



Children and Young People's Services

Statement of purpose

Buckinghamshire Adoption Service

Revised 2008

Statement of purpose

The Statement of purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service. The information contained in the Statement of purpose is prescribed in Schedule 1 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Standard 1). The Statement of purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated as required by the National Minimum Standards. This document has been informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003;
- The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005;
- Related Regulations, Local Authority Circulars and Practice Guidance;
- Every Child Matters 2003.

The Statement of purpose links all sections in the document to the relevant Adoption National Minimum Standards and the five outcomes of Every Child Matters that are most important to children and young people. (All references to the National Minimum Standards are outlined in Appendix 1)

- **Being Healthy – there are no corresponding National Minimum Standards (NMS).**
- **Staying safe:**
 - The agency matches children with adopters (NMS2);
 - The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS4);
 - Adopters are given information about matching (NMS5);
 - The functions of the Adoption Panel are as specified (NMS10);
 - The constitution and membership of Adoption Panels are as specified (NMS11);
 - Adoption Panels are timely (NMS12);

- Adoption agency decisions are made without delay and appropriately (NMS13);
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS15);
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS19).
- **Enjoying and achieving:**
 - The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS6);
 - The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18).
- **Making a positive contribution:**
 - Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7);
 - Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8);
 - The adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9).
- **Achieving economic wellbeing** – there are no corresponding National Minimum Standards.

Management – This is not one of the outcomes of Every Child Matters but will be covered in the Statement of purpose, as there are a number of NMS, which cover the management of an adoption service.

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Appendix 2 – Buckinghamshire County Council Corporate Plan

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1 Values, aims and objectives

(NMS 1 applies)

The National Adoption Standards have been written to ensure that looked after children, birth families, prospective adopters and the general public understand what they can expect from an adoption service. The values below set out the important principles, which underpin both the National Adoption Standards and the Adoption – National Minimum Standards. Buckinghamshire fully endorses these **values**.

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- Where possible it is best for children to be brought up by their own family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully 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.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and 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 different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service adheres to the principle of providing an efficient adoption service that works within current legislation, the budget set by Buckinghamshire County Council and the Corporate Plan (Appendix 2), which puts the people of Buckinghamshire at the heart of its services. The Corporate Plan 2005-2009 aims:

“To give children and young people the best possible life chances”.

The **aims** of the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service are:

1. To recruit, assess and provide suitable families, within the time scales laid down by the National Adoption Standards that meet the needs of every child referred to the adoption service.
2. To provide information on the process of adoption and the children available for adoption to applicants wishing to adopt a child into their family.
3. To provide an adoption support service to enable a child to remain with an adoptive family and ensure that the child reaches their full potential.
4. To provide information on the process of adoption for applicants wishing to adopt a child into their family from overseas.
5. To provide information on the process of adoption for those people who wish to adopt a related child from within their family, for example, stepparent or relative adoptions.
6. To provide information and support to those people wishing to obtain information about, and from, their birth records.
7. To provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption whether prior to, or after, the making of an adoption order.
8. To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by the Adoption Service.
9. To provide opportunities for adoption workers to increase their knowledge in new research and developments.

The Adoption Service Plan (Appendix 5) sets out the objectives for the service in pursuit of the aims set out above.

2 Named manager

(NMS 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21 and 22 apply)

The responsible manager for the Adoption Service is Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1YU. In their absence, Divisional Manager, Prevention, Assessment and Protection, will deputise.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is Divisional Manager, Prevention Assessment and Protection. In their absence, Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements, will deputise.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser is Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption, The Friary, Rickfords Hill, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 2RT, telephone number 01296 387630.

The day-to-day duties of the Adoption Support Services Adviser are delegated to Team Manager of the Adoption Support Team, based in County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1YU, telephone number 01296 387956.

3 Qualifications and experience of named manager and decision maker

Named manager

BSc Social Science (Hons)

Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

Diploma Social Science

Post Graduate Certificate in Management

Began a social work career in 1978 and since then has held a number of positions, both as a direct practitioner and for the last 16 years as a manager within children and families

services in Buckinghamshire and elsewhere. Since 2007 has been the Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements, in Buckinghamshire, which includes being the named manager for the adoption service. This experience includes all aspects of adoption work.

