

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

ADOPTION

July 2011

Adoption
Statement of Purpose
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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011, Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003, Adoption support agencies (England) and adoption agencies regulations 2005 and the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

Wiltshire Adoption Service statement of Purpose is reviewed annually.

This statement of purpose has been endorsed by the Children's Services Senior Management Team.

Copies of the statement of purpose will be given to those working in the adoption service, childcare team managers and social workers involved with the adoption process. A copy is given to all prospective adopters and adopters in Wiltshire and all birth parents, guardians and of children placed for adoption.

It is also available on the Wiltshire Council website.

Mission Statement

Wiltshire's Adoption Service is committed to providing high quality standards of care to looked after and adopted children in order to maximise their life chances and ensure that they have the opportunity to achieve each of the Every Child Matters five outcomes.

The Adoption Service aims to-

- provide a range of safe, secure and enduring adoptive placements to meet the assessed needs of children needing adoptive placements in order to promote and safeguard their welfare.
- ensure that adoptive placements promote stability and positive outcomes for children by working in partnership with adopted children, adoptive parents, birth families and other professionals in the adoption and adoption support processes.
- fully develop the role of corporate parenting in achieving positive outcomes for children needing permanent placements in line with the council's objectives.

Aims of the Adoption Service

Our overall aim is to help children and young people who are adopted to attain the highest possible standards of health, development and educational attainment.

To ensure that the safety, needs, wishes and welfare of the child are at all times kept at the centre of the adoption process.

To ensure that where it is not possible for children to live safely with their birth families they are provided with a permanent, stable, alternative family through adoption or special guardianship.

To ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents, including those wishing to adopt a child from overseas, couples whether married or not, gay or lesbian and single people, from any ethnic background are welcomed without prejudice. They will be responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services.

To ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process and have access to independent counselling and adoption support services.

To ensure that the timescales set out in Regulations are met, wherever possible and where it is not possible the reasons must be clearly recorded. Our performance against the achievement of these timescales is monitored.

Objectives of the Adoption Service

To increase the number of children adopted from the care system, in line with government targets.

To recruit a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to offer placement choice in order to meet the assessed needs of the children needing adoptive families.

To develop a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies, in order to support adoptive placements and avoid placement breakdowns.

To ensure that the adoption agency employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver the adoption service.

To ensure that applicants for inter-country adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.

To ensure that birth families wishing to seek information about an adopted relative are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.

Principles of the Service

The Child

The child's welfare is paramount in all decisions about her/his future.

The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and taken into consideration, according to their age and understanding.

Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all the needs of the child in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, physical, social and emotional development and that promotes a supportive lifelong relationship.

Children and young people should not be in public care throughout their childhood.

A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic background are all important factors to consider in finding a new family. The adoptive family should reflect this, if this can be found without unnecessary delay. No child should be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and parents do not share the same racial or cultural background.

All children who have adoption as their plan receive a copy of the children's guide to adoption.

All children placed for adoption receive a copy of the children's guide to adoption support "growing up in your adopted family".

The Birth Family

The local authority will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for their child.

Every child is entitled to information about her/his birth family in order to promote her/his sense of identity.

There will be arrangements for ongoing contact, direct or indirect, between the child and birth family unless this would not be in the child's best interests.

The birth family's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and taken into consideration at all stages in the process.

The Adopters

All adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Priority for undertaking assessments will be given to those with the skills and experience to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption.

Every effort will be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs. Where this is not possible, the reasons for the decision to separate them will be clearly recorded on the child's file.

Adoptive parents and prospective adopters should be consulted with, provided with information, their views sought and taken into account throughout the process.

Adoption support services should be provided, as appropriate, to promote the stability of placements and ensure good outcomes for children.

General

The local authority will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the needs of all parties in the adoption process are met.

All the parties to the adoption process are entitled to an assessment of their need for adoption support services, including financial support.

All the parties to the adoption process will have access to the Department's Complaints procedure.

Management Structure in Wiltshire

All the managers in the adoption service are suitably qualified and experienced in line with the requirements of the Adoption & Children Act 2002. All have completed or are in the process of completing management training courses.

