



## **Derbyshire County Council Adoption Service**

### **Statement of Purpose**

**2017/18**

**This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 18 of the Adoption Services Minimum Standards 2014 (Care Standards Act, 2000) and regulations 2, 3 and 4 of the Local Authority Service (England) Regulations 2003. Regulations 3 and 24B and Regulation 4 of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 200 and Regulation 5 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011/2012 require an Adoption Agency to produce a Statement of Purpose, which contains a range of detailed information. This Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with the above requirements and will provide a source of information to all areas of the Children's Services Department, partner agencies, adopters and prospective adopters, children who may be adopted and their parents or guardians and adopted people, their parents, birth family and former guardians.**

**This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed no less than annually. The Adoption Service of Derbyshire County Council is conducted in a manner that is consistent with this Statement of Purpose. All information is correct as of 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017 and has been approved by Derbyshire County Council elected members.**

## **1. Aims, Objectives and Principles of the Adoption Service**

The primary aims of Derbyshire County Council's adoption service are to;

- Provide high quality child-centred legally permanent placements either through adoption or special guardianship. Legal permanence is a positive alternative for children to enable them to grow and reach adulthood, within a stable and loving family environment; this process is to be kept within an agreed timescale and all parties involved will be kept fully informed throughout.
- Recruit, train and prepare sufficient adopters who are best able to meet the needs of children referred for adoption. Derbyshire County Council's adoption service acknowledges that successful outcomes for children can be found with married couples, couples in a relationship, couples in a same sex relationship, single people and people with or without birth children. Where this cannot be achieved within the agency, every step will be taken to find suitable adopters outside our own resources.
- Provide training, advice and support to social workers, who are working with children and families, where adoption is the plan.
- Provide support services, advice and guidance for adoptive children, adoptive families and birth families before, during and after the adoption process, where appropriate and applicable.
- Provide support services to adopted adults and their families

The primary objectives of Derbyshire County Council's adoption service are to;

- Ensure that, prior to the matching process commencing, the child and their needs have been fully assessed and considered before planning for adoption. Full consideration will be given to family and friends as possible carers, who are able to meet the needs of the child through a legally permanent order.
- Ensure that the views of children and young people have been heard and acted upon before any decisions concerning their future are taken – that full consideration is given to the welfare, safety and assessed individual needs of the child for permanency. These considerations are the core of the process and come before the needs of anyone else involved.
- Work with birth families so as to achieve, wherever possible, an effective partnership to assist the child in making a successful transition to an adoptive placement and to maximise the opportunities for the adoptive placement to remain stable.
- Ensure that where adoption outside the birth family has been identified as the care plan, an appropriate match is found at the earliest opportunity in order to minimise delay.
- Seek the following, where a child has been matched with adopters, unless they are inconsistent with promoting the best interests and welfare of the child:

- Consideration in placing siblings together.
- Contact, either direct or indirect, with the birth family and individuals significant to the child is undertaken, where appropriate and applicable.
- All needs, including education and health care, are met by the adoptive parents.
- A period of introduction, prior to placement commencing, appropriate to the child's age, abilities and understanding – the introduction will be child rather than adult led.
- The views of the child to be sought prior to, throughout and following the placement process, on a regular basis and in a manner appropriate to their age, abilities and understanding.
- Recruit a wide range of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children – while matching does not rely upon exact ethnic or cultural counterparts, adoptive parents and prospective adopters will respect diversity in gender, abilities, ethnicity, religious and spiritual needs, culture, language and sexuality in society, and in the backgrounds of the child they adopt, and choices the child may make in later life. Furthermore, through training, supervision and personal development, all adoption team staff members will be expected to value diversity and counter any discriminatory practice.
- Use every opportunity to recruit prospective adopters from all sections of the community, by promoting the service in a positive fashion and providing a timely and well informed response to any and all enquiries.
- Provide to relatives and friends, approved as adoptive parents or special guardians, the same support and assessment of needs as any other adoptive parent would receive.
- Find alternative placements; where none can be found 'in house', through the East Midlands Consortium, the National Adoption Register and any other appropriate service
- Recruit, train and maintain a skilled and appropriately qualified team capable of assessing, matching and supporting adoptive placements, which are committed to ensure that children placed for adoption receive a safe, secure and loving family whilst remaining sensitive to the needs of adoptive parents and birth relatives during the adoption process.
- To ensure that at all times Derbyshire County Council's adoption service is fully compliant with all legislation and policy requirements, relating to the running of the agency and that all written materials are informative, up to date, fit for purpose and freely available in a variety of media.
- Provide innovative and high quality training packages, covering all aspects of the adoption process, for adoptive parents and staff members.

Furthermore, Derbyshire County Council's adoption service will;

- Counsel, prepare and assess people who wish to adopt a child from outside the United Kingdom.

- Undertake welfare supervision and prepare reports for the Courts, for step parent and inter-country adoption applications.
- Prepare reports for the Adoption Panel and the Courts on any aspect of adoption that is required.
- Assist in the arrangements for direct contact between adopted children and their birth families where this is deemed appropriate.
- Manage safe contact between adopted children, adoptive and birth families through the Letterbox Contact system, which will be reviewed regularly.
- Offer support services to anyone affected by the adoption process, to include individual counselling, support events and training groups. Provide Birth Records Counselling for adopted adults.

