

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Summer 2023

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(The wording in this publication can be made available in other formats such as large print or Braille).

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that it provides. Children, young people and families can use this as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

Adoption Counts is an integrated adoption service working across Manchester, Trafford, Salford, Stockport and Cheshire East Councils. Adoption Counts Regional agency is hosted by Stockport Council.

Services are provided in accordance with

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption Counts, as a local authority adoption service is inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. AIMS and OBJECTIVES

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards for care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.

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3. Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

At Adoption Counts, we believe that children are best able to enjoy close and enduring relationships and to develop their potential within a family setting. Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underpins this ethos: that every child has a right to family life, which, if the family of origin cannot provide it, should be provided by a permanent alternative. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family. Where this is not possible however and children are assessed, as in need of an adoptive placement, Adoption Counts will:

- Provide children with the right adopters at the right time, approving those equipped to meet the needs of children waiting
- Place children with families who can provide continuity of relationships through childhood and beyond
- Minimise changes of plan away from adoption
- Reduce delay and improve timescales for matching and placement for all children – working with care planning processes in each local authority to improve early identification / twin track planning and to achieve best practise and consistency across the region
- Recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive parents and foster to adopt carers in sufficient numbers and within timescale to meet the assessed needs of children requiring permanent families, including children with complex needs and sibling groups
- Encourage applications from prospective adopters who are able to put children's needs first, including single people, couples who are heterosexual, gay, transgender, married, in civil partnerships or unmarried
- Ensure that assessments are robust and of high quality, in order to be sure that approved adopters can provide the nurture and parenting required by children who have suffered separation from their birth family and possible adversity such as abuse, neglect or exposure to substances
- Improve earlier permanency planning using:
 - Concurrent Planning
 - Fostering for Adoption
- Take innovative approaches to placing those children who tend to wait longer for a match

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- Linking children with adopters from enquiry stage onwards where appropriate
- work with partner Local Authorities to ensure both the child and family are prepared for placement
- Reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown through timely and improved matching, preparation and adoption support
- Provide access to information, counselling and support as appropriate to adults, whose lives have been affected by adoption, including adopted adults and birth families
- Provide information on the Service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad

3. PRINCIPLES

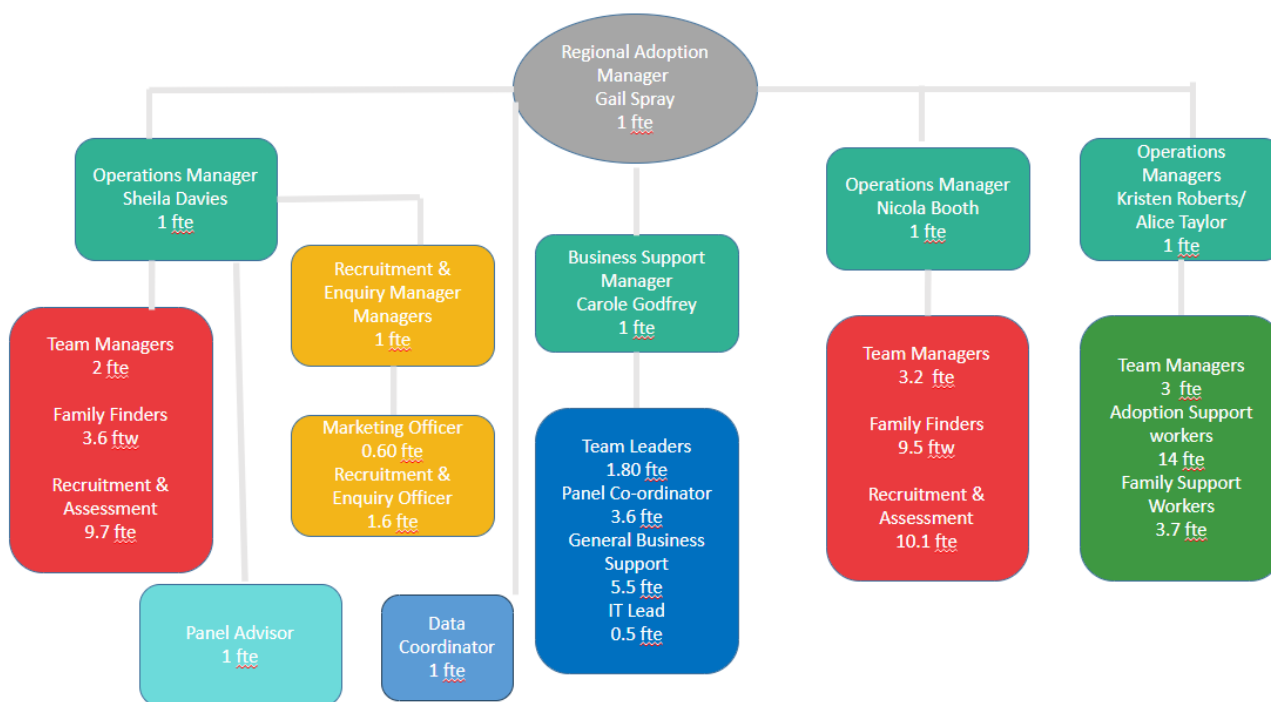
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs of those who require a service
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and will be provided with appropriate support services
- All decisions will be fair and transparent.
- The organisation will regularly review the services it provides, consult with, and learn from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments and complaints. We will highlight best practise and report on outcomes to inform future developments.
- Concerns about the service will be addressed and information about the complaints procedure is available.

