

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICES

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. Introduction – what this Statement of Purpose is all about.

This Statement is to explain what we set out to achieve in Kent County Council's Adoption Services and the range of services we offer to children, prospective adopters, adoptive families, birth families, guardians and adults who were adopted as children. This includes services to Looked After Children with an adoption plan and in relation to inter-country and non-agency adoptions.

Kent County Council's Adoption service is committed to ensuring that children are able to remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child within the birth family, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting and these include adoption. Kent County Council works with Coram, a Development and Innovation partner, and together we aim to support Kent's Corporate Parenting Strategy by increasing placement choice, stability and support.

2. Principles – what we believe in.

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from good parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills, leading to a successful adult life.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family, but when this is not achievable, adoption will be actively pursued, where it is in the child's interests.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family should always be valued and respected.
- The child's wishes and feelings should be actively sought, assessed, and taken into account at all stages. No child should be assumed unable to communicate their views and each child's preferred method of communication should be identified
- Birth parents and birth families should be encouraged to take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption.
- Children who are adopted fare better if all those involved in the process – Kent County Council Adoption Services staff, adoptive parents, birth families and other agencies, including Health and Education – work in close partnership.
- Delays in the adoption system cause lasting harm for vulnerable children, and may rob them of their best chance of the love and stability of a new family
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language should be recognised and valued when decisions are made and efforts should be made to recruit families who meet the ethnic, cultural and/or religious needs of children to be placed. However, this should not be

allowed to automatically outweigh other considerations, such as the need to find long-term stability for the child quickly.

- Children should be allowed to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individual needs. People applying to adopt are expected to understand the importance of maintaining these relationships.
- The particular needs of disabled children should be recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- Prospective adopters should be prepared and supported to promote the child's social and emotional development, and to enable the child to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- The same standards of assessment and approval should be applied to applicants who wish to adopt children from abroad.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in Kent, out-of-county adoption should be pursued to provide a permanent family.
- Confidentiality of Adoption Records should be strictly maintained and access allowed only in accordance with regulation 41 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

3. Aims – what we intend to do.

Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Services including the Independent Reviewing Officers and Foster Carers, and the Kent County Council Adoption Service will:

- Ensure that the child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process so that they may achieve the best possible outcomes
- Monitor children through the process, including through the use of Permanency Planning Meetings, to minimise delay,
- Welcome those people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents without prejudice, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval.
- As speedily as appropriate, assess and prepare prospective adopters who can offer children a stable and permanent home
- Ensure that services are provided to all involved, which recognise the lifelong implications of adoption.
- Provide help and support to achieve successful and lasting placements
- Work closely in partnership with all involved – adopted children, adoptive families, birth families and other agencies, including Health and Education - to ensure that the Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Adoption Standards are complied with and to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.
- To ensure birth families are treated fairly openly and with respect and have access to independent counselling and other relevant support services
- To recruit a pool of prospective adopters who reflect the diverse needs of the children needing adoptive families.

4. Objectives – how we are going to achieve them.

- A high quality and comprehensive range of adoption services to meet the needs of all affected by the adoption process.
- Close partnership working with all those affected by and/or involved in the adoption process.
- A process which treats those who are interested in becoming adoptive parents fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect; and which keeps them informed about how their enquiry/application is progressing, and the reason for any delays.
- Recruitment and assessment processes which are regarded as respectful and helpful by prospective adopters and which provide a suitable and diverse range of adoptive families to meet the needs of children referred for adoption.
- A process that avoids unnecessary delay.
- A service which, if unable to make a placement within its own resources, will refer children to the UK Adoption Register, Adoption Link, to other adoption agencies, and advertise in adoption journals and the media.
- Children placed wherever possible with adoptive families who can meet their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or religious needs while recognising that these are just some of the range of needs to be met.
- An extensive and varied support service to help current adoptive families and children address the lifelong implications and impact of adoption, including facilitation of the Adoption Advisory Board.
- Appropriate literature to children, adoptive families and birth families.
- Ensure that Concurrency and Foster to Adopt placements are available in appropriate cases
- Comprehensive support for adopted adults and birth relatives seeking information about their own or birth relative's adoption, provided by our independent support partner Barnardo's, through their Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service (CAFIS).

5. Services

Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Services, including the Adoption Service provide the following adoption services:

- Recruitment and Assessment of adopters
- Assessment of and provision of support needs for adopted children and their families
- Counselling for parents considering adoption for their child
- Preparation of children for adoption
- Progressing of adoption plans for children

In addition, Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Services have contracted with the following two service providers:

Inter Country Adoption Centre Information events and preparation courses are to be provided by the Inter Country Adoption Centre. So that resources are not diverted from Looked After Children, a fee will be charged to cover the cost of the home study and related elements of the assessment process. Fees are subject to annual review and details are available on request.