The main principles and values which underpin Derbyshire County Council's adoption service are to:

- Place the needs of the child at the heart of the adoption process, act in their best interests at all times and make sure that the service works in a way that avoids both disruption and delay. Wherever possible, a child should be brought up by their own birth family but where this cannot be achieved, the child's safety, wellbeing and future development is the primary concern of the adoption agency. Adoption and/or legal permanency is primarily a service for children and no adult has the automatic right to become an adoptive parent or special guardian.
- Treat every individual, within the adoption process, with respect and courtesy. We will, wherever possible and appropriate and according to age and ability, consult and listen to children we are responsible for and explain to them what is happening in a way they may best understand. We will treat adoptive parents and prospective adoptive parents as valued and crucial stakeholders in our service and, in turn, they respect the principles and values that guide our service. We will work sensitively with birth parents whose children are to be adopted.
- Work in partnership with others, including other adoption agencies and colleagues in the fostering service, to find the best possible outcome for the child. Derbyshire County Council's adoption service acknowledges that the adoption process is an ongoing and continually developing responsibility, one which we and partner organisations and co-professionals will support for as long as is necessary.
- Commit to anti-discriminatory practice – we recognise the gender, abilities, ethnicity, religious and spiritual needs and cultural origins and background of the child for whom we are responsible and welcome enquiries from prospective adopters irrespective of gender, abilities, ethnicity, religious and spiritual needs, culture, and sexuality.

- To fully recognise and take into account the needs of disabled children when making decisions about them.
- Consultation and quality assurance, to continually look at ways of improving the services. Adoptive parents are encouraged to express their views throughout both the approval and the matching process, through ongoing evaluation. Views are also sought from adoptive parents who participate in adoption support after the adoption order. Children and young people, both awaiting adoption, and, where applicable, from the adoptive parents' birth family will be consulted in a way appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Recognise that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and this requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. We will work with others to meet the needs for services for those affected by adoption.

## **2. Standards of Care to be followed by Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Service**

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service aims to provide safe, secure and loving permanent home for children who are unable to live with their birth families, through adoption or permanent fostering, which will meet that child's needs until they reach adulthood and beyond. This will be achieved through compliance with, but not limited to, the standards, regulations and requirements below;

- The Adoption Act 1976
- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre and Post Commencement) Regulations 2005
- The Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children Act 2006
- Equality Act 2006 and 2010
- The Independent review of Determinations (Adoption) Regulations 2009
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011

- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and case Review and Fostering Services (Misc Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

### **3. Status and Constitution of Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Service**

Derbyshire County Council is an approved adoption agency under Section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and will be inspected against the Care Standards Act 2001.

### **4. Improving Outcomes for Children**

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service pledges to constantly improve the care provision it offers and consistently achieve the best possible outcomes, for all children and young people in its' care. Our intent is guided by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards, as well as more recent governmental guidance to ensure a genuine partnership between all those involved within the adoption process, which can be summarised through best outcomes from the Government, local government and other statutory agencies. This pledge is reflected in the Department for Education's document 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' (March 2012) and can be summarised as;

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are paramount and central to all aspects of the adoption process
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and should be actively sought and taken into account at all stages of the adoption process
- Delay for children waiting to be adopted can be seriously detrimental to their health and development
- A sense of identity is an important part of their well-being. As such, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be recognised and positively promoted
- The needs of disabled children and those with complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account
- Inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family for those children who cannot be appropriately cared for in their country of origin
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive families will be valued and respected

- Successful outcomes for children require a genuine and effective partnership between the Government, local authorities, Voluntary Adoption agencies(VAA's) and Adoption Support Agencies
- Adoption is a life-long process for children, adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. To reflect this, information and services must be provided to take account of the different or specific needs of all parties. Similarly, and with regards to decision making due account should be taken of their wishes and views
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity and confidentiality protected as well as their right to decide whether to enter into direct contact or indirect contact or communication with birth relatives.

Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Service is currently working to the National Adoption Charter. The Charter outlines what we will do to support children and young people going through adoption as well as what are expected from adoptive parents.

Adoptive parents are encouraged to consider these outcomes for their children (Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy and Improvement Programme 2013 – 2015):

- Enjoy good physical and emotional health – all children and young people have the right to live a healthy lifestyle. The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully met and recognised and taken into account.
- Feel safe – all children and young people have the right to be safe and secure, protected from harm and neglect, and to live in an environment that enables them to develop to their full physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social potential. Our staff will continue to receive relevant development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Have fun – all children and young people have the right to time and support to pursue appropriate leisure interests, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful life.
- Do well at school, college or work – all children and young people have the right to the best possible education and training, growing up in a loving environment which meets their identified needs and equips them to live full adult lives.
- Stay out of trouble – all children and young people have the right to enjoy improved life chances, which will minimise the risk of offending behaviour or involvement with the police or judiciary.
- Contribute to their communities – all children and young people have the right to family life wherever possible and to be supported to play their part within the wider community. They have the right to a continuity of care, wherever possible, and to develop and preserve their own identities. They also have the right to have their wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account as well as being provided with information that will enable them to make choices about their lives,

subject to their age and understanding and so be capable of making a positive contribution to the community and to society.

- Achieve well as adults - all children have the right to live above the poverty threshold and to be equipped with the skills and knowledge that will help them overcome socio-economic disadvantage where necessary. All children should feel valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

## **5. Meeting the Needs of Children and Young People Awaiting Adoption in Derbyshire**

Derbyshire County Council Children's Services Department works in partnership with other child care agencies and professionals, across the county, to deliver a comprehensive range of services aimed at ensuring children do not become accommodated, or remain so, except where this is consistent with their assessed needs.

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service supports and complements this role, by providing a range of services, specifically aimed at meeting the needs of children in the county, those of their families and of adoptive parents and prospective adopters.

