

Report of Corporate Director of Children & Learning

to

Cabinet

on

8th January 2013

Report prepared by: Sue Cook
Corporate Director Department of Children and Learning

Adoption Service Annual Report Statement of Purpose

**Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee –
Executive Councillor: Councillor James Courtenay**

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report on the last years activities in the Adoption Service and to review the updated Statement of Purpose in line with Standard 18.3 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Annual Report (Appendix 2), updated Statement of Purpose (Appendix 3) is agreed and the annual adoption scorecard (Appendix1) is noted.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The provision, standards and operations of the adoption service is governed by:
- The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 (updated 2005)
 - Adoption Agencies regulations 2005
 - The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011
 - Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential amendments) Regulations 2012 and the
 - Adoption Minimum Standards 2011
- 3.2 National Minimum Standard 25.6 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority

- a) receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency twice a year
 - b) monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users
 - c) satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration
- 3.3 National Minimum Standard 18.3 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority formally approves the Statement of Purpose and reviews it at least annually.
- 3.4 In January 2012, the adoption service was inspected and was deemed overall to be good.
- 3.5 A report was received by Cabinet on 13th March 2012 with an associated action plan to address those areas highlighted in the inspection for improvement. Most areas identified are now fully met, with good progress being made on the rest. Appendix 4 provides details of this progress.
- 3.6 In May 2012 the Government published an Adoption scorecard to more transparently monitor adoption standards across the country. Appendix 1 outlines the detail of Southend's performance as at October 2012. The outcome of this second score card shows that Southend has made improvements in relation to both the time between placement order being granted and matching with an adoptive family and the number of days between entering care and being placed for adoption. The third measure shows a 1% decrease in time taken between entering care and being placed for adoption. However this equates to very small numbers and is linked to the long term effort made to place our most challenging and older children. The department of Education has not yet released the national figures at the point of preparing this report so statistical neighbour and national comparisons are not able to be completed.
- 3.7 From 1st September 2012 new regulations came into force in relation to Preferred Option decisions. These are no longer presented to the full adoption panel. It is now the sole responsibility of the Agency Decision Maker in consultation with the adoption medical advisor; independent panel advisor and legal representative. Southend has reviewed its processes to ensure it is compliant with this new requirement.

4. Other Options

- 4.1 It is a statutory requirement to present a report to the executive twice yearly and the updated Statement of Purpose annually. The Annual Report and Statement of Purpose forms one report and the Adoption Consortium report is presented later in the year. This report last came on 4th September 2012.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose outlines the Adoption Service core services and the annual report outlines the activities undertaken by the Southend Adoption Service during 2012 and the outcomes and impact of the service.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities
The Annual Report sets out the framework for the work of the Adoption Service. It provides evidence of the annual activity which directly supports the delivery of the Corporate Priority to *'Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable Children'*.

6.2 Financial Implications

If the service does not work efficiently in recruitment and family finding and within the Partners in Adoption Consortium, there could be a financial impact in the purchasing of adoptive families through the National Adoption register at a cost of between £13,000 & £27,000 per placement.

In order to further support the work of adoption over the next year the DFE have identified a one off ring fenced grant to local authorities for the purposes of:

- Diagnostic work to identify gaps or systems weaknesses which are hindering improvements in adoption outcomes
- System redesign to remove delay
- Design and implementation of robust case management arrangements based on effective management information to reduce drift and delay
- Development of social work capacity in permanency planning
- Peer review, challenge and support

Southend has identified the challenge of concurrent planning for children as its area for focus. This process involves approving some adopters as both adoptive parents and foster carers in order to enable a child to be placed at a much earlier stage under Fostering regulations, and then to remain under Adoption Regulations should the primary plan become adoption.

An undertaking of this nature would ensure Southend was one of only a handful of local authorities outside of London to operate a concurrent planning project and potentially, it would enable the placement of some of our older children who do not usually attract adoptive parents.

- 6.3 Legal Implications
None

- 6.4 People Implications
None

- 6.5 Property Implications
The adoption service moved to the Civic Centre on 10th November 2012. The service is now, for the first time, located with the other child care teams and no longer has the additional costs of maintaining a sub office.

6.6 Consultation

Consultation with adoptive and birth families and more recently with adopted children about the work and delivery of the service takes place on a regular basis. The inspection in January 2012 also included consultation with prospective adopters.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The adoption service works within the Partners in Adoption Consortium which covers a diverse geographical area and enables a wider choice of families for Looked after Children in Southend being placed for adoption. Sufficiency planning has identified the need to target families for children from Eastern European countries as well as those willing to adopt children with additional needs and those who are older at the point of placement.

6.8 Risk Assessment

None

6.9 Value for Money

The decision to bring back in house the Post adoption service in 2010 continues to demonstrate value for money and improved service. This element of the adoption service was deemed excellent in the 2012 adoption inspection.

The provision of an internal supply of adoptive families ensures value for money. High cost external placements are negated.

Southend has recently developed an additional arrangement with Essex County Council's adoption agency for reduced costs when placing within their area. This arrangement demonstrates improved financial benefits as opposed to using the National Adoption Register.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Adoption Scorecard October 2012

8.2 Appendix 2: Adoption Service Annual report 2012

8.3 Appendix 3: Updated Statement of Purpose December 2012

8.4 Appendix 4: Updated action plan from adoption inspection 2012

Adoption Scorecard

Southeast

Children

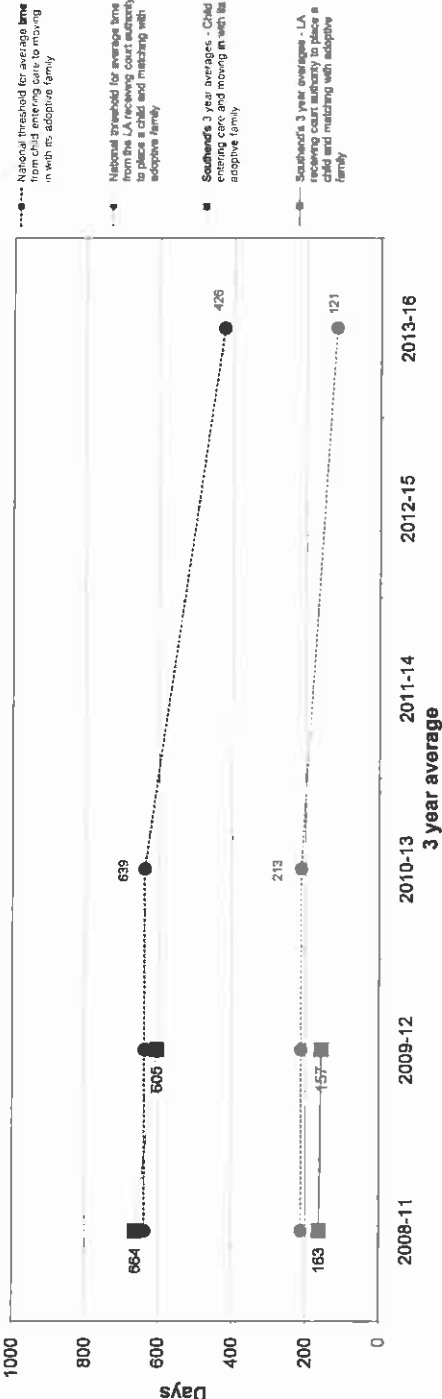
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)	605	Children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	50 (60%)
Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	157		n/a
Average time in 2012 was longer	185	Average time in 2012 was longer	10,180 (56%)
Threshold met	Threshold met		n/a

L.A.'s 3 year average (2008-12)

England's 3 year average (2008-12)

2012-13 performance threshold

Average Time Indicators



Prospective Adopters

Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed
Indicators to be agreed	Indicators to be agreed
Data not available until 2013	

Related Information

Adoptions from care (number adopted and % leaving care who are adopted)	65 (19%)	9,740 (12%)	Number and % of children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption	x (x%)	1,360 (7%)	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. Where adopted by their local family are adopted at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)	531	546	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds (number adopted and % of children leaving care who are adopted)	10 (22%)	1,490 (6%)	Average length of care proceedings locally (weeks)	48	53	Number of children awaiting adoption (as at 31 March 2012)	15	6,750	Number of approved prospective adopters (as at 31 March 2012)	Data not available	Data not available
L.A.'s 3 year average (2008-12)	England's 3 year average (2008-12)																			



Southend Adoption Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2012

Welcome from Southend Adoption Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present the Southend Adoption Service Annual Report for 2012. We have had another busy year. The service has continued to place a number of children with new families both within the Partners in Adoption consortium and outside and has also been very successful in selling some of our adopters to raise income which can then be used to better support Southend children, moving to adoption. Our commitment to quality and the best outcomes for children remains our priority focus. The SPARKLES parent and toddler group has gone from strength to strength and has become embedded in what we do, often having over 15 children attending at any one time. We have developed our own post adoption support group in response to consultation which is proving very popular.