Barnardo's To provide their Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service (CAFIS):

- An independent counselling and support service for birth parents whose children are Looked After by KCC and are the subject of adoption plans
- A counselling and advice service for birth relatives of adopted children/adults
- Direct and indirect (letterbox) contact service for adoption and special guardianship
- An access to birth records service

6. The Recruitment Process and Timescales

Kent County Council is committed to meeting and preferably exceeding the timescales set out in the current Statutory Guidance i.e. response to initial inquiry and provision of information in 10 working days, Stage 1 to be completed in 2 months, and Stage 2 (assessment) to be completed in 4 months. Kent County Council aims to continue to reduce the proportion of adoptive families who wait for more than 3 months from being approved to being matched with a child (National Scorecard Indicator).

Kent County Council's sufficiency strategy is to prioritise the recruitment of adopters according to the needs of our children in care waiting for adoption. This is reviewed regularly and may change depending on the needs of children waiting.

The following are normally the main steps in the process:

1. Contact the Initial Enquiry Team (providing a service for both Fostering and Adoption), answer basic eligibility questions and receive Information Pack (sent within 5 days)
2. Attend Information Event
3. Initial Home Visit by an Adoption Social Worker.
4. Completion and acceptance of a Registration of Interest form (If both the Service and the prospective adopter wish to proceed to Stage 1)
5. Attend Preparation Training Days (stage 1 and 2) whilst statutory checks, references, and medicals are undertaken.
6. On completion of Stage 1 and acceptance of the expression of interest to continue to Stage 2, the assessment/home study report commences with an allocated Adoption Social Worker.
7. The Adoption Social Worker and Prospective Adopter complete a Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR).
8. The Adoption Panel considers the PAR and makes its recommendation.
9. The Agency Decision Maker (within 7 working days of the Panel meeting) decides whether or not to grant approval so that matching with a child can begin.

The interests, welfare and happiness of the child are paramount. Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Services Adoption Service will always work as best they can so that children wait less than 18 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

Our target is for a minimum of 13% of children leaving care are adopted from care

When we are unable to comply with this timescale, we will give a full explanation and record the reasons on the child's, or prospective adopter's case record.

7. Family Finding and Matching

We will aim to place children with a family which understands and will promote their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language.

The adopters' ability to accept the child's background, understanding of the impact of neglect and possible abuse on the child, their own family structure and support, and their approach to child rearing will all be considered in an effort to find a family best matched to the child.

If appropriate families are not available in Kent, every effort is made to find a family through the Adoption Register, Adoption Link, sharing profiles with adoption agencies, Adoption Exchanges, Profiling and Pop Up Events. and an annual Activity Day.

Prospective adopters will be given copies of all relevant information to assist them in parenting the child, including the updated Child Permanence Report, medical and educational reports on the child etc. They should sign a confidentiality agreement and an explanation that the documentation must be returned if the adoption does not go ahead.

8. Adoption Support

Support for prospective adopters

Support for prospective adopters will ideally start from their first contact with the agency, depending on the prospective adopter's requirements at that time. During the initial stages, support would comprise information about, for example, what qualities we are looking for in adopters, the assessment process, the timescales, eligibility, and what categories of children are currently being placed.

Support is then available throughout the entire process of recruitment, assessment and matching, for example: meetings with other applicants and those who are already adopters; discussions regarding, say, the implications of adoption, or the trauma involved in being an adopted child; the possibilities of behavioural problems and how to deal with them; the categories of children the applicant feels confident in being able to provide a family etc. etc.

In extreme cases, this may regrettably conclude in "counselling out" i.e. advising prospective adopters that they are unlikely to be successful applicants.

Support services to adoptive families and children

These are provided by the multi - agency Adoption Support and Special Guardianship Team (ASGST), after an Adoption Order is made.

CAMHS are also responsible for providing support to children placed for adoption

The named Adoption Support Services advisor for Kent County Council's Specialist Children's Adoption Service is the |Head of Adoption Service, Geoff Gurney.

Support needs for a child will be assessed at each stage of the adoption process and will be considered in reviews once the child is placed for adoption. A multi-agency approach will be taken to adoption support.

The Adoption Support Plan presented to the Adoption Panel requires specific details about supporting the adoption, both after placement and after the Adoption Order.

The Specialist Children's Services Area 'Access to Resources' Panels consider requests for financial support and allowances that may be available for children with additional needs, and that are subject to means testing.

Adopters and Special Guardians of children are entitled to request an assessment for post adoption support needs.

Preparing a child for adoption

The child's social worker (from a Specialist Children's Services Area team) will ensure that the child(ren) has/have an age appropriate understanding of adoption and is given the appropriate children's guides. The setting in which preparation and counselling is given, and those involved, must ensure the child is not inhibited from communicating their wishes and feelings.

Any emotional difficulties resulting from the child's past life must be identified and addressed through direct or other therapeutic work.

Where English is not the child's first language or there is learning, hearing or communication impairments, specialist assistance will be provided to ensure that counselling and preparation is appropriately given.

Specialist advice will be sought by the child's social worker regarding religious background and culture.

Information about the child's life

The child's social worker will actively seek clear and appropriate information, and photographs, for the child from the birth parents and birth family about themselves and the child's birth and early life; health issues in the birth family; their views about the adoption and contact. Information will be recorded and updated whenever possible.

Preparation of a Life Story book will be coordinated and presented in a format appropriate to the child's age and understanding: the draft will be presented to the adoption panel at the time of the match, and the final version is to be handed to the adopter/s no later than the second review of the adoption placement. Later Life letters will be developed, and given to the adopter/s within 10 days of the Celebration Hearing.

The wishes, views and feelings of children

Children's wishes, views and feelings will be taken into account, unless this is contrary to their interests. The wishes of pre-verbal or non-verbal children will be assessed carefully by their social worker, based on their behaviour and other means of communication. Where it is not possible to act upon their wishes, they will have clear explanation and support.

Health

Children will have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including specialist services when they are needed. The child's health will be promoted in accordance with the Child's Permanence Report. Prospective adopters will receive a consultation from the medical advisor on the health history of their child and receive support from the LAC nurse. They will be clear about what decisions are delegated to them, and when consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained. The wishes and feelings of children will be sought and taken into account in their health care, according to their understanding.

Leisure

Prospective adopters are encouraged to create an accessible and stimulating environment to develop the emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills of children. The Kent County Council Adoption Service supports adoptive children to take part in activities, individual interests and hobbies.

Promoting educational attainment

Children will be supported to attend school and in their learning during and beyond the school day. Adopters should attend parents' meetings and will be supported by the child's social worker, their social worker and the Virtual school to advocate for the child with schools, colleges and other educational establishments. Adopters are encouraged to make use of the Education Plan for Adopted Children, and supported in its use by the Virtual School Kent (see Education Policy for Children Adopted from care).

Contact arrangements

Kent County Council Adoption are committed to promoting post adoption contact whenever it is in the child's interests, particularly in relation to siblings who are placed separately.

Expectations in relation to contact pre and post adoption are set out in Kent County Council's Contact Policy and Procedures. The interests of the child must be paramount and the wishes and feelings of the child in relation to contact should be included in the Child's Permanence Report, together with those of the child's parents and the agency.

Contact arrangements are discussed with birth parents. Support for the birth parents for contact is assessed in the Adoption Support Plan, and agreed with CAFIS. The prospective adopter's views regarding contact are discussed in the light of the child's needs. Prospective adopters are helped to understand the effects of unauthorised contact, including through online social networks, and offered support in case this happens.

All forms of contact are more successful if the parties have met together before arrangements start: therefore a meeting between parents and adopters before the child is placed will be encouraged and supported by social workers.

Contact arrangements are discussed at Reviews in accordance with the Adoption Support Plan; Support is offered to help with agreed contact arrangements through CAFIS.

Siblings

Although every effort is made to enable siblings to live together, providing this meets the assessed needs of each child, where this is not possible, face to face contact arrangements are made providing it is safe to do so. Otherwise, letterbox contact is established through CAFIS.

Disruptions

The child and his/her adoptive family are supported in order to avoid placement disruption. If, despite all efforts, an adoptive placement breaks down, the Kent County Council Adoption Service provides support to facilitate the transition for both child/ren and the adoptive family. The overriding consideration is the welfare of the child, and counselling and advice is offered to ensure that the child moves in a planned way. Disruptions meetings are held in all cases in accordance with the Placement Planning & Disruption Meeting procedures.

Services to Birth Parents

CAFIS offers:

- An independent counselling and support service for birth parents whose children are Looked After by Kent Adoption and are the subject of adoption plans

- A counselling and advice service for birth relatives of adopted children/adults
- A post-adoption contact service for adoption and special guardianship, including Letterbox contact

Services to adults who were adopted

CAFIS also offers an access to birth records service

Further information concerning the services and support provided in Kent for its adopters is available online at www.kentadoption.co.uk.

9. Personnel and Structure – who we are (see Appendices 1 & 2)

Manager of the Adoption Service

Geoff Gurney,
Interim Head of Adoption Service,
For Kent County Council
Specialist Children’s Services
The Stables
Oakwood Park
Maidstone
ME16 8AE

The Specialist Children’s Services Children in Care Teams

These are responsible for the preparation and support of children for adoption and for working with birth parents and families.

