



***LEEDS CITY COUNCIL ADOPTION AGENCY
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE***

June 2005

Revised July 2007, January 2008 & November 2008

1 Context

Leeds City Council, through the power delegated to the Chief Officer of Children and Young People's Social Care, undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service.

"It seeks to operate within the requirements of, inter alia, the following:

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Adoption Act 1976 (where still applicable)

Children Act 1989 (and accompanying Regulations and Guidance)

Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999

Children and Adoption Act 2006

Care Standards Act 2000

Children Act 2004

Human Rights Act 1998

Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005

Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005

Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003

Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption) Regulations 2005

Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005

Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005

Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005

Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005

Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005

Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005

Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations

The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003

National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003

National Care Standards Commission (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2003

Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

National Minimum Standards Adoption Agencies

National Minimum Standards Adoption Support Agencies

Working Together to Safeguard Children

The Assessment Framework

2 The Aims and Objectives of the Agency

2.1 The Adoption Service is part of a range of Local Authority services, which seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. When this is not possible the Adoption Agency undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances.

2.2 The priorities of the Adoption Agency are:

2.2.1 To identify the children being Looked After by Leeds City Council who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child.

2.2.2 To prepare and assess prospective adoptive applicants applying to the Agency who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.

2.2.3 Applications will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:

- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- Children from minority ethnic groups.
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support.
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care.
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability.
- Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties.
- Single children aged 4 years or over.
- Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged 4 years or over.

2.2.4 Applicants will be expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there is not complete background and/or health information.

- 2.2.5 The Agency is committed to providing post placement support services to all Leeds City Council approved adopters who achieve the placement of a child(ren).
- 2.2.6 The Agency is committed to providing Adoption Services for all those whose lives have been affected by adoption, recognising the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees. (Please see the Agency's Adoption and Adoption Support Policies for details of support to adopters, to adopted children, to birth relatives, and to adult adoptees). It is recognised that the level of Services provided will on occasions be limited by the financial constraints within which the Agency and wider Authority are required to operate.
- 2.2.7 The Agency is also committed to providing a counselling and support service to:
- Any person directly affected by adoption that requires counselling or support.
 - Adopted persons requiring access to birth records.
 - Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives.
 - Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service.
- 2.2.8 The Agency is committed to fulfilling its duty under The Adoption (Inter country Aspects) Act 1999, to provide, or arrange to provide, an Inter country Adoption Service. The Agency provides preparation and training through Doncaster Adoption Agency for such adopters but carries out assessment, registration and support through its own panels and social workers. A charge is made for this service linked to the inter agency fee.
- 2.2.9 Some counselling and support services to adopters and adoptees and Birth parents are provided through After Adoption Yorkshire, an independent adoption support agency.
- 2.2.10 The Agency is committed to maintaining effective systems for recording, Managing and keeping safe, information about children placed for adoption and adopters and information received from people affected by adoption. Adoption Archives are stored on CD in the Department, a full set is kept in secure conditions by the company which created the CDs (Design Image) and the files themselves are kept in the West Yorkshire Archives. In the event of a disaster in any of these settings, copies can be generated of the Archives.

2.2.11 The Address of the Agency is:

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

2.2.12 **The Adoption Agency Decision Maker and Adoption Support Adviser (ASSA)** is Elizabeth Shingler.

2.2.13 **The Registered Manager for the agency will be** the Resource Team Manager, a post currently held by Rodger Walker who therefore is the Agency's Registered Manager. In his absence the person in charge is his line manager, Elizabeth Shingler.

2.2.14 The day-to-day management of the work of the Adoption Agency is undertaken by Team Manager-Adoption and Permanence and the Team Manager-Adoption Support in consultation with the Family Placement Team Manager (Children with disabilities).

2.2.15 **The Team Managers:** The Adoption Team Managers (Adoption and Permanence and Adoption Support) are Charlotte Thomas and Val Hales, who provide the service within the wider Department with specialist knowledge and skills in permanency work. The Team Managers (Adoption and Permanence and Adoption Support) work closely with the Team Managers (Fostering) to ensure provision of a consistent, coherent and flexible service.

3 Registration

The Agency is registered with the Care Standards Authority under Part II of the Act. No conditions are in force in relation to this registration.

4 Qualifications and Experience of the Registered Manager

Name: Rodger Walker

Date: Appointed: January 1998 Qualification: C.Q.S.W.

Relevant Experience: Employed in the field of Adoption in Barnardo's from 1978 to 1982 as an adoption worker. Resource Teams Manager in Leeds Children and Young People's Social Care since 1998.

