



Statement of purpose

Buckinghamshire Adoption Service

Revised July 2011

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 and 2 of the The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and outlined in Adoption National Minimum Standards (Standard 18). The Statement of purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated as required by the National Minimum Standards. This document has been informed by:

- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Every Child Matters 2003
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 – amended 2011
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) 2011
- Related Regulations, Local Authority Circulars and Practice Guidance

The Adoption Service actively promotes the Every Child Matters five outcomes:

- **Be Healthy**
- **Stay safe**
- **Enjoy and achieve**
- **Make a positive contribution**
- **Achieve economic wellbeing**

Contents

Section	Page
1 Values, aims and objectives	4
2 Named manager	6
3 Qualifications and experience of named manager and decision maker	7
4 Management structure of the Adoption Service.....	8
5 Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff	11
6 Services provided	12
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	28
8 Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records	30
9 A summary of the procedures	31
10 The address and telephone number of OFSTED	33
11 List of National Minimum Standards.....	34
12 Children's Guide requirement outline	35
13 The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose.....	37
14 Other relevant documents.....	38
• Buckinghamshire Children and Young People Plan	
• List of current staff and relevant qualifications	
• Adoption Business Plan	

1 Values, aims and objectives

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. We will work with the Court to ensure they have all the information necessary to inform decisions about adoption within reasonable timescales
 - Child will be matched within 6 months of agency agreeing child should be placed for adoption
 - In care proceedings, panel should approve a match within 6 months of the court decision
 - Relinquished baby to be matched at panel within 3 months of the agency agreeing child should be placed for adoption
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made. We will ensure a balanced consideration of all factors when planning adoption and not introduce unnecessary delay by inflexibility
- 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, which puts the people of Buckinghamshire at the heart of its services.

The **aims** of the Buckinghamshire Adoption Service are to provide a responsive and dynamic service:

1. To provide a high quality adoption service for all residents of Buckinghamshire
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 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
4. To provide information on the process of adoption for applicants wishing to adopt a child into their family from overseas
5. To recruit, assess and provide suitable families, within the time scales laid down by the National Adoption Standards that meet the diverse needs of children referred to the adoption service
6. To provide a suitable and well matched adoptive placement for every child with a plan for adoption
7. 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
8. To provide information and support to those people wishing to obtain information about, and from, their birth records
9. To provide a range of services for adopted adults as well as birth relatives of those placed for adoption

10. 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
11. To provide support and guidance to Special Guardians, once an order has been granted
12. To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed for adoption or with Special Guardians
13. To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by the Adoption Service
14. To provide opportunities for adoption workers to increase their knowledge in new research and developments
15. To ensure that at all times, the Adoption Service complies with relevant legislation, regulations and guidance

2 Named manager

The responsible manager is Neil Wood, Operations Manager Adoption and Fostering, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1UZ, telephone number 01296 387630.

In the event that the Operations Manager Adoption and Fostering is absent, Diana Large, Divisional Manager Permanency and Placements, will respond.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser is Neil Wood, Operations Manager Fostering and Adoption. This role may be occasionally delegated to Lesley Newth-West, Team Manager Adoption Support.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is Heather Clarke, Divisional Manager Prevention Assessment and Protection, County Hall, Walton Street, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 1UZ, telephone number 01296 382158. In her absence Diana Large, Divisional Manager Permanency and Placements, will deputise.

3 Qualifications and experience of named manager and decision maker

Neil Wood, named manager

Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

Diploma Social Studies

Certificate in Management Studies

Diploma in Management Studies

Began a social work career in 1977 and since then has held a number of positions, initially in residential childcare and latterly for 21 years as a Fostering and Adoption practitioner and manager, in a North-West London borough. Since 2008 Neil has been a manager within Buckinghamshire Family Placement Service; since August 2009, as Operations Manager Adoption and Fostering. This experience includes all aspects of adoption work.

