

# SURREY ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

## 2013/2014

### INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in association with the Adoption and Children's Act 2002, Adoption Agency regulations (2003, 2011) Adoption Support Regulations 2005, and National Minimum Adoption Standards 2011. Adoption regulations require adoption agencies to provide a clear statement of the aims and objectives of our Adoption Agency and the strategy for meeting those aims and objectives on an annual basis.

The Statement provides details of:

- The principles and quality standards which underpin the service
- An overview of services provided by the Agency, including support services
- Activity
- Management structure, numbers, qualifications and experience of the staff
- Quality assurance and external monitoring mechanisms
- Procedures for recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters
- Complaints
- Quality Assurance
- Arrangements for revision and circulation

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Surrey's Adoption and Permanency Service works to secure and promote legal permanency for children who are unable to live with their birth parents. This is achieved largely through adoption or special guardianship arrangements.

Through successful permanency arrangements we believe that children can reach their full potential and to achieve the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes: Be Healthy, Stay safe, Enjoy and achieve, Make a positive contribution and Achieve economic wellbeing.

### PRINCIPLES AND QUALITY STANDARDS

- Legal permanence represents the best outcome for children, whether this means placement with birth parents, a connected person, or a substitute family claiming the child under adoption, fostering or special guardianship arrangements.
- Striving for permanency for children is therefore the business of all Surrey Children's Services staff.

- The child's need for permanency from as early an age as possible is key to our thinking and practice.
- In recruiting and assessing prospective carers or adopters, the needs of looked after children and the ability of the prospective carer to meet these needs are the primary consideration.
- As such the wishes of adults to be considered as prospective adopters or carers is secondary to the Agency's needs for adopters placements to children most in need of adoption and permanency.
- The recruitment needs of the Agency should be subject to continual review in order that the Agency is able to respond to the placement needs of children.
- Enquiries are welcomed from a diverse range of families, reflecting the varied and individual needs of children requiring permanency.
- In matching children with prospective families or special guardians, their needs must be considered holistically taking account of a broad range of factors, rather than focussing on single issues such as family structure, or ethnicity.
- Whilst there will not be a requirement for adoptive families to reflect the child in all respects (e.g. with regard to ethnicity, culture, religion or language) there must be consideration of the ability of the family selected to acknowledge and promote the child's needs in these respects.
- Practice should be informed by the best available research and be evidence based.
- Applicants are entitled to receive a professional, timely and respectful relationship which adopts a partnership approach.
- When there is no local match, family finding should be extended beyond Surrey in the interests of ensuring that the child is not left waiting for a match, or indeed for the perfect match
- By making Surrey adopters available to other placing agencies, and promoting use of the National Adoption Register, the national pool of adopters is enhanced and there is better placement choice for looked after children generally.
- Placement stability for children placed under adoption or special guardianship is prioritised through careful matching and provision of a range of support services.
- Support is acknowledged as important for all those whose lives have been touched by adoption or permanency.
- In addition, Surrey Children's Service has created a set of quality standards to underpin its work with children and young people, the key principle being that '**the Child is the central focus of our work**'. To this end the wishes, feelings and views of the child are explicit, recorded and respected in all the work we undertake.
- We work with children, young people, parents and carers to consistently promote equality of opportunity and social inclusion whilst respecting their culture and background.
- Children are safeguarded whilst allowing for risk and challenge as appropriate to the capabilities of the child. Particular attention is paid to safeguarding children with a disability
- Corporate parenting responsibilities are fulfilled to ensure safety, security and stability of care where possible within their family network and community. Particular attention will be given to good quality care planning and achieving permanency for a child

- We promote effective partnership working, within the community network and with partner agencies to achieve optimum outcomes for children
- Children's Service staff are supported, trained, managed and supervised to provide the best possible outcome to children and young people within the legislative framework and available resources
- The Children's Service is led and managed by managers who strive for quality and excellence, demonstrate integrity, a detailed understanding of processes and resources and provide a clear direction to constantly improve service delivery

## SERVICE OVERVIEW

The following services are provided to children and young people:

- A Family Finding Service for Surrey Looked After Children in need of legal permanency
- Operation of an adoption panel
- Support for adopting families pending and following placement.
- A range of post order services

In addition, adults whose lives have been touched by adoption (their own or that of a close relative) can also access services as follows:

- Counselling and Support services for adopted adults
- Support services for birth relatives of adopted children
- An agency and non-agency adoption service for adults seeking to adopt

### Family Finding:

Children in need of adoption are referred to the adoption and permanency service, either because of a request from the birth parent(s) or as a result of authority from the Courts to place a child for adoption. Our aim then is to secure a placement for a child as quickly as possible, given research indicating that timeliness in achieving permanency is linked to positive outcomes for adopted children. Accordingly, we follow national minimum standards for Adoption. These state that it should take no longer than 12 months for a child to join their new family once the Agency has made a plan for adoption.

