

COVENTRY CITY ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

March 2015
(updated)

Coventry Adoption Statement of Purpose

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Pursuant to the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, as amended by the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005 every adoption agency has to produce a Statement of Purpose and is required to review the Statement of Purpose.
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose of the Agency is formally approved by the Cabinet Member responsible for the People Directorate and is available on the Coventry City Council Website to anyone seeking a copy.

2. The Statement of Purpose covers the following matters

- 2.1 The aims, values and principles of Coventry Adoption Services
- 2.2 The functions of the Adoption Services, including the service users, and activities of the agency
- 2.3 The name, qualification and experience of the manager of the service
- 2.4 Information about the organisation and staffing of the service
- 2.5 Systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the services provided
- 2.6 Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.
- 2.7 Information about the complaints procedure
- 2.8 The address and telephone number of Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner

3. The Aim of Coventry's Adoption Services

- 3.1 To provide a comprehensive adoption and post-adoption service, including the provision of Adoption Support Services to all parties affected by the adoption process consistent with best practice and national standards and requirements.
- 3.2 To provide services which are appropriate and tailored to the particular needs of service users and people affected by adoption, in particular potential service users are welcomed without prejudice and given clear information on the services provided by the agency.
- 3.3 Consistent with Coventry City Council's duty towards children who are Looked After, where adoption is the plan, to ensure that they are placed with families who can offer them safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood. In particular, the Adoption Service seeks to safeguard and promote the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services

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3.4 To find adoptive homes for all children looked after in Coventry who require a permanent family through adoption.

3.5 Where children cannot be placed within the agency's own resources the Service will seek to make arrangements with other Adoption Agencies to secure placements for children.

4. Values of the Adoption Service

4.1 The Service;

- Believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond
- Affirms that where possible it is best that children are brought up by their own birth family
- Ensures the child's welfare, safety and needs are the paramount considerations and at the centre of the adoption process
- Considers the child's wishes and feelings and takes them into account at all stages.
- Seeks to avoid delays in adoption to minimise impact on the health and development of children
- Responds promptly to the requests of and work with people affected by adoption, being respectful of their ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexuality, gender and disability, and their experience and understanding of adoption.
- Takes account of and values children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language when decisions are made
- Aims to ensure the particular needs of disabled children are fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- Values and respects the role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family.
- Understands that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals.
- Works with others to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption
- Where the service provision involves an adopted adult and their birth relatives it is the wishes and feelings of the adopted adult that take precedence.
- Works in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered and that the needs of service users are met effectively

5. Principles of the Adoption Service

5.1 The principles on which the service is based include;

- Respect for the confidentiality of all those involved.
- Children's needs are placed first in all decision-making and actions.
- Services will not discriminate against groups or individuals.
- Services will be delivered effectively, efficiently and with the avoidance of delay.
- There is a commitment to monitor and review services.

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- There is a commitment to involve users in the ongoing review and development of the service. The service consults service users on decisions in relation to their service provision, seeking and welcoming feedback, using this feedback in its management and development of the service.
- The Agency, as a function of Coventry City Council, has written policies and procedures in place for working with service users with physical, sensory and learning impairments and for whom English is not the first language. There is a commitment to ensure that communications take due account of physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of children, birth parents/guardians, prospective/adoptive parents and staff.
- Arrangements are made through appropriate interpreters for those who are unable to understand a document to have it read, translated or explained to them.

6. Who Receives Adoption Services

6.1 Adoption Services are provided to;

- Children who are to be adopted.
- Birth parents or guardians.
- Prospective and approved adopters and adoptive siblings including advice to those who are seeking to adopt from overseas.
- Children and their adoptive parents who require Adoption Support Services.
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families.
- Step-parents wishing to adopt.
- Private adoption applicants.

