



Title of Paper: SET Adoption Panel Annual Report 2024-25

For Decision

~~Requires majority decision prior to implementation or action.~~

For Discussion

Requires consideration and debate.

For Noting

~~Contains information Members should be made aware.~~

1.0 Background

This is the 12th Annual Report for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Adoption Panel.

The Adoption Panel's aim continues to deliver the provision of a responsive Adoption Panel that is capable of providing a high-quality service to both children and prospective adoptive parents.

2.0 Key Issues

The number of best interest recommendations for children made by the adoption panel was nineteen. These twelve males and seven female children ranged in age from seven months old to six years old. Seven children were aged one or younger when they were presented to adoption panel. Four sibling groups were presented to the adoption with a care plan of adoption

The Panel recommended twenty-five matches throughout the period. Seven recommendations were for informal matches of children to dually approved carers. Eighteen formal matches were recommended, when the child was available for adoption through freeing order or parental consent. Fifteen of these adopters originated from the Trust.

The Adoption Panel recommended eighteen adoptive applicants for approval in this period. Four former foster carers were assessed and approved to adopt a child in their care.

The Courts freed nineteen children for adoption from the South Eastern Trust in this period; twelve male children and seven female children.

Twelve children from the Trust were made subject to Adoption orders; four male children and seven female children.

ADOPTION PANEL SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS:

The Adoption Panel business meeting took place on 16th April 2024 to consider the annual report of 2022-2023 and to reflect on the functioning of panel. This was the postponed meeting from January 2024.

Actions agreed for 2024-2025 included:

- Induction and integration of new panel members

- Future Training areas on Care planning, supports and assessments with birth families, post adoption services

Due to the number of changes to the panel membership and induction training for each, there were no additional local panel training dates in this period.

A Regional workshop for adoption panel members took place in February 2025 which was attended by seven SET Adoption Panel members. Dr Heather Anderson delivered a presentation at this workshop regarding common medical conditions within adoptive applicants. Other presentations included trauma informed Adoption panels, the use of UK wide placements by Northern Irish Trusts, the experience of concurrent care planning and an update on the Adoption and Children's Act for Northern Ireland.

3.0 Resources Implications (inc Organisational, Financial, Human Resources)

There is a dedicated adoption panel administrator. He collates and circulates all panel paper via the Board papers App. In addition, he takes and circulates the minutes of all adoption panels.

4.0 Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE)

We have endeavoured to make our adoption panel experience more trauma informed for all participants. This includes the provision of a small care bag for prospective adopters while waiting to attend the panel. The adoption panel are mindful of the impact of delays on applicants waiting and endeavour to hear all agenda items in a timely way.

5.0 Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate

It continues to be challenging to identify adoptive placements for older children and sibling groups. To date, the Trust has maximised the opportunity with existing carers to create permanence and stability for the children who receive best interests' recommendations, however there are a small number of children that require a cross-Trust placement identified through the ARIS system.

In January 2026, recruitment was centralised through the HSC Adoption platform. This will hopefully increase the pool of adopters across the Trust.

Lead Director: Marie-Louise Sloan, Director of Children's Services & Executive Director of Social Work.

Date: 21 May 2026