



Hartlepool Borough Council

Child and Adult Services

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council approved this Statement of Purpose on 29 September 2003.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on an annual basis and is submitted for approval to Elected members.

This document was reviewed and updated in May 2013 and is to be submitted for approval by Elected members in May 2013.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Adoption Services no later than May 2014.

CONTENTS

Page 4	VALUES, AIMS, OBJECTIVES
Page 6	SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ADOPTION AGENCY
Page 7	STAFFING INFORMATION
Page 8	ADOPTION AGENCY - ORGANISATION AND CONTROL OF OPERATIONS
Page 11	COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
Page 12	USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES
Page 13	APPENDIX 1

Values, Aims and Objective

Value Statements

The value statements listed below underpin the provision of Adoption services in Hartlepool.

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- 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 and language will be fully recognised and positively promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the need for services of those affected by adoption.
- Government will work in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered.

Aims and objectives of the adoption service

Adoption means an Adoption Order under the 1976 Act or preceding legislation and vests parental responsibility in the adopters. The Order extinguishes the rights and duties of birth parents including any parental responsibility any person had before the Order (updated in 2002 Act).

Adoption affects the following groups of children;

- Babies whose parents cannot or do not wish to care for them.
- Children who are in the care of the Local Authority.
- Children cared for by relatives.
- Children in a step-parenting family.
- Children brought into the country from abroad.

Hartlepool Borough Council Adoption Service aims to provide a range of adoptive placements for those children requiring permanent substitute families.

The Adoption Service aims to ensure that prospective adopters are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed and to provide a safe and secure home environment.

The following guiding principles underpin the services provided by the Adoption Service:

- Adoption is a process with life long implications for adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents.
- There is a commitment to providing adoption services to all sectors of Hartlepool's population and to seek to provide sensitive needs led services to children, parents and adopters.
- There is a duty to establish and maintain services designed to meet the needs of adopted children, adopters and birth parents.
- There is a recognition of the importance of incorporating research and user feedback into the formulation of policies, procedures and practice. Constructive feedback from service users is welcomed and should be directed to the Adoption Service Team Manager.
- The provision of after adoption services to adopted adults, birth relatives, adopted children and their families, intermediary services to birth relatives and support and advice to birth parents where the plan for adoption has been made and the parents are contesting the plan.

Objectives

- To conduct recruitment activities and employ strategies in order to attract the range of adopters identified for children and young people.
- To undertake effective assessments of prospective adopters within timescales specified in National Guidance.
- To establish and support a Permanence Panel to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval to the agency decision maker.
- To provide pre-approval training for prospective adopters equipping them to meet the needs of children referred for adoption and developing their awareness of adoption issues.
- To protect children from abuse and neglect.
- To create stability for children and young people who require permanent substitute families.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- To create lifelong attachments with adoptive parents in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, prospective adopters, birth parents and social workers.
- To provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his/her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.
- To provide or contract to provide after adoption services to provide support to people who have been adopted, their birth families and adoptive parents.

Services provided by the adoption agency

The Adoption Service provides the following services and facilities:

- Recruitment, assessment and preparation of prospective adopters.
- Family finding for children awaiting adoptive placements.
- Support to adoptive placements.
- Adoption and Fostering panel training

- Consultation and advice to social workers considering adoption as an option for a child/children.
- Post adoption support service.
- Post Box Service.

More detail on each of these areas of service provision can be found in the departmental Adoption Procedures.

In April 2003, Hartlepool Borough Council entered into a formal contract with “*After Adoption*” an agency specialising in post adoption support to provide services to the following groups in the form of individual work or group support:

- Adopted adults
- Birth Parents and Relatives with children under 18 who have been adopted or where the plan is adoption
- Adopted Children and their families
- Special Guardians
- Birth relatives where the children that were adopted are now adults

Staffing information

Name and Job Title	Date of Appointment	Qualifications	Experience
Jane Young Head of Business unit Resources and Specialist Services	October 2010	CSS PQ1 PQ CCA CMS	Qualified in 1989. Experienced in Children & Families Social Work and Fostering & Adoption including managing a leaving Care Team and Family Placement Team
Christine Croft Placement Team Manager	March 2012	DipSW PQ1 PQCCA DiPILM (Management)	Qualified in 1997. experienced in Children and Families Social Work and in establishing and running a fostering service. Fostering Social Worker since February 2009.
Kathryn Ling Principal Practitioner	February 2009	CQSW PQCCA	Qualified in 1983 Experience in Children and Families, Mental Health, Disability Team and Family Placement work
Clare Frankland – Adoption Social Worker and Post Box Coordinator/Post Adoption Support.	April 1989	CQSW PQCCA DiPSW	Qualified in 1981 Generic social work before specialising in Family Placement since 1988. Vast experience of adoption work
Alison Garbutt – Adoption Social Worker, Development Post.	September 2010	CSS BSc Child Care	Qualified in 1990. Worked in Children and Families team as Social worker and then Principal Practitioner before moving to current post
Emma Howarth	April 2013	BSC Child Care	Experience as a Family Resource Worker and