7. Overview of the Work of the Adoption Service

- To provide a child/children/young person with a permanent family by adoption, which will meet the child's need for stability, security, love and a resource into their adulthood and beyond
- Recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a range of prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of Coventry children.
- Assistance to locality social workers in counselling pregnant women who wish to place their baby for adoption.
- Making available counselling and support either within the service or by external referral for all birth families with an adoption plan for their children.
- Ensuring children are supported throughout the adoption process, appropriately engaged, involved, prepared and offered counselling commensurate with their age and understanding.
- Schedule 2 counselling for adopted adults and advice regarding Intermediary Services.
- Assessment, preparation, training and support for people who wish to adopt a child from abroad whether in-house or via referral to other agencies.

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- Providing advice and consultation to locality workers working with a child and family where adoption is the plan.
- Preparing reports for Adoption Panel and courts on aspects of adoption work.
- Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels and courts regarding aspects of adoption work.
- Preparing reports and attending other Local Authority Adoption Panels where a match has been recommended for a Coventry approved family.
- Offering of an Adoption Support Service after placement and after an order has been made in accordance with Adoption Support Regulations 2005.
- Participation in the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium including the exchange of approved applicants to facilitate the placement of children.
- Joint working and partnership arrangements with other local authorities/agencies to maximise the aims of Coventry Adoption Service.

8. The Name, Qualifications and Experience of the Manager

8.1 Responsible Manager of the Adoption service:

Elizabeth Gosling
Integrated Service Manager Family Placements
People Directorate
Adoption Service
Civic Centre 1
Earl Street
Coventry
CV1 5RS
Tel no: 02476 831873 Fax 02476 294660

8.2 Professional qualifications: Bachelor of Applied Science (Social Work) -
Curtin University
Masters of Science (Child Welfare) – Bristol University

8.3 Experience: Qualified as a social worker in 1979, have experience in both non statutory as a residential social worker and the statutory sector specializing in working with children looked after or on the edge of care and securing permanency by way of adoption. This includes 15 years' experience at Service Manager, Head of Service.

8.4 Responsible Manager from 6th October 2014

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9. Structure of the Adoption Service

9.1 Looked After Service Teams are responsible for the arrangements for children and undertake all case management including discussion with birth family members where adoption is the plan for the child. Independent counselling and support of birth parents is available in line with the Adoption Regulations. Children's Case management is initiated within the Neighbourhood Teams with the practice of joint working with the 'Looked After' Service to progress adoption plans once rehabilitation is ruled out.

9.2 The Adoption Service has 3 teams, Assessment, Support and Permanence/Family Finding who work as an integrated service within the Family Placements Service. The Assessment Team is responsible for recruiting foster carers and adopters. This team works with adoption enquirers to determine initial eligibility, delivers preparation training, and helps those who confirm their interest in adoption to complete their application undertaking pre approval assessment and training and booking Panel. The Support Team provides the ongoing support of adopters and foster carers. They make arrangements for adoptive placements and support new families through to adoption. The Permanence/Family Finding Team holds case responsibility for children with Placement Orders and undertakes family-finding for these children. This team also has responsibility for producing Life Story Books and Later in Life letters for children who are placed for adoption as well as making referrals for birth parent counseling.

9.3 Currently the Teams are each led by 2 Team Managers responsible to the named Manager of the Adoption Service who has overall responsibility. Managers are responsible for supervising the work of the teams' social workers, all of whom are qualified. The majority of social workers are Senior Caseworkers who satisfy the requirements within the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 (which includes 3 years post qualification experience in child care social work, including direct experience of adoption work). Staff who have not yet achieved that level of qualification are supervised by a staff member who has met the requirement. The service is augmented by 3 Children & Family Support Workers.

9.4 The staff involved in the service have a wide range of experience of working in the field of child-care and family placement, including international experience. Staff are representative of the diverse backgrounds in Coventry, including White British, African Caribbean and Asian heritage.

