



Statement of Purpose

April 2010



Adoption Agency

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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 (put in link here?). A copy of this statement is also lodged with OFSTED. The information contained in it is amended annually.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards Addendum 2005. 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 :-

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care.
- 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.
- 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.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- 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.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly.

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 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 care, 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

Information meetings are held monthly for people interested in adopting and these are advertised on our website. Information packs are also available with dates provided for the Information meetings for the year. These packs are usually sent to enquirers the same day and are always sent within 5 working days of an enquiry being made and are also available from the website. The information meeting provides an opportunity for people enquiring about adoption to talk to officers and adopters about their experiences, answering any questions. Enquirers can then be seen individually by a worker to both explore individual queries and discuss the initial eligibility criteria. Interpreting facilities can be provided for those families who wish to gain information in other languages. Enquirers are provided with a registration of interest form for completion.

5.2 Initial Home Visit

Following receipt of a registration of interest form an adoption social worker arranges an Initial Home Visit to discuss interest in more detail and identify any possible issues at this stage which may need to be followed up before proceeding.

Following this a decision is made about whether they will proceed to the next stage, this is confirmed in writing by the Team Manager for the adoption team.

Once an application form is received the statutory checks, Criminal Record Bureau(CRB) and medicals are taken up and the assessment is deemed to have commenced.

If the decision is not to proceed reasons will be given in writing along with advice about appeal 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 part of the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium. A 2nd time adopters course is currently being developed with the agency.

5.4 Assessment / Home Study

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 will then be presented to the adoption panel and applicants have 10 days before panel to make comments on the report. 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.

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,
- approve the match of a child/ren to adopters

There are three Adoption Panels in Leeds. They meet once per month and have an Independent Chair. Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and includes those who have personally being involved in adoption. All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following consideration of the recommendations and the information presented at panel. Applicants and workers will be verbally informed of the agency's decision within 2 working days and will receive this in writing within 14 working days.

6. Post Approval

A one day post approval training is provided for all adopters regarding introductions and matching issues. Adoption Officers also ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations, e.g., British Association of fostering and adoption (BAAF), Adoption UK. A one day training course is available for grandparents or other relatives who are supporting the adopters and wish to have more in depth information regarding adoption called “related by adoption”.

Following the adoption panel the adoption officer will work with adopters to identify matches to a child/ren and will provide support and guidance throughout the process. There will be regular visits and adopters are advised to discuss with their worker if they are considering any changes to their circumstances that may alter the assessment that was approved by the Panel.

Information will be given about the children in Leeds and when a referral to the regional consortium or the National register will be made. 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 information regarding a child (the Child Permanence Report). They will meet with the social worker for the child and other professionals relevant for that particular child: for example, medical adviser 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 plans to be incorporated into the documentation for panel. The child’s worker, the prospective adopters and their worker attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the decision.

Once the decision has been made then there will be a planning meeting which will involve the foster carer, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers (for the child, the carers and the adopters) and may be 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. Arrangements will need to be kept under review to ensure they continue to meet the child's needs. 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 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 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.

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

- An annual social event for adoptive families
- Training and workshops
- Flexible respite support

Adopted children & young people:

- Social groups
- Activities
- Listening to them, helping them to understand their background,
- Providing information about other organisations that are designed to help adopted children.

Birth relatives:

- A confidential and independent advice and counselling service,
- 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 with accessing and understanding more 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.

11. Management of the Service

Structure as at April 2010

<p>Interim Director of Childrens Services Eleanor Brazil</p>
<p>Chief officer Children and Young people's social care Jackie Wilson</p>

Interim Head of Service for Looked After Children Sue May from 26 th July 2010	
Service Delivery manager and registered manager of the adoption agency Sarah Johal	
Team Manager Adoption Lynne Buckle	Team Manager Adoption Judith Matthews
Team Manager (new post created April 2010 still to be appointed to)	

The City council appoints elected members to oversee the work of the Children and Young People’s Social Care and delegates certain responsibilities to the Chief Officer of 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. The Department has appointed a registered manager for the fostering and for the adoption services, Sarah Johal, who is responsible to the Interim Head of Service, Yvonne Cherrington who is, in turn, responsible to the Chief Officer for Children’s Services, Jackie Wilson, the nominated agency decision maker and Adoption Support Service Advisor (ASSA)

There are two adoption teams at present and these teams comprise of two geographically focussed teams managed by Lynne Buckle and Judith Matthews. One team leads on adoption support and the other team leads on recruitment and family finding. The team managers are responsible to the registered manager of the service. There is a third team which works undertakes some work with adoptive families, the Family Placement team, run for children with disabilities and their families city wide. This team works in conjunction with the adoption teams. All the managers are qualified social workers. The management group share responsibility for developing policy and procedure in line with national regulations and standards to ensure a high quality and responsive service.

There has been significant investment in the fostering and adoption service recently and a further adoption team is in the process of being developed. This will enable more recruitment work to be undertaken.

The Adoption service is based within

Leeds Children and Young People’s Social Care
Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
LEEDS

LS2 8QB

Information about the Adoption Service can be accessed in a variety of ways including the recruitment line **0113 2474747** and different websites; Leeds City Council; via a link from the Yorkshire adoption consortium website.

All enquiries whether received by the recruitment phone line, email, internet or visit to the office are dealt with promptly.

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 9 years within both child care and adoption and fostering services.

There are 17.5 qualified social workers working within the adoption service. All the social workers have a social work qualification, are registered with the General Social Care Council and have relevant experience within a children and families service. They all have at least one year post qualifying experience.

Administrative support is given by 4.5 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.

13. Monitoring and Performance

The Adoption Agency is monitored by external inspections carried out by OFSTED. The last inspection was in February 2008 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 for adoption support.

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 will be 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.