In particular, the service provides the following;

- An adoption service to Derbyshire residents wishing to adopt children.
- An adoption service to non-Derbyshire residents living within a reasonable distance wishing to adopt children.
- A contracted adoption service to Derbyshire residents wishing to adopt from overseas and outside the United Kingdom.
- Family Finding for children for whom there is no immediate, available placement.
- Fostering for adoption, where children, who have an adoption plan but not a Placement Order, can be placed with families who might adopt them before court proceedings have concluded.
- A court and welfare service to children adopted from overseas and outside the United Kingdom.
- A comprehensive assessment and support service to Connected People (previously Family and Friends carers) wishing to care for a child permanently under the auspices of Special Guardianship order.
- Support services to adopted adults.
- Support services to birth relatives of adopted children and adults.
- An adoption support service for adoptive families prior to and after the making of an adoption order.

## 6. Recruitment Strategy, Policy and Procedure

Derbyshire County Council recruits adoptive parents through a number of methods, incorporating advertising in national, specialist adoption publications, internal publications and information events.

Current recruitment activity includes;

- Regular Family Finding events held in-house, open to all approved prospective adopters within the county and belonging to other local adoption agencies, focussing on fast tracking applicants who express an interest in children featured at the event.
- Promoting children waiting to be matched through publications such as 'Children Who Wait'.
- Participation in the East Midland's Consortium joint Family Finding events.
- Participation in Family Finding events organised by the National Adoption Register, if appropriate.
- Liaising with the Fostering Recruitment team to ensure that where a candidate expresses an interest in both fostering and adoption, a joint visit is undertaken.
- Liaising with area fostering teams, to assist in supporting foster carers who wish to adopt a child placed in their care.

All recruitment is undertaken by the Assessment and Placement team, based centrally in Matlock, with the primary aim of finding adoptive families for children who will give them the best possible opportunity to grow in a safe, secure and loving home which will enable them to reach their full potential as they grow towards adulthood. Prospective adopters are recruited from across the county although applicants from outside Derbyshire will be considered where those applicants are interested in adopting a child with more complex needs and so add to our pool of prospective adopters, enabling better matches to be made.

The Assessment and Placement team welcomes and will respond positively to enquiries from all prospective adopters, in order to find a wide range of potential placements to meet the needs of the children for whom we are responsible. Wherever possible, we will match a child and a prospective adopter according to ethnicity, cultural heritage, spiritual or faith background but where this is not possible we will place where these significant factors can be promoted. Applicants have to be aged over 21 years to begin the process, but there is no upper age limit. However, candidates do need to be in good health (as verified by a medical) and we do not, under BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) guidelines, consider anyone who smokes to adopt children less than five years old or any child with health concerns. We generally aim for a gap of no more than 45 years between parents and their children.

Expressions of interest can be taken centrally through 'Call Derbyshire' (0800 083 7744) and recorded immediately onto Frameworki client records system,

or emailing the service at [adoption@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@derbyshire.gov.uk) or completing a registration of interest form on [www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social\\_health/children\\_and\\_families/adoption\\_and\\_fostering/adoption - Registration of Interest form](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social_health/children_and_families/adoption_and_fostering/adoption_-_Registration_of_Interest_form).

An information pack will be sent out within 5 working days of the initial enquiry and then offered a follow-up contact with an Adoption Duty Social Worker within 10 days of that initial enquiry, which is normally via telephone. If an enquirer remains interested they will receive an initial visit from an adoption social worker. This provides comprehensive information on the adoption service, the needs of children awaiting placement, the criteria required to become an adoptive parent and a full description of the process and the timescales involved.

This interview will allow the prospective adopter to further explore the adoption process whilst providing the Assessment and Placement team worker with the opportunity to determine whether the applicant is able to sufficiently meet the needs of children requiring adoptive placements. If a candidate is interested in proceeding further, they will complete a registration of interest form (ROI). They will be offered help with this if they wish. The ROI is the beginning of stage 1 of the adoption application process. Within 5 days of the ROI the adoption service manager will decide whether or not to accept it and applicants will be notified in writing.

During Stage 1, in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, Derbyshire County Council will carry out statutory checks and references to include; an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, six written personal references of whom at least three are visited (two personal references and one family – in the case of a joint application, two personal references and two family will be visited), employment references, references from schools (if the candidates have children of school age), local authority checks and medical checks. In addition, DBS checks will be taken on any other person in the prospective adopter's household aged 16 and over. If the prospective adopter has been in a previous relationship, their former partner will be contacted and all birth children, where applicable, will be interviewed.

The applicant will also be asked to attend one day preparation training during the 2 months period of stage 1 and to supply further information including: a Medical (which the applicant pays for); a Health and Safety checklist; a pet questionnaire (if appropriate); a chronology; a Family tree; details about their support network; child care experience; any reading or additional training they have; a financial circumstances form. Help can be provided to complete any of this.

Stage 1 must be completed by the applicant within two months of their initial enquiry. The adoption service manager will then decide whether they can proceed to Stage 2. S/he will not be able to decide if the training or the additional information has not been completed. S/he may also decide that applicants should not proceed to Stage Two due to issues identified during Stage 1. The applicant will be informed in writing of the decision and advised

of other agencies they can apply to if Derbyshire adoption service is either unable or unwilling to proceed with an assessment (stage 2). If the decision is that the applicant can proceed to Stage 2 they must confirm with the adoption service manager that they wish to do so within 6 months of receiving this letter.

Once applicants confirm that they wish to proceed they will be allocated an adoption Social Worker who will complete an adoption assessment agreement with them. S/he will check all references and using information collated in Stage one and through direct work with the applicant complete an assessment. During this time the applicants will attend 2 days preparation training. The adoption Social Worker will complete a Prospective Adopter's Report and visit the personal referees. A second opinion or an Attachment Style Interview will be undertaken if appropriate.

