

December 2006

Number 4

IRM Newsletter



End of Year 2 statement

Welcome to the fourth IRM newsletter for Agencies.

Since our last newsletter, the practice guidance on *Preparing and Assessing Prospective Adopters* has been published. The practice guidance is designed for social workers assessing the suitability of prospective adopters to adopt a child in the UK or abroad.

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00138/>

The IRM has completed its 2nd year of operation and this issue focuses on feedback from the second year of operation and comments on how the Adoption & Children Act 2002 has impacted on cases coming to the IRM.

The newsletter is being sent to your Agency Liaison Officer and can be shared with all staff in your agency. **Please feel free to circulate it widely.** It will also be placed on the IRM website.

The IRM End of Year 2 Statement for 2005/2006 has now been posted on the Every Child Matters website.

In summary there were 18 applications to the IRM during the second year with 8 applications being heard.

4 applicants were recommended as suitable to adopt and 4 applicants were not recommended.

In the majority of cases the agencies' final decisions have reflected the recommendations of the IRM panel.

The adoption agencies and review panels gave a



Recovery cost of a review

Feedback From IRM Panels

number of reasons why they considered prospective adopters were not suitable to adopt a child, but there were four common areas; withholding important information from the agency, the ability of prospective adopters to work with the agency, information supplied by referees and the prospective adopters' parenting capacity

Use the attached link to see the full report.

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/IRM%20year%20two%20report.doc>

It has been agreed that the recovery cost of a review for 2006/07 will continue to be £2227.

The following themes have emerged from feedback from all applicants and agency workers and panel members in Year 2.

- Applicants and agency representatives were positive about their contact with IRM staff and felt they were friendly, approachable and efficient.
- A theme continued from the 1st year was that the majority of applicants commented that they had not felt supported by their agency during the IRM process. However there were some agencies who had given thought on how to support applicants with contact from another worker or manager where it was not appropriate for the assessing worker to fulfil that role. This is an issue agencies may wish to consider when they are aware a case is coming to the IRM.
- Applicants' experience of the IRM panel meetings were positive; they felt that they were made to feel welcome, put at their ease and that panel members



listened to what they had to say. Some applicants commented that the review had gone well, even if the outcome was negative and others commented that the process was less intimidating than their attendance at their agency's panel.

- Applicants and agency workers in some cases particularly welcomed the separate waiting rooms.
- ▶ Most agencies were positive about their experience of the IRM panel meetings. Comments included that the panel was relaxed, friendly, helpful, encouraging, professional and responsive. Questions were generally deemed to be put in a 'reasonable and non-threatening way' and the level of questioning was 'appropriate'.
- ▶ Some agencies have commented that they felt their role was to answer the IRM panels' questions and they were not given the opportunity to present the local authority's case or summarise their position. IRM Panel Chairs have now been encouraged to give agencies this opportunity.
- ▶ Where applications were related to specific children, the role of the IRM panel can be seen as confusing as it can only consider the approval and not the match. However IRM panels will consider information about the children concerned where it is felt to show evidence of the applicant's ability as prospective adopters. Workers have queried the fact that the IRM panel can only consider the suitability of the prospective adopters to adopt rather than in relation to a specific child. We do ensure that applicants are made aware that matching is a separate process approved only by the agency.

Feedback from Panel Members continues to acknowledge the complexity of all the cases coming to the IRM.

In some cases it was noted that agencies had worked hard to meet timescales to complete the assessment of the family and had established a good relationship with the applicants and worked in partnership with them.

There were also good examples of agencies making efforts to obtain additional family or non related references where particular issues had arisen which they felt needed verification. On the other hand there were cases where this was felt to be lacking.

Another concern was where reports did not contain evidence to back up statements made or analysis of the information.

Whilst the remit of the IRM is to consider the adopter's application, inevitably issues related to the agencies' actions do arise during the application and it was felt useful to have a formalised feedback on these issues.

Consequently we have instigated a feedback form to agencies which enables the review panel to give to the agency both positive comments and concerns about practice, policies or paperwork outside of the panel minutes which we would encourage agencies to consider.

Requests for additional information on behalf of the IRM panels have been made in the following areas;

- Clarification of CRB check status or follow up of reported incidents not included in CRB information
- Updating of medical information



Impact on IRM of Regulations & Guidance

- Clarification of information in the assessment report
 - Updating or seeking additional personal or family references
 - Additional paperwork including family trees, reports from preparation training and written references.
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The implementation of **The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005**

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20050389.htm>

& **The Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption) Regulations 2005**

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2004/20040190.htm>

created some changes that affected the IRM:

- Prospective adopters now have 40 working days rather than 28 calendar days in which to make an application following receipt of the 'qualifying determination' from the decision maker (AAR 27(4)) (Guidance - Ch 3, p 17 para 71). We have found a number of applicants have made use of this extended timescale.
- We have found that the letter of qualifying determination sent out by some agencies does not comply with Regulation 27 (4). Agencies are recommended to use the standard template letter in Statutory Guidance Annex D which sets out the timescales and the 3 options available to prospective adopters. This allows for additional text to be used.
http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/5A010FC00D7125D5CCB248D27F5247F3.pdf
- The IRM has considered a small number of applications leading from a brief prospective

IRM Website

www.irm-adoption.org.uk



<http://www.irm-adoption.org.uk/sleaflet.pdf>

adopter's report. (AAR 25(7)). Our experience of these would lead us to make the following observations.

