



Adoption Service Statement of Purpose

May 2011

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1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements and also how the service is managed and its fitness to provide a comprehensive adoption service.

This statement can be used by children and young people and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do. It is available to all members of staff, children and birth parents and is available on our website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with Ofsted. The information contained in it is amended annually and formally approved by the Council's Executive.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005, the Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011. The Adoption Agency is inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. Principles and values

The Adoption Service is part of an integrated Fostering, Adoption and Family Placement Service within Leeds City Council Children and Young Peoples Social Care. The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 underpin the principles and values of our service :-

Values: Children

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children who are looked after are actively consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care within the adoption process
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family

- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life
- The child's welfare safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made
- Children should be allowed to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individual needs. People applying to adopt are expected to understand the importance of maintaining these relationships
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver the best outcomes for children
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected

Values: Adopted adults and birth relatives

- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly
- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved – adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by

adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life

- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life
- Agencies have a duty to provide services that considers the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members

3. The Aims of the Agency

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 by ensuring the provision of comprehensive and high quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards for care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements. It also aims to ensure that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services. We are committed to working in partnership with other agencies and to ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of Best Value for the council.

4. Objectives of the agency

- To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards
- To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption
- To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety

and protection for children or young people in their care

- To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, their needs will change over time
- To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children in partnership with other agencies
- To provide information on the Service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad
- To provide a service for non agency adoption adoptions. For example, partner and step- parent adoptions
- To ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and values diversity of both foster children, birth families and adopters regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all
- That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through compliments and complaints

5. Recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving prospective adopters

5.1 Enquiries and Registration of Interest

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Leeds via the adoption website pages www.leeds.gov.uk/adoption or request an Information Pack. Information Packs are forwarded to enquirers normally the same working day or at most 3 working days following receipt of request. If enquirers have any interpreting requirements on information provided they can be advised about available assistance. Enquirers are invited to a monthly Information meeting, details of which are provided on the website pages and in the information pack. Enquirers may attend any meeting of their choice. The Information meeting is a power point format

presentation by experienced adoption staff and includes opportunities for enquirers to ask questions and explore individual queries, including those on eligibility criteria. If enquirers wish to progress their interest, registration of interest forms are made available at the end of the meeting.

5.2 Initial Home Visit and Application

Following the receipt of a registration of interest form, an adoption social worker will contact the enquirer and discuss their interest in more detail. If appropriate and after exploring suitability and any other issues, the adoption worker will arrange an Initial Home Visit. This visit offers an opportunity to explore interest and suitability in more detail and if appropriate, agree a formal application. If proceeding, an application form will be provided for the enquirer(s) and Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks consent normally sought at this stage. The decision to proceed with a application is agreed and confirmed by an Adoption Team Manager following a written initial visit summary and recommendation by the adoption worker. On receipt of a application, the adoption service will process statutory checks, enhanced CRB disclosures and arrange medicals for each applicant. At this stage the assessment is deemed to have commenced. If there is a decision not to proceed to assessment, reasons given will be made in writing including advice about appeals and the complaints procedure.

5.3 Preparation Groups

The material used in preparation training is designed to provide prospective adopters with information about the adoption process, issues to consider in adopting a child and information regarding the needs of adopted children. An invitation to attend a preparation group is usually within 1 month of the application being formally accepted. Preparation groups for first time adopters are run usually about 6 times per year. Groups for Asian language speakers are run 2/3 times per year for all the agencies as part of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium. Second or third time

adopters are able to access preparation groups available locally from After Adoption Yorkshire and Action for Children.

5.4 Adoption Assessment

A qualified social worker (adoption officer) undertakes the assessment and it is usual for the social worker to be allocated to start the home study just prior to the training to explain about the process and what can be expected on the preparation course. The assessment process usually takes about 6 months unless complications or delays have occurred due to unforeseen circumstances. The Prospective Adopters Report, which is completed by the adoption officer, is presented to the adoption panel. The adoption panel's recommendation about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child should be made within 8 months of receipt of their formal application. Applicants are able to make comments on the report and have at least 10 days to consider whether any additional comments or amendments are required. There may be circumstances where it is not possible to allocate an assessment within a reasonable timescale because there may be other priority allocation needed to meet the needs of specific children waiting for placement. For potential applicants who work for Leeds Children and Young People's Social Care we would advise applicants to approach another agency to be assessed as prospective adopters in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