The Service Director of the Children & Families Branch has overall responsibility for the adoption service in Wiltshire. The Service Director is one of the Adoption Agency Decision Makers and the Adoption Support Services Adviser (delegated to the Adoption Support Co-ordinators).

The adoption service is located within the Department for Children and Education. The Head of Children in Care has management responsibility for the adoption service.

The Adoption Team Manager has line-management responsibility for the Adoption Assistant Team Manager, Adoption Support Co-ordinators, Adoption Social Workers and responsibility for the operational development of the adoption service.

The Adoption Support Co-ordinators have line-management responsibility for the Adoption Support Workers.

Name	Designation
Carolyn Godfrey	Corporate Director of Children and Education
Sharon Davies	Service Director, Social Care
Lin Hitchman	Head of Children in Care
Andrea Viner	Adoption Team Manager
Jackie Hatschek	Assistant Team Manager Adoption
Marion Hunt Sally Hughes	Qualified Social Workers Adoption Support Co-ordinator Adoption Support Co-ordinator
Denise O'Connor Alison Lewis Julie Pearce Pam Mears Leonie McKenna Christine Pullen	Adoption Social Workers
Ann Mazzotta	Unqualified Adoption Support Worker
Currently vacant	Unqualified Adoption Support Worker

All the Managers, Adoption Social Workers and Adoption Support Co-ordinators hold the minimum social work qualification have had a minimum of 2 years' experience in children & families social work or closely related field. All have childcare social work experience.

The Adoption Team Manager has extensive experience in childcare social work and in adoption and management qualification to level 6.

Operational Functions

The countywide Adoption Team delivers the adoption services.

There is a dedicated Adoption Support Service that is responsible for providing and developing adoption support services in Wiltshire, including for Special Guardianship.

The Independent Reviewing Service has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of children's adoption plans, conducting the LAC reviews until the Adoption Order is made, ensuring the timescales are adhered to.

A Home finder Management Group meets every three months to oversee the home finding process, track the progress of individual children and adopters in order to expedite placements and to review the effectiveness of the Home finding process. The group is chaired by the Adoption Team Manager and membership includes representatives from the two fostering teams.

The Home finder booklet is produced every two months with stop press releases in between to avoid delay in matching and placement.

Wiltshire provides a comprehensive set of adoption procedures for staff to assist them in their adoption work. The procedures are available on the intranet, which means they can be easily and regularly updated in line with changes in legislation and practice.

The Adoption Agency has contracts with Voluntary Adoption Support Agencies to provide complementary services to those provided in-house. PACT (Parents and Children Together) provides adoption support services to birth families, adopted adults and adoptive families.

The Agency is a member of Adoption UK and purchases targeted services at specific needs identified, such as training for social workers and adopters. The Agency pays for membership to Adoption UK for the first year for adopters as support.

The Agency has a contract with PACT to provide inter-country adoption services, including assessment, training, reviewing and adoption support.

Strategic and Developmental Function

Wiltshire is a member of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC), which is a consortium of local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Support Agencies (VASAs) and is used to share resources to increase the range of placement possibilities for children and adopters, and for the sharing of good practice.

They produce the 'e-Link book', which features children needing adoption placements. The Adoption Team Manager is the link person with the Consortium and attends quarterly and other regional meetings.

SWAC also has regular regional group meetings for Panel Chairs, Panel Advisers and Adoption Support staff. Wiltshire has representation on all of these groups, to share issues, good practice and disseminate relevant information.

Wiltshire is a member of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). It provides a quarterly information pack, including details of training events, publications and practice notes. It provides licences for the printing and use of nationally recognised adoption forms. It publishes a bi-monthly newspaper 'Be My Parent' and has a Be My Parent Online Service, which feature the more difficult to place children needing adoptive placements. There are local Trainer/Consultants who are available to provide training, advice and guidance on specific issues. The Adoption Team Manager is the link person with BAAF and attends quarterly and other regional meetings.

Wiltshire subscribes to Adoption UK and receives quarterly journals and a 'Children Who Wait' magazine featuring children needing placements for adoption.

