



ADOPTION PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT

For Year-end 31st March 2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth Annual Report for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Adoption panel.

The Adoption panel has continued to sit on the first and third Tuesday of each month and will normally sit for a half day, although it can be extended in time, or additional panels scheduled if required.

The membership of the Adoption panel has seen no changes over this review period (see Appendix 1 for list of Adoption panel members).

The Trust would like to thank all panel members for their hard work and dedication to their role as members of Adoption panel.

The panel's aim has remained the provision of a contemporary Adoption panel that is capable of providing a high quality service to both children and prospective adoptive parents.

The Adoption panel will normally have a set agenda of three cases per panel, an additional slot is available to address urgent matters, or for seeking panel's advice. The fourth slot is consistently used and on occasions, additional panel days are still required during the year.

2. OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the South Eastern Trust Adoption panel from 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019.

The Adoption panel has three primary functions;

To consider and make a recommendation to the adoption agency on;

- Whether adoption is in the "Best Interests" of a particular child and if so, the most appropriate legal route by which this can be achieved.
- Whether an applicant is suitable to be an adoptive parent.
- The suitability of a proposed placement for adoption of a child with approved adopter/s.

Additionally, the Adoption panel has responsibility for;

- Providing an opinion on the suitability of a proposed placement of a child for whom the care plan is adoption, with prospective adopters on a foster care basis.
- Providing a consultation service to the Trust on adoption issues.
- Making recommendations in respect of the payment of adoption allowances

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Adoption panel continues to have a high volume of work being presented, which has been managed within the panel timetable. All panel members have become fully integrated into their roles on the Adoption panel and independent members will be availing of appraisals to assist the development of reflection, learning and identification of training needs.

Training took place in June 2018 regarding matching considerations. All panel members will undertake legal issues training at the next Adoption Panel Business Day on 11th June 2019. This will be facilitated by the Directorate of Legal Services.

There has been an increase in the number of Freeing Orders granted in this reporting period by three to sixteen; however the number of children being adopted has decreased by nine to nine, which is reflective of a regional trend. This trend is also reflective of the complex cyclical nature of the Court processes in this area of work.

It is positive to note that within the South Eastern Trust consistency has been maintained with regards to the number of children matched with prospective adopters (twenty-one). Of these twenty-one, eighteen were matched formally, enabling these cases to be progressed to the Adoption Order stage. Some of these adoption orders will be achieved in the next reporting period.

In respect of all applications by adoptive parents, they have been approved as dually approved or concurrent carers, enabling children to be placed with adopters at an earlier stage. This is clearly in the best interest of our children as it improves the attachment process due to earlier stage of placements and promotes emotional well-being.

Adoption panel business has increased significantly over the last few years as a recommendation is made in respect of the informal match and following the granting of a Freeing Order, the same case is required to return to Panel for a second time for consideration of a formal match. This matter is currently being considered as part of amendments to legislation proposed by the Adoption & Children's Bill.

The South Eastern Trust Adoption service has continued to progress service development in the area of post-adoption support. The anticipated adoption reforms

as set out by the Department of Health in the draft Adoption & Children's Bill will enhance expectations on Trusts in the area of post-adoption support and deliver adoption reform. This is an on-going process and the Trust continues to remain open and engaged with the Department of Health regarding this service reform.

The Trust Adoption Team have worked with their regional colleagues during this reporting period as part of the 'Adoption Changes Lives' recruitment campaign. It was positive to note an increase of enquiries resulting from this campaign.

There has been consistency of Adoption panel composition during this reporting period. Further changes however to social work representation on the Adoption panel are planned for the next reporting period. The Trust will also be progressing the appointment of an Adoption Panel Advisor in the next reporting period. This role is a non-voting member of the panel whose remit is aimed to improve the governance arrangements and oversight over adoption panel business by ensuring a consistency of interface between the panel and the Trust. It is also envisaged this role will assist the panel to identify and progress learning and improvements relating to Trust presentations to panel and the experience of attendees.

4.0 PANEL BUSINESS DAYS

The Adoption panel held one review day during the year (12th June 2018); the discussions of this review day focused on;

- Review of the draft Trust 2017-2018 Adoption Panel Annual Report.
- Update on Adoption service developments within the Trust, including post-adoption support, permanence clinics and adoption recruitment campaigns.
- Feedback on learning from an intercountry adoption case.
- Update on special restrictions on adoption from Ethiopia.
- Learning from Court judgements regarding Adoption panel reports and minutes.
- Appraisals of independent panel members. It was agreed that the Adoption panel chair Mrs Kate Anderson will undertake this role in the short term.
- Adoption panel legal issues training was noted to be outstanding for panel members and was being progressed by the Adoption service.
- Feedback on panel experience in relation to the presenting social worker and prospective adopters in attendance was also noted as an area for development, which will be taken forward in the coming year.

In addition to Adoption panel business discussed on 12th June 2018, panel members availed of training and case reflection on the processes relating to matching children with prospective adopters. This interactive training was facilitated by a very experienced independent Panel Chair from Scotland, Ms Barbara Hudson and also included members of the Trust Pre-linking Panel. All in attendance found this training to be of benefit to their respective roles. A number of recommendations were explored and are being progressed by the Adoption Service to ensure that panel members are appropriately informed around the decision making to make a recommendation to the adoption panel to matching children with prospective adopters.

5.0 SUMMARY OF ADOPTION PANEL ACTIVITY

During this reporting period the Panel continued to meet on the first and third Tuesday of each month and had an allocated time frame of half a day.

A summary of Panel business is as follows;

5.1 CHILDREN

Panel Business	2018 / 2019	2017/2018
Best Interest for Adoption Recommendations	Eighteen	Twenty-Two
Freeing Orders Granted	Sixteen	Thirteen
Best Interest for Adoption Recommendations Rescinded	Two	Two
Children Adopted	Nine	Twenty-Two
Matching Recommendations Made	Twenty-one in total Of these, 3 were *informal and 18 were *formal matches	Twenty-two in total Of these, 11 were *informal matches and 11 were *formal matches – relating to 18 children in total - i.e. that some of the children were informally matched, and then formally matched within the 12 month reporting period)

**An informal match is one made before a child is available for adoption- through freeing order or parental consent. This enables a child to be placed on a dually approved fostering basis.*

**A formal match is made after a child is freed by the courts for adoption or the parents' consent to the child being adopted.*

ANALYSIS – BEST INTEREST CASES

Cases are presented to Adoption panel by children and family social work teams (CAFT) following the care planning process and a careful, balanced analysis of care planning and placement options for a child. When the decision is reached at the Looked after child review to refer the matter to Adoption panel for an examination of whether or not the panel consider adoption to be in the child's best interest, the case is then prepared for adoption panel.

The number of children who received a Best Interest decision has decreased to eighteen, a decrease of four from the previous reporting period. The Trust's Best Interest figures since the 2014/2015 reporting period are twenty, twenty-four, thirteen, and twenty-two.

The profile of the eighteen children where the Adoption Panel made Best Interest Recommendation is broken down as follows;

	2018/2019	2017 / 2018
Single Children	Five	Twelve (<i>of which 6 are part of a larger sibling group</i>)
Siblings	Five sets of two children (one of these pairs went through panel seven months apart)	Two sets of two children Two sets of three children
Children of a sibling group where older siblings are in care or are adopted	Three	Six
Best Interest recommendations rescinded	Two	Two

The number of siblings being presented for Best Interest recommendation has remained steady from last year at ten children. In three of these sibling pairs, the recommendation from the social worker was for them to be placed together for adoption. The other two pairs of siblings had recommendations of placing separately due to the level of their individual developmental and emotional needs.

It is highlighted that three of the children were the younger siblings of a larger group of children who are in the care system, or have been adopted. In none of these cases were these young siblings removed from parental care at the same time as their older siblings, demonstrating the pervasive and recurrent nature of the problems experienced by the birth parents.

The legal profile of the children being referred to the Panel for a Best Interest recommendation has remained constant, with the majority being subject to Interim Care Orders at the time of Panel. This shows the increasing trend towards consolidated hearings of Care and Freeing processes, which is favoured by the Court and enables the full Court process to be undertaken in one final hearing.

Legal Profile	2018 / 2019	2017 / 2018
Voluntarily Accommodated/ relinquished for adoption	Zero	One
Interim Care Order	Thirteen	Ten
Care Order	Four	Seven
No Order	One	Four

ANALYSIS – FREEING ORDERS

During this reporting period, sixteen children were Freed for Adoption, eight of which were male and eight were female. This is an increase of three from last year. Eight of these children had been placed dually approved with their prospective adoptive parents at the time of the Freeing Order being granted. One of these was via the Home on Time Scheme. Foster carers for three of the children were being assessed to adopt them, therefore the emotional attachment could continue. Two children were placed shortly after the Freeing Order was granted. One child is awaiting the outcome of a family member's assessment to adopt. The Trust is still seeking a placement for one of these children who has been Freed for adoption.

This reflects best practice as the process of dual approval and concurrent care ensures children are placed with potential adopters at an earlier stage, thus aiding and improving the attachment process.

The children freed for adoption included seven single children, three were the youngest of sibling groups where the older children were in foster care, or are adopted. One sibling set of three children were freed at the same time, another sibling pair were freed for adoption together.

ANALYSIS – ADOPTION ORDERS

The number of adoptions has dropped significantly from twenty-two in the previous reporting period to nine in this reporting period. When examining the list of children who obtained a Best Interest recommendation in this period, only three of these

children accounted for the sixteen children that were freed before 31.03.2019. Thirteen had best interest recommendations pre April 2018.

The other fifteen children who had obtained a best interest in this reporting period were in the process at various stages as follows;

Family finding on going	10
Kinship options being explored	2

These fifteen children are not yet Freed by the Court due to elongated Court processes, Court dates have been postponed, birth mothers have given birth to further children, and further assessments of the birth family have been permitted by the Court.

Across the region, Adoption Order numbers have fallen this year from 85 in 2017-18 to 73 in 2018-19. This is linked to the shortage of suitable adoptive placements in the region. Trusts are using their own carers and therefore the surplus of carers for the Adoption Regional Information System (ARIS) database is diminishing. Where children are older, have complex needs or are part of a sibling group, the Trust is unable to prove "likelihood of placement" for the purposes of obtaining a Freeing Order. The Trust needs to prove that they are confident that they can place a child for adoption within 12 months of a Freeing Order being granted; otherwise this Order can be legally challenged by the birth parents.

ANALYSIS – INFORMAL & FORMAL MATCHING

Twenty-one matches took place at Panel over in this reporting period. Four children were presented at Adoption panel twice in this reporting period- for informal and then formal matching, having been placed dually approved and then freed for adoption in the court. The matching therefore took place in respect of seventeen children in total. Twelve were matched with Trust carers (one of these were kinship adopters). Two were with carers from Family Care Society; two others were placed in other Trust areas. Two of the children matched had come through the Home on Time Concurrent Care scheme.

Thirteen children were matched with 'strangers'. Two with concurrent carers, one with kinship adopters, and one with Trust foster carers.

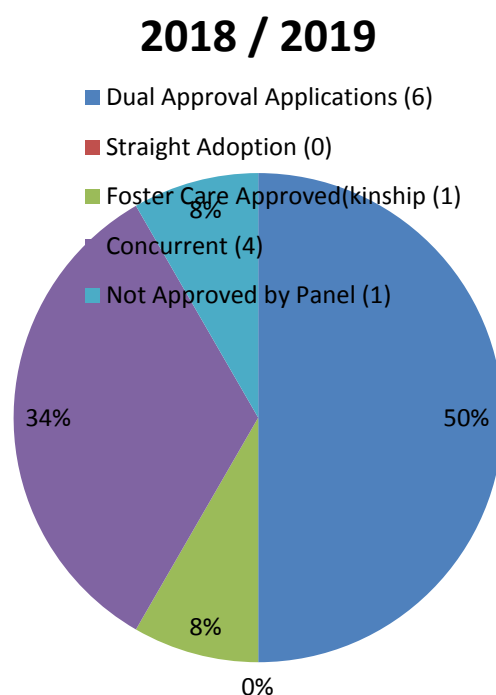
Of the children who received a Best Interest recommendation in this reporting period, six are already booked into a future Panel dates in 2019 for matching.

5.2 PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The Trust Adoption team is responsible for assessing those who live in the Trust area and who wish to adopt. They may be related to the child, be the current foster carers of a child or be as yet unknown to a child requiring adoption. Proposals are presented to the Adoption panel for recommendation of approval based on comprehensive assessments.

Domestic application recommendations made at panel

	2018 / 2019	2017 / 2018
Domestic Adoption Applications Recommended for Approval by Panel	Eleven	Fourteen



Half of the applications brought to panel were for prospective adopters who wished to take a child on a dually approved basis- fostering a child initially who has a best interest recommendation but before the freeing order is granted by the Court. The number of people wishing to provide concurrent care grew from 1 couple in the previous year to 4 couples in this period.

One couple presented to the Panel within this reporting period were not recommended for approval. They appealed this decision and their application was subsequently heard by the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust Adoption Panel, who upheld the recommendation of the South Eastern Trust Adoption Panel.

There were no age range amendments or rescinding of approvals in this year.

	2018/2019	2017/2018
Approval ranges amended	Zero	One
Approvals deferred	Zero	Zero
Approvals to Adopt Rescinded by Panel	Zero	Zero
Adoption Reviews	Eight	Eight
Approved Adoption Applicants on Trust Adoption Register as of 31 st March 2019	Eight	Eleven
Approved Adoption Allowances for this period	One	Eleven Households (Eleven children)
Total Number of Adoption Allowances Paid	Seventy-two households, which corresponds to Eighty-three children (as of 31.03.19).	Seventy-two households, which corresponds to Eighty-six children

The Adoption Team are actively involved in the Regional “Adoption Changes Lives” Campaign, launched during national Adoption Week (15-21st October 2018). In order to publicise this, posters were displayed in all Trust premises and promoted on the Trust and Regional Websites. An Information Evening was held on 22nd October 2018 at which thirty-three people attended (sixteen couples and one person whose husband was unable to attend). Five of these couples were prompted to attend as a result of Campaign publicity, the remaining eleven couples and one individual received invitations from the Trust to attend as they had previously enquired about adoption. Two of the couples were from other Trusts. Of the remaining fifteen families, seven expressed an interest in proceeding further and received home visits.

The number of enquiries during October 2018 was twelve, compared to five in September and November 2017. The total number of enquiries the Trust received between 1st October 2018 and 31 March 2019 was forty-three.

In March 2019, twelve people attended the Preparation to Adopt course held in Bangor. All six couples (one same sex) have applied to the South Eastern Trust to progress their application. All wished to proceed with their application and are at different stages in the adoption process.

The Adoption team continue to working with Adoption Services across the region to co-ordinate regional recruitment campaigns.

Adopters continue to attend the Trust training organised by the Fostering Team. The training includes topics such as 'Introduction to Attachment', 'Attachment Building' and 'Brain Development & Trauma'. Adopters also attend the 'Core Issues in Fostering' training. The Trust recognises the importance of training to prospective and approved adopters in addition to social work support. Over the last six months the Adoption Service has introduced their own training booklet including courses on Post-Adoption Blues, Parent and Child Yoga and Infant Mental Health. To date attendance by adopters at various stages in the process has been excellent and encouraging. All those who attended have found these courses beneficial and feedback has been very positive. It has also been noted that there has been an improvement in adopters attending fostering training courses, which has also been advertised in the Adoption Training booklet.

Adoption Services will continue to highlight adoption and the needs of children who require adoption through local media, combined regional campaigns, using social media platforms and using adopters' personal experiences of adoption. These efforts will seek to encourage more enquiries.

In October 2018 an audit was completed in adoption services. The audit sought to identify learning regarding:

- Timescales & processes of assessment of prospective adoptive carers.
- Identify, if any, service improvements to the adoption process to promote positive experiences of prospective adopters

A range of recommendations were identified to improve efficiency within the team through the development of internal processes.

DOMESTIC APPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT RECEIVED

In total, sixteen applications from prospective adoptive parents were received by the Adoption Team between the period 1st April 2018 - 31st March 2019.

These applicants are all at various states in the assessment process and have not yet been presented to Panel for a recommendation for approval. These applications

will be presented to the Adoption Panel upon completion and addressed in the next reporting period.

ADOPTION REVIEWS

Following the approval of prospective adopters, the social worker should visit and review their circumstances on a 6 monthly basis; a written report should be considered by a manager and forwarded to the holder of the list of Approved Prospective Adopters. Most prospective adopters have obtained a placement within the first year to 18 months of being approved as prospective adoptive parents.

ADOPTION ALLOWANCES

A recommendation that Adoption allowances should be paid was made in respect of one child during 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019. In total, adoption allowances were paid to seventy-two households. This was in relation to forty-two males and forty-one females (eighty-three in total).

Due to the complex histories of some of the children being presented to Panel, at the point of the formal match, the Panel have recommended that payment of adoption allowance are left open for four children for future consideration. This ensures that if the needs of the child changes as they grow and develop, adoption allowances can be claimed to provide additional support if required.

DOMESTIC ADOPTION APPLICATIONS (BY TRUST AREA)

SETRUST Area	2018 / 2019	2017 / 2018
North Down	Eight	Eight
Lisburn	Five	Seven
Downpatrick	Three	Six

The figures above highlight that the greatest number of people applying for adoption in this reporting period are from the North Down and Lisburn areas, with a decrease in the number of applications from the Downpatrick area. However it should be recognised that these figures vary from year to year.

The South Eastern Trust continues to offer a range of options for adopters, i.e. dual approval, concurrent care, straight adoption (after the granting of a Freeing Order), however the vast majority of adoptions continue to remain in the dual approval category, although the number being approved for concurrent care is increasing.

It is pleasing to note that it is now the norm for all applicants to attend the Adoption panel when their adoption application is being considered.

An information leaflet for applicants which outlines Adoption Panel membership and what to expect on the day of their attendance is currently being updated and will reflect the changes to panel composition over the last 2 years.

Adoption panel cancellations

Adoption Panels were cancelled in this reporting period (August and November 2018) due to cases being withdrawn and no other cases ready for presentation at short notice. On other occasions, some Panels were oversubscribed. This trend of the Panel timetable not being fully utilised is reflective of the complex care planning and Court processes associated with this age group of children, resulting from a range of factors:

- Cases are unable to be considered by panel for a Best Interest if the parents have been granted permission from the Court for further assessment, even if the Trust does not join in these instructions. This can delay the progression of the care planning process to Freeing. Children may have care plans recommending permanence via adoption, but are not able to proceed to the Adoption Panel until the outstanding assessments have been received and considered carefully.
- Kinship carers coming forward to be assessed at later stages in care planning and Court processes.
- Cases being booked into Panel prematurely when the care plan is still twin tracked, and new developments in the birth family.

The above factors have resulted on an impact on Adoption panel availability when social workers request panel dates. All these issues continue to be monitored and reviewed by the Adoption Service in an effort to promote panel effectiveness and availability.

6.0 **ADOPTION REGIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (ARIS)**

REFERRALS OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

From the 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019, the profiles of eleven approved adopters from the Trust were notified to ARIS. Of these approved adopters, one was kinship and was referred only for statistical purposes. The remaining ten were 'stranger' adopters. Five of these were identified for placements within our own Trust, and therefore did not go 'live' on ARIS.

REFERRALS OF CHILDREN

Eighteen children from the Trust were notified to ARIS as having a Best Interest recommendation in this reporting period.

From the 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019, the Trust referred eight new children to ARIS for matching, as no suitable matches were available within the South Eastern Trust area. Potential links have been identified for four of these children and one placement from the ARIS database is being explored.

ARIS Exchange Days are arranged and facilitated by Health and Social Care Board. This is a process where Trusts within the region profile children that they have experienced difficulty obtaining a placement for. There are normally two Exchange days per year, whereby the child's social worker will be in attendance and available to answer any questions prospective adoptive parents may have. Pictures and videos of the children form part of the social work presentation. Prospective adoptive parents who are 'live' on ARIS are invited to attend each Exchange day.

There were two ARIS Exchange days in the period (17th April and 2nd October 2018) At the April 2018 event; the SETRUST profiled two single girls ranging in age from eleven months to thirty months. Neither of these has resulted in a placement. No placement has been identified for the older child who has complex developmental needs and the current foster carers now wish to offer a long-term foster placement. The younger child was subsequently matched through the ARIS database and is placed for adoption in a cross-Trust placement.

At the October 2018 event the South Eastern Trust Permanence team profiled three children in total; two girls and one boy. There were no expressions of interest in the younger girl who has complex needs (she was eighteen months old at the time of the event). The older girl, who was five years old at the time, had limited expressions of interest and no placement was identified. There were expressions of interest in the boy, who was two years old, however the Trust is currently re-examining his Care plan.

These events are a good way of accessing the pool of approved prospective adopters across the region, though are very time consuming in the preparation and follow up, sadly not always resulting in a suitable placement being found.

7.0 NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL OVERVIEW – ORDERS GRANTED

	2018 / 2019	2017 / 2018
Placement Adoption Orders granted	Seventy Three	Eighty-five
Adoption Abroad granted	Zero	Zero
Adoption Relative granted	Zero	Two
Intercountry Adoption granted	Two	Zero
Freeing Orders granted	Seventy-Four	Eighty-three

The Trust secured nine Placement Adoption Orders in this period for children who were previously looked after. This accounted for 12% of the adoption orders granted regionally. The previous year the South Eastern Trust accounted for the highest percentage of adoptions across the region at 26%. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of care planning towards adoption.

HSC Trust	Number	% of all adopted children
Belfast	22	30%
Northern	16	22%
South Eastern	9	12%
Southern	8	11%
Western	18	25%
Northern Ireland	73	100%

Children Adopted from Care in Northern Ireland 2018/19

8.0 INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

	2018 / 2019	2017 / 2018
Number of Adoption Applications approved by Panel via Intercountry Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two • One couple approved as adoptive parents for one female child, in the age range of 0-2 years, from Thailand. • A second couple were approved as adoptive parents for one female child, in the age range of 3-5 years, from Thailand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three - One couple were approved for one female child aged 0-2 years or siblings aged 0-3 years from Thailand. - One couple were approved for one or two children of either gender aged 0-3 years from the Philippines - One couple were approved for one female child, aged 0 to 18 months, from Thailand
Adoption Orders Granted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One (in respect of one female child, from Thailand) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two (in respect of two female children, both from Thailand)
Change of acceptance range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One

Applications and placements have been from Hague convention ratified countries (e.g. Thailand, Philippine's). Hague convention placements (with the exception of the Philippines) do not require an application to the High Court for an Adoption Order under Northern Ireland legislation. All Hague convention placements are carried out under an entrustment or private fostering arrangement.

The Regional Team for Intercountry Adoption undertake the assessment of all inter-country applicants. The Trust now complete post placement assessments, reviews and reports, which is an additional and new area of work, however as noted above the numbers are small.

In April 2016 inter-country adoption cases for the South Eastern Trust transferred from Belfast Trust to the SEHSCT. We currently have seven inter-country cases; one set of adoptive parents had a child placed with them in this reporting period. These placements require support, statutory visits and reviews until an Article 23 is received by the Trust.

9.0 **SOUTH EASTERN TRUST PRE- LINKING PANEL**

The South Eastern Trust Pre-Linking panel meets on a monthly basis. The current make-up of the Panel is as follows;

- Principal Social Worker for Adoption (Chairperson),
- Principal Social Worker for Safeguarding,
- Senior Social Worker for Permanence and Post Adoption Support Teams(x2),
- Senior Social Worker for Adoption Team,
- Psychologist, SET Connects
- Senior Social Worker for Fostering

The Pre-Adoption Linking Panel is now well established in the Trust and has continued to identify potential links between children and prospective adoptive parents. The Panel is considering potential matches at an earlier stage which is having a positive outcome for the children presented. This has helped to speed up the placement process by enabling possible placements for children to be identified at an earlier stage thus shortening delay.

The Pre-Adoption Linking Panel also facilitates a transparent process of reviewing matches considered for prospective adoptive parents. A matching criterion is used following presentations in respect of the children.

The Adoption Panel and Pre-linking Panel engaged in joint training provided by a very experienced Independent Panel Chair from Scotland in June 2018, this training focused on research and Panel experiences around pre-linking considerations and considered areas for development to improve reporting to the Adoption Panel on the decision making processes relating to matching recommendations.

SUMMARY OF PRE-LINKING PANEL BUSINESS

CHILDREN

- Thirty one children have been considered at the Pre-Linking Panel during the reporting period. Of these, thirteen were male and eighteen were female. Seven of these children were sibling groups (six groups of two and one group of three).
- The age range of the children considered at the Pre-Linking Panel ranged from eight months to six years and ten months old.

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Twenty five couples were considered in respect of potential matches during this period.

- Matching criteria was applied in respect of the prospective applicants and on occasions, couples may have been considered for more than one child.

10.0 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT AND BREAKDOWNS

The Trust Permanence & Post-Adoption Support Teams continue to offer support to families following the granting of an Adoption Order. As a result of Children's Transformation funding, these teams have been enhanced during the reporting period by an additional three members of social work staff

In this reporting period, the Trust supported forty-five families who had requested post-adoption support for their child. Support services offered ranged from counselling, advice, narrative work, theraplay, self-esteem work, and addressing issues around contact. Some of these families were referred into the Trust SET Connects Service for Psychology input. Some were referred through the Post-Adoption referral Panel into Extern projects such as Linx and Time Out, which provide support for teenagers who are displaying risk-taking behaviours. Therapeutic, Education and Support Services in Adoption (Tessa) also provided support to a number of families during this period.

Three young people (age range 15-17) became looked after during this reporting period. Each of these families had been receiving support for over a year including social work, psychology services and CAMHS. These young people were experiencing a range of issues including violent outbursts, problems with drugs and alcohol, self-harming, criminal activity, educational issues, poor coping strategies and difficulties in the parent-child relationship. Case responsibility for post-adoption support is the responsibility of the Trust's Permanence & Post Adoption Team, who also maintains responsibility for these young people for a number of months following reception into care. The plan is for these cases to transfer to the Intensive Support / 16+ social work teams. The Permanence & Post Adoption team continue to engage with the family unit to offer support.

The team continued to provide support regarding post-adoption contact. In this reporting period, one hundred and forty-four children and young people have had direct contacts with a variety of birth family members, which are supervised by Trust staff. Reviews of this contact take place periodically. Forty-one indirect contacts took place in reporting period through the Post box services, which is operated by the team.

The Trust is becoming more proactive with our post-adoption families. Three post-adoption groups took place during the reporting period; a cookery school, an attachment based swimming group and a survival skills day for teenagers. Each of these included a child/parent pairing for the activity to enhance the attachment, whilst having fun and building a network with other adoptive families and mixing with staff from the Trust. In total these groups reached twenty-three families.

11.0 Adoption Panel Service Developments

There are a number of areas of service developments relating to adoption panel business to be progress in the coming year.

- The Trust will be progressing the appointment of an Adoption Panel Advisor in the next reporting period. This role is a non-voting member of the panel whose role is to advise panel members and presenting social work staff on agency policy, procedure and practice, to quality assure reports coming to panel and assist the Chairperson and administrator in agreeing the agenda and finalising the Panel record. This role is to be established and it is envisaged that this will promote the effective use of panel time, share learning from good practise amongst practitioners and enhance the quality of written presentations coming before the panel. This will improve the quality reporting to panel and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of panel time.
- Development of feedback from adoption panel attendees to assist learning and development.
- Enhancement of connectivity between the Trust pre-linking panel and the Adoption panel, to ensure effective communication between the Trust pre-linking panel and the adoption panel around the decision making processes involved in the matching of children to prospective adopters. The Trust was also be incorporating into panel presentations the proposed transition plans and support plans for children moving to adoptive placements.
- The Trust adoption service will continue to develop practice relating to the recruitment, training and post adoption support for children and adoptive families. The adoption panel will continue to be fully informed of these practice development through adoption panel business days.

Appendix 1

ADOPTION PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Adoption Panel membership for the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 is set out below;

Mrs Kate Anderson	Independent Chairperson
Mrs Lisa Hine	Vice-Chairperson & Head Of Service Fostering & Adoption
Dr Heather Anderson	Medical Advisor
Dr Maura Briscoe Non-Executive Trust Board Member	South Eastern H&SC Trust Board Representative
Mrs Joan O'Hagan Non-Executive Trust Board Member	South Eastern H&SC Trust Board Representative
Mr Jonathan Patton Non-Executive Trust Board Member	South Eastern H&SC Trust Board Representative
Mrs Janine Walker	Independent Member (On a break from Panel duties)
Mrs Nicola Cherry	Independent Member
Mrs Claire Brennan	Independent Member
Mr Stephen McVey	Independent Member
Ms Sara Tibbs	Independent Member
Ms Dorothy Riordan	Independent Member

Mr Wesley Graham	Independent Member
Mrs Ann Walsh	PSW Cared For Children (Social Work Representative)
Mrs Gillian Forrest	Principal Practitioner – Court (Social Work Representative)
Ms Lorraine Noade	PSW Cared For Children (Social Work Representative)
Mr David Hamilton	PSW, SET Connects Manager & PSW Family Centre (Social Work Representative)
Dr Michael Hoy	Assistant Director & Trust Agency Decision Maker ** (left post in November 2018)
Ms Sinead Owens Ms Emma O'Neill Directorate of Legal Services	Panel Legal Advisors Non -Voting
Dr Kerry Sweeney Consultant Psychologist	Provision of advice when required.
Mr Conor Smyth	Adoption Panel Admin Manager
Ms Carole Wright	Administration Manager (Oversees Panel Administration in the absence of Mr Smyth)

Please note the social work representation, non-executive director and independent member attend panel on a rotational basis.

****Agency Decision Maker**

The Agency decision maker is a senior manager in the Agency with expertise in adoption and childcare who has been designated to make decisions on behalf of the Agency, including those specified in the Adoption of Overseas Children Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002.

It is the role of the Agency Decision Maker(ADM) to review the Adoption panel recommendations, before making a decision on behalf of the Trust. The Agency Decision Maker can approve the recommendation, refuse the recommendation, ask for additional information or request further work is completed. Dr Michael Hoy left this post in November 2018, Mrs Lisa Hine; (Head of Service for Fostering & Adoption) has undertaken the role on an of Acting Agency Decision Maker since this time, on an interim basis pending the role being assumed by the newly appointed Assistant Director.