10. Staffing of the Adoption Service

10.1 The Adoption Service consists of the following staff

The Head of Service LAC

The Responsible Manager who is the Integrated Service Manager, Family Placements Service

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The Assessment Team
(Who also cover Fostering) consists of:

2 FTE Team Managers
2 FTE Senior Practitioners
13 FTE Social Worker posts
.6 FTE Children and Families
Support Worker

Support Team
(Who also cover Fostering) consists of:

2 FTE Team Managers
2 FTE Senior Practitioner
posts
8 FTE Social Worker posts
1.5 Child and Family Support
Workers
1 part time Birth Records Social Worker

Permanence and
Family Finding Team
consists of:

2 FTE Team Managers
1 FTE Senior Practitioner
14 FTE Social Worker posts
1 FTE Child and Family Support Worker

Access to part of Joint Business Support Hub:

Agency Advisor – Gail Helfet who is responsible for providing Professional Advice to the Adoption Panel and Agency Adoption Support Services Advice. Gail has over 30 years experience in the field of adoption and holds a BA Soc.Sci (social work) and CQSW qualification. Gail has undertaken specialist training in Adoption and Attachment with family Futures

11. Monitoring Arrangements to ensure effectiveness and quality

11.1 Arrangements are in place to ensure that the service provided by the Adoption Service is effective and that the quality of the service is of an appropriate standard. These include the following;

- The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report are considered by the Cabinet Member for Social Care each year and are subject to Cabinet Scrutiny
- A summary of progress against adoption targets is contained within the quarterly report of the Directorate and considered by Cabinet each quarter

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- Managers provide monthly performance information in respect of their team
- Adoption Service targets are reported on within the Quality Improvement Framework for the Directorate
- All staff have regular supervision provided within the framework of a supervision agreement
- There is an annual performance appraisal system in place
- Information about children and prospective adoptive families is recorded on LCS, Liquid-Logic Childrens System – commonly known as Protocol and the Teams' LAC tracking system.
- An annual report covering the activity and performance of the Adoption Service is presented each year to Senior Managers and Elected Members.
- Prospective adopters are interviewed at the end of the preparation groups to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the training and provide information for the home study assessment
- Prospective adoptive parents are invited to give written feedback after the training sessions to enable the trainers to evaluate the effectiveness of the course
- Prospective and approved adopters are asked for written feedback at all stages of service provision
- Managers from the Placement Service meet with relevant managers in the Neighbourhood and Looked After Service to progress children's plans for adoption
- A fortnightly review meeting is held following every Adoption Panel to track the progress of approved adopters, children waiting adoption, proposed matches and children linked with new adopters. The database is updated regularly and a copy is made available to relevant staff including the Service Manager for monitoring purposes. Prospective adopters who do not have placements are identified through this process and made available where appropriate to other agencies seeking adoptive parents
- The policy and procedures of the Adoption Agency are in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures, "Working together to Safeguard children" and "What to do if you're worried a child is being abused". These procedures include a written child protection policy that includes the management and reporting of child protection issues. All staff and service users have access to the agencies child protection policy, upon request
- Service Level Agreements with other Agencies are reviewed at a minimum annually

12. Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting adopters.

Recruitment and Preparation to Adopt

12.1 The main consideration of the Adoption Service is to provide adoptive families for children that will allow them to grow up in a secure and positive environment and reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.

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- 12.2 The needs of children requiring adoptive placements are complex and diverse. In order to meet these needs the Adoption Service will work flexibly and be willing to consider options that offer the potential to provide a suitable adoptive home for a child.
- 12.3 The Adoption Service accepts applications to become adopters from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion. Accordingly promotional material for recruitment states clearly 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.
- 12.4 The agency does not discriminate against people on the grounds of weight, smoking, health or other lifestyle issues but adopts a common sense approach that considers the specific needs of children and applicants likely ability to meet those needs through a child's developing years. All prospective applicants have a medical and on occasion medical opinion may advise applicant's they are not fit to proceed.
- 12.5 The agency has a system in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive parents, publishes the priority statement with its information pack and reviews it regularly in the light of changing patterns of need. Where those enquiring are unlikely to meet the needs of local children needing adoption they are referred to other agencies.
- 12.6 A copy of the written eligibility criteria, information on becoming an adoptive parent and what is expected of adopters is provided on request.
- 12.7 Information is given about children who need families locally at the initial visit and there are preparation groups and information provided to help prospective adopters decide whether to proceed further.
- 12.8 Those wishing to adopt from another country are referred to PACT - an independent adoption agency who have specialised in international adoption.
- 12.9 The Adoption Service continually seeks to improve its service and actively seeks user experience feedback from enquirers at different stages through the recruitment, preparation and assessment process.
- 12.10 The Adoption Service will provide training, preparation and support to its adopters. Applicants are given information about the preparation and support services available to adopters, and given the opportunity to talk to others who have adopted children.