Wiltshire joins all newly approved gay and lesbian adopters to New Family Social as support.

The Adoption Panel and Central list

The current central list of potential Adoption Panel members is made up of:-

- (a) an Independent Chair
- (b) a vice chair
- (c) Two social workers with at least 3 years relevant experience in child care social work, including direct experience in adoption work.
- (d) one elected member of the authority, from the corporate parenting group.
- (e) the Agency's Medical Adviser
- (f) 5 independent members, (all with personal experience of adoption).

It is proposed to add to this list and increase the central list to 14 thus increasing the diversity, flexibility and knowledge base of the panel.

The Independent Chair is independent from the day to day management of the adoption service.

The Agency has a Legal Adviser to the Adoption Panel who provides written legal advice and may attend if requested to do so but is not a member of the Panel.

There is also an Agency Adviser to the Panel who is not a Panel member but should attend Panel meetings as its adviser. He or she should be able to contribute to Panel meetings by raising issues and providing advice, for example about the Agency's procedures and practices.

The Adoption Panel Administrator is responsible for taking the minutes of the meetings and undertaking the other administrative aspects of the Panel's work.

The Agency provides an annual training day for Panel members and Adoption Agency staff. Panel members are also offered opportunities to attend other relevant internal and external training events.

Adoption Panel Function

The Panel's main function is to make recommendations to one of the Agency's Decision-Makers (the Service Director, Children's Social Care or the Head of Service Community Safeguarding), who makes the Agency decision on the following matters:-

- (a) whether a child should be placed for adoption
- (b) whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child
- (c) whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter.

The Panel must also consider and may give advice to the Agency on:

- (a) the Agency's proposals for the provision of adoption support services to the adoptive family
- (b) the arrangement the Agency proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child
- (c) whether an application should be made by the Agency for a Placement Order
- (d) whether the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian or the prospective adopter should be restricted and if so the extent of the restriction.

In considering the recommendation to make, the Panel must bear in mind that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration and:-

- (a) shall take into account and give consideration to all reports and information passed to the Panel
- (b) shall request any further information that the Panel considers necessary
- (c) shall obtain legal and medical advice on each case presented to Panel
- (d) should consider whether all other possible options for care of the child have been explored and discounted.

The Panel is required to keep minutes of its meetings and a written record of any recommendations it makes and the reasons for them.

The Panel receives regular update reports on children and adopters who have been to Panel, in order to track their progress.

As part of its monitoring function, the Panel considers, at quarterly intervals, a spreadsheet detailing the position of all the children and adopters currently in the adoption process.

The Agency Decision

In line with regulations prospective adopters, birth parents and the child must be notified of the agency decision verbally within 2 days and in writing within

7 working days of the agency decision maker receiving a copy of the final minutes.

Services Provided

As an Adoption Agency, Wiltshire provides a range of adoption services to children needing adoption, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, birth parents, birth families, adopted adults and the general public. These services are provided by:

The Adoption Team recruit, train, assess and provide support to prospective adoptive parents.

The Adoption Team provides a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out information about their adoption.

The Adoption Team, through the contract with a Voluntary Adoption Support Agency (VASA), provides an intermediary service for birth relatives and adopted adults who wish to trace each other.

The Adoption Team allocates an Adoption Social Worker to act as the 'nominated home-finder' for children needing adoptive placements.

The Adoption Team provides a consultation service to the childcare teams on matters relating to adoption placements.

The Adoption Team, through a contract with an external provider offers a service to step-parents who wish to adopt, including the preparation of a report for court.

The Adoption Team, through a contract with PACT offers services to inter-country adopters.

Childcare teams are responsible for ensuring that the child's Life-story Work and Later Life Letter are completed by the time of the Adoption Order.

Childcare teams are responsible for managing direct contact arrangements between children and their birth families, pre and post Adoption Order.