## **6.1. Preparation**

All prospective adopters are expected to attend 2 days preparation groups, during stage 2 of their adoption assessment. The preparation groups are held throughout the year and involve contributions from individuals concerned in all aspects of the adoption process. Foster carers wishing to adopt a child they currently have in placement and people wishing to adopt for a second time do not have to attend the preparation groups but their worker will discuss with them what their training need might be. There is an expectation that any additional training thought to be necessary will be undertaken.

Foster carers who make a formal application to adopt a child in their care can, under the 2013 Regulations (1<sup>st</sup> July) to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 ('the Care Planning Regulations'), be approved as a prospective adopter under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. They may be given temporary approval as a local authority foster carer for a named looked after child, where the local authority considers that this is in the child's best interests.

Where foster carers are accepted to adopt a child in their care, consideration will be given to the specific long term needs of that child to include; the quality of attachment between the child and their carers, the child's wishes and feelings, the ability of the fostering household to provide permanent care and the impact on the child of being adopted into that household.

## **6.2. Assessment and Approval**

All applicants will be treated with respect and all enquiries and discussion will relate to their ability to offer a safe, secure and loving home to a child needing adoption, and the service will respect the confidentiality of all those involved.

The assessment and preparation of prospective adopters uses the framework provided by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). Derbyshire County Council's adoption agency will complete the assessment within the timeframe of 4 months as stipulated by DfE Statutory Guidance on Adoption – July 2013 whilst allowing time for prospective adoptive parents to reflect, discuss and question their social worker. Where this is not possible, reasons for delay will be recorded and all parties kept informed.

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service will not exclude any applications on the basis of health or lifestyle choices. All applicants will have undergone a medical assessment and issues such as smoking, diet, weight, alcohol consumption and past or ongoing illnesses will be discussed in the assessment and reported to Panel (a candidates' family history and any criminal convictions (either their own or of members of their household) will be similarly discussed so as to ensure that the prospective adopters will meet the safeguarding thresholds necessary to provide a home suitable for a child awaiting permanent placement. Medical reports are prepared at the start of the assessment, where health issues may be anticipated and, in such cases, the Panel Medical Advisor will inform a decision as to whether to commence or continue the assessment. As children placed for adoption have already suffered significant losses, it is important that their adoptive parents will be able to meet their needs throughout their childhood.

Derbyshire County Council requires those interested in applying for approval as adopters to participate in a series of group preparation sessions. Topics included in the information and counselling/training programme include;

- Why children need adoption
- Parenting/Adoptive Parenting tasks
- Separation and loss
- Attachment and bonding
- The adoption triangle
- Prospective adopter assessment process and requirements
- Role of the Adoption Panel
- Medical and background issues affecting the child's development/behaviour
- Safe care and caring
- Life story work and preparing children for placement
- Case studies for approval and matching children
- Introductions for child into placement
- Contact
- Post placement support
- Adoption and the law
- Rights and needs of adopted adults and access to records

Once an application, from a prospective adopter, has been accepted and if that application is subsequently rejected, the prospective adopters have the

right of appeal to the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism), information of which can be found in the appendices.

## **7. Structure and Role of Panel**

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service operates two Adoption and Permanence Panels, each meeting once per month, although additional panels can be arranged if necessary. The panel satisfies both the Adoption and Fostering Regulations, in order to consider and make recommendations, about permanence plans for children.

*Please note – from 1 September 2012, not all cases must be referred to the Adoption Panel. Cases where the criteria apply for the local authority to apply for a Placement Order, i.e. the child is the subject of a Care Order or the Threshold Criteria for a Care Order are satisfied or where there is no parent or guardian, will not be referred to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation, but will be referred directly to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision. All other cases (i.e. where the parents have given consent and there is no application for a Placement Order) will continue to be referred to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker will take into account when making a decision.*

Each Adoption and Permanence Panel draws members from a 'Central List', and whilst there is no maximum number of members, the quorum for each meeting is five members, as long as the chair or vice chair, a social worker and an independent member are present and all papers are presented to members five days prior to panel. The panel membership consists of the following;

- Independent Panel Chair
- Vice Chair
- Medical Advisor
- Independent Members – with personal or professional experience of adoption or fostering
- Children's Services representatives – which includes adoption social workers fostering social workers and social workers with childcare experience

A professional advisor and minute taker will be in attendance. Legal advice is obtained, on every case under consideration, prior to panel and a legal advisor is available to attend if necessary.

The panels undertake the following functions;

- Whether adoption is in the child's best interests, where a child has been relinquished for adoption by their birth parents
- To consider reports on potential adopters and recommend whether they should be approved.

- To review the approval of waiting adopters
- To consider matches between adopters and children and to make recommendations with regard to these.
- To receive disruption reports.
- To consider the six monthly reports about the work of the Panel.
- To receive information on children waiting for placement, post Placement Order
- To terminate approval, where necessary

Applicants can choose whether or not they attend panel, with regards to approval or subsequent matching, in person. Panel Members make a recommendation and it is the role of the Agency Decision Maker to make the final decision, within a maximum of seven working days of receipt of the final copy of the Panel minutes. This decision must be conveyed verbally within two working days and then confirmed in writing, within five working days. If the application has been successful, the candidates will also be informed about the National Adoption Register and its' use.

