



Statement of Purpose

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with underpinning legislation, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, and the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005.
- 1.2 It has also been written in accordance with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards 2014 for Adoption Services.
- 1.3 Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North and South Tyneside Councils collaborated to establish the Adopt North East in 2018. Adopt North East is hosted by North Tyneside Council and has dedicated social work teams that provide a recruitment service, an assessment and approval of adopter's service and an adoption support service to the communities of the five local authorities.
- 1.4 Adopt North East is based at
Balliol Pembroke Wing
Chesters Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE12 8QP
- 1.5 Adopt North East is part of the wider Children's Social Care Service in all five local authorities, and reflects each Council's commitment to 'Best Practice' in the provision of an Adoption Agency. Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North and South Tyneside believe that children should experience permanence and security throughout their childhood and that it is best for a child to live within their birth family, if it is safe to do so.

Where this is not possible, all five Councils aim to provide, in conjunction with Adopt North East, permanent alternative families who will promote the child's well-being and development by providing the highest possible

standards of care to meet his or her individual assessed needs.

2. Vision for the Service

In *Children's social care reform: a vision for change (2016)* the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020. In respect of adoption, the government's vision is for an adoption system where:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence.
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality, evidence based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care.
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay.
- Every adoptive family has access to an on going package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

The vision of Adopt North East is .

- to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption. This will be achieved by bringing together the best practice from each authority into Adopt North East.

2.2 Guiding principles;

- a. That looked after children and prospective adopters are advantaged by doing so and
- b. That a regional adoption service is demonstrably efficient and flexible in delivering the service.

2.3 Ambition

- a. Reducing the time that children have to wait for adoptive placements
- b. Improving the experience for prospective adopters from initial inquiry, through the assessment process, panel approval and placement matching and the delivery of post adoption support services.

3. Aims

3.1 The main aim of Adopt North East is to provide a child focused

and efficient service: which will be demonstrated by increased numbers of adopters being recruited, through timely assessment and the provision of training and support, which prepares adopters well and enables children to achieve permanence in loving and nurturing families.

- 3.2 To provide an effective, flexible shared adoption agency where the needs of individual children can be met within the legal security of adoption as appropriate.
- 3.3 To ensure that adoption is considered as an option for all children requiring permanent alternative care away from their birth family.
- 3.4 To provide a proactive and professional family finding service which seeks to match individual children with prospective adoptive families that have been assessed as able to meet their needs.
- 3.5 To ensure that the recruitment, preparation, training and support given to prospective adopters is a comprehensive service and meets their needs so that they can be successful adopters.
- 3.6 To provide a responsive and comprehensive adoption support service to children, their birth families and adoptive families living in the region who as a result of adoption require advice, counselling, practical or emotional support. In addition, to provide adoption support services to children and their adoptive families placed by Adopt North East outside of the boundary of all five Local Authorities.
- 3.7 To provide an effective service for any person requesting an Adoption Intermediary Service.
- 3.8 To support prospective adopters who are interested in Inter-Country Adoption.
- 3.9 To provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to access their files or trace their birth family. To support adults who access their files, to provide them with a copy of all the relevant information about their birth family and also the reasons why they were adopted.
- 3.10 To provide the Adoption Panel Advisor role and Adoption Support Service Advisor role to ensure that the quality of the shared service is supported and developed across the five councils.

4. Objectives

- 4.1 To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.
- 4.2 To recruit and maintain sufficient numbers of prospective and approved adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children across the Adopt North East Region who need adoptive placements. This recruitment should whenever possible

reflect the ethnicity, culture, religion and language needs of the children.