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- The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of Stockport council. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.
- Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability while being mindful of the need to avoid undue delay.

4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



Adoption Counts came into being on the 3rd July 2017. It is a shared adoption service across the region working with Stockport, Trafford, Cheshire East, Manchester and Salford

councils. The Regional Manager reports regularly to a Management Board, made up of Senior Officers from each local authority with representation from Adoption Matters and Caritas Care –our voluntary sector partners, and from adopter representatives. The Chair of the Management Board is elected by the board and is one of the Local authority members.

The regional agency operates under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements, the budget, staffing and funding contributions for the five local authorities.

5. THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families

Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a home study, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation and post approval training.

- Placement finding

Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption, including those who require early permanence through fostering to adopt or concurrency. The family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible.

- Support for adoptive families

Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process, after placement and post adoption. This includes workshops and training and support groups. Children's social workers hold statutory case responsibility for the child in placement but work jointly with Adoption Counts in matching and supporting adoptive families until the adoption order.

- Non-agency adoption
- Independent counselling for birth families

This is provided in by another agency commissioned by Adoption Counts

- Keeping in touch (formerly known as Letterbox)

The keeping in touch team and access to adoption archives is provided, and enables adopted children to maintain relationships with their birth families.

- Services for adopted adults

Support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults wishing to find out about their birth families and to Intermediary service are provided.

Information about all aspects of the via the website www.adoptioncounts.org.uk or via the Facebook page www.facebook.com/AdoptionCounts

6. NUMBERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF

The Head of Service, Gail Spray, has responsibility for the overall service.

Gail holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work and has over 25 years' experience in Local Authority settings, covering safeguarding, early help and prevention and adoption. Since 2014, before and after the launch of Adoption Counts, she has played a central role in developing the Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support, which is one of only 2 in the country. She has managed a multi-agency team delivering adoption support with health, social care and education colleagues in Adoption Counts. Gail holds a level 5 ILM award in Leadership & Management.

The agency has three Service Operations Managers. There are five Registered Managers, one for each local authority. Each Registered Manager sits within their local authority and is not a member of Adoption Counts.

Sheila Davies holds a CCETSW certificate in Social Services and has been in the social work role for over 40 years qualifying in 1984. She has over 30 years of post-qualifying experience with cared for children, fostering, special guardians and in Adoption. Sheila is a highly experienced senior manager having driven performance in some challenging positions. Her move to Adoption Counts in 2021 was grounded in her wish to put children at the heart of her work.

