

# Essex Adoption Service Statement of Purpose



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# Introduction

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the Essex Adoption Service, the services provided and how the aims and objectives are to be met. The information contained in the Statement of Purpose is prescribed in Schedule I of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Standard 1). The Statement of Purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated as required by the National Minimum Standards. This document has been informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003;
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2003;
- Children Act 2004
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005;
- Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999
- Related Regulations, Local Authority Circulars and Practice Guidance;
- Every Child Matters 2003.

The Statement of Purpose links all sections in the document to the relevant Adoption National Minimum Standards and the five Every Child Matters outcomes that are most important to children and young people.

- **Being Healthy – there are no corresponding National Minimum Standards (NMS).**
- **Staying safe:**
  - The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2);
  - The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4);
  - Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5);
  - The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10);
  - The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11);
  - Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12);
  - Adoption agency decisions are made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13);
  - The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15);
  - Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19);
  - The agency safeguards and promotes the welfare of its services users (NMS 32)

- **Enjoying and achieving:**

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6);
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18).
- Services are tailored to meet the needs of people affected by adoption (NMS33)

- **Making a positive contribution:**

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7);
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8);
- The adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9).
- Service users receive good quality services based on their needs (NMS32)

- **Achieving economic wellbeing** - there are no corresponding National Minimum Standards.

## 1. Values, aims and objectives

The Adoption Regulations and Adoption National Minimum Standards form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. They can be used by children, birth families, prospective/adoptive parents and adopted adults as a guide to what they can expect from an adoption agency and adoption support agency.

The values statement below explains the important principles which underpin these Standards. Essex fully endorses these values:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond. Where possible this should be with their birth family, but where this is not consistent with their welfare every effort will be made to secure an alternative stable home where the child will feel loved and valued.
- Adopted children deserve the best experiences in life, from excellent parenting and education to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents, skills and interests, in order to have an enjoyable childhood and successful adult life. Stable placements, emotional wellbeing and support are essential elements of this success.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language is fully recognised and positively valued and promoted.

- Disabled children and children with complex needs may have particular needs which should be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Delays in making decisions and in placing children with a family who can meet their developmental needs can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided where possible.
- here a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in his or her own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Safeguards and standards applied to intercountry adoption are in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption 1993.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, VAAs and ASAs.

The Essex Adoption Service adheres to the principle of providing an efficient adoption service that works within current legislation, the budget set by Essex County Council and the Corporate Plan, which puts the people of Essex at the heart of its services. The Budget and Corporate Plan 2010-11 states:

“We believe that all children have the potential to make a success of their lives and that all efforts should be made to make sure that disadvantaged children are able to fully participate in society. Looked after children are more likely to suffer mental health problems and under-achieve at school. It is one of the key duties of a council to make sure that these children are protected and can enjoy their childhood.”

The **aims** of the Essex Adoption Service are:

- To place children with prospective adopters who best meet their assessed needs within the timescales laid down by the National Minimum Standards
- To recruit, assess and provide suitable families, within the timescales laid down.
- To provide information on the process of adoption and the children available for adoption to enquirers wishing to adopt.
- To provide an adoption support service to enable a child to remain with an adoptive family and fulfil their full potential.
- To provide information on the process of adoption for enquirers wishing to adopt a child from overseas, a related child from within their family or a child conceived through donor or surrogacy.
- To provide information, help and support to those people wishing to obtain information about, and from, their birth records.
- To provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption whether prior to, or after, the making of an Adoption Order.
- To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by the Adoption Service.
- To provide opportunities for adoption workers to increase their knowledge in new research and developments.

The annual Adoption Service Plan sets out the objectives for the Service in pursuit of the above aims.

## **2. Named manager**

The registered manager and Adoption Support Services Adviser is Tony Sharp, Adoption Service Manager, PO Box 297, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1YS. Telephone number 01245 434355.

In the event that the Adoption Service Manager is absent the Head of Service, Fostering and Adoption, Stephanie Bishop, will deputise.

The responsible individual is Stephanie Bishop.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is Jean Imray. In her absence Stephanie Bishop, Head of Fostering and Adoption will deputise.