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- 12.11 Enquirers are sent an Adoption Information Pack within 5 days of their enquiry, giving comprehensive information on the adoption process, criteria for preparation, acceptance, prioritisation, and information on the range of children seeking adoption placements. Enquirers are invited to confirm their interest in adoption by returning a form to the Recruitment Team who will then undertake a local authority check. Those who fail to reply are followed up by letter.
- 12.12 Home Visits are made to all who confirm their interest to give enquirers additional information and to offer preliminary advice as to the eligibility of applicants to adopt. Enquirers who seem likely to be able to offer an adoption placement are invited to submit an application form and attend training. When this is received Agency checks and references are taken up.
- 12.13 Pre Adoption Training Courses are held 6 times per year, ensuring that potential applicants do not have to wait too long for a place on the course. The course is designed to offer applicants an opportunity to explore adoption and its implications in a non-threatening way and to decide whether or not adoption is for them from an informed perspective.
- 12.14 Adoption Training Courses include the experience of adopters as well as inputs from a range of professionals. Potential applicants are invited to reflect on their own learning and a brief interview is held at the end of the course to summarise the key learning points.

Assessment and Approval

- 12.15 Assessments are completed using the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their development needs. Assessors seek evidence throughout the assessment process to focus on the issues they are likely to encounter and identify the competencies and strengths they have or will need to develop.
- 12.16 Where the prospective adopters are already foster carers of the child they wish to adopt, they are invited to participate in the same preparation groups as other prospective adopters or are provided with alternative training.
- 12.17 Status, health and enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about prospective adopters. Enhanced CRB checks are undertaken on members of their household aged 18 or over and an explanation is given to prospective adopters as to why the checks are undertaken.

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- 12.18 In addition, where applicants have worked with children or are employed in the caring professions references are taken up from those employers. A current employer reference is required for all applicants. Where applicants have been in a previous relationship where children have been born efforts are made to contact the previous partner, except where this is contra-indicated on safety grounds, to establish their view of the applicant.
- 12.19 Birth children of the applicants are also contacted where practical to establish their view of the applicants desire to extend their family through adoption. The assessor interviews at least two personal referees and one family member. Written accounts of the referee's views of the applicant are obtained and presented to Adoption Panel. The agency has a checklist of issues to be addressed by assessors interviewing referees.
- 12.20 Following completion of the Adopter's Report, including a brief account of training and preparation undertaken, reports of referee visits (confidential unless referee wishes the reference to be shared with adopters), and all other relevant reports these are sent to members of the Adoption Panel in the week preceding the Panel. The application also includes a questionnaire to advise Panel if adoptive parents are prepared to agree to notify the adoption agency if their adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards, the applicant/s views on contact and their willingness to pass on information to the birth parents if they wish to have it.
- 12.21 Applicants are invited to attend if they wish to present their views to Panel. There is an explanatory leaflet available to applicants explaining the Panel process and another leaflet introduces Panel members. Panel meets on every second Wednesday. There is a private room available for applicants waiting to speak with Panel.
- 12.22 Panel Members will have had the opportunity to consider the written reports in advance of Panel and identified any salient issues. (The Adoption Decision Maker is also sent a copy of the papers to enable these to be read prior to the minute from Panel being sent.)
- 12.23 The Chair of Panel will briefly introduce the application and identify key strengths in the application. The Medical Advisor is invited to comment on the applicant/s' health background and any necessary points affecting the application are clarified. Any relevant legal issues are raised with the Legal Adviser.
- 12.24 Panel members are then invited to comment on the application and the Chair formulates these comments into issues to address either to the assessor or to the applicant/s. The applicant/s and the assessor are then invited to join the Panel. Applicants are welcomed and then any agreed questions are put to them. The applicant/s are invited to ask any questions of Panel before leaving with their Assessing Social Worker to allow Panel to conclude their discussions and make a recommendation.

