



# ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2010 - 2011

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Statement of Purpose has been produced to meet Southampton's Adoption Agency's obligations under the Adoption Act 1976, The Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the National Adoption Standards 2003.

1.2 It provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of our Adoption Service and sets out our strategy for meeting those aims and objectives.

1.3 The statement also provides details of:

- The services provided by the agency
- The management structure of the service
- The Adoption Service staffing structure
- The numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of adoption agency staff
- The procedures and processes for recruiting, training, approving, reviewing and supporting adopters
- Work with children
- Work with adults
- Adoption Panels and the role of the IRM
- Monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms
- Complaints procedure

1.4 The Adoption Agency operates within the framework of Equal Opportunities legislation and Southampton City Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. The agency does not discriminate in any way on the basis of race, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or age in relation to staff and service users.

1.5 The Adoption Agency complies with the following legislation, standards and associated regulations:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Adoption Act 1976 (for the purposes of the transitional arrangements)
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2002
- National Minimum Adoption Standards and Associated Regulations 2002
- Inter-country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- Adoption Support Services Regulations and Standards 2003

## **2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

2.1 Southampton's Safeguarding service has established services for children in need with the aim of promoting their health and development and, so far as is

consistent with that aim, to promote their upbringing by their birth parents. We recognise that for some children this is not possible and remaining at home is not desirable. The placement of choice for such children will usually be with alternative carers, either from within their family and friends network or with Local Authority approved carers.

- 2.2 The Adoption Agency aims to provide high quality child-centered legally permanent placements for appropriate children through adoption. Legal permanence is a positive alternative for children who cannot live within their birth families to enable them to grow and reach maturity within a stable and loving adoptive family.
- 2.3 The Adoption Agency aims to work with partner agencies to ensure a range of high quality services are made available to adopted children, adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults.
- 2.4 To provide the best possible permanent placements for children, to enable them to reach their full potential and to achieve the following outcomes, as outlined in the Every Child Matters outcomes:
  - Be healthy
  - Stay safe
  - Enjoy and achieve
  - Make a positive contribution
  - Achieve economic wellbeing
- 2.5 To ensure that full consideration is given to the welfare, safety and assessed individual needs of children. These considerations are at the centre of all adoption work, taking precedence over the needs of anyone else involved in the adoption process.
- 2.6 To recruit, assess, train and support a sufficiently large and diverse pool of adopters able to provide a placement to meet the assessed needs of every child referred to us.
- 2.7 Where adoption outside the family has been identified as the care plan, an appropriate match is found at the earliest opportunity in order to minimise delay in achieving legal permanency.
- 2.8 To ensure that the wishes and views of children are established in an age appropriate way and for these to be clearly communicated throughout the adoption process.
- 2.9 To work with birth families in an attempt to achieve 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.

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### **3. PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS**

- 3.1 Adoption is a service for looked after children who need legally permanent family placements through adoption.
- 3.2 Adoption applicants and approved adopters have the right to respect and transparency in all of our dealings with them and our full support at all times, consistent with the needs of children being paramount and there being no “right” to become an adoptive parent.
- 3.3 Adopters are recognised as highly valuable partners and will be viewed and treated as one of the key stakeholders in our service for children.
- 3.4 When matching children with adopters we will seek to ensure the following, unless any of these are inconsistent with promoting the welfare of the child:
  - Consideration is always given to placing siblings together unless this is not in their best interests
  - Contact, either direct or indirect, with birth family and kinship network is facilitated, where this meets the needs of the child, and is subject to review
  - The educational and health care needs, including any needs arising from a child’s disability, must be met by the adoptive placement. Safe caring guidelines will be an integral part of the adopters preparation and assessment process
  - Children are placed with adopters who match their racial, cultural, religious and linguistic background
  - Children are matched with adopters with a minimum of delay and within the Adoption National Minimum Standards
  - There will be a period of introduction before the placement commences, appropriate to the age and circumstances of the child. The pace and content of the introductions will be led by the needs of the child and not the adults involved
- 3.5 The views of the child will be sought prior to and on a regular basis following placement in an age appropriate manner. Relatives, friends and foster carers approved as adopters will have their support and training needs assessed and met, as for any other carers.
- 3.6 If no in-house placement is available the service will seek a placement from our Adoption Consortia, the National Adoption Register, Adoption Exchange events and private or voluntary agencies where this can be shown to be in the best interests of the child and, so far as this is possible, within the financial resources available to the service.
- 3.7 The adoption support needs of children, adoptive parents and birth parents will be assessed prior to placement.
- 3.8 Post placement, adoptive parents and their children and birth parents will be offered an Adoption Support Needs Assessment on request in line with the Adoption Support Regulations (Adoption and Children Act 2002).

#### **4. ADOPTION SERVICE STAFFING STRUCTURE - See Appendix 1**

##### **4.1 Registered Manager of the Adoption Agency – Jane Martin, Service Manager**

##### **4.2 Relevant qualifications and experience of the Adoption Manager**

The Adoption Manager has 23 years of statutory child care experience including 13 years as a manager and 10 years in adoption. She has also attended a two year Adoption and Attachment course with Family Futures. Having been appointed in March 2010 the manager will undertake a CMI level 5 management course from January 2011.