- It is acknowledged that there is no prescribed format for workers to use for a brief report. This has meant that IRM panels have seen a great variety in the cases submitted to the IRM to date.
- The Brief Reports seen have not always included evidence of work undertaken to address the issue/s of concern so as to demonstrate that it could not be resolved through training or further information. Also there has not always been a balanced view of **all** the information gathered prior to the report being compiled or clear evidence that the applicant/s are not suitable and therefore that there is no value in a full assessment being completed. Agencies may want to consider these points.

Visits to the IRM website have continued to increase with people mainly accessing the website through links from BAAF, search engines, DfES & adoption websites, such as Adoption UK.

We are happy for agencies to include a link to the IRM website from their adoption information pages.

The leaflet – 'Making Adoption work better' was redrafted to take account of changes in the Adoption and Children Act and copies were sent to agencies at the end of December for use with applicants wishing to use the IRM.

IRM Staff



Contact Details

However we would continue to ask that agencies print copies of the leaflet from the website to give to prospective adopters in information packs or at information meetings or preparation groups or to circulate to workers and panel members.

The 'Leaflet for Workers' goes into detail about what will happen at the review panel meeting. It was been updated to include information on applicants using the Data Protection Act 1998 to apply for a copy of IRM panel minutes. The leaflet is sent to agencies for social workers attending an IRM panel and is also available for information on our website.

Elaine Dibben, the Contract Manager and Chris Blythe, the full time Administrator welcome queries from agencies about how the IRM works or whether a case is eligible or from prospective adopters wanting information to help them decide whether to make an application.

IRM

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Scheduling of IRM Panels

Panel Dates

2007

BIRMINGHAM

LONDON 1

IRM PANEL DATES 2006

- We are continuing our scheduling of IRM panels to make effective use of review panels' time. Agencies will be notified of the date and location of the panel about 4-6 weeks after our letter advising of receipt of the application. Panel locations would be selected to offer the best access to those applicants whose cases are being reviewed on that day. Intercountry cases are presented to either London 1 or Manchester.

The following dates are to be used as a guide only and we reserve the right to change the date and location.

Tuesday 9 January	Tuesday 13 February
Tuesday 13 March	Tuesday 10 April
Tuesday 8 May	Tuesday 12 June
Tuesday 10 July	Tuesday 14 August
Tuesday 11 September	Tuesday 9 October
Tuesday 13 November	Tuesday 11 December

Tuesday 16 January	Tuesday 6 February
Tuesday 13 March	Tuesday 3 April
Tuesday 15 May	Tuesday 5 June
Tuesday 10 July	Tuesday 7 August
Tuesday 4 September	Tuesday 9 October
Tuesday 20 November	Tuesday 4 December

LONDON 2

Wednesday 31 January Wednesday 28 February
Wednesday 28 March Wednesday 18 April
Wednesday 30 May Wednesday 27 June
Wednesday 25 July Wednesday 22 August
Wednesday 26 September Wednesday 31 October
Wednesday 21 November

BRISTOL

Thursday 18 January Thursday 15 February
Thursday 15 March Thursday 12 April
Thursday 10 May Thursday 21 June
Thursday 19 July Thursday 16 August
Thursday 13 September Thursday 11 October
Thursday 8 November Thursday 6 December

LEEDS

Tuesday 30 January Tuesday 27 February
Tuesday 27 March Tuesday 24 April
Tuesday 22 May Tuesday 26 June
Tuesday 24 July Tuesday 21 August
Tuesday 25 September Tuesday 30 October
Tuesday 27 November Tuesday 18 December

MANCHESTER

Wednesday 10 January Wednesday 7 February
Wednesday 7 March Wednesday 4 April
Wednesday 3 May Wednesday 6 June
Wednesday 4 July Wednesday 1 August
Wednesday 5 September Wednesday 3 October
Wednesday 7 November Wednesday 5 December

CAMBRIDGE

Tuesday 23 January	Tuesday 20 February
Tuesday 20 March	Tuesday 17 April
Tuesday 22 May	Tuesday 19 June
Tuesday 17 July	Tuesday 21 August
Tuesday 18 September	Tuesday 16 October
Tuesday 20 November	Tuesday 18 December

NEWCASTLE

Wednesday 10 January	Wednesday 7 February
Wednesday 7 March	Wednesday 4 April
Wednesday 2 May	Wednesday 6 June
Wednesday 4 July	Wednesday 1 August
Wednesday 5 September	Wednesday 3 October
Wednesday 7 November	Wednesday 5 December