Our Ethos

We strive to provide opportunities for children and young people to have secure futures and to find safe, high quality adoptive placements where this is required for children who cannot return to their birth families.

We work closely with our partner agencies and birth families to ensure that we achieve the best outcomes for all young people.

I am pleased to say that throughout 2012, placement stability in adoptive placements has been maintained with only one disruption this year.

Highlights

The Christmas party and summer post adoption events have been a great success and were enjoyed by all who attended and have really helped to build on the joint initiatives with Havering & Thurrock, our consortium partners.

Winning Children's social work team of the year award in London- more detail in the report.

Looking forward

For 2013 we are committed to building on the success of 2012. We will continue to offer a quality service which is value for money with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for Southend Looked after Children.

We aim to:

- Develop further the post adoption group
- develop further the extended family work
- continue to develop further the adoption consortium joint initiatives.
- look more closely at income generating schemes



Diane Keens
Group Manager
Young People & Family
Support

Southend Adoption Service

Purpose of this report

The provision, standard and operations of the Adoption service are governed by:

- The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 (Updated 2005)
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (amendment) regulations 2011 and the
- Adoption minimum Standards 2011

National Minimum Standard 25.6 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority

- a) receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency
- b) monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users

The aim of this report is to provide the information required to enable the Executive side of the Council to fulfil its duties in this respect.

Overview

Following major surgery in January 2012, Diane Keens returned to her role as Group Manager in August 2012 and continues to be the registered manager for the service.

Jo Hines, has developed greatly in her role as Team Manager. She took a lead at the OFSTED adoption inspection in February 2012 where the service was deemed to be "Good".

Fiona & Sharon both left the team this year. Fiona moved back to Coventry in the early summer and Sharon retired to open her own floristry business. Faye Khraud and Susan Ikhifa joined the team. Faye is an experienced worker from

the Care Management Teams in Southend and Susan is an experienced adoption worker from a London Borough. Both have enthusiastically taken on new challenges since becoming part of the team.

Aimee has continued to develop her work in Theraplay which is proving very useful to the adoption service and the families with whom we work.

Nikki is training to be a social worker and so left the team to undertake her placements. Holly has recently joined the team on a temporary basis to cover for Nikki until she qualifies in the summer of 2013.

Our other administrator, Denise, has worked tirelessly to support the team. Denise has also continued to be actively involved in the birth parent drop in which has enabled her to develop closer links to some of the families supported to use letterbox contact.

In November 2012 the Team left their current premises to move into the Civic Centre. This has allowed closer links with the Care Management Teams which has been eagerly anticipated. The move will over the next year provide opportunities for closer working relationships with the children's workers. There will be some challenges in moving the service which has been in the same place for so many years and ensuring that we let everybody know where the team is. The team have worked hard over the past few months to begin this process which will continue into the coming year.

Statistics for past twelve months

- Numbers of adopters approved : 23
- Numbers of children referred for adoption: 36
- Number of children matched with new families: 13
- Number of Adoption orders made: 17

Dear Ruth

You have made a long- emotionally tough process easy and enjoyable. We have learned from your experience, wisdom and kindness. You are a shining example of how good the process can be.

Prospective adopters February 2012

Dear Elaine

Thank you so much for everything you have done to help us in our journey to becoming a family. Sarah couldn't have been a better match for us and we love her incredibly.

Thank you

Adoptive parents July 2012

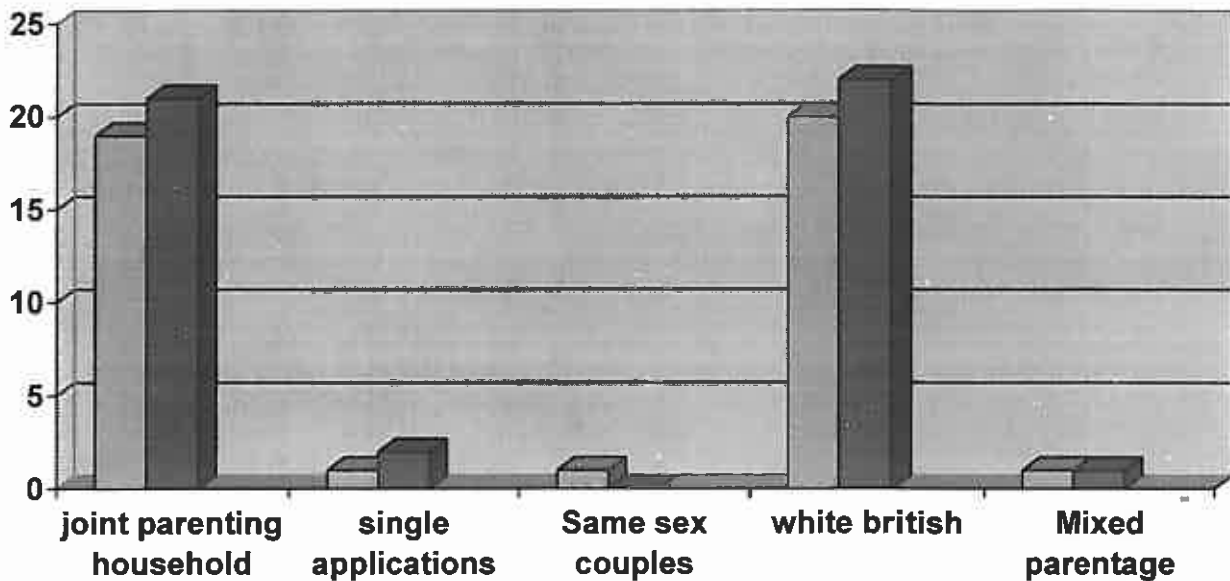
Recruitment, training and assessment

In the past twelve months we have received over 69 (73 in 2011) requests for adoption information. All packs were sent out within 24 hours of request. From this interest we have undertaken 27 (21 in 2011) initial visits and 23 (21 in 2011) households have attended workshops since the beginning of 2012. Adoption workshops are run across the Consortium on a bi-monthly basis, and Southend have run six sets of workshops during that time, although applicants continue to be encouraged to attend the next available set of workshops wherever in the consortium these are being run.

National statistics show a high dropout rate between expressing an interest and proceeding to initial visit. This is generally found to be due to both partners not being willing to continue; a clearer understanding of adoption and in several cases in the past year to due to unexpected pregnancy.

In the past year the team have undertaken 29 assessments. There have been 23 adopters approved throughout the year with the remaining 6 due early in 2013.