Given the concerns that black and minority ethnic children typically face longer delays before being placed in a family, we adhere to current adoption guidance, enabling children to be placed within a family that can support their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious needs, without the requirement that the family must match the child in every respect. To help us make sure we consider the child's needs holistically, use is made of a matching tool. This approach ensures that placements are made that are both timely and well considered.

Children are placed with their siblings wherever possible unless there are clear indications that this would not be in their best interests, mindful that for most children this is a life long relationship which confers considerable benefits to the child (research indicates that placement together can have benefits in terms of promoting placement stability.) For some siblings however, a shared experience of early neglect, trauma and abuse can be contra indicative to future placement together. This means that careful consideration is needed which looks at both the risks and benefits of placement together. Sometimes this needs to be informed by expert advice, and the service will seek this in order to give the children the very best chance of a successful outcome.

Whilst finding a family for a larger sibling group is challenging, family size in itself should not be a reason to move quickly to a plan of separation. Where there is concern that a placement together might not be achievable, even if this is the preferred plan, it is important to make every effort to find a family, before reviewing and possibly changing the plan.

Where it is considered to be in the best interests of children to grow up in separate households from their siblings, care is taken to record the rationale behind the decision making and contact between families that raise siblings placed separately is actively promoted and supported. For a small number of children no match is identified from the pool of local adopters, and so given the need to ensure that children do not wait longer than absolutely necessary, the search is extended and the child assigned to a named worker from the adoption and permanency team who works alongside the child's social worker to identify a family. Children most likely to wait for a family longer are:

- Over 4s
- Siblings with a least one child of school age
- Children with health issues, developmental delay or uncertainty
- Children with complex emotional needs
- Children from black and minority ethnic groups

Family finding for these children is likely to require creating profiles and DVD recordings of the children (to be shared with other adoption agencies who might have prospective adopters available and able to meet the child's needs). For example, Surrey is a member of a consortium with Hampshire, Oxfordshire and a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading: PACT (Parents and Children Together) and it is to these agencies that we would turn first, followed then by non consortium agencies. The child may also be featured at events such as regional adoption exchanges-designed to bring the children to the attention of potential adopters. Use of a national adoption register has also enabled additional matches. In the event that a match is secured with adopters from a different agency by any of these methods, a fee is paid to the agency.

Where foster carers express interest in providing a long term home, this is quickly followed up as we know that research indicates that placements which were carer lead, and based on an existing relationship often are amongst the most successful. The addition of special guardianship orders from 2005 has enabled many placements to become long term, backed by a legally secure order. This has been the means by which many children with complex health or developmental needs have been able to find a permanent home who might otherwise have waited much longer or in vain for an adoptive family.

### **Adoption panels:**

Surrey has an adoption panel which draws on a central list of members, as required under National minimum standards for adoption. Currently panels make recommendations as follows:

- Whether to approve applicants as prospective adopters
- Whether to continue or withdraw approval in where there has been a significant change of circumstances, or where there has been no placement made within a year of approval (and annually thereafter)
- To consider whether a child should be placed for adoption in the event that there is a request from the child's birth parent(s) for the child to be adopted
- To consider whether a proposed match should proceed
- To hear cases of placement disruption which occurred prior to the making of an adoption order

- To hold regular reviews of agency activity, including updates on cases presented previously

In accordance with national minimum standards and adoption guidance there is an independent chair of panels, with a vice chair to ensure continuity of provision, plus

- Panel Adviser (non voting)
- Medical Advisor
- Legal Advisor
- County Councillor
- Independent Members
- Children's Services Representatives

The Independent members consist of adoptive parents, some with overseas adoption experience and/or adoptees. There is a birth mother on one panel. Additionally, Panel members typically have a range of experience including for example education, finance and medicine. All panel members undergo an application process including the taking up of references and CRB checks. In accordance with national minimum standards they are required to have annual appraisals and the agency must maintain files for each panel member which can be made available for inspection by Ofsted. Annual training is provided.

Legal and medical advice is made available to the panel, and the panel can make use of additional advice as required from additional disciplines such as education. The panel are assisted by 2 part time administrators who provide detailed minutes from each panel meeting.

The panel meets alternate weeks in order to ensure that there is no delay in cases being heard.

### **Support (pending a child being placed for adoption, and following placement):**

The Adoption and Permanency worker remains in contact with the family following approval through to adoption. If there has been no match with a Surrey child within 3 months of approval, or if the background and heritage of the family is such that we agree a match is more likely to result from placing a child from another part of the UK, the family are entered on the National adoption Register, with their consent.