##### **4.3 Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff**

**See appendix 2 for information on staffing qualifications and experience.**

###### **4.3.1 The Adoption Team consists of:**

- Adoption Services Manager - 1 FTE
- Assistant Team Managers - 2.5 FTE
- Panel Adviser - 0.3 FTE
- Social Workers – 11.5 FTE. The majority of social work staff have part-time contracts and three qualified staff are full time. The staff group are mainly very experienced adoption social workers with a number of staff having been in the team since 1997
- Social Services Assistant - 1 FTE
- Administrative staff – 4 FTE

4.3.2 Four qualified and experienced sessional social workers undertake additional assessments of adopters in order that adoption resources are maintained at a level to ensure choice and diversity of placements. They are supervised by an Assistant Team Manager.

4.3.3 The Southampton Adoption Service is part of the Children's Services and Learning Directorate. The Head of Service for Safeguarding holds responsibility for the service with delegation to a Principal Officer.

4.3.4 A Service Manager for Resources undertakes direct line management for the team alongside fostering, residential care and 'Pathways' - Children in Care and 16+ services.

#### **5. SERVICES PROVIDED BY SOUTHAMPTON ADOPTION SERVICE – see Appendix 3**

The following services are provided by staff within the Adoption Services:

- Recruitment, preparation, training and assessment of prospective adopters to meet the needs of children for adoption
- Step parent adoption
- Inter-country adoptions
- Non-agency adoptions
- Contingency planning for children for whom there may be a plan for adoption
- Preparation of the child's Permanence Reports and applications to court for Placement Orders
- Case-holding Children Looked After (CLA) following granting of the Care Order and Placement Order and post placement prior to the Adoption Order
- Direct, attachment and life story work with children to prepare them for placement/ adoption, including Life Story Books
- Adoption Support Services to adopted children and their parents
- Counselling for birth parents and relatives
- Annual Information Exchange (Letter Box)
- Schedule 2 counselling (adopted adults)
- Support and training groups for all adopters for one year post adoption
- Training of other staff relating to adoption and working with children
- Two Adoption Panels, including one Adoption and Permanence Panel
- Jointly managing the South Coast Adoption Consortium

## 6. ORGANISATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 6.1 The Adoption Service was set up in 1997 following the local government reorganisation which established Southampton City Council.
- 6.2 The service differs from most local authorities as the team works with the children where there is a possible or definite adoption plan. This involves 'contingency' working with a social worker from an area based Children In Need Team as part of Southampton Children's Service and ensures a seamless approach to the work which in turn reduces timescales for the placement of children.
- 6.3 The Adoption Service is part of the Safeguarding Division within Southampton's Children's Services and Learning Directorate. **See Appendix 4.**
- 6.4 The Adoption Team has, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, divided into three parts which are flexible to meet changing service needs:
- Children's Team - contingency role including LAC, and preparation of children for adoption
  - Recruitment, training, preparation and assessment of adopters
  - Adoption Support Services

- 6.5 All team members participate in Duty, Schedule 2 and BRIC and also assist with adopter training and information sessions. Each part of the team is supervised by an Assistant Team Manager who takes a lead for practice in these areas.
- 6.6 The Panel Advisor, while being line managed by the Adoption Manager, does not supervise staff to ensure sufficient independence to carry out this role.

## **7. QUALITY ASSURANCE/MONITORING THE WORK OF THE AGENCY**

7.1 A number of mechanisms exist in order to provide a range of checks and balances to monitor the work of the Agency, and to ensure that service delivery is consistently of a high quality and is meeting the performance targets (both national and local), and business outcomes identified in the annual Business Plan:

- Adoption Panels and Agency Decision Maker
- Role of elected member on each panel
- Second opinion visits to prospective adopters by a second social worker in the team as part of evidence for panel
- Regular feedback to panel about children requiring adoption and approved adopters waiting for placements.
- A six monthly updating report about the work of the Adoption Service is produced for the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee
- Annual Adoption Agency Report
- Panel Chair, Adoption Services Manager, Panel Adviser and Principle Officer meet quarterly to review the functioning of the Adoption Panel. The Head of Service attends twice a year
- File Audits
- Case Reviews and Disruption Reports
- Performance data information in relation to key performance indicators
- Review process for adopters
- Feedback mechanism for service users built in to key stages of the adoption process
- Managers agreement needed at pre-linking stage for all children including for inter-agency/consortium placements
- Managers agreement needed for all prospective adopters to be invited to submit their application. PAR midway supervision is seen by the Adoption Manager
- Monitoring and audit of staff supervision
- Adoption Services Manager chairs Permanency Planning meetings to ensure all permanency plans for children including plans for adoption and quality of CPRs and Support Plans
- ATMs from the Adoption Service meet monthly with ATMs from the CIN Teams to offer advice and discuss referrals and social workers provide monthly surgeries for social workers in the CIN teams about all adoption matters

See Appendix 5 for information on Adoption Panels.

