

Introduction

This report summarises the work of Lancashire County Council's Adoption Panel over the 6 month period from 1st April to 30th September 2019. Lancashire Adoption Panels are Joint panels which means that they compose of both Adoption and fostering items. However this report considers just the adoption items.

With regard to children's cases and the decision to place for adoption, this was removed from the panels remit, except in cases where there is no court scrutiny (relinquished children). However, this report also summarises the work of these separate SHOPA meetings (see section 2 of this report).

SECTION ONE

1. Composition of the adoption panels and recruitment activity

The Agency is required to maintain a central list of persons who are considered to be suitable members of an adoption panel.

The central list is designed to reduce delay for children through by avoiding postponement of panels due to not being quorate (requires a minimum of five members). Each panel must include a social worker with a minimum of three years' experience.

Each panel also requires an independent chair (or vice chair) and three other members, at least one of whom must be independent if the Chair is not present. Both our panel chair and vice chair are independent panel members. We also have a medical advisor at each panel, a minute taker and a panel advisor.

During this period we have had a level of uncertainty due to the ongoing Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) planning. However, we have recruited 2x new independent social workers who are now available to sit as panel members. One is a retired registered manager of a private fostering agency and the other a retired practice manager from a local authority fostering service. In addition, enquiries have been made to our democratic services regarding the availability of elected members to sit on our panels. Due to the imminent changes to panel scheduling as a result of the RAA, it has been agreed that elected members will be approached to sit on panel once the new timetable and structure of panels comes into effect.

2. Support and training available to panel members

During this period, there has been one panel development day which took place on 4th June 2019. This development day focused on team building between the panel members for the two authorities that are merging to become a RAA in the near future (Lancashire and Blackpool). As such the panel members from both authorities were invited to attend. The session was hosted by the panel advisor for Lancashire County Council and a student on placement with the advisor at the time.

This session included the following:

- Introductions and agenda for the day. Housekeeping.
- A brief guided meditation to relieve stress (included as part of Lancashire's Health & Wellbeing initiative)
- Life highlights session- an icebreaker which touched on social media use, the positives and the issues to be aware of. This sparked conversation regarding the need for foster carers to understand social media and how children use it.
- The Apprentice- a team building exercise which involved everyone bringing a precious item to the session (which they were advised of at invite stage) and each team deciding on one

of the items to pitch (or sell) to the whole cohort. This led on to discussion about precious items and life story work for children who are adopted.

- Hopes and fears- A team exercise which explored hopes and fears in relation to the team merge as part of the RAA development. The panel advisor answered as many questions as possible and two of the three panel chairs from across the two authorities were also present to assist.
- Evaluation (see below)

The feedback from panel members regarding this development day was as follows:

1. Something they enjoyed today

- Chocolate from the apprentice session
- Meeting people
- Meeting new people, excellent advice, team building exercise, nice atmosphere, well organised and good participation
- The apprentice session and mindfulness session

2. Something they would like to point out

- The student was very good, and it was good to have an agenda in advance
- Bigger room would be better and more Blackpool attendees
- Not everyone is comfortable with icebreakers and meditation, the facilitators could have mixed us up more
- Not a strong Blackpool representative

3. Something they did not enjoy

- Mindfulness as it felt uncomfortable
- Standing up at the front singing and dancing as the room was too small
- Nothing
- Mindfulness and room too small

4. Something they will treasure

- Meeting Blackpool and Preston panel members and meeting new members
- The pitches were informative and funny, made nice new friends and the clarity and structure of the day was good.
- The pitches presentations session
- Meeting new and old people

5. Something they would like to add

- Formal joint briefing sessions including all panel members and staff
- More factual information about the RAA
- Grieving process and overview of systems. Overall the day was well led and organised and the time limits for each of the sessions were perfect.

6. What have you taken away from the day?

- Meeting new faces, laughter and teamwork in a fun way. We also felt welcomed throughout the day.
- Smiles and laughter, friendships, a better understanding of the RAA and fond memories of the day.
- Meeting new people and putting names to faces.

Panel members have also had access to briefings each month which are provided on the server. The following topics have been covered during this reporting period:

- A copy of the Independent Review Mechanism's (IRM) report from 2016 shared.
- Briefing produced by the panel advisor regarding a Lancashire case that went to the IRM – discussion on lessons learned. Reflection on whether panel need to adapt their questions when considering a negative recommendation.
- A 7 minute briefing from The Safeguarding Board on Coercive Control
- A 7 minute briefing from The Safeguarding Board on Social Media and Mental Health
- Copy of The Fostering Network Summary Report 2019 provided for information.
- A 7 minute briefing from The Safeguarding board on making safeguarding Personal.

All regular panel members have an appraisal each year of service. Those who are on the reserve list and attend ad hoc have appraisals as appropriate depending on how often they attend.

All panel members have again completed GDPR online training in this reporting period or at least within the last year. The requirement is that this online training is completed every year.

3. Panel Functions

The Adoption Panels key function is to make recommendations to the agency decision maker on the following:

- The suitability of prospective adoptive applicants to adopt
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with particular prospective adopters.
- To consider the review of approved adopters who have not been linked to a child in the first 12 months of approval
- To scrutinise cases where children are relinquished for adoption.
- The panels also look at any disrupted placements and cases where adopters resign within their first year, as lessons learned exercises.

In addition, the National Minimum Standards 2014 states that:

- Panel's report every 6 months on the quality of reports presented
- Panel's report on the restrictions on preparing these reports
- Panel's report on the consistency of linking's, approvals and decisions to place for adoption (in the case of the later, as already noted this is reported on in section 2 of this report)

3. Composition and comparison of items presented to panel during this period

To prevent these reports being cumbersome, the data for this period is compared with the last 2 reportable periods only. This will allow an analysis of data over the whole year and a comparison between this reporting period and the same reporting period last year.

BREAKDOWN OF PANEL ITEMS 1 ST APRIL - 30 TH SEPTEMBER 2019	
Total number of items presented	82
Mainstream Approvals	37
Concurrent Approvals	5
De-registration	0
Relinquished Child – SHOPA	1
Mainstream Linkings	29
Concurrent Linkings	4
FFA Linkings	6
BREAKDOWN OF PANEL ITEMS 1 ST OCT 2018 – 31 ST MAR 2019	
Total number of items presented	66
Mainstream Approvals	28
Concurrent Approvals	9
De-registration	1
Relinquished Child – SHOPA	1
Mainstream Linkings	19
Concurrent Linkings	3
FFA Linkings	5
BREAKDOWN OF PANEL ITEMS 1 ST APR 2018 – 30 TH SEPT 2018	
Total number of items presented	82
Mainstream Approvals	29
Concurrent Approvals	9
De-registration	1

Relinquished Child – SHOPA	1
Mainstream Linking's	32
Concurrent Linking's	4
FFA Linking's	6

BREAKDOWN OF THE ABOVE AND ANALYSIS

- Over the last year there has been a total of **148** items submitted to the Lancashire adoption panels. Of these **14** were for the approval of concurrent carers, **65** were mainstream approvals and **66** were linking's. We have had only **1** deregistration for the whole year and only **2** relinquished children.
- On completion of the next 6 monthly report from October 2019 to March 2020 there will be a comparison and analysis between the last 2 reporting years to chart the overall increase or decrease in panel business.
- Comparison between this 6 monthly reporting period and the same reporting period last year shows that the statistics have remained fairly consistent. Both periods had a total of **82** items submitted.
- The only significant difference between this period and the same reporting period last year is that mainstream approvals are up from **29** to **37**. That's a **27%** increase in the number of adopters available to the service.

5 The quality of reports presented to panel

The panels grade the paperwork for each item that is presented using an electronic feedback system. Assessments are completed by a central team who cover all areas of Lancashire and therefore this analysis does not include a comparison between localities. This feedback is given on all approvals or PARS, relinquished babies and on all linking's or APRs. It is not however given on disruptions, reports submitted where there is a negative recommendation or for resignations.

The feedback is sent to the panel advisor in the form of an email from the data capture software (clicksuite). This is then forwarded by the advisor to the social worker and their manager so that this can form part of their supervision as appropriate.

Submissions are graded as either: Very Good, Fairly Good, Average, Fairly Poor or Poor.

There were **81** reports of the **82** submissions that required feedback. Of those reports a total of **75** received feedback. The missing 6 reports were presented to a panel in June while the advisor was not available. This will be raised with the service for future to ensure that feedback is sought even in the advisors absence. However the total number of reports receiving feedback has improved since the last reporting period whereby out of **65** reports that required feedback only **48** received it.

Therefore, in this reporting period, a total of **92%** of submissions received feedback compared to only **73%** in the last period. .

THE RESULTS

THE QUALITY OF REPORTS FOR THIS PERIOD 1 ST APR – 30 TH SEPT 2019				
VERY GOOD	FAIRLY GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIRLY POOR	VERY POOR
53	18	4	0	0
THE QUALITY OF REPORTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 ST OCT 2018- 31 ST MAR 2019				
VERY GOOD	FAIRLY GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIRLY POOR	VERY POOR
35	5	8	0	0
THE QUALITY OF REPORTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 ST APR – 30 TH SEP 2018				
VERY GOOD	FAIRLY GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIRLY POOR	VERY POOR
38	9	4	2	0

BREAKDOWN OF THE ABOVE

- **70%** of the items that received feedback were considered to be of very good quality.
- Of the figures above, **29** of the items graded as very good were PARs (assessments) and **24** were APRs (linking's).
- Of those considered average, all **4** were linking's.
- There were **0** items considered to be below an average quality
- The reasons given for the average scores for the APRs were: lack of an appropriate support plan to highlight the support available for adopters who come from external agencies, CPR not being updated (this was the reason in **2** cases) and the practicalities of managing 2x children as a single carer not explored, the practicalities of a couple managing 3x children placed at the same time not explored.

ANALYSIS OF THE ABOVE

From the above table it is clear that the number of reports receiving the top grading has improved. However, as noted, the number of reports receiving feedback has also gone up considerably, this will skew the data. What can be determined is that for both the previous period and the same period last year, there is a positive trend towards more reports receiving a good or very good grading and fewer reports receiving a mark of average or below.

6. Timescales

For previous reports we have used the regulatory timescales. However for this report and the previous report we have used the Adoption scorecard data. Thus comparison is only available over the last year.

DATA FOR THIS PERIOD

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (days)

Start of Care to Placement - average 493 days

Total Placed	Within Timescale	Outside of Timescale	
47	22	25	46.8% within timescale

A2: Days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)

Placement Order to Matching Decision - average 157 days

Total Matched	Within Timescale	Outside of Timescale	
46	28	19	69.9% within timescale

A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family %

Total Placed	Less than 14 months	
47	22	46.8% in less than 14 months

DATA FOR THE PREVIOUS PERIOD

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (days)

Start of Care to Placement - Current Target = less than 425 days

Total Placed	Within Timescale	Outside of Timescale	
83	49	34	59% within timescale

A2: Days between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)

Placement Order to Matching Decision - Current target = less than 121 days

Total Matched	Within Timescale	Outside of Timescale	
84	56	28	66.6% within timescale

A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family %

Total Placed	Less than 14 months	
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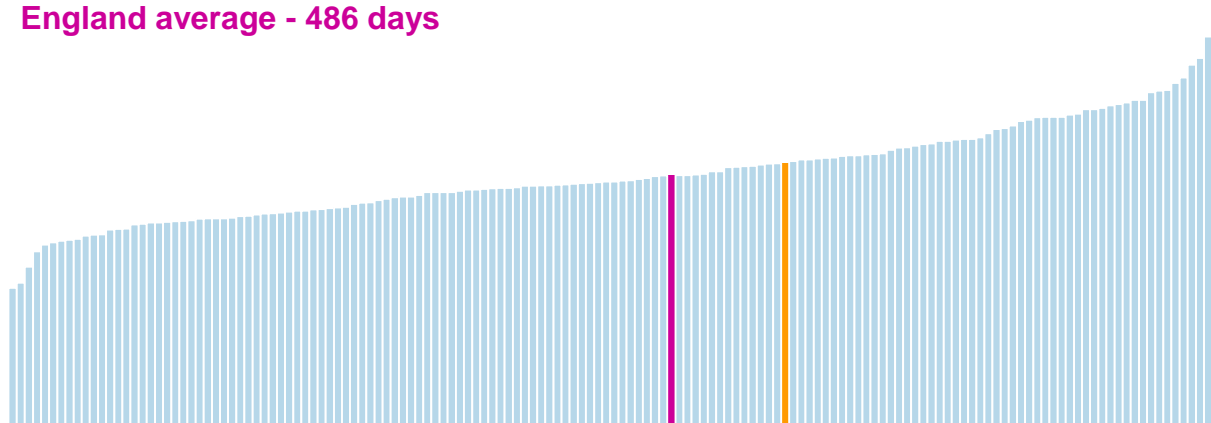
83