Nicola Booth holds a Diploma in Social Work, obtained in 2004, a Post Qualifying award obtained in 2006 and a Post Qualifying Child Care award obtained in 2008. She has over 20 years' experience working within children's social care in a variety of roles including family support services and child in need / child protection. From 2007, Nicola has specialised in adoption, joining Cheshire East's adoption service initially as an adoption support social worker, then working as a practitioner within the recruitment and assessment and family finding services. Nicola managed Cheshire East's adoption team from 2015, transferring to Adoption Counts in 2017.

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Kristen Roberts holds a BA (hons) degree from Durham University, a Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) obtained in 2005, and obtained her post-qualifying award in 2007. She has 17 years' experience in children's social work including having worked on long-term children's teams, LAC teams and as an adoption social worker in family finding, assessment of adopters, and adoption support. Kristen became manager of the Adoption Support Team when Adoption Counts was formed, and has been responsible for the daily running of the multi-disciplinary team. She is currently acting as interim Operations Manager along with Alice Taylor (as a job share).

Alice Taylor holds a First Class Honours degree in Psychology from Lancaster University awarded in 2006, and a Master of Arts in Social work from Lancaster University awarded in 2008. She also has an ILM Level 5 NVQ Diploma in Management and leadership and principles of Leadership and management from Trafford College awarded in 2017. Alice has been working as a social worker for nearly 14 years in the Children and families area. Alice started her career as a supervising social worker on a fostering team, eventually moving on to a Team Manager role within a specialist fostering team. Following this she worked within a Family placement Team as the Team Leader with responsibility for Special Guardianship assessment and support, and the manager for adoption cases. Alice joined Adoption Counts in March 2022 as Operations Manager for adoption support on a job share basis with Kristen Roberts.

The numbers, location and specialisms of staff are set out in the structure chart above. All Social Workers have a Social Work Qualification, are registered Social Work England, and have relevant experience in children and families service.

There are six adoption teams in total - Recruitment, Assessment and Family Finding is undertaken by five adoption teams covering the region. The Specialist Adoption Support Team is responsible for providing a range of adoption support services.

Teams work cooperatively with each other in order to provide a seamless service for children and their adoptive families, ensuring the allocation of work as needed.

7. SERVICES PROVIDED

7.1 Procedure for adopter recruitment, training and approval.

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Counts via the agency website www.adoptioncounts.org.uk or by making contact through the dedicated enquiry line 0300 123 2676. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and an information pack is sent out, usually on the same working day but always within 24 hours.

Information meetings

Enquirers are invited to and encouraged to attend an information event; these are held every two weeks across the region. Details of these are shown on the agency website, on First4adoption website and offered over the telephone. The information event has a DVD presentation about adoption, provides the opportunity to meet adopters, and experienced adoption social workers. If enquirers are unable to attend an information event, this needs to be discussed and alternative arrangements made, usually by meeting a worker at one of the offices. Following the information event, if enquirers wish to progress their interest, they would have a detailed conversation with us and request a home visit.

Initial Meeting

An adoption social worker who will provide more information about adoption undertakes the meeting, and the personal circumstances of adopters will be discussed in detail to help them consider if adoption is the right choice for them. The social worker will also start discussions about practical considerations.

A detailed summary of the meeting will be completed and passed to an adoption manager before a registration of interest form can be submitted. On most occasions, enquirer(s) submission of a registration of interest form will be accepted. The adoption manager will make a decision within 5 days about whether it should be accepted. At this stage, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s). A letter will be sent to the prospective adopter (s) confirming that their application is proceeding or detailing the reasons why their registration of interest cannot be accepted.

Stage 1 Pre-assessment process

Stage 1 begins on the day that Adoption Counts accepts the registration of interest from adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete.

The stage 1 process will include the following:

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- A social worker will be allocated to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.
- All of the statutory references/checks will be completed including the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible which will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues
- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training /preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have.

Preparation sessions

Prospective adopter(s) will be invited to attend preparation sessions in Stage 1. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption website.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 12 times per year based on need. Second or subsequent adopter training is provided at regular intervals across the region.

Statutory Checks

All statutory checks, including DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as the ROI is received. Applicants are aware that negative police/statutory checks may affect their application and in some case may result in rejection. References are taken up with Local Authorities where the applicants have lived over the past 10 years. Applicants are advised to inform us of any adverse history, medical condition or counselling/ therapy history which any of these checks may reveal. If applicants work with children or vulnerable adults, employers are asked whether there are any concerns of a safeguarding nature. This includes voluntary work. In most cases other checks include employer's checks, contacting adult children of the applicant/s and former significant partners will be done in Stage 2.

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Medical Advisor

Applicants will be asked to have their adoption medical as soon as their ROI is received. The Medical Advisor may follow up on any concerns with the GP/hospital consultant. The Medical Advisor's opinion is taken into account in assessing the applicants' suitability to progress to Stage 2 alongside other information.

Stage 2 - The Assessment Process

The stage 2-assessment process cannot begin until the stage one assessment has successfully been completed (apart from fast tracked applications, which comply with the specific criteria set out by regulation.) In some instances, applicants can proceed to stage two with outstanding checks subject to a management decision if it is deemed that not to do so would cause unnecessary delay.

We will at all times endeavour to ensure that the same worker undertakes stage 1 and stage two.

The applicants must inform us in writing that they wish to progress to stage 2. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long process during which a home study assessment is undertaken leading to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage 2 plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and provisional panel dates. The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, previous partner, employers and references. Personal referees will also be visited.

Based on the information in the assessment the adoption social worker will put together a detailed Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will reach a conclusion about the prospective adopters(s) suitability to adopt and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is presented to the adoption panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the stage 2 process that they cannot recommend approval, we may present a "brief report" to panel which sets out the concerns. Applicants can make representation in person or in writing to panel. If panel recommend that the

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application should not continue, or that they cannot recommend approval of a completed assessment, and if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by panel or by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinize the decisions of adoption agencies.

The recommendation of the subsequent adoption panel or IRM is then referred back to the ADM who will consider all the information and reach a decision that will be final. They may seek legal advice to assist.

Interviewing members of Extended Family/Adult children

If members of the extended family are expected to play a particular role in an adopted child's life (e.g. by providing day care for a working parent) they will be interviewed. Family members or friends who may regularly provide back-up care will have a DBS safety check. Where possible adult children of the applicant(s), including those who live away from home, are interviewed. Where an interview is not possible, adult children receive a letter seeking their comments on their parent's plans. The comments of adult children are taken seriously. They do not have an automatic veto but their views are considered and followed up. If we can obtain their permission, their comments are shared with the applicants.

Where applicants have had previously significant relationship -where they have cohabited for a lengthy period, or have parented a child with a former partner, that partner will generally be contacted to ascertain their view or identify any concerns they may have about the applicant's ability to keep a child safe. If this is not appropriate (e.g. because of possible violence from a previous partner towards an applicant), the reason will be explained in the assessment report and the Panel will take a view of all the circumstances. A decision not to approach a previous partner must be agreed by the Head of Service / Regional Adoption Manager.

Referees

At least three personal referees need to be interviewed and to complete a written reference. One of these should be a family member who may be different from the family member referred to above. In the case of applicants who are couples, it is our policy to interview a representative from each side of the family. Additional referees may be needed if there are issues about a particular stage in the applicant's life about which we need to obtain another view. A written summary of each interview is made. Interviews with referees are confidential and referees should be assured that we will treat them as such unless they agree to share. Referees are asked to sign the summary of the interview, which is provided to Panel.

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Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adoption Counts has a contract with another agency to provide this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child (or the children's) plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

A fast track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. The process will bypass the stage one process and start at the beginning of stage two (as above). They will be offered training.