Where a candidate has been unsuccessful in their application to adopt the Agency Decision Maker's reasons why they were not approved will be made known to them within the above time scales. Applicants may request a review of the decision within forty days, from which the Agency Decision Maker will give a final decision. The applicant can also have the decision reviewed independently by the Independent Review Mechanism, within forty days of notification (details to be found in the Complaints section) or make a complaint through Derbyshire County Council Children's Services complaint's process.

Reviews of approved adopters, who do not have a child placed with them, will be conducted by the authority on an annual basis. Where prospective adopters do not have a child placed, an update report may be presented to the Adoption Panel, if there has been a significant change of circumstances – the Adoption Panel will consider whether continued approval is recommended.

Where a child's parents are not prepared to consent, where care proceedings are ongoing or where a child has no parents, decision must be made by the Agency Decision Maker – in these circumstances, the social worker of a child requiring permanence via adoption will continue to complete a Child Permanence Report which will provide information and assessment on a child's background, needs and contact plans as well as future matching and placement considerations. This report, however, will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker who will decide on the suitability of the plan, following advice from the Medical, Legal and Agency Advisors.

It is the role of the Adoption Manager and the professional advisors to the panel to performance monitor the panel process – candidates are asked to leave their views, through feedback forms, which are also available for presenting social work staff. This information is regularly collated and

presented to senior managers and cabinet members, through the Corporate Parent's Committee, to assess, review and develop the service as necessary.

The Adoption Service has developed an induction programme and training for new panel members. Additionally, training events are arranged twice a year for panel and members contribute to identifying their individual training needs within their annual appraisal meetings. Senior Managers and panel members meet to discuss relevant issues affecting the service.

The Adoption Panel fulfils its responsibility in relation to quality assurance and monitoring of adoption cases. Quality issues or concerns are recorded in panel minutes and brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker and relevant Senior Management for any necessary action.

## **8. Matching, Linking and Support - Valuing Adopters**

Wherever possible, sibling groups of children requiring adoption will be placed together. Before a decision is made that this is not in the children's best interests, a thorough assessment of the sibling relationship will be undertaken. If the children are to be placed separately, full reasons will be given by the agency decision maker and will be made available to the children. The Assessment and Placement Team will seek to ensure that contact in some form is retained between the children. All children who are to be adopted will undergo a full medical assessment. Full medical information will be made available to prospective adopters prior to placement being agreed.

The majority of children available for adoption will need some contact, either directly or indirectly, with their birth family.

### **8.1. Linking**

Following advice from the panel medical advisor, and in accordance with BAAF guidelines, it is the practice in Derbyshire not to place children under 5 years or any children with known health concerns in households where people smoke. When seeking placements for children from minority ethnic backgrounds, a placement does not necessarily have to be with adopters whose ethnic background reflects that of a child. This will usually be preferred but we will look for placements where adopters are able to meet the needs of children from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Adoption Panel will consider plans for contact between the child and members of the birth family and comment on their suitability.

When considering a particular adoption placement for a child, the Adoption Panel will receive a report which clearly sets out the assessed needs of the child and the ability of the proposed family to meet those needs. The Panel will consider

whether the caring potential of the family is such that they are the best possible match for the child. Prospective adopters are invited to give their views about the proposed placement and to attend the Panel where the proposed link is discussed.

## **8.2. Support**

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service recognises the need to provide support to adoptive families from the beginning of a placement and on an ongoing basis, recognising that adoption is a life time relationship. The authority similarly recognises the need to give financial support in some adoption situations. To meet this need, the Agency has a scheme for the payment of adoption allowances in specified circumstances.

Financial support is offered to all adopters to facilitate introductions. Financial support to provide necessary equipment for children being placed **may** also be payable.

Following approval as adoptive parents, all prospective adopters have an allocated social worker. This is usually the worker who completed the assessment. This worker will support the adoptive family until the finalising of an adoption order. When a child is placed for adoption, the child's social worker will be involved in supporting the child in placement as required by adoption legislation.

Children placed for adoption will be subject to statutory adoption reviews under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. This will involve an Independent Reviewing Officer who will ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for the future are progressing satisfactorily. Where an adoption placement ends in an unplanned way, the Service Manager responsible for the child, assisted by the adoption social worker, will convene a disruption meeting to consider what has happened and assist in planning for the future. The meeting will be chaired by someone independent of the case. Minutes of the meeting will be considered by the Adoption Panel.

## **9. Overseas Adoption**

The Assessment and Placement Team will undertake home study reports for people wishing to adopt a child from a country outside the United Kingdom. This will include the home study/assessment; presenting to the Adoption Panel, following up references and statutory checks, submitting papers to the Department of Education and supporting the family in decision making when a match is offered. A charge, equivalent to one sixth of the BAAF Interagency fee, is made.

When a child is brought into the country for the purpose of adoption, the Assessment and Placement team will undertake the welfare supervision and prepare the Schedule 2 report to the Court.

When a progress report is required after adoption by the country of origin the Assessment and Placement Team will visit and provide a report.

## **10. Services to Adopted People, Birth Families, Children and Letterbox**

Adoption support events for adoptive families are arranged regularly and speakers may be invited to address particular issues. Adoptive families can also access the adoption surgeries which are held each month in four locations within the county.

A "letter-box" (indirect) contact facility is provided through which birth families and adoptive children and families communicate as part of an agreed plan. This is facilitated and monitored by adoption support workers. Assistance in writing letters is provided if requested.

Some direct contact between siblings and between children and members of their birth families is facilitated by the Adoption Support team.

The Adoption Support team provides a counselling service for adult adoptees in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption Act 2002. A support service is also offered to people adopted since 1975 who are seeking information about their origins. The intention of the service is to provide appropriate advice and counselling. The service does not engage in tracing family members and does not act as intermediaries. Where a tracing service is requested the Adoption Support team will advise people of appropriate organisations.

