

Derby City Council Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

Derby City Council Adoption Service places children and their needs at the centre of its activity. The welfare and safety of children is of paramount concern when making decisions regarding adoption.

May 2012

Andrew Bunyan
Director of Children
& Young People's Services

Statement of purpose

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the Derby City Adoption Service. The information contained in the Statement of Purpose is prescribed in Standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011. The Statement of Purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated as required by the National Minimum Standards.

This document has been informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002; (and accompanying regulations and guidance) (Amendment 2011)
- Children Act 1989
- Human Rights Act 1989
- Care Standards Act 2000; and associated regulations
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Related Regulations, Local Authority Circulars and Practice Guidance;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (and associated child protection guidance)
- Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their families.

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1. Values, aims and objectives

The National Adoption Standards have been written to ensure that looked after children, birth families, prospective adopters, adopted adults and the general public understand what they can expect from an adoption service. The values below set out the important principles, which underpin the National Adoption Standards. Derby City fully endorses these values.

Values – Children

- The child's wishes and feelings are listened to and their welfare and safety are the paramount considerations in the adoption process.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills and talents leading to a successful adult life.
- Where possible it is best for children to be brought up by their own family.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.

Values – adopted adults and birth relatives

Adoption is an evolving lifelong process for all those involved - adopted adults, birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life

Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.

Agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare and circumstances of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.

Adopted adults should have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

The aims and objectives of the Derby City Council Adoption Service are:

- To recruit, assess and provide suitable families, within the timescales laid down by the National Adoption Standards that meet the needs of every child referred to the adoption service.
- To provide information on the process of adoption and the children available for adoption to applicants wishing to adopt a child into their family.
- To provide an adoption support service to enable a child to remain with an adoptive family and ensure that the child reaches their full potential.
- To provide a service for those wishing to adopt a child into their family from overseas via the Yorkshire Adoption Agency Ltd.
- To provide information on the process of adoption for those people who wish to adopt a related child from within their family, for example, stepparent and relative adoptions.
- To provide information and support to adopted adults wishing to obtain information about, and from, their birth records.
- 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.

2. Named manager

The responsible manager for Adoption Services within Derby City Council is Diane Grist, Deputy Head of Service, Children in Care and Adoption Services, Saxon House, Friary Street, Derby DE1 1AN.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is Service Director, Specialist Services, Mark Barratt.