Of the households who have proceeded to workshops the following breakdown is found:



2011 - ■
2012 - ■

Of the households approved by Southend, there are currently 7 households available on the Consortium register. During 2012, Southend set up it's own post adoption group outside of the consortium. This was in response to consultation with our adoptive families who were not attending the post adoption group held in Thurrock by the consortium. Southend adopters asked for a local group and since it was set up, this has been very well attended and has received excellent feedback. This has also attracted families who have previously adopted but who have not been known to the adoption service in recent years and has led to them receiving post adoption support in their families where difficulties have arisen.

Adoption Panel

Changes in Legislation in April 2011 changed the core membership of the panel, allowing a much greater choice where needed from a much larger central list.

In 2012 we ran 13 Adoption panels. The following statistics are available from the work of these panels:

- PAR's (Prospective adopters report) presented (general approval): 20 in 2012 *(9 in 2011)*.
- PAR's presented (for a specific child): 3 *(1 in 2011)*
- PAR's presented (Overseas adoption): 0 *(0 in 2011)*
- Children presented for Preferred option: 20 to 1st September *(19 in 2011)*
- Children presented for Preferred Option to Decision Maker from 1st September - 12
- Children for matching with adopters: 13 *(22 in 2011)*
- Number of disruptions: 0 *(1 in 2011)*

Aimee

Linda & I would like to thank you for helping us through the PAR and for the kind words you said today to the panel. I know you will say that we were only doing your job, but we both feel you have made what could have been a hard task clear and simple and we appreciate your efforts on our behalf.

It's strange but I was not nervous today, merely looking forward to passing a large milestone on our journey to parenthood.

Kindest regards

Colin (prospective adopter following adoption panel) January 2012

Post Adoption Services

Post adoption services have continued to develop during the past year. This continues to be a growing area of work.

We continue to run two post adoption groups. One is our post approval group, for all approved adopters who have not yet been linked with a child. This is run jointly across the consortium and allows us to offer ongoing training and to share profiles.

We have been running a Consortium wide Post adoption group for adopters with placements; however, this was poorly attended by Southend families. Early in 2012, we therefore undertook a consultation exercise with Southend adopters who requested a local support group, rather than the consortium wide group. This has now been running for a few months and has proven very successful. We have linked in with some adoptive families in Southend whom we had previously lost touch with and from this have been able to offer post adoption support where difficulties have been identified.

Our new Post Adoption Support Group has already had speakers on :

- Dyadic developmental psychotherapy
- Understanding and responding to attachment patterns

The post adoption group has allowed us the opportunity to identify stresses within certain placements at an earlier stage and to pick up and undertake direct work with the family before breaking point has been reached.

Where preschool children are placed for adoption in Southend we encourage families to attend SPARKLES. SPARKLES is a group in which adopters are shown and encouraged to play with their own child using therapy techniques, a therapeutic approach that promotes the development of attachment relationships. This group continues to grow and over the summer over 15 children attended one of the sessions.

SPARKLES has added benefits as adopters who meet each other have often gone on to develop supportive relationships and networks.

Recognising the need for ongoing opportunity for adoptive parents to consider the issues affecting their children an ongoing training programme has now been established in Southend as part of the new local post adoption group.

The letterbox contact system continues to develop and we are currently supporting over 150 contact plans, in several cases this includes direct contact.

At Southend Adoption Service we recognise that when a child joins an adoptive family it is not only the immediate family that are impacted, but also their extended families and networks. In 2011 we piloted an information sharing evening for this group which also focused on how they could in turn provide practical support. The first night was a great success with 100% positive feedback. We have continued to run this group which is well attended and has already proven a great success in supporting a placement where difficulties did arise and we were able to tap into the extended support who felt that the training had given them the understanding to help.

Birth Parent Support Group

We have through 2011/12 continued to run the group which directly supports birth families who have been affected by adoption. The Birth parent group meets on a monthly basis in a local community centre. We have found that the quantity and quality of letters received has improved and has allowed some children to receive contact with birth families that they otherwise would have missed.

The group remains small but we have come to recognise that this is viewed more as a drop in. We advertise the group in local community areas to ensure that as many families as possible can be supported.

Jo Hines is a real hard worker and I want to thank you for everything well done Jo

I think Jo is brilliant

FW (Birth mother)

Schedule 2 & BRIC

Possibly influenced by all the media interest and TV programmes like 'Who do You Think You Are' this is an area of work that continues to grow. BRIC (Birth Relative Initiated Contact) is where birth families express an interest in making contact with an adopted adult, whilst Schedule 2 is where an adopted adult requests their adoption records and often support in tracing their birth family.

In 2011 we worked with over 35 people who were trying to trace information or family members who had been adopted. We successfully reunited a number of people and continue to support many as they develop long lost relationships and make sense of their past.



Dear Jo

I can't thank you enough for all your hard work finding out all that information, which has helped me form some idea in my mind of my birth mother and family, and for the sensitive and considered way in which you conveyed it to me. There are not many days passed when I haven't given it a good deal of thought. I am still very glad that I now know so much more.

Thanks so much again

Kind regards

Jamie

Inspections

In February 2012 the adoption service had their tri-annual OFSTED inspection. They summarised that:

- The overall quality rating was good
- Children's safety & welfare is promoted by the agency
- The arrangements for supporting families and children placed by the agency are good
- The wishes and feelings of children are not obtained consistently. However, some skilled work is carried out with older children to establish their wishes and feelings and to help them understand their situation.
- Birth parents are well supported and encouraged to become fully involved in the planning for their child
- The service to adults returning to find out about their adoption or a birth relative is of an excellent quality
- This is an agency that is managed and staffed by committed and child-centred personnel.

In June 2012 Southend had their Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked after children services. This summarised that:

- Specialist Service managers are readily available to staff, provide clear advice and case direction to them and staff report that the support they receive from managers is excellent
- Partnership working is excellent
- The overall effectiveness for Looked after Children is good.
- The adoption service is judged good overall, and most of the recommendations from its most recent inspection have been implemented.

Special Award

In December 2011 The Adoption Team was invited to the House of Lords to attend the finals of the Social Worker of the Year Awards.

The Adoption Team won Team of the Year (Children's services) Award.

What the judges said about the team was:

"The team has used a range of innovative techniques to address service user needs. They have a great team spirit, high morale and showcased a range of examples of how they have worked together effectively and efficiently. The judges felt that they had a good overview of the team as a whole".

This was a fantastic accolade for the Team and for Southend Borough Council. It has led to direct meetings with Martin Narey, Ministerial Advisor on Adoption, who has been very instrumental in the recent adoption reforms and has asked for our views on forthcoming changes and has raised Southend's profile nationally for adoption.



Southend Borough Council

Statement of Purpose

Southend Adoption Service

283 London Road
Westcliff-On-Sea
Essex SS0 7BX

December 2012
Telephone: 01702 354366
Fax: 01702 437217
Website: www.southend.gov.uk

Contents

	Page	-
Introduction	3	
Aims and Objectives	4	
The Service's Values	5	
Policies	6	
The Structure of the Service	7	
The System(s) in place to Monitor and Evaluate	8	
The Services Provided	9	
Adoption Panel	18	
How to Complain	20	



Introduction

The following Statement of Purpose is intended to set out clearly the aims and objectives of the Southend Adoption Agency as required by Schedule I of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 (amended 2005) and the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011. As required under these Regulations, the Statement of Purpose will be presented to the Council's Cabinet for endorsement and will be reviewed and updated annually.

The Statement of Purpose will take into account the following:

- ❖ The Southend Adoption Agency Policy Document
- ❖ The Adoption Act 1976 as amended
- ❖ The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 (amended 2005)
- ❖ The Care Standards Act 2000
- ❖ The National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales 2011
- ❖ The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- ❖ The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 – amended 2011
- ❖ Children and Adoption Act 2006
- ❖ Any relevant Local Authority Circulars and Good Practice Guidance
- ❖ Adoption Scorecard
- ❖ Outcome of Adoption Inspection 2012
- ❖ Outcome of Safeguarding inspection 2012



The Aims and Objectives of the Local Authority in Relation to the Adoption Service

Southend Sea Borough Council Adoption Service aims to provide a comprehensive range of adoption services to children requiring adoption, birth families, adopters and those who have already been adopted. In meeting its aims and objectives, the Adoption Service will work within the relevant policies of both Southend Borough Council and the Adoption Service.