5 The number, relevant qualifications and experience of the staff working for the purposes of the Agency

5.1 The Adoption Agency work within Leeds City Council is undertaken by the staff of the Adoption and Permanence Team and the Adoption Support team. The Teams, together with the two Fostering teams, provide the full range of Family Placement services, including Fostering Services and the processing of Step Parent Adoptions.

5.2 Total staffing:

Resource Team Manager-Rodger Walker.

Team Manager (Adoption and Permanence) – Charlotte Thomas.

Team Manager (Adoption Support) – Val Hales.

Total Manager Hours – 3 F.T.E.s.

Principal Caseworker (post adoption) Worker Hours – 1 F.T.E.

Adoption Support Social Workers and family support worker-6.5 F.T.E.s.

Principal Caseworker-Permanence – 1 F.T.E.

Adoption and Permanence Social Workers – 5.5 F.T.E.s

Special Guardianship – 0.5 F.T.E.

All the above are qualified social workers and have experience in adoption.

One adoption support worker is not a qualified social worker but is a qualified teacher. She does not carry out any duties that only a qualified social worker may do.

5.3 Admin support is given by five admin support workers.

5.4 All Social Work staff within the Family Placement Team who undertake adoption work hold a professional Social Work qualification i.e., CQSW, CSS or DipSw.

5.5 On appointment, 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.

5.6 Leeds City Council is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve the Post Qualifying Award.

6 The Organisational Structure of the Agency

6.1 The City Council appoints elected members to oversee the work of Children and Young People's Social Care and delegates certain responsibilities to the Director of Children's Services ,Rosemary Archer, for the financial management, proper management systems and the safe care of children and the Interim Head of Operations (Children and Young People's Social Care) Liz Shingler.

6.2 The Department has appointed a registered manager for the fostering and for the adoption services, Rodger Walker, who is responsible to the Interim Head

of Operations, Elizabeth Shingler who is, in turn, responsible to the Interim Chief Officer (Children and Young People's Social Care) Jayne Jack.

6.3 There are two adoption teams structured on a geographical basis managed by two team managers, Val Hales (adoption support) and Charlotte Thomas (adoption and permanence). The team managers are responsible to the registered manager, Rodger Walker. All the managers named in points 6.1 to 6.3 are qualified social workers.

6.4 There is a third team which works with adopters, the Family Placement team, run for children with disabilities and their families city wide. It co-operates with the Agency's Adoption teams, and adopters for children with disabilities are assessed and approved in the same way as all adopters. A separate statement of purpose for this service has been produced and is available from the manager of that service.

7 Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard

7.1 The Agency is committed to seeking feedback from Service Users in order to inform future Service provision.

7.2 At the current time a fairly robust system is in place to seek feedback from adopters at key points in the adoption process.

7.3 At the current time consideration is being given to how best to seek feedback from the children being placed for adoption and birth parents.

7.4 Within the coming year, systems will be further developed to seek feedback from users of the Authority's post adoption services including:

- adoptive parents
- adopted children
- adult adoptees
- birth relatives

7.5 Feedback from Adoptive Parents

7.5.1 Adoptive parents are consulted on their view of the adoption process as well as having the opportunity to attend the Agency's Adoption Panel when their application to be approved to adopt is first considered.

7.5.2 The Inter agency Adoption reference group, made up of professionals from other related agencies and disciplines, meets once a quarter to provide feedback on adoption support services.

- 7.5.3 At the current time prospective applicants requesting an information pack who then wish to have further information are invited to attend the next 'Information Meeting'. Such meetings are held approximately 6 times each year.
- 7.5.4 Where applicants decide not to proceed after attending preparation groups, the reasons for this are usually known, although follow-up is limited.

7.6 Feedback from Birth Parents

- 7.6.1 After Adoption Yorkshire provide a counselling service to birth parents on issues of adoption under a Service Level Agreement. They provide an annual report on the numbers and categories of people who ask for these services.
- 7.6.2 Where parents attend for interview, their views about how their needs/wishes have been addressed by the Agency are sought. Where birth parents are able to engage with the Authority at the stage that plans are being made to place their child(ren) for adoption, their thoughts and wishes are proactively sought, both in terms of the adoption plan and in terms of the type of family they would wish their child(ren) to be placed in.
- 7.6.3 Except where birth parents sever all links with the Agency, contact is maintained with birth parents until the adoption of their child(ren) is legally concluded, and afterwards, through the Contact Register.