Evaluation of feedback from service users – see Appendix 6.

## 8. ACTIVITY DATA - APRIL 2009 TO MARCH 2010

### 8.1 Annual Statistics

#### 8.1.1 Performance Indicators

Below are the two main general performance indicators used by central government to assess the performance of Adoption Services

**N161 – Percentage of Children Looked After adopted within 12 months of being placed for adoption:**

Target – 76%

Actual – 74%

**PAF C23 – Proportion of Children Looked After who were adopted:**

Target – 7.3%

Actual – 9.1%

#### 8.1.2 Statistics

Total number of children adopted	22
Should be placed for adoption decisions for children	20
Number of adopters approved	25
Number of post adoption Support Needs Assessments	35
Number of Schedule 2 requests	37

## 9 LINKS WITH OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 9.1 The information contained in the Statement of Purpose is consistent with the procedures, protocols and practice guidelines of the Adoption Agency.



- 9.2 All information and guidance provided to staff, birth parents and carers will accurately reflect this statement.
- 9.3 The Adoption Service will work with other parts of the Council and external agencies to ensure that as far as practicable, their services are developed in a way which is consistent with and complementary to this statement.

## **10 COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES – See Appendix 7**

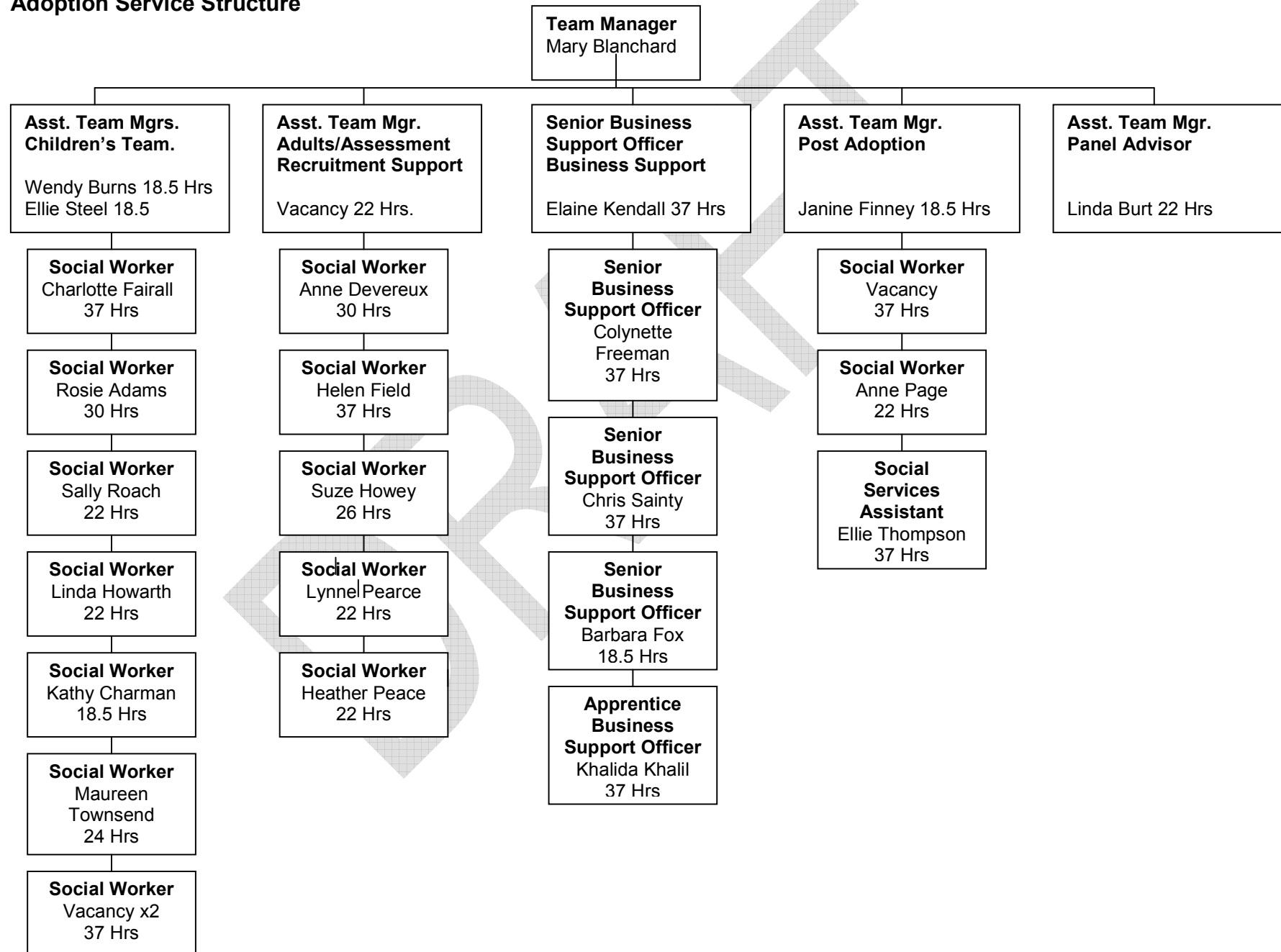
- 10.1 All service users are given a copy of the complaints procedure at the time of enquiry; this includes both prospective adopters and referrals for post adoption support.