Heather Clarke, agency decision maker

Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

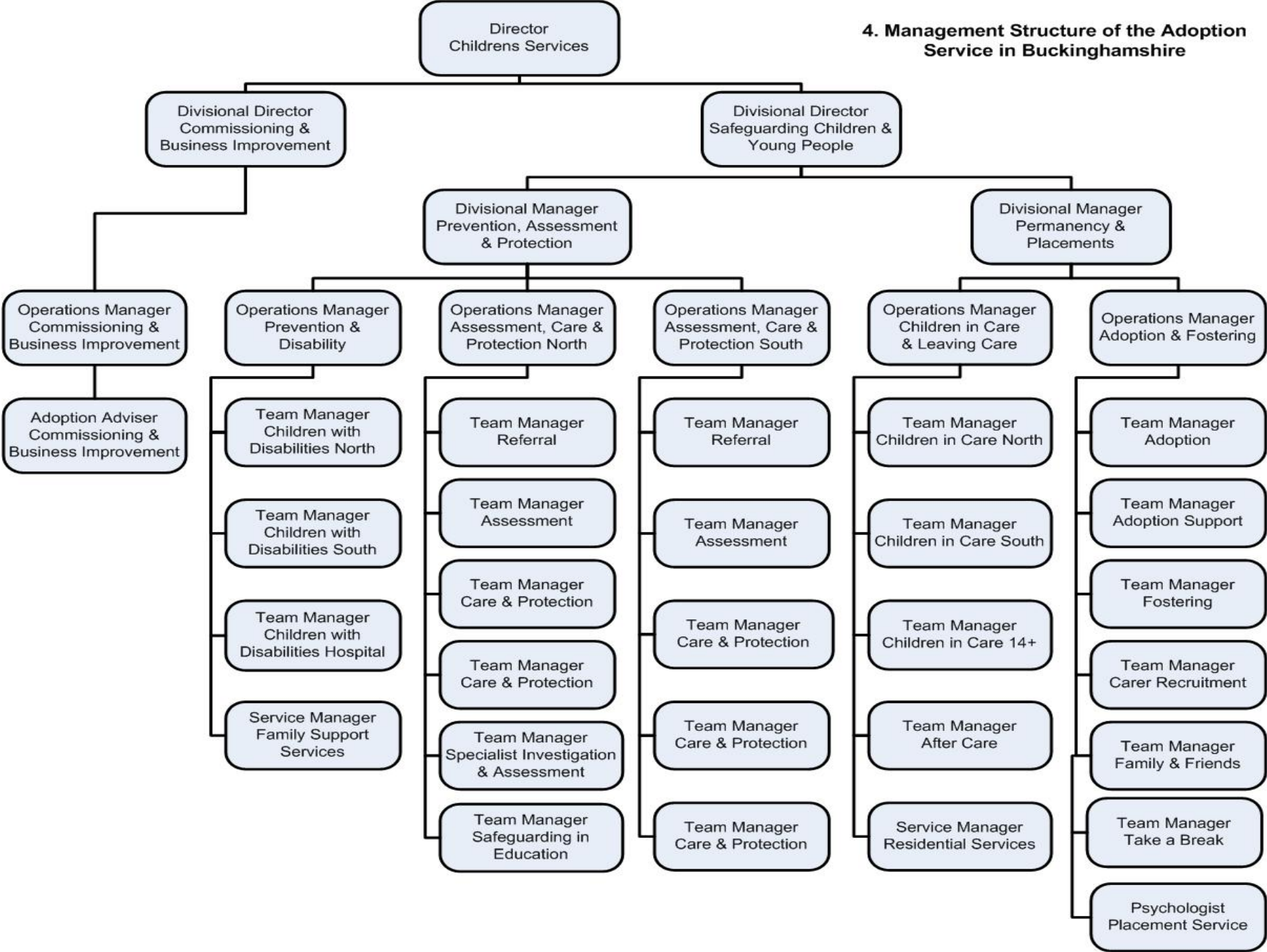
Diploma in Applied Social Studies

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.

4. Management Structure of the Adoption Service in Buckinghamshire



Remit of teams

The Adoption Team based in Council Offices Amersham: 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 also provide initial support and advice to stepparent and relative adopters. If they choose to proceed, those assessments are referred to St Francis's Children's Society www.sfcs.org.uk who complete these on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

All enquiries about adopting a child from overseas (following advice being given in relation to domestic adoption as an option) 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 are also based in Council Offices Amersham: Responsible for Adoption Support 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. In 2010, they also acquired the role of supporting Special Guardians with respect to Support Plans and contact.

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 Adoption Team Manager and the Adoption Support Team Manager meet monthly with their peers in the Fostering Service, together with their Operations Manager, Adoption and Fostering. This has practice and development, collaboration, peer support and group supervision functions.

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, Placements 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 Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements; Operations Manager Adoption and Fostering; Operations Manager for Quality Assurance and Information Management and the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel meet quarterly 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 the Adoption Panel Medical Adviser, Legal Adviser and team managers of the children in care teams to ensure and maintain consistent standards of practice across the Adoption Service.

The Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel meets 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

(fte = Full time equivalent)

The Adoption Team is made up of:

fte

- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Assistant Team Manager
- 5.8 Social Workers
- 0.5 Social Work Assistant

And is supported by:

fte

- 1 Service Administrator (Adoption Support team shared post)
- 2 Administrative Support Staff

The Adoption Support Team is made up of:

fte

- 1 Team Manager
- 3.1 Social Workers
- 0.59 Play Therapist
- 0.5 Social Work Assistant

And is supported by:

fte

- 1 Administrative Support Staff

All Social workers and managers are qualified and the complete list of current staff with their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to OFSTED as required.