Second or subsequent adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and there is a 2year average age gap between that child and a potential new child.

These timescales will not apply if the child to be placed is a sibling of the child already in placement. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start in stage 2. They would be offered training.

7.2 Family finding for Children

All children requiring an adoptive placement will have an individual placement strategy identifying the nature of the family finding likely to be required. Many children will be matched within Adoption Counts by families approved by the agency. For others who traditionally may have waited longer due to their complex needs, the agency will use a variety of avenues to secure a match. Children who are subject of Placement Orders, and for whom there is no identified adoptive family will have their details added to Link maker following a decision at tracking .

The service uses a range of family finding methods, including internal strategic matching, local and national exchange days. In-house family finding events, bespoke family finding,

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national searches and activity days. All efforts are made to maximize the search for adopters for these children. Monthly reviews are held to track the progress of the search for families for these children. A detailed family finding policy underpins this work.

Matches of children with prospective adopters are made based on a child's holistic needs, including age, siblings, special needs as well as ethnicity, race and religion. A placement will not be delayed in order to find an exact ethnic/religious match if a family is available who can meet the child's other needs. However, transracial adopters will need to demonstrate how they can promote a child's positive sense of identity. Our RACE matters training enables this.

The Adoption Service requires that the LA to undertake a sibling group assessment to determine whether children are placed together or separately, and if to be separated how each child's needs will be met in terms of attachments within the sibling group/ings.

Any plans for maintaining relationships (post adoption contact) with the children's birth parents, siblings or relatives is made after an assessment of the child's needs and welfare. The prospective adopter will be consulted about any proposed contact plan.

7.3 Adoption Panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- Approval of the match between children and adopters
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan

Membership of the Adoption Counts panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the district.

The agency holds 4-5 panels across the region each month.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within 7 working days of the minutes being received of the

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recommendation from panel. They may make a decision different to that recommended by the panel. The agency decision maker for approvals of prospective adopters is the Head of service / Regional Adoption Manager Adoption Counts, the DCS or ADCS Stockport.

Decision making for children to be matched for adoption is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's statutory local authority.

Decisions are notified to a child's parents, guardian, prospective adopters and social workers will be informed orally of the agency decision within 2 working days and the decision will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

7.4 Matching and Support

Following panel adopters are offered additional training to help them prepare for a child coming into their family. Topics covered include introductions, moving children into new families, making good connections and maintaining relationships and therapeutic parenting. Adoption Social Workers also ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations, e.g. Coram BAAF, Adoption UK and PAC UK.

There is also a training course available for grandparents or other relatives who are supporting the adopter/s and wish to have more in depth information regarding adoption called Family & friends training.

The adopter(s) social worker will help to identify suitable matches with a child/ren and will provide support and guidance throughout the whole process. We would encourage all adopters to wait 3 months to achieve a match within the agency before starting a wider or national search. We believe that adopters can be better supported by our agency by taking a local placement.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the Keeping in touch team with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision. A life appreciation day will often be arranged depending on the child's age and circumstances to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences.

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Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

The child's worker, the prospective adopters and their worker will attend the Adoption Panel. If the adopter is being matched with a child from an agency outside Adoption Counts, they will attend that agencies panel. If a match is agreed there will be an introductions planning meeting to plan for the introduction, and placement of the child. "Managing Transition" is used as the good practise guidance on. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the Early Permanency Route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering.

7.5 Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or more usually, once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information.

7.6 Post Placement

The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by visiting weekly up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six weekly. Statutory visits are the responsibility of the placing local authority. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and the worker for the prospective adopters will give advice. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family and child's social workers.

Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safekeeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

7.7 Maintaining relations and keeping in touch

Support with maintaining relationships between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the Adoption Counts. All arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child, and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact may include letter exchange or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members.

A keeping in touch arrangement may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent, or any other relative, or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of face to face contact may be arranged where necessary and agreed.