Meanwhile, there is a regular training programme provided to adopters waiting for a match, and prospective adopters are encouraged to make good use of this to continue their preparation for life with a child and to ensure that adoption remains a 'live' issue following the end of the application process. Sessions typically run monthly and are held in the evenings as part of a rolling programme. The subjects are chosen to build on the earlier 4 day training with sessions such as: Introductions, Attachment, Information for friends and family of adopters, Matching, Social networks and adoption, Use of the post box, Contact and Life story books.

The Adoption and Permanency worker will discuss any possible match with the family in the first instance, ensuring that they receive the right level of information about the child or children to enable them to decide whether they can make the life long commitment to the child that is needed.

The worker also facilitates a planning meeting following the formal decision to proceed with the match, and co-ordinates introductions over a period of typically 10-14 days. A post order support plan is also agreed at a meeting in which the prospective adopters participate.

Meanwhile, the child's social worker and foster carer carefully prepare the child to move onto their new family, using story books and a welcome book which has been made by the adoptive family.

Regular visits are required under adoption regulations following an adoption placement, weekly for the first 4 weeks of a placement, with a looked after child review held within the first 28 days

of placement. Visits to the family are usually shared between the Adoption and Permanency worker and the child's own social worker during this period.

Prospective adopters share parental responsibility with the local authority and the birth parents for this period pending the making of a final adoption order and therefore there remains a role for the adoption and permanency worker, the child's worker and the independent reviewing officer pending adoption.

In some instances additional support may be provided, dependent on individual circumstances such as provision of financial support, visits from a family support worker, or therapeutic guidance on how best to parent the child given their particular needs, and some families participate in a training package (Safe base) designed to teach therapeutic parenting of children with attachment difficulties. Finally, many families choose to attend our fortnightly parent and toddler group which is specifically for adopting families and find this both a helpful social activity as well as a further means of remaining in touch with the Agency.

At such time that the family and the Agency are of the shared view that the child has settled and been 'claimed' the family are encouraged to make an application to the Court for an adoption order. This is reviewed at the child's looked after child review - which happens at prescribed intervals-within 28 days of placement, thereafter 3 months later and then 6 months after that.

The court cannot hear a case before the child has been in placement for at least 10 weeks, and in practice the timing of an application varies to reflect the complexity of the child's needs and the decision making about when and why the child would no longer benefit from continuing to remain 'looked after'. When the time is right however, applicants are assisted to submit their application, and briefed as regards the court process, legal representation and preparing themselves and the child for attending court.

### **Support following adoption or special guardianship:**

In many instances following the making of an adoption order or special guardianship order there will be no need for an ongoing social work service, although often families may choose to remain in contact with the Agency and other adopters/carers through attending training, social or support events, or they receive an indirect service as a result of an ongoing post box or receipt of financial payments to support the placement.

In the event that additional needs arise following adoption, the adopters/carers may request a review of the child or family's support needs at any time until the young person reaches the age of 18. Families requesting support should in the first instance contact the Surrey Social Care Contact Centre. An initial assessment will be arranged by the team covering the area where the family is living, which would be led by the assessment team, but involve a discussion with the Adoption and Permanency Service and agreement as to whether a member of the team will join for the purposes of the assessment.

The purpose of an initial assessment is to determine whether the child needs services from the local area social work team-most commonly because the child meets the threshold for Child in Need services or whether the Adoption and Permanency Team is the more appropriate team to draw up a support plan. This is because the Adoption and Permanency Team does not provide a crisis service, and therefore may not be the best team to case hold if the family is experiencing difficulties of a level that might require this type of response. Where an initial assessment is undertaken involving an adopted child however, a discussion would take place with the local assessment team to determine whether it would be helpful for a worker from the Adoption and Permanency Team to join the area worker in conducting the assessment and making next steps recommendation.

When this has taken place, if there appears to be a role for the Adoption and Permanency service the case would transfer by agreement of the Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA), currently Debra Hale, who acts as a point of contact for those affected by adoption and with a right to be assessed for services in relation to adoption (See appendix 2.) The ASSA also provides information, advice and signposting to relevant services.



### **Eligibility for support where another agency acted as the placing agency:**

Adopters/Special Guardians caring for children placed by other agencies or who move into Surrey remain the responsibility of those agencies for the first 3 years following the adoption or Special Guardianship Order.

