

Adoption Statement of Purpose 2022

Introduction

Hampshire County Council acts as an Adoption Agency to provide adoption services as required under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

The Agency aims to fulfil its range of duties and responsibilities under the above legislation and the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 in meeting the needs of those children who have or may be adopted, their birth parents and those people who are or may be adoptive parents.

Principles of the Service

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a stable and loving family, which can meet their needs through childhood and beyond. Children's birth parents and families, their adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- The child's welfare and safety will be the paramount consideration and will be at the centre of Hampshire's adoption process.
- All children will have the same opportunities irrespective of gender, ethnic origin, disability, culture, religion, language and sexual orientation.
- Achieving permanence for a child will be a key consideration in working with children in need and their families and in working with any child who is looked after by Hampshire.
- Permanence can be achieved by remaining with or returning to birth parents, legal permanence with extended family, adoption or permanent placement with other than extended family through legal means.
- Delay in the adoption process can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of children and must be kept to the minimum necessary to achieve the child's best interests.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved. Children and young people who have been adopted, adoptive families and birth families all have access to a range of services and supports to meet their assessed needs.
- Children have the right to be listened to, express their wishes and feelings and participate in decisions about their future. They will be encouraged and enabled to do this at all stages of the adoption process and in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexual orientation need to be properly recognized and positively valued and promoted. Children will not be kept waiting for an ideal match.

Aims and Objectives of the Service

The main aims of the Hampshire County Council Adoption Service are to:-

- Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need permanent placements.
- Meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.
- Adhere to permanency planning timescales as set out in adoption legislation, in order to avoid delay and maximise each child's opportunity to experience a stable and secure family life.
- Provide appropriate choice of adoptive placements via our partner Agency, Adopt South Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for children within Hampshire County Council, and beyond where appropriate, for example through the Interagency Funding and National Searches via a provider such as Link Maker.
- Ensure that children are well prepared both practically and emotionally for a move to a new permanent family.
- Provide a comprehensive support package, including financial support where appropriate to achieve stable and successful placements.
- To work in partnership with Adopt South to provide and input into effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children and linkings with children to be progressed without delay.
- Ensure all staff are appropriately recruited, supervised and trained to fulfill their agency functions.
- Ensure that where possible and appropriate, siblings will be placed together and that decisions to separate siblings are made following a sibling assessment.
- Ensure that children's plans for adoption are agreed by the Agency Decision Maker to meet court timetables
- Ensure that arrangements for contact with the birth family are carefully considered and meet the individual child's needs.
- Provide independent time limited advice and support to birth parents at the point that adoption becomes the plan for the child.
- Provide an efficient and responsive assessment and counselling service for children, adopters, birth relatives and adopted adults in respect of adoption support services in conjunction with other agencies.
- To maintain effective partnership with other adoption agencies.
- To ensure that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise available resources.
- To ensure that accurate and up to date records and management information is kept in relation to individual children and services and to maintain confidentiality and security of adoption records.
- Ensure service users are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.
- Treat all service users with respect and without prejudice or discrimination.

Adopt South

Adopt South is a Regional Adoption Agency and was been formed through the partnership between Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council, with support from voluntary adoption agencies, Adoption UK, Barnardos and Parents and Children Together (PACT).

It began operating as a Regional Adoption Agency on 1 April 2019 and is responsible for:

- Recruiting, assessing and approving adopters across the partnership's region.
- Matching children in need of adoptive families.
- Supporting families pre and post Adoption Order.
- Providing services for adult adoptees and birth relatives.
- Provision of Adoption Information Exchange (AIE) and direct post order contact.

Adopt South's Statement of Purpose is available on request.