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- 12.25 The applicants are invited back into Panel to hear the recommendation of Panel following Panel discussion and this will be confirmed in writing once the Agency Decision Maker has considered the matter.
- 12.26 Following Panel the minute of the meeting is completed by the Adoption Administrator and is circulated to the Members of the Panel for approval. The minutes are then given to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker reflects on the papers and Panel recommendation and then returns his decision to the named Manager of the Adoption Service for transmission to applicants within 7 working days of the Agency Decision maker receiving the final panel minutes.
- 12.27 Approved Adopters are allocated a named Support Social Worker to give them on-going support and guidance throughout their adoption journey from placement through to adoption and beyond.
- 12.28 Approved adopters who are waiting for a placement match are reviewed each year by the Adoption Service. If the review suggests a change is required in their approval a report is presented to Panel. Adopters are invited to comment on any report and have a right to be heard by Panel, as with their initial report. Any subsequent change recommended by Panel is subject to the same process of confirmation by the Agency Decision Maker as their original recommendation.

13 Matching adopters and children and Placement

- 13.1 The Recruitment Team prepares an annual plan containing the agency's strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.
- 13.2 The Family Finding Team, whose principle task is overseeing home-finding for children, receives information on all children with adoption plans, advises the Assessment Team of emerging trends and needs, seeks authority for specific child advertising, maintains the links with the National and Local Consortium Adoption Registers and takes a principle role in arranging for possible links between adopters and children waiting.
- 13.3 Children are matched with adopters who best meet their assessed needs. Wherever possible this will be with a family which
- (a) Reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language; and
 - (b) Allows them to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- 13.4 Where the child cannot be matched with a family which reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language, every effort is made to find an alternative suitable family within a realistic timescale to ensure the child is not left waiting indefinitely in the care system. Where children cannot live with a family as set out in (a) and (b) above, the children's social worker will explain and record this, having regard to their age and understanding.

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- 13.5 In matching children with approved adopters, the agency seeks to ensure that it takes into account the views and feelings of the child as far as these can be ascertained based on age and understanding, the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and the birth family, potential adoptive parents and their children.
- 13.6 There is a clear process for matching children with potential adopters. Children's Social Workers complete BAAF Children's Permanence Report along with a Checklist of Needs and a profile of the child. This is used to inform the family-finding process. Suitable matches are identified and passed to the social worker to consider. The Social Worker, Family Finder and/or the Prospective Adopters support Worker will visit the Prospective adopters to explore further.
- 13.7 If the prospective adopters express interest in going forward then an Adoption Placement Report is prepared and considered by Adoption Panel along with the relevant Child's Placement Report, the Adopter's Report, the relevant minutes of any Adoption Panel that has considered the child or applicant and an assessment of post-adoption support needs. The Panel recommendations are conveyed to the Agency Decision maker for a formal decision.
- 13.8 Adopters are invited to prepare a folder of information for the child about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
- 13.9 A planning meeting is held, chaired by a Team Manager, to consider, in detail, the transition of the child from the foster placement to the new adoptive home. Planning meetings are attended by the appropriate representatives from the Children's Neighbourhood or Looked After Service, the Adoption Team, the prospective adopters and the foster carers. There is an agreed format for the Adoption Planning meeting which is completed and signed by all parties (Adoption Placement Plan).
- 13.10 Prospective adopters support - All successful applicants are allocated an adoption support worker whose task it is to support the adopters through the waiting period, consider any potential matches and discuss appropriate matches with applicants prior to formal matching meetings.
- 13.11 Opportunities are taken to use the waiting period to assist adopters continue to prepare for the placement of a child. Where necessary the adopters will be helped to increase their childcare experience. Additional training is offered as necessary. There is an Adopters' Support Group that applicants are invited to attend. All waiting and approved adopters receive a regular newsletter from the Adoption Team.
- 13.12 Following placement, support, in the form of paid travel expenses, a means tested settling in allowance and additional financial help may be agreed subject to certain criteria to assist adopters.