7.8 Annual Reviews of Prospective Adopters

We aim to match approved adopters and children at the earliest opportunity working proactively with adopters to enable placements to be made. The clear focus is on placing children in loving homes but there may be occasions where there is an interval between an adopter being approved and a child being placed.

Where approved adopters have not achieved a match with a child within a year of approval a review is presented to the Adoption Panel for their consideration and advice. Adopters for whom there has been a significant change of circumstance will also be presented at the Adoption Panel for review. This process will be repeated annually if the adopters remain without a match.

If as a result of the review there is a recommendation for deregistration of a prospective adopter due to specific concerns which have arisen during the period, the social worker will write a report for Panel, detailing:

- Placements that have been considered and/ or made (in the case of adoption disruptions). Why no placement resulted
- Any safeguarding issues relating to the adopters
- Significant changes in circumstances
- Changes in the kind of child sought
- The applicant's views and wishes
- Information from updated statutory checks – DBS updates; and
- Making a recommendation as to whether to continue the approved status of the applicant/s or not

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As with the original approval, prospective adopters have the right to view the report, comment on it and to attend Panel. The representations procedure or referral to the Independent Review Mechanism is available at this stage as at the initial approval stage.

7.9. Adoption Support

Adoption Support Services are integral to our delivery for adopted children, new adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults, recognizing the life long journey. We are committed to supporting families in the early transition stages of a placement and when an adoption order is made. Thereafter we recognize that new challenges may emerge requiring varying levels of tailored support to ensure successful outcomes for children. All such services are provided to the same high standard of professional care, as if they were being provided to direct placements of the service and the safeguarding children policy, equal opportunities policy and complaints policy all apply.

The service currently has an Adoption Psychology team funded by the 5 Local Authorities Adoption Counts will promote the integration of health and care services, working together to provide access for families from 'getting advice' (universal services), to 'getting help' (targeted services) and to 'getting more help' (specialist services), whenever they feel they need it in a locality that suits them. (See diagram below).

Service overview

The Adoption Psychology Team is an assessment, consultation and therapeutic CAMHS and Educational Psychology partnership service for Adopted Children, their parents, carers and workers. It is a partnership between Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, One Education and Adoption Counts.

The service is multidisciplinary including clinical psychology, therapeutic social work, child psychiatry and educational psychology. The service is partly co-located with Children's Social Care, which enables a co-ordinated approach to the mental health and emotional wellbeing and develops the skills of the social work teams through consultation, training and joint working.

It is consultation and referral-based and offers timely and flexible appointments with some choice of venue. The service sits alongside other services that support the child's home, care planning, relationships, health, education and hobbies. The iThrive model shows how the Adoption Psychology and Adoption Counts Adoption Support Service fit together.

i-THRIVE Model of Care - Adoption Support



Adoption Psychology Service outcomes:

- Adopted children have good mental health
- Adopted children have healthy relationships
- Adopted children have stable placements
- Adopted children and their parents have a positive experience of care and support

Service Aims

- Children who have a Placement Order and an adoption plan are offered, where necessary, assessment and intervention to support decision-making and make recommendations to inform their placement needs.
- Adopted children and families have access to assessment and interventions to improve their relationships, emotional and behavioural regulation and engagement with learning.

- Children and families placed in their adoptive placement can access group-based approaches as part of an early intervention package to enable families to have a good start on their adoption journey.
- Children who have been placed in their adoptive placement are able to access specialist assessment and intervention up to age 12.
- Adoption social workers, family finders and children's social workers can access Specialist Consultation for adopted children up to the age of 18 for advice and signposting.
- Prospective adopters and adoptive parents are offered training, consultation and evidence-based interventions to enhance their understanding and management of the psychological needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- Adoption Social Workers are offered training and consultation to enhance their understanding, assessment skills and knowledge of attachment, mental health difficulties and interventions

We deliver these services through 1-1 support and group work. This is to all of the five LAs adopted children in their first 3 years of placement and to any adopted family's resident in the five LAs after this time. Some specialist support will be commissioned via the voluntary sector.