- 4.3 To provide an efficient and effective service for prospective adopters. This service to include, information, preparation, assessment and ongoing support.
- 4.4 To offer a service to birth families who wish to relinquish children for adoption.
- 4.5 To develop and deliver a range of adoption support services to adopters, adopted children and their birth families in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance.
- 4.6 To provide a signposting service for adopted adults searching for their birth family and for birth family members who are searching for an adopted adult.
- 4.7 To provide organisation and management of the post adoption letter box contact scheme.
- 4.8 To ensure that staff working in the shared adoption service have the necessary qualifications, knowledge, skills and training to deliver an effective service.
- 4.15 To provide information and advice to those seeking to adopt from overseas.

5. Principles and Values

- 5.1 The work of Adopt North East is underpinned by the following values and beliefs.

(a) Children

- Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all their needs in terms of stability and security, that promotes their physical, social and emotional development and that offers a supportive lifelong relationship.
- Where a child's needs cannot be met within their birth family, adoption may offer the best alternative to meet their needs.
- In all planning for children, the child's welfare is paramount and their wishes and feelings should always be sought and taken into account in decision making, in accordance to their age and understanding.
- Children are entitled to be treated with respect; diversity and difference should be valued and enjoyed. A child's sense of identity and self-respect needs to be actively promoted, particularly

awareness of issues of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and ability.

- Children should only be separated from their siblings where clear evidence supports doing so on the basis of the child's assessed needs.
- Every child is entitled to information about his/her birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- Contact (direct or indirect) should be encouraged if compatible with the child's needs.

(b) Adopters

- The role of the adoptive parent in offering a permanent family to a child will be valued and respected.
- All adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. No applicant will be discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, culture, disability, sexuality, gender, age, financial status or marital status.
- All applicants are entitled to know what issues will be taken into account in their assessment, including age, health, relationships and family history. Applicants will be regarded as partners in the assessment process and will be kept fully informed of their progress, and of any concerns identified in the assessment.

(c) Birth Families

- Wherever possible, Adopt North East will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for children.
- Birth families will be treated fairly, openly and with respect, and their relationship with their child will be acknowledged.
- Birth families will be kept fully informed of the adoption process, the legal implications and their rights.
- Birth families will be given such information about their child's adoptive parents as is compatible with the child's and the adoptive family's safety and security.
- Birth families will have access to independent counselling and advice if required.

6. Diversity

- 6.1 Each Council has a Corporate Diversity and Equalities Strategy and Adopt North East will work towards achieving their stated objectives. These can be accessed via each Council's internet sites.
- 6.2 Adopt North East has a key role to play through the provision of placements that are able to meet a diverse range of individual needs.
- 6.3 Adopt North East will ensure it provides services in a way which appropriately meets the needs of all individuals, and that its structure policies and procedures do not discriminate against disadvantaged groups.

7. Senior Manager (Interim)

- 7.1 The host Authority for the Adopt North East is North Tyneside.
- 7.2 The Manager of the Adopt North East is **Bryan Glover**.

8. Qualifications

BA (Hons) Psychology and Education 1986
MSC in Social Work Studies 1993
DipSW 1993

Experience

Worked as a social worker since 1991

Contact Details:

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Chesters Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE12 8QP

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0191 643 3534

8. Structure of the Service

- 8.1 Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North and South Tyneside have collaborated to establish Adopt North East . This shared adoption service is hosted by North Tyneside and has a dedicated recruitment team two dedicated assessment teams – a Family Finding Team and Post Adoption Support team.
- 8.2 The Senior Manager of Adopt North East is responsible for the day to day running of the service.
- 8.3 The Senior Manager is supported by four Team Managers, and an Administration Coordinator.

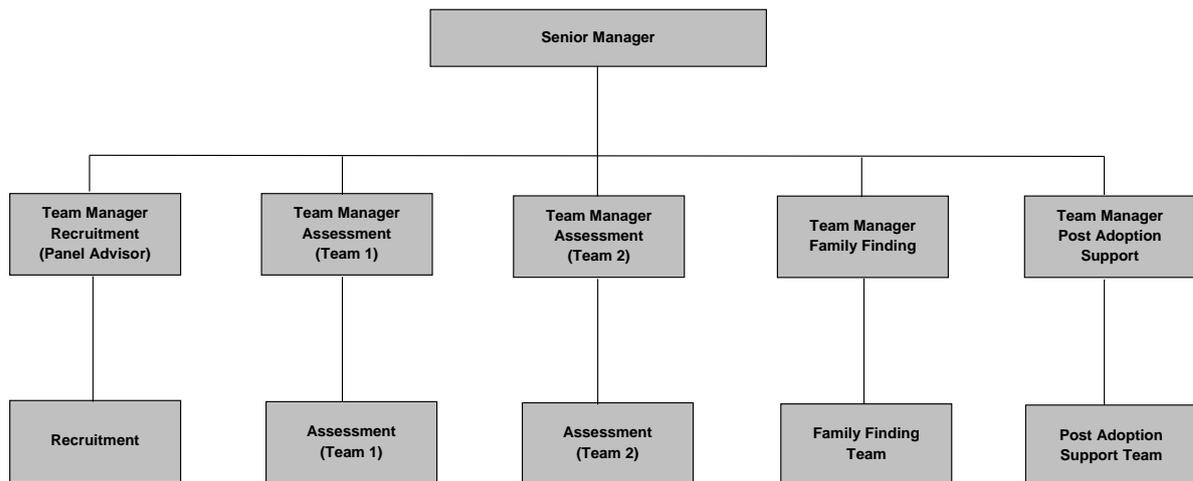
8.4 Adopt North East has one dedicated Agency Decision Maker

Adopt North East Structure



Adopt North East

Staffing Structure



9. Services Provided to Children

- 9.1 The Adoption Service provides services to children requiring an adoptive placement. These children have an identified care plan of adoption, or are relinquished children.
- 9.2 The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 introduced changes with effect from 1st September 2012. From this date only children with a plan for adoption which Require no application for a Placement Order (children whose mother had requested they be placed for adoption) can be considered by an Adoption Panel in respect of the agency decision that they should be placed for adoption.
- 9.3 In all other cases when an adoption plan is considered, there is an alternative process in place concluding with the decision of the Agency Decision Maker as to whether the plan should be adoption or not and this decision being presented to court.
- 9.4 The Adoption Child Care worker in each Local Authority attend early planning meetings for children whose plan may be adoption and in this way are informed of the children that may eventually have a plan for adoption. Information about these children is then shared with Adopt North East. This enables family finding to commence at the earliest

point and the sufficiency of adopters to be monitored.

- 9.5 Profiling meetings are held for children when the plan for adoption is clear. All involved professionals and carers are invited to this meeting to share all known information about each child in order to gain a full picture of their needs.
- 9.6 The search for an adoptive family for a child pursues all avenues available to ensure that any delay is minimised.
- 9.7 Children and adopter profiles are uploaded to Link Maker in all cases where matches have not been identified prior to approval or a Placement Order being granted. Children and adopters are also referred to the Adoption Register for England immediately if finding an adoption placement for the child is likely to be difficult. However any child without an adoptive placement after five months of searching is referred to the National Adoption Register as advised in the guidelines. Children will also be featured at Adoption Exchange Days. Consideration is also given to profiling the child/ren in certain publications if family finding is proving to be extremely difficult.
- 9.8 When a prospective adoptive family is identified, the relevant paperwork is prepared and the case is presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation. The local Authority Agency Decision Maker then approves the match if s/he agrees with the recommendation.
- 9.9 Once the match is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker a series of introductions take place, if these are successful the child is then placed with the adoptive family.
- 9.10 The child's Social Worker supports the placement together with the adoptive family's social worker until the Adoption Order is granted.
- 9.11 Foster to Adopt placements are also actively recruited for to ensure, where appropriate, a child can be placed with their potential adopters at the earliest opportunity to minimise the amount of moves they experience and establish security as soon as possible.

10 Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment, Support and Approval of Adoptive Parents.

- 10.1 Adopt North East has an annual recruitment strategy and runs regular recruitment campaigns to capture the interest of prospective adopters. A variety of media is used during the campaigns which are focused around the needs of children waiting and those who are likely to be referred to the service.
- 10.2 Prospective adopters who make contact with the service, either by

telephone or on the internet are initially given an information pack to consider. If having read this, they wish to proceed with an application; they then return an expression of interest form.

- 10.3 On receipt of this expression of interest form, a recruitment and assessing social worker will telephone the prospective adopter within **10 working days** and provide them with further information. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed, a recruitment social worker will arrange an initial visit. This visit will inform the decision making if the prospective adopter wishes to progress to Stage 1.
- 10.4 Following the receipt of a 'Registration of Interest' the shared adoption service has to acknowledge receipt of the form and decide if they will accept or decline the application within **5 working days**.
- 10.5 If Adopt North East accepts the application this is the start of **Stage 1**.

The Service must at the start of this stage complete an assessment agreement with the applicant/s setting out the responsibilities of the Agency and the prospective adopter/s. This stage is **2 months** in length, and adopters are required to complete their own research and portfolio of evidence. Adopt North East will complete Statutory Checks, Health and Safety Assessment and provide Preparation for Adoption Training for applicants at this stage.

- 10.6 At the end of **Stage 1** there will be a meeting held with the prospective adopter/s and the Shared adoption Service must decide and inform the applicant/s if they can progress to **Stage 2** or if they need to complete further work. If the decision is that the applicant/s can progress a second assessment agreement must be agreed.
- 10.7 Following this, adopters are allocated a social worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team who will work with them to complete the assessment for their application. Additional suitably qualified independent social workers are commissioned when necessary. **Stage 2** of the process must be completed within **4 months** in order to meet the stipulated timescales within the Statutory Guidance.
- 10.8 Once completed the assessment and related documents are presented to the Adopt North East Panel for their recommendation. The applicants are fully involved in their assessment which is an open process. Applicants are invited and encouraged to attend the panel. Timescales for assessments are in accordance with Regulations and National Minimum Standards.
- 10.9 If applicants are not approved and wish to appeal this decision, they will be given information about the **Independent Review Mechanism**. This is a review body, operated by the Coram Children's Legal Centre

On behalf of the Secretary of State. The Independent Review Mechanism can advise the Adoption Agency to reconsider the decision but does not have the authority to overturn the decision made originally by the Adoption Agency.

11. Post Placement and Post Adoption Support

Adopt North East provides the full range of Services as required under Adoption Support Regulations 2005.

11.1 Financial Support

Assessments for financial support are carried out by the child's relevant adoption child care team, not Adopt North East, and where financial support is awarded, this is reviewed annually.

11.2 Assistance with Contact

The Adoption Service maintains the indirect contact – Letterbox - service on behalf of all adopted children in all five local authorities. The Support Workers will also assist birth families to write their letters if this service is required.

11.3 Post Approval Training and Workshops

Parenting courses and workshops are provided post approval for adoptive families on a variety of topics for example, attachment issues, talking to your child about adoption, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and the issues that may arise due to this.

11.4 Counselling for Birth Parents

The Adoption Service has a service level agreement with After Adoption Birth Ties to provide counselling for birth parents that have had a child adopted. This service provides independent information and individual support to birth parents.

11.5 Post placement and Post Adoption Support to adoptive families

Both children placed for adoption and the prospective adopters retain the support of a social worker until the making of an Adoption Order. Following this they also retain the services of the adoption support team staff where required. These staff will undertake both practical support, advice about behaviour or relationships, and will work with other professionals and the carers to provide the necessary support to the adoptive family.

Where there is disruption there are processes in place for undertaking independently chaired disruption meetings. Findings from any such disruptions are used to change practice or procedure if any failures or lessons are learned.