Adoption Website

Wiltshire Council has an adoption website www.wiltshireadoption.org.uk to provide information on the adoption service, including:

- Services for children who need adoption
- Becoming an adoptive parent (including an online enquiry form)
- The Adoption Support Service
- Accessing your adoption records (adopted adults)
- Tracing an adopted person (intermediary service for birth relatives)
- Tracing your birth relatives (intermediary service for adopted adults)
- Special Guardianship
- Inter-country adoption
- Step-parent Adoption

Adoption Support Service

The Adoption Support Service undertakes assessments of need for adoption support, including financial support. The Adoption Support Service also undertakes assessments of need for Special Guardianship support services.

The Adoption Support Service is also responsible for:

- developing a range of adoption support services to meet the needs of adopted children and adoptive families e.g. support groups, newsletters and training for adopters and staff
- preparing Adoption Support Plans for children and reviewing the plans at regular intervals, as required
- accessing specialist therapeutic help for children
- accessing counselling and advice for adoptive parents
- managing the post-box service (to enable adopted children to maintain indirect contact with their birth families)
- reviewing direct contact arrangements
- accessing universal services and benefits
- organising training events and conferences for adopters and staff
- providing practical help and support to adoptive families
- preparing Special Guardianship support plans and reviewing them on request
- acting as single point of contact to provide information and advice to adopters, adopted young people, birth relatives and Special Guardians.

Systems for Monitoring and Evaluating Service Provision

An annual report and a 6 monthly interim report is presented to Elected Members, detailing the activity of the Adoption Agency.

The supervision and annual appraisal system for all staff assures the monitoring of individual performance and identification of training needs to compensate for any gaps in knowledge.

A File Audit system is in place for managers to regularly check on the quality of children's adoption records and adopters' files, to ensure that all departmental policies and procedures are being followed.

Training on adoption issues is part of the 'training pathway' for staff involved in adoption work and staff complete post-training evaluation forms, which feed into reports produced by the Staff Development Team.

The Senior Independent Reviewing Officer produces 6 monthly reports on the work of the Service, including the progress on permanence plans being achieved.

An Adoption Recruitment Strategy is in place to identify and inform recruitment needs for adoptive parents, based on the profile of the children needing adoption. This is reviewed and updated annually and is being used to inform our prioritisation principles for assessing applicants.

The Adoption Team routinely review and evaluate the quality of the Adoption and Permanence training courses for adoptive applicants, including seeking and collating feedback from applicants.

Contracts with VASAs are reviewed 6 monthly and statistics provided quarterly to monitor performance, quality of service and ensure value for money.

The Home-finder Management Group meets quarterly to track and monitor the children and adopters currently in the adoption process, with particular focus on suggesting ways forward those without an identified placement.

Adoption Panel

There is an annual training day for the Adoption Panel, which helps to ensure Panel members are kept up-to-date with current issues in adoption. In order to meet the requirements of the National Minimum Adoption Standards, part of this day involves a session with the Agency's adoption managers and staff.

The Agency Decision Maker/s meets with the Adoption Panel twice per year and will pick up on any issues of concern raised by Panel members.

A spreadsheet showing the current position and progress of all the children and adopters in the process is shared and discussed with the panel and the Agency Decision Maker/s.

All Panel members are required to undergo an annual review of their performance.

The Agency Decision-Maker meets quarterly with the Panel Chair and Agency Adviser to discuss issues connected with Panel business, including developmental, quality control and any other issues of concern.

The Adoption Panel has a system for receiving feedback from applicants who attend Panel, children's social workers and Adoption social workers, which are discussed at subsequent Panels and suggestions for improvements to Panel's practice are considered.

The Service to Prospective Adopters

The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in detail in our Adoption Agency procedures, which are available on the intranet.

In brief the process is as follows:

Within 5 working days of their enquiry, all enquirers are sent an information pack about adoption, including:

- a letter of invitation to attend an Information Session
- our information leaflet for prospective adopters
- our policy with regard to smoking
- the leaflet on adoption
- our criteria for prioritising assessments
- leaflet on Concurrent Planning (in development).

Enquirers are invited to attend an Information Session about adoption, to meet adopters and Adoption Social Workers. The session provides the opportunity to learn more about adoption and about the necessity for us to prioritise applications, to meet the needs of the type of children requiring adoption (i.e. older children with challenging behaviour, sibling groups and children with special needs).