The objective of Children's Services is for every child to remain with their birth family and every reasonable effort will be made by the Authority to enable and support the birth parents, or the wider birth family, to provide a permanent home for the child where the child's needs can be met within a safe environment. However, if this is not possible then the child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving, adoptive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. At all times the child's best interests come first with their welfare and safety being paramount.

The Adoption Service aims to recruit sufficient adopters to ensure that children can be placed with a family that not only meet the child's day to day needs but also the ethnic, cultural, religious, physical and emotional needs of the child. However, no child should wait indefinitely for an ideal placement.

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of a child retaining some form of contact with their birth parent(s) or birth family. Any decision about the possibility, type and frequency of contact will be based on the needs of the child and what is in the child's best interests. Where a child is of an age to understand, the child's views and wishes in relation to adoption will be considered when making plans for the child.

The Adoption Service aims to provide anyone enquiring about adoption with full information on the adoption process so that they can make an informed judgement about whether or not to proceed with their application. This will include those wishing to adopt from within the United Kingdom and from overseas, foster carers wishing to adopt a child already in their care and step-parents and relatives wishing to adopt a child from within their family.

Prospective adopters will be welcomed without prejudice and will be provided with clear eligibility criteria. They will also be given information on children waiting and what is required to meet the children's needs. The adoption provision aims to provide a service to birth parents and birth families that takes into account the lifelong implications of adoption and treats each individual fairly and with respect.

Birth parent(s) and birth families will be given information on local and national support groups, and where an adult adoptee requires information from their birth records, the adoption service aims to provide a supportive and informative service at all times.

The Adoption Service aims to provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption whether prior to, or after, the making of an Adoption Order. The Adoption Service also aims to protect all the information held and will provide security and confidentiality for all records, including those to be held for 100 years from the making of the Adoption Order.

The Adoption Service will maintain management information systems in order to monitor and evaluate the service provided and ensure all work is undertaken with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards, current legislation and Regulations, current policy statements and accepted good practice in mind.

Where can I see this Guide

Written copies are available at the Adoption Team. If you would like a written copy please contact the Adoption Team Manager at the address above or by contacting johines@southend.gov.uk

The guide is available on the Southend Borough Council website

The statement will be translated into other languages or made available in a format that is right for someone with physical, sensory and learning impairments and communication difficulties, upon request.

The Service Values

Southend's Success for All Children's Group has the following shared vision

'We aim to make sure that all children and young people who live in Southend are able to take advantage of the opportunities which are here now and to enhance these opportunities for the future. It is to

- Help them raise their aspiration and achievement
- Ensure they have the opportunities they need for inclusion
- Facilitate their participation in decision making that affects their lives
- Strive for excellence in the services we provide

The Adoption Service's values include:

- Being child centred; their best interests being paramount
- Focusing on outcomes for children
- Being outward looking, flexible, adapting to new ideas and ways of working and being responsive to individual need
- A commitment to learning
- Listening to children and their families
- Ensure that the services promotes equal opportunities and does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin, religion or culture
- Developing and enrich partnerships with other local, regional and national agencies to improve standards and offer a complete service, taking every opportunity to share best practice as openly as possible
- Improving standards of practice and service continuously to respond to changes in law and challenge poor practice
- A commitment to Children and Learning's Specialist Services Practice Priorities

How will this happen?

These Aims and Objectives will be achieved by:

- Providing placement choices that reflect:
Equality
Diversity

Individual and personal needs
Social and cultural background preferences

- Delivering local Consortium placements wherever possible and appropriate to allow ongoing appropriate levels of post-adoption support
- Active leadership that delivers clarity of purpose to the adoption service
- Clarity about the purpose of individual placements
- Matching placement availability to requirements
- Providing access to support services (e.g. health, therapy) for children, and adopters.
- Facilitating the maintenance of valued relationships, where appropriate, especially with siblings and anyone identified by the child and birth family where possible.
- Avoiding drift and working with time scales that meet the child's best interests
- Designing and managing effective processes and ways of working
- Joint working and partnership
- Ensuring that staff are trained and motivated to deliver a child centred service
- Learning in order to deliver continuous improvement through:
 - The assessment and review of the service
 - Responding positively to complaints and feedback
 - Learning from any placement disruptions
- Involving children in policy and decision making
- Ensuring that children's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages
- Taking corporate responsibility within Children and Learning for the effective management, quality and support of placements
- Being vigorous in challenging poor practice and addressing problems effectively
- Providing appropriate and pro active guidance and support to birth parents
- Undertaking ongoing quality assurance and consultation to ensure that the service focuses on outcomes for children

The Policies

There are detailed adoption policies and procedures to guide the way in which the principles are practiced. These cover children, adopters, birth families, adoption support, and non-agency adoption and inter country adoption.

New staff and panel members are given a copy of the adoption policies and informed of any changes.

A written copy can be obtained as above in 'Where can I see this guide?'

There is also a complete range of more general Southend Borough Council's policies which all staff first access as part of their induction.

The Structure of the Service

The Service is committed to monitoring the quality of its services and the outcomes of placements and collects data that measures the service's performance. The Group Managers for Young People and Family Support and for Specialist Resources and Quality Assurance are responsible for the quality standards of the services and the Adoption Panel also plays a key role in this.

Staff with relevant qualifications, usually a CQSW, DipSW or Degree in Social Work, are appointed by interview in accordance with equal opportunities, good practice and human resources recruitment policy. Copies of staff qualification, references and checks are kept on Personnel files for inspection and oversight by the appropriate inspectors and managers. Regular supervision, training and annual employee development appraisals are conducted.

The Adoption Team currently consists of one Team Manager, 1 Senior Practitioner, and 4 Social Workers. Administrative support is provided by 1.5 Adoption Administrators. All social workers within the team are suitably qualified with experienced in varying degrees of children and family social work and fostering or adoption itself.

The Adoption Team is part of the Department for Children and Learning's Specialist Services. The Acting Head of Specialist Services is Heather Flinders, who is also the Agency Decision Maker and the Interim Corporate Director of Children and Learning is Sue Cook. The Adoption Service is part of Young People and Family Support Services which is managed by the Group Manager Young People and Family Support (see below and attached structure chart)

- Heather Flinders, Interim Head of Service and Agency Decision Maker. Heather gained a BA Hons Degree in English and Sociology. She gained CQSW in 1991 and a Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Social Studies at Southbank and a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work Leadership and Management at ARU in 2008.
- Suë Hadley, Head of Children's commissioning and Learning Infrastructure, is the Deputy Decision Maker. She gained an MA (Hons) 1978 University of Dundee; an MSc in 1998 in Care policy and planning and a CQSW/Dip. in Applied Social Sciences in 1988 at the University of the Southbank
- Diane Keens Group Manager Young People and Family Support since April 2011 and Registered Manager of the Adoption Service.
- Diane was manager of an Adoption Team since 2002, joining Southend in September 2007 as Adoption Team Manager and has worked within Children and Families Service for over 29 years in Essex and Thurrock. Diane gained a Certificate Qualification in Social Work in 1985 at Chelmer College, Essex; a Bsc Hons Degree in Social Work (1st) in 2000 at Anglia Polytechnic University, Full PQ award and a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work (Management) in 2006 at Anglia Ruskin University
- Jo Hines, Adoption Team Manager from May 2011 has extensive adoption experience having worked previously in the Adoption Service in Essex since 1997 and as Senior Practitioner in the Southend Adoption Team since 2007. Jo has a particular interest in Theraplay which brings an added dimension to the Team.
- Elaine Watkins, Senior Practitioner (since July 2011), has worked in social work since 1991, focusing on various children's services. Elaine took time out to study for a degree in Health Promotion before qualifying as a Social Worker in 2004, when she joined the Permanent Placement Team in 2004. She has worked in the Adoption Team since November 2005.
- Faye Khraud (since July 2012). Faye gained a BA in Social Work at the University of Essex in 2010 and worked in the Care Management Teams in Southend prior to joining the adoption team.
- Susan Ikhifa (since July 2012). Susan completed her Diploma in Social Work in 2003 and has previously worked in the Redbridge Adoption Team before joining Southend.
- Aimee Fossett, Social Worker, was a student social worker in the team in 2009 and joined the team on a permanent basis in 2010 having gained her Degree in Social Work at Southend University.
- Ruth Cadywould is a qualified social worker and joined the team in November 2010. Ruth is a qualified nurse and qualified social worker and has considerable experience working in residential settings with adolescents and younger children.