### **3. Qualifications and experience of named manager and decision maker**

#### **Tony Sharp, registered manager**

BA (Hons) CQSW, University of Bradford 1974

Diploma in Management Studies (General Management) 1986

Business Excellence Model (BEM) Assessor Training Certificate 1998

Childcare Social Worker 1974-1978

Managerial posts, predominantly in childcare services 1978-1997

Adoption Service Manager 1997 to present

#### **Jean Imray, agency decision maker**

CQSW, Essex Institute of Higher Education 1988

Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Organisational Development in the Public Services 1999

MSc in Applied Organisational Development in the Public Services 2001

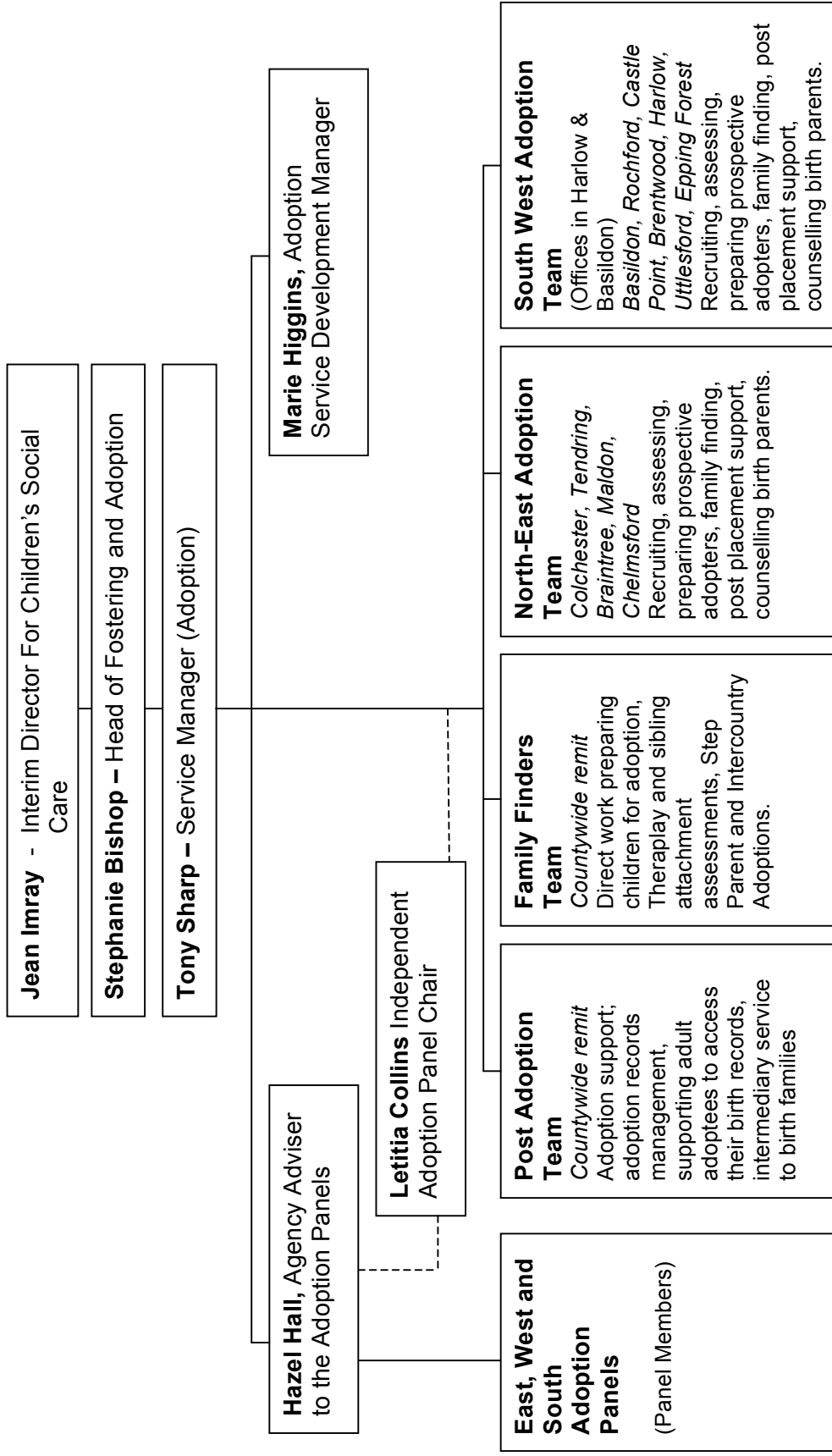
Social Work Practitioner 1988 – 1993

Managerial posts within Children's Social Care and Education Services 1993-2007

Head of Service (Assistant Director) Children Education and Families, Thurrock Council March 2007 – March 2010

Interim Director of Children's Social Care, Essex County Council ,August 2010 -

## 4. Management structure of the Adoption Service



## **Remit of teams**

The adoption locality teams at Basildon, Harlow and Colchester take referrals of preschool children and sibling pairs. The adoption social workers link with the relevant childcare worker to help them provide the information and requisite paperwork for the Panel, ensure the birth family has all the required information and that any work that needs to be undertaken with the child, in relation to adoption, is completed. The teams are also responsible for recruiting and preparing adopters.

Family Finders has a county wide remit but takes referrals of sibling groups of three or more, children 4+ years and sibling groups of two where the oldest child is older than 4. Family Finders also undertakes all assessments in respect of inter-country adoptions and reports in stepparent and relative adoptions.

The Post Adoption Team is responsible for the provision of post adoption services, Schedule 2 counselling, and administration of contact arrangements. This team also undertakes work with birth parents and birth families in relation to both direct and letterbox contact, as well as access to adoption files.

Adoption Social Workers provide support, advice and guidance to birth families up to and beyond the Adoption Order.

## **Meetings structure**

The Essex Adoption Service has a comprehensive meetings structure, which is designed to provide information for all staff working within the Adoption Service and ensure the effective management of the service.

The Adoption Service Manager and the adoption team managers meet monthly to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from the operation of the service and plan service developments.

The Adoption Service Manager, the Essex Adoption Panel Chair, and the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panels meet regularly with both the Adoption Panel Medical and Legal Advisers to ensure and maintain consistent standards of practice across the Adoption Service.

The agency adviser to the adoption panels meets regularly with adoption panel administrators to ensure and maintain consistent standards of administration across the Adoption Service.

# **5. Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff**

The list of current staff and their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to the Ofsted Inspection Service on request.

## 6. Services provided

The information contained in this section is under the headings originally suggested in the draft practice guidance to support the National Adoption Standards for England 2001 (Section F2).

### **a. Effectively publicising adoption services, their accessibility, including information about services provided by other agencies**

The Essex Adoption Service has a dedicated freephone and minicom number for recruitment, which is widely publicised throughout Essex. Initial enquirers are given information over the telephone and sent a comprehensive information pack within five working days.

One member of staff, within Corporate Communications, takes the lead for the promotion of Adoption and Fostering Services. The adoption service ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is based on the needs of children being referred to the service. A monitoring system is in place to ensure that the number of children referred, their needs, for example, disabilities, placement with siblings, ethnicity, and so on, informs the recruitment strategy. Adoption information is also available on the Essex Adoption Agency's dedicated website - [www.adoptessex.org.uk](http://www.adoptessex.org.uk). There are links through the website to other adoption organisations. The adoption service information leaflets also include details of other useful adoption organisations.

### **b. All aspects of the recruitment process, including effective arrangements to advise, assess, counsel and support those who become approved adopters and those who do not**

The Essex Adoption Service holds monthly information meetings to which all enquirers are invited. These meetings are intended to provide an overall picture of adopting in Essex, and will include information about Essex children currently needing adoptive homes. This also provides an opportunity to talk to experienced adoption workers and adoptive parents. Attendees will be informed that priority will be given to those who are able to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption at that time and therefore it may not be practical to assess everyone.

People wishing to proceed will receive an initial visit from an adoption worker where their personal circumstances will be discussed. If the enquiry proceeds, further information is obtained to enable all the checks and references to be undertaken. Checks and references will be requested from the following:

- Criminal Records Bureau;
- CAFCASS;
- Health Visitor;
- Social Care Departments for other areas in which the applicants have lived;
- employer or educational tutor if the applicants are still attending college;
- self-employed applicants will need to obtain a reference from a contractor, supplier or customer;

- the Education Department and relevant schools will be contacted for a reference if the applicant has, or has had, children of school age;
- Overseas Residency – applicants will need to obtain a Certificate of Good Conduct from the Embassy or Consulate for the relevant Country;
- members of Armed Forces – applicants will need to give their service number and checks will be taken up through SSAFA;
- where applicants have been previously married, or lived with another partner for two years, the absent partner will be contacted unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

If at any stage applicants or the adoption service consider that the application should not proceed, a full discussion will be offered to explore the circumstances leading to this decision. Wherever possible the reasons for not proceeding will be shared with the applicants although in exceptional circumstances it may not be possible to disclose third party information. All decisions will be confirmed in writing.

Applicants are invited to attend a preparation course to prepare them for the task of adopting. It is a requirement that first time prospective adoptive parents attend a preparation course to help them understand the difference between parenting an adopted child and parenting a birth child and the impact this is likely to have on the child, on themselves and their families.

Most applicants will proceed to a home study assessment following the preparation course. The aim is to complete the assessment within eight months of the formal application to proceed.

### **c. The assessment of prospective adopters using objective, thorough, fair and transparent criteria**

At the information meetings issues around who can adopt and the qualities required are openly discussed. The information booklet, “Adopting Children, Your Questions Answered”, provides clear criteria on the qualities and skills required to adopt Essex children. Adopters will need to show they have the capacity:

- to learn from experience;
- to cope with stress;
- to meet the ethnic, cultural, health and educational needs of a child needing adoption;
- to offer consistency of care and opportunities for bonding and attachment;
- to work with children’s services and other agencies to secure necessary services for the child;
- to build and sustain close/intimate and reciprocal relationships;
- to understand other people’s point of view and their feelings - empathy;
- to be in touch with sad and angry feelings;
- to resolve past traumas or losses;
- to build secure attachments, to share difficulties and accept help.

At the information meeting, enquirers are informed about the wide range of people who may be able to adopt and any limitations that may arise in certain circumstances. The information given will cover the following:

- families from all types of backgrounds;
- people without children;
- people with children;
- single people;
- people from all ethnic backgrounds;
- people with disabilities;
- people who are not “perfect”;
- people who have had problems in the past;
- people who rent their home;
- overweight people and smokers;
- people whose infertility treatment has ended.

Further explanation is given to each of these bullet points, so, for instance, when discussing weight, smoking and age, this is qualified by explaining that adopters need to have the health and vigour to meet the many and varied demands of children throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

Further information is given about the qualities needed to adopt, which are:

- ability to see the child as they are – not how you would like them to be;
- acceptance, commitment, flexibility, stickability, sensitivity, openness;
- ability to cope with a bit of a mess and disruption – not perfectionists;
- ability to ask for and accept help;
- sense of humour.

During the remainder of the assessment process, other criteria are explored in more depth with applicants, including the non-smacking policy, and the need for adopters to embrace Britain as a multi-racial society and value diversity.

Applicants attend a preparation course, organised by locality adoption teams, which provides information about adoption. These courses also offer participants an opportunity to reflect upon the impact of adoption on themselves and their families.

After the preparation courses all applicants are assessed, and the information collated, using the Prospective Adopters’ Report (PAR) produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. Applicants are visited within their own home, and seen together, and separately, if there is more than one applicant. Applicants are invited to make their own written as well as verbal contributions to their assessment and are given the opportunity to read and comment

on the completed Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). Work with the adopters' own children is also undertaken if appropriate. Other members of the household are also interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are seen at this stage. The assessing adoption social worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters. The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicants who will have ten working days to give their views to the agency. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the adoption panel when their application is being considered.

#### **d. Inter-country adopters**

Applicants for Inter-Country adoption are assessed in the same way as domestic adopters. A summary of the process for Inter-Country adoption is set out below.

- Enquirers are sent information about inter-country adoption and adopting domestically, within five working days of enquiry.
- Applicants are referred to the Intercountry Adoption Centre for further information on the country they wish to adopt from.
- Enquirers are sent a detailed letter setting out the procedures and requirements for inter-country adoption, and details of charges and are invited to the office for an initial consultation.
- Enquirers are asked to state in writing that they accept the terms and conditions laid out in the letter and wish to proceed.
- Statutory checks are completed.
- Applicants are expected to attend a preparation course run by the Intercountry Adoption Centre.
- A Home Study Assessment is completed by an independent social worker.
- Applicants attend the Adoption Panel with their assessing social worker.
- Applicants are charged for their assessment and Adoption Panel time.
- Once applicants are approved their approval, Prospective Adopters Report (PAR), medical information, etc., is sent to the DfE for endorsement.
- Once the prospective intercountry adopters are linked with a child they will need to visit the child's country of origin and inform the adoption agency they wish to proceed with the adoption. This will be confirmed with the DfE.
- Intercountry adopters might have to return to the child's country of origin a second time to adopt the child.
- Once the child enters the UK the adoption agency must be notified within 14 days. Independent reviews and statutory visits will be made until the Adoption Order is granted.
- Inter-country adopters are entitled to receive the same post adoption service as domestic adopters.
- The Adoption Service has established good links with Friends Linked by Inter-Country Adoption (FLICA) as well as other Inter-Country organisations and adopters will be encouraged to contact these organisations.

### **e. Non-agency adoptions**

- Enquirers approaching the Service are sent written information about non agency adoptions within five working days.
- Applicants are asked to confirm in writing that they have received the information and they wish to proceed.
- Applicants are invited to an information meeting.
- Applicants are asked to complete an initial application form.
- Applicants are asked to sign their agreement for statutory checks to be undertaken in line with agency adopters.
- A social worker is allocated and begins the home visits and other enquiries.
- The applicants submit their application to court.
- The social worker completes the Annex A report for court.

### **f. Birth parents - Support, information and counselling for birth parents**

It is acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that adoption represents the best outcome. The Essex Adoption Service fully supports the principle that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services, which recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. The child's social worker and adoption social worker have discrete but complementary roles in providing services to birth families. The Adoption Service and childcare workers will endeavour to work with birth parents to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their children and ensure that birth parents' views about adoption and contact are fully recorded.

- It is the responsibility of the adoption social worker to explain the adoption process and gather the birth parents' views about the kind of family they would ideally like for their child. The birth parents will also be asked for their views about contact and whether they would like their child placed with siblings. The adoption social worker will explain the importance for the child of having a full medical history of not only the birth parents but also the birth family. The Adoption Service will be responsible for providing the birth family with information about local and national support groups and helping them to fulfil agreed plans for contact.
- Birth parents are entitled to see what is written about them and presented to the adoption panel.
- All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information, and contribute, to their child's Life Story Book and Letter for Later Life.
- In addition birth parents are offered access to further independent counselling provided through LINK.
- The Adoption Service will provide birth parents, via the childcare social worker, with an information leaflet explaining the adoption process.
- Following the making of an Adoption Order birth parents can access services through the Essex Post Adoption Service.

- The Adoption Service will seek the birth parents' views on the service they have received and will address any shortfalls where appropriate.

### **g. Adoption panels**

Essex has three adoption panels chaired by the same independent chair and attended by the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panels. The panels are constituted in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and follow the requirements of the National Minimum Standards (Standard 11.3). Each panel meets twice a month and is supported by dedicated panel administrators. Adoption panels also monitor the progress of children every four months following a best interests decision, up until placement. Each panel follows the same format for the compilation of minutes and each substantive item has a checklist completed at the end to ensure that everything, which needs to be, has been addressed.

The Essex Adoption Service holds an annual panel conference, which updates panel members on changes in legislation, practice and research. In addition each panel has a separate business meeting to review the previous year's work.

Whilst it is now a requirement that prospective adopters be invited to attend the panel when their application is being considered, Essex has followed this practice for 12 years and positively encourages applicants to attend. Prospective adopters are given a leaflet explaining the panel process and are also asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting. Their comments are fed back to the panel and the Adoption Service Manager retains a copy of all evaluation forms.

### **h. Preparation of prospective adopters for the placement of a child, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Prospective adopters have already received some preparation for the placement of children through attendance at the preparation courses and during their assessment. (See above – Sections b and c)

When prospective adopters are identified as meeting a particular child or children's needs the adoption worker and child's social worker will provide the prospective adopters with verbal and written information about the child. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed they will receive further detailed information and will be visited by the child's foster carer and the two social workers. All adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet with the medical adviser prior to the adoption panel, particularly where children have special needs. In all cases the leave of the court will be sought to disclose written information about a child and their background to prospective adopters. If following a period of reflection all parties wish to proceed, a matching report, which incorporates the Adoption Support Plan, is prepared for the adoption panel which will recommend whether or not the matching should proceed. Prospective adopters are also invited to attend the Matching Panel.

As well as seeking the prospective adopters' views about the placement, children's views are sought where they old enough to express a view.

In order to plan introductions and placement of a child, an adoption manager or senior practitioner chairs a Placement Planning Meeting. Following placement the prospective

adopters continue to receive visits from the adoption social worker, who supports the placement until the Adoption Order is made. Once placed the child is reviewed by an independent reviewing officer who will continue to regularly review the placement up to the making of an Adoption Order. Essex has a dedicated Post Adoption Support team. Support can also be accessed through Adoption UK and other local and national organisations (see Section n for details). The services, which are available to adoptive families after the granting of an Adoption Order, are also available to families post placement.

Essex took the lead in forming a consortium with four neighbouring local authorities and two voluntary agencies, called the East Anglian Consortium. The aim of the consortium is to increase the choice of adoptive placements regionally by circulating details of children and approved adopters who have not been linked by their own agency. The consortium also strives to achieve consistent high practice standards across the region. Essex also increases placement choice by using the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Essex also provides training and development opportunities for prospective and approved adoptive parents.

#### **i. Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

Every child should have a Life Story Book, a Letter for Later Life and a written guide to adoption. This work should be undertaken by the child's social worker with help and advice from the adoption worker. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history and help maintain their heritage. The Letter for Later Life includes information about the child's birth and early life, and provides up to date information about themselves and their situation.

The adoption teams also work jointly with children's social workers and foster carers to prepare children. Work is undertaken with children to ascertain their wishes and feelings about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with. Once a family has been identified, children are given appropriate information, depending on their age. The placement planning meeting co-ordinates an age appropriate introduction timetable. This is reviewed during introductions to assess progress and whether the timescale for the child's move needs to be adjusted in accordance with their needs.

Post placement the social worker continues to support the child in placement but where more in depth work is needed the child and prospective adopters can be referred to Lionmede (Children Looked After Clinical Service) or other appropriate post placement/adoption support services, for example, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Family Futures. See Section on Post Adoption Services below for more detail.

#### **j. Clear criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, the arrangements for review and making these available to adopters**

The Essex Adoption Service will pay pre-placement costs (introductory expenses and settling in expenses) in certain circumstances and will also meet the cost of legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex.

At the point of matching, all children must have an Adoption Support Plan which sets out both the prospective adopters' and child's support needs, with any financial implications, and how the adoption service intends to meet these. The Adoption Support Plan must be agreed with the adoptive family before being presented to the adoption panel.

Where ongoing financial support is provided the Adoption Service will undertake an annual financial review.

The Adoption Service has a dedicated inter-agency budget when it is not possible to place a child with Essex adopters.

#### **k. The process for establishing, maintaining, monitoring and reviewing contact arrangements for each adopted child**

The adoption service recognises the importance of children and young people having suitable contact with their birth families and other significant people. Such contact is entirely governed by the best interests of the children. Contact can vary from the annual exchange of written information to face-to-face contact with members of the birth family at intervals appropriate for the child.

The Adoption Service operates a well-established letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for direct face-to-face contact.

The Adoption Service generally believes there are mutual benefits of at least one meeting between a child's birth parents and adoptive parents around the time of placement; other significant birth relatives may also be involved.

Contact plans are first considered at the Looked After Children reviews, and included in the care plan. Adoption panels may advise on contact plans and whether an application should be made for a Placement Order. Further work to ensure that these plans are viable may take place at any time between the Adoption Panel (Best Interests), the Care Order, the Adoption Panel (Matching) and the placement of the child with prospective adopters. Children's needs will change over time and contact plans should evolve to reflect the child's changing circumstances and needs.

Post placement contact arrangements continue to be reviewed at each adoptive placement review. The service does not formally review contact arrangements after the Order is made, but if issues arise these are addressed through the Post Adoption Team.

#### **l. The review of disrupted placements, ascertaining the causes for the breakdown to aid future planning for the child**

Following a disruption the Essex Adoption Service convenes a disruption meeting in order to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors which led to the breakdown of the placement. This helps in planning future placements. An experienced independent Disruption Meeting Chair (an experienced Independent Social Worker, with experience of conducting Serious Case Reviews and other high profile and complex meetings and reviews) chairs these

meetings. A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are presented to the adoption management team meeting, the relevant adoption panel and the Agency Decision Maker in order that they can learn any lessons. The disruption rate for children placed by the Essex Adoption Service remains below the national average.

**m. Investigations into allegations that are made known to adoption service staff, adopters and children and young people**

All child protection investigations involving children placed for adoption are in line with the procedures of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board.

**n. The range of post adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption**

Essex has had a post adoption service since 1997. The Post Adoption Team provides an intermediary service to birth families and Schedule 2 counselling for adult adoptees. The team also provides a range of direct services to adoptive families. The Post Adoption Service has commissioned and developed more specialist services from organisations such as Adoption UK, Family Futures Consortium and Barnardos LINK. The Children and Young Peoples Service has a multi-disciplinary therapeutic team (based at Lionmede), which provides therapeutic services for looked after children, children placed for adoption and adoptive families.

All newly approved adoptive parents are offered free membership of Adoption UK for two years. Adoption UK also co-ordinates the local support groups for adopters. In addition local adoption teams organise support activities for adopters.

The Essex Adoption Service also runs, in conjunction with Adoption UK, a Buddy Scheme whereby adoptive parents are put in contact with others who have already adopted and can provide helpful support.

All known adopters in Essex are sent regular information on support services available through Adoption UK.

**o. An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption**

The Essex Adoption Service works to the Essex County Council's Corporate Equality Policy, which is available to all staff via the County Council's Intranet service.

The adoption service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, providing the adoption service believes that they can safely meet the needs of children into independence.

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

The Essex Adoption Service has developed a comprehensive system for monitoring service users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and reported in the annual Adoption Service Plan. Where necessary the information is used to improve the service.

This monitoring includes:

### **Adoptive applicants**

- Whether the initial information pack was received within five working days of enquiry, whether the information was helpful and suggestions for improvement.
- Feedback on the Information Meeting.
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses.
- Feedback on attending adoption panel.
- Feedback on written information at time of placement.
- Evaluation of service received following the making of an Adoption Order.

## **Birth parents**

- Evaluation of the service received.

## **Children**

- Wishes and feelings of children recorded in the Child Permanence Report.
- A specially adapted adoption placement review form. The views of children are also recorded in their adoption file at all stages.

## **Inter-Country adopters, Stepparents**

- Whether the initial information pack was received within five working days of enquiry, whether the information was helpful and suggestions for improvement.
- Inter-country adoption - evaluation of service received following the forwarding of papers to the Department for Education.
- Step-parent adoptions – evaluation of service following the making of an Adoption Order.

## **Post Adoption Services**

- Schedule 2 & Birth Relative Initiated Contact Counselling– evaluation of service when applicants have received the information they require.
- Children and adults receiving post adoption support services including a “smiley face” simple feedback form for children.

## **Monitoring of the Adoption Service**

- Comprehensive Management Information System, which tracks the progress of children and adopters, ensuring the service meets the timescales.

For the last nine years the Service has produced a Service Plan, which evaluates performance in the previous year and sets targets for the forthcoming year, having regard to any serious shortfalls in the service and the standards and timescales set out in legislation.

There are review systems in place for the following:

- monitoring the progress of children prior to placement through four monthly updates to the adoption panel;
- all approved adopters are formally reviewed at six monthly intervals by adoption social worker and team managers;
- the independent adoption reviewing officer reviews the progress of all children placed for adoption;
- staff within the Adoption and Children’s Services supervise and monitor the placement;

- the Corporate Parenting Members Panel receives reports on the Adoption Service's functioning at six monthly intervals.

The adoption panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice, in conjunction with the Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panels.

There is a well-established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff on the Essex County Council's Intranet, and an ongoing performance review system for all members of the service. This includes an annual appraisal of all adoption panel members

## 8. Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records

The Essex Adoption Service acknowledges the need to ensure all records are maintained in accordance with the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption. The indexes to all adoption case records are kept for at least 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an Adoption Order being made, the related case papers are kept for 100 years from the date of the making of an Adoption Order. All other records are retained in line with the Essex County Council Policy on Record Retention and Destruction Handbook. All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Service Manager and the Post Adoption Team will maintain a log of all requests. All files are held in lockable, secure storage. Where records are not held within premises owned and managed by Essex County Council, Records Management ensure that the records are held under conditions that are fit for purpose.

## 9. A summary of the procedures available to service users and others if they are dissatisfied with the adoption agency

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories.

1. Any service user, or a person acting on behalf of a service user with their informed consent, can make a complaint about the service received from any of the adoption teams. The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**". Where a person making a complaint does not qualify to access that procedure, the complaint will be dealt with in line with the Essex County Council Customer Care Procedure. Complaints may be made directly to any member of staff of the adoption service or to the Have Your Say Team, Children and Young People's Service, Essex County Council, PO Box 297, County Hall, Chelmsford CM1 1YS. Telephone: 01245 434202 Fax: 01245 435131 E-mail: [haveyoursay@essexcc.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@essexcc.gov.uk) .
2. Where the decision maker is minded to not recommend the approval of adopters, or to discontinue approval, they will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the adoption service or referred to the Independent Review Mechanism. The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is organised by the British Association for Adoption Fostering (BAAF).

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been informed that their adoption service does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive parents (or has withdrawn their approval). More information on the IRM can be obtained from the Contract Manager, Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, LEEDS LS12 6AJ, Telephone: 0845 450 3956 Fax: 0845 450 3957 Email: [irm@baaf.org.uk](mailto:irm@baaf.org.uk) Website: <http://www.irm-adoption.org.uk/>

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

Head Office functions operate from the following address:

Ofsted National Business Unit Royal Exchange Buildings St Ann's Square Manchester M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040

E-mail: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Following an inspection the report on an Adoption Agency (or other Children's Services department) becomes a public document and can be found on the Ofsted website.

## 11. The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed in conjunction with the Adoption Service Plan.

The information contained in this Statement of Purpose (and the annexes) can be made available in alternative formats:

Large print, Braille, audiotape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages. Please contact the Essex Adoption Service:

By telephone: 01245 434030 By fax: 01245 434311

Cllr. Sarah Candy, Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed



Date

Cllr. Ray Gooding, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services

Signed



Date

and Jean Imray Interim Director For Children's Social Care

Signed



Date

have approved this Statement of Purpose.

**Review date October 2011**

**This booklet is issued by**

Essex County Council Adoption Service.

You can contact us in the following ways:

**By post:**

Essex County Council Adoption Service

Adoption Office, EUG Area 1

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CM1 1YS

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01245 434311

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[adoption.training@essex.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.training@essex.gov.uk)

**Visit our website:**

[www.adoptessex.org.uk](http://www.adoptessex.org.uk)

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