Services Provided by the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service is structured into the following teams:

- Adopt South Recruitment Team – this team is responsible for the recruitment of adoptive parents.
- Assessment Team – which delivers a service for Adopt South undertakes the training and preparation of prospective adoptive parents, undertakes the prospective adoptive parents assessment and supports prospective adoptive parents through approval to placement and final Adoption Order.
- Adoption Support Team –which delivers a service for Adopt South, providing a range of support services to adoptive families

Children and young people

The service recognises that children for whom adoption is the plan and adopted children may have specific education, health and emotional needs. Every effort is made to find families who can meet a child's religious, cultural and ethnic needs and promote a child's sense of identity which is important to a child's well-being and helps them to enjoy and achieve in life.

Supporting educational attainment of vulnerable children is a priority for Hampshire and appropriate support will be identified as a matter of priority. This includes close liaison with the Virtual School.

Access to consultation with clinical psychologists is available to social workers about children and a similar consultation service is available for adoptive parents. Nurses

for Looked After Children are available to address the health needs of children throughout the adoption process.

A children's guide is available for children for whom adoption is the plan.

Recruitment, Approval, Training and Support of Prospective Adopters

The service responds within statutory timeframes to initial enquiries and assessment of prospective adoptive parents. The service recruits, prepares, assesses, trains, supports and links adoptive families with children for whom adoption is the plan.

The adoption service is open and inclusive. Prospective adopters are welcomed and are given training and support to help them understand the backgrounds and needs of children with plans for adoption and to see the situation from the child's point of view. Adopt South welcomes prospective adopters irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, religion and disability. We recognise that children need adopters from all kinds of backgrounds and that the ability and willingness to meet a child's needs is the most important factor.

Fostering for Adoption placements with adopters are being made where this is in the best interests of the child. At the point of enquiry and assessment, prospective adopters are being offered the opportunity to explore this option.

Adopters are provided with a range of information following approval to support them in the adoption task. Support is also provided through training opportunities, access to regular consultations run by a clinical psychologist, post-approval workshops, support groups, social events, and individual support from members of the adoption service. Most support services are delivered by Adopt South though some are commissioned externally.

Adopt South provide a mentoring service for adopters and prospective adopters. All mentors are experienced adopters and are provided with specialist support and supervision.

Permanency Planning and Family Finding role

The children's adoption team manager allocates a social worker to all cases, where adoption may be an option being considered as part of childcare planning, to begin parallel planning. There are regular Matching Meetings and Family Finding Meetings where all children for whom adoption has been agreed, including those deemed 'harder to place' are discussed and plans for seeking permanent adoptive placements are formulated, monitored and reviewed.

Support to Birth Parents and Relatives

Birth parents and relatives have access to independent support and counselling. Information is given to birth parents about this service at an early point in the permanency planning process.

Adoption Support Team:

Birth records counselling, Access to adoption records and Intermediary Work: The Adoption Support Team offers a counselling service to adopted adults who are seeking information about the circumstances of their adoption.

The team provides an intermediary service to both adopted adults and birth relatives who are seeking to find a family member. This service is only available to individuals living within Hampshire County Council's boundary. Changes to legislation means that this service can be provided to descendants of deceased adoptees, if they have a "proscribed relationship".

Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Support Team provides a range of adoption support services across the region as part of Adopt South in accordance with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2014, this includes the following:

- Access to consultations for adoptive parents who do not feel they require a full assessment.
- Access to therapeutic parenting programmes, Nurturing Attachments and Adopting Changes.
- Upon request a social worker will complete an Adoption Support Needs Assessment for eligible families.
- Adoption support plans can cover areas such as therapeutic re-parenting, life story work, identity work, understanding developmental trauma, therapy influenced activities to help build positive attachments.
- Access to Education Psychologist consultations and Video Interaction Guidance.
- Activities for adopted children provided by Groundworks Fusion.
- Duty service for information and advice for adoptive parents, children, and adults affected by adoption.
- Adoption Information Exchanges are coordinated by the Adoption Support Team, and individual support is provided to birth parents and adoptive parents to ensure the exchanges are meaningful for the children and young people.
- Support to families where there are direct contact arrangements.

Inter Country Adoption

Hampshire Adoption Agency has a service level agreement with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a registered voluntary adoption agency, to assess, train and prepare those people who are seeking to adopt a child from overseas. However, Hampshire Adoption Agency retains some responsibility for children entering the country from Non Hague Convention countries who require their overseas adoption to be ratified within UK legislation.

Adoption Panels

Adopt South provide and maintain all panel services and legislative requirements including approvals, linking's and plans of adoption in cases of relinquished children. Outcomes for children remain the priority for panel scheduling and development of it's members.

Step-Parent Adoption

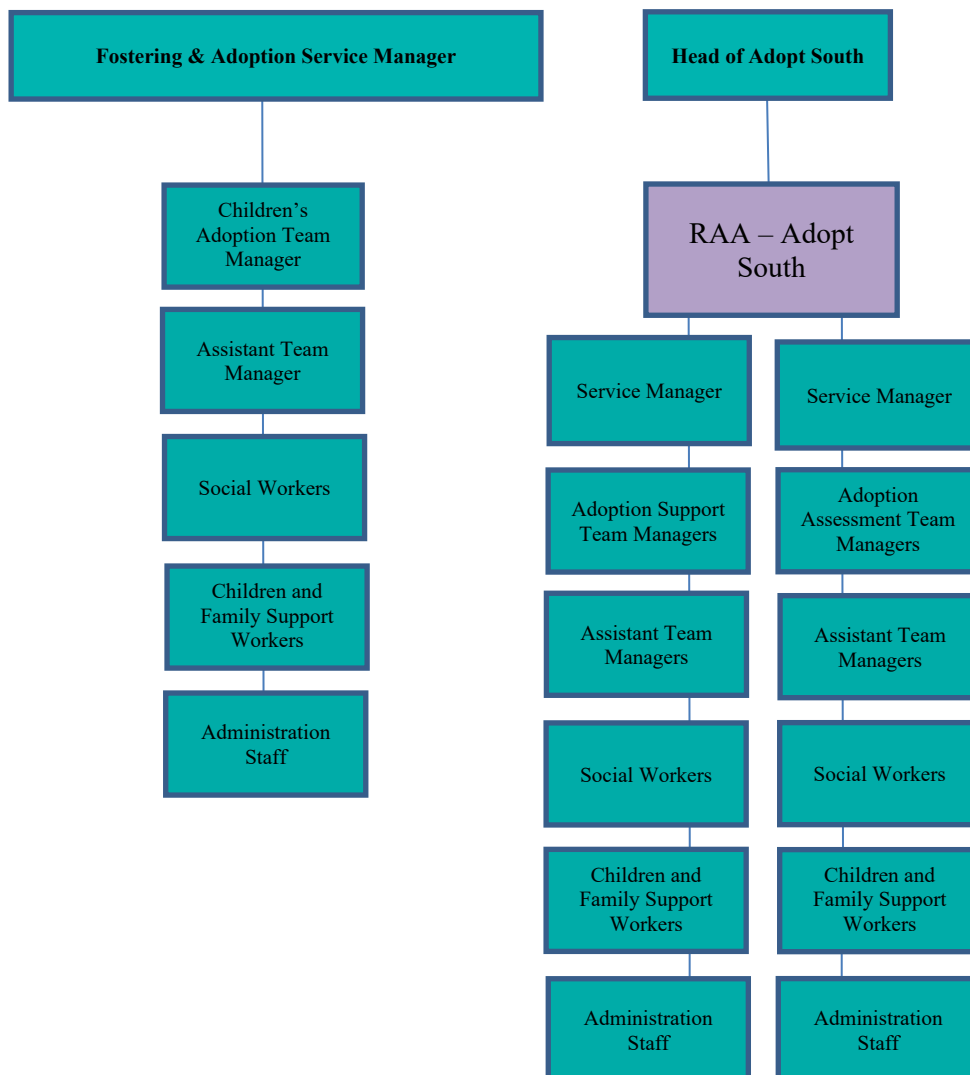
Hampshire Adoption Agency is responsible for the provision of the completion of stepparent adoption assessments for its residents and facilitates a duty services to support enquiries to better understand the legislation and legal alternatives available to them. This work now sits within the Children's Adoption Team having transferred from January 2021.