A placing agency may however seek advice from the ASSA as regards accessing support services on the child's behalf. Following three years from the date the order was made, responsibility for assessing support needs passes to Surrey if the family continues to live here. The ASSA will provide

- Advice and information within Children's Services in relation to adoption support issues
- Co-ordination and facilitation of adoption support services within the Children's Service and on a multi and Inter-Agency basis.
- Examples of current post order support services provided locally include:
- Post box service to facilitate an indirect contact-referred service.
- Facilitated direct contact-referred service.
- Financial support (subject to child-based criteria and means test)-referred service.
- Access to regular Post approval training and social events.
- Buddy Scheme (provided through Adoption UK)-referred service.
- Parent consultation service (provided by Adoption UK)-self referral/referred service.
- A parent and toddler group for adopters -available to agency adopters.
- Individual membership of Adoption UK-referred service, available to all adopters.
- An in-house social work service, working with families on parenting strategies, promoting attachment and other interventions post order-referred service.
- Access to monthly support surgeries (provided by the Post Adoption Centre—available to all agency adopters and special guardians.
- TAP (the attachment project) a specialist Multi-Agency consultation panel, designed to facilitate and promote attachment between children and their permanent families-referred service.
- An Education psychology service to assess adopted children experiencing difficulty in school. Referred service.
- A monthly drop-in service-available to all agency adopters.
- All support packages are reviewed 3 monthly with the individual families concerned. Feedback from service users is used to improve individual support and develop adoption support services.

### **Adopted adults are able to access the following:**

- Birth records counselling.
- Support and advice to adoptees in relation to adoption records held in the Surrey archive, or with regard to accessing alternative registered intermediary services

- Access to independent counsellors
- Access to a monthly support group
- Signposting for Intermediary services for adopted adults

### **Birth relatives affected by adoption can access:**

- A specialist Birth Relative Parents worker,
- Counselling via a service level agreement with an independent adoption support agency
- Assistance with maintaining contact through facilitated meetings or through the Surrey post box with their child's adoptive family, including assistance with letter writing if this is needed.

### **Agency and Non Agency Adoption:**

The processes for agency adoption applications i.e. adoption of a child placed by the Agency is outlined in the subsequent section: procedures for recruitment, preparation assessment and approval of adopters. Non agency adoption is a service to families applying to adopt a child who was not placed by an adoption agency. Applications are generally driven by the wish of somebody who is caring for a child but not the birth parent, to formalise the relationship through adoption and acquire parental responsibility in the process.

This service is mainly accessed by step parents, followed by a small number of children being adopted by a close relative following placement under a private arrangement and lastly inter country adopters who have adopted a child from another country having first undergone assessment of their suitability to adopt with a voluntary adoption agency (IAC - the Inter Country Adoption Centre) with whom Surrey has a service level agreement. Applicants pay to receive this service from IAC. Depending on which country the overseas adoption took place in, there may be a requirement for a further adoption order to be sought in the UK courts as not all such overseas adoptions are recognised in the UK.

With children to be adopted from abroad there are additional visiting and reviewing requirements as specified under the adoption with foreign elements regulations.

All Non Agency Adoption applicants are required to give the local authority 3 months notice of their intention to make an application for an adoption order, and this provides a window for counselling and information gathering, ahead of the need to respond to a request for a report from the court.

The need to make enquiries about the applicant, to meet with the child to gauge their needs and understanding of the process, to trace and interview the absent birth parent are often poorly understood at the outset, as is the social worker's responsibility to make recommendations as to whether an alternative legal order should be considered (such as a parental responsibility order, a contact order or exceptionally, a supervision order).

Enquirers complete an initial questionnaire and are invited to attend an office appointment to review their motivation for applying to adopt, to consider possible options and the process involved. In practice, when the appointment has taken place and potential applicants have given the matter further consideration, some decide not to pursue an application at least for the present time.

When an application is placed before the court, the service provides a comprehensive report to the Court based taking account of the welfare checklist. As with agency adoption extensive checks are made, with other agencies and personal referees. Applicants undergo DBS checks, and in some instances a medical examination is required

In writing their report, the social worker is required to consider how the making of the order will impact for the child in the present and in future years, to consider whether there are alternative legal arrangements which could better meet the child's needs or if additional orders are required for the benefit of the child. They must also consider the impact of the order for the applicant, the birth parents, and the wider family network.



## Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship Orders were introduced as a new legal permanence option within the Adoption and Children Act and came into being on the 31st December 2004. Due to the nature of the Court process the assessment and preparation process for family and friends (kinship carers) as potential permanent carers is different from that of adoption.

The Adoption and Permanency Service manages the applications of potential special guardians for looked after children, usually within the context of ongoing care proceedings which has brought forward a connected person who wishes to be considered. Some applications are made later, some times following care proceedings or accommodation of a young person, usually as a result of the child or young person's foster carer deciding that they wish to make a legal commitment to the child.

