



Appendix A

**Adoption Agency
Statement of Purpose
2014/15**



Statement of Purpose
Central Bedfordshire Council - Adoption Agency

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011, Standard 18.

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1. Background / Context / Status of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service is part of The Corporate Parenting Service in Central Bedfordshire Council. The Adoption Service is based at Stevenson Court, Priory Business Park, in Bedford.

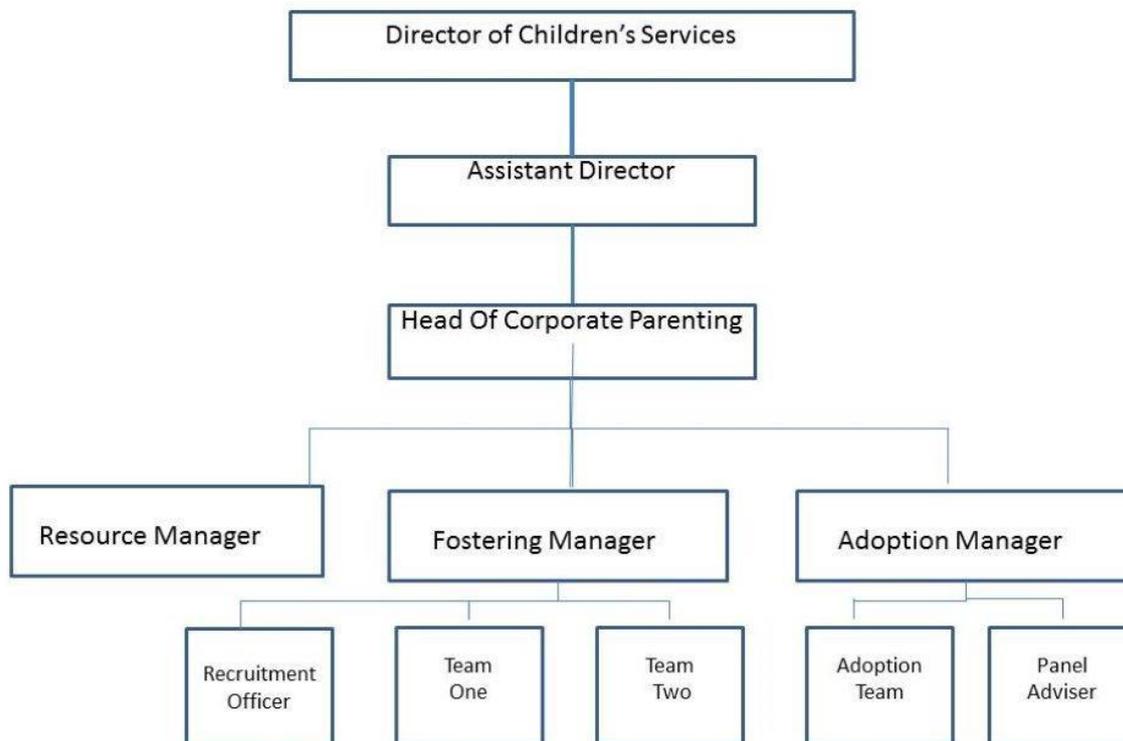
Prior to this, Central Bedfordshire's Adoption Service was a shared Service with Bedford Borough Council but this arrangement ceased in January 2014.

2. Aims and Objectives

The Adoption Service recognises the life long nature of adoption and other permanent placement options and aims:-

- To provide a high quality adoption and permanence service for the residents of Central Bedfordshire.
- To provide a suitable and timely adoptive placement for every child with a plan for adoption.
- To ensure that recruitment of adopters is targeted to meet the needs of children from Central Bedfordshire and nationally.
- To recruit a range of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children.
- To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed for adoption.
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage, language and identity of children are fully recognised and valued.
- To provide support services that ensure successful outcomes for children placed for adoption.
- To ensure that adoptive families are enabled to meet the health and education needs of children placed with them.
- To provide a range of support services for adopted adults.
- To offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption.
- To ensure support is provided for the birth relatives of the children who are placed for adoption by Central Bedfordshire Council.
- To ensure that, at all times, the Adoption Service complies with legislation and policy requirements which affect its activity.

3. Management and Organisational Structure



Ultimate responsibility for the Adoption Service rests with the Elected Members. The Adoption Service forms part of Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Services for which the Director of Children's Services is responsible. The overall management responsibility for the Adoption Service is the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services. Operational managerial responsibility sits with the Head of Corporate Parenting. The Practice Manager for the Adoption Team supervises the adoption social workers and the Panel Adviser for adoption and fostering. The Resources and Placement Team, which is managed by the Head of Corporate Parenting, supports the adoption service in relation to recruitment of adopters, publicity and communications.

4. Services Provided by Central Bedfordshire Adoption Service

The Adoption Service provides the following services:

- Advice/counselling to those enquiring about adoption.
- Recruitment, assessment, approval and ongoing training and support of prospective adopters.
- Support for families who have adopted and for adopted children, through assessment of adoption support needs and provision of services. These services may include financial assistance, education support and a wide range of social work and therapeutic services.
- Training opportunities for all adoptive parents.

- Out of hours telephone support to prospective adopters with children placed for adoption and to adoptive families receiving adoption support.
- Assistance to access to birth records and counselling for adult adoptees.
- Intermediary services for adults adopted through the former Bedfordshire County Council and for adopted adults living in Central Bedfordshire.
- Support to birth relatives of Central Bedfordshire children with a plan for adoption.
- A contact support service for all parties involved in ongoing contact for all adopted children.
- A permanence planning, matching and family finding service for Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Social Care Teams.
- An adoption service to those wishing to adopt from overseas, through a Service Level Agreement with PACT (Parents and Children Together).
- Access to services provided by National Support Groups.
- Access to counselling services for birth family members.

5. Procedures

a) Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters

Central Bedfordshire Council has detailed policies and procedures for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters. The following is a summary of the recruitment, assessment and approval process in Central Bedfordshire. This follows the new two stage adopter recruitment and approval process as introduced by the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013 which came into force in July 2013, as part of the Government's Adoption Reform.

- Enquirers can telephone the Service on 0300 300 8090 and will automatically be passed to the Adoption Duty Worker. At this stage, the Adoption Duty Worker will gather basic information about the enquirers and answer initial questions about adoption.
- Prospective adopters contacting the Service are provided with written information about adoption within five working days. They are given the opportunity to meet with a social worker and provided with an Information Pack which includes a Registration of Interest Form (ROI).
- If the enquirer submits a Registration of Interest Form, this is passed to the Adoption Team Manager, who will consider whether or not to accept the Registration of Interest. Unless there is any obvious reason known as to why the Registration of Interest should not be accepted, the Team Manager will give permission to progress the enquiry to Stage One.
- The prospective adopter(s) are invited to a meeting with a member of the Adoption Team to complete a Stage One Plan (Agreement), detailing what will be expected of them and the Agency, at this stage.
- Stage One of the process is 'adopter led' and should normally take no more than two months to complete. The applicant should use this time to explore the extent of their

interest in and capacity for adoption, including considering Fostering for Adoption placements, whilst the Agency carries out Statutory Checks, in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005.

- These Checks include:
 1. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS)
 2. Six written personal references of whom at least three are visited.
 3. Employment references.
 4. Local Authority checks.
 5. Medical checks.
- In addition, DBS Checks are taken up on any other person in the prospective adopter's household aged 18 and over.
- Central Bedfordshire Council will offer support to prospective adopters during Stage One as appropriate, the process being monitored by a co-ordinator within the team.
- Additionally, prospective adopters have the opportunity to attend an Information Event in order to hear more about adoption.
- Towards the end of Stage One, prospective adopters are offered an end of Stage One Interview in order to ascertain whether they wish to move on to Stage Two and if so, whether the Agency wishes to accept their application.
- Prospective adopters can take up to six months to complete Stage One if they so wish before needing to begin the process again.
- Following the end of the Stage One Interview, social workers will discuss with the Practice Manager whether the Agency feels able to accept an application from the prospective adopters at this time. This will be based on their potential ability to meet the needs of children requiring an adoptive family.
- Should the Practice Manager decide that a prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt, either during Stage One or at the end of Stage One, they will provide the prospective adopter with a written explanation of the reasons.
- If the Practice Manager decides that the prospective adopters can proceed to Stage Two, the case will be allocated to a Social Worker who will meet with them. A Stage Two Plan (Agreement) will be completed and the Social Worker will carry out an adopter assessment – Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). This should be completed and the decision as to the applicants' suitability be made within four months of the date of the Stage Two Plan.
- Applicants will be invited to attend Preparation Groups during the process of assessment.
- Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation. The recommendation is then presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision on the applicants' suitability to adopt. Should the Agency Decision Maker be minded not to approve the application, prospective adopters can either make representations to the Service or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

- The Adoption Team demonstrates a positive and supportive approach towards applications to adopt from previous adopters and foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care. These assessments will be fast tracked, with prospective adopters moving directly to Stage Two.
- Following approval, Central Bedfordshire Council will seek to place the right child with the prospective adopters as soon as possible; either children in the care of the Council or nationally. This includes the active consideration of Fostering for Adoption placements alongside other adoptive placements in order to make the most suitable and timely placement for each child requiring adoption.
- Adopters for whom a match has not been identified within three months of approval will be referred to the National Adoption Register.
- The Adoption Team aims to provide ongoing support to adoptive families, and an adoption support plan will be drawn up before placement which identifies the likely support needs of the placement. This is then reviewed prior to the Adoption Order being granted.
- Children in adoptive placements are reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer. The Review helps identify when it is appropriate for an Adoption Order to be lodged by the applicants. In most cases, this would be decided by the time of the second Review. Adopters are supported by their Social Worker in making the application.

b) Adoption Support for adoptive parents and their children, adopted children and adults and birth relatives of adopted children and adults

Central Bedfordshire Council provides a range of ongoing support to adoptive families, including family events and activity groups for adopted young people. In line with legislation, adopters for whom we are the responsible Adoption Agency can ask for an assessment of their adoption support needs. The Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) for Central Bedfordshire Council is (previously Head of Service) and can be contacted on the number stated below.

Central Bedfordshire Council provides a service to Adopted Adults and their Birth Relatives. Details of this service can be found on our website and in the leaflet Services to Adopted Adults and Their Birth Relatives.

The Adoption Team ensures that all those seeking to adopt are fully informed as to their entitlements in regards to adoption support, from the very beginning of the assessment process.

6. Staffing

The current complement is:

- 1 Practice Manager (full time)
- 3 Senior Practitioners (2 full time equivalent)
- 4 Social Workers (3.5 Full time equivalent)
- 2 Social Work Assistants (1 full time equivalent)

The Manager and Social Workers are all professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. All staff have a Personal Development Review and have an identified training plan from which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Central Bedfordshire's Learning and Development Programme.

The professionally qualified Social Work staff are supported by an Administrative Team of two staff. The Adoption Team have also been committed to providing placements for Social Work students.

The Adoption Agency is supported by specialist staff who work across the Adoption and Fostering Service. These include a Recruitment and Marketing Officer and a Training Coordinator, as well as a Professional Panel Adviser and Panel Secretaries who support the Adoption Panel.

7. Adoption Panel

The Adoption Regulations require the Adoption Panel to consider the case of every child, prospective adopter, and proposed adoption placement referred to it by the adoption agency for consideration, prior to making its recommendation as to:

- a) Whether a child should be placed for adoption.
- b) Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child.
- c) Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter.
- d) Whether on the information so far available a prospective adopter is unlikely to be suitable to adopt a child.
- e) Whether a prospective adopter, following review, is no longer suitable to adopt a child.

The Adoption Panel in Bedfordshire is a joint panel for Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. It meets every month but can meet more frequently if need be. The Panel is chaired by an independent person who has considerable professional experience of adoption. In addition, panel members include the Fostering Team Manager of Bedford Borough Council, the Team Manager of the Children with Disabilities Team of Bedford Borough Council, the Medical Adviser who is an experienced Paediatrician, elected members, an Educational Psychologist, social workers, two adoptive parents and a birth parent. The Agency Adviser and a Panel Secretary are also in attendance but are non-voting members. Written legal advice is available to the panel from the Legal Adviser who on occasion may be present but is not a panel member.

Changes in Regulations which came into force from 1 September 2012 have meant that decisions about whether a child should be placed for adoption are now made by the Agency Decision Maker without recourse to the Panel. However, this only applies to cases where consent for adoption has not already been given by the child's parents.

Agency Decisions

Each council has a delegated senior manager to make decisions based on the Panel's recommendations. These decisions are made within seven working days of receiving the minutes of the Panel meeting.

8. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Adoption Service is monitored at all levels through staff supervision. In addition, the Agency Adviser provides scrutiny and feedback as does the Adoption Panel. Recruitment information is tracked through weekly management reports and management information is considered at fortnightly managers' meetings. Regular reports are provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Feedback from service users is sought at regular intervals e.g. after Information Evenings, Preparation Training, Panel, Adoption Order.

In addition the Service is subject to inspection by Ofsted.

9. Complaints

The Adoption Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Policy and Procedure, for dealing with and monitoring complaints by prospective adopters, adopters, birth relatives, staff and other parties with a relevant interest in the Adoption Service.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of Central Bedfordshire Council, but a central record is also kept within the Adoption Service. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Service to respond and learn from complaints made. The Council is developing a database which will in future enable customers to make and track a complaint via the Council's website.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Services Children Act Complaints Procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

The Complaints Procedure has several stages: Stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Adoption Service or from Central Bedfordshire's Customer Relations Department.

10. Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption

Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures and Central Bedfordshire procedures for managing allegations regarding such children.

11. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Head of Service of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Practice Manager of the Adoption Service. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member for Children's Services and will be notified to the Registration Authority within 28 days.

This statement of purpose will next be reviewed in March 2015.

12. The Registration Authority

The Registration Authority is:

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

Tel: 08456 404045
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

13. Contacts

For more information about Adoption in Central Bedfordshire please contact:

Adoption Team
Corporate Parenting Service
Central Bedfordshire Council
Unit 16 Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Court
Bedford MK44 3WJ

Tel: 0300 300 8090

For copies of the Complaints Procedure or further copies of this Statement of Purpose, please contact the Adoption Service on the contact details above.

If you wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, on the Adoption Service or make a complaint, please contact:

Head of Corporate Parenting Service, Adoption and Fostering Service, Unit 16 Stephenson Court, Fraser Road, Priory Business Park, Bedford, MK44 3WJ



Approved:

Signed.....

**Sue Harrison
Director of Children's Services**

Dated.....

Signed.....

**Cllr Mark Versallion
Executive Member for Children's Services**

Dated.....