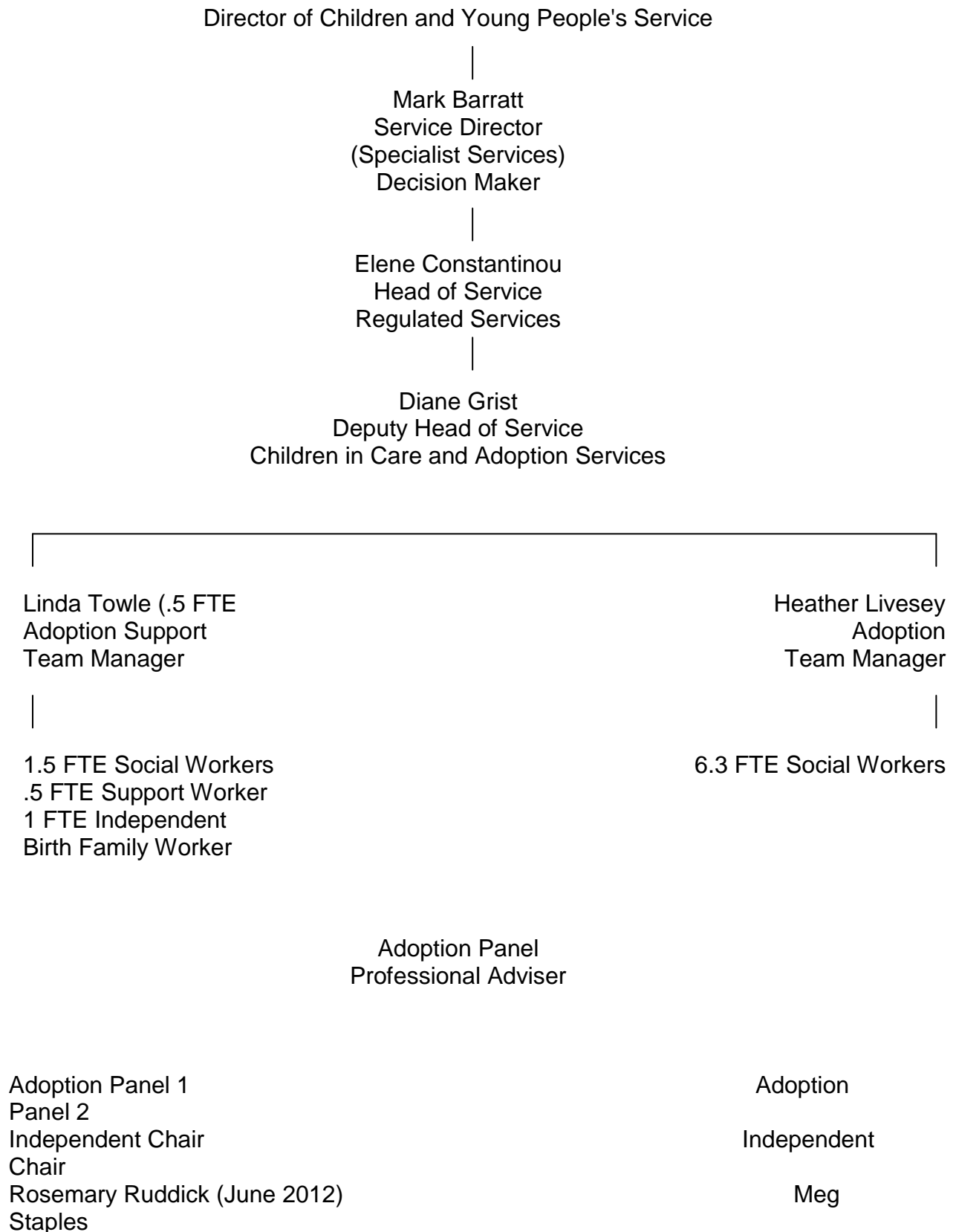
3. Qualifications and experience of named managers

Diane Grist

- BSc Psychology 1984
- Diploma in Applied Social Studies 1991
- Certificate of Qualification in Social Work 1991
- Practice Teaching Award 1998
- PQ1 2001
- Certificate in Management Studies 2004
- Diploma in Management 2011

Experience in child care practice including residential care, fostering and adoption since 1984.

4. Organisational structure of the Derby City Council Adoption Service



5. Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

The list of current staff and their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to the OFSTED Inspection Service.

6. Services provided

a) Effectively publicising adoption services, their accessibility, including information about services provided by other agencies

As well as responding to enquiries from prospective adopters, the agency actively recruits adoptive families. The Adoption Agency has the services of a Marketing Officer (who sits within the Communications Team) who is responsible for generating enquiries using all relevant forms of media. This includes local and national press, television, and the internet, radio, leafleting and working within the community to generate enquiries. Information and enquiries can be received through the Derby City Council website who will direct enquirers to the Adoption Service. The Agency accepts applications from prospective adopters within a 50 mile radius of Derby City. If a suitable prospective family living at a considerable distance from Derby City apply to be assessed for a specific child, Derby City will negotiate with an Adoption Agency who is local to the family to assess and support them. Applicants living a considerable distance from Derby who are making general enquiries will be referred to their local Adoption Agency.

b) All aspects of the recruitment process, including effective arrangements to advise, assess, counsel and support those who become approved adopters and those who do not

Derby City holds bi- monthly information meetings to which all enquirers are invited. Some enquirers may prefer a private home visit which can be arranged. These meetings are intended to provide an overall picture of adopting a child in general with an emphasis on the needs of children requiring adoption in Derby City. The meetings also provide an opportunity to talk to experienced adoption workers and adoptive parents. Attendees will be informed that priority will be given to those who are able to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption, for example, older children, sibling groups, and children with complex needs.

People wishing to proceed will receive an initial visit from an adoption worker where their personal circumstances will be discussed and this is the opportunity for prospective adopters and social workers to fully discuss the adoption process and the roles and expectations of both parties. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed after the home study – and the Adoption Agency is in agreement – an application form will be completed and information provided by the applicant to enable all the checks and references to be undertaken.

Checks and references will be requested from the following:

- Criminal Records Bureau; - with particular arrangements if the applicant has lived for a period in another country
- Health Visitor; where the applicants have children already
- Children & Young People's Departments in both this and other areas in which the applicants have lived;
- Employer or educational tutor if the applicants are attending college; particular references will be required where applicants have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults.
- Self-employed applicants will need to obtain a reference from a contractor, supplier or customer; plus bank or accountant
- The Education Department and relevant schools or nurseries will be contacted for a reference if the applicant has, or has had, children of school age;
- Overseas Residency – applicants will need to obtain a Certificate of Good Conduct from the Embassy or Consulate for the relevant Country;
- Members of Armed Forces – applicants will need to give their service number and checks will be taken up through SSAFA;
- Where applicants have been previously married, or lived with another partner who have cared for children, the absent partner will be contacted unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.
- Applicants will be asked to provide 6 personal referees if a couple and 4 if a single applicant.

If at any stage applicants or the adoption service consider that the application should not proceed, a full discussion will be offered to explore the circumstances leading to this decision. Wherever possible the reasons for not proceeding will be shared with the applicants although in exceptional circumstances it may not be possible to disclose third party information. All decisions will be confirmed in writing.

Once the application form has been accepted the applicants will be invited to attend a preparation course to prepare them for the task of adopting. It is a requirement that prospective adoptive parents attend a preparation course 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, on themselves and their families.

Most applicants will proceed to an assessment following the preparation course although for some applicants the preparation course helps them to decide that adoption may not be the way forward for their family. Once the group has been completed and the applicants are happy to proceed the home study assessment

begins. The aim is to complete the assessment within eight months of the formal application being accepted.

c) The assessment of prospective adopters using objective, thorough, fair and transparent criteria

At the information meetings issues around who can adopt and the qualities required are openly discussed. Adopters will need to show they have the capacity -

- to work with children's services and other agencies to secure necessary services for the child;
- to learn from experience;
- to cope with stress;
- to meet the ethnic, cultural, health, religion, sexuality, language and educational, needs of a child requiring adoption;
- to build and sustain close/intimate and reciprocal relationships;
- to understand other people's point of view and their feelings - empathy;
- to be in touch with sad and angry feelings;
- to resolve past traumas or losses;
- to build secure attachments, to share difficulties and accept help.

At the information meeting, enquirers are informed about the wide range of people who may be able to adopt and any limitations that may arise in certain circumstances. The information given will cover the following:

- families from all types of backgrounds;
- people without children;
- people with children;
- single people;
- people from all ethnic backgrounds
- people with disabilities;

- people who are not “perfect”;
- people who have had problems in the past;
- people who rent their home;
- health and lifestyle issues;
- people whose infertility treatment has ended.

Further explanation is given to each of these bullet points, so, for instance, when discussing health issues, this is qualified by explaining that adopters need to have the health and vigour to meet the many and varied demands of children throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

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

- ability to see the child as they are – not how you would like them to be;
- acceptance, commitment, flexibility, sensitivity, openness;
- ability to cope with uncertainty and lifestyle adjustment;
- ability to ask for and accept help, support and advice;
- sense of humour.

During the remainder of the assessment process, other criteria are explored in more depth with applicants, including the non-smacking policy, and the need for adopters to embrace diversity and difference.

After the preparation courses all applicants are assessed, and the information collated, using the Prospective Adopters Report produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

Applicants are visited within their own home, and seen together, and separately, if there is more than one applicant. A part of the assessment process a medical is required with the adopters GP which will be commented upon by the Agency's Medical Adviser. Applicants are invited to make their own written as well as verbal contributions to their assessment and are given the opportunity to read and comment on the completed Prospective Adopters Report. 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. A mid way review is held with the applicants and social worker. The assessing adoption Social Worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters. The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicants who will have ten working days to give their views to the agency.

Following the completion of the Prospective Adopters Report a "second opinion" report will be completed with the applicants. This visit and subsequent report will form part of the paperwork presented to the adoption panel. The panel will make a recommendation with regards to approval which must then be ratified by the adoption agency's Decision Maker.

Prospective adopters are expected to attend the adoption panel when their application is being considered unless there are exceptional reasons why this should not occur.

If for any reason once an application has been accepted, the Adoption Agency makes a recommendation not to proceed, which is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, the applicants will have the right to have the information presented to the Adoption Panel and be able to attend the panel. If the adoption agency does not recommend that the applicant/s are approved then representation regarding the recommendation can be made to either the adoption panel for reconsideration of the recommendation or an application can be made to the Independent Review Mechanism.

d) Inter-country adopters

Applicants for Inter-Country adoption are referred to Yorkshire Adoption Agency Ltd for a comprehensive inter country adoption service. There will be a charge made to the family by the Yorkshire Adoption Agency Ltd.

e) Non Agency Adoption

The role of the LA is to provide a report to the court as to the suitability of the applicants to adopt.

- Enquirers approaching the Service are sent written information about non agency adoptions within five working days.
- Applicants are asked to confirm in writing that they have received the information and they wish to proceed by completing a Notice of Intention Form.
- Applicants are asked to complete an initial application form.
- Applicants are asked to sign their agreement for statutory checks to be undertaken in line with agency adopters.
- A social worker is allocated and begins the gathering information for the court report.
- The applicants submit their application to court.

f) Birth parents - Support, information and counselling for birth parents

It needs to be acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that adoption represents the best outcome. The Derby City Adoption Service fully supports the principle in the National Adoption Standards that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services, which recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. The child's social worker and adoption social worker have discreet but complementary roles in providing services to birth families. The childcare workers will endeavour to work with birth parents to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their children and ensure that birth parents views about adoption and contact are fully recorded.

- It is the responsibility of the children's and adoption social worker to explain the adoption process and gather the birth parents views about the kind of family they would ideally like for their child. The birth parents will also be asked for their views about contact and whether they would like their child placed with siblings. The social worker will explain the importance for the child of having a full medical history of not only the birth parents but also the birth family.
- Birth parents are entitled to see what is written about them and to provide information on the report if they so wish which will be presented to the adoption panel.
- All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information, and contribute, to their child's Life Story Book and Letter for Later Life.
- In addition birth parents are offered access to further counselling provided by the Independent Worker for birth families.
- The Adoption Service will provide birth parents, via the childcare social worker, with an information leaflet explaining the adoption process.
- Following the making of an Adoption Order birth parents may request an assessment for Post Adoption support.

g) Adoption panels

Derby City has two adoption panels with independent chairs and attended by the same Professional Agency Adviser. The panels are constituted in line with the adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and follow the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. Each panel sits monthly

Prospective Adopters are positively encouraged to attend panel for their approval consideration and for the matching of children with them.

Prospective adopters are given a leaflet explaining the panel process and are also asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting. Their comments are fed back to the panel and the Professional Adviser retains a copy of all evaluation forms.

The Adoption Tracking meeting monitors the progress of family finding for all children where adoption is the plan.

h) Preparation of prospective adopters for the placement of a child, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption

Prospective adopters have already received some preparation for the placement of children through attendance at the preparation courses and during their assessment.

When prospective adopters are identified as meeting a particular child or children's needs the adoption worker and child's social worker will provide the prospective adopters with verbal and written information about the child. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed they will receive further detailed written information and will be visited by the child's foster carer and the two social workers. All adoptive parents should have the opportunity to meet with the medical adviser prior to the adoption panel, particularly where children have special needs. If following a period of reflection all parties wish to proceed, a matching report, which incorporates the Adoption Support Plan, is prepared for the adoption panel which will recommend the matching should proceed. As well as seeking the prospective adopters' views about the placement, children's views are sought where they are old enough to express a view.

In order to plan introductions and placement of a child, the Adoption Service Manager chairs a Placement Planning Meeting at the beginning and the end of the introductory process (pause and plan) to ensure that all parties remain of the view that the match between the adopters and the child is an appropriate one. If for any reason adopters do not feel that the placement is an appropriate one this is the time to let the child's social worker or their own social worker know.

Following placement the prospective adopters continue to receive visits from the adoption social worker, who monitors and supports the placement until the adoption order is made, as well as visits from the child's social worker. During this period of time the child remains a "looked after" child and the local authority remains responsible for the overall welfare of the child.

Once placed the child is reviewed by an independent reviewing officer who will continue to regularly review the placement up to the making of an adoption order.

Derby is a member of the East Midlands Adoption Consortium. The aim of the consortium is to increase the choice of adoptive placements regionally by circulating details of children and approved adopters who have not been linked by their own agency. The consortium also strives to achieve consistent good practice standards across the region. Derby City also increases placement choice by using the Adoption Register for England and Wales which has details of adopters and children requiring adoption. Derby City produces a brochure of Prospective Adopters and children requiring adoption for circulation to all national approved Adoption Agencies and attends events such as Exchange days held in London and Manchester.

i) Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption

Efforts will be made to find a placement which meets or can promote the child's individual needs arising from racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexuality, religion or disability taking into account at all times the need to ensure that a child is placed with a permanent family with the minimum of delay.

Every child should have a Life Story Book, a Letter for Later Life and a written guide to adoption. This work should be undertaken by the child's social worker with help and advice from the adoption worker. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history and help maintain their heritage. The Letter for Later Life includes information about the child's birth and early life, and an explanation as to why they were placed in an adoptive family. The information in the later life letter can be difficult for an adopter to share with a child but it is important that children have a realistic age appropriate understanding of the reasons why they were in care, could not be cared for by their family of origin and ultimately were placed for adoption.

Age appropriate work is undertaken with children to ascertain their wishes and feelings about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with. Once a family has been identified, children are given appropriate information, depending on their age. The placement planning meeting co-ordinates an age appropriate introduction timetable. This is reviewed during introductions to assess progress and whether the timescale for the child's move needs to be adjusted in accordance with their needs.

Post placement the social worker continues to support the child in placement but where more in depth work is identified the child and prospective adopters can be referred to other appropriate post placement/adoption support services, for example, if agreed as part of the Adoption Support plan.

j) Criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, the arrangements for review and making these available to adopters

The Derby City Adoption Service may pay pre-placement costs (introductory expenses and agreed settling in expenses) in certain circumstances and may also meet the cost of legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex.

At the point of matching, all children must have an Adoption Support Plan which sets out both the prospective adopters' and child's support needs, with any financial implications and how the adoption service intends to meet these. The Adoption Support Plan must be agreed with the adoptive family and the Deputy Head of Service before being presented to the Adoption Panel.

k) The process for establishing, maintaining, monitoring and reviewing contact arrangements for each adopted child

The adoption service 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 child. 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 Adoption Support Service operates a well-established letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adults within the adoptive family and birth family. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for direct face-to-face contact, when deemed to be in the child's best interest.

The Adoption Service generally believes there are mutual benefits of at least one meeting between a child's birth parent and adoptive parents around the time of placement; other significant birth relatives may also be involved where this is appropriate, eg where a grandparent or other significant individual has been involved in the care of a child. Any such meetings are always undertaken to benefit the child and photographs of the meetings can be taken with the agreement of all parties.

Contact plans are first considered at the Looked After Children reviews, and included in the care plan presented to court. Adoption panel may advise on contact plans. Children's needs will change over time and contact plans should evolve to reflect the child's changing circumstances, needs and expressed wishes.

Post placement contact arrangements continue to be reviewed at each child's statutory review. The service does not formally review contact arrangements after the Adoption order is made.

l) The review of disrupted placements, ascertaining the causes for the breakdown to aid future planning for the child

Following a disruption (where an adoptive placement breaks down before the granting of the Adoption Order) the Derby City Adoption Service convenes a disruption meeting in order to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors which led to the breakdown of the placement. This helps in planning future placements. An experienced, preferably independent childcare manager chairs these meetings. A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are presented to the adoption management team meeting and the relevant adoption panel in order that they can learn any lessons.

m) Investigations into allegations that are made known to adoption service staff, adopters and children and young people

All child protection investigations involving children placed for adoption are in line with

safeguarding procedures. This process will differ slightly where an allegation is made prior to an adoption order being granted. Full details are available in the Derbyshire Child Protection Procedures

n) The range of post adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption

The Derby City Post Adoption Team offers assessment of support needs and where appropriate services or signposting to other services for parties affected by adoption. Assessments and services are offered in line with the Adoption Support Services 2005.