8 Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

8.1 Recruitment of Adopters

- 8.1.1 The Agency belongs to the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium through which it is able to both provide and obtain adoptive placements as well as recruiting its own adopters.
- 8.1.2 The Authority has experienced a fairly steady level of enquiries/applications in recent years. The Agency has a full time recruitment and development officer who conducts recruitment campaigns for adopters and foster carers on a regular basis.
- 8.1.3 The Agency has always been mindful of the period of time that children with special placement needs can wait for placements. In order to prevent 'undue delay' in placing such children, the Agency ensures that where children are unlikely to be able to be linked via the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium, agreement to funding is sought at an early stage with a view to these children being featured in national journals/publications and fliers, detailing the child(ren)'s specific placement needs, sent to other Agencies.

- 8.1.4 All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and the subsequent matching and placing process.
- 8.1.5 The Authority's information pack was updated in 2007 and is reviewed on an annual basis.

8.2 Preparation of Applicants

- 8.2.1 All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an Adopters' Preparation Group. The material used is designed to provide prospective applicants with information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children, both in Leeds and nationally who need adoptive parents.
- 8.2.2 The purpose of the group is to provide prospective applicants with the information that they need about adoption in general, the Adoption Agency and the profile and needs of children requiring placement, in order to enable them to make an informed decision about adoption. The preparation course provides prospective adopters with material to discuss in the individual assessment.
- 8.2.3 The Agency runs 3 or more preparation groups each year, depending on need. The Agency seeks to accommodate all prospective applicants on its own preparation groups. However, it also works in co-operation with Catholic Care on occasion to share participation in their preparation groups.
- 8.2.4 The current material used in preparation groups uses BAAF materials.

8.3 Assessment of Applicants

- 8.3.1 Applicants wishing to be assessed by the Agency as prospective adopters are invited to make a full application, normally after completing preparation groups (CRB checks are taken up prior to group attendance).
- 8.3.2 The Agency will prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. If the Agency deems an application as being unlikely to succeed, this is acknowledged to the applicants at an early stage and the reasons for this explained.

- 8.3.3 The Agency's decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application will be based on:
- The minimum legal requirements and Agency criteria.
 - The Agency's priority areas for recruitment.
 - Under regulation 22.1 of the 2005 Adoption Regulations all applicants must be considered once they have made an application but the decision whether to proceed rests with the Agency.
- 8.3.4 When the Agency decides not to proceed with an application, applicants will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to them.
- 8.3.5 The Agency seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, detailed within the BAAF Form F.
- 8.3.6 The 'home-study' assessment is usually undertaken by a specific worker, with on occasion a 'Second Opinion' being provided by the Team Manager if necessary.
- 8.3.7 Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.
- 8.3.8 The Agency does not subscribe to the pure model of competency based assessments, prospective adopters are assisted, through both the preparation groups and the home-study process to consider/identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.
- 8.3.9 A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all prospective adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards.
- 8.3.10 Prospective adopters are kept informed of progress throughout. The Agency seeks to balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays.
- 8.3.11 Wherever possible the Agency seeks to present the applicants to the Agency's Adoption Panel for consideration, within six months of receiving their completed application.
- 8.3.12 Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care will be welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster carers who make application to adopt children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters.

8.3.13 All prospective adopters receive a copy of their assessment report, at least 28 days before the Adoption Panel that will consider their application and have the opportunity to comment on the report.

8.3.14 At the current time the Agency delegates the training of Inter country Adoption applicants to a local voluntary adoption agency, Doncaster Adoption Society. It carries out its own assessment and registrations. The Agency seeks to ensure that the work undertaken with enquirers and applicants is in line with the requirements of the Adoption (Inter country Aspects) Act 1999 and the Inter country Adoption Agency (Hague Convention) Regulation 2003.

8.4 Approval Processes

8.4.1 All prospective adoptive applicants seeking approval will have their application presented to one of the Agency's three Adoption Panels for consideration.

8.4.2 The composition of the 3 Panels is in line with Regulations and they are chaired independently.

8.4.3 Each Panel is held four weekly. The overall functioning of the Adoption Panels are managed by the Professional Advisers (the Team Managers).

8.4.4 Panel members are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the Panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the Panel meeting.

8.4.5 The Link-worker for the applicants, or in her/his absence, her/his Team Manager will be present when an application is considered to answer the Panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision.

8.4.6 Under regulation 26(4) of the adoption regulations 2005 all applicants must be given the opportunity to represent themselves at Panel, before it makes the decision whether to make a recommendation about their suitability to adopt. However, it is not compulsory for applicants to attend the Panel if they choose not to.

8.4.7 The recommendation of the Panel is conveyed to the applicants on the day of Panel and draft minutes will be forwarded within twenty four working hours to the Adoption Agency Decision-Maker.