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- 13.13 The Agency operates a means tested Financial Support Adoption Scheme to assist adopters of limited means and those where the children are likely to cause greater than normal expense. Where the adopters are foster carers there is a transitional period during which adopters may receive an enhanced financial support adoption allowance.
- 13.14 The adoption support worker will continue to support the adopters before and during the placement of a child to ensure they are well prepared in advance of the child coming to live with them. Adopters are fully involved in planning meetings around the introductions of the child and care is taken over the timing of the introductions and a number of review meetings built in to ensure that the placement is progressing in a satisfactory way and to give all parties, including the adopters an opportunity to withdraw if they are not confident about the success of the placement. Adopters confirm in writing their acceptance of the placement before the child is placed.
- 13.15 The Adoption Agency has arrangements in place to offer information, support and advice to prospective adopters who receive a proposed match with a child from an overseas authority.
- 13.16 Throughout the preparation, assessment, and support stages of adoption the agency emphasises to parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and encourages them to provide this to the adopted child at appropriate stages of their development.
- 13.17 The initial screening, preparation/training, assessment and home study are designed to assist adopters to understand and combat the effects of racism and any other form of discrimination.
- 13.18 At all stages in the adoption process the agency seeks to ensure that the adoptive parents are assisted to understand the need for the child to develop and maintain a positive self-identity and their role in assisting the child to reflect on and understand her/his history, in an age appropriate way, and to keep appropriate memorabilia.
- 13.19 Where there are difficulties in the placement or the adoption disrupts the adopters' support worker and the child's social worker will provide information and support to the adopters and to the child. Where there is an adoption breakdown a disruption meeting is held involving all parties to assist in understanding the issues and identify any learning in moving forward.
- 13.20 The purpose of this meeting is not to apportion blame but to understand the relevant factors and assist all parties to come to terms with the facts and to move on, and most importantly to inform the process of finding a new more appropriate placement for the child.

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13.21 Where the disruption occurs during the introduction period then the meeting is chaired by a Team Manager from the Adoption Service. Where the adoption disrupts post placement an independent consultant is employed to chair the meeting. A short report from the Disruption Meeting is presented to the Adoption Panel to assist the Panel in its own learning.

13.22 In line with the Adoption Support Regulations and Guidance the Adoption Service revises and updates its procedures and practices to take account of new regulations. In particular adopters and others affected by regulations who are entitled to a review of their support needs, including a review of their financial support, may access the Adoption Support section of the Adoption Team to initiate a review. The Agency Advisor undertakes the role of designated Adoption Support Services Advisor.

13.23 The range of Adoption Support Services to be offered includes access to the full range of statutory and non statutory services offered by the local authority and partner agencies to children and families in Coventry, within the same framework of eligibility as other children and families. In addition the agency will provide, following assessment, and in line with the criteria in the Regulations and Guidance the following services:

- Financial support (ASR 3.1.a)
- Support groups / Activity Days for adoptive parents and adoptive children (ASR 3.1.6)
- Support for contact arrangements between adoptive children and their birth relatives or with other people with whom they share significant relationships (ASR 3.1.c)
- Therapeutic services (ASR 3.1.d)
- Services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement or adoption, including respite care (ASR 3.1.e)
- Counselling, advice and information (S2(6) (a) of the 2002 Act)
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or threatened disruption is in danger of occurring. Organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)

14 Birth Parents and Birth Families

14.1 The Agency recognises that birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. The Agency seeks to ensure they are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

14.2 Children's Social Workers are committed to a partnership approach towards planning with birth parents over children's futures and wherever possible birth parents are fully involved in planning for the child's future placement. Parents are consulted over the plan for adoption, the type of family to be considered, issues around contact, religious preferences, and any other matters of importance to the birth parent.