Initial Enquiry Team

This team is responsible for the recruitment and supply of initial information to prospective adopters

Recruitment and Assessment Teams

These teams are responsible for recruiting and assessing prospective adopters and ensuring they have the necessary support and training to prepare them for adoption. They are also responsible for supporting adopters through the matching and placement process to the making of the final adoption order.

Family Finding Team

This team has lead responsibility for family finding and matching children with adopters. All prospective adopters will receive specialist medical advice from our medical advisers before the placement of any children is finalised.

Administrative and business support

These teams support the business processes involved in adoption and provide management information to ensure that all statutory timescales are complied with or exceeded.

Post Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team

This multi-disciplinary team works closely with sessional workers and partners from the Virtual school, the LAC nurse, parenting programmes and adopters and special guardians to provide comprehensive assessment and support to adoptive placements, post order, including social events, workshops, courses, a help desk and individual advocacy and support

CAFIS. They are contracted to run a help desk for families and individuals affected by adoption, an independent birth parent counselling service, and advice and support on contact, including the Letter Box service.

Non agency team

This team provides information, counselling and assessment service for families who want to adopt or apply for a special guardianship order on a relative or step child. It has been agreed that it will become a fully commissioned service in 2015.

Adoption Agency Decision Makers

The decision-maker are Assistant Directors, who are all qualified and experienced child care social workers and have knowledge and experience of permanency planning for children, adoption and child care law and practice. Kent has four Adoption Agency Decision-Makers, in the North, South, East and West areas.

Adoption Panel Team

The team provides administrative support to Kent's Adoption Panels

10. The Adoption Panel

Kent currently has 3 Adoption Panels made up of a pool of members with an understanding of children's needs, members of the County Council, other professionals with experience of adoption and/or adoption issues, and independent members (including the Chair) with a range of backgrounds, including those who have had first-hand experience of adoption, e.g. who have been adopted or who have adopted a child. They also have access to specialist medical and legal advisers. One Panel is constituted as an Adoption & Permanence Panel, meeting the requirements of the Fostering and the Adoption regulations.

Adoption Panels provide independent recommendations about whether:

- Adoption is in the best interests of the child(ren) where the birth parent/s consent to the adoption
- People who have applied to be adoptive parents are suitable to undertake the task of adoption
- Whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable parent for a particular child

The final decision is taken by the Adoption Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision maker has responsibility for approving Adoption Plans for children, where it is necessary to apply for a Placement Order

11. Monitoring and Reviewing

- Staff, including managers, receive regular supervision and appraisals.
- The Service is regularly inspected by OFSTED.
- The Agency's performance, including the numbers of adopters approved, numbers of children with adoption plans and timescales for children's progress through the adoption system is reported to Senior Managers via the Corporate Parenting Panel.

- Preparation and Training Courses for adopters are regularly evaluated with user feedback being acted upon when appropriate.
- Adopters are involved at every stage of the process, including involvement in preparation groups. Following the granting of an adoption order, feedback is sought from adoptive parents, which is then used to inform development of services. The Adoption Advisory Board meets quarterly and provides feedback to the agency on pre and post adoption services.
- Complaints from service users are always investigated thoroughly and any learning points applied.
- The Adoption Panel monitors the performance and quality of reports from Social Workers and receives reports on the progress of children through the Adoption process. Evaluations are used to inform the development of the service.
- The overall workload of the Service is monitored regularly with the Head of Adoption chairing Performance Surgeries and joint tracking meetings to problem solve particular difficulties. The panel chairs provide two 6 monthly reports annually for the Corporate Parenting Panel
- The Adoption Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed by the management team and presented to elected members annually.
- Kent County Council's Adoption Service provides an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The Adoption "Deep Dive", takes place quarterly and is chaired by the Corporate Director of Health & Social Care/Director of Specialist Children's Services.

11. Complaints

Kent County Council has a comprehensive Complaints procedure. Complaints are considered as a way of improving the services which are provided. Complaints made against the Adoption Service are resolved through a problem-solving approach within the service. If a complaint is not resolved in this way, the matter is progressed through the formal complaints procedure.

In the case of an adopted child making a complaint, this will be investigated by Action for Children who are commissioned by Kent County Council to offer an independent complaints investigation service. ACH may also become involved with complaints made by adults in relation to services for adopted children. Other complaints may involve an 'off-line' investigation by a manager who has no personal involvement in the situation.

If complaints are not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, they may then progress their complain through a formal complaints review panel, the Local Government Ombudsman (if the complaint is about a Kent County Council service) or the Information Commissioner (if the complaint is about Kent County Council's response to a request for information). Time scales are imposed for the resolution of complaints

Alternatively the Ofsted Adoption Inspection Team can be contacted at:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Children's Services helpline: 0300 123 1231

Kent Adoption Service Team as at January 2016

Head of Adoption Service Geoff Gurney

Tracking Administrator – Theresa Svart

