



## The Kent Adoption Service's Statement of purpose

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## Purpose and Objectives of the Kent County Council Adoption Service

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for Kent County Council's Adoption Service as required under the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

Kent County Council are committed to ensuring that children can 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.

The purpose of the adoption service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of children who have been or may become adopted, birth families, and adoptive parents. This will include services in relation to those 'looked after' children with an adoption plan, and in relation to the non-agency adoption service.

To achieve its aims the adoption service will:

- Ensure that the needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process;
- 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;
- Ensure that services are provided to all involved in adoption that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption;
- Assess and prepare prospective adopters who can offer children a stable and permanent home;
- Provide help and support to achieve a successful and lasting placement;
- Monitor children through the process to minimise delay.

All those involved in adoption will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

## Core Values

The adoption services' core values are:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond;
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth 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. The preferred communication methods of each child should be promoted and supported;
- Birth parents and families will be encouraged and supported to contribute to the planning and implementation of their child's adoption care plan;
- Delays in the adoption journey of any child can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible;
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made;
- 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 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 commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who must work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption;
- Prospective adopters will be adequately prepared and supported to promote the child's social and emotional development, to enable the child to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem;
- Partnership working with others, internally and externally, to ensure that the Adoption National Standards are met.

## Services provided by the Kent County Council adoption service

The adoption service is managed by the head of adoption and four team Managers.

The adoption service is structured as follows:

- Two recruitment & assessment teams
- Family finding team
- Adoption panel management and quality assurance team
- Post adoption support team *in partnership with Coram*
- Barnardo's (CAFIS) commissioned to work on behalf of Kent to provide independent support for birth parents of children with adoption plans; counselling to adult adoptees; access to information post adoption; support for post adoption & post SGO contact arrangements

The Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) has been commissioned to provide a full service from the point of enquiry until the child enters the UK with the adopters.

### Recruitment & assessment team (RAS)

The focus of the recruitment & assessment teams are to recruit adopters for all Kent children with a plan for adoption: the emphasis in the recruitment strategy is to identify families able to adopt sibling groups; children with disabilities/complex needs; children of minority ethnic groups; and foster to adopt carers.

The recruitment of adopters is a priority for the adoption service. There are two recruitment & assessment teams with their own team managers (see structure chart).

Kent's procedures are set out in the [recruitment, assessment & approval](#) section, children's procedures online.

The following are normally the main steps in the process: Initial enquiry:

- Applicants can call the initial enquiry line on 03000 422 373 or enquire via email;
- Prospective adopters contacting the service are directed to the adoption and First4Adoption websites;
- Our monthly information events are advertised on the website and enquirers can attend without prior booking;
- Those attending the information session can book an initial home visit with a social worker; they can also book after the event;
- The initial enquiry form is completed in a follow up phone call by the initial enquiry officer and the home visit is confirmed;
- This will allow the potential adopter to further explore the adoption process whilst providing the adoption service with the opportunity to determine which applicants are most likely to meet the needs of Kent children requiring adoptive placements;
- Applicants are given the registration of interest form following successful initial home visit. If the application is accepted, prospective adopters will be given the necessary information required for stage one of the process;

- If the social worker does not recommend progression of the prospective adopter's application to stage one the applicants are advised of the reasons for this decision and possible action they may wish to take. They are also advised how to access the complaints procedure.

### **Stage one assessment process - Time scale 2 months**

- The social worker who undertook the home visit usually continues to support potential adopters during stage one;
- Prospective adopters are expected to complete First4Adoption e-learning before attending the 3-day preparation course as well as self-assessment forms;
- In accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, Kent County Council is required to carry out statutory checks and references in relation to all applicants. These include:
  - ✓ Barring and Disclosure Service (DBS);
  - ✓ Three personal references for single applicants and four for couples;
  - ✓ Employment references (usually during stage two);
  - ✓ Local authority checks;
  - ✓ Medical assessment;
  - ✓ Health visits or school checks if appropriate (or during stage two);
  - ✓ Housing (mortgage/rental status).

The stage one social worker will make a decision along with the team manager if the applicant meets the requirements to proceed to stage two of the process. Those who are not suitable at this stage will be provided with a verbal and written explanation. Potential adopters can take a break of up to 6 months between stage one and two.

### **Stage two assessment process - Time scale 4 months**

Prospective adopters usually continue with their stage one social worker who will undertake a full assessment. Further checks as appropriate are taken during this stage (ex-partner, health visitor, school, adult children) unless a professional decision was taken that this was required during stage one. Prospective adopters attend a two-day preparation course during this stage.

Approved foster carers and second time adopters (approved after 2006) can proceed straight to stage two of the assessment process.

Once the assessment is completed, it is presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation to the agency decision maker (ADM) for a final decision

## Non-agency assessments

The non-agency social workers are a part of the RAS teams. There is a two-phase process (mirroring that of the agency two stage process) so that all references and checks are completed in phase one to identify whether there are reasons that the adoption order is unlikely to be granted.

Procedures for the social workers undertaking non-agency assessments are set out in the [non-agency adoption section](#), children's procedures online.

## Family finding

The adoption service aims to place children with a family which understands and will promote their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. Placements will be secured in a timely manner. For a small number of children finding the best possible match will exceed expected timescales. However, we are committed to finding legal permanence for all our children.

The adoption service works in an open and transparent way with prospective adopters to ensure they are well informed about a child's needs, so they can fully consider the implications of a child's history and the possible impact of this on the child's health, development and wellbeing, both in the present and in the future. Family finding social workers create a child's profile which is shared with prospective adopters and is then supplemented by much more detailed information to prospective adopters when a possible link has been identified.

If appropriate families are not available in Kent, every effort is made to find a family through adoption match, adoption link maker, sharing profiles with adoption agencies, adoption exchanges, profiling and pop up events and activity days/events and consultation sessions with adopters.

Procedures for the family finding team are set out in the [placement for adoption section](#) guidelines.

### **Relinquished babies**

The family finding team provides advice, information and counselling for parents (usually pregnant or new mothers) who are considering adoption for their baby.

Some parents will decide against proceeding with an adoption plan. For those few parents each year who decide that adoption will be in the best interests of their child, the adoption service will undertake the arrangements in consultation with parents.

### **Early permanence planning**

The family finding team works in partnership with district teams to promote early permanency for children, and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. The family finding team is represented by a senior practitioner at permanency planning meetings (PPMs) for all 10 and under on the edge of care / pre-proceedings who provides guidance on such matters as sibling assessments, the adoption process, post adoption contact options, life story and identity needs, achievable

plans and family finding. The post holder also has responsibility for tracking and monitoring children aged 8 years old and under who are on the edge of care or who enter care plus unborn babies who are involved in the public law outline (PLO).

The family finding team has links with the independent reviewing service to consider how to jointly improve timeliness and tracking across Kent. The work between children with disabilities, fostering and family finding has been further strengthened to consider how our children with disabilities can have their needs for permanence met and that adoption will always be considered as an option.

### **Foster to adopt**

Foster to adopt is used for babies and children who are in the care of Kent County Council where the plan is likely to be adoption, but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family, most children go on to be adopted. Foster to adopt protects children from experiencing multiple moves within the care system. It provides children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care whilst detailed assessments of their birth family are completed, and the court decides on the plan for the child.

Consistent care for the child reduces possible future harm and it supports the child in developing healthy attachments. Babies and children are placed with approved adopters who have been assessed and approved as temporary foster carers for the child. The foster to adopt carers will provide the day to day care for the child and will continue to work with the child's social worker to ensure that the child have all their needs met.

At the same time, the child's social worker will continue working with and assessing the child's birth parents to see if they have made the changes needed to have the child returned to their care. The court will make the final decision on the plan for the child. If the decision is that the child should be adopted then foster to adopt carers can go to an adoption matching panel and if panel agree, will become the adopters for the child. Alternatively, if the court decides that the child should be returned to their birth family then the child is returned. As part of developing the scheme in partnership with Coram, discussions took place with Judiciary, CAFCASS and health who have all engaged and been positive about the scheme. Kent continues to work in partnership with Coram to develop this scheme including foster to adopt training workshops.

### **Adoption panel management & quality assurance team**

Four panel meetings, including the dual panel are held each month. The aim is to ensure panel members have a good understanding of adoption issues and a high level of competence in considering and making evidence-based recommendations to the agency decision makers. Adoption panel members have a combined pool of professional and personal knowledge, experience and skills as adopters and adoptees including background in adoption and fostering work.

Quality assurance by the agency panel advisers is regarded as a high priority. They offer advice to social workers, ADM's and the adoption panels to ensure compliance with statutory guidance, legislation and good practice. Feedback from social



workers, adoption applicants and panel members are incorporated into a report and informs service improvement plans.

Procedures for the adoption panel service are set out in the [adoption panel section](#), children's procedures online.

## Post Adoption and SGO team (PAST)

Kent Adoption service works in partnership with Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency to provide a multi-disciplinary service.

The PAST provides a range of services to adopted children and their families, including:

- Provision of information, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals through the support and advice line;
- Post adoption support assessment and a support plan;
- Therapeutic parenting sessions - systemic family therapy, therapeutic life story work;
- Incredible years parenting programme for adopters with children under 9 years;
- STOP parenting programme for adopters with adolescents;
- The development of a parenting programme specifically geared for adoptive parents with autistic children;
- Intensive adoptive parent support groups;
- Learning and development workshop programme for adopters, and their families – (rolling programme running from September to the following July each year). Includes topics such as explaining adoption, 'who's in charge', transitions, social media, siblings, life story work and parenting adolescents. (appendix B);
- Supporting adopters with education issues;
- Adopter mentoring scheme - to support adopters in early placement. Learning is being incorporated into the continuous development of the scheme;
- Young people's participation group - strengthening adopted children and young people's voices, developed by a family therapist and senior social worker from PAST, in conjunction with Coram 'adoptable', who have trained three ambassadors, been involved in running theatre workshops and have presented to Kent corporate parenting group. Younger children's participation was developed in September 2017. Since the start the group has had 6 successful social events for children;
- LGBT family group developed in November 2017, supporting children and parents with a supportive group and social activity. The group has met 3 times and will continue to develop;
- Parent led support groups - the team are developing links with parents who feel able to lead a support group for adopters in their community. The hope is that the group leaders will then sit as members of the adoption advisory board;
- Adoption advisory board – representative from adopters and each part of the adoption service. The adoption advisory board serves as an advisor and critical friend to the service.

Procedures for adoption support are set out in the [adoption support section](#) and education policy for children adopted from care, Kent children's procedures online.

## Services to birth parents & adult adoptees

### **Barnardo's (CAFIS) adoption support**

Contact, intermediary and birthparent support services are provided by a commissioned service provided by Barnardo's, the children's charity.

### **Independent support service to birth parents**

To provide a support and counselling service to birth parents prior to an adoption taking place, where a child is (or children are) in care and looked after by Kent County Council, and for whom adoption has been identified as the plan.

Birth parents will have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. This may include counselling on the procedures for placement for adoption and adoption itself.

### **Access to birth records and intermediary service for adult adoptees**

To assist adopted persons, either adopted through Kent County Council or who are resident in Kent, and who are aged 18 or over, to obtain information in relation to their adoption, and to facilitate contact between such persons and their adult birth relatives.

Adopted adults may wish to use either one of these services i.e. "access to birth records" only, or "intermediary services" only (having completed their own research into their pre-adoption background), or they may wish to use both services.

Advice will be given, as appropriate, on tracing birth relatives.

### **Access to information and an intermediary service for birth relatives**

To provide access to non-identifying information regarding the adoption and advice and support to birth relatives aged 18 and over, who require intermediary services, when the adoptee has reached age 18 or over. Information on counselling for the applicant and the subject of the application should be made available. Priority given to relatives of people adopted before 12th November 1975.

### **Contact services**

A contact service for children under the age of 18 who have been adopted, or who are the subject of a special guardianship order and who have contact with their birth relatives.

The contact services include both an indirect letterbox service and a direct contact service (face to face) as defined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Children Act 1989.

Procedures are set out in access to birth records and [adoption case records](#), intermediary services in children's procedures online.

## Inter country adoption

Kent commissions the intercountry adoption centre (IAC) to provide a service on Kent County Council's behalf to prospective adopters of children from overseas who they are hoping to adopt in the UK.

Procedures for [inter country adoption](#) are set out in the inter country section, Kent children's procedures online.

## Performance monitoring of the adoption service

Performance is measured through Kent performance management systems and this includes the development of a team operational dashboard (TOD) with data available at a team and individual level so activity can be tracked by managers supporting the ongoing focus on timeliness.

