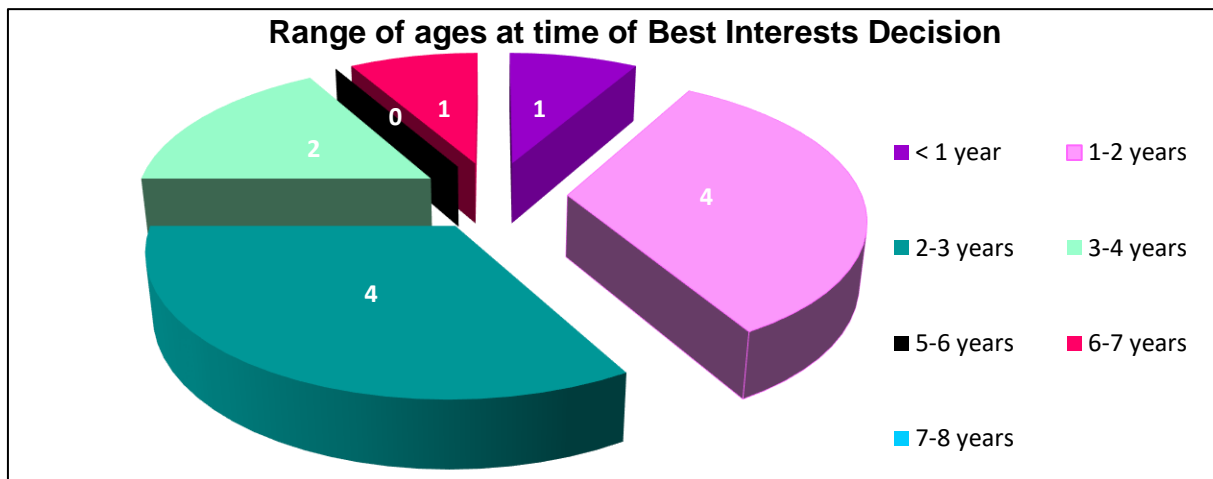
2 children had **4** placement moves – one child had been removed from parental care following an injury. She was however returned to parents by the Court, only to suffer significant sexual abuse.



Best Interest for Adoption Recommendations

Recommendations for Adoption were made in respect of **12** children, a significant reduction from 20 last year. The age range of these children on whom Best Interest Decisions were recommended varied from **8 months** old up to **6 years 5 months**.

The breakdown of ages at time of Best Interest Decision is as follows:

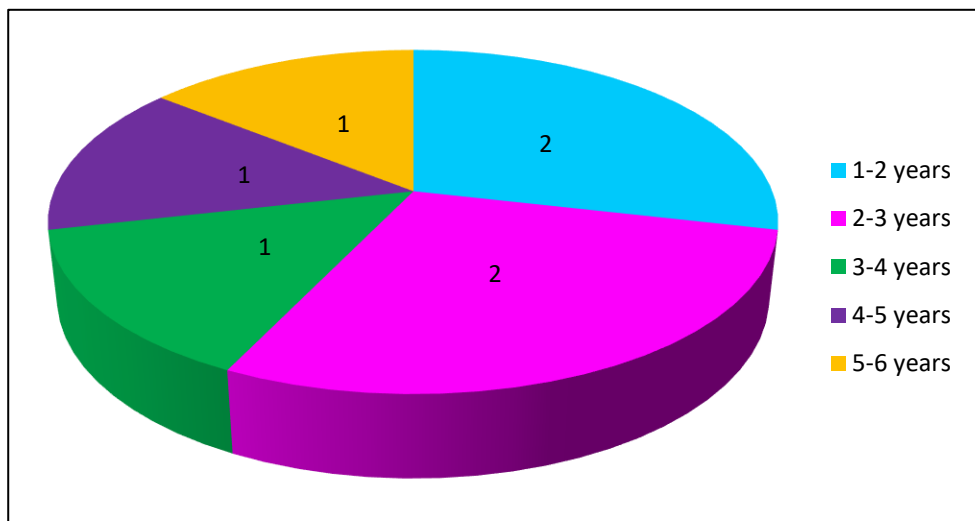


Freeing Orders

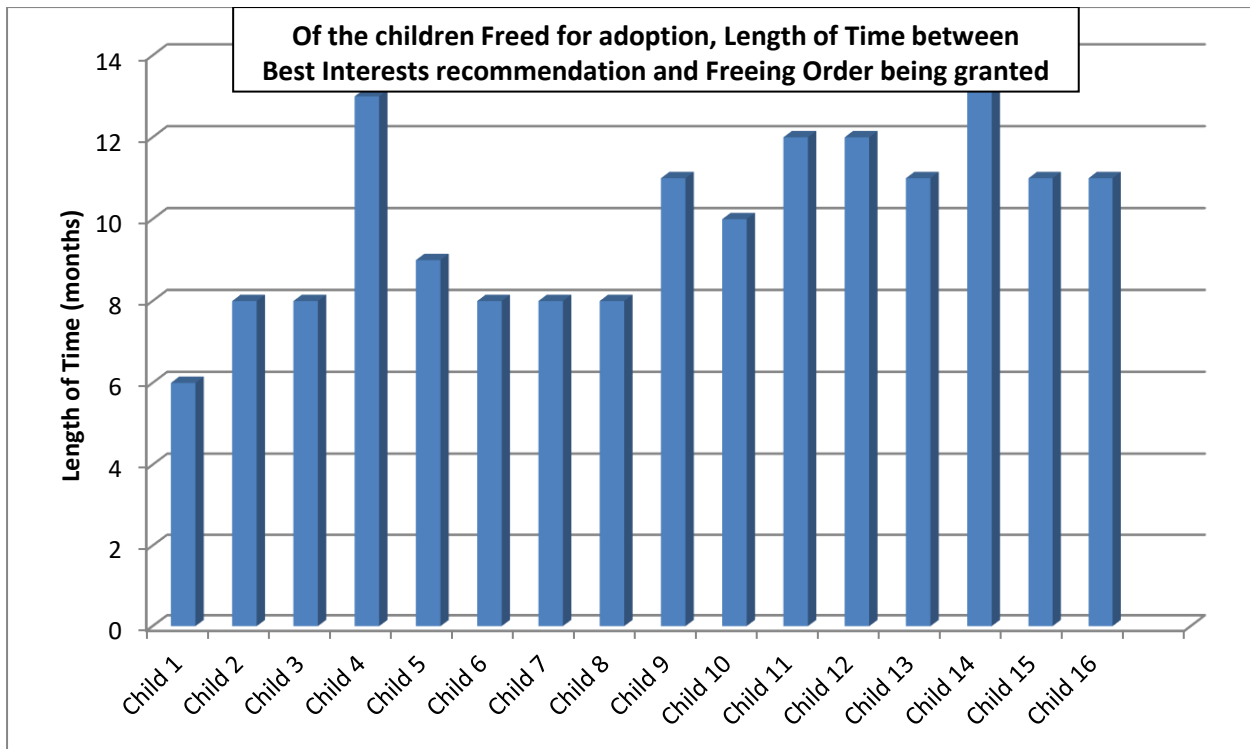
Freeing orders were granted in respect of **7** children.

The age range of children made subject to Freeing Orders during the year varied from **1 year 9 months up to 5 years 5 months.**

Age range of children Freed for adoption within the time frame



The length of time between Best Interest recommendation by panel and the granting of the Freeing Order ranged from **2 months** up to **1 year 5 months**



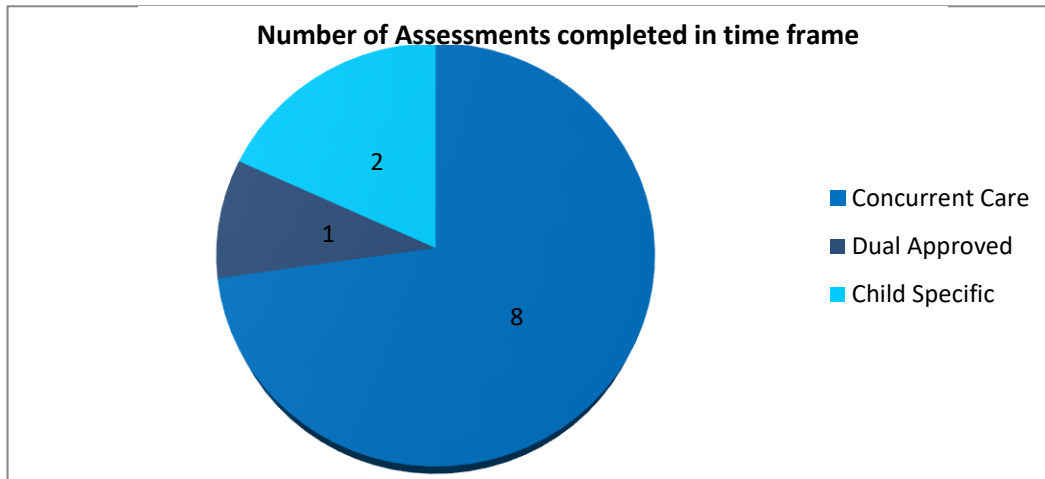
Form E Reports (Children's Assessment)

Panel members believe that in general there is a high standard in the Form E reports presented by children's social workers. The children's assessment form renamed CARNI has been piloted in two Trust areas and has been used on a few occasions within the Northern Trust. Unfortunately the necessary training for the completion of CARNI was significantly impacted by the pandemic.

Approvals

12 new applications for domestic adoption were heard by panel, 11 were recommended for approval.

- 8 were approved concurrently
- 1 was dual approved
- 2 were for specific children in their care.
- 1 application was not approved at panel



Panel Objectives

The following were the objectives which were identified for 2020-2021:

- To ensure that all panel members continue to have an opportunity to avail of relevant training opportunities on a regular basis
- To welcome new panel members and provide induction training for them
- To consider the role of the Adoption Panel chair and keep under review the need for independence in the role
- To provide regular opportunities for panel members to consider issues impacting on the work of the panel
- To continue to highlight delay in respect of both children and adoption applicants and to work with the Trust in minimising delay for both
- To continue to learn from feedback obtained from applicants and presenting social workers attending panel
- To consider the implications of developments both within Northern Ireland and beyond.

The panel objectives for the year were largely achieved and will remain unchanged for the incoming year with the addition of the following:

- Assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on the work and operation of the Adoption Panel
- Consider the use of technology to work towards a paperless panel
- To keep abreast of any regional developments with regards to the new Adoption legislation

Eithne Daly

Adoption Panel Advisor

21/06/2021


Our Vision

**We provide compassionate care
with our community, in our community.**

If you would like to give feedback on
any of our services please contact:

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

Telephone: 028 9442 4655

 Northern Health and Social Care Trust

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