8.4.8 The Decision-Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven days of the Panel meeting.

8.4.9 The Agency Decision-Maker will convey her decision in writing (by signing the minutes) to the applicants' Link-worker and the Team Manager.

8.4.10 The Team Managers ensure letters confirming the Agency's decision are sent to the adoptive applicants.

8.4.11 In the event of an application being deferred or turned down, prospective adopters are informed of their right to make representation or complaint or to refer to the IRM.

8.4.12 Reports are updated after two years but there is no time limit on the time span of the approval.

8.4.13 Approval relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover placement of children from abroad.

8.4.14 All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of a child(ren) via the Leeds City Council Adoption Agency. However, if a suitable placement is not identified within the first three months of applicants' approval, approved adopters will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing Agencies in the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium and via the National Adoption Register.

8.4.15 Approved applicants whose range of approval suggests that they are unlikely to be 'matched' to a child(ren) via the Agency or the Consortium within the first three months of their approval will be referred to the Register at an early stage (subject to the agreement of the other member Agencies).

8.5 Support to Prospective Adopters

8.5.1 Approved adopters will be given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.

8.5.2 All approved and waiting adopters will have a named Social Worker (Link-worker) who will provide regular support throughout the post approval period and assist applicants in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and to objectively evaluate whether it is appropriate to pursue possible matches.

8.5.3 Where information on a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications of it, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. Where there are significant medical issues, a meeting with the Agency's Medical Adviser will be arranged.

8.5.4 The Agency will assess the risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these.

8.5.5 The Agency will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption.

- 8.5.6 Where adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Agency will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to foster the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about and connection to their origins. The Agency will seek to help adopters, to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.
- 8.5.7 The Agency will ensure that adoptive parents are informed prior to a placement about support services that are available within the area, should they or the child require specialist support after the Adoption Order has been made and how they might access these services.
- 8.5.8 The Agency will ensure that prospective adopters are aware of what (if any) adoption allowances may be payable in respect of the child and the Process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. The Agency will also ensure that adopters are aware of any DWP benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.
- 8.5.9 Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Agency will continue to receive Link-work support from an identified Adoption Worker within the Adoption teams, until such time as the legal adoption is concluded. A pre-order meeting is held prior to the court hearing to determine any ongoing or future support needs.
- 8.5.10 All adopters within the Leeds City Council area will also have access to the CAMHS Team should they require specific advice/support in relation to the child's emotional and/or behavioural development.
- 8.5.11 It is the expectation of the Agency that all children placed with Leeds City Council approved adopters will have a named Social Worker who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting her/him within the placement.
- 8.5.12 The Agency will encourage adopters to formally sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members that was agreed at the time of placement and will support them in facilitating these arrangements.
- Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive situation within the family.
- 8.5.13 Adopters will be asked to inform the Agency in the event of an adopted child's death.
- 8.5.14 The Agency will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on progressing the application to adopt to the appropriate Court at the appropriate time. The Agency is responsible for the court application fee.

8.5.15 The Agency recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid placement breakdowns. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or maltreatment and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten placement, whatever services have been made available.

8.5.16 Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity the Agency will seek to ensure that:

Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child.

- The child's welfare remains paramount.
- The Review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child.
- The possibility of placement breakdown is acknowledged and planned appropriately.

9 Adoption Support Services

9.1 Where adoptive parents living in the Leeds City Council area contact the Agency seeking information/advice/support due to difficulties with an adoptive placement, they will be offered an interview and an assessment of their support needs completed with them. The Agency will wherever possible seek to provide information and support in order to achieve a positive outcome and prevent the breakdown of the placement, but this will need to be managed within existing staffing and budget constraints.

9.2 Where the difficulties in a placement are such that the adoption breaks down, the Agency will seek to provide support to the adoptive parents in order to enable them to remain positively involved in the planning for their child.

9.3 Adopters will be routinely offered support after adoption orders have been made by the Adoption Support Team.

9.4 Any adoptive parents contacting the Agency for support at any stage following the granting of an Adoption Order, will be made aware of other support services available, both locally and nationally and how they might access these.

10 The Complaints Procedure

- 10.1 All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of children for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer.
- 10.2 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, operated on behalf of Leeds City Council by the NCH and how they would be able to contact it should they wish to do so.
- 10.3 Other Service Users are also provided with details of the complaints process on engagement.
- 10.4 The Team Manager (Adoption and Permanence) together with the Team Manager (Adoption Support) monitor all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Teams.

11 Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED

Telephone 0845 6404040

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