Support is provided to birth family members by the Birth Parent Support team (who form part of the Adoption Support team) from the time that a Child in Care review decides that adoption is the appropriate care plan for the child. There are dedicated workers in the Derbyshire County Council's adoption service who provide support for adoptive families in Derbyshire.

This service is independent of both the child's and the adopter's social worker. It provides support, advice and details of other appropriate resources. Birth families who have had a member of their family adopted can access support through the adoption surgeries if they so wish.

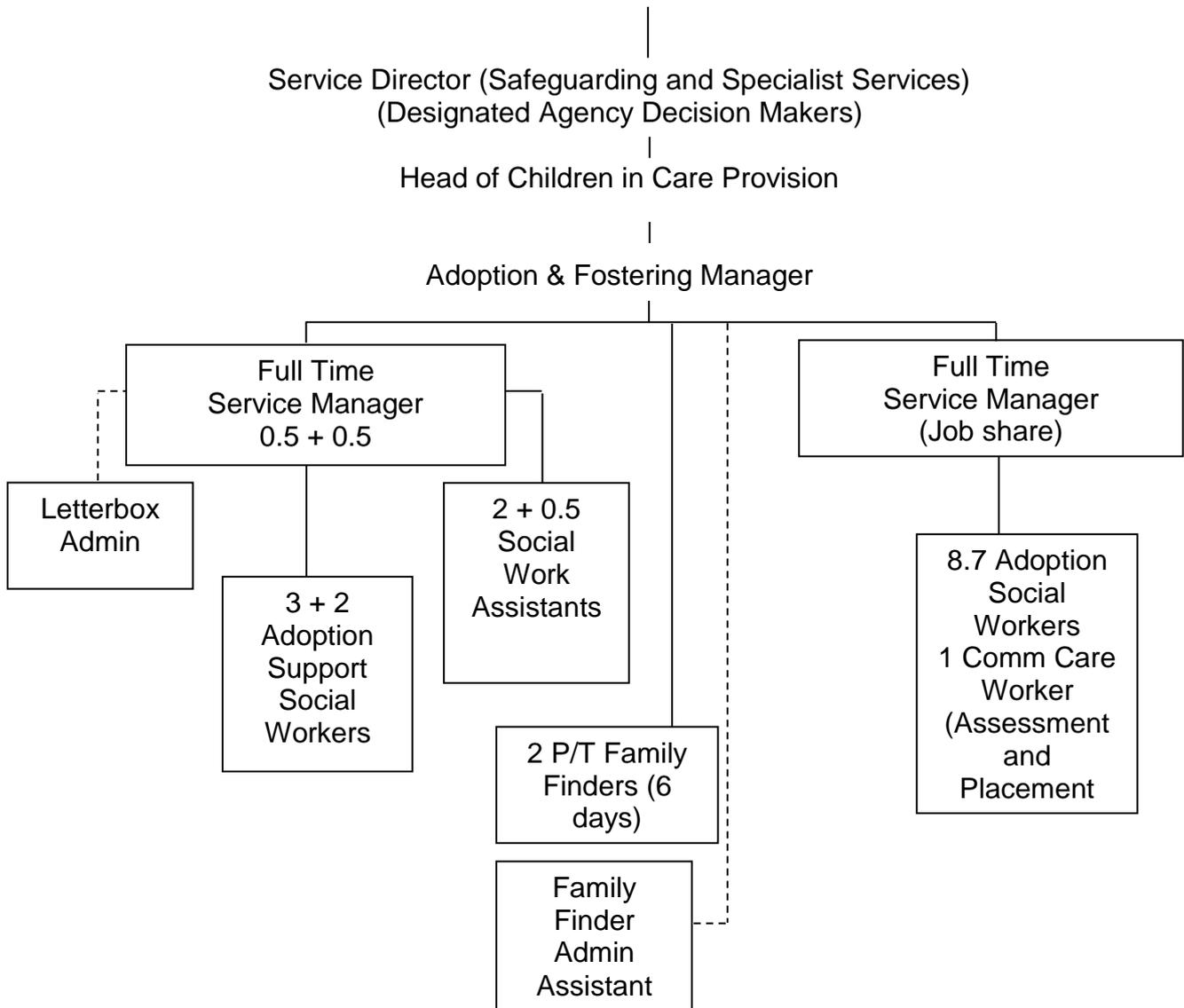
Under the Adoption Support Regulations and Guidance published in 2003, Derbyshire County Council's adoption service provides that those affected by adoption can ask for an assessment of support need. Initially this should be done through the adoption surgeries or the adoption duty service. Referral to other services within and outside the Department may be made.

The Adoption Manager is designated as the Adoption Support Services Advisor and co-ordinates the support services in the county.

**11. Structure and Staffing**

**ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

**Director of Children and Young Adults Department**



NB – All '+' figures are temporary staff, agreed until January 2018

## **11.1. Registered Manager**

The Director of Children's Services is the Registered Manager with OfSTED. The Registered Manager has overall responsibility for the performance of the adoption service. The Registered Manager is;

Jane Parfremment  
Director of Children's Services  
County Hall  
Matlock  
Derbyshire  
DE4 3AG

## **11.2. Agency Decision Maker**

The Agency Decision Makers are responsible for all adoption panel decisions and provide independent oversight of panel business including approvals, incidents, complaints, allegations, resignations and de-registrations. Oversight includes;

- Adopter carer approval – recommendation by Central Panel – decision ADM
- Fostering to adopt - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM
- Match - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM
- Disruption - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM

The Agency Decision Makers are;

- For the Adoption Panel (for new applications and matches) - Service Director Early Help & Safeguarding, Childrens Services, Alison Noble
- For Adoption decisions for children - Assistant Director, Early Help & Safeguarding, Childrens Services, Peter Lambert

They may also comment on plans relating to siblings being placed together, contact with birth family members and adoption support needs.

Responsibilities include;

- Maintaining the overall quality of case planning and decision making for children and young people in the care of the authority.
- Maintaining the focus on safeguarding through line management.
- Providing service performance reports to the Director and Assistant Director.
- The development of policy in line with national standards and developments.
- The organisation and preparation of inspections and reviews.
- To consider the payment of an adoption allowance.

### **11.3. Adoption Manager**

The manager of Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Service is Gwen Roe ([gwen.roe@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:gwen.roe@derbyshire.gov.uk) – tel. 01629 532250), BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies, MA Applied Social Science, CQSW and DMS)

### **11.4. Staffing Summary**

The Assessment and Placement team is managed by a full time service manager, whilst the Adoption Support team is managed by a half time manager.

There are two social workers responsible for family finding, who are managed directly by the Adoption and Fostering Manager.

All social workers have a diploma in social work, or equivalent and all staff members are registered with the General Social Care Council  
The team have regular service development days/half days and, wherever possible advantage is taken of external courses pertaining to adoption issues.

### **11.5. Functions Undertaken by the Adoption Team**

- Recruitment of prospective adopters, including publicity campaigns.
- 'Family Finding' to specifically find families for children with an adoption plan.
- Assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive families, to include home visits, home studies, reference and statutory checks and running preparation groups, to include relevant and up to date training (e.g. Esafety)
- Offering ongoing support for approved families awaiting a placement.
- Offering advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and post placement.
- Providing guidance for staff members who are preparing children for adoption and advising birth families and foster carers of children awaiting adoption.
- Providing support services to adoptive families and birth relatives.
- Facilitating direct and indirect contact arrangements.
- Providing specialist advice and consultation, where requested and appropriate.
- Counselling, information and advice in relation to the following;
  - Birth parents whose children may have been adopted
  - Prospective adopters

- Adults who have been adopted, including birth records counselling
- People who wish to adopt children from another country
- Non Agency adoptions, including step-parents who wish to adopt their partner's children
- Relatives of adult adoptees who may want information or advice

## **12. Performance Data**

Derbyshire County Council's adoption service presents performance management information every year to our Corporate Parenting Committee, on the previous financial year's performance. This information can be found in the document 'Annual Report of Derbyshire Adoption Service' and the six monthly report made under Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014.

## **13. Quality Assurance and Monitoring**

Arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by Derbyshire's Adoption Service are effective and that the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.

All staff members have regular supervision.

All prospective adopters complete an evaluation of the preparation course in order to monitor the effectiveness of the delivery of training.

All individuals receiving a service from the Adoption service are asked to complete an evaluation form about the service they have received.

All prospective adopters are advised of the department's complaints procedure and given information about how to make a complaint.

Prospective adopters are asked to provide feedback regarding their attendance at Adoption Panel.

Children who are referred to the Assessment and Placement team will have a permanence plan. These are generally made at the four month review and are monitored through the children in care Review Process.

The Adoption Team regularly reviews the progress of family finding and possible matches for waiting adopters within the team meeting.

Prospective adopters who do not have placements are identified through this process and are made available to other Adoption Agencies seeking adoptive parents.

The Family Finders progress family finding for children with an adoption plan. They will identify drift, or any other issues that arise and liaise with children's social workers as appropriate.

The Family Finders give regular progress monitoring reports on children who have an adoption plan to the Adoption Panels.

The adoption and permanence panels provide commentary on all reports presented to panel which are collated into a 6 monthly report presented to the corporate parenting committee.

## **14. Complaints and Allegations**

Derbyshire County Council maintains a statutory complaints service, and the leaflet "Comments, Compliments and Complaints" is included in the Adoption Information Pack so prospective adopters may use it at any stage in the process. The complaints process is a three stage process;

### **Stage 1**

The authority and the complainant seek to resolve the concern with the involved local manager with direct responsibility, within ten days. Complainants should initially make their complaint to the service manager for the team involved.

### **Stage 2**

If the complainant is unhappy with these findings, they can go to Stage 2, where the Quality Assurance department will appoint an investigating officer and an independent person to respond to any concerns. If this is unsatisfactory, they may be entitled go to **Stage 3**, an Independent Complaints Panel.

All complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate and all staff members must ensure that anyone within the adoption process understands how to make a complaint, and to whom it should be directed. At any stage, they may contact their Councillor, MP or consult with a solicitor.

Complainants should refer their concerns to Children's Services Quality Assurance on 01629 523042 or email Mandy Stafford-Wood, Head Of Quality, Performance And Participation- Childrens Services, Quality, Performance And Participation, at [amanda.stafford-wood@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.stafford-wood@derbyshire.gov.uk). If they are still dissatisfied with the findings, they can contact the Commissioner for Local Administration in England (The Ombudsman) at; The Commissioner for Local Administration in England  
PO Box 4771  
Coventry  
CV4 0EH  
Telephone; 0300 061 0614

If anyone has any concerns about the service, which they feel it is in the public interest to make known, the authority provides complete guidance on confidential reporting (also known as 'Whistle Blowing') in the Adoption and Permanence Procedures.

If a prospective or approved adoptive parent is unhappy with a decision made by the Adoption Panel, the applicants have the right to appeal within 40 days of receiving notification. The appeal has to be made in writing to the Agency Decision Maker. Alternatively, they may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), again, within 40 days of receiving notification. The IRM is part of BAAF, working on behalf of the Department of Education. Adoption Agencies cannot refer to the IRM – only prospective adopters. They do not have the authority to rescind decisions made by the Agency but can offer an independent review of decisions, from which they can make recommendations.

The IRM can be contacted at;

FAO Contract Manager,  
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)  
Unit 4,  
Pavilion Business Park,  
Royds Hall Road,  
Wortley,  
LEEDS  
LS12 6AJ

Telephone; 0845 450 3956

Email; [irm@baaf.org.uk](mailto:irm@baaf.org.uk)

Derbyshire County Council actively monitors and reviews all complaints, incidents and allegations to identify patterns and trends within adoption which it may then seek to address within a wider context and so improve the quality of service for both Looked After children and young people and for adopters.

## **15. Advocacy and Children's Rights**

Derbyshire County Council's Children's Rights Officer can be contacted on 01629 532029. Part of this role is to make sure that the authorities' adoption service fulfils its obligations to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children and young people. The Children's Rights service assists our Advocates, whose role it is to act independently upon behalf of children and young people who are looked after, ensuring that they are fully aware of the processes that affect their time in care, helping them plan for their future and above all, seeing that their voice is heard. There is a statutory obligation, under the Adoption Act 2002, that all children in care must be offered the services of an Advocate, if they are making or are intending to make a complaint.

Derbyshire County Council is committed to giving children and young people in care, the best opportunities they can have in life by putting them at the centre of all our processes. By consulting with adoptive parents and their children, we are looking to constantly improve the service and provide the best possible outcomes.

## **16. OfSTED**

OfSTED is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services, including Derbyshire County Council, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act (2000). Should an adopter need to contact the service, with any questions, queries or complaints, they can be reached on 0300 123 1231 or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or in writing to;

OfSTED,  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

## **17. Valuing Diversity and Anti-Discriminatory Code of Conduct**

Derbyshire County Council is committed to challenging any form of discriminatory conduct. We will treat all candidates fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption enquiry and assessment process and applicants will be approved as carers, irrespective of ethnicity, spirituality, faith, gender, sexual orientation or ability, providing the adoption service considers that they can safely meet the needs of children in care and will, in turn respect their needs. The minimum age for a candidate to apply to adopt in Derbyshire is 21 years of age.

We will make every attempt to find a placement which meets the needs of the child or young person, taking into account their ethnicity, spirituality, faith, language, culture, gender and ability although we recognise that no child in care should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. Where it is not possible to place a child in a family that reflects their ethnic origin every effort will be made to assist the adoptive family to address their identity needs.

## **18. Fostering for Adoption**

The Fostering for Adoption scheme is for children who are in our care where the plan is likely to be adoption, but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family.

Fostering for Adoption allows children to be placed with their potential permanent carers on a fostering basis while the authority seeks a placement order from the courts. The Children and Families Act 2014 places a new duty on local authorities to consider placing looked after children for whom the local authority is considering adoption with foster carers who are also approved prospective adopters.

In some circumstances, a child may not be able to return to their birth family and a permanent option will need to be explored and evidenced. Fostering for adoption placements are sought for those children, who are unable return to the family, and where adoption is the preferred form of legal permanency. This would allow the carers being granted an adoption order for the child they are currently fostering – in this way, fostering for adopt protects children from experiencing multiple moves. Fostering for adoption carers are able to make strong attachments with the child even though they are aware that the child may return to a family member. Once the child has been adopted by the carers there is the possibility for the child to retain supervised contact with birth family members

Assessment follows the two stage process;

- Stage 1: The two-month Pre-Assessment Process focuses on initial training and preparation of prospective adopters and is very much adopter-led. Local authorities will carry out prescribed checks and references to determine suitability to adopt a child.
- 
- Stage 2: The Assessment Process should take place over four months, during which the agency carries out intensive training and assessment of the prospective adopter.

The foster for adopt carers will be supported by a social worker to provide guidance and support and will also receive ongoing training. The worker will continue to offer support up until the point of an adoption matching panel or if the child leaves the foster for adopt placement. They will receive a weekly fostering allowance for the child and will be entitled to adoption leave – these allowances will cease once the placement has been agreed at adoption matching panel or the child returns to their birth family or placed in an alternative placement with family or friends.

It remains central tenet of the Fostering for Adoption scheme that the child's needs and welfare are paramount.

## **19. Appendix – Other Permanency Groups**

Permanency planning, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders:

In addition to the range of adoption services provided by Derbyshire County Council, additional support is given to a range of permanency planning option for looked after children.

It is the aim of the authority to ensure that children we care for are, whenever possible and appropriate, returned to their family and community networks as soon as it is safe to do so.

Where this is not possible, we will work with everyone concerned to see that child is part of a stable and permanent family. This may be resolved through adoption but there may be some situations where this is not possible. Where this occurs, a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order may be the most appropriate alternative.

Derbyshire County Council has a commitment to supporting families who have made a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order in respect of a child who was in care after immediately prior to the making of the Special Guardianship Order and to supporting the birth families of such children or in respect of a child who was looked after immediately prior to the making of a residence order and to supporting the birth families of such children.

These alternatives should not be seen as being apart or standalone from mainstream services and children and families involved within them should be assisted to access mainstream services, if necessary.

Support available includes;

- Counselling, advice and information
- Financial support where appropriate and applicable
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between the child and their birth parents or any other individuals significant to the child, with whom contact would be in their best interest
- Therapeutic services for the child and family