The System(s) in place to Monitor and Evaluate the Provision of Services to ensure that Services provided are Effective and the Quality of those Services is of an Appropriate Standard.

Statistical records are kept of the adoption service's activities, these are analysed to evaluate and monitor the service and to ensure children's plans are moving forward within timescales that meet their needs, and that adopters are being assessed and approved within the timescales of the National Adoption Minimum Standards. Monitoring is also undertaken to provide information on the needs of the children requiring adoption, the numbers of adopters required, and to ensure sufficient staff are available to provide an effective and efficient service.

The Government introduced an Adoption Scorecard in 2012 which set priorities for all Adoption Services. Southend will use this as an additional tool to monitor and evaluate the provision of services within the Agency.

Following approval, adopters are reviewed every year and are referred back to the adoption panel if they have not been linked within two years of approval.

Statistical records are also kept of all post adoption activity.



The following systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the service given:

- ❖ Preparation courses, the value of the training, information and preparation given.
- ❖ Case work supervision and performance management of staff.
- ❖ Quality assurance of papers going to the Adoption Panel.
- ❖ Adoptive applicants attending panel are asked to provide feedback on their experiences.
- ❖ Feedback on cases presented by members of the Adoption Panel.
- ❖ Review of how members of the Adoption Panel fulfil their functions.
- ❖ Following the making of an Adoption Order, adopters are asked to complete an evaluation form so that the service they have received can be monitored, and where necessary, improved.
- ❖ Various consultation exercises undertaken into specific areas of the service
- ❖ Southend participation survey

Systems for providing feedback and evaluation from the following groups are in place. These include:

- ❖ Initial information given to enquirers and the time taken to respond to Adopters' experience of introductions, placement and the information given on the child.

- ❖ Adoption Panel attendance feedback
- ❖ Birth parent(s) and birth families and the service they have received.
- ❖ Where they are of an age to understand and communicate, the views of children placed for adoption.
- ❖ Inter-country adopters and the service they have received.
- ❖ Non-agency adopters, e.g. step-parents and relatives, and the service they have received.
- ❖ Schedule 2 users (birth record counselling and adult adoptees) and the service they received.

The Services Provided

The Service is part of a unitary authority consortium "Partners in Adoption" with Thurrock Council and the London Borough of Havering for the placement of children. The Team covers all areas of adoption including recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, preparation of children for placement, counselling of adopted adults, step-parent adoptions, birth parent counselling, and inter country adoptions.

Who receives Adoption Services?

- ✓ Children requiring adoption
- ✓ Birth relatives
- ✓ Prospective adopters
- ✓ Approved adopters
- ✓ Children and their adoptive families who need adoption support
- ✓ Adopted adults and members of their birth families



What services are provided?

The Adoption Service provides adoptive families for Southend and consortium partners children. The Agency offers placements with adopters who have been approved and who are provided with comprehensive support and training.

The Adoption Service offers a therapeutic service for young people through the Child and Family Consultation Service, and where needed with adjoining Child and Family Consultation services, where adopters live outside the boundaries. The Marigold Family Centre also undertakes life story work with children.

Specialist education support is available through the Looked after Children's Advisory Teacher and Liaison Officer until the making of an adoption order and beyond if the family reside in Southend.

Specialist Health support is available through the agency's Looked After Children Nurse and Consultant Paediatrician, Dr Sriskandan.

Adopters are supported through the process of adoption by the allocation of an adoption Social Worker, usually the worker who has completed their assessment with them. They visit regularly (at least six monthly pre placement and more frequently as needed post placement) and have telephone contact in the intervening period. They are responsible for advising on the linking & matching of placements, practical support and advice to adopters, acting as a key liaison person with the child's social worker and completing reports for the Court.

A post approval group meets on a quarterly basis across the Consortium for approved adopters awaiting placement to offer ongoing training and to share profiles of children needing adoption.

A post adoption support group meets on a quarterly basis, which looks at issues such as managing difficult behaviour, the effects of separation and loss, first aid and life story work as well as offering a Christmas Party and other social events throughout the year.

Family events also take place at least twice a year enabling adopters and their children to meet and integrate with other such families within their immediate and wider networks, further seeking to normalise adoption for all and strengthening the links developed between them further.

A Theraplay parent and toddler group for adopters with pre-school placements to support the development of secure attachment. (Sparkles) and thus improve outcomes for children placed for adoption.

A Birth Parent support group runs on a monthly basis to support birth parents with issues regarding adoption and to support the ongoing development of letterbox contact. This aims to help maintain contact between adopted children and their birth parents in a meaningful way.

Any family living in the Southend area whose lives are affected by adoption are able to apply to the Southend Adoption Service and request an assessment of need. This will be undertaken by a qualified adoption social worker to identify support required and available to the family or person concerned. A Support Plan will then be drawn up and agreed by the Adoption Support Services Advisor.

Southend Adoption Team has full membership of BAAF where adopters can gain additional support and advice. Southend also has a Consultation Service with Family Futures an Adoption Support Agency to help advice on the most complex cases.

Recruitment of Adopters

A recruitment campaign is ongoing within the Consortium and we have a "Partners in Adoption" website and adoption materials in relation to this.

Partners in Adoption has a free phone line (0800 652 1271) for enquiries about adopting. This is widely publicised throughout Southend, Thurrock and Havering. Basic information is given to enquirers by phone and an information pack sent within 2 days. There is Publicity & Recruitment Coordinator for the Consortium who coordinates the publicity and recruitment strategy, which is updated annually.

Adoption information is also available on the Southend Borough Council website which links to the website designed for enquirers at www.partners-in-adoption.co.uk The two sites provide a great deal of adoption information.

Partners in Adoption hold information meetings to which our enquirers are invited. These meetings give an overall picture of adopting in Southend, Thurrock & Havering. Enquirers can also meet experienced adoption workers and adoptive parents. It is explained to those who enquire that priority will be given to applicants who are able to meet the needs of the children currently awaiting adoption. This can change at any given time but usually we need adopters for older children and sibling groups, children with disabilities and children from minority ethnic groups. It may not be practicable to assess everyone who cannot meet the needs of children currently needing placement.

If there is not an imminent information meeting, or for people wishing to proceed, then an initial visit from an adoption social worker is arranged, where the personal circumstances of the enquirers will be discussed. We aim to arrange within 4 weeks of enquiry.