The Adoption Service Management Structure

Adoption & Fostering Service Manager
 Hampshire County Council,
 Children's Services
 Glen House, Glen Road,
 Swanwick,
 Hampshire
 SO31 7HD

E-mail: Sarah.Smith@hants.gov.uk

The Adoption & Fostering Service Manager works directly to the Head of County Services.



Monitoring and Evaluation of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service works within the overall Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Families, which sets out a range of general and service specific standards and methods by which these standards are monitored. Children for whom adoption is being considered or who have been placed for adoption are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Hampshire Adoption Service and Adopt South will continually monitor and evaluate its service at every stage of the adoption process to ensure quality and effectiveness. Hampshire and Adopt South welcome feedback from service users.

Feedback from prospective adopters on service quality and effectiveness is obtained via feedback sheets on adoptive parent's training and the prospective adopter report approval process. The adoption panel experience is similarly evaluated.

The Adoption Service is inspected on a 3-yearly basis by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

Complaints

Complaints Procedure

Hampshire County Council Children's Services complaints procedure is based on Getting the Best from Complaints (Departments for Education and Skills 2006). The service is provided to service users at the point of contact.

The Complaints and Customer Relations Manager's address is:

Hampshire County Council
Children's Services Complaints Team,
Elizabeth Court 1, The Castle Winchester Hampshire SO23 8UG

Tel: 01962 847 484

Fax: 01962 834 510

e-mail: childrens.services.complaints@hants.gov.uk

The Complaints and Customer Care Manager maintains close links with the Adoption teams and monitors the process, outcomes and recommendations of all complaints. An overview looks at all complaints across the service bi-annually.

The Complaints Procedure is made up of 3 parts:

- **Stage 1 Local Resolution**
- **Stage 2 Investigation**
- **Stage 3 Review Panel**

If complainants remain unsatisfied at Stage 3 they can ask for their complaint to be examined by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Independent Reviewing Mechanism

Prospective adopters are given written information about the role of the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) as part of their preparation process. They are also provided with leaflets about the IRM when information is being prepared for presentation to panel.

Advocacy Service

Hampshire provides access to an independent and confidential advocacy service for children looked after on behalf of Hampshire County Council. The service supports young people in meetings and reviews, offers independent advice and advocacy, supports young people in making a complaint and facilitates consultation and participation of young people in matters affecting their lives. This service can be accessed via the Participation Team:

Ofsted

Hampshire County Council is inspected by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

The Children's Services latest Ofsted inspection was judged under their new framework. The overall quality rating was '**Outstanding**'. This is a fantastic recognition of the quality of our service provided by staff and mirrors the outcome in respect of the Adoption Service from the last inspection highlighting the maintenance of the service provided to children and their families.

Inspection is the main way Ofsted check the quality of services for children and young people. The purpose of inspections is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

You can contact Ofsted to ask more about their inspection of children's services make a complaint or raise a concern about a service that Ofsted inspects or regulates, or you can view inspection reports online.

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone number:
0300 123 1231

e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Highlights from 2021-2022

Between April 2021 and March 2022, **47** children had been placed for adoption; **10** children had been placed in Fostering for Adoption Placements under Early Permanence Arrangements, **62** children's plans had been referred to the Agency Decision Maker; **60** Placement Orders and **43** Adoption Orders had been made.

Approval of the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually and formally approved by the Executive Lead Member.

Hampshire County Council strives to meet the requirements laid down in the Adoption Regulations and the National Minimum Standards (Department of Health) published under the Care Standards Act 2000. It also reflects the requirements as laid down under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The service is particularly mindful of the outcomes framework in Every Child Matters, namely: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing.

Feedback

We welcome feedback about our policies and procedures. If you have any comments about this Statement of Purpose, please address them to:

Adoption Service Manager
Hampshire County Council,
Children's Services
Glen House, Glen Road,
Swanwick,
Hampshire
SO31 7HD