## **11 REVISION AND CIRCULATION OF STATEMENT**

- 11.1 This statement has been produced by managers of the service in consultation with staff and users of the service, in compliance with National Adoption Standards and the relevant adoption legislation
- 11.2 Members of the Social Services Executive have formally approved the Statement of Purpose.
- 11.3 The Adoption Manager is responsible for ensuring that the Statement of Purpose is updated or modified when necessary, but at least annually
- 11.4 The revised statement will be presented to Members annually for their approval.
- 11.5 The statement will be provided to OfSTED. Amended statements will be provided to OfSTED within twenty-eight days of approval by Members.
- 11.6 The statement will be provided to:
- All staff including independent specialists engaged in the adoption process.
  - All current and prospective adopters and permanency carers.
  - All key stakeholders
- 11.7 A summary of the statement will be provided to children placed in adoptive or permanent placements of sufficient age and understanding and a full copy will be provided on request to parents of children who are users of this service.

# Appendix 1

## Adoption Service Structure



## **Appendix 3**

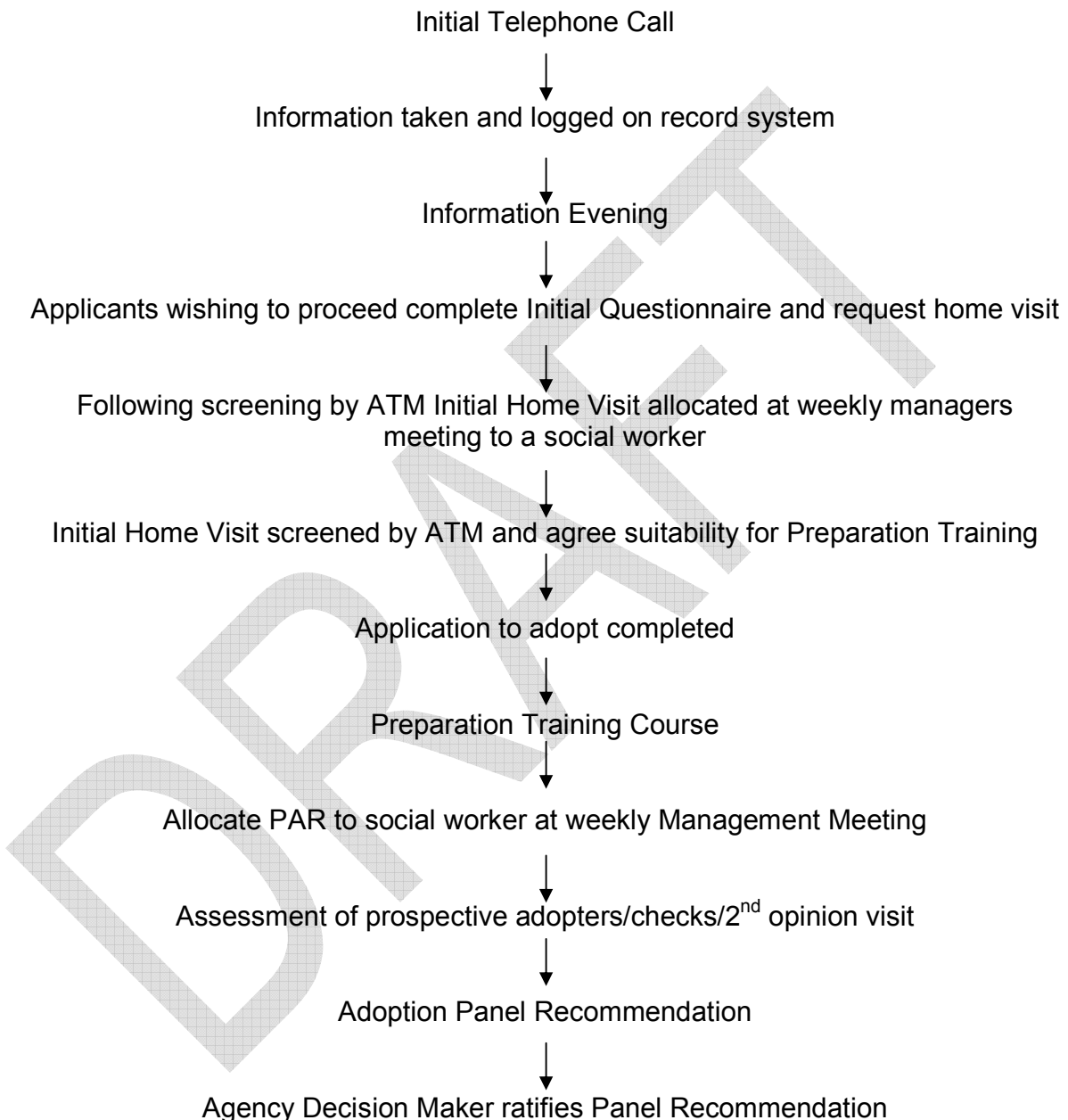
### **INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES PROVIDED**

#### **Adopter Recruitment Strategy**

- 1.1 The service aims to recruit a flexible and diverse pool of adopters who are able to meet the needs of all children referred for adoption.  
  
Priority will be given to assessing adopters who, at the time, best meet the needs of children coming through the system needing adoption. Second time adopters will be considered in the same way but the needs of the existing children already in placement will be of primary concern as will the needs of any birth children. It is likely that any existing children will need to be successfully attending school prior to commencement of assessment. Exception to this will be made in relation to the placement of a sibling.
- 1.2 The recruitment staff work closely with the Southampton Communications Team in order to ensure coherent communication of adoption recruitment activity across the city. This approach allows the agency to achieve best value in that it can capitalise upon city publications and advertising mediums.
- 1.3 The Assistant Team Manager for adult recruitment takes a lead role in ensuring that the agency collates information about the profile of Looked After Children who require adoption in order that the agencies recruitment strategy is fit for purpose.
- 1.4 The Agency Recruitment Strategy (currently being revised) outlines the agencies activities and outcomes on an annual basis. In addition the South Coast Consortium produces a joint Recruitment Strategy.
- 1.5 Southampton is a member of the South Coast Consortium with Portsmouth, Poole, Isle of Wight and West Sussex. Consortia members meet on alternate months and focus on matching adoptive families with children that cannot be placed within their own Local Authority and the sharing of practice issues. The consortium arrangements serve to extend the range of families which Southampton has available to Looked After Children requiring adoption. By agreement the Consortium does not exchange funding for adoptive placements and prospective adopters are available to all Consortium members. The numbers of placements are monitored annually to ensure parity.

## 2. Recruitment /assessment process of prospective adopters

All prospective adopters will follow the process below. From the point of application adopter assessment should take 8 months to approval by Panel. Exceptions to this due to agency pressures and/or life circumstances for adopters will be monitored:



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### **3. Prospective Adopter Assessments (PAR)**

3.1 Assessments are undertaken by qualified social workers using the BAAF template for PAR assessments. The majority of PARs are undertaken by Adoption Team members, but in order to fast-track assessments or work with higher numbers of applicants, the team has approximately four 'sessional' social work staff who also undertake this work. Sessional workers are supervised and monitored by an Assistant Team Manager.

3.2 The main aspects of the assessment include:

- 8-10 visits to the applicants home to conduct the assessment
- Evidence of child care experience
- Health and safety assessment
- Pet questionnaire / animal behaviorist checks for all dogs
- Employment and life event chronology checks
- References (covering whole of life, not known solely by one applicant, up to Eight references obtained in writing – from these, at least three interviewed (two of which will not be a family member)
- Financial check and references / identity checks etc. e.g. mortgage statement, car insurance, driving license, passport and employment reference
- Reference from, or interview with previous partner wherever possible (especially where care of children was involved)
- Interview with all birth children including adult children and those from a previous relationship
- Medical report
- Report from adoption preparation course
- Social workers analysis / view regarding applicants ability / competence
- Statutory checks including CRB, including relevant checks if an applicant has lived abroad for more than a year

### **4. Duty processes**

4.1 All the social workers take turns as Duty Officer on a rota. Duty is available from 10am to 3pm daily to take calls from members of the public and professionals. Typically calls include: enquiries regarding how to become adoptive parents, people wishing to trace birth records/relatives, intermediary enquiries, counselling, information exchange queries, post adoption requests for support and referrals for parallel planning.

4.2 The duty system is managed by a rota of Assistant Team Managers. The new full time ATM for adopter recruitment will also take a lead for the management of Duty to review systems and provide better consistency of practice.

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## **5. Working with children**

5.1 Southampton Adoption Service undertakes contingency work with colleagues from the area-based Children In Need Teams when the care plan is likely to result in adoption. Co-working exists until the legal process has been completed and the care plan has been agreed, as well as viability assessments of family and others who may wish to be considered. Work with children consists of:

- Looked after Children statutory responsibilities
- Life story work; work to enable a child to understand his/her background, roots, identity, make sense of the events leading to care / adoption
- Preparation for adoption – explaining the meaning of adoption through play, books etc (and, if old enough, the process of adoption)
- Gaining the views of children concerning the type of family they wish to live with
- Family Finding – finding the most suitable placement able to meet the child's needs including specific advertising where this is needed
- Linking and Matching – preparing the linking report for Panel
- Introductory process and subsequent support of a child in placement (including statutory reviews)
- Post placement support – until the Adoption Order is made
- As part of the assessment process for adoptive families, work is undertaken with birth children to ensure they understand, as far as possible and according to age, the implications of an adoptive child joining the family

## **6. Working with adults**

6.1 In addition to the recruitment, training, assessment, approval and support of adopters, the services also undertakes the following:

