

Adoption Statement of Purpose 2014-15

Introduction

Hampshire County Council acts as an Adoption Agency to provide adoption services as required under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

The Agency aims to fulfil its range of duties and responsibilities under the above legislation and the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 in meeting the needs of those children who have or may be adopted, their birth parents and those people who are or may be adoptive parents.

Principles of the Service

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a stable and loving family, which can meet their needs through childhood and beyond. Children's birth parents and families, their adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- The child's welfare and safety will be the paramount consideration and will be at the centre of Hampshire's adoption process.
- All children will have the same opportunities irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, disability, culture, religion, language and sexual orientation.
- Achieving permanence for a child will be a key consideration in working with children in need and their families and in working with any child who is looked after by Hampshire.
- Permanence can be achieved by remaining with or returning to birth parents, legal permanence with extended family, adoption or permanent placement with other than extended family through legal means.
- Delay in the adoption process can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of children and must be kept to the minimum necessary to achieve the child's best interests.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved. Children and young people who have been adopted, adoptive families and birth families all have access to a range of services and supports to meet their assessed needs.
- Children have the right to be listened to, express their wishes and feelings and participate in decisions about their future. They will be encouraged and enabled to do this at all stages of the adoption process and in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexual orientation need to be properly recognized and positively valued and promoted. Children will not be kept waiting for an ideal match.

Aims and Objectives of the Service

The main aims of the Hampshire County Council Adoption Service are to:-

- Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need permanent placements.
- Meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.
- Adhere to permanency planning timescales as set out in adoption legislation, in order to avoid delay and maximise each child's opportunity to experience a stable and secure family life.
- Provide appropriate choice of adoptive placements for children within Hampshire County Council, and beyond where appropriate, for example through the Consortium or the National Adoption Register.
- Ensure that children are well prepared both practically and emotionally for a move to a new permanent family.
- Recruit, prepare and support sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds to provide permanent family care for Hampshire's children where their individual needs and history will be understood, valued and respected.
- Provide a comprehensive support package, including financial support where appropriate to achieve stable and successful placements.
- Provide effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children, prospective adopters' assessments and linkings with children to be progressed without delay.
- Ensure all staff are appropriately recruited, supervised and trained to fulfill their agency functions.
- Ensure that where possible and appropriate, siblings will be placed together and that decisions to separate siblings are made following a sibling assessment.
- Ensure that children's plans for adoption are agreed by the Agency Decision Maker to meet court timetables (implemented from September 2012 when children's plans for adoption no longer can be presented to the Adoption Panel where a Placement Order is required in order to place a child for adoption).
- Ensure that arrangement for contact with the birth family are carefully considered and meet the individual child's needs.
- Provide independent time limited advice and support to birth parents at the point that adoption becomes the plan for the child.
- Provide an efficient and responsive assessment and counselling service for children, adopters, birth relatives and adopted adults in respect of adoption support services in conjunction with other agencies.
- To maintain effective partnership with other adoption agencies.
- To ensure that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise available resources.
- To ensure that accurate and up to date records and management information is kept in relation to individual children, adoptive parents and services and to maintain confidentiality and security of adoption records.
- Ensure service users are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.
- Treat all service users with respect and without prejudice or discrimination.

Services Provided by the Adoption Service

The adoption service is structured into the following teams:

- Two area Children's Adoption Teams (East and West)
- Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Team – this team is responsible for the recruitment of adoptive parents and foster carers.
- Adoption Assessment Team – this team undertakes the training and preparation of prospective adoptive parents, undertakes the prospective adoptive parents assessment and supports prospective adoptive parents through approval to placement and final Adoption Order.
- Adoption Advisor
- Adoption Support Team – this team provides a range of support services to adoptive families within Hampshire.

• **Children and young people**

The service recognises that children for whom adoption is the plan and adopted children may have specific education, health and emotional needs. Every effort is made to find families who can meet a child's religious, cultural and ethnic needs and promote a child's sense of identity which is important to a child's well-being and helps them to enjoy and achieve in life.

Supporting educational attainment of vulnerable children is a priority for Hampshire and appropriate support will be identified as a matter of priority.

Access to consultation with clinical psychologists is available to social workers about children and a similar consultation service is available for adoptive parents. Nurses for Looked After Children are available to address the health needs of children throughout the adoption process.

A children's guide is available for children for whom adoption is the plan.

Hampshire has a pool of volunteer advocates from the Hampshire Children's Advocacy Service who offer support to young people as appropriate.

• **Recruitment, Approval, Training and Support of Prospective Adopters**

The service responds within statutory timeframes to initial enquiries and assessment of prospective adoptive parents. The service recruits, prepares, assesses, trains, supports and links adoptive families with children for whom adoption is the plan.

The adoption service is open and inclusive. Prospective adopters are welcomed and are given training and support to help them understand the backgrounds and needs of children with plans for adoption and to see the situation from the child's point of view. Hampshire welcomes prospective adopters irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion and disability. We recognise that children need adopters from all kinds of backgrounds and that the ability and willingness to meet a child's needs is the most important factor.

A two stage assessment process was successfully implemented in July 2013 following the Government's consultation. The new process will last a maximum of 6 months for most applicants.

Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent placements with adopters also approved as foster carers are being made where this is in the best interests of the child. At the point of enquiry and assessment prospective adopters are being offered the opportunity to explore these options.

Adopters are provided with a range of information following approval to support them in the adoption task. Support is also provided through training opportunities, access to regular consultations run by a clinical psychologist, post-approval workshops, support groups, social events, and individual support from members of the adoption service. Some support services are commissioned by Hampshire though the majority are delivered in-house.

- **Permanency Planning and family finding role**

The children's adoption team managers allocate a social worker to all cases, where adoption may be an option being considered as part of childcare planning, to begin parallel planning. There are regular 'matching meetings' and Family Finding Meetings where all children for whom adoption has been agreed, including those deemed 'harder to place' are discussed and plans for seeking permanent adoptive placements are formulated, monitored and reviewed.

- **Support to Birth Parents and Relatives**

Birth parents and relatives have access to independent support and counseling. This is provided by Barnardos, via a contractual arrangement with Hampshire. Information is given to birth parents about this service at an early point in the permanency planning process.

- **Adoption Support Team:**

Adult Work: Currently Hampshire County Council commission additional services to assist with the provision of access to records and intermediary and support services.

Counselling and intermediary work: The Adoption Support Team offers a counselling service to adopted adults who are seeking access to records about their adoption and family of origin. They also offer counselling to birth relatives seeking to make contact with adopted relatives.

The team provides an intermediary service to both adopted adults and birth relatives who are seeking to find a family member. This service is only available to individuals living in the Hampshire County Council boundaries.

Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Support Team provides a range of adoption support services in accordance with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and a range of workshops and support groups are provided for adoptive families, children and birth parents/family:

- Requests for assessment for adoption support services are received by the Adoption Support Team via Hantsdirect. All eligible adoptive families are entitled to an adoption support needs assessment which is completed by a social worker with the family to identify any adoption support needs. A decision is then made as to how this can best be met. This may be through the Adoption Agency's own service provision, or through signposting to other agencies.

- Some therapeutic services are provided from within the Adoption Support Team and others in conjunction with CAMHS and other relevant professionals/providers.
- Adopter Support groups.
- A range of workshops and training days for adoptive families and children on single issues.
- Adoption Information Exchange.
- Support of direct contact arrangements (by children's adoption social workers and the Adoption Support Team).
- Confidential telephone helpline and regular surgeries commissioned.

- **Inter Country adoption**

Hampshire Adoption Agency has a service level agreement with Parents and Children Together (PACT) a registered voluntary adoption agency to assess, train and prepare those people who are seeking to adopt a child from overseas.

- **Adoption Panels**

Hampshire County Council Adoption Service provides an advisory service for our weekly adoption panels. Extra panels can be convened to avoid delays for children's planning for adoption.

- **Step-Parent Adoption**

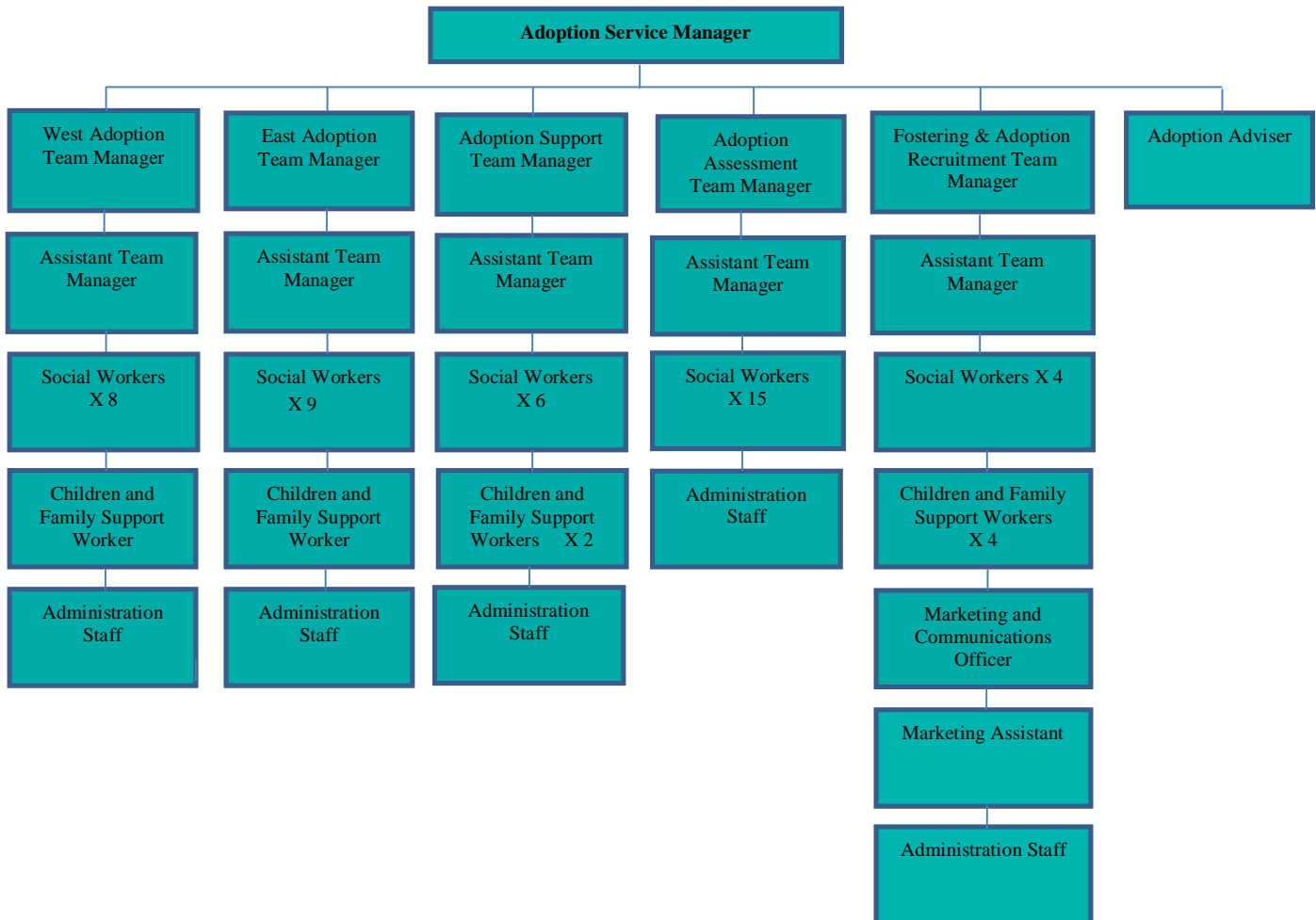
Hampshire has dedicated workers who specialise in step-parent adoptions and who are located in the Adoption Assessment Team to undertake the assessment and court report.