Potential kinship carers considering SGO are expected to undergo a viability assessment whilst appropriate vetting checks are undertaken – if the indicators are positive a full assessment is undertaken. The outcome of assessments are written up and presented to the Court using the annex B format. As with Agency Adoption, the child having previously been looked after confers significant rights with regard to entitlement to assessment of needs.

Many referrals do not progress, this can be for a variety of reasons including safeguarding concerns about placing a child back into their family of origin in which they were not previously regarded as safe, significant health concerns about the potential special guardian, or the impact of managing the child's needs alongside existing commitments.

However, against this it is important to consider the benefits for the child in growing up in their own family, where positive relationships may have been maintained, and a sense of their identity is more likely to be assured. Whilst this work may be challenging for assessing workers, charged with balancing the risks and benefits for the child, it has nonetheless been regarded as a helpful alternative to adoption or non legal permanence.

## ACTIVITY 2012-13

### Children

- 52 looked after children from Surrey were matched with adopters and placed in new families
- 3 children with disabilities were considered as in need of adoption, and all were matched with a family within the period
- 8 BME (Black or minority Ethnic) children were matched and placed, 4 with Surrey families and 4 with a family approved by another agency.
- 11 groups of siblings were placed together in new families, and an additional 3 children were placed in families where a birth sibling had previously been placed.
- 1 child experienced placement disruption.
- Post Box Exchanges – there are now over 710 Post Box folders requiring over 2000 exchanges with birth relatives given that some children have exchanges set up once or twice a year with several family members.
- Supervised Contact: the service supported over 50 families
- 57 statutory Post Order Support Needs Assessments were completed. This was in addition to those already receiving a service from previous years, and those who were accessing services directly from contracted services (such as the Post Adoption Centre and Adoption UK) or a one off/non targeted service such as training, the drop-in surgery or the adopters parent and toddler group

- The Attachment Project (TAP) provided monthly consultation slots for carers and workers in relation to children with complex attachment needs, this included consultation around issues of sibling placement-together or apart, placement support and stability and therapeutic needs of the children

## Adults

- The Agency received 406 initial adoption enquiries
- We approved 43 families. The adopters ranged in age from late 20s to early 50s.
- Successful applications included 41 heterosexual couples and 2 same sex couples.
- 7 foster carers were approved to adopt 8 children who had already been living in their care.
- Reflecting the local demographics most applicants were from white British backgrounds, with 3 successful applications received from couples of mixed heritage.
- Following approval, most prospective adopters were matched with a child within 12 months
- We also received over 300 referrals for support from adult adoptees, these included requests for birth records counselling, intermediary work or birth relative initiated contact.
- Referrals were received and support provided to over 60 birth relatives

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

A number of mechanisms exist to monitor the work of the Agency, and to ensure that service delivery is consistently of a high quality and meeting national and local performance indicators.

- The Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker quality assure work presented
- Elected members sit on the Adoption Panel
- Panel reviews the progress of family finding for all children requiring adoption and also approved adopters waiting for placements on a quarterly basis
- A quarterly adoption forum provides a strategic interface between the Agency and the panels
- Twice yearly Annual Adoption Agency Reports and updates are provided to elected members
- Disruption Reports are provided in relation to any adoption placements which fail to result in an adoption order
- Performance data information in relation to key performance indicators is collected and reported within the monthly children's social care 'Report Card'

Feedback mechanisms for service users are built in to all key stages of the adoption process and have recently been revised to improve opportunities for young people to be give feedback on the service

In addition, there is an active focus group for service users which meets quarterly and provides feedback on service delivery and development. Service users are routinely involved in information events and during assessments, helping to provide the service user's view and to bring the experience of adoption to life for applicants.

## EXTERNAL MONITORING OF THE WORK OF THE AGENCY

The Independent Review Mechanism was launched on 30th April 2004. It is being operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department of Education. The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a Panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been told that their adoption Agency does not propose to approve them as suitable to adopt a child. In 2012-13 there were no cases referred to the IRM

In addition:

- An annual data set and commentary on performance is provided to Ofsted
- Quarterly performance data is provided to the Department of Health
- The Agency is inspected three yearly by Ofsted, most recently in 2011, with the result that an overall rating of 'good' was awarded
- An annual 'Scorecard' from the Department of Health

The current scorecard which can be seen on the Department for Education Website has aggregated performance over 3 years 2009-12. Currently Surrey meets all thresholds (these measure timeliness of placement for children with adoption plans.)

As such, the current measure is a reflection both of the success of our family finding and the effectiveness of local courts.

## MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

(See appendix 1) The Service is managed within the Care Services part of Countywide Services, which forms one arm of Surrey Children's Services

James Beardall, Care Services Manager was appointed in 2010. He has over 20 years experience as a qualified social worker/manager, and manages all the regulated care services including: adoption, fostering and residential services. His qualifications are as follows:

NVQ Management level 5  
BSc Behavioural Science  
Diploma in social Work

Suzanne Chambers, Team Manager is the operational and policy lead for Adoption and Permanency and registered manager following appointment in 2010. She has been qualified as a social worker since 1987, and a manager since 2004. Her qualifications are as follows:

B.A. (Hons) Psychology  
MSc Social Policy and social work studies  
Certificate of Qualification in Social Work  
Diploma in health and social care management level 5

4 Full Time Equivalent Assistant Team Managers (5 posts given that some are part time) complete the management team, each holds functional leads as well as providing regular supervision to staff. Casework and group work functions are provided by 16 full-time equivalent Social workers, and one permanency support specialist, assisted by 3 Assistant social workers and a Referral and Information officer. The team is also supported by a dedicated team of business support staff

In addition the following are commissioned by the Adoption Service:

- Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel
- Adult psychotherapists -1 day per week provides consultation for adopters and carers

- 2 educational psychologists-seconded 1 day a week each
- 2 mental health CAMHS workers-half a day a week each
- Plus consultation from child and adolescent psychiatrist, and clinical psychologist half a day a month each.

All social workers are appropriately qualified for their posts and registered with the General Social Care Council. A high percentage hold post qualifying awards such as the Child care Award, or higher degrees and many have additionally undertaken specialist courses/training including Practice Teaching, Diploma in Adoption and Attachment, Counselling, Play Therapy, and Theraplay.

Most of our staff have held positions across the range of Children's Services prior to joining the team and therefore are knowledgeable as regards the roles of colleagues in the following areas:

- Key working children in child care / child protection / Court cases
- Key working Looked After Children in residential settings
- Fostering and Adoption Work.
- Child and Adult Mental Health.

A satisfactory enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS, previously known as CRB) check is required for all staff including business support workers employed within the service.

## **PROCEDURES FOR THE RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS**

The Service aims to recruit a flexible and diverse pool of Adopters and Permanent Carers who are able to meet the needs of looked after children with adoption care plans, especially those within the priority groups above. In recent years, the Agency received more enquiries from members of the public hoping to adopt a pre-school aged child than it was able to progress. However, fewer enquiries were received with respect of children in our priority groups, despite ongoing efforts to raise their profile nationally and locally. It is important therefore that in communicating with the general public we are transparent about the needs of our children whilst encouraging enquirers to think about how adoption could enrich both their own and a child's life. This is key to improving the conversion of initial enquiries to approval and matching with children most in need of adoption.

Initial enquiries are received by telephone or e-mail. All enquirers are offered an opportunity to attend a Learn2adopt session-held weekly at our Addlestone office to receive detailed information about adoption and the needs of adopted children. From 1<sup>st</sup> July adoption regulations have required us to offer detailed information within 10 working days)

Following this, enquirers can choose to register interest and in doing so provide permission for background checks. Those accepted progress to a 2 stage process, the initial stage lasting 2 months is adopter lead and consists of the adopter furthering their knowledge about adoption and providing further information about themselves-through a series of self assessment tasks and background checks. A medical is also undertaken by the applicants' own GP and reviewed by our medical adviser.

On completion of stage one the agency reviews all the information held and determines whether or not to progress the applicant to stage 2-which is adopter lead and results in presentation of a completed assessment to the adoption panel. Stage 2 should be completed within 4 months, and includes attendance at preparation groups.

### Eligibility criteria:

We provide a service to Surrey residents but will consider non Surrey residents in exceptional circumstances particularly if they are wishing to consider a child from our priority groups.

- Applicants can be single, married, in a civil partnership or be an unmarried couple (same or opposite sex)
- There is no upper age limit, but applicant(s) must be aged 21 or over,
- They should be domiciled or habitually resident in the UK
- Have no declared specified offences against children or convictions which might indicate unsuitability to work with children or vulnerable adults. (Formal checks are made later if the Agency accepts an application.)
- The applicants should not still be undergoing fertility treatment or investigations of fertility. (We generally consider that a minimum of 6 months should have elapsed since the last treatment.)
- We consider applicants who have children living as part of their household on a case-by-case basis.
- The applicant(s) need to be able to commit to having a parent at home full time for a minimum of 6 months following placement of a child for adoption.
- Declared health status is such that there is no reason to believe that they could not meet the physical and emotional needs of a child placed for adoption now and through their growing years (this would need to be further evidenced following formal application by a medical assessment)
- If applicants declare a health condition or disability that might impact on ability to parent, we take advice from our medical adviser at an early stage of the process with their agreement. (We follow current evidence based guidance from BAAF on the detrimental effects of passive smoking for children under 5 and children with respiratory problems).
- Enquiries are welcomed from single applicants and those applying as a couple (irrespective of whether the relationship is one that is legally recognised or whether it involves a same sex or different sex partnership).
- The applicant(s) should be settled in their accommodation, with suitable and sufficient accommodation for a child to be placed
- They must show willingness to engage with the process and to facilitate statutory and agency checks.
- Already have good levels of childcare experience or be able and willing to extend this.