Name and Job Title	Date of Appointment	Qualifications	Experience
			Safeguarding and Assessment.
Patricia Adams Administrative staff – shared with Fostering Service	11.1.07		C&AS Admin Children and Families
Amanda Cusworth			Part time Administrative staff. Responsible for Post Box support.

Adoption agency - organisation and control of operations

The Placement Team Manager who is ultimately responsible to the Assistant Director within the Children's Services Department manages the Adoption Service. The Agency Decision Maker is currently the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

The Placement Team Manager supervises the Principal Practitioner who in turn takes responsibility for supervising the two full time adoption social workers and one part time (4 days per week). As part of the Government's initiative to improve adoption services the Adoption Team has received 12 months funding to increase recruitment, reduce delay in placing children, to put policies in place in respect of early adoption.

This funding has allowed some change within the structure of the team, the roles and responsibilities of worker.

Alison Garbutt now has a development role focusing upon; improving the quality of Life Story Work, supporting Social Workers in this task providing mentoring, advice and support. This role will also allow Alison to be part of the planning around early adoption and have a scope for developing Life Appreciation Days for children, whilst also taking on some assessment work.

Clare Frankland's roles and responsibilities have also been strengthened. Clare will now focus upon improving the Post Box System electronically and providing improved Post Adoption Support Services whilst still taking on some assessment work.

Emma Howarth has responsibility for Family Finding for both children needing adoptive placements and long term fostering. She is also responsible for supporting and giving advice to the Safeguarding and Assessment Team's in completing Child's Permanency Reports.

The funding has also allowed the Team to increase its capacity. There are plans to recruit two full time workers, on a temporary basis of 12 months, (1 of whom will join the team in June 2013) with another vacancy to be filled later this year.

The roles of these workers will be fundamentally to assist in the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and those wishing to consider early adoption.

The Placement Team Manager is also the Agency Panel Advisor.

As with any Adoption Agency, the Adoption and Fostering Panel is critical to the monitoring and quality assurance of the work of the agency and enables the agency to meet its statutory obligations.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel takes place on a fortnightly basis to consider both fostering and adoption matters, reducing any delay in recommending the approval of any matching consideration.

Statutory Requirements

1. Specific requirements govern the composition and terms of reference of Adoption Panels. These are set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendments) Regulations 2011.
2. The Adoption Panel established by Hartlepool Borough Council performs an important role in assisting the agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:
 - The suitability of prospective adopters and foster carers
 - Whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter.
 - Foster Carer Review and De-registration.
 - Reviews of adopters where they have waited more than 6 months for a child to be placed.

The Panel can give advice to the agency (but is not required to do so) on:

- Contact arrangements
- The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex likely needs and background.
- Whether a child qualifies for an adoption allowance

The panel is also required to feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports presented to panel as part of its quality assurance role.

The Regulations seek to ensure that the Adoption Panel has a separate identity from the agency with an important independent element. The National Minimum Standards (England) 2011, and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 further endorse this level of independence.

Panel Composition

In accordance with amended regulations in force from April, 2011, Hartlepool Borough Council have established a “central list” of persons considered to have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for consideration.

The requirement is that the panel is a multi agency body with a considerable element of independence from the adoption and fostering service. This independence means that they do not make the decisions on behalf of the adoption and fostering service but make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions.

There is no limit to the number of people on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every panel meeting. For the purpose of considering adoption matters the members of the central list will include:

- An Adoption Social Worker
- the Medical Adviser to the agency
- other persons considered suitable including independent persons. These people could include specialists in education, Child and Adolescent mental health and those with personal experience of adoption
- and may include other Social workers

The Panel Chair is required to be independent of the agency and to have the following significant qualities:

- The authority and competence to chair a panel
- The ability to analyse and explain complex situations
- The ability to identify key issues, problems and solutions
- Excellent interpersonal, oral and written communication skills

Panel business can only be conducted if there are at least five members which for the purposes of considering adoption matters must include

- The Independent Chair or Vice Chair – the guidance now indicates that more than one Vice Chair can be appointed
- Adoption Social worker
- At least one other “independent person”- who is not a member or employee of the Adoption Agency.