11.6 Counselling, Advice and Information

This is provided via the post adoption workers within the team. They

offer advice and support in respect of Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives, access to records and adoption counselling where appropriate.

11.7

Assessing the Needs for Adoption Support Services – post Adoption

An adoptive family can ask for an assessment of need for adoption support services at any time whilst the child is under 18 years of age and up to 25 years of age where the young person has a disability. If this is within three years of the order, the placing authority will be responsible for arranging the assessment, but may ask another authority to do this on its behalf. After three years, the request for an assessment should be made to the adoption service in whose area the family is living. Within the area covered by the regional adoption agency this Adoption Service will be provided by Adopt North East. However the placing authority retains responsibility for any ongoing financial commitment at the time of the child's adoption. Where a request is received by Adopt North East for an assessment of Adoption Support Needs, the adoption worker will undertake a comprehensive assessment of need.

The assessment will include the following elements:

- The needs of the person being assessed and how they might be met.
- The needs of the adoptive family and how they might be met.
- The needs, including developmental needs, of an adopted child and how they might be met.
- The parenting capacity of the adoptive parent.
- Wider family and environmental factors.
- The circumstances that led to the child being placed for adoption
- Any previous assessment of needs for adoption support services.

Once the assessment has been completed, the following steps will be taken:

If the proposal is to provide services, the Adoption Service will provide an adoption support plan in writing. The Adoption Support plan will include:

- The services to be provided
- What it is expected the service will achieve
- How the success of the service will be measured and evaluated
- The timescales for providing the service; when and for how long.
- When and how the plan will be reviewed.
- The named person that will monitor the provision of the services according to the plan and undertake reviews.

It should be noted that, whilst an adoption agency has a duty to assess the need for adoption support services if requested, there is no

statutory obligation to provide these services even if identified as appropriate. However Adopt North East recognises the uniqueness of the adoption relationship and the lifetime commitment involved and accepts its general responsibility to do everything possible to support adoptive families to ensure successful outcomes.

Where a support plan is agreed consideration will be given to making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.

The services provided as detailed above meet the requirements of the 'Adoption Passport' introduced as part of the Government changes to Adoption Services. Adoptive families can access the Adoption Passport support guide for adopters via the First4Adoption website.

12. Adoption Panel

12.1 The Adopt North East shared adoption service has a joint panel and must have 6 members to be quorate. The Adoption Panel is a body of people who consider all the relevant information presented to them in order to make a recommendation:

- To consider whether an adoptive applicant should be approved as suitable adopters.
- To consider prospective matches between children and adoptive parents.
- A child plans for adoption of children where no application for a Placement order is made.

The Adopt North East Panel is scheduled to meet twice a month.

12.2 The key functions of the Adoption Panel are to:

- Ensure all relevant information has been provided and is of sufficient quality
- Ensure that the agency have followed the guidance and regulations in terms of children whose plan is adoption.
- Consider all the information about each case
- Provide the Agency with a recommendation in each case
- Offer Advice to the agency on each case.

12.3 In order to conform to the Adoption Agency Standards 2011, the adoption panel must consist of an Independent Chair, or Vice Chair, Independent Members, and a Social Worker with relevant adoption experience. Medical advice is also required and the Medical advisor is a Panel member. Legal advice is required when considering if a child's plan should be adoption; however legal advisors are not required to

attend panel, but if they do they are not Panel members. When panel is considering approvals or matches panel may obtain legal advice where it considers necessary.

The Agency Advisor should attend Panel but is also not a Panel member.

- 12.4 Panel members must complete relevant training. There must also be Panel training at least annually.
- 12.5 Panel members have an annual appraisal, conducted by the Panel Chair and Agency Advisor. The Panel Chair has an annual appraisal conducted by the Agency Decision Maker, and all Panel Members contribute to this appraisal.
- 12.6 Adopt North East has appointed an Agency Decision Maker who is the Senior Manager for adopter recruitment. It was agreed by Adopt North East that each local authority will appoint an Agency Decision Maker's will agree/disagree the recommendations from the Adopt North East Panel for matches involving a child from their local authority.

13. Arrangements to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the services provided.

- 13.1 Adopt North East as an Adoption Agency will be inspected by OFSTED as part of the Single Inspection Framework for each partner local authority and is subject to the requirements and recommendations made by that body.
- 13.2 Adopt North East is hosted by North Tyneside as the lead local authority. A Executive Board has been established consisting of senior representatives from each local authority and meets every month. This Board has overall accountability and monitors and controls the activities of the service, setting performance objectives and targets. The Board provides scrutiny, challenge and strategic direction, and, approves the Adopt North East Development Plan.
- 13.3 Each Month the Service Managers with responsibility for permanence from each of the five Local Authorities will meet with the Senior Manager of Adopt North East and discuss operational matters and performance targets.
- 13.4 Six monthly reports are provided to the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services in each of the five local authorities. It is the responsibility of the Board member for each respective authority to ensure that these are presented, discussed and noted: **NMS Standard 25 (2014)**. These reports include quality assurance information provided on a 6 monthly basis by the panel chair to the agency.

14. Complaints Procedures

- 14.1 The shared adoption service has a clear complaints procedure, based on the procedure currently in use in North Tyneside. This procedure deals with complaints received from service users from the five local authorities.

Records of these complaints will be kept in accordance with **Regulation 17 (AAR 2003) and NMS Standard 26 (2014).**

- 14.2 On receipt of a complaint, the matter is, where possible, dealt with informally by the Team Manager responsible. In the event that the complaint is of sufficient concern that informal resolution is inappropriate, or cannot be resolved informally, then it will be referred to the

Customer and Member Liaison Office
Telephone: (0191) 643 2280
Email: CMLO@northtyneside.gov.uk

[Ofsted Complaints](#) or call 0300 123 1231 between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.

The Complaints Team will ensure the formal complaint is allocated for investigation, and liaise with the complainant directly.

- 14.3 Where the complaint cannot be resolved following investigation at stage 1, the complainant has the option of requesting a stage 2 investigation, followed by a stage 3 Review Panel and ultimately a referral to the Ombudsman's Office.

14.4 Safeguarding

North Tyneside operates under the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) model and has a Safeguarding Board.

The procedures include arrangements for dealing with allegations of abuse or neglect for children placed for adoption. These procedures will be followed by social

workers within Adopt North East. If a child has been placed with prospective adopters, a prompt referral will be made to the Local Authority where the child is placed, in order for the allegation to be investigated under that Authority's procedure. Full co-operation will be given by the shared adoption service to the Authority investigating the allegation with regard to information about the child.

- 14.5 If an allegation is made against a professional working with a child, the Local Authority that employs the professional will take responsibility for undertaking the investigation. It is unlikely that a Child Protection Conference will be needed as children to be placed for adoption are 'Looked After Children', but in this unlikely event advice would be

sought from the North Tyneside Designated Officer Designated Officer as to which Local Authority should convene the Conference. The Designated Officer will offer assistance and advice to Adopt North East staff. The North Tyneside MASH operates a Duty Advice line and advice will be made available to staff, when requested, of the shared adoption service.

15. Arrangements for approval and review of Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed by Adopt North East on an annual basis in consultation with staff members and Adoption Panel members. Any changes or proposed amendments to the Statement of Purpose will be submitted to the Adoption Panel for consideration and Cabinet/Executive for approval.

16. Arrangements for distribution of Statement of Purpose

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be given to each member of staff and each Adoption Panel member.

It will be made available, upon request, to:

- Any person working for the purposes of the adoption service
- Any adopter or prospective adopter of the Adoption Service
- Any child placed with an adopter by the Adoption Service
- The parent of any such child

Updated by Bryan Glover - Interim Senior Manager
December 2018