5.5 Approval and Adoption Panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the Adoption agency on the following:-

- that a child should be adopted
- people are approved as adoptive parents
- whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- approve the match of a child/ren to adopters

There are three Adoption Panels in Leeds. They meet monthly and have an Independent Chair. Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personally been involved in adoption and others with relevant skills and experience. All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information

presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make its decision within 7 working days of the recommendation of the panel. The child's parents or guardian and prospective adopters will be informed orally of the agency decision within 2 working days and the decision will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

6. Post Approval

Adoptive parents are offered an additional training day once they are approved in order to help them prepare for placement. Topics covered include introductions, moving children into new families, making good connections and contact. Adoption Officers also ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations, e.g., British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), and adopters are provided with 1 year's free subscription to Adoption UK. Related by Adoption is a 1 day training course available for grandparents or other relatives who are supporting the adopters and wish to have more in depth information regarding adoption.

Once adopters are approved, the adoption officer will work with adopters and social workers to identify suitable matches to a child/ren and will provide support and guidance throughout the whole process.

All prospective adopters are referred to the National Adoption Register at three months, with their agreement, if no match has been identified locally and within the consortium.

In order to make an informed decision about a child, the prospective adopters are given full information regarding a child (the Child Permanence Report) as well as any other additional reports about the child's needs and requirements. All children have a full adoption medical and adopters are provided with this and other health information. Adopters will meet with the social worker for the child and other relevant professionals e.g. medical adviser, nursery staff and child's foster carers to ensure they receive all the available and known information about a child.

The proposals for the placement will be then set out in the Adoption Placement Report which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and will include an Adoption Support Plan based on needs identified in both the assessment of the child and adoptive household. The adopters have an opportunity to comment on the report and their views are recorded and included in the report for panel.

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their adoption officer attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child. Once the decision has been made, a placement planning meeting is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. Good practice guidance on placements called "Flying Start" is used to guide the meeting. The planning meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers and are usually chaired by a manager or other worker. The meeting will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions and the monitoring and support.

7. Annual Reviews of Prospective adopters

In the event that no placement has been made within 12 months from approval, the Adoption Officer will conduct a Review of their approval status with the adopters.

8. Post placement support

Planning and provision of post placement support to all parties should help secure the placement and prevent disruption. Prospective adopters are given information about local and national support services. The period between placement and legal adoption can be a stressful time for all parties and regular support is important. The child concerned continues to be a 'looked after' child and as such is subject to statutory requirements.

Once the child has been placed for adoption, visits by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker will take place. The status of the child as a 'looked after' child will continue until such time as an Adoption Order is made. The child must be visited during the first week of placement by his/her social worker followed by at least one of the workers visiting weekly up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement where the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed at that Review but will not be less than six weekly.

The Child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker for the prospective adopters. The Annexe A Report for Court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers. Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safe keeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

9. Contact and the Information Exchange Service

Assistance and support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the agency. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child, and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact may include letter-box contact or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members. These arrangements are usually made through agreement by all involved, though some may be the subject of a Contact Order. All forms of contact are more successful if the parties have met together before arrangements start; therefore a meeting between birth parents and adopters before the child is placed will be encouraged and supported by social workers, where this is appropriate.

An Information exchange arrangement (letterbox scheme) may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent or any other relative or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of direct contact may be arranged where necessary.

10. Adoption Support

Leeds has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. This service is provided in partnership with After Adoption Yorkshire who provide an independent service and with other agencies, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

Adoptive Families:

- Advice line, confidential counselling service
- Support groups
- Assessment of needs

- Soft play group
- Access to therapeutic support and educational support
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- Newsletter
- A celebrate adoption day event for adoptive families
- Training and workshops
- Flexible respite support

Adopted children & young people:

- Social groups and activities
- Offering advice and training for schools to help teachers understand why school can be difficult sometimes for adopted children
- Listening and helping them to understand their feelings and background history in conjunction with adoptive parents
- Providing information about other organisations that are designed to help adopted children
- Information about registering a veto

Birth relatives:

- A confidential and independent advice and counselling service via After Adoption Yorkshire
- Support regarding contact arrangements
- Enabling parents to record on their child's file whether or not they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18

For Adopted Adults:

- Discussion and advice about wishes around contact with and from birth relatives
- Counselling and assistance in accessing and understanding information about their history
- Counselling /advice about the implications of tracing and making contact
- Intermediary service between adopted adults and birth relatives, support groups and workshops via After Adoption Yorkshire

