

2015/16

Statement of Purpose

Southwark Adoption Service



Get the facts on adoption

- Visit www.southwark.gov.uk/adoption
- Call free 0300 222 5936
- Email adoption@southwark.gov.uk

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose explains the vision, objectives and services provided by Southwark's Adoption Service. In doing so it sets out how Southwark as an Adoption Agency meets the requirement of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Children Act 1989, Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011), the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and other relevant legislation, regulations and guidance.

Southwark's Adoption Service is part of the Children's Specialist Services and its primary role is to find permanent homes for our looked after children through adoptive placements.

The Statement of Purpose is provided to staff, adopters, other professionals, Speakerbox (Southwark's Children in Care Council) and the public upon request. In addition the document will be posted on Southwark's web site and its understanding actively promoted.

The Adoption Agency's policies, procedures and written guidelines accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose.

2. VISION

In July 2014 Southwark Council renewed its Fairer Future Promises with the following vision that is the overriding context of this Statement of Purpose.

The council will create a fairer future for all in Southwark by protecting the most vulnerable; by looking after every penny as if it was our own; by working with local people, communities and businesses to innovate, improve and transform public services; and standing up for everyone's rights.

In October 2014 Southwark's Children and Young People's Plan set out the following vision.

Every child, young person and family in Southwark thrives and is empowered to lead a safe and healthy life. We will work together to deliver high quality services that make a measurable difference in helping to overcome inequality and disadvantage, and strengthens families' abilities to raise their children successfully and independently.

The plan set a key priority as Safety and Stability so that every child should grow up in a safe, loving and stable home with a commitment for more children and young people living in a permanent and stable home.

In March 2014 Southwark Children's Specialist Services began a journey of transformation of its services to enable:

- the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and families: to ensure children and families are the focus of all that we do
- the best possible service: to deliver the best service possible to children and families and being an outstanding local authority.
- the best possible support to staff: to enable them to help families change and flourish

3. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Adoption Service is to achieve and sustain permanence for children in safe, secure and loving families by means of highly skilled professionals using principled working practices and supportive systems in order to give children the best possible childhood maximising their life-long opportunities.

The specific objectives of the Adoption Service are set to be within the legislation, regulations, guidance and standards and as follows.

- To put the needs, wishes, feelings, welfare and safety of the child at the centre of the adoption process.
- To consider adoption as an option for all children requiring permanent alternative care away from their own birth family.
- To make timely decisions and actively deliver plans in respect of permanence for children within prescribed timescales, minimising delay.
- To consider fostering for adoption or concurrent adoption placements for all children who are suitable.
- To deliver a sensitive and responsive service to families who wish to relinquish children for adoption.
- To recruit, prepare, approve and prepare adopters able to meet the needs and maximise the life chances of Southwark's children, including such factors as ethnicity, culture, religion and language.
- To prepare children practically and emotionally for a move to a new permanent family
- To provide suitably experienced and qualified social workers in the Adoption Service to assist and advise in the planning of each adoptive placement and promotion of permanence planning and delivery.
- To deliver a wide range of adoption support services to adopters, adopted children and their birth families to achieve stable and successful placements.
- To undertake non-agency (step parent/partner) adoption assessments.
- To provide a sensitive and personal response to adults seeking information about their adoption, and birth families wishing to contact adult adopted children, by guiding them towards an 'an intermediary service'.
- To provide advice and information to those seeking to adopt from overseas by steering them towards a specialist assessment agency.

4. PRINCIPLES & VALUES

4.1 Children

- Every child has the right to have a family throughout their childhood that will: meet all their needs in terms of stability and security; promote their physical, social and emotional development; and provide them with a supportive lifelong relationship.
- Where children's needs cannot be met within their birth family, adoption will be considered as possibly the best alternative for meeting those needs.
- The child's welfare is the paramount consideration in all planning and action.
- We listen to children. Their wishes and feelings are always taken into account in decision-making, according to the child's age and understanding.
- Children are treated with respect. Their diversity and difference is valued and enjoyed.
- Children's sense of identity and self-respect is actively promoted throughout their childhood with particular awareness to issues of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, ability and sexual orientation.
- Children are placed within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, wherever that is possible and without delay. Where this is not possible, plans are put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them within families who can meet their other needs.
- Children are only be separated from their siblings where clear evidence supports doing so on the basis of the children's individual assessed needs.
- Children are entitled to information about their birth family in order to promote their sense of identity.
- Children's contact with their birth relatives is encouraged if compatible with their need for physical safety and emotional security.
- Children are made aware of their rights as children in care and have information that allows them to make representations and complaints where necessary.
- Children with disabilities are placed in an environment which recognises and caters for their disability and, at the same time, promotes their social inclusion.
- The disadvantages experienced by children in care are recognised and appropriate care and adoption support plans made.

4.2 Birth Families

- Birth families are treated with respect.
- Birth families are assisted to properly participate in the planning and decision-making processes concerned with their child's future.
- We listen to birth families. They are properly informed and consulted and their wishes ascertained and respected.
- Birth parents parental responsibility are limited as a result of court directions and decisions taken by the local authority in the exercise of its duties considering the child's needs as paramount.
- Birth parents are supported to maintain an appropriate level and type of contact with their children.

4.3 Adopters

- Prospective adopters are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- Prospective adopters are not discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, culture, language, sexuality, gender or marital status.
- Prospective adopters needs do not take precedence over the need to find suitable families for children.
- Prospective adopters will know what issues are taken into account in their assessment, including age, health, relationships and family history.
- Prospective adopters are worked collaboratively in the assessment process and are kept fully informed of their progress, and of any concerns identified during their assessment.
- Enquirers about adoption and prospective adopters are considered positively against the current needs of children waiting for adoptive families.
- Different child rearing practices, family values and attitudes, across differing racial, cultural, religious and social groups are respected and understood.

3.4 Corporate parents

All areas of the council, statutory agencies including Health, Education and Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and voluntary agencies, where involved, actively work in partnership to support the adoption of children to achieve positive outcomes for children in public care.

4. MANAGEMENT, STRUCTURE & STAFFING

Southwark's Adoption Service is part of the Southwark Children's Social Care. The Director of Children's Social Care reports to the Director of Children and Adults Services who reports to the Chief Executive (the most senior officer of the Council) who has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service. The Director of Children's Social Care reports directly to the Corporate Parenting Committee and Council Scrutiny Committee (groups of elected members).

Children's Social Care is a large and complex range of services. The Adoption Service is part of the Permanence Service which has lead responsible for ensuring all children in Southwark's care achieve permanence. This responsibility is shared with Assessment, Safeguarding and Family Support, Children with Disabilities and Care Services.

Every child in care in Southwark has an allocated social worker who is responsible through their management for case planning and implementation, including permanence planning for those children who have been assessed as unable to return to the care of their own birth families. These social workers are based in Practice Groups. These are small teams of social workers with dedicated business support able to easily access clinical expertise. These Practice Groups are also responsible for supporting birth relatives in accessing the independent support services for them.

All social workers involved in adoption work are professionally qualified, and all have access to regular supervision from qualified and experienced managers.

The Adoption Service takes primary responsibility within Southwark Council for adoption including the case management of most children Placement Orders, relinquished babies and post-adoption support.

The Adoption Service consists of

- 2 Practice Group Leads
- 4 Advanced Practitioners (including 1 Adoption Support Services Advisor)
- 2.5 Experienