

Children, Young People & Learning



Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2014 – 2015

**Version 1
April 2014**

Bracknell Forest Children's Social Care
www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

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Accessibility

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1 Introduction

This statement of purpose has been produced by Bracknell Forest Council's Children's Social Care Service under the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Adoption Standards 2011. The statement aims to give all stakeholders and service users a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Adoption Service, as well as to detail the services provided.

This is a key document against which the Adoption Service is inspected by Ofsted and which is formally reviewed and approved by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning and the Director of Children Young People and Learning on an annual basis.

The statement is consistent with Bracknell Forest Council's Children and Young Person's Plan and is supported by Children's Guide to Adoption, which is available for children and young people involved with the Adoption Service or who are already adopted.

2 Policy Statement

Bracknell Forest Council seeks to promote the upbringing of children within their birth family. The central aim of the Adoption Service is to:

- provide a wide range of high quality adoption and adoption support services for children unable to live with their birth families, available to all parties affected by the adoption process that will be consistent with statutory obligations and regulations regarding the adoption of children;
- carry out the council's statutory duty towards children who are looked after and the council's corporate parenting role under the Children Act 1989 by ensuring that they are placed with families and carers who can offer them safe, stable care and promote their life chances;
- contribute to the council's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the borough by ensuring that all children are able to fulfil their potential in respect of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and enjoying economic wellbeing;
- ensure that all our services are accessible and delivered fairly, in accordance with the council's equality policy, and that service users are given the opportunity to comment on the services they receive and participate in service development.

3. Principles and Core Values

Bracknell Forest Council believes that all children and young people who need permanent substitute care should have an opportunity to grow up as part of a

loving family who can meet their needs during childhood and beyond into adult life. The Adoption Service is therefore based on the following principles;

- the child's welfare and safety should be the main focus throughout the adoption process. Children's rights should be respected at all times;
- children have the right to stability and continuity throughout their lives so that they are able to maintain their identity and develop their full potential;
- decisions taken about placing children should take full account of the individual child's cultural, racial and religious identities, as well as the specific needs of children with disabilities;
- relationships that are important to the child should be sustained and developed where possible and assessed as appropriate;
- children, birth parents and adoptive parents should have access to all relevant information and be encouraged to participate in any discussions and decision-making processes;
- all decisions should be taken in a manner that is fair and transparent, and individuals should be given an opportunity to challenge decisions. Services should be administered in a fair manner and in keeping with the Council's equality and valuing diversity policies;
- decisions about the child's future should be taken in a timely manner that minimises delay;
- adoption is a life-long commitment that has far-reaching consequences for those who are affected; this should be recognised by staff involved in delivering adoption services, and services should be delivered in a sensitive way;
- the confidentiality of all those involved in the adoption process should be respected.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Service

Bracknell Forest's Family Placement Team aims to provide an efficient adoption service that meets the needs of those children in the borough who require permanent substitute care.

The Adoption Service will continue to improve and increase timely adoption and increased use of Special Guardianship arrangements. The service will be delivered in line with the Adoption and Children Act 2002; Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, [Adoption Agencies \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#), the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services 2011, [Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2013](#) and [Children and Families Act 2014](#).

The team is an integral part of the Children's Social Care Service and works closely with the children's social work teams to achieve permanency for children. Early involvement of the Family Placement Team in child care planning is crucial to minimise disruption and to avoid delay.

The service also aims to provide a service for adoptive parents, and birth parents and adults who wish to contact family members from whom they were separated following adoption.

5. Information on Service Users

Adoption Services are provided to:

- children who are to be adopted;
- birth parent;
- prospective and approved adopters including those who are seeking to adopt from overseas;
- children and adoptive parents who require adoption support Services;
- adopted adults and members of their birth families.

6. Providers

The Adoption Service' first priority is to identify those children being Looked After by Bracknell Forest Borough Council who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with prospective adoptive families within the time-scales prescribed by the statutory guidance and appropriate to the needs of each child.

Applications will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:

- children who have significant emotional or behavioural difficulties which they are likely to display through childhood.;
- children from minority ethnic backgrounds;
- children who have significant developmental delayed and who may require additional support in education;
- children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care;
- children who have an identified physical or learning disability;
- children whose background histories include having a parent with significant mental health difficulties;
- single children, in particular, aged 4 and above;
- sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged four years or over;

All applicants will be expected to understand and accept that all children who are placed for adoption will have complex backgrounds and needs and that there will be some children for whom there is not complete background and or health information.

Agency Details

The Name and Address of the Registered Provider

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Adoption Service
Bracknell Family Placement Team
Children's Social Care
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
Berkshire RG12 1JD

The Responsible Individual:

The Responsible Individual is Sheila McKeand, the Head of Service, Looked After Children. Sheila is based at the Time Square Council Offices, Market Street Bracknell.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker

The Adoption Agency decision makers are :

Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer, Children's Social Care.

Sonia Johnson Head of Service, Specialist Services

Based at the Time Square Council Offices, Market Street, Bracknell. RG12 1JD

The link to the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS)

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council, Wokingham Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, the host authority. The service currently comprises a Manager, an Adoption consultant, two administrators, two project workers, who are qualified social workers and a Records Officer. Detailed information regarding the role of the Adoption Advisory Service is available on request.

The BAAS operates the Consortium adoption panels and recruits and trains adoption panel members; manages the direct and indirect post adoption contact services, operates a birth relative support project, provides specialist advice and training on adoption matters, provides a service to the closed adoption records, co ordinates specialist groups that operate across the consortium, and organises events such as life appreciation days, Information exchanges and an Adopters Conference.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor [ASSA]

The role of the Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is to:

- give advice and information to people affected by adoption – be a single point of contact to provide information, signpost appropriate services and to advise on how those services may be accessed;
- give advice, information and assistance to other staff in the local authority on assessments of need for adoption support services, the availability of services locally and effective planning for service delivery - in particular, supporting and facilitating intra- and inter-agency joint working where needed;

- give advice on good practice in adoption where needed;
- consult with, and give advice, information and assistance to other local authorities as appropriate, for example, liaising between authorities where a family is moving between areas to try to ensure a smooth transition in the provision of support services.

In Bracknell Forest, the Family Placement Team Manager holds the role of ASSA however responsibility for providing information is delegated to the Assistant Team Manager in respect of information about adoption services and the Post Adoption worker in respect of information about post adoption services.

Qualifications and Experience of the Team Manager

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Name | Helen Fenton |
| Date appointed | 1 st June 2009 |
| Qualifications | BSc in Psychology and Social Biology, Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), 1989; Certificate in Family Therapy, 1995; Post Qualifying Practice Teaching Award, 2007. CMI Diploma in Management and Leadership Level 5 - June 2010 |

Staffing Details

Staff Team

Adoption services within Bracknell Forest Borough Council are provided primarily by the Family Placement Team. The Family Placement Team is responsible for the full range of family placement services, including fostering, respite care (short break), family finding, connected persons assessments and in family adoptions. The social worker from the relevant child care team is responsible for work with children being placed for adoption and their families.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Helen Fenton: | Team Manager (until 30 th May 2014) |
| Kim Harris: | Assistant Team Manager (Team Manager from 1 st June |
| Karen Wood: | Assistant Team Manager |
| Amanda Loosemore: | Post Adoption Worker |
| Marisa Tredoux | Senior Social Work Practitioner (p/t) |
| Dena Gambrell: | Social Worker |
| Emily Osgathorp: | Social Worker |
| Hilary Bush: | Social Worker (p/t) |
| Michelle Jackson: | Social Worker (p/t) |
| Sam Howard: | Social Worker |
| Cally Pearson | Social Worker |
| Nikki Douglas: | Social Worker |
| Diane Joel: | Family Worker |
| Emma Churchill: | Family Worker (Life Chances Team) |
| Marie Sullivan: | Publicity and Recruitment Officer (p/t) |

Qualifications of Managers

Team Manager: Helen Fenton

Helen qualified as a social worker in 1989 and has worked in a variety of settings within Children and Families Services. Helen has extensive knowledge and experience in the areas of child protection and work with children with disabilities.

Helen has previously worked as an Assistant Team Manager for five years and as a social worker within a Family Placement Team for five years. She became Team Manager of the Family Placement Team in June 2009. Helen has completed the Post Qualification Practice Teaching Award. Helen successfully completed the CMI Diploma in Management and Leadership Level 5 in June 2010

Assistant Team Manager: Kim Harris

Kim was appointed as Assistant Team Manager in October 2011. Kim has 18 years experience working in Family Placement social work and in particular with fostering services. Kim has a BSc (hons) in Health and Community Studies, Diploma in Social Work, Management Qualification, PQ child care award part 1, NVQ Assessor's Award and NNEB qualifications. She also has 10 years experience as team manager and service manager. Kim takes a lead in fostering matters.

Assistant Team Manager: Karen Wood

Karen Wood was appointed as full time Assistant Team Manager and began working in the team in early June 2012. Karen has more than twenty years experience of children and families social work. Karen has particular knowledge about adoption having worked for seven years in an Adoption and Permanency Team. Karen takes a lead in adoption matters.

Social workers:

All the social work staff in the Team are qualified, and the experience across the team is varied and extensive. This includes field work experience in children and families; children with disabilities; young people in supportive lodgings; working in a special school. The team have a number of years combined experience in Family Placement. , In relation to post qualification training, three have achieved their PQ1 and three have achieved the post qualifying specialist Child Care Award. One worker is due to complete the **Practice Educators Award in 2014** .

Staff members are regularly supervised, have an annual appraisal and training needs are reviewed. Staff receive regular in-house training and post-qualification training, in line with Council policy and the requirements set out in the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Agencies. Specialist training is available within Children's Social Care and also organised through the pan Berkshire Consortium and Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS). Team / group reflective supervision has been available through a clinical psychologist approximately once per month for six months.

Quality Assurance

All adoption services are monitored regularly to ensure that performance adheres to the standards set down in adoption legislation. The Family Placement Business Plan is aligned to the Children and Young People's Plan, which is monitored quarterly against its aims and objectives by the Departmental Management Team.

An annual report on the work of the Adoption Service is produced alongside the reviewed Statement of Purpose by the Executive Member of Children, Young People and Learning, the Departmental Management Team and Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel.

The mechanism for quality assurance is:

- all staff in the Family Placement Team receive regular supervision and training, as well as an annual appraisal. The team manager is supervised by the Head of Service for Looked After Children;
- children's cases are regularly reviewed, with statutory child care reviews chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who are part of the Department's performance management team.
- management information is collected regularly to ensure performance indicators are met, to plan adoption services that are effective and to set targets for the service. The Adoption Service works to written policies and procedures that set out clearly their role and responsibilities under adoption legislation and provide a reference for good practice;
- prospective adopters are effectively recruited, prepared, trained and supported so that the adoptive placements available are of a high quality and able to meet the needs of the children;
- the Adoption Panel is administered by the BAAS and is independent of the Council management structure and is responsible for scrutinising applications from prospective adopters and the match proposed between child and prospective adopter.
- following the change of regulations in September 2012. adoption plans for children are now scrutinised by the Service Manager for BAAS before a decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker
- senior managers and team managers hold separate tracking meetings regularly to monitor the progress of all children who are to be placed for adoption;
- where an adoptive placement breaks down, a disruption meeting is held, chaired by BAAS, and the findings fed back to the Adoption Panel and to the Children's Social Care Management Team;
- the Adoption and Permanence Team operates within the council's legal and regulatory framework and is subject to corporate policy.

Roles of the Family Placement team in respect of adoption and permanency

The Family Placement Team provides a central point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an adopter. The team co-ordinates all recruitment and preparation of prospective adopters, including preparation training and assessment of applicants wishing to become adoptive parents.

The Family Placement Team undertakes family finding for all children in Bracknell Forest who require an adoptive family. Family finding social workers present the matches to the Berkshire Adoption Panel in partnership with the child's social worker and the adopter's social worker. Each social worker has a role thereafter to co-ordinate and support introductions and placements.

The Family Placement Team also provides a family finding service for children who require permanent substitute care, including Special Guardianship and Connected person's assessments and support.

7. Inter Country Adoption

The Agency is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999 & Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005 to provide, or arrange to provide, an Inter-country adoption service. Currently the Agency commissions this area of work to Parents and Children Together a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading. PACT undertakes the assessments and the preparation of reports as required. Once a child has been placed a decision is made whether to commission PACT to undertake the welfare visits and Annexe A report or, more usually, for these to be undertaken by a worker from the Family Placement Team. Post adoption support is available for all adopted children and their families within Bracknell Forest.

8. User Feedback

The Service is committed to seeking feedback from service users in order to inform future service provision and does so by a variety of methods. Written feedback is sought from prospective adopters during the assessment process including information meetings, preparation and training groups. Feedback informs the structure of the process and content of adoption groups. It is used to update and adapt the process and content of information.

9. Adoption Panel

Bracknell Forest Council Adoption Agency has a joint Adoption Panel with Slough Borough Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council. The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agencies' Regulations 2005 and The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determination (Amendment) Regulations 2011. Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) maintain a central list of persons considered suitable members of adoption panel. The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service manages the panels which are held once every two weeks.

The composition of the Berkshire Panel is in line with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations and includes:-

- Independent Panel Chair (appointed by agreement with all the agencies and suitably qualified in accordance with AAR 3.2 and 3.7);
- a minimum of 6 members, one of whom is an independent person and a social worker with at least 3 years experience.

The Panel is additionally supported by:-

- the Panel Adviser (Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service Manager);
- a Legal Adviser (Joint Legal Services);
- a Minute taker.

Additional panels are arranged if required.

Panel members and the Agency's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of the reports to panel in the week preceding the Panel.

In the case of prospective adopters the applicant's family placement social worker will attend the panel to answer any questions raised by the panel in order to assist them in reaching a decision. They may be accompanied by their manager or the manager may attend in the social worker's absence. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend the panel.

When a child's plan for permanence is being presented to panel the child's social worker will attend the panel to answer any questions raised by the panel to assist them in reaching a decision. The social worker may be accompanied by their manager or the manager may attend in the social worker's absence.

In the case of matching a child and prospective adopters, the child's social worker, the adopters' family placement social worker will attend panel. They may be accompanied by their manager or the manager may attend in the social worker's absence. The adopters will be invited to attend.

The Berkshire Adoption Panel provides a thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker. Its function and purpose is to:

- consider and make recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters;
- consider and make recommendations about the proposed matches between children and prospective adopters;
- consider any adoption support plans submitted as part of the proposed placement.

The Adoption Panel Chair completes a feedback form for each case presented to the Adoption Panel which covers the key aspects of the quality of the report and the presentation to the Panel by the adoption worker.

10. Recruitment

Advertising features seeking adoptive families for children aged 0 – 8 years are regularly placed in newspapers (local and surrounding areas up to 30 miles radius), social media and targeted publications such as "Supporting Disabled Children" aimed

at those working with disability. This strategy will continue to allow the agency to place children with prospective adopters who have been approved by Bracknell Forest. . The agency also works collaboratively, as part of the Berkshire Consortium of Unitary authorities, to share information about adopters for children across the county. National initiatives in promoting adoption have contributed to the number of adopters recruited.

The agency has a strategy of keeping the profile of adoption constant in the local media and has a steady level of enquiries. All enquiries about adoption are welcomed without prejudice, responded to with the minimum of delay and given clear information both verbal and written about the process of recruitment, assessment and support.

The Family Placement Team has an efficient system to respond to enquiries, and are committed to responding positively to anyone who has an interest in adoption. The team provides clear, written information for prospective adopters about eligibility criteria and the assessment and approval process. A full information pack is sent out within five days of an initial enquiry.

The team welcomes enquiries and applications from all sections of society, including single people, same sex couples and unmarried couples and people from a wide variety of races, religions and cultures. Following attendance at an open evening, applicants are visited by initial interview can be offered.

10.1 Preparation

The agency runs Information Meetings and Adoption Preparation groups for those who are considering becoming adoptive parent/s. The Berkshire Adoption Consortium have worked together to address the changes to the assessment process and the need to increase the number of adopters. As a result of this work, an Information Meeting and a Preparation Group are arranged every month – thereby ensuring that prospective adopters do not have to wait and also increasing capacity. In addition, workers across the county have worked together to develop new formats, forms and leaflets in respect of the new assessment process.

Information on current Information Meetings and Adoption Preparation groups is published on the Bracknell Forest web site and is included in the Information Pack.

10.2 Police and other checks

The following checks are carried out on all prospective adopters as a part of Stage One of the two stage preparation and assessment process introduced on 1st July 2013:

- Disclosure and Baring Service (Criminal Records Bureau prior to January 2013)
- Department of Health
- Local Authority
- Probation
- Police references on all adult members of the prospective adopter's household and regular visitors.

Prospective adopters are required to have a medical examination by their GP to ascertain their state of health. Each prospective adopter must also

provide the names of three or four personal referees per applicant and three of these will be selected by the team for interview as part of the assessment process

10.3 Assessment

The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 introduced a two stage approval process for those wishing to adopt to ensure that the majority of adopters are approved within six months. Stage One of the process (pre-assessment stage) is primarily lead by the applicants who need to demonstrate that they understand the issues associated with adopting children. During Stage One a written agreement/plan is entered into between the applicants and the agency. It is expected where possible that applicants attend the Adoption Preparation Groups during this stage of the process and statutory checks and references are also taken up by the agency. This stage of the process should take up to 2 months but can be extended on the request of the applicant(s).

At the end of the Stage One process applicants should inform the agency if they wish to progress to Stage Two and the agency will make a decision within 5 days whether or not the applicant can move to Stage Two of the assessment process. Should applicants progress to Stage Two a worker will be allocated to undertake the assessment and a Stage 2 written plan will be completed. The allocated worker will meet regularly with the applicants in their home. The Adoption Service uses the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Prospective Adopters Report to guide the assessment process and to explore the prospective adopter's background, experience and knowledge. The information in this report is designed to give an accurate picture of the prospective adopter's family life and what they have to offer to a child.

As part of the assessment process, the social worker will also interview family members, friends and others in the prospective adopter's support network, particularly in the case of a single prospective adopter. Ex-spouses and partners are always interviewed if there are any children from this relationship and may be interviewed even where there were no children but it is considered to be a significant relationship. A reference from the applicants employer is always taken where they have been or are employed working with children.

Prospective adopters are kept informed of the progress of their application, and will have the opportunity to read the assessment report prepared by the assessing social worker and make their own comments for the panel. A midway review meeting (no later than 8 weeks after the start of Stage Two) will take place between the worker and his/her supervisor to determine whether or not a second opinion visit is required. A second opinion visit, undertaken by either a senior practitioner or manager will only be required where there are any areas of concern either from the adoption service or the prospective adopter's perspective. Once the report has been agreed it is formally submitted to the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

All assessment should explore with applicants whether they are able to consider Fostering to Adopt arrangements as set out in The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. This is a new process whereby approved adopters can become foster carers for a specific child on a temporary basis. This arrangement allows children to be placed with their prospective adopters prior to the completion of the formal matching process. The adopters' approval as foster carers ends on the date that the formal process is completed - at which point the child's status changes to a protected placement under the adoption regulations. There is an inherent risk in the fostering arrangement in that should the plan for the

child to be placed for adoption change, they could potentially be removed to another placement or returned to their birth family. Therefore Fostering to Adopt would only be considered where the risks of a move were considered very low and where the adopters are willing to accept the risks.

10.4 Approval

Recommendations about whether prospective adopters should be approved to adopt are made by the Adoption Panel. The panel includes people with a wide range of experience and the panel chair is independent of the council. The panel meets once every two weeks however additional panels can be arranged to meet additional need. The panel will read the report of the assessing social worker, and any other information that may be presented, and will make a recommendation to the council about approval as a prospective adopter. Prospective adopters will be invited to attend the panel meeting should they wish to do so.

The recommendation and advice of the Adoption Panel are provided to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service through agreed panel minutes, usually within 5 working days of the panel meeting. The Agency Decision Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven working days of the receipt of the recommendation and final set of Panel minutes. The Agency Decision Maker's decision is shared verbally with the prospective adopters within two working days and written confirmation by the Team Manager is sent to them within five working days.

In the case of a child's plan for permanence the child's social worker will inform the birth parents verbally within two working days and send written confirmation of the plan within five working days.

In the case of matching a child and prospective adopters, the team managers of the Family Placement Team and the children's team will ensure that written confirmation is sent to the child's birth parents and verbal and written confirmation is given to the adopters.

10.5 Right of appeal

Applicants to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the decision of the Agency Decision Maker are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process together with timescales, is made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM works to the following timescales:

- applicants have 40 working days from the decision to decide to contact the IRM;
- Bracknell Forest will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within ten working days;
- the IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.
The IRM can be contacted at:
Contract Manager
The Independent Review Mechanism
Unit 4

15 Pavilion Business Park
Wortley
Leeds LS12 6AJ
Tel: 0870 034 6420
Email: irm@baaf.org.uk/Web: www.irm-adoption.org.uk

10.6 Matching

Adopters who have been approved are given clear information about the matching, introduction and placement process.

The matching process is designed to ensure that children are placed with adoptive families who are most likely to be able to meet the child's needs. This involves drawing up a hierarchy of the child's needs and the criteria adopters must meet in order to meet these needs. These will include the child's needs arising from their cultural, racial and religious identity. From this information, an adoptive family that best meets the criteria will be selected.

The adoption social worker will check to see if the approved adopters match any of the profiles of the children within Bracknell Forest who are waiting for an adoptive placement. If there is no match identified they are referred to the Berkshire Consortium.

If, after 3 months a match has not been identified, permission will be sought from the adopters for their details to be submitted to the National Adoption Register for England and Wales. Approved adopters whose range of approval suggests that they are unlikely to be matched to a child within the consortium will be referred to the National Adoption Register at an earlier stage, subject to the adopter's approval.

In considering a match with an identified child, adopters are given a copy of the Child's Permanence Report which contains full information about the background and needs of the child, including health, educational and therapeutic needs. The adopter will be able to meet with the child's social worker and any other professionals who are working with the child, to discuss these needs.

Once it has been agreed to proceed with the match, the social worker will prepare a BAAF Adoption Placement Report which the adopters will have an opportunity to both contribute to and consider and agree the final report.

Once agreed, this is sent to the Adoption Panel along with a BAAF Adoption Support Plan, in order to make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as to whether the proposed child should be placed for adoption with the proposed adopter/s.

The Panel may also give advice on arrangements regarding contact, adoption support services and the extent to which prospective adopters will be able to exercise parental responsibility once a child has been placed with them.

10.7 Support

During the assessment and matching process, an assessment will be carried out of what support is required by the adoptive family in order to care for the child and ensure the placement is successful. Any services that are identified in the

assessment as necessary will be provided by the Adoption Support Service. These could include practical, financial and therapeutic support.

10.8 Reviews

Reviews of adopter's approval will take place whenever the agency considers it necessary, and not more than one year following approval and afterwards at intervals of not more than one year. Review of approval relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover the placement of children from abroad.

10.9 Information, advice and counselling and therapeutic services

The Post Adoption worker can offer advice, information and counselling to adoptive parents, or can refer them on to more appropriate resources..

10.10 Financial support

Financial support can be provided to help adoptive parents with any additional costs in caring for the child, in particular where the child has specific on-going needs due to health issues. There is no automatic entitlement to financial support. Such support is means tested so that each applicant is assessed on the basis of their own financial circumstances and the needs of the child to be adopted.

11. Mediation around contact issues

The BAAS team runs a letter-box exchange of information scheme that enables birth families and adopters to exchange information. The service is confidential and is normally agreed and set up as part of the adoption planning for the child. The BAAS can also facilitate direct contact between the adopted child and their birth family where this has been agreed and deemed in the child's best interests, including supervised contact.

12. Placement

Once a child has been placed for adoption, Bracknell Forest has a duty to monitor and review the placement until such time as an adoption order is granted. The social worker responsible for the child and the adopter's social worker co-ordinate visits to the family and review meetings will be held and chaired by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer, to monitor progress. Adoption Support Plans and services are reviewed at this meeting. Until the adoption order is made such services continue to be reviewed annually by the post adoption worker.

If an adoptive placement disrupts the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, acting on behalf of the agency, will convene a meeting in order to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors which led to the breakdown of the placement and better inform future planning for the child. Specific learning for practice will be reported to the management team for action plans to be developed to address them. The meeting will be chaired by an independent person experienced in adoption and in managing disruption meetings. The meeting should be held approximately six weeks after the placement has disrupted.

13. Post Adoption

Adoptive families have the right to request an assessment for adoption support services at any time following the making of an adoption order. Where they consider they need to have support services, they can contact the post adoption worker for information and advice on the types of services available and the assessment process.

The Adoption Support Team will respond to any new requests for adoption support from adoptive families who live in the Borough. Families with whom Bracknell Forest has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the adoption order unless an agreement for financial support was made pre-adoption order. In these cases support will continue for the life of the agreement between the adopters and the Council.

14. Services for Children and Birth Families

14.1 Services for children

The Family Placement Team liaises closely with those professionals working with children who have been identified as requiring an adoptive placement, such as children's social workers and teachers.

The team facilitates the family-finding process for children with an Adoption Plan in place. Each child is allocated a family finding social worker. This worker works closely alongside the child's allocated social worker in the selection and matching process and remains involved until the child is placed. The Assistant Team Manager, Family Placement, chairs regular reviews of the progress of family finding for each child.

The team's expertise is used to draw up contact agreements where a child is to be placed with an adoptive family, in order to ensure the plans for contact with the birth family best meets the child's long term needs.

14.2 Adoption information

The Adoption Service is an intermediary agency that can provide help for adopted adults who are trying to trace birth parents and relatives, and to birth parents or relatives who are trying to trace an adopted adult.

The service can:

- provide counselling to the individual wishing to trace a relative
- access information from a variety of sources to help individuals begin the tracing process
- act as an intermediary between the individual, other adoption agencies and the person being traced to establish whether or not that person wishes to have contact.

14.3 Services for birth parents

Birth parents, relatives and others who had a significant relationship with an adopted child can apply to the Family Placement Team for information, advice and counselling around adoption, as well as to seek assistance around contact issues.

The team can help birth parents, relatives and others to access counselling via the Post Adoption Centre or any other relevant agency.

14.4 Special Guardianship

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced special guardianship orders. These are intended to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is not appropriate, but who could still benefit from a legally secure placement.

The Adoption Service has overall responsibility for special guardianship services and provides information and advice to prospective special guardians and will assess applicants and report to the court on the applicant's suitability to be the child's special guardian.

The Family Placement Team is also responsible for providing support services for those affected by special guardianship orders that live in the borough; including the child, their parents and the special guardian.

14.5 Adult Adoptees

Where an adult adoptee seeks to resurrect contact with her/his birth family, support will be provided to the birth relatives if they live within the Bracknell Forest Council area and if they request it. The Local Authority is responsible for providing an adoption service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records.

14.6 Persons adopted before 30 December 2005

In the case of persons adopted before 30 December 2005, Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act preserves the legal right of an adopted person, on reaching the age of 18, to apply to the Registrar General for information they need to obtain a certified copy of the record of their birth.

The agency will continue to have the discretion under the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 to disclose identifying information to adopted adults who are seeking to find out about their family history and origins. This information may help inform any decision by the adopted person as to whether he or she wishes to apply for an intermediary service. If, however, a birth sibling has also been adopted then the agency will not be able to give out the sibling's adoptive identity without that person's consent.

14.7 Persons adopted after 30 December 2005

As set out in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, an adopted person on reaching the age of 18, has the right to receive the information needed to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate. However if that person was adopted on or after 30 December

2005 they must apply to the appropriate adoption agency for this information rather than to the Registrar General. If the agency decides that such information should be withheld from an adopted person, it must apply to the High Court for an order denying access to this information.

14.8 Intermediary Services

Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides adopted adults and their adult birth relatives with the right to apply for an intermediary Service.

In all circumstances adoptees will be helped to consider carefully what actions they might take in terms of obtaining information and/or tracing and the possible implications of their actions for others. The Agency will provide an intermediary service to adult adoptees who are wishing to make contact with a birth parent, sibling or grandparent and who are able to provide a name and address of the person who they wish to contact. The Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, but will provide adoptees with details of other agencies and organisations that may assist them, provide such a service, or offer additional support.

All adoptees will be provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

In those cases where the original contact is from a resident of Bracknell Forest then where a birth parent or sibling of an adopted adult is wishing to establish contact with her/his birth child/sibling, she/he will be offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted her/himself. Birth relatives will be encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General (which provides a safe and confidential way for birth relatives to assure an adopted person that contact would be welcome).

If the adopted person is aged over 18 and the Authority has a previous address for her/him, the agency will, if the birth relative requests it, seek to make contact with the adopted person via the last known address and inform them of the birth relative's wish to initiate contact.

14.9 Child Protection Investigations

Any allegation of abuse in relation to a child placed for adoption or adopted will be dealt with in accordance with the Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board child protection procedures. Allegations are investigated fairly, quickly and consistently, in a way that provides effective protection for the child and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation. Where the child is known to the Family Placement Service through involvement in adoption placement or adoption support services, adoption staff are informed of and involved in strategy discussions to provide information and to consider the implications for past, current and future placements, and for any current panel procedures.

It should also be noted that in addition to actions taken under the Child Protection Procedures, any allegation against adoptive parents may also require consideration

in relation to criminal investigation, adoption panel procedures and the complaints procedure.

15. Complaints

Children's Social Care aims to provide the best possible service. If a service user, or someone planning to use our service, is unhappy with any aspect of our service or a decision we make, they can make a complaint. This is important as it helps us to improve our services. It is the responsibility of the staff or their managers to try to put right any concerns raised by service users when a problem first arises. This local resolution is the first stage of the complaints process.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at the first stage it may become necessary for the complaint to be formally registered. This formal investigation stage is known as stage two and service users have a right to go straight to this stage of the process if they wish.

If the complaint is still unresolved after the formal investigation at stage two, a Review Panel may be requested, which is chaired by an independent person. This is stage three of the process.

If a child or young person makes a complaint about services provided for them, then the Children Act complaints procedure must be followed. In this event a child or young person involved in the complaint will be entitled to an advocate to support and represent them in the process.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the complaints manager

16. The Registration Authority

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The address of the registration office is:

Ofsted

National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Building
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 03001 231231

Children's Commissioner for England

A child or young person who lives away from home or who receives social care, who needs advice or assistance can contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England in the following ways:

Telephone Free: 0800 528 0731

E mail : advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Look at the website : <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>

Write to : The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT33

Telephone : 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>

OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

The British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TS

Email: mail@baaf.org.uk

Tel: 020 7421 2600

Website: www.baaf.org.uk

Department of Education Adoption Web Pages

Adoption - The Department for Education

Adoption UK

46 The Green
South Bar Street
Banbury
OX16 9AB
23

Tel: 01295 752240

Fax: 01295 752241

Website: www.adoptionuk.org