If the agency thinks that enquirers are unlikely to be a resource for the children currently most in need of adoption it may decline to consider the enquirer further. If this is the case, feedback is given and we may suggest an approach to other adoption agencies whose needs may be different. (From early 2013, a national adoption gateway has been created in the form of a website/advice line named First4adoption. This is a ready source of information for the public about how to adopt and identifying possible adoption agencies. )

As part of their application, visits are arranged to foster carers and experienced adopters to hear at first hand the challenges of caring for children who have experienced separation, loss and varying forms of neglect and abuse. Prospective adopters are also invited to attend the Parent and Toddler group run for adopters of preschoolers as they quickly recognise that this is a means of building additional support from like-situated families.

Applicants and the assessing social worker work together during stage 2 with some meetings taking place in the applicants home, others in the office. An analysis of the information collated and shared is undertaken, the result being a comprehensive prospective adopter's report. The report is seen and commented upon by the applicants, and any amendments agreed. In practice, applicants contribute significantly to their reports.

The assessment is overseen by a manager and a manager's oversight report is also provided to the panel. Where there is some complexity to issues that have been raised the manager may undertake a second opinion visit. The Adoption panels make recommendations as to whether the application should be approved. This must then be ratified by a senior manager, the Agency Decision Maker prior to the applicants being approved and a match progressed.

Where the agency considers it is unable to support approval it has the option to present either a full or a brief report to the panel detailing its enquiries and the reason why it does not propose to complete a full assessment if this has not been completed.

Applicants are given the choice whether to attend panel. In recent years it has been the case that all applicants have elected to attend and this has been considered very helpful by panels, enabling them to gain a sense of the applicants and what they have to offer.

The panel has three options available to it in every case it hears: to recommend acceptance, rejection or to defer the case for additional information. In all instances the practice of panel is to provide the applicants with verbal confirmation of the recommendations following its deliberations, with the proviso that ratification will need to take place.

The Agency Decision Maker, a senior member of Surrey Children's Services, then decides whether to ratify the panel's recommendation, taking account of all the available information including the minutes of the adoption panel meeting before taking a final decision. The decision is then confirmed in writing within 7 working days.

In the event that the Agency does not approve an application or decides not to complete a partially assessed case the applicants have the choice of seeking a further determination, by a review panel (see IRM).

All approved adopters who have not had a child placed with them within 12 months of their date of approval are required to have an annual review of their approval. This is completed internally by managers within the Adoption and Permanency Service, unless there has been a significant change of circumstance or the approval is of 3 years duration in which case a fuller review is required and must be presented to panel.

## COMPLAINTS

Adoption and Permanency adheres to the Council's corporate complaints procedure. All service users as a matter of routine are given a copy of Surrey's complaints leaflet.

A children's guide appropriate for the age and needs of the children we work with is provided, either directly to the young person or their carer.

Complaints relating to children are handled under the provisions of the Children's Act S.26 (1989), further defined in the Representation Procedure (Children and Young Persons) Regulations (1991). With the introduction of the Children and Adoption Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) 2003 came an extension of the previous provisions. In addition complaints can be made to:

Ofsted  
 Royal Exchange Buildings  
 St Ann's Square  
 Manchester  
 M2 7LA  
 Telephone: 0300 123 4666



## REVISION AND CIRCULATION

This Statement has been produced by managers of the Service in consultation with staff and users of the Service, in compliance with National Adoption Standards and the relevant Adoption legislation. Members of the Social Services Executive will be asked to formally approve the Statement, (the revised Statement is presented to Members annually for their approval).

The Care Services Manager and Team Manager are responsible for ensuring that the Statement is updated or modified when necessary, but at least annually

The Statement is provided to OFSTED. Amended Statements will be provided to the Commission within twenty-eight days of approval by Members.