All applicants have to meet standard requirements and in addition, our prioritisation principles include giving priority to applicants who:

- have been in a stable relationship for at least 2 years
- are prepared to consider a child up to five years of age or more
- wish to be considered for a sibling group of two or more children.
- are open to contact with birth families
- have completed treatment for infertility for a year.

Those interested in knowing more are invited to complete an Adoption Enquiry Form and, if they meet the prioritisation requirements, an Initial Assessment may be offered.

Applicants are then prioritised to attend a Preparation Course, which provides more detailed information and helps people decide whether adoption is for them.

Those wishing to proceed to the next stage, and deemed suitable, are asked to complete a formal application form and are allocated an Adoption Social

Worker to work with them through the assessment process, which involves a number of home visits, CRB and other checks, references and a full medical.

The assessment must be completed and presented to the Adoption Panel within 8 months of the receipt of the formal application form.

Applicants receive a copy of their completed assessment report and are invited to comment on it, within 10 working days of the panel meeting.

Applicants are invited to attend Adoption Panel when their approval is being considered. Their Adoption Social Worker will help to prepare them for attendance and will provide them with a leaflet about the Adoption Panel.

The Panel will make a recommendation as to whether the applicants are suitable to be approved as adopters. The Panel must consider and may give advice to the Agency about the number of children, age range, gender, likely needs and background that the prospective adopters may be suitable to adopt.

After the Agency Decision-Maker has made the decision on their approval, based on the Panel's recommendation the prospective adopters must be notified of the decision verbally within 2 days and in writing within 7 working days of the agency decision maker receiving a final copy of the panel minutes.

If the applicants are not deemed suitable, they will be able to have the decision reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Mechanism. A detailed letter setting out the reasons for the decision will be sent to the applicants.

Following their approval, the prospective adopters' Adoption social worker keeps in touch with them and ensures they have access to information about the children needing placements (through the monthly Home-finder newsletter).

If no child has been placed with them within a year, there must be a review of their approval as suitable to adopt. After the review the prospective adopters must be informed whether they remain suitable to adopt.

When a 'match' with a child is identified, the Adoption Support Co-ordinator will make an assessment of the adoption support needs of the placement, together with the child's social worker, the adopters and their social worker.

This information is incorporated into the Adoption Support Plan which, together with the Adoption Placement Report, is presented to Adoption Panel when the 'match' is being considered.

Adopters may also request an assessment for adoption support services at any future point, following the making of an Adoption Order. The assessment will be conducted by an Adoption Support Co-ordinator and the Department has the discretion to decide whether to provide adoption support services.

The Complaints Procedure

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption service, the Department for Children and Education welcomes and encourages feedback from service users, providers and partners.

The Department recognises that children, their, birth parents, adoptive parents and prospective adopters are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore, to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

There is a clear, robust framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties to the adoption process are heard and the Children's Guide provides information to children about how to make a complaint.

In most adoption situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker, the adopters' Social Worker, the Adoption Support Co-ordinator, as appropriate.

Any of the parties to the adoption process can use the Children Act Complaints Procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:

- any child who has been placed for adoption by Wiltshire Council (including adults who were formerly adopted)
- a birth parent of a child who has been or is being adopted
- adoptive parents
- prospective adoptive parents during the preparation/assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement
- one person on behalf of another e.g. an adoptive parent on behalf of an adopted child.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the Complaints Officer at Wiltshire Council who can be contacted on Tel: 01225 713678

Since April 2010 there have been 2 complaints which have been resolved at Stage one of the complaints process.

There is a leaflet available for children and young people, which explains the complaints process and how to make a complaint. Information regarding complaints, comments and seeking advice is contained in the children's guide to adoption and the children's guide to adoption support.

The Registration Authority

Ofsted is an independent non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. Their aim is to “inspect and regulate to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people and in education and skills for learners of all ages”.

The address of the local Ofsted area office is:

**Ofsted South Regional Centre
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The national Ofsted address is:

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