Adoption is a life-long process for all involved and does not begin or end with the making of an adoption order.

Most adoptions are happy, but adoptive parents, adopted people and birth families sometimes have worries or difficulties, which are different from other family problems. It can often be helpful to talk to people who have experienced all aspects of adoption

In keeping with a flexible and responsive service, support strategies are tailored to identified needs and in accordance with best practice drawing on both local and nationally recognized programmes i.e. based on the Nurturing Attachments, Foundations for Attachment and Theraplay models.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

8.1 Supervision

- All social workers/senior practitioners/managers will receive regular supervision. The frequency will depend on the needs of the supervisee, and is offered not less than 4 weekly.

- We aim to have individual Continuing Professional Development Plans in place for each staff member, updated annually, with access to development opportunities and training to ensure a competent, skilled and talented workforce in tune with the needs of the service and flexible and responsive delivery;
- file audits are undertaken as part of an overarching quality assurance framework approach overseen by the Head of Service.

8.2 Safeguarding

- All safeguarding issues or serious concerns about placements are discussed with the appropriate manager within the service and recorded by the social worker. Consultation with the Safeguarding Unit is undertaken where appropriate
- Learning from safeguarding reports, from serious case reviews and from disruption meetings are discussed with the adoption service, and the adoption panel and analysis of practice is shared with our colleagues and with our partners in other agencies to instil robust practices and keep children safe at all times ensuring their welfare is paramount
- Where children are placed for adoption or foster care, any safeguarding concern, incident or accident, serious illness, a child who is missing, death or serious injury of children or complaints, or incidents likely to impact on a child's welfare are recorded by the statutory agency, appropriately investigated in accordance with statutory and safeguarding guidance and outcomes analysed and relevant parties notified.
- All staff, panel members, and others involved in the service to children and have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service clearance and references are obtained and verified; and Social Work Staff will hold current registration with the Social Work England and are expected to adhere the standards of proficiency and the code of ethics integral to the professional standards of the agency.

8.3 Service Feedback

Service user feedback is proactively sought and listened to so that our services continue to improve, including:

- Evaluation forms completed by prospective adopters who attend preparation and training groups. Similarly, feedback sought at the midway point of their assessment, and after attendance at the adoption panel
- Feedback forms are sent out after the adoption order is granted, and at this stage service users are asked to comment on their experience of the service

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- Undertaking periodic user satisfaction surveys of adopters or carers over a period of years asking for information on the quality of adoption support received and their overall experiences (both positive and negative) of the adoption, with an opportunity to make suggestions and improvements. Adopter consultation Forums are held at least 3 times per year to which adopters are invited. These forums provide an opportunity for adopters to meet directly with the Regional adoption Manager and operational managers to share their views about the service and to suggest improvements, which could be made
- Children and Young people are engaged with and openly encouraged to comment on the service, appropriate to their age and understanding, their views informing future delivery and incorporated into training of carers
- The Adoption Agency is monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted.
- There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals. Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels
- 4 x yearly meetings are held between the senior Management team, Panel Chairs and Agency Decision Maker.
- The Head of Service reports regularly to the board on performance in an agreed format and submits a six monthly report to the each local authority DCS and Executive
- A management information system and government scorecard are in place, which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption
- Tracking of adopters and children monitors delay and learning from avoidable delay is incorporated into service development
- A robust quality assurance framework is in place

9. CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

If there are aspects of the adoption service you are not satisfied with you should discuss this, in the first instance, with your supervising social worker who will listen to your concerns and try to resolve the problem. If the complaint is about your supervising social worker, you should speak with a manager within the adoption service. If the complaint is about aspects of the adoption service as a whole then you should contact the Complaints Manager in the first instance.

Different complaints may be dealt with under a number of separate procedures: A complaint may be about:

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- The adoptive placement
- The adoption service
- The Local Authority including the child's social worker
- A service involved with the child, i.e. the child's school

Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue. In certain cases the adoption service operations manager will be the most appropriate person to talk to. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, you have the right to progress the complaint to the formal stage 1.

The Formal Complaint Process

If you are a child, or your complaint is on behalf of a child, then you should contact the local authority, which has responsibility for that child. The local authority will be responsible for handling your complaint as it retains responsibility for the welfare of each adopted child. Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue.

However, if you are not satisfied with their response you can contact the Complaints section of the relevant local authority by clicking on one of the links below.

Stockport: <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/general-complaints>

Manchester:

http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200025/complaints_comments_and_questions/67/complaints_compliments_and_suggestions/2

Salford: <https://www.salford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/complaintscomments-or-compliments/>

Cheshire East: http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/customer-services/complaints_and_feedback/complaints_and_feedback.aspx

Trafford: <http://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/complaints/complaints.aspx>

If you are an adopter, prospective adopter or birth parent, and you wish, to complain about a service provided by Adoption Counts, you should make the complaint to Stockport Council which is the lead agency for Adoption Counts and which will investigate all complaints about Adoption Counts.

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You can make your complaint by clicking here <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/general-complaints> or by writing to Devon Sherwood, Stopford House, Piccadilly, Stockport or calling on 01614743895.

Complaints can be made in writing, in person and by telephone.

Stage 1:

In the first instance at Stage 1, the complaint will be forwarded to the Manager with responsibility for the services provided to the child or adopter. The Manager will consider the complaint and provide a response to you and the child, including what will be done to resolve the complaint and any learning the service will adopt as a result of the complaint. The Manager may arrange to visit you and/or the child to discuss the complaint.

Stage 2:

If after receiving the response to Stage 1 you and / or the child remain dissatisfied, you can ask that the complaint be progressed to stage 2. At this stage, someone who is independent of the adoption service will investigate the complaint further. They would produce a report for the Service along with any findings of the investigation and any recommendations that might serve to resolve the complaint. A Senior Manager within the adoption service will also write to you and the child saying what will be done to resolve the complaint.

Stage 3:

If after receiving the response at stage 2, you and / or the child remain dissatisfied you can ask for the complaint to be considered by an independent Review Panel. A Review Panel makes decisions about the complaint, and may make other recommendations for the adoption service to think about. At Stage 3, a Service Manager has to respond to the Review Panel's decision and any recommendations.

Following the stage 3 Review Panel, if you are still dissatisfied, you have the right to make representations to the Local Government Ombudsman.

10. DETAILS OF THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

The Registration Authority is Ofsted whose address is: Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD
Telephone No. 0300 123 1231
Fax: 0300 123 3159

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11. REGISTERED PROVIDER

The Registered Provider is Stockport MBC Adoption Agency:

Responsible Individual: Mrs. Gail Spray. Head of Service

Stockport Council

Etrop Court Wythenshawe

T- 0161 600 8532

Mobile- 07866999599

Email: gail.spray@adoptioncounts.org.uk

Qualifications of Responsible Individual:

Gail Spray qualifications:

BA (Hons) Applied Community Studies , Manchester Polytechnic, Post Graduate diploma in Social Work, Manchester University, ILM Level 5 (Leadership and Management)

1989-1993 Family Support Worker NCH

1995-2002 Childrens SW Social Worker Stockport MBC

2002-2008 Team Manager – Family Centre Stockport MBC

2008 – 2012 Team Manager – Childrens Centres Stockport MBC

2012- 2014 Team Manager – Early Help Services Stockport MBC

2014 -2016 Team Manager – Adoption Stockport MBC

2016 -2017 Development Manager – Adoption Support (RAA project team)

2017 – 2020 Operations Manager – Adoption Support – Adoption Counts

2020 Head of Service Adoption Counts

Qualifications and Experience of Staff:

All professional staff hold a recognised qualification in social work and proof of current registration with the Health and Care Professions Council.