

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.

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Andrew Bunyan
Director of Children and 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 2014. 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
- Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations (Amendment 2013)
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Adoption Support Services (amendment) Regulations 2014
- 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 and adopted 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 information and advice to those wishing to adopt a child into their family from overseas.
- 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 Rod Jones Acting Head of CIC Regulated Services. The Adoption Agency Decision Makers are Hazel Lymbery Service Director, Specialist Services, and Rod Jones Acting Head of CIC Regulated Services.

3. Qualifications and experience of named managers

Rod Jones Acting Head of Children in Care Regulated Services:

BA Hons Comparative Literature, University of Warwick 1975

Post-Graduate Diploma in Applied Social Sciences (CQSW) Liverpool Polytechnic, 1983

Post-Graduate Diploma in Health and Social Care Management, Nottingham Trent University, 1998

4. Organisational structure of the Derby City Council Adoption Service

Hazel Lymbery: Service Director and Agency Decision Maker

Rod Jones: Acting Head of Children in Care regulated Services.

Sally Penrose: Deputy Head of Service Fostering and Adoption

Lyn Bugarski: Adoption Panel Professional Adviser

Adoption Panel 1 Independent Chair: Rosemary Ruddick

Adoption Panel 2: Independent Chair: Meg Staples

Adoption Support:

Lyn Bugarski (15 hours), Team Manager

2 FTE Social Workers

0.5 FTE Support Worker

1 FTE Independent

Birth Family Worker

Adoption Team:

Heather Livesey, Team Manager

7.3 FTE Social Workers

0.6 Consortium Administrator

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) Recruitment

The adoption service has a marketing plan which is regularly reviewed and which is updated every twelve months. The agency works in partnership with other agencies, for example First4Adoption and the East Midlands Consortium to ensure full and accurate information is available to the public.

Recruitment material explains the meaning of adoption, gives information on the needs of children who are likely to be placed for adoption, details eligibility criteria and the adoption process. The recruitment material also contains information about fostering for adoption. The agency recruits within approximately a 50 mile radius.

The agency works to the timescales set out in adoption minimum standards and where these are not met will state the reasons. The process is undertaken in line with adoption agency regulations and statutory guidance.

At the initial enquiry stage people interested in adopting are offered a telephone discussion within five working days of receipt of the information pack. The service holds two information sessions a month on a drop in basis and/or enquirers are offered a home visit. The agency works in an open way and will give an honest appraisal of the enquirer's likelihood of being assessed as suitable to adopt and on the timing of any registration of interest.

b) Assessment and preparation

Those who appear suitable and who wish to proceed from the enquiry stage are invited to complete a Registration of Interest form and then proceed to stage one of the assessment process. A stage one agreement is completed and checks and references are taken up. Preparation groups start in stage one.

At the end of stage one, the agency makes a decision on whether to proceed to stage two of the assessment process. If there are any issues which may prevent the applicant progressing to stage two, these will be discussed with the applicant.

Approved foster carers and second time adopters may be able to progress immediately to stage two.

In stage two of the process, applicants are allocated a worker who will take them through the assessment and preparation process. A stage two agreement is drawn up detailing the expectations of the prospective adopter and the agency. Remaining checks and references are taken up and further training is offered.

At the end of stage two, a prospective adopter report is completed. This is shared with the applicants who are invited to add their comments. The agency uses the BAAF Prospective adopter report format.

c) Adoption Panel and agency decision.

The agency has two adoption panels which each meet once a month. Applicants are encouraged to attend panel. The panel makes a recommendation to the agency on the applicant's suitability to adopt and may offer advice on matching issues.

The agency decision maker considers panel's recommendations and any advice and makes a decision within seven working days of the panel minutes being agreed.

If the panel recommendation and/or the agency decision is not to approve the applicant has the option to either make representations to the agency decision

maker or to ask for the case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism. Full information will be given about each of these options.

d) Family finding and matching.

The adoption service works closely with other children and young people's teams to keep current information on the children who are likely to need adoptive families. This is used to inform recruitment. Family finding can start before a formal plan of adoption has been made, for example, pre-birth for children who may benefit from a fostering for adoption placement. The adoption service offers advice to other teams and can attend permanency planning meetings.

Where the agency is considering adoption for **siblings**, there will be an assessment of whether the siblings should be placed together or separately, taking into consideration the interests of each child.

A family finding social worker will be allocated when the agency decision maker decides a child should be placed for adoption. The family finder will consider adoptive families approved by Derby City but, if there is no suitable local match, will refer a child to the East Midlands Consortium and the Adoption Register. The agency uses a wide range of family finding strategies including, featuring children, exchange days and adoption activity days. The progress of family finding is tracked through adoption tracking meetings and the statutory review process.

Potential matches for adopters approved by Derby City are considered by the adoption service. Approved adopters may be matched with children from the City but if no suitable match is identified they will be referred, subject to their consent, to the East Midlands Consortium and the Adoption Register.

e) Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters.

Linking and matching is undertaken in line with adoption regulations and statutory guidance. The adoption agency aims to find the family who can best meet most of the child's identified needs.

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. Matches for children who are in the care of Derby City Council are presented to Derby's adoption panel. Adopters are encouraged to attend. Derby adopters who are matched with a child or children from another agency will be invited to that agency's panel.

f) Adoption support.

At the matching stage every child will have an adoption support plan. This will be reviewed and updated through the statutory review process up until the adoption order is granted. Thereafter, adopters can request an assessment of their support needs from the responsible local authority.

g) Inter-country adopters

Enquirers about inter-country adoption will be asked if they have considered adopting a looked after child. Derby City's primary role is to find adoptive families for looked after children in England. Those who, after receiving information and advice about domestic adoption, still wish to apply as inter-country adopters, will be re-directed to an appropriate agency. Inter-country adopters will be responsible for the payment of all fees and charges made.

h) 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.

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

It is 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.

j) 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 speak to 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.

k) 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.

l) 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, e.g. 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.

m) 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 team meeting and the relevant adoption panel in order that they can learn any lessons.

n) 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 Derby Safeguarding Board Procedures

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

The Derby City Adoption Support 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. Access to these services is subject to eligibility criteria. The Adoption Support Team manages the indirect contact letterbox scheme between adoptive parents and birth relatives.

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

p) 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:

- Feedback 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, who are not yet matched, 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

There are regular business meetings held with the panel chairs, medical advisers, agency decision maker, head and/or deputy head of service and the professional adviser to help develop practice.

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, including electronic records, 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 part of the adoption service. The complaint will be dealt with under the Children's Social Care representations and complaints procedure.

Compliments, concerns and complaints can be reported on line at [www.derby.gov.uk](http://www.derby.gov.uk/customer.services@derby.gov.uk)
customer.services@derby.gov.uk

Or to the Complaints Officer at: Derby City Council, the Council House, Corporation Street, Derby DE1 2FS
Minicom: 01332 640666
Telephone: 01332 711223

2. Those making enquiries about adoption and prospective adopters can seek additional information and advice about the adoption process from the Adoption Gateway. See: <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk/>
Telephone 0300 222 0022

3. Prospective adopters who are informed the agency does not consider them suitable to adopt have the option to either make representation to the agency or to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is organised by the British Association for Adoption Fostering (BAAF). More information on the IRM can be obtained from the IRM Contract Manager, Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

Unit 4,
Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ
Tel No: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate)
Fax: 0845 450 3957
Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

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

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
general helpline 0300 123 1231
prefix for Typetalk 18001
for textphone/Minicom users 0161 618 8524

enquiries@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 Commission of Derby City Council annually.