In addition to the members of the Panel, the Adoption Panel should also include:

Panel Adviser: This is the Placement Team Manager who attends the Panel in an advisory capacity. They advise the Chairperson and panel members on matters of agency policy, practice and procedure. The Adviser takes back any issues raised by Panel members to the Adoption Social Workers or the agency as a whole.

The professional adviser is not a panel member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation.

Legal Adviser: This person advises the Panel on any relevant legal issues. The Legal Adviser is not a Panel Member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation. The Legal Advisor is not expected to attend panel in person, unless specifically asked and required to do so. They are however expected to provide legal advice and guidance in writing to be considered by panel members for each panel meeting.

Membership of Hartlepool Adoption Panel

- Chairperson – Independent Person
- Vice Chairperson Team Manager, Principle Resources Manager
- Vice Chairperson – agency worker
- Agency Social Worker – Social Worker, Through Care Team/Adopter
- Agency Social Worker – Social Worker, Disability Team
- Elected Member
- Adoption Social Worker /Adopter
- Independent member/Adopter
- Independent member/Adopted Person
- Independent member/Foster carer/Adopter
- Independent members – Foster carers x3
- Medical Advisor
- Previously Looked After Child.

Advisors to Panel

- Panel Adviser
- Legal Adviser
- Medical Adviser

Formal voting is not a requirement of the Adoption & Fostering Panel and the Chairperson must try to encourage a consensus view amongst Panel Members. The Panel Chairperson can ask for further information to be made available for Panel Members where a clear consensus is not possible. Any serious reservations expressed by Panel Members must be minuted for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker in Hartlepool is Sally Robinson the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

All Panel members are required to have a current Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Check and new members are also asked to provide two references which are verified by telephone, an employment history and verification of their identity. New members of the Panel attend a Panel as an observer prior to attending as a full member. They will also receive an induction programme relevant to their needs as part of this process.

Panel members are required to participate in annual reviews. Reviews of the panel members are conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser. The annual review of the Panel Chair is conducted by the Agency Decision maker.

The agency is required to arrange panel training at least one day a year but the intention is to extend this to provide additional half day sessions to update on developments throughout the year.

The Adoption & Fostering Panel meets twice monthly and is instrumental in monitoring and evaluating the provision of services to ensure that the quality and effectiveness of the adoption service are of an appropriate standard.

On occasion additional panels may need to be arranged to meet the needs of the service.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints can be made about any aspect of service provided by the Children's Services Department. Complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days. There are up to three stages to the complaints system but the aim is to resolve complaints quickly and informally at Stage One wherever possible.

The complaints system can be used by; users of services, carers of those using services, potential service users, foster carers or adopters. The system can also be used to appeal about a decision made about a service provided by the department.

Complaints are dealt with in three stages:

- Stage One: The informal resolution stage. A complaint will be acknowledged and a Social Work Team Manager will look in to the complaint and try to resolve it. The complainant will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days or 20 working days if the complaint is complex.
- Stage Two: The complaint will be considered by an Independent Person who will check that the investigation is fair and complete
- Stage Three: The Review Panel Stage. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with any part of the written response at Stage 2 it is possible for the complainant to go to a review panel.

As well as the corporate complaints system detailed above, prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel have two main options:

Prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel are entitled to make further representations to Hartlepool Borough Council, as the Adoption Agency;

OR

From 30 April 2004, prospective adopters have the right to refer their case to an Independent Review panel for a review of the agency's determination. The independent panel do not have the power to overturn the original decision but will make a recommendation to the agency on the suitability of the applicants to be adoptive parents.

These options cannot be run simultaneously; prospective adopters who have not been approved by panel must decide whether to make further representations to the agency or seek an independent review of the decision.

Useful Contact Numbers and Addresses

Placement Team
8-9 Church Street
Hartlepool
TS24 7DJ

Tel: 01429 405588
E-mail – fosterandadopt@hartlepool.gov.uk

After Adoption
Unit 112
The Design Works
William Street
Felling
Gateshead
NE10 OJP

Tel: 0191 4788396
Action Line: 0800 056 8578
Website: www.afteradoption.org.uk
E-mail – helpline@talkadoption.org.uk

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)
Head Office
Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TS

Tel: 0207 7421 2601

BAAF Northern England Tel: 0113 289 1101

Website: www.baaf.org.uk
E-mail: mail@baaf.org.uk

Dr Roger Morgan
Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
Aviation house
125, Kingsway
LONDON WC23 6SE

Tel: 0800 528 0731
Website : www.rights4me.org

APPENDIX 1

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL – ADOPTION SERVICE

