

## **The Role of Adoption Panels**

Since new laws came into force in 1984, all adoption agencies, whether Local Authority or Voluntary, have to have adoption panels.

### **How are Panels Made Up?**

Panels consist of up to 10 members - the Chair who must be Independent of the agency, a panel advisor, minute taker, medical advisor, social work representatives and other independent members such as adoptive parent, adult adoptee, birth parent, adoption specialist etc. They should also have access to a legal advisor who will sometimes attend panel if there is legal advice to give. In this way there should be a good cross section of people on the panel able to make an informed decision.

### **The Panel has the following main functions:**

- To consider the case of every child referred to it by the agency and make a recommendation as to whether the child should be placed for adoption. Since the latest reforms only cases where there is no court involvement now come direct to the panel, such as children who are voluntarily relinquished. Panel also have a duty to consider the contact arrangements for the child and can advise for an application for a Placement order to be made.
- To make a recommendation on the suitability to adopt of prospective adopters who are referred by the agency. Panel may give advice, where appropriate, regarding the age range and number of children, needs of the child.
- To consider the 'matching' of a particular child/children with specific adopters, to include advice where necessary on the proposal to provide adoption support services for the adoptive family and any contact arrangements. Panel members will often look at how the transition to placement will happen for example; to check the move will not happen near to birthdays or Christmas so as to avoid that time of year becoming a sensory reminder.
- To make sure all the legal requirements have been met eg. Up to date medicals, DBS checks, references etc.
- To adhere to procedures and policies laid down.

### **What Happens at Panel?**

**Prospective Adopters are now routinely invited to attend the first part of the Panel meeting with their Social Worker, when their case is presented for approval and for 'matching'. Panel members hopefully do their best to put adopters at their ease and be sensitive and aware of the importance of the day.**

**Any questions asked should be relevant and directed to the Social Worker and based on the reports submitted to the panel. Panel members may ask for greater elaboration on a topic or clarification of facts. When making recommendations Panel members must take into account the child's welfare which is of paramount importance. There is a Child Welfare Checklist to aid this process.**

**After the Social Worker(s) have presented the case, and Panel members have asked all their questions, the Panel retires to consider its recommendation.**

**Panels may make a positive or negative recommendation and all reasons have to be noted. If all the right procedures are followed and a well evidenced report and presentation of the case by the Social Worker is given then usually a positive decision is reached.**

**Once approved by the Panel, the agency decision maker makes the final decision based on the panel's recommendations, any reports presented and the minutes of the panel.**

**With the new reforms to the system and to avoid delay statistics are kept of whether cases are heard within the recommended timescales.**