- Inter-country adoption; assessment and support of applicants who reside in Southampton wishing to adopt from overseas
- The Adoption Service will provide an information service to adopted adults seeking to obtain information about their past from adoption case records
- Adopted adults will also be given information about other post adoption/tracing services available from independent agencies such as NORCAP and the Post Adoption Centre
- Information will be provided to adopted adults and birth relatives about making use of the Adoption Contact Register
- The Adoption Service is not currently providing an intermediary service as this is not a statutory requirement or a priority within existing resources. Currently the service will ensure that birth relatives are advised how they can access an intermediary service, through other voluntary agencies
- Birth Family Counseling – referrals for this service are received either directly from birth family or others who have been affected by a child's adoption. A birth parent may opt to seek support from a social worker known to them in

the Adoption Team or an independent specialist counselor can be provided. A therapeutic counseling service is offered by a commissioned registered independent therapist

- Training for adopters post approval and pre-placement are undertaken during the year, focusing on legal issues. A programme of additional training is currently being developed, integrating training for adopters waiting for a placement and those who have adopted.

## **7. Post adoption support services**

- 7.1 Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 post adoption services are provided to adoptive families and to adult adoptees and birth relatives.
- 7.2 This is led by an experienced Assistant Team Manager and has one part-time social worker and one full-time Social Services Assistant plus the support of an administrator. Other social work staff in the Team also support the work of post-adoption.
- 7.3 On request all adoptive parents are offered an Adoption Support Needs Assessment and where appropriate a support plan is devised to meet their assessed needs and reviewed on a 3-6 monthly basis. Direct support to adoptive families from the Adoption Service is limited and most families will be sign posted to other services able to meet their needs. Families needing therapeutic support can be referred either to CAMHS and or to the joint agency, multi-disciplinary Behaviour Resource Service (BRS). Family Centers also can provide support staff and the team has limited funding to purchase specialist therapeutic work for families. There are plans to develop more inter-agency links and in particular to develop more joint working with Education colleagues.
- 7.4 Natural support groups have formed through prospective adopters being encouraged at preparation training groups to remain in touch. Some of these are thriving, long-standing groups which provide excellent support to the adults and children involved.
- 7.5 Two social events occur each year in the summer (a picnic) and a New Year (themed) party and disco. These are very popular events and are well attended and received. They provide an excellent opportunity for staff, adoptive parents, adopted children, and council members to meet.
- 7.6 A Training and Support Group has been developed for post adoption families which meets four times a year and has been running since 2008. Discussions are under way with Hampshire about number of joint support groups. In addition adopters have access to a programme of training run jointly by Portsmouth.
- 7.7 There is also a lively newsletter advertising the events during the year and keeping adopters in Southampton in touch with developments in the service.

7.8 A Social Services Assistant post was created for post-adoption support. The post holder was appointed in June 2008 and is able to offer that practical support to adopters, birth parents and children. She is also responsible for the Letterbox Exchange which involves approximately 350 exchanges.

## **8. Birth parents**

8.1 Birth parents are entitled to an assessment of their adoption support needs, and access to the following support services

8.2 Help with writing letters in relation to the Post Box Service:

- Support in relation to direct facilitated contact
- Advice and information
- Access to independent birth parent counselors

## **9. Services to Adult Adoptees and Birth Relatives**

9.1 The Post Adoption team provides services to adult adoptees under Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. This work includes:

- Birth records counseling to adult adoptees adopted prior to 1976
- Access to birth records

9.2 Services to birth relatives of adult adoptees are provided under Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. This work involves:

- Advice and information.
- Access to independent birth parent counselor.

## **10 Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA)**

10.1 This service provides a named contact person for adopted families, and those affected by adoption, in order to provide information, advice and signposting to relevant services. It is currently delegated by the Head of Service to the Adoption Manager.