The continued focus of robust tracking systems across Kent supports the early identification of children for whom the plan is likely to be adoption. This in turn creates early identification of matches and has reduced the time taken for children moving to their adoptive placement following a placement order.

The adoption service provides an annual report to the corporate parenting panel outlining the details of the services provided and outcomes for children and adopters.

## Complaints procedures

Most of complaints made against the adoption service are resolved through a problem-solving approach within the service and we always welcome hearing from those affected if however, concerns remain unresolved Kent County Council has a comprehensive complaints procedure.

Complaints are valued as a way of improving the services which are provided. If a complaint is not resolved in this way, the matter is progressed through a formal complaints procedure outlined as follows.

### **Step 1:** Contact us with details of your complaint:

- Write to Kent Children's Social Services, Customer Care, Kroner House, Eurogate Business Park, Ashford, TN24 8XU;
- Call 03000 410304;
- Email [cscomplaints@kent.gov.uk](mailto:cscomplaints@kent.gov.uk);
- Text 0786000 8025 and begin your message with the word complaint.

We can help you put your complaint in writing or give you advice.

### **Responses**

We will then investigate the issues and try to help, and you will receive a written reply from a senior manager. We aim to resolve your complaint within 10 working

days, and by 20 working days at the latest. If your complaint will take longer we will keep you informed of the progress.

## **Step 2**

If you are not satisfied with the [first response to your complaint](#) you have the right to take it further.

## **Investigation**

You may be entitled to an investigation or take your complaint to the local government ombudsman. Contact us for advice.

If we investigate your complaint:

- An investigating officer who is new to your case will investigate the issues raised;
- An independent person from the young lives foundation, the children's charity, will also be appointed to consider your complaint;
- The investigating officer and the independent person will contact you to make sure they fully understand the complaint.

## **Responses**

When the investigation is complete, we will send you a full response. We aim to do this within 25 working days of the investigation starting, but it can take longer. We will keep you informed of progress. Where it is not possible to complete the investigation within 25 working days, it may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days.

## **Other organisations that can help:**

### **Local government ombudsman**

If you remain unhappy with the response to your complaint you have the right to take your complaint to the [local government ombudsman](#) who is independent of Kent County Council.

You may contact them at any time, but they would normally expect you to complete our complaints procedure first.

### **The young lives foundation**

If you are a child or young person in care, you can get help to make a complaint from the young lives foundation:

- Call 01622 683815;
- Email [advocacy@ylf.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@ylf.org.uk);

- [The young lives foundation website.](#)

## **Ofsted Contact Details**

Ofsted  
NBU, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040

Fax: 08456 404049

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Web: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## **Name and address of manager**

Sarah Skinner - Ba (Hons), MA and CQSW - Head of Adoption

Address: Kent Adoption Service, The Stable Block, Oakwood House, Maidstone,  
Kent ME16 8AE Tel: 03000 420508

## **Qualifications and experience of manager**

Sarah Skinner – qualifications and experience.

Sarah Skinner was awarded a BA (Hons) Social Science from Bristol Polytechnic in 1985. She then went on to study at Warwick University in 1987 where she graduated with a MA Applied Social Studies & CQSW. This was followed by completion of the Advanced Social Work Diploma, Goldsmith University 1991.

Sarah became the Head of Kent Adoption in July 2016. She has a sound working knowledge and experience of operational, strategic planning, service delivery and managing budgets across a variety of teams and services in children's service within the local authority and can demonstrate a proven record of achievement. Alongside the adoption service these include children and families, policy and performance & the independent reviewing service and Virtual School Kent. Sarah has experience of project/change management and working in partnership with multi agency colleagues and other sectors within KCC such as education, youth offending service, advisory service Kent, the educational psychology service, connexions. She has experience of developing and implementing service planning, performance and quality assurance in a multi-disciplinary and partnership environment.

Sarah has gained a thorough knowledge of adoption legislation and other relevant child care legislation and regulations that impact upon the well-being of children in care and those who have left care. She is fully aware of the adoption vision for change agenda and is developing this initiative in Kent.

Sarah has presented many reports to senior managers in Kent regarding the adoption service and other areas of work she has engaged in. This has included strategic boards such as the corporate parenting panel, the Kent corporate parenting group and the CAMHS strategy board as well as to specialist children's senior management.

# Structure Chart

Kent (Centralised) Adoption Service  
Specialist Children's Services  
June 2018

