

Adoption Statement of Purpose 2015-16

Aims and Objectives

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

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

- Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need permanent placements.
- Provide appropriate choice of adoptive placements for children within Hampshire. County Council, and beyond where appropriate, for example through the Adoption 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, where appropriate, financial support in order to achieve stable and successful placements.
- Provide effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children, prospective adopter' 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.
- Ensure that arrangements 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
- 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.

Service Delivery

Children and Young People

All work within the Adoption Agency is guided by determining and acting on what is in the best interests of each child.

- All children will have the same opportunities irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, disability, culture, religion, language and sexual orientation.
- 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.
- The child's welfare and safety will be the main focus throughout the adoption process and their rights will be respected at all times.
- Decisions about a child's future will be taken in a timely manner that minimizes delay.
- The confidentiality of all those involved in the adoption process will be respected.

Recruitment

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.

The service responds within statutory timeframes to initial enquiries.

Assessment of Prospective Adopters

In assessing prospective adopters, Hampshire County Council follows the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Statutory Adoption Guidance and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption (Care Standards Act 2000) as well as adhering to the good practice guidance provided by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering.

Following an initial enquiry, all prospective adopters are sent an information pack and have the opportunity to attend an Adoption Information Session. At the Adoption Information Session applicants will be given a Registration of Interest Form.

Completed Registration of Interest Forms will be considered by Adoption Service managers and all suitable applicants will progress to Stage 1 of the adoption process. Stage 1 is led by the applicants with the support of a named social worker. At this stage statutory and best practice checks are undertaken: these include a number of formal checks with agencies such as the police, local authorities and education. Applicants will also be asked to undergo a health assessment and have the opportunity to undertake e-learning on issues related to adoption. On successful completion of this stage, applicants will progress to Stage 2 of the adoption process.

In Stage 2 an assessing social worker will undertake a competency-based assessment with the prospective adopters (based on the BAAF process) and further checks will be undertaken which include personal references and home and safety assessments. During Stage 2, prospective adopters will also be invited to attend the Adoption Preparation Course.

Approval of Prospective Adopters

The assessment process ends with a written report and a recommendation made by the assessing social worker as to whether prospective adopters are felt suitable to adopt. The report is shared with the prospective adopters and referred to an independent adoption panel for consideration.

Hampshire's Adoption Panels are made up of people who all have either personal or professional experience of adoption. Adoption Panel members will consider the information in the assessment and make a recommendation about whether they feel the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt. This recommendation is then referred to the Agency Decision Maker, a senior manager in Hampshire Children's Services for consideration and a decision on behalf of Hampshire Adoption Agency.

Children's Permanency Planning and Family Finding

Children's adoption team managers allocate a social worker to begin parallel planning all cases where adoption may be an option being considered as part of childcare planning.

There are regular matching and family finding meetings where all children for whom adoption has been agreed are discussed and plans for seeking permanent adoptive placements are formulated, monitored and reviewed.

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| Express Interest in Adoption |
| Adoption Information Session |
| Submit Registration of Interest Form |
| Stage One |
| Stage Two |
| Adoption Preparation Training |
| Independent Adoption Panel |
| Agency Decision |
| Matching and Linking |
| Adoption Order |

Adoption Support Services

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

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 may be commissioned by Hampshire although the majority are delivered in-house.

Support to birth parents and relatives

Birth parents and birth relatives have access to independent support and counselling. Information is given to birth parents about this service at an early point in the permanency planning process.

Adult work

Hampshire County Council currently 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 within the Hampshire County Council boundaries.

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.

Step Parent Adoption

Hampshire has dedicated workers within the Adoption Assessment Team who specialize in step-parent adoption work.

Agency Statistics

- From 1 April to February 2015 **61** sets of adopters were approved
- **65** children had plans for adoption agreed 1 April 2014 to February 2015
- **95** children were placed for adoption between 1 April 2014 to February 2015
- **70** Adoption Orders were made between 1 April 2014 to February 2015

Service Feedback for 2014

Complaints about the Adoption Service

Feedback is vital to our growth and development. We take great pride in the services that we provide and want to ensure we deliver a quality service to all. We welcome all feedback and deal with all comments promptly and professionally.

In 2014-15 to date there were 19 formal complaints made about the service. These were all dealt with following the complaints procedure.

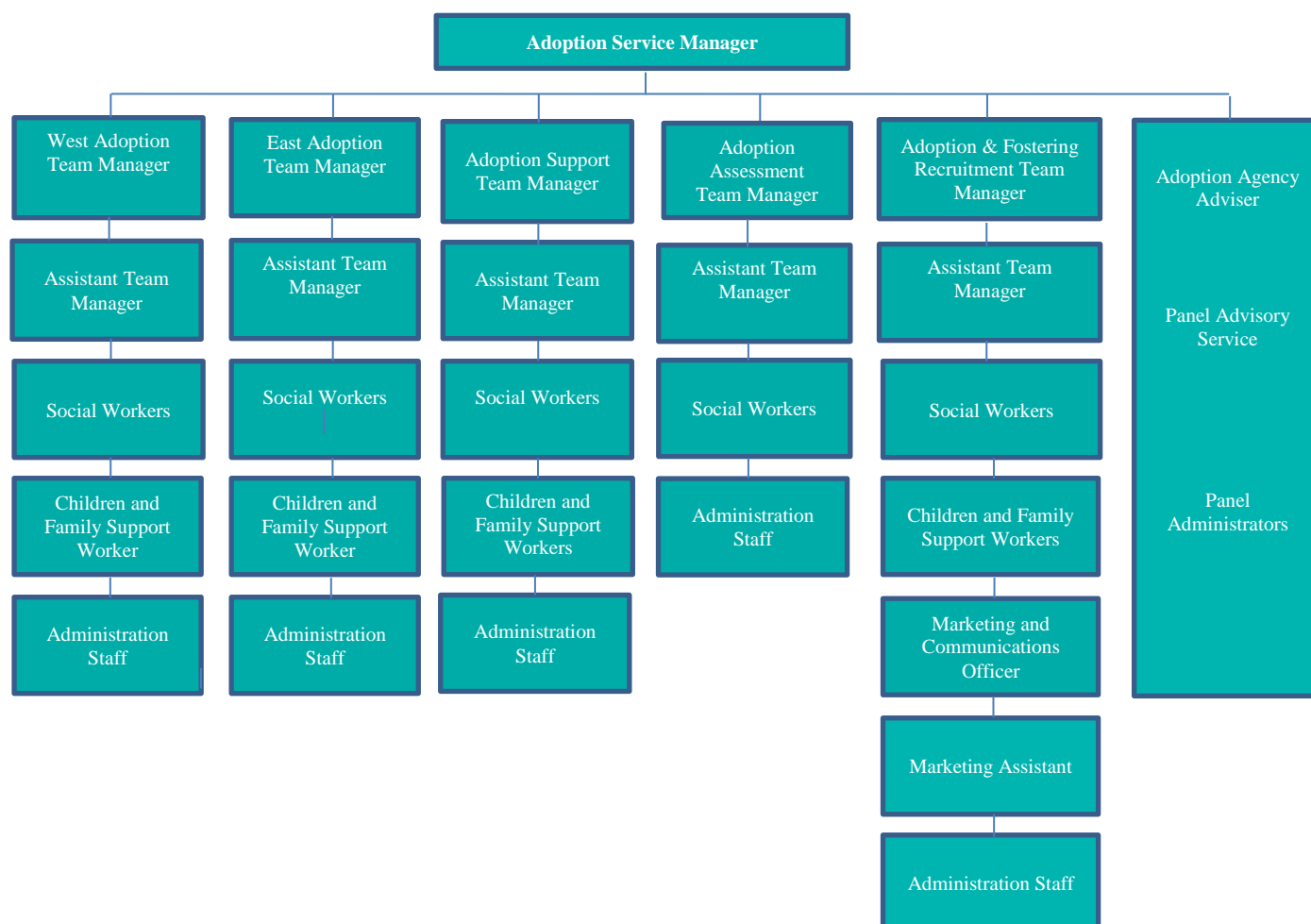
More information about comments and complaints and compliments process can be found by visiting www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/contact-cs/cs-complaints.htm

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, Children and Families Branch.



Staff Qualifications and Experience

Service managers and team managers have both social work and management qualifications to support their extensive experience in providing services for children. They are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC).

Social workers all hold relevant professional qualifications and are registered with the HCPC, as well as having experience in supporting children in need and Looked After Children. Children and Family Support Workers do not hold a professional social worker qualification but have experience of working with children, young people and families gained from working with a range of services. They work under the supervision of social workers or team managers.

All Hampshire County Council employees and contractors are subject to rigorous selection, assessment and checking prior to commencing work within their teams as set out in regulations. The recruitment process for the Fostering Service is also monitored by Ofsted.

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 South Central Consortium 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.

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 II
The Castle
Winchester
Hampshire
SO23 8UG

Highlights from 2014-15

Ofsted inspection highlights

In February 2014 our Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted under their new framework. The Adoption Service was judged as 'outstanding' with the overall rating of Children's Services being 'good'. 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 service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Here are some of the Ofsted report highlights:

Adoption is considered as an option for all children at the earliest possible opportunity. Adoption planning is given the highest priority by the local authority and this has resulted in a year on year increase in the number of children being placed for adoption over the last three years. The number of children adopted increased from 37 in 2011–12 to 62 in 2012–13. This figure has already been exceeded this year and the local authority's own data shows that 72 children have been placed for adoption in 2013–14. This work is underpinned by a robust adoption policy and a rigorous approach to adoption training for social workers, including those in frontline referral and assessment teams. The needs of children with complex problems are recognised, and the deployment of a dedicated adoption social worker ensures that children with complex needs are placed for adoption where this is the plan.

Arrangements to monitor the progress of children who are subject to an adoption plan are robust. The progress made by individual children waiting for adoption is closely monitored and placement options are continuously explored. This has resulted in the very large majority of children with a plan for adoption being successfully placed. Eleven of the 20 children who have been waiting for adoption the longest have been successfully matched this year. Only eight children have been waiting for a family over a year, and these are continually monitored by managers to ensure that they are prioritised and placements actively sought. Where it becomes apparent that adoption is not achievable in a timescale that meets the child's needs, the local authority takes decisive action to secure alternative means of achieving a permanent home.

Performance on the Department for Education (DfE) adoption scorecard and the authority's own recent data (December 2013) shows that adoption performance exceeds that of comparable local authorities.

Assessments of prospective adopters are thorough and of a very high standard, contributing to very effective matching and a low breakdown rate. The quality of child permanence reports is of a consistently high standard. These assessments use research very well to understand children's experiences and needs, for example, addressing issues such as the long term impact of domestic violence on children and the impact of placing and separating sibling groups. There are a number of examples where the service has worked with specialist adoption agencies to secure the best placement for siblings.

For more information or to view the full report visit www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Adoption Recruitment

We always need new adopters to ensure we are matching children with the best adopters for their needs. We hold a number of recruitment events and stands throughout Hampshire every year.

We actively support National Adoption Week to raise the profile of adoption.

New exciting initiatives during 2014-15 included a new website, new Twitter and Facebook accounts and re-branding to 'Homes for Hampshire Children'. New projects for 2015-16 include the launch of the new information pack and DVD.

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Ofsted

Hampshire County Council is inspected by Ofsted. 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.

Enquiries:

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Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Telephone: 0300 123 1231 (Children's Services)

Telephone: 0300 123 4666 (Complaints or concerns about Ofsted inspected services)