11. Management of the Service

Structure as at April 2011

Director of Children's Services Nigel Richardson		
Chief Officer Children and Young People's Social Care Jackie Wilson		
Head of Service for Looked After Children Sue May		
Service Delivery Manager and Registered Manager of the Adoption Agency Sarah Johal Deputy Service Delivery Manager (Temporary) Val Hales		
Team Manager Adoption Development Mandy Prout	Team Manager Adoption Support Lynne Buckle	Team Manager Adoption & Family Finding Judith Matthews
Business Support Manager Pat McGreavy		

The City council appoints elected members to oversee the work of Children and Young People's Social Care and delegates certain responsibilities to the Chief Officer Children and Young People's Social Care. The Chief Officer, Jackie Wilson, has overall responsibility for the financial management, proper management systems and the safe care of children. She is the nominated agency decision maker and Adoption Support Service Advisor (ASSA). The Department has appointed a registered manager for fostering and adoption services, Sarah Johal.

There has been significant investment in the Adoption service in the last year and there are now 3 adoption teams. The 3 teams work cooperatively with each other in order to provide a seamless service for children and their adoptive families. One team leads on adoption support, providing a comprehensive range of services in partnership with other agencies. The second team leads on family finding for the children needing adoptive families using a wide variety of methods to ensure all avenues are fully explored to identify suitable adoptive families. The third team leads on adoption development and is currently involved in a number of projects, notably setting up the safebase training for adoptive families in partnership with the charity, After Adoption. There are plans to set up a clinic for social workers providing advice and guidance on complex issues such as contact or the placement of sibling groups. Additionally, the family finding team and development team have been

promoting the Opening Doors Policy to ensure families fully consider the rewards of adopting children with disabilities.

The Adoption service is based within

Leeds Children and Young People's Social Care
Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
LEEDS
LS2 8QB

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via telephone number **0113 2474747** , website www.leeds.gov.uk/adoption; or e-mail ss.fostering.and.adoption@leeds.gov.uk.

12. Numbers, Qualifications and experience of staff

The Registered Manager, Sarah Johal has the following qualifications:

CQSW 1990 (Newcastle Upon Tyne Polytechnic); MA Social Work and Social Care Sept 2001 (Bradford University); Advanced Award in Social Work April 2002 (General Social Care Council); Post Graduate Certificate in Applied Social Work Management 2007 (Leeds Metropolitan University). She has 20 years post qualification experience in child care, including 13 years in Adoption and Fostering. She has been a manager for 10 years within both child care and adoption and fostering services.

There are 21.6 social workers working within the adoption service. All the social workers, except one, has a social work qualification and are registered with the General Social Care Council and have relevant experience within a children and families service. There is one specialist post within the Adoption Support Team, a Family Advisor, which does not require a social work qualification. Instead, a broader professional base is required and the current post holder is a teacher with personal adoption experience.

Administrative support is given by 8.5 admin support workers including the Adoption Archivist and panel administrator.

All Adoption Social Work staff are required to have a minimum of one year's post qualifying experience within a Children and Families setting. The Authority has generally been successful in recruiting staff with considerably more than the

minimum experience required and there is a range of experience among the staff, with a number of highly skilled practitioners.

13. Monitoring and Performance

The Adoption Agency is monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted. The last inspection was in December 2010 and the report is available from the Ofsted website or the registration address as below or direct from this Service upon request. This judgement was good with outstanding features, particularly “Enjoy and Achieve” which showcases the adoption support provision for adoptive families. Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice yearly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chairs and Agency Decision Maker. Statistical data is kept and the service provides an annual report to the Senior Leadership Team and members. Activity in the adoption service is measured against national targets on a regular basis. Issues arising from complaints are discussed and recommendations following complaints are implemented. There is a robust evaluation mechanism in place to receive feedback from adopters at key points in the adoption process. Within the coming year, systems have been further developed to seek feedback from all users of the Authority’s adoption services.

14 The Complaints Procedure

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of child for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer. All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the Complaints Procedures and also informed of the role of the Children’s Rights Service.

15 Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED CONTACT DETAILS

Ofsted

NBU, 3rd Floor

Royal Exchange Buildings

St Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040

Fax : 08456 404049

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone 0845 6404040

Matters of concern about this adoption service can be referred to OFSTED who will decide what action to take.