48

57.8% in less than 14 months

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2015-18

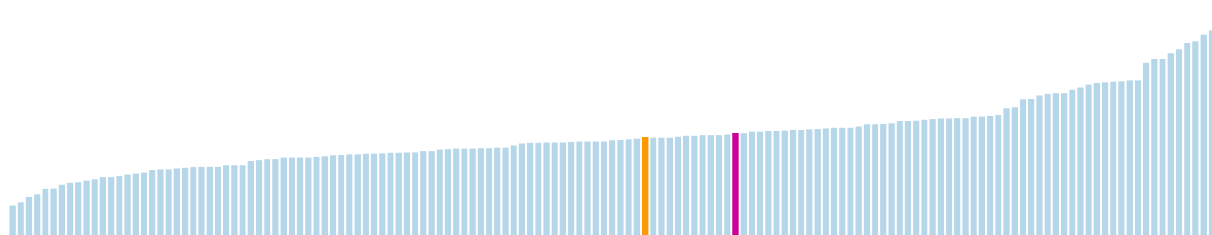
England average - 486 days



The chart above is the adoption scorecard for A1 timescales. The red line indicates the average marker. The yellow line shows Lancashire's position nationally. Therefore, Lancashire are above average in terms of the time taken between a child entering care and moving into an adoptive family.

A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, 2015-18

England average - 201 days



The chart above is the adoption scorecard for A2 timescales. The red line indicates the average marker. The yellow line shows Lancashire's position nationally. Therefore, Lancashire are below average in terms of the time taken between receiving authority to place and deciding on a match.

ANALYSIS

Comparison over the year shows a slight drop in the targets with less than **50%** within the A1 timescale for this period compared to nearly **60%** in the previous period. In addition the total number with orders dropped considerably. Lancashire's average of **493** days for A1 is above the national average of **486** as can be seen from the chart above.

However, our A2 statistics show a better than the national average result. Our average number of days being **157** days compared to the national average of **201** days.

7. Qualified Social workers

Panels are required to feedback on whether the social worker preparing the reports is suitably qualified under the restrictions on writing reports 2005 regulations. It is the panel advisor's view that **100%** of cases were presented by a suitably qualified social worker as in the cases where a social worker was not suitably qualified, the work was overseen by a relevant qualified social worker or manager who was qualified. However, the table is useful to determine the number of newly qualified social workers who are undertaking this task.

THIS PERIOD	APPROVALS	LINKING'S		RELINQUISHED BABY
	PAR	PAR	APR	CPR
Social Worker Qualified	27	32	27	1
Social Worker Not Qualified (report overseen by practice manager who is qualified)	15	4	11	0
Social Worker Qualified - not recorded	0	3	1	0

LAST PERIOD	APPROVALS	LINKING'S		RELINQUISHED BABY
	PAR	PAR	APR	CPR
Social Worker Qualified	30	26	17	1
Social Worker Not Qualified (report overseen by practice manager who is qualified)	7	0	9	0
Social Worker Qualified - not recorded	1	0	0	

PREVIOUS PERIOD	APPROVALS	LINKING'S		RELINQUISHED BABY
	PAR	CPR	PAR	CPR
Social Worker Qualified	33	37	40	1
Social Worker Not Qualified (report overseen by practice manager who is qualified)	4	5	2	

Social Worker Qualified - not recorded	1	0	0	
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ANALYSIS OF THE ABOVE

Comparison of the above highlights that the number of newly qualified staff completing these reports has risen since the last reporting period and in comparison to the same reporting period last year.

SECTION TWO

1. 'Should be placed for adoption' (SHOPA) decisions

The decision to place a child for adoption is considered by the agency decision maker (ADM) without attendance at a panel. The ADM takes into account the paperwork submitted by: the childcare social worker, the panel advisor, the medical advisor and the legal advisor. There are 3 SHOPA (should be placed for adoption) submissions every month. There is a general requirement that submissions for legal advice require 5 days for completion as a minimum. All paperwork goes through a quality assurance (QA) process before it reaches the ADM.