Key Aims of the Recruitment Strategy;

- Recruit a variety of adopters to meet the ever-changing needs of children in Southend requiring placements.
- Attract adopters from black and ethnic minority communities, those interested in taking older children, those with disabilities and larger sibling groups.
- Increase stability of adoptive placements through appropriate support packages
- To provide a choice of placements to match the needs of children and young people thereby decreasing the possibility of disruption

If following initial visit the enquirers or the Agency consider that they should not go ahead to be assessed as adopters, a full discussion will be offered to explore the circumstances leading to this decision. This is confirmed in writing. When the Agency decides not to proceed with an enquiry the reasons for not proceeding will be shared with the applicants according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Following an initial visit, enquirers who want to go ahead are asked to make a formal written application, which is then formally accepted by the Agency. Statutory checks are then undertaken. We will then invite enquirers to attend an adopters' preparation course. We require all first-time adoptive parents to attend such a course. This is to help them understand the difference between parenting an adopted child and parenting a birth child and the impact this is likely to have on the child, themselves and their families.

When the course is finished, a home study assessment will then be carried out. The aim is to complete the assessment within eight months of the formal application.



Placements for Children

Placements for children are considered on the basis of seeking carers from within the child's family first (Connected Persons). If this is not possible, placements from within the Borough's own resources (adopters) or those available within the local Consortium will be sought, unless this is not in a child's best interests. If this is then still not available, an external resource will be located by the Adoption Team. This is achieved in a variety of ways including through linking with the National Adoption Register, advertising in specialised publications, featuring children via exchange events and through continually developing links with other adoption agencies throughout the country.

The Adoption service receives requests for placements for adoption from the child's social worker. The request is provided in writing and outlines the reasons for placement, care needs, ethnicity, religion and language and intended timescales, legal status, forum in which the decision for adoption or concurrent planning was made and any other key information that enables a suitable match to be found.

An Adoption notification meeting then takes place to clarify what information is required for panel and by when and who will take responsibility for this.

Prior to the "preferred option decision", a worker is allocated from the Adoption Team to link up with the social worker and begin family finding and hopefully direct work with the birth family. This support they can continue for as long as it is required and certainly until the making of the adoption order.

Once a child has been referred for adoption, a child's permanence report and adoption placement report are prepared. During this work it is ensured that:

- Children are carefully listened to where they are old enough.
- Children's views about their situation, in particular, who they live with in the future and who they continue to have contact with are recorded and actively taken into account at each stage.
- Children should receive support services that meet their assessed needs
- Children should receive proper preparation for placement and support after placement.

(For more information see Adoption Agency Policy Statement)

Birth families views about placements are sought and taken into account.

Every effort is made to find a placement, which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs. This takes into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However, no child should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. Placements that cannot meet all these needs, but are sympathetic to them, can be considered.

The child is provided with a full and realistic family history and helped to maintain their heritage. A letter for later life is prepared and includes information about the child's birth and early life, and provides up-to-date information about themselves and their situation. The child's social worker writes this letter to be read by young adopted people when they reach their teenage years.

Social workers, foster carers and others staff work to prepare children for adoptive placement. Work is undertaken with children in regard to their wishes and feelings about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with.

When a family has been matched, children are given appropriate information about their new family in a format they can understand. This often includes welcome books including photos and DVD's, prepared by the prospective adopters.

Adoptive Applicants

Adoptive applicants from all sections of the community: married people; couples living together, single people, same sex partnerships and members of the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups, are sought in order to meet the diverse needs of children in this area.

People who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval. They will be treated fairly throughout the adoption process.

(For procedures, criteria and more detailed information see; Adoption Agency Policy and Information for Adopters leaflet)

Adopters will need to show that they can:

- ✓ Learn from their experiences
- ✓ Cope with stress
- ✓ Meet the ethnic, cultural, health and educational needs of the child needing adoption
- ✓ Offer consistency of care
- ✓ Work with children's social workers and other agencies to secure necessary services for the child
- ✓ Build and sustain close, intimate and reciprocal relationships
- ✓ Understand other people's points of view and their feelings
- ✓ Be in touch with sad and angry feelings
- ✓ Resolve past wrongs or losses
- ✓ Build secure attachments and share difficulties

At all stages of referral people are informed about a wide range of people who can adopt. These include: -

- ✓ Families from all types of backgrounds
- ✓ Couples with or without children
- ✓ Couples who are married or not; heterosexual or gay
- ✓ Single people
- ✓ People from all ethnicities
- ✓ People with disabilities
- ✓ People who are not 'perfect'
- ✓ People who have had problems in the past
- ✓ People who rent their houses

- ✓Some overweight and older people and smokers (subject to medical advice)
- ✓People whose infertility treatment has ended.

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

Adopters are clearly told that if they smoke they are unable to adopt a child under the age of 5 years. They are also told that they are not deemed to be a non-smoker until they have given up for a period of twelve months.

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

- ✓ The ability to see the child as he or she is, not how you would like them to be
- ✓ Acceptance, commitment, flexibility, stickability, sensitivity and openness.
- ✓ The ability to cope with a bit of a mess and disruption
- ✓ Ability to ask for and accept help
- ✓ A sense of humour.

The information for the assessment is brought together in a format known as the PAR (Prospective Adopters Report) produced by the British Association for Adoption & Fostering. An adoption social worker visits applicants in their own home. They are seen together and separately if there is more than one applicant. Applicants are invited to make their own written as well as verbal contributions to their assessment. Work with the adopters own children is also undertaken if appropriate. Other members of the household are also interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are seen at this stage, also ex-partners. The assessing social worker will analyse the information and make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters.

Applicants see the completed Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and are asked to sign to say that they agree its contents. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the adoption panel where their application is considered.



Post Approval

The Agency will review approved adopters every twelve months whilst on the register and continue to provide advice, support and counselling. After two years the assessment will be updated and represented to panel.

Every effort will be made to match the applicants with a suitable child or children. Applicants should be clear however that our priority is to find appropriate families for children. Approved adopters will be informed of the National Adoption Register and the Partners in Adoption consortium arrangements

Prospective adopters receive preparation for a child being placed when they attend the preparation course and during their assessment.

When a link with a particular child or children has been agreed at the linking meeting, the adoption social worker and child's social worker will tell the prospective adopter about the child and give some written information too. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed, they will receive further detailed information including the child's permanence report. The child's foster carer and the two social workers will also visit them.

All prospective adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet with the medical advisor prior to the matching adoption panel, but particularly where children have special needs.

Where the child's case has been considered by court, leave of the court will be sought to disclose specialist written reports about the child that may help adopters.

The agency is committed to developing a comprehensive range of services aimed to support adoptees, both as children and adults, prospective adopters and adopters in the periods before placement, after placement and post adoption. An Adoption Placement Report is prepared prior to the full adoption panel to make clear what support will be offered to the child and their new family. This will include services such as financial support, payment of legal expenses where agreed; referral to specialist local services; letterbox contact, ongoing training and a telephone helpline.

Following approval of the match at the full adoption panel, a placement planning meeting will be called. The Adoption Team Manager or senior practitioner will chair this. The meeting includes the adopters, their social worker, the child's social worker, foster carer and the foster carers supervising social worker.

The purpose of the meeting is to ensure that the adopters have all the relevant information available about the child. We provide the prospective adopters with a copy of the child's permanence report, matching report and adoption support plan. An introductions programme is devised in consultation with the adopters.

After the child is placed with the adopters, the child's social worker and the adopter's social worker continues to support the placement. Where more in-depth work is needed, the child and prospective adopters can be referred to services both in house and by other agencies as part of the adoption support plan.

Reviews are chaired by an independent reviewing officer until an adoption order is made. The review first considers the child's progress and then the adoption support plan and whether changes need to be made to it. Adopters are informed that they can make contact with the agency at any time in the future if they wish the adoption support plan to be reviewed.

Financial Support and other Support Arrangements

For placements arranged through Southend Adoption Agency, the Agency is able to pay introductory expenses and will meet costs of legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex. Applicant's court fees for an adoption application are paid.

At the point of matching, all children must have an adoption support plan, which highlights any financial implications. Adopters are provided with a leaflet setting out what benefits they may be entitled to. When all possible benefits have been claimed and if there is still a financial need, the Agency assesses whether it should assist. The adoption support plan must be agreed by the Adoption Services Support Adviser (the Group Manager Young People and Family Support) and with the adoptive family before being presented to the Adoption Panel.

Subsequently, the child and adopters circumstances will need to be reassessed before any help is offered. Where there is a specific need for financial help related to the placement for adoption and subject to means testing (which is required by government regulations). Southend will consider assisting adopters before and after the child is adopted. This support is available to any adopter living in the Southend area, whether the child has been placed by Southend or not.

Unless the circumstances are exceptional, most financial help given will be in the form of a one off rather than regular payments. One exception is where existing foster carers are adopting, where Southend Borough Council will agree to regular payments for a period of up to two years.

Making, maintaining and reviewing Contact Plans

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

The agency operates a letterbox contact scheme for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for letterbox and direct face-to-face contact with the child by adoption support social workers.

There are usually mutual benefits from holding at least one meeting between the child's birth parent and the adoptive parents around the time of introductions. Other significant birth relatives may also be involved.

After placement, contact arrangements continue to be revisited at each review, but not after an adoption order is made. If there are any issues that arise later, these are addressed through the adoption support social workers.

A birth parent drop-in is run on a monthly basis to offer birth parents support and advice in all matters relating to adoption, but in particular to support with contact arrangements.

The Adoption Agency recognises that the contact requirements in each individual case, vary and need to remain flexible in order to meet a child's ever changing needs, therefore when approached Southend Adoption Service seek to review any request, ultimately the child's new parents will make decisions according to what they feel is in their child's best interests.

What happens if placements break down?

Very few placements for children do disrupt. However, where there is a disruption the Agency convenes a disruption meeting in order to try to understand the factors, which led to the breakdown of

the placement. This helps in planning future placements. These meetings are chaired by an Independent Chairperson. A summary of the conclusions of this meeting are considered by the management team, within the Consortium and with the Adoption Panel to inform future practice.

Birth Families

Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption.

Birth parents will be informed and consulted at the earliest stage when the agency has decided parallel plans, which include adoption. They will have the opportunity to give their account of events and to see and comment on what is written about them in reports for the Adoption Panel and in information passed to adopters.

Birth Parents will be offered a worker from the Adoption Team to advise and support them throughout the adoption process. If requested, this service can be provided by another of the Consortium's partners or purchased independently.

The Agency will provide a service for birth parents that wish to relinquish their child for adoption, usually babies. When the agency is approached before the child's anticipated birth, as much preliminary work as possible will be undertaken with the birth parents before the child is born, to ensure that the decision to place for adoption is based on the fullest possible consideration of all the alternatives available.

All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information and contribute to their child's life storybook and letter for later life. The life storybook provides a simple and age appropriate explanation of what has happened to the child up until they join their adopted family. It includes pictures of important people and places in the child's life so far, mementoes and other information relevant to the child. The child's social worker usually does this work with help and advice from the adoption worker. (For more information see Adoption Agency Policy Statement)

A Birth Parent drop-in now runs on a monthly basis to support Birth Parents with any issue relating to adoption and especially to support in the provision of letterbox contact.

Step-Parent Adoption

The Service also provides advice, information and counselling for those who are seeking to secure the adoption of their partner's children. The same service will be provided for adoption by relatives.

Enquirers are sent written information about non-agency adoption within 2 working days. If having read the information provided, families wish to proceed, they are asked to apply in writing. Applicants are asked to complete the forms for statutory checks in line with agency adopters.

The adoption team will provide a detailed report for the court having considered all alternatives to adoption with the applicants. The Agency has a duty to only recommend adoption where it is in the best interests of the child for an order to be made.

In order to assess whether adoption is in the best interests of the child, it is necessary to seek the child's own views and the views of the birth parent who is not making the application. Similarly the views of wider family members will be taken into consideration where appropriate.
(For more information see Adoption Agency policy Statement)

Services for Adopted Adults

The Service offers counselling and acts as an intermediary with the birth family where adoptees over the age of 18 years contact the Adoption Service seeking information or seeking contact with their birth family. This includes those seeking access to their adoption records, referred to the team by the General Register Office.

This service is available both to those adults adopted through this Agency and those living in this area whose adoptions were arranged through other Adoption agencies.
(For more information see Adoption Agency policy Statement)

Where adoptees are under the age of 18 and are seeking further information and possible contact with the birth family, the agency will offer counselling and act as an intermediary, taking into account the views of the adoptive family.

Birth Relative Initiated Contact

Requests from adult birth family members for help seeking information or making contact with adult adoptees, placed by the Agency, will be facilitated by the team, who will act as an intermediary, approaching the adult adoptee, where their whereabouts can be found.

Recognising the potential impact that this work may have upon the adopted person, their separated sibling and other involved people; the work will be guided by the following general principles:

- The welfare, safety, needs, current circumstances and wishes of the adopted adult and others involved will inform any work undertaken.
- The role of the Service will be to assist the individual to understand and accept the situation they are in and the choices open to them, not to advocate on their behalf.

(For more information see Adoption Agency Policy Statement)

Applications for approval as an Inter-country Adopter

The Service believes that with inter-country adoptions, as with all other adoptions, the child's needs are paramount. The service will provide initial written information and counselling to applicants seeking to adopt a child from another country and offer advice on how further specific information regarding the legal and good practice arrangements for adoption in a particular country might be obtained. The team will apply the same standards as for domestic adoptions. (For further information see Adoption Agency Policy Statement)

Equal Opportunities

The Adoption Team is committed to working in an anti-discriminatory way, incorporating the Authorities Equal Opportunities Policy in all its work. Ensuring services to children meet their individual needs such as racial and cultural identity, religious and linguistic needs, disability, gender and sexuality.

The service endeavours to make a positive commitment to address these needs and promote respect and celebrate difference.

Child Protection

The Service complies with the SET procedures and Southend's Safeguarding Board policy in all areas of child protection and provides adequate training to its staff and adopters to ensure that children are safeguarded and protected at all times.



Adoption Panel

Southend Adoption Panel is compliant with The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amend 2011) and relevant guidance. Terms of reference for this panel and panel membership are available within the Southend Adoption Agency Policies.

The panel consists of people with a wide range of experience and diverse backgrounds and operates at sufficient frequency to avoid delay in considering children for adoption, approval of adopters and matching.

The Adoption panel is set up in accordance with government regulations. The panel is there to make recommendations to the agency on three main issues -

- ✓ Whether to approve people as suitable adopters
- ✓ Whether a match for a child with a particular adopter is right for them

They also comment on –

- ✓ Adoption Support Plans
- ✓ Contact arrangements
- ✓ Issues of concern, which they feel the Agency needs to put right.
- ✓ Quality assurance matters

The Head of the Adoption Agency will then consider the panel's recommendations before making a decision. Whether a child should be placed for adoption is now the decision of the Decision Maker and is no longer presented to the full adoption panel.

Panel Arrangements

Southend has one Adoption Panel which usually meets monthly. The panel has been reconstituted under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 – amended 2011. There is now a central list of panel members who perform the functions of the adoption panel.

The panel ensures an independent chairperson. Southend appointed Panel Chair (Lyndsay Davison) in June 2011, and we have two independent Vice-Chairs who will stand in as required.

The main decision maker is Heather Flinders, Interim Head of Children's Services in the Department of Children and Learning. She has overall responsibility for services for looked after children.

Involving people in Agency Decisions

Applicants to be approved as adopters are always invited to attend the panel where their approval is being considered and subsequently when they are matched with a child.

The panel always gives reasons for their recommendations. These reasons are recorded in the panel minutes. When applicants attend panel they are informed of the recommendation immediately in most cases, otherwise within 24 hours. Decisions are made within 7 days of the Decision Maker receiving the relevant minutes.