6 Services provided

a. Effectively publicising adoption services, their accessibility, including information about services provided by other agencies

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 Fostering Recruitment Team has a Marketing Co-ordinator, who provides some cross team support in conjunction with the Adoption Team Managers, towards promotion of Adoption Services, including Adoption Support. 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. The Adoption and Adoption Support service information leaflets include details of other relevant organisations. Adoption information is also available on the Buckinghamshire Adoption Agency's dedicated website – www.bucksc.gov.uk.

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

Following an enquiry about adoption, 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, older children, sibling groups, and therefore it may not be practical to offer assessment to 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 and an application is received, further information is obtained to enable all the checks and references to be undertaken in a timely fashion. Checks and references will be requested from the following:

- Criminal Records Bureau
- Full medical for each applicant
- NSPCC
- Health Visitor
- Social Services Departments for other areas in which the applicants have lived
- Personal references
- 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.

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 continue with a home study assessment following the preparation course. The aim is to complete the assessment within eight months of the formal application.

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

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 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:

- Families from all types of backgrounds
- People without children
- People with children
- Single people (male or female)
- People from all ethnic backgrounds
- Same sex couples
- 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. The serious effects of passive smoking are well documented and therefore we would not place children under the age of five, or who have relevant health issues in households where there are smokers.

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 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

Applicants for inter-country adoption are advised to contact Parents and Children Together (PACT) who provide this service on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

Parents and Children Together, 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading RG1 4QS.
Telephone 0118 938 7600 www.pactcharity.org

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, assessment report, medical information and other relevant documents are sent to the DfE 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 DfE
- 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

Other than inter-country adopters (for whom, see (d) above) non-agency adopters are referred on to St Francis's Children's Society (SFCS) who are commissioned to carry out these reports and attend court, on behalf of Buckinghamshire.

St Francis's Children's Society, Collis House, 48, Newport Road, Woolstone, Milton Keynes, MK15 0AA. Telephone 01908 572700 www.sfcs.org.uk

- Enquirers approaching the service are sent written information about non-agency adoptions within five working days, as well as advice about the report process, which is referred on to SFCS
- Applicants are asked to confirm in writing that they have received the information and they wish to proceed
- Applicants are asked to formally notify Buckinghamshire of their intent to adopt
- Applicants are asked to sign their agreement for statutory checks to be undertaken in line with agency adopters; these are processed by Buckinghamshire then results forwarded to SFCS
- Case referred to SFCS
- The applicants submit their application to court
- The SFCS social worker completes the Annex A report for court
- SFCS return final report for Adoption Team Manager and Buckinghamshire Legal department to check and file
- SFCS inform Buckinghamshire Adoption Team Manager of outcome

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

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 in some circumstances. 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 (see contact details at (e) above
- 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 Adoption Support 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

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 – amended 2011 and follows the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 17). 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

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 all parties wish to proceed, a matching report (which incorporates the Adoption Support Plan) is prepared for a Matching Meeting. This is chaired by an Operations Manager who checks the paperwork and process of the proposed match. The match is then presented to the Adoption Panel, that 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 an Adoption Support Team who provide a range of advice and

services which are available to adoptive families after placement. Support can also be accessed through Adoption UK and other local and national organisations.

Buckinghamshire is also a member of a consortium with four neighbouring local authorities and one voluntary agency, called the Adoption 6 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

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 (as described in 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 Adoption Support 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

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 reasonable 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. This ensures that matches for children are not unduly delayed by limiting matches to locally recruited adopters.

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

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 Adoption Support Service.

From 2010, the Adoption Support team took on responsibility for supported contact in Special Guardianship cases. This is developing on similar lines to the existing provision for supported contact for adoptive families.

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

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 childcare manager chairs these meetings. A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are presented to the Placements Service management team meeting and the relevant Adoption Panel 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 adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption

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 Adoption Support Team has spot purchased some specialist services from organisations such as Adoption UK and the Post Adoption centre. Birth parent groups and individual counselling for birth relatives has been commissioned from St Francis's Children's Society.

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 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 social events such as an Easter Egg Hunt, annual picnic for adopters, their families and adopted children. All known adopters in Buckinghamshire are sent regular information on support services available through the Adoption Support Team and Adoption UK.

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

The Adoption Support Team hold regular surgeries to offer office interviews for more detailed advice and consultation and to facilitate assessment of need where appropriate. Additionally, they provide a telephone advice line for Adopters and Special Guardians.

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

This team also facilitate groups for young adult adoptees and adolescent adoptees.

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.

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

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
- Feedback through exit questionnaire (eg birth parent support group etc)

Children

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

Inter-country adoptions, Notified adoptions and Schedule 2 counselling

- Inter-country adoption – PACT operates a quality assurance system as part of contract with Buckinghamshire
- Notified 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

For the last nine 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

There is a recently reviewed and updated reflective 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, Adoption and Fostering and the Adoption Team Manager meet once a month to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from the operation of the service.