2. The breakdown of business and grading of submissions

BREAKDOWN OF BUSINESS

DETAILS OF SUBMISSIONS FOR THIS PERIOD	
Total number of cases presented to ADM Consultation	55
Number considered for SHOPA	49
Number of SHOPA agreed	49
Number of SHOPA recommendations deferred	0
Number of SHOPA not agreed within this timeframe (will be carried forward to the next period)	3
Number considered for Change of Plan	3
Number of Changes of Plans agreed	3
Review of SHOPA	0
Number of Change of Plans deferred	0
DETAILS OF SUBMISSIONS FOR THE LAST PERIOD	
Total number of cases presented to ADM Consultation	51
Number considered for SHOPA	46
Number of SHOPA agreed	43

Number of SHOPA recommendations deferred	2
Number of SHOPA not agreed	1
Number considered for Change of Plan	2
Number of Changes of Plans agreed	1
Review of SHOPA	0
Number of Change of Plans deferred	1
DETAILS OF SUBMISSIONS FOR THE PERIOD 1st APRIL 2018 TO 30th SEPTEMBER 2018	
Total number of cases presented to ADM Consultation	53
Number considered for SHOPA	42
Number of SHOPA agreed	37
Number of SHOPA recommendations deferred	5
Number considered for Change of Plan	11
Number of Changes of Plans agreed	7
Review of SHOPA	4

ANALYSIS OF THE ABOVE

- During this period a total of **55** cases have been brought to the SHOPA ADM. Of these, **49** were for a SHOPA decision and **3** were to change an existing SHOPA decision to an alternative care plan. The remainder will receive a decision within the next reporting period.
- The above figures are comparable to both the previous six months and to the same period last year.
 - In the previous six months there were a total of **51** cases with **46** of those being for a SHOPA decision and **2** for a change of plan
 - In the same period last year the figures were: **53** cases with **42** of those being for a SHOPA decision and **11** for a change of plan.
- Over the last year there has been a total of **106** submissions to the agency decision maker. Of these **0** were deferred. That's **100%** of reports submitted deemed to be good enough for a decision to be made.
- The number of change of care plan submissions for the whole year is **5**, with only **3** in this period, which is a considerable drop from the same reporting period last year, which was **11**.

That's a decrease of **72%** which is encouraging. The aim is to reduce the number of change of plans that are presented by ensuring a more robust decision making process at the initial submission to SHOPA.

GRADING OF BUSINESS

The agency decision maker has considered the quality and consistency of all child permanence reports (CPRs) across the different areas of Lancashire, as seen below.

The paperwork presented for the change of care plans (3 cases in total) does not receive a grading from the ADM.

The grading scale used is: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

The table below for this period can then be compared to the data provided for the previous period.

QUALITY OF REPORTS SUBMITTED FOR THIS PERIOD			
	Number of SHOPA cases from the East of the county	Number of SHOPA cases from the North of the county.	Number of SHOPA cases from the Central area of the county
Total considered	25	5	19
Number considered outstanding	0	0	0
Number considered good	1	0	2
Number considered to require improvement	21	5	9
Number considered in adequate	3	0	8
Number that ADM did not record a grade for	0	0	0
QUALITY OF REPORTS SUBMITTED FOR THE LAST PERIOD			
	Number of SHOPA cases from the East of the county	Number of SHOPA cases from the North of the county.	Number of SHOPA cases from the Central area of the county
Total considered	20	8	18
Number considered outstanding	0	0	0

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Number considered good	8	3	4
Number considered to require improvement	9	4	12
Number considered inadequate	2	0	0
Number that ADM did not record a grade for	1	1	2

QUALITY OF REPORTS SUBMITTED FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL 2018 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2018

	Number of SHOPA cases from the East of the county	Number of SHOPA cases from the North of the county.	Number of SHOPA cases from the Central area of the county
Total considered	14	10	18
Number considered outstanding	0	0	0
Number considered good	2	1	5
Number considered to require improvement	11	6	13
Number considered inadequate	0	1	0
Number that ADM did not record a grade for	1	2	0

BREAKDOWN AND ANALYSIS OF THE ABOVE

- There are no outstanding reports for this period or the previous, or for the same reporting period last year.
- Only 6% of the reports for this period were considered to be of a good standard compared to 32% of reports in the last period. This highlights a decrease in the quality of reports submitted to SHOPA.