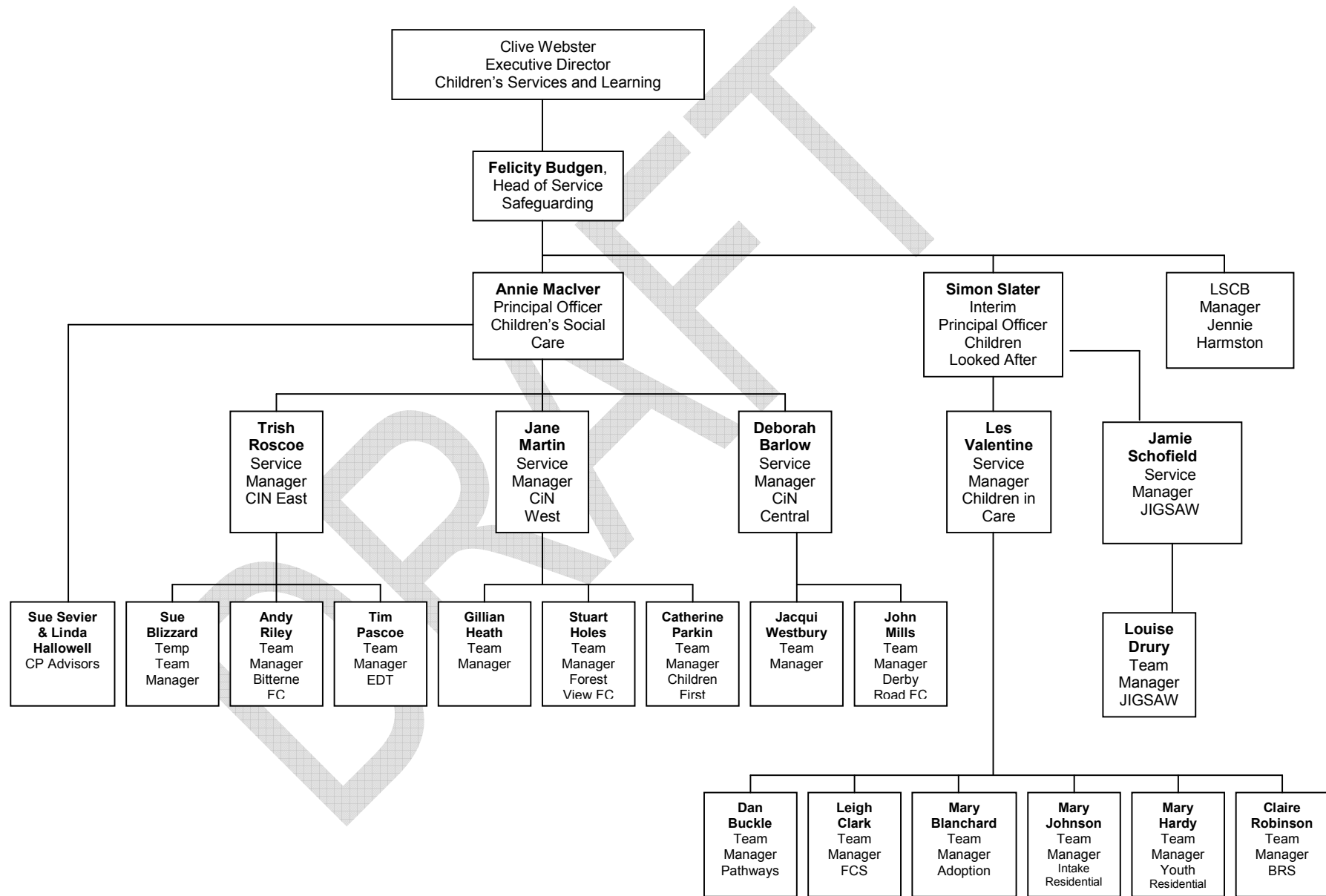
10.2 The ASSA role also involves the following:

- Advice and information within Children's Services in relation to adoption support issues
- Coordinating and facilitating the development of adoption support services within the Children's Service and on a multi and inter-agency basis.



# Appendix 4

# SAFEGUARDING



## Appendix 5

### ADOPTION PANELS/APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

- 1.1 Southampton City Council has two Adoption Panels (including one Adoption and Permanence Panel additionally constituted under Fostering Regulations), each one meeting once a month, so there is a Panel on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month.
- 1.2 Adoption Panels have the following functions:
  - To consider reports on potential adopters and recommend whether they should be approved
  - Variation and rescinding of approval of prospective adopters
  - To consider whether adoption is in the best interests of children and where this is appropriate to make a 'should be placed for adoption' (SHOBPA) recommendation
  - To make recommendation for a Placement Order
  - To consider matches between adopters and children and to make recommendations with regard to these
  - To scrutinise Post Adoption Support Plans (PASP)
  - Receiving adoption disruption reports
  - Updates on the progress of adopters and children
  - Evaluation of feedback form those attending Panel
  - Feedback to Adoption Service about quality and timescales of prospective adopter approvals
  - Feedback to Adoption Service about quality and timescales of CPRs
- 1.3 As a matter of good practice Southampton's Panels review each month the panel activity and progress for the previous six months and 12 months of all children who have received a SHOBPA decision in respect of adoption and the agency's resource list of adopters.
- 1.4 In accordance with regulations the operation of the two Adoption Panels is entirely separate. Once a case has been heard by one panel, it must return to the same panel if it subsequently needs to be re-presented. When a match is being considered, it must be heard by the panel who dealt with the children previously rather than the adopters.
- 1.5 Where a care plan of adoption is to be presented to Court as part of care proceedings the case must first be brought to Adoption Panel for a recommendation to be made that the child 'should be placed for adoption' and that a Placement Order is recommended.
- 1.6 Feedback forms after panel are given to potential adopters and a separate form is also given to presenting social workers to gain their views

## **2 Adoption Panel composition**

### **2.1 Each Adoption Panel consists of:**

- Independent panel chair
- Panel advisor
- Medical advisor
- Legal advisor – accessed by telephone if required
- City Council Member
- Independent members
- Children's Services representatives – registered social workers

2.2 The independent members consist of adoptive parents, some with overseas adoption experience and/or adoptees. Additionally, panel members typically have a range of experience including for example education, finance and medicine.

2.3 Prospective adopters are invited to attend panel in person in for both approval and subsequent matching. A leaflet outlining the process is sent to adopters in advance.

2.4 The composition of the Adoption and Permanency Panel is the same as the Adoption Panel but there is no legal or medical representative in attendance, although legal and medical advice has been made available in all cases.