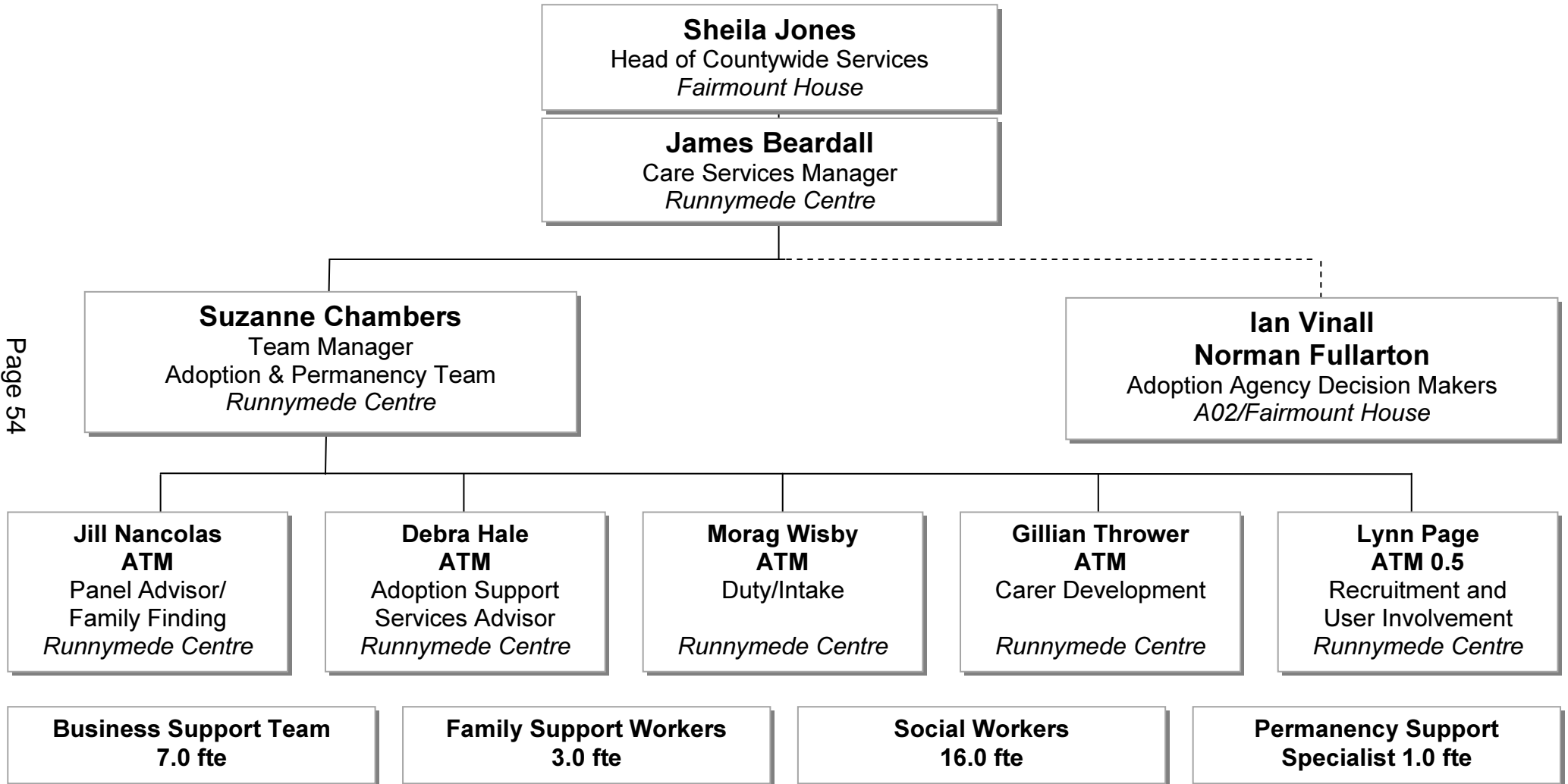
The Statement will be provided to:

- All staff including independent specialists engaged in the adoption process.
- All current and prospective adopters and permanency carers.
- All key stakeholders

A summary of the Statement will be provided to children placed in adoptive or permanent placements of sufficient age and understanding, and a full copy will be provided on request to parents of children who are users of this service.

# Management Structure

Page 54



## Adoption Assessment Services

Person being assessed	Services for which they are entitled to be assessed						
	Services to enable discussion of matters relating to adoption	Assistance in relation to arrangements for contact	Therapeutic services	Services to ensure the continuation of adoption relationship	Services to assist in cases of disruption	Counselling, advice and information	Financial support
Agency adoptive child	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Adoptive parent of an agency adoptive child	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆
Child of adoptive parents				◆	◆	◆	
Natural parents or guardians of an agency adoptive child	◆	◆				◆	
A relative (or someone with whom the Local Authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of agency adoptive child		◆				◆	
Intercountry adoptive child			◆	◆	◆	◆	
Intercountry adoptive parent				◆	◆	◆	
Natural sibling of an adoptive child		◆				◆	
Non-agency adoptive children, their parents and guardians						◆	
Prospective adopters						◆	
Adopted adults, their parents, natural parents and former guardians						◆	
A relative (or someone with whom the Local Authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of a non-agency adoptive child						◆	

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