The Adoption Service Management Structure

Maureen Edwards Adoption Service Manager
Hampshire County Council, Children's Services
Glen House, Glen Road, Swanwick, Hampshire, SO31 7HD

E-mail: maureen.edwards@hants.gov.uk

The Adoption Service Manager works directly to the Head of County Services.



Monitoring and Evaluation of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service works within the overall Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Families, which sets out a range of general and service specific standards and methods by which these standards are monitored. Children for whom adoption is being considered or who have been placed for adoption are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Hampshire Adoption Service continually monitors and evaluates its service at every stage of the adoption process to ensure quality and effectiveness. Hampshire welcomes feedback from service users.

Feedback from prospective adopters on service quality and effectiveness is obtained via feedback sheets on adoptive parent's training and the prospective adopter report approval process. The adoption panel experience is similarly evaluated. An Adopter's Participation group meets regularly to include the views of adoptive parents in the development of services.

As part of the Adoption Consortium with Oxfordshire, Surrey and PACT and as a member of BAAF's Southern Regional Group of Local Authorities, Hampshire County Council Adoption Service actively considers and shares good practice and policy development.

The Adoption Service is inspected on a 3-yearly basis by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

Complaints

Complaints Procedure

Hampshire County Council Children's Services complaints procedure is based on Getting the Best from Complaints (Departments for Education and Skills 2006). The service is provided to service users at the point of contact.

The Complaints and Customer Relations Manager's address is:

Hampshire County Council
Children's Services Complaints Team,
Elizabeth Court 1, The Castle Winchester Hampshire SO23 8UG

Tel: 01962 847 484

Fax: 01962 834 510

e-mail: childrens.services.complaints@hants.gov.uk

The Complaints and Customer Care Manager maintains close links with the Adoption teams and monitors the process, outcomes and recommendations of all complaints. An overview looks at all complaints across the service bi-annually.

The Complaints Procedure is made up of 3 parts:

- **Stage 1 Local Resolution**
- **Stage 2 Investigation**
- **Stage 3 Review Panel**

If complainants remain unsatisfied at Stage 3 they can ask for their complaint to be examined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Independent Reviewing Mechanism

Prospective adopters are given written information about the role of the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) as part of their preparation process. They are also provided with leaflets about the IRM when information is being prepared for presentation to panel.

Advocacy Service

Hampshire provides access to an independent and confidential advocacy service for children looked after on behalf of Hampshire County Council. The service supports young people in meetings and reviews, offers independent advice and advocacy, supports young people in making a complaint and facilitates consultation and participation of young people in matters affecting their lives. This service can be accessed via the Participation Team:

Lee Culhane Participation Officer
Hampshire County Council
Elizabeth Court 1, The Castle Winchester Hampshire SO23 8UG

Telephone number: 01962 45313
e-mail: lee.culhane@hants.gov.uk

Ofsted

Hampshire County Council is inspected by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

In February 2014 our Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted under their new framework. The overall quality rating was '**good**' with adoption being judged as '**outstanding**'. This is a fantastic recognition of the quality of our service provided by staff.

Inspection is the main way Ofsted check the quality of services for children and young people. The purpose of inspections is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

You can contact Ofsted to ask more about their inspection of children's services make a complaint or raise a concern about a service that Ofsted inspects or regulates, or you can view inspection reports online.

Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St. Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA

Telephone number: 08456 04045
e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Approval of the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually and formally approved by the Executive Lead Member.

Hampshire County Council strives to meet the requirements laid down in the Adoption Regulations and the National Minimum Standards (Department of Health) published under the Care Standards Act 2000. It also reflects the requirements as laid down under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The service is particularly mindful of the outcomes framework in Every Child Matters, namely: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing.

Feedback

We welcome feedback about our policies and procedures so if you have any comments about this Statement of Purpose, please address them to:

Maureen Edwards Adoption Service Manager
Hampshire County Council, Children's Services
Glen House, Glen Road, Swanwick, Hampshire SO31 7HD

E-mail: maureen.edwards@hants.gov.uk