2.5 The Agency Decision Maker for the Adoption Panel is required to make a decision within a maximum of seven working days of the date of panel. The Decision Maker then conveys the decision in writing to the applicants if the application has been successful.

2.6 Applicants can appeal Agency decisions in writing within 28 days. The Agency Decision Maker subsequently decides whether the case should be re-considered at panel. This can include being reviewed by the other Adoption Panel.

### **3.0 Role of the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).**

3.1 The Independent Review Mechanism was launched on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2004. It is being operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department of Education. The Independent Review Mechanism is a review process, conducted by a panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been told that their adoption agency does not propose to approve them as suitable to adopt a child.

3.2 Adoption agencies cannot refer matters to the IRM – it is only prospective adopters who can refer. The IRM does not have the authority to rescind the decisions made by adoption agencies – they can only offer an independent review of decisions from which they then make recommendations.

3.3 It is the responsibility of the applicant to initiate a written application to the IRM which should contain the following information:

- The grounds for the complaint, i.e. reason for disagreeing with the adoption agency's determination

- The date of the letter received from the adoption agency
- The name and address of the adoption agency

3.4 The application must be made within 40 days of the date of the adoption agency's letter.

#### **4. Following approval**

4.1 Prospective adopters are considered for Southampton children requiring placement as well as well as being added to a list of South Coast Consortium adopters who are waiting for placements.

4.2 The social worker in the team who has the lead role for Family Finding has responsibility for ensuring that adopters are added to the Consortium resource list and where appropriate and with consent they are added to the National Adoption Register for consideration across the country.

4.3 Prospective adopters are supported by their social worker and encouraged to expand their child care skills and experience through training and involvement with children.

#### **5 Review process for approved adopters**

5.1 All approved adopters who have not had a child placed with them within 12 months are required to have an Annual Review of their approval. This is completed internally by managers within the Adoption Service. If there are considerable changes within their circumstances this will return to panel for review.

5.2 Until an Adoption Order is granted, adopters will have CRB and medical checks on a two yearly basis

## **Appendix 6**

### **1. EVALUATION OF FEEDBACK FROM SERVICE USERS**

#### **1.1 Evaluation of Panel**

A feedback form is given to prospective adopters who attend panel and to professional staff. Panel feedback is collated and fed back by the panel advisor to panel and to the Adoption Services Manager.

#### **1.2 Evaluation of information session**

Participants asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of each information session. Results are used to evaluate current sessions and suggest improvements for future sessions.

#### **1.3 Evaluation of preparation training**

As Above

#### **1.4 Evaluation of service**

An evaluation document is completed with adoptive families post-adoption. This is undertaken by a member of the team, not the social workers involved with the placement and it covers feedback on the process from beginning to end. The Adoption Services Manager collates this data which informs future practice, development and staff training.

#### **1.5 Children's Guide**

A Children's Guide to Adoption is available for those children of an age able to understand its content. As the team undertake direct work with children, all children and young people are offered life story work.

##### **Life Story Book**

A Life Story Book is completed for all children; this helps them to understand their history and the reasons they could not live with their birth family. Adoptive parents are given help and advice about using the Life Story Book with their child.

Age appropriate books and play are used to support this work.

## Appendix 7

### COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 1.1 Complaints relating to children are handled under the provisions of the Children's Act S.26 (1989), further defined in the Representation Procedure (Children and Young Persons) Regulations (1991). With the introduction of the Children and Adoption Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) 2003 came an extension of the previous provisions. In addition the DfES guidance "Getting the Best from Complaints"
- 1.2 The Act defines "qualifying individuals" who have a legal right to complain through the process. Complaints can be made through the process if they relate to the services being received by the child or young person.
- 1.3 Adoption services can be complained about under this act. All complaints are acknowledged by the Customer Care and Complaints Team.

The process has three stages:

- Stage One - Local Resolution - 10-20 days  
The team working with the child or family will usually respond to first stage complaints as they will have knowledge of the situation and will be best placed to answer questions. In Southampton, this is usually the Adoption Manager or Assistant Team Manager. If the matter is not resolved then it can be passed to Stage Two.
  - Stage Two - Independent investigation – 25-65 days  
An independent investigator and independent person are commissioned to investigate the complaint. Once the investigation is complete they will produce a report, with recommendations, which is usually shared in full with the service user. Once the service has received both reports they will write to the service user, responding to each complaint. If the service user remains unhappy they can request the matter is referred to Stage Three.
  - Stage Three - Panel Hearing - 30 days to convene
- 1.4 The panel will be made up of three people who are not employed by the Council. They will listen to the service users and the service's views in regard to the complaint. The investigator will also attend the panel to answer any questions. The panel cannot reinvestigate the complaint or hear new matters but they will make recommendations to the service to try and resolve the complaint. The service will make a final response to the service user once it has considered the panel's recommendations. If the service user remains unhappy they have the right to refer the complaint to the local government.
  - 1.5 All service users as a matter of routine are given a copy of Southampton's complaints leaflet at the first enquiry stage.

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

In addition complaints can be made to the Ombudsman and to OFSTED.

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