Services may include Schedule 2 counselling and access to records for adopted adults, and section 98 intermediary services for adopted adults and specific adult birth relatives of adopted adults.

The Post adoption Team manages the indirect contact letterbox scheme between adoptive parents and birth relatives.

Adoptive parents are offered training opportunities, a support group run by Adoption UK and an annual newsletter. Adoptive families are invited to social events and adopted children over the age of 10 are offered activity and support groups. Derby City also pays for one year's membership of Adoption UK for all newly approved adopters.

o) An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption

The adoption service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, providing the adoption service believes that they can safely meet the needs of children requiring adoption.

7. Monitoring and evaluation of the provision of services

The Derby City Adoption Service has developed a comprehensive system for monitoring service users feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and used in staff supervision and team meetings. Where necessary the information is used to improve the service.

This monitoring includes:

- From adoptive applicants
- Feedback on the Information Meeting.
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses.
- Feedback on the assessment process.

- Feedback on attending adoption panel.
- Feedback on written information at time of placement.
- Evaluation of service received following the making of an adoption order.

Birth parents

- Their views are sought at all stages of the process and particularly in relation to the Child's Permanence Report to which they are offered the opportunity to contribute

Children

- The views of children are recorded in their adoption file at all stages and where appropriate in the Child's Permanence Report.

Monitoring of the Adoption Service

- The computerised data and information recording system tracks the progress of children looked after. The 'infoview system' provides management information across a range of indicator and performance issues. The service has produced a Business Plan, which reviews performance in the previous year and sets targets for the forthcoming year, having regard to any serious shortfalls in the service and the standards expected.

There are review systems in place for the following:

- monitoring the progress of family finding for children prior to placement through regular updates to the Adoption Tracking Meeting
- all approved adopters are formally reviewed annually by the adoption social worker and team managers;
- the independent reviewing officer reviews the progress of all children placed for Adoption, up until the granting of the Adoption Order;
- staff from the Adoption Agency and Children's Services supervise and monitor the placement;
- the adoption panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice, in conjunction with the Agency Professional Adviser to the Adoption Panels.

There is a well-established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff

The Head of Service meets regularly with Service Managers to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from developments in the service.

8. Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records

The indexes to all children's adoption case records are kept for at least 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an adoption order being made, the related case papers are kept for 100 years from the date of the making of an adoption order. All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Support Manager and a log of all requests is maintained. All files are held in lockable, secure storage. Some older files of cases prior to 1997 are still held by Derbyshire County Council in their Archive Service in Matlock.

9. A summary of the procedures available to service users and others if they are dissatisfied with the adoption agency

Complaints and representations.

1. Any service user, or a person acting on behalf of a service user with their informed consent, can make a complaint about the service received from any of the adoption teams. The complaint will be dealt with in line with the Derby City Complaints Procedure. Complaints may be made directly to any member of staff of the adoption service or to complaints@derby.gov.uk, Customer Management, Saxon House, Heritage Gate, Friary Street, Derby DE1 1AN Tel 01332 255538

2. Where the decision maker is minded to not recommend the approval of adopters, they will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the adoption service or referred to the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is organised by the British Association for Adoption Fostering (BAAF). The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been informed that their adoption service does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive parents (or has withdrawn their approval). More information on the IRM can be obtained from the IRM Contract Manager, Dolphin House, 54 Coventry Road, Birmingham B10 0RX.

Telephone: 0121 766 8086 Fax: 0121 766 8557, E-mail irm@baaf.org.uk.

10. The address and telephone number of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)

Head Office functions operate from the following addresses:

Ofsted National Business Unit

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11. The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed in conjunction with the Adoption Service Plan and presented to the appropriate Committee of Derby City Council annually.