Agency decision maker

Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

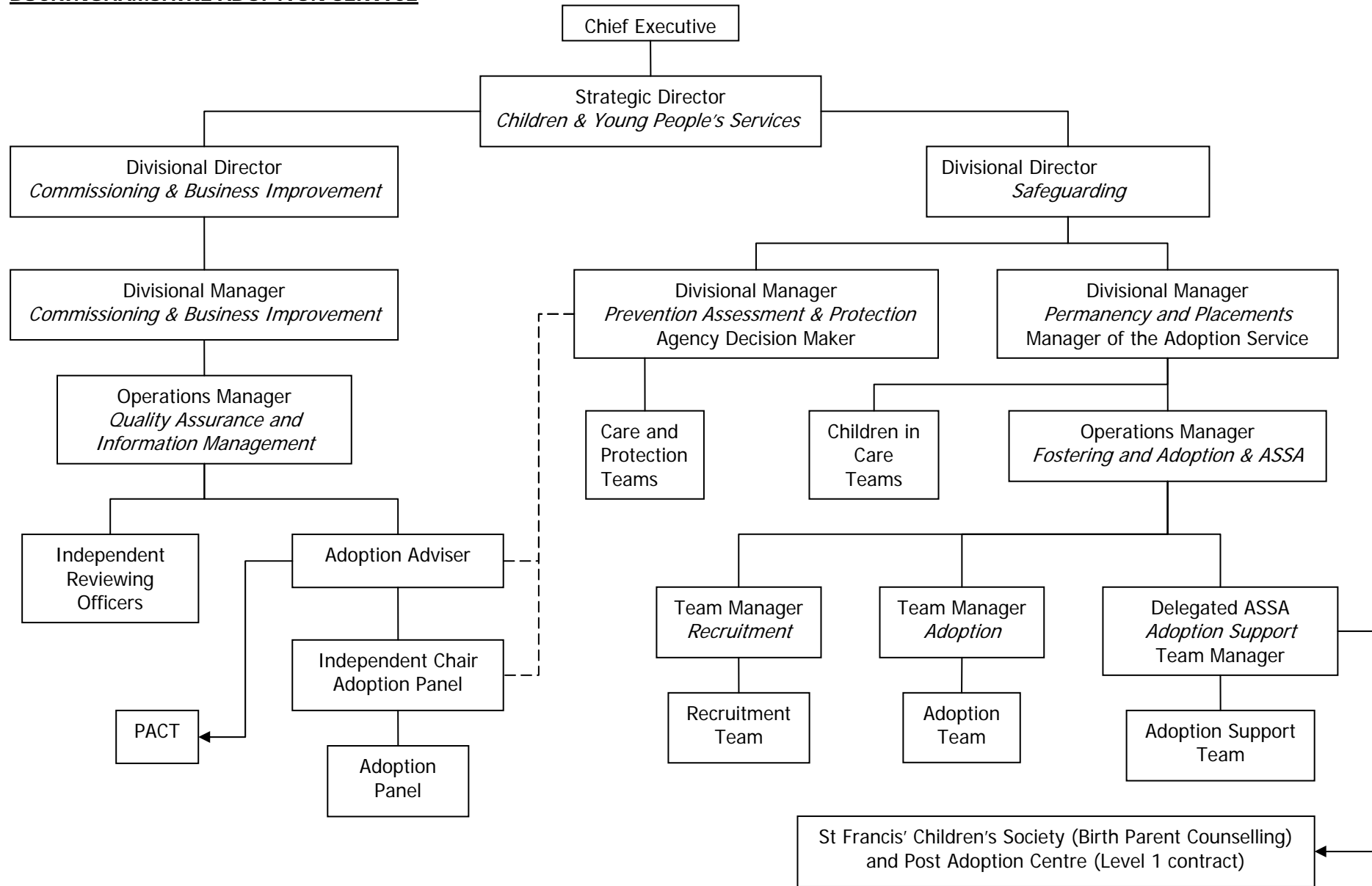
Diploma in Applied Social Studies

Certificate in Education

Child Protection Post Qualification

Many years experience in social work with children and families, both as a practitioner and senior manager in a number of local authorities in the South of England. This includes managing a range of prevention, assessment and child protection services for children who are looked after, including adoption.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE



Remit of teams

The Adoption Team based in Council Offices, Amersham is responsible for recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters and the provision of support to those adopters until the time of adoption.

The Adoption Team also receives family finding referrals in relation to children for whom adoption is the plan. The adoption social workers link with the relevant child care worker to help them provide the information and requisite paperwork for the Adoption Panel and ensuring that any work that needs to be undertaken with the child, in relation to adoption, is identified and completed.

The Adoption Team is also responsible for stepparent and relative adopters.

All enquiries about adopting a child from overseas, following advice being given in relation to domestic adoption, are referred to Parents and Children Together (www.pactcharity.org) who undertake this specialised area of work on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

The Adoption Support Team based in County Hall, Aylesbury is responsible for Post Adoption services, Schedule 2 counselling, intermediary services and the administration of contact arrangements. The team undertakes work with birth parents and birth families in relation to letterbox and direct contact, as well as access to adoption files.