- Comparison over the three localities highlights that the most submissions came from East and that of those submissions the majority were considered to require improvement. Equally, in all 3 localities the most consistent grading was 'requires improvement' which suggests further work is needed to improve the standard of submissions throughout the Authority.
- In addition to the above, Central submitted the most submissions that were considered to be inadequate, a total of **42%** of their overall submissions. This will be highlighted to the advanced practitioners for the area so that further work can be conducted to ensure an increase in the quality of reports submitted to SHOPA.

4.Timescales of submissions for 'should be placed for adoption' decisions

The timescales are measured from the point the plan of adoption has been ratified by the independent reviewing officer (IRO) to the date of the SHOPA decision. This should be no more than 8 weeks with a requirement to present to SHOPA within 6 weeks to allow time for a decision to be made. Changes of plan are not included in this data therefore there are **52** submissions to consider.

SHOPA TIMESCALES BASED ON SHOPA AGREED FOR THIS PERIOD	
Number recorded out of timescales	2
Number recorded within timescales	50
Number of cases where timescales have not been recorded	0
Number of cases where social worker considers within timescales	0

REASONS GIVEN FOR TIMESCALES DELAYS	
Adoption medicals	0
Staffing	0
Viability assessments	0
No reason given	2
Other	0
SHOPA TIMESCALES BASED ON SHOPA AGREED FOR THE LAST PERIOD	
Number recorded out of timescales	6

Number recorded within timescales	31
Number of cases where timescales have not been recorded	3
Number of cases where social worker considers within timescales	6
REASONS GIVEN FOR TIMESCALES DELAYS	
Adoption medicals	0
Staffing	0
Viability assessments	0
No reason given	0
Other	Reports not of sufficient quality Leave to oppose PO application
SHOPA TIMESCALES BASED ON SHOPA AGREED FOR THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR	
Number recorded out of timescales	10
Number recorded within timescales	24
Number of cases where timescales have not been recorded	5
Number of cases where social worker considers within timescales	2
REASONS GIVEN FOR TIMESCALE DELAYS	
Adoption medicals	3
Staffing	0
Viability assessments	3
No reason given	4

BREAKDOWN OF THE ABOVE

- There appears to be an improvement in the number of submissions that are considered to be within timescale in this last period. Out of the **52** submissions a total of **50** were within timescale, that's **96%** compared with **67%** for the last period.
- The reasons given for delay in this period have not been provided.

4. Qualified Social workers

The agency decision maker for should be placed for adoption decisions is required to feedback on whether the social worker preparing the reports was suitably qualified.

ADOPTION AGENCIES REGULATIONS SOCIAL WORKER QUALIFIED FOR 3 YEARS (SHOPA AGREED)	
Number recorded as qualified	33
Number recorded as not qualified and reports overseen by qualified Practice Manager	15
Number not recorded	4

ANALYSIS

It is the panel advisors view that in **100%** of cases presented the paperwork was either completed by a suitably qualified social worker OR overseen by a suitably qualified social worker thus meeting the report writing regulations.

There is a need to ensure that the social worker completing the submission sheet understands the importance of ensuring they complete the 'reason for being out of timescale' section of the form.

KEY THEMES FROM THIS REPORT

- The quality of reports submitted to the adoption panel has improved in this period compared to the last. The number of submissions is consistent with that of the same period for the previous year.
- The total number of submissions to the SHOPA ADM has remained consistent with the same period last year.
- The quality of reports submitted to the SHOPA ADM has decreased significantly with only **6%** of submissions receiving a grade higher than 'requires improvement'. This will be addressed and reported on in the next reporting period. The plan to address this includes the completion of a new policy and guide by the panel advisor which will be circulated to all the children's social care teams and the advanced practitioners to assist with the completion of SHOPA submissions.

Tracey Ellis

Panel advisor 25/11/19

COMMENTS FROM THE PANEL CHAIR

The panel continues to provide robust analysis of all the material presented to it and offers recommendations based on members' thoughtful and detailed exploration of suitability. All members attend when required; there have been no incidents where the panel has failed to form a quorum.

The membership of the panel's central list is well balanced with a wide range of experiences and backgrounds; this engenders opportunities to bring different perspectives to discussions and analysis. As outlined above the recruitment of two social workers to the panel has improved the balance considerably. The only challenge yet to be overcome, is the cultural and heritage backgrounds of the membership, which doesn't fully reflect the community which the panels serve.

The panel receives consistently positive feedback from attendees, both applicants and professionals. Members always provide a friendly and open welcome to all who attend, regardless of their circumstances.

Sean White: Panel Chair