Individual decisions are made about when and how to tell children about agency decisions that adoption is right for them. The child's age, maturity and understanding and what they are likely to understand is taken into account.

If the decision maker is minded not to approve an adoptive applicant or not to continue with their assessment, she will write to them setting out the reasons and giving them the chance within 40 days to ask for the decision to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism.

Placements with other Adoption Agencies

When children's needs cannot be met within the consortium, they will be placed with adopters approved by other adoption agencies. Similarly, adopters approved by Southend who do not match the needs of the consortium children are assisted to have a child placed with them from elsewhere.

A Summary of the Complaints Procedure Established in Accordance with Section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989(A) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990 (B)

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories as follows:

1. Where the complaint is related to the service received, this is dealt with in accordance with Section 26 of the Children Act 1989, and the procedures on complaints for the Southend Borough Council's Department of Children & Learning.

A service user or somebody acting on their behalf can make a complaint by contacting:

Customer Services Manager
Department of Children and Learning
PO Box 6, Civic Centre
Victoria Avenue
Southend – on – Sea
Essex SS2 6ER

2. Where the complaint relates to the fact that the Agency Decision Maker decides not to approve the applicant, then the applicant will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the adoption service, or be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is organised by the British Associate of Adoption and Fostering. The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been informed that the Adoption Agency does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive parents (or has withdrawn the approval).

More information on the IRM can be obtained from:

IRM Contract Manager
Dolphin House
54 Coventry Road
Birmingham, B10 0RX

Telephone: 0121 7668086
Fax: 0121 7668557
E-mail: irm@baaf.org.uk



Contact Addresses and Telephone Numbers

The Southend – on – Sea Borough Council Adoption Agency is registered with:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

08456 404045

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Southend Adoption and Fostering, 283 London Road, Westcliff, Essex

Diane Keens (Group Manager)

01702 534406

dianekeens@southend.gov.uk

Jo Hines (Team Manager)

01702 350436

johines@southend.gov.uk

Aimee Fossett

01702 350437

aimeefossett@southend.gov.uk

Elaine Watkins Senior Practitioner

01702 354435

elainewatkins@southend.gov.uk

Faye Khraud Social Worker

01702 350421

fayekhraud@southend.gov.uk

Ruth Cadywould

01702 350421

ruthcadywould@southend.gov.uk

Susan Ikhifa Social Worker

01702 350439

susanikhifa@southend.gov.uk

The System for Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually and presented to Southend Borough Council's Cabinet for approval.

For a copy of this document in any other format / language, or to order more copies, please call 01702 354366.

Adoption Service Action Plan in Response to Adoption Inspection 2012

Recommendations	Actions Proposed	Update October 2012
<p>Ensure the written policy which is intended to safeguard from abuse or neglect includes children receiving an adoption support service (breach of Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 as amended Regulation 9 1 (a))</p>	<p>The set procedures to specifically include adopted children receiving an adoption support service</p>	<p>Working together is being updated. Raised at LSCB and to feed into this process. Review progress April 2013.</p>
<p>Carry out an assessment of a person's needs for adoption support services and prepare a written report of the assessment (Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 Regulation 14 (1) and (2) (b))</p>	<p>At present information is being collated to develop a guide for adoptive families with regard to what support is available throughout the local area, a requirement in the Adoption Agency Regulations 2011.</p> <p>This guide is seeking to incorporate the universal services that are available to all families within the community as well as more specialist services which may be available, including ongoing training in issues relating to adoption, Sparkles or post adoption support groups.</p> <p>Develop an assessment template for Post Adoption referrals.</p> <p>Develop a Service Provision Template outlining what support can / can not be provided to an adoption placement which in turn can be given to the adoptive parents</p>	<p>Complete. The Southend Post Adoption group is now up and running. We have been able to make contact with some adopters who previously did not engage with the service and have been able to begin to offer them support where difficulties arise.</p> <p>At present any family seeking post adoption support are still assessed in line with the Assessment Framework. Assessment tools are being developed further specifically to meet adoption needs. Once developed this will be uploaded onto Care First. Review December 2012.</p>
<p>Ensure that no child is assumed unable to communicate their views (NMS 1.3)</p>	<p>Life story work training has been provided across the care management teams, The Marigold Family Resource Centre as well as</p>	<p>Completed July 2012</p>

	<p>the Fostering and Adoption Service.</p> <p>Assessment tools to be in place, which include, observation of the child in their current placement, clear views on their presenting attachment style and needs, the quality of their current relationships, observation reports from any contacts with significant family members all in the context of their long term permanency needs.</p> <p>An adoption social worker is allocated to a child early on where the plan is for adoption and works in partnership with the statutory social worker to support, prepare and assess a child's wishes and feelings.</p>	<p>Completed July 2012</p> <p>Complete. Now allocated at point of referral</p>
<p>Ensure that the information obtained for the child is clear and appropriate; this is with particular reference to the content and quality of the child's permanence report (NMS 2.1)</p>	<p>Ensure that information is clear and appropriate as follows :-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the Child Permanency Report is quality controlled by the practice manager within the Care Management Teams before it is sent to the Adoption Service for presentation to the Adoption Panel • That prior to the Adoption panel it is checked again by an adoption advisor • Quality assured at Preferred Option stage. • The CPR to be updated and checked prior to any matching with prospective adopters. • At the time of An Adoption Placement 	<p>New processes introduced in line with this recommendation in April 2012. This has been circumvented by the introduction new regulations relating to the role and remit of the Agency Decision Maker. Southend has a full process in place which is due to be reviewed after 6 months (May 2013).</p>

	<p>Planning Meeting, an additional check has now been introduced.</p>	
<p>Ensure that the child's life story book and later in life letter are passed by the adoption agency to the prospective adopter on the dates agreed and that they are well presented and written in a simple and age appropriate style (breach of The Adoption and Children act 2002 Regulation 35 schedule 5 (8) Children Act 2002 Statutory Guidance (48))</p>	<p>The 2011 Adoption Agency regulations stipulate that a child placed for adoption should receive their life story book and letter for later life within 10days of the Adoption Celebration Hearing.</p> <p>A consultation with adoptive families took place in 2011 to ascertain where children in the 2008 - 11 period had not received a life story book or letter for later life.</p> <p>Since 2011 The Adoption Service have developed a tracking system to monitor this task and seek to ensure that all children placed for adoption receive their life story book or letter for later life in a timely manner.</p> <p>In 2011 Life story work training was provided across the care management teams, The Marigold Family Resource Centre as well as the Fostering and Adoption Service.</p>	<p>The life story books and letter for later life continue to be tracked each month.</p> <p>The last review indicated vast improvements in the timeliness of this work being completed, with only 3 pieces outstanding since the inspection.</p>
<p>Ensure that when timescales have not been met, the panel records the written reasons in the written minutes of the panel meeting (NMS 17.9)</p>	<p>A new front sheet for Prospective Adopter Reports has been developed to support this process in that the time frames from approaching the agency to being presented at the Adoption Panel are clearly set out. Where the expected timeframes have not been achieved the reasons for this will be minuted.</p>	<p>Completed March 2012.</p>

<p>Include in the Statement of Purpose the procedures for assessing needs for adoption support; this is with specific reference to families either previously unknown to the agency or who adopted some years ago. (breach of Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 as amended Regulation 2(1) Schedule 1 7a)</p>	<p>As previously stated an area for more robust development is to formalise the process in which adopters unknown to the Adoption Service access support, once established these will be incorporated into the Statement of Purpose once established</p>	<p>Complete. Added to Statement of Purpose December 2012</p>
<p>The New Adoption Plan for Tackling delay has necessitated the creation of performance indicators and associated change in practice to meet the requirements of the adoption scorecard time thresholds</p>	<p>Changes and adaptations have been made to Care First to enable accurate measurements that correlate to these indicators.</p>	<p>Complete</p>