8 Storage, access and maintenance and security of adoption records

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

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 not possible 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 may appoint 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 stage 2, the complainant may request their unresolved complaint is taken 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. Conclusions and recommendations from this panel mark 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:

IRM Contract Manager, Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley,
Leeds LS12 6AJ. Telephone 0845 450 3956 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

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11 Adoption National Minimum Standards - 2011

- Standard 1 The child's wishes and feelings
- Standard 2 Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity
- Standard 3 Promoting positive behaviour and relationships
- Standard 4 Safeguarding children
- Standard 5 Promoting good health and wellbeing
- Standard 6 Leisure activities
- Standard 7 Promoting educational attainment
- Standard 8 Contact
- Standard 9 Providing a suitable physical environment for the child
- Standard 10 Recruiting and assessing prospective adopters
- Standard 11 Intercountry - assessing prospective adopters
- Standard 12 Birth parents and birth families involved in the adoption plan
- Standard 13 Matching and placing the child with prospective adopters who can meet most of their assessed needs
- Standard 14 Intercountry - matching prospective adopters to child's assessed needs
- Standard 15 Adoption support
- Standard 16 Intermediary services
- Standard 17 Adoption panels and agency's decision-maker
- Standard 18 Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides
- Standard 19 Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency or an adoption support agency
- Standard 20 Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity
- Standard 21 Suitability to work with children and service users
- Standard 22 Handling allegations and suspicions of harm
- Standard 23 Learning, development and qualifications
- Standard 24 Staff support and supervision
- Standard 25 Managing effectively and efficiently, and monitoring the adoption agency or adoption support agency
- Standard 26 Individuals who are registered providers of adoption support agencies
- Standard 27 Records
- Standard 28 Fitness of premises for use as an adoption agency or adoption support agency
- Standard 29 Notification of significant events

12 Childrens Guide requirement outline

Regulations require that each local authority shall produce a written guide to the adoption service (the children's guide) that shall contain:

- A summary of the Statement of Purpose
- A summary of the procedures where adoption is identified as the appropriate plan for a child (this should include the likely timescales for each stage of the process)
- Information about the counselling available
- A summary of the authority's complaints procedures
- Details of how a child may have access to the services of an advocate who is independent of the authority to assist him/her in bringing a complaint under the complaints procedures
- The address and telephone number of OFSTED
- The name, address and telephone number of the Children's Rights Director

The Adoption National Minimum Standards state that the Children's Guide to adoption must be suitable for all children (of an appropriate age and understanding) for whom adoption is the plan and given to each child as soon as that decision has been taken. It should include a summary of what happens at each stage (including at Court) and how long each stage is likely to take. If necessary the Guide should be produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.

Using the Children's Guide

Each local authority should have available to staff, a Children's Guide, the contents of which is reviewed/updated on a regular basis.

The authority should provide a copy of the Children's Guide to:

- OFSTED
- Every prospective adopter with whom the authority has placed a child for adoption
- Every child (subject to his age and understanding) who may be, or has been placed for adoption by the authority

Compiling the Children's Guide

In compiling the Guide the contents and language used should be appropriate to the age of the child. Buckinghamshire provides a Children's Guide which should be given to all children being placed for adoption, the contents of the Guide should be read through by the social worker with the child and should not just be given to the child. It should where appropriate be supplemented by other 'child friendly' leaflets, such as:

- Adoption, what it is and what it means (BAAF)
- Talking about adoption – for children under 10 (BAAF)
- What happens in court? (BAAF)
- Children's leaflet from Complaints and Commendations Service (including details of how to make a complaint)
- Children's Rights Service (including details of how to seek an advocate)
<https://www.rights4me.org/>

Buckinghamshire's Childrens Guides to Adoption:

Children's Guide to Adoption and other child focussed information about adoption can be accessed from our website:

http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/sites/bcc/children_social_care/adoption/adoption.page

13 The system for reviewing the Statement of purpose

The Statement of purpose will be reviewed in conjunction with the Adoption Business Plan as well as the Children and Young People Service Plan.

The information contained in this Statement of purpose (and the linked documents) 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

By email: adoption@buckscc.gov.uk

Signed

Date

Valerie A Letheren, Cabinet Member, Children's Services

Signed

Date

Sue Imbriano, Strategic Director, Children and Young People

Next Review date July 2012

14 Other relevant documents

- [Buckinghamshire Children and Young People Plan](http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/partnership/CYPT/Children_and_Young_Peoples_Plan.page)
(http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/partnership/CYPT/Children_and_Young_Peoples_Plan.page)
- List of current staff and relevant qualifications (*available on request*).
- Adoption Business Plan (*available on request*).