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- 14.3 The views of the birth parents on adoption and contact are obtained by the Permanency Social Worker for the child and included in the BAAF Child's Permanence Report presented to Panel.
- 14.4 The child's Permanency Social Worker is required to seek to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth parents and birth families about themselves and life before the child's adoption to assist the child to maintain his heritage. This will include information about the child's birth and early life, the birth family's view about adoption and contact and provide up-to-date information about themselves and their situation. This information is contained within the BAAF Child's Permanence Report and in a "later life" letter prepared by the worker for the adopters. A copy is also included in the child's adoption file.
- 14.5 Children's Permanency Social Workers are expected to share information about the content of the Child's Permanence Report with the birth parents and to record their view on the contents of the report.
- 14.6 When adoption is considered as the plan for a child, or where the agency considers that "twin tracking" is required because of doubt over the birth parent's ability to achieve the changes required to parent a child safely, Regulations require that an opportunity for independent counselling and support is to be offered to birth parents. The agency has made arrangements for the referral to an Independent Service for birth families where counseling and support is required and agreed.
- 14.7 Post adoption contact arrangements, including letterbox contact between birth families, adopted children and their new families, are facilitated by the Adoption Support Team.

15 Adoption Panel

- 15.1 The function of Coventry's Adoption Panel is to make quality and appropriate recommendations about the suitability of prospective adopters, and their continuing suitability, and the matching of children and approved adopters. The Panel seeks to promote the welfare of children at all times. Where disruptions occur, the Panel receive a report and discuss this to see what lessons may need to be learned.

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- 15.2 The Policies, procedures and functions of the Panel are contained within the Department's Procedures Manual. Copies of these are given to every Panel member.
- 15.3 Membership of the Adoption Panel is in line with the National Minimum Standard, Regulations and Guidance.
- 15.4 There is an annual training day organised for Panel members and may include members of the Adoption Team. Panel members are able to attend individual courses when felt to be beneficial to their role on Panel. New Panel members receive a full induction and all Panel members are appraised annually.

16 Agency decisions

- 16.1 The Adoption Agency's decision will be made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the Adoption Panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.
- 16.2 The Decision Maker will take into account all the information surrounding the case and the Panel's recommendation before making a considered and professional decision. The agency decision will be made within 7 working days of the Agency Decision Maker receiving the final Panel minutes.
- 16.3 Immediately following the Adoption Panel the recommendations of the Panel are passed on orally to the parents or guardian of the child and prospective/approved adopters, as appropriate by the relevant social worker or adoption link worker. The formal decisions of the Panel are conveyed orally to the child by the child's social worker in an age appropriate way and in writing by the Decision Maker to the parents and to the adopters if birth parents do not wish to be informed a case note explanation is placed on file.

17 Work with Children

- 17.1 There is a Children's Guide to adoption that is suitable for all children for whom adoption is the plan. This is given to the child as soon as that decision has been taken. It includes a summary of what happens at each stage (including at court), and how long each stage is likely to take.
- 17.2 The children's guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate, how to make a complaint and how to contact Ofsted, along with a shortened version of the Statement of Purpose. Where necessary, arrangements can be made for the Guide to be reproduced in a variety of formats suitable for the needs of specific children.
- 17.3 Children's social workers prepare children for adoption by direct counselling, life story work and work around their wishes and feelings.

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- 17.4 Clear and appropriate information is obtained for the child from the prospective adopters about themselves and their home and when applicable, their children, family and pets.
- 17.5 At all stages in the adoption process the wishes and feelings of the child are considered by the child's social worker, properly represented at planning meetings, and taken fully into account during all stages of the adoption process.