All referrals in relation to the provision of an independent counselling service to birth parents whose children are being adopted are received by the Adoption Support Team and referred on to St Francis' Children's Society, a registered adoption agency who provide this service on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

Meetings structure

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service has a comprehensive meetings structure, which is designed to provide information for all staff working within the Adoption Service and ensure the effective management of the service.

The Manager of the Adoption Service is a member of the management team, and this team is committed to providing good outcomes for looked after children.

The Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption and the adoption team managers meet once a month to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from the operation of the service and plan service developments.

The Manager of the Adoption Service, Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption, Operations Manager for Review and Audit and the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel meet bi monthly to discuss issues of policy and practice arising across the adoption service.

The Adoption Manager, Adoption Panel Chair and the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel meet twice a year with both the Adoption Panel Medical Adviser, Legal Adviser and team managers of the children in care and care and protection teams to ensure and maintain consistent standards of practice across the Adoption Service.

The Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel meetings regularly with the Adoption Panel Administrator to ensure and maintain consistent standards of administration across the Adoption Service.

5 Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

The list of current staff (Appendix 3) and their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to Ofsted.

6 Services provided

The information contained in this section is under the headings suggested in the draft practice guidance to support the National Adoption Standards for England 2001 (Section F2). The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service aspires to the time scales set down by the National Adoption Standards.

**a. Effectively publicising adoption services, their accessibility, including information about services provided by other agencies
(NMS 2 and 3 apply)**

The Adoption Service has a dedicated number for recruitment, which is widely publicised throughout Buckinghamshire. Initial enquirers are given information over the telephone and sent a comprehensive information pack within five days.

The Recruitment Team Manager (Fostering and Adoption), in conjunction with the Adoption Team Manager takes the lead for the promotion of Adoption and Fostering Services. This person works closely with adoption service staff to ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is based on the needs of children being referred to the service. A monitoring system is in place to ensure that the number of children referred, their needs, for example, disabilities, placement with siblings, ethnicity, and so on, informs the recruitment strategy. Adoption information is also available on the Buckinghamshire Adoption Agency's dedicated website – www.buckscc.gov.uk. The adoption service information leaflets also include details of other useful adoption organisations.

**b. All aspects of the recruitment process, including effective arrangements to advise, assess, counsel and support those who become approved adopters and those who do not
(NMS 2 and 3 apply)**

Following an enquiry about adopting, the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service offers either an initial visit or an information meeting. Initial visits and information meetings are intended to provide an overall picture of adopting in Buckinghamshire and will include information about Buckinghamshire children currently needing adoptive homes. This also provides an opportunity to talk to experienced adoption workers and at the information meetings the opportunity to meet adoptive parents.

Prospective adopters will be informed that priority will be given to those who are able to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption, for example, currently older children, sibling groups, and therefore it may not be practical to assess everyone. If applicants are unable to attend an information meeting a face-to-face visit will be offered. People wishing to proceed following an information meeting will receive an initial visit from an adoption worker where their personal circumstances will be discussed.

If the enquiry proceeds, further information is obtained to enable all the checks and references to be undertaken. Checks and references will be requested from the following:

- Criminal Records Bureau;
- NSPCC;
- Health Visitor;
- Social Services Departments for other areas in which the applicants have lived;
- Employer or educational tutor if the applicants are still attending college;
- Self-employed applicants will need to obtain a reference from a contractor, supplier or customer;
- The Education Department and relevant schools will be contacted for a reference if the applicant has, or has had, children of school age;
- Overseas Residency – applicants will need to obtain a Certificate of Good Conduct from the Embassy or Consulate for the relevant country;
- Members of Armed Forces – applicants will need to give their service number and checks will be taken up through SSAFA;
- Where applicants have been previously married, or lived with another partner for two years, the absent partner will be contacted unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

If at any stage applicants or the adoption service consider that the application should not proceed, a full discussion will be offered to explore the circumstances

leading to this decision. Wherever possible the reasons for not proceeding will be shared with the applicants although in exceptional circumstances it may not be possible to disclose third party information. All decisions will be confirmed in writing.

Once satisfactory checks and references have been received applicants are invited to attend a preparation course to prepare them for the task of adopting. It is a requirement that first time prospective adoptive parents attend a preparation course to help them understand the difference between parenting an adopted child and parenting a birth child and the impact this is likely to have on the child, on themselves and their families.

Most applicants will proceed to a home study assessment following the preparation course. The aim is to complete the assessment within eight months of the formal application to proceed.

c. The assessment of prospective adopters using objective, thorough, fair and transparent criteria

(NMS 4 applies)

At the information meetings and initial visits issues around who can adopt and the qualities required of prospective adopters are openly discussed. Adopters will need to show they have the capacity:

- To learn from experience;
- To cope with stress;
- To meet the ethnic, cultural, health and educational needs of a child needing adoption;
- To offer consistency of care and opportunities for bonding and attachment;
- To work with children's services and other agencies to secure necessary services for the child;

- To build and sustain close/intimate and reciprocal relationships;
- To understand other people's point of view and their feelings – empathy;
- To be in touch with sad and angry feelings;
- To resolve past traumas or losses;
- To build secure attachments, to share difficulties and accept help.

During initial visits and information meetings, enquirers are informed about the wide range of people who may be able to adopt and any limitations that may arise in certain circumstances. The information given will cover the following:

- Families from all types of backgrounds;
- People without children;
- People with children;
- Single people;
- People from all ethnic backgrounds;
- People with disabilities;
- People who are not "perfect";
- People who have had problems in the past;
- People who rent their home;
- Overweight people and smokers;
- People whose infertility treatment has ended.

Further explanation is given to each of these bullet points, so, for instance, when discussing weight, smoking and age, this is qualified by explaining that adopters need to have the health and vigour to meet the many and varied demands of children throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

Further information is given about the qualities needed to adopt, which are:

- Ability to see the child as they are – not how you would like them to be;
- Acceptance, commitment, flexibility, stickability, sensitivity, openness;
- Ability to cope with a bit of a mess and disruption – not perfectionists;

- Ability to ask for and accept help;
- Sense of humour.

During the remainder of the assessment process, other criteria are explored in more depth with applicants, including the non-smacking policy, safe caring and the need for adopters to embrace Britain as a multi-cultural society and value diversity.

Applicants attend a preparation course, organised by the Adoption Team, which provides information about adoption. These courses also offer participants an opportunity to reflect upon the impact of adoption on themselves and their families.

After the preparation courses all applicants are assessed, and the information collated, using the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. Applicants are visited within their own home, and seen together, and separately, if there is more than one applicant. Applicants are invited to make their own written as well as verbal contributions to their assessment and are given the opportunity to read and comment on the completed PAR assessment. Work with the adopters' own children is also undertaken if appropriate. Other members of the household are also interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are seen at this stage. The assessing adoption social worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters. The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicants who will have ten working days to give their views to the agency. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the Adoption Panel when their application is being considered.

d. Inter-country adopters

(NMS 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 18 apply)

Applicants for inter-country adoption are advised to contact Parents and Children Together (PACT), 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading RG1 4QS, telephone

0118 938 7600, (www.pactcharity.org) who provide this service on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

Applicants for inter-country adoption are assessed in the same way as domestic adopters. A summary of the process for inter-country adoption is set out below.

- Applicants are referred to PACT for further information on the country they wish to adopt from;
- Enquirers are sent a detailed letter setting out the procedures and requirements for inter-country adoption, and details of charges and are invited to the office for an initial consultation;
- Enquirers are asked to state in writing that they accept the terms and conditions laid out in the letter and wish to proceed;
- Statutory checks are completed;
- Applicants are expected to attend a preparation course run by PACT;
- A Home Study Assessment is completed by a qualified and experienced social worker;
- Applicants attend the Adoption Panel with their assessing social worker;
- Applicants are charged for their assessment and Adoption Panel time;
- Once applicants are approved their approval, PAR, medical information etc is sent to the DCSF for endorsement;
- Once the prospective inter-country adopters are linked with a child they will need to visit the child's country of origin and inform the adoption agency they wish to proceed with the adoption; this will be confirmed with the DCSF;
- Inter-country adopters might have to return to the child's country of origin a second time to adopt the child;
- Once the child enters the UK the local authority where the adopters live must be notified within 14 days;
- Independent reviews and statutory visits will be made until the adoption order is granted;

- Inter-country adopters are entitled to receive the same post adoption service as domestic adopters.

e. Non-agency adoptions

- Enquirers approaching the service are sent written information about non-agency adoptions within five working days;
- Applicants are asked to confirm in writing that they have received the information and they wish to proceed;
- Applicants are asked to complete the form "Notification of Intent to apply for an Adoption Order";
- Applicants are asked to sign their agreement for statutory checks to be undertaken in line with agency adopters;
- A social worker is allocated and begins the home visits and other enquiries;
- The applicants submit their application to court;
- The social worker completes the Annex A report for court.

f. Birth parents – Support, information and counselling for birth parents

(NMS 7, 8 and 9 apply)

It needs to be acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that adoption represents the best outcome. The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service fully supports the principle in the National Adoption Standards that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services, which recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. The child's social worker and adoption social worker have discreet but complementary roles in providing services to birth families. The Adoption Service and the child care workers will endeavour to work with birth parents to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their children and ensure that birth parents' views about adoption and contact are fully recorded.

- a. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to explain the adoption process and gather the birth parents' views about the kind of family they would ideally like for their child; the birth parents will also be asked for their views about contact and whether they would like their child placed with siblings; the child's social worker will explain the importance for the child of having a full medical history of not only the birth parents but also the birth family; the Adoption Service will be responsible for providing the birth family with information about local and national support groups and helping them to fulfil agreed plans for contact;
- b. Birth parents are entitled to see what is written about them and presented to the Adoption Panel;
- c. All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information, and contribute, to their child's Life Story Book and later life letter;
- d. In addition birth parents are offered access to further independent counselling provided through St Francis' Children's Society;
- e. The Adoption Service will provide birth parents, via the childcare social worker, with an information leaflet explaining the adoption process;
- f. Following the making of an Adoption Order birth parents can access services through Buckinghamshire Post Adoption Service;
- g. The Adoption Service will seek the birth parents' views on the service they have received and will address any shortfalls where appropriate.

g. The Adoption Panel

(NMS 10, 11, 12 and 18 apply)

Buckinghamshire has one Adoption Panel chaired by an independent chair and attended by the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel. The Panel is constituted in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and follows the requirements of the National Minimum Standards (Standard 11.3). The Panel meets every three weeks and is supported by a dedicated Panel Administrator. The Adoption Panel

also monitors the progress of children every six weeks following a best interests decision, up until placement.

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service holds an annual Panel training day, which updates Panel members on changes in legislation, practice and research. In addition the Panel has a business meeting to review the previous year's work.

Whilst it is now a requirement that prospective adopters be invited to attend the Panel when their application is being considered, Buckinghamshire has followed this practice for many years and positively encourages applicants to attend. Prospective adopters are given a leaflet explaining the Panel process and are also asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting. Their comments are fed back to the Panel and the Agency Adviser retains a copy of all evaluation forms.

h. Preparation of prospective adopters for the placement of a child, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption

(NMS 5, 6 and 18 apply)

Prospective adopters have already received some preparation for the placement of children through attendance at the preparation courses and during their assessment (see above – sections b and c).

When prospective adopters are identified as meeting a particular child or children's needs the adoption worker and child's social worker will provide the prospective adopters with verbal and written information about the child. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed they will receive further detailed information and will be visited by the two social workers. All adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet with the medical adviser prior to the Adoption Panel, particularly where children have special needs. In all cases the leave of the court will be sought to disclose written information about a child and their background, to the Adoption

Panel and to prospective adopters. If following a period of reflection all parties wish to proceed, a matching report, which incorporates the Adoption Support Plan, is prepared for the Adoption Panel, which will recommend whether or not the match should proceed. As well as seeking the prospective adopters' views about the placement, children's views are sought where they are old enough to express a view.

In order to plan introductions and placement of a child, the Agency Adviser or Adoption Team Manager chairs a Placement Planning Meeting. Following placement the prospective adopters continue to receive visits from the adoption social worker, who supports the placement until the Adoption Order is made. Once placed the child is reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer who will continue to regularly review the placement up to the making of an Adoption Order. Buckinghamshire has a dedicated Adoption Support Team whose services are available to adoptive families after the granting of an Adoption Order and are also available to families post placement. Support can also be accessed through Adoption UK and other local and national organisations. This includes a Buddy Service putting new adopters in touch with more experienced adopters.

Buckinghamshire is also a member of a consortium comprising six local authorities and one voluntary agency, called the Adoption 7 Consortium. The aim of the consortium is to increase the choice of adoptive placements regionally by circulating details of children and approved adopters who have not been linked by their own agency. The consortium also strives to achieve consistent high practice standards across the region. Buckinghamshire also increases placement choice by using the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

i. Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption

(NMS 5, 6 and 9 apply)

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

Every child should have a Life Story Book, a later life letter and a written guide to adoption (Appendix 4). This work should be undertaken by the child's social worker with help and advice from the adoption worker. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history and help maintain their heritage. The later life letter includes information about the child's birth and early life, and provides up to date information about themselves and their situation.

The Adoption Team work with children's social workers and foster carers to prepare children for an adoptive placement.

Work is undertaken with children to ascertain their wishes and feelings about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with. Once a family has been identified, children are given appropriate information, depending on their age. The placement planning meeting co-ordinates an age appropriate introduction timetable. This is reviewed during introductions to assess progress and whether the time scale for the child's move needs to be adjusted in accordance with their needs.

Post placement the social worker continues to support the child in placement but where more in depth work is identified the child and prospective adopters can be referred to placement/adoption support services, for example, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the Post Adoption Centre. See section on Post Adoption Services below for more detail.

j. Clear criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, the arrangements for review and making these available to adopters

(NMS 6 applies)

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service will pay pre-placement costs (introductory expenses and settling in expenses) in certain circumstances and will also meet the cost of legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex.

At the point of matching, all children must have an Adoption Support Plan which sets out both the prospective adopters' and child's support needs, with any financial implications, and how the adoption service intends to meet these. The Adoption Support Plan must be agreed with the adoptive family before being presented to the Adoption Panel.

Where ongoing financial support is provided the Adoption Service will undertake an annual financial review.

The Adoption Service has a dedicated inter-agency budget when it is not possible to place a child with Buckinghamshire adopters.

k. The process for establishing, maintaining, monitoring and reviewing contact arrangements for each adopted child

(NMS 8 and 9 apply)

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of children and young people having suitable contact with their birth families and other significant people. Such contact is entirely governed by the best interests of the children. Contact can vary from the annual exchange of written information to face-to-face contact with members of the birth family at intervals appropriate for the child.

The Adoption Service operates a well-established letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for direct face-to-face contact.

The Adoption Service generally believes there are mutual benefits of at least one meeting between a child's birth parent and adoptive parents around the time of placement; other significant relatives may also be involved.

Contact plans are first considered at the Looked After Children reviews, and included in the care plan. Adoption Panels may advise on contact plans and whether an application should be made for a Placement Order. Further work to ensure that these plans are viable may take place at any time between the Adoption Panel (best interests), the Care Order, the Adoption Panel (matching) and the placement of the child with prospective adopters. Children's needs change over time and contact plans should evolve to reflect the child's changing circumstances and needs.

Post placement contact arrangements continue to be reviewed at each adoptive placement review. The service does not formally review contact arrangements after the order is made, but if issues arise these are addressed through the Buckinghamshire Post Adoption Service.

I. The review of disrupted placements, ascertaining the causes for the breakdown to aid future planning for the child

(NMS 6 applies)

Following a disruption the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service convenes a disruption meeting in order to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors that led to the breakdown of the placement. This helps in planning future placements. An experienced independent person chairs these meetings. A copy of the minutes of the disruption meeting and a summary of the conclusions of the meeting are

presented to the Placements Service management team meeting, the Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker in order that they can learn any lessons. The disruption rate for children placed by Buckinghamshire Adoption Service remains low and where appropriate, every effort is made to support adoptive placements.

m. Investigations into allegations that are made known to adoption service staff, adopters and children and young people

All child protection investigations involving children placed for adoption are in line with the procedures of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board.

n. The range of post adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption

(NMS 6, 9, 18, 25, 26 and 27 apply)

The named Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is Graham Smith, Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption.

The day-to-day duties of the ASSA are delegated to Jean Milsted, Team Manager of the Adoption Support Team, based in County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1YU, telephone number 01296 387956.

The Adoption Support Team provides an intermediary service to birth families and Schedule 2 counselling for adopted adults. The team also provides a range of direct services to adoptive families. The Post Adoption Service has commissioned and developed more specialist services from organisations such as Adoption UK and the Post Adoption centre.

Following the making of an Adoption Order, adoptive parents will be visited by their social worker from the Adoption Team to discuss the family's need for post adoption support and to ensure that they are aware of the various sources of

support available to them. If necessary the adoption social worker will arrange for a referral to be made to the Adoption Support Team, with the consent of the adopters.

The Adoption Support Team regularly produces a newsletter sent out to all known adopters in Buckinghamshire detailing events such as an Easter Egg Hunt, annual picnic for adopters, their families and adopted children.

Parenting Workshops are held regularly and adopters are encouraged to access these and help build on their skills.

The Adoption Support Team holds regular events for adopted adults wanting to find and make contact with their birth family.

A qualified and experienced play therapist within the team provides a service to adopted children and their families who are referred to him through the team manager.

Adoption UK co-ordinates local support groups for adopters. In addition local adoption teams organise support activities for adopters.

Buckinghamshire Adoption Service also runs, in conjunction with Adoption UK, a Buddy Scheme whereby adoptive parents are put in touch with others who have already adopted for support.

All known adopters in Buckinghamshire are sent regular information on support services available through the Adoption Support Team and Adoption UK.

o. An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service works to Buckinghamshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, which is available to all staff via the County Council's Intranet service.

The Adoption Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, providing the Adoption Service believes they can safely meet the needs of children into independence.

Every effort will be made to find a placement that meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

7 The system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by the Adoption Service are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard

(NMS 17 applies)

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service has developed a comprehensive system for monitoring service users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and where necessary is used to improve the service.

This monitoring includes:

Adoptive applicants

- Whether the initial information pack was received within five working days of enquiry, whether the information was helpful and suggestions for improvement;
- Feedback on the Information Meeting;
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses;
- Feedback on attending Adoption Panel;
- Feedback on written information at time of placement;
- Evaluation of service received following the making of an Adoption Order.

Birth parents

- Evaluation of the service received.
- Bi monthly meetings between the Named Manager (Divisional Manager Permanency and Placements), Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption, Operations Manager for Review and Audit and the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel.

Children

- Through the placement review, the views of children are also recorded in their adoption file at all stages.

Inter-country adopters, stepparents and Schedule 2 counselling

- Inter-country adoption – PACT operates a quality assurance system;
- Stepparent adoptions – evaluation of service following the making of an Adoption Order;

- Schedule 2 counselling – evaluation of service when applicants have received the information they require.

Monitoring of the Adoption Service

- Comprehensive Management Information System, which tracks the progress of children and adopters ensuring the service meets the time scales is produced for presentation and discussion at a monthly meeting, chaired by the Operations Manager for Children in Care.
- Bi annual meetings between the Adoption Manager, Agency Decision Maker, Adoption Panel Chair, Medical Adviser, Agency Adviser, Legal Adviser and team managers of the children in care and care and protection teams.

For the last six years the Service has produced a Service Plan, which reviews performance in the previous year and sets targets for the forthcoming year, having regard to any serious shortfalls in the service and the standards and time scales set out in legislation.

There are review systems in place for the following:

- Monitoring the progress of children prior to placement through six weekly updates to the Adoption Panel;
- All approved adopters are formally reviewed annually by adoption social workers and team manager;
- The independent adoption reviewing officer reviews the progress of all children placed for adoption;
- Staff within the Children in Care Team within Safeguarding supervise and monitor the placement;
- The Adoption Panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice, in conjunction with the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel.
- The Panel Adviser provides feedback to team managers where appropriate.

- Team managers are provided with a copy of the minutes of the case discussion in relation to cases for which they are responsible.

There is a well-established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff on the Buckinghamshire County Council's Intranet, and an ongoing performance review system for all members of the service.

The Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption and the Adoption Team manager meet once a month to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from the operation of the service.

The Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption and team managers are provided with a copy of the minutes of the Adoption Panel and written feedback from the Adoption Panel Chair and Agency Adviser including in relation to standards and time scales.

8 Storage, access and maintenance and security of adoption records

(NMS 25, 26 and 27 apply)

The Buckinghamshire Adoption Service acknowledges the need to ensure all records are maintained in accordance with the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption. The indexes to all adoption case records are kept for at least 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an Adoption Order being made, the related case papers are kept for 100 years from the date of the making of an Adoption Order. All other records are retained in line with the Buckinghamshire County Council Policy on Record Retention and Destruction. All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Support Team Manager who will maintain a log of all requests. All files are held in

lockable, secure storage. Where records are not held within premises owned and managed by Buckinghamshire County Council, Records Management ensure that the records are held under conditions that are fit for purpose.

9 A summary of the procedures available to service users and others if they are dissatisfied with the adoption agency

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories.

1. Any service user, or a person acting on behalf of a service user with their informed consent, can make a complaint about the service received from any of the adoption teams. The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance **"Getting the Best from Complaints"**. Where a person making a complaint does not qualify to access that procedure, the complaint will be dealt with in line with the Buckinghamshire County Council Hearing the Customer's View complaints procedure.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S COMPLAINTS PROCESS

1. The complaints and representations procedure in Buckinghamshire is described in the leaflet "Hearing the Customer's View", available for adults, or "Your Shout", available for children and young people.

Anyone who receives services has a right to complain if they think that something that should have been done has not been done or that something has been done badly or incorrectly. We welcome complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome

comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

Hearing the Customer's View Complaints Procedure:

Stage 1 – The first stage of the procedure is the informal, problem solving stage. Operations Managers, Team Managers or staff themselves, with their Team Manager's awareness, deal with complaints at this stage.

Stage 2 – If it is impossible to resolve the complaint at the first stage, then the complainant may ask for their complaint to move to the second stage. The request should be made to the Complaints Officer within 28 days of the final response to Stage 1. The Complaints Officer appoints an independent investigator to look into the concerns raised and following the report made, the Divisional Manager makes a response to the complainant within 28 days of their request.

Stage 3 – Following the conclusion of this stage, the complainant may take their complaint to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure. A Review Panel is set up to consider the independent investigator's report and any additional information provided by the complainant. This marks the end of the Social Services Complaints Procedure. Should the complainant remain dissatisfied, they may take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.

2. Where the decision maker is minded not to recommend the approval of adopters, they will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the Adoption Service or referred to the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is organised by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a Panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been informed that their Adoption Service does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive

parents (or has withdrawn their approval). More information on the IRM can be obtained from the IRM Contract Manager, Dolphin House, 54 Coventry Road, Birmingham B10 0RX, telephone 0121 766 8086, fax 0121 766 8557, email irm@baaf.org.uk.

10 The address and telephone number of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)

Head office functions operate from the following address:

Ofsted National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Telephone: 08456 404040
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11 The system for reviewing the Statement of purpose

The Statement of purpose will be reviewed in conjunction with the Adoption Service Plan.


The information contained in this Statement of purpose (and the annexes) can be made available in alternative formats:

Large print, Braille, audiotape or disk; we can also translate the information into other languages. Please contact the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service:

By telephone: 01296 395000

CLlr Lin Hazell, Portfolio holder

Trevor Boyd, Divisional Director, Safeguarding

Signed 



Date 20/05/08

20/05/08

Review date February 2009

Appendix 1

This appendix sets out the sections in the Statement of purpose, which correspond with the National Minimum Standards and the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Section 1 – Values, Principles, Aims and Objectives

Section 1 pertains to Adoption National Minimum Standards:

- **NMS1** – There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency, which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide

Section 2 – Named Manager

Section 3 – Qualifications and Experience of Named Manager

Section 4 – Organisation and Structure of the Adoption Service

Sections 2, 3 and 4 pertain to Every Child Matters, Staying Safe:

- **NMS 13** – The Adoption Agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the Adoption Panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child;
- **NMS 14** – The people involved in carrying on and managing the Adoption Agency:
 - Possess the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and adoption law and practice;
 - Have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively; and
 - Ensure it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

- **NMS 15** – Any person carrying on or managing the Adoption Agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children;
- **NMS 16** – The Adoption Agency is managed effectively and efficiently;
- **NMS 17** – There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the Adoption Agency and ensuring quality performance;
- **NMS 19** – Anyone working in or for the Adoption Agency is suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare;
- **NMS 20** – Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service;
- **NMS 21** – There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the Adoption Agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service;
- **NMS 22** – The Adoption Agency is a fair and competent employer, with good employment practices and good support for its staff;
- **NMS 23** – There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Section 5 – Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

“Staying Safe” also covers section 5 and Appendix 2, List of Staff and their qualifications and National Minimum Standards set out above.

Section 6 – Services provided

This section on the services provided by the Adoption Service covers every outcome of Every Child Matters (as set out on pages 1 and 2) and the following National Minimum Standards.

- **NMS 2** – The Adoption Agency has a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally;
- **NMS 3** – Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear

written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process;

- **NMS 4** – Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process;
- **NMS 5** – Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this that they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales;
- **NMS 6** – Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them;
- **NMS 7** – The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption;
- **NMS 8** – Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage;
- **NMS 9** – The Adoption Agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption; this includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact;
- **NMS 10** – Adoption Panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented;
- **NMS 11** – The Adoption Agency shall ensure that the Adoption Panel is properly constituted, that Panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a Panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up-to-date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice; where the Adoption Agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the Adoption Panel understands the implications of a child being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country;
- **NMS 12** – Adoption Panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid any delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children with adopters;

- **NMS 18** – The Adoption Agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Section 7 – The system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by the Adoption Service are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.

This section corresponds to NMS 17 (see under section 2, 3 and 4 above).

Section 8 – Storage, Access, Maintenance and Security of Adoption Records

Section 9 – A summary of the complaints procedure established in accordance with section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989 (a) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990 (b).

These sections do not directly correspond to any of the Every Child Matters outcomes, but do relate to the following National Minimum Standards.

- **NMS 25** – The Adoption Agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopters with whom the Adoption Agency has worked;
- **NMS 26** – The Adoption Agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child;
- **NMS 27** – There is a written policy on case recording, which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Section 10 – The address and telephone number of the Care Standards Commission

Section 11 – The system for reviewing the Statement of purpose