18 Information about the Complaints Procedure, and Independent Review Mechanism

- 18.1 Prospective adopters are advised of the Department's complaints procedure and given information on how to make a complaint. They are also given information about the Council's representations procedure and the Independent Review Mechanism.
- 18.2 There is a leaflet available explaining the Independent Review Mechanism and this is made available to all applicants whose application is recommended for refusal.
- 18.3 The Department operates a system known as the 3 "C's", -"Comments Compliments, Complaints"
- 18.4 There is a Children's Complaints Officer who oversees the operation of the Complaints system and arranges for them to be investigated. The name and address of the Children's Complaints Officer is;

David Wilson
Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate,
Room 250
Civic Centre 1,
Little Park Street,
Coventry
CV1 5RS
Telephone: 024 7683 3462;
Fax: 024 7683 2451

What happens following a Complaint

- 18.5 The complaint is registered and action taken to investigate any concerns. The Children's Complaints Officer will monitor the outcome. In most instances, complaints will be followed up by the manager with direct responsibility for the service. This is because local managers are usually best placed to sort things out quickly, and in most cases a speedy resolution is the most appropriate response.
- 18.6 If the complaint is very complicated, involves a number of service areas or has not been resolved at a local level, a more senior Manager or an independent investigator may investigate it.

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18.7 If the complaint is about a registered service, an Inspector from Ofsted may investigate it.

Timescales and outcomes

18.8 Complainants should be contacted by letter or phone, within 3 working days of the complaint being received to let the complainant know what is happening, who is dealing with the complaint and how to contact them. Complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible, ideally within 10 working days.

18.9 Occasionally it is not possible to resolve complaints within the period. This may be due to the complexity of the complaint and the number of people who need to be interviewed. If this is the case, then the person dealing with the complaint will keep the complainant informed.

18.10 When work on the complaint is complete, the complainant will be informed of the outcome. If the complaint has required a formal investigation, the outcome will be reported fully and in writing. This will include the action taken to investigate the complaint, how any conclusions have been drawn and details of any action that has been or will be taken to rectify problems or make improvements.

18.11 However, if the investigation has involved the use of Human Resources procedures, there will be details that cannot be shared as they must remain confidential. Similarly, if the complaint has been on behalf of someone else, their personal information is protected by the Data Protection Act and so the level of detailed information provided will be limited. Anyone not satisfied with the way Coventry Adoption Service has investigated a complaint can contact the Children's Complaints Officer to ask for further investigation.

Further Complaints

18.12 If a complaint was subject to a formal investigation and the complainant is not satisfied with the process, there is an option of writing to the Executive Director of the People Directorate to request an independent review of the process.

18.13 The complaint will be reviewed by a Panel chaired by an independent person. Details of how to do this will be included in the complaint outcome letter.

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19 Independent Review Mechanism

19.1 Adopters are given a leaflet in respect of the Independent Review Mechanism. They are made aware of their capacity to make presentations to the agency, or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of the adoption agency's qualifying determination (which is that it considers a prospective adopter not suitable to adopt a child). Adopters are also given information about the Complaints Procedure.

20 The address and telephone number of OFSTED

20.1 Ofsted regulates social care services in England, such as children's homes, residential family centres and fostering and adoption services. All Adoption Agencies must meet national minimum standards and the associated regulations, set by the Government, in order to qualify for registration.

20.2 From time to time parents, and others with an interest in children's social care, have concerns about the quality of these care services. When considering complaints, Ofsted do not act as a complaint adjudicator. They do not decide if complaints are upheld, partially upheld or are unsubstantiated. Instead they will investigate concerns to make sure that the social care provider continues to meet the national minimum standards and associated regulations and remains suitable for registration.

20.3 You can make a complaint by letter (see address below) or email (enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or by telephone (0300 123 1231) or in person.
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

21 The address of The Children's Commissioner

21.1 The Children's Commissioner, currently Anne Longfield, has a legal duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England with a particular focus on children and young people with difficulties or challenges in their lives, and in particular those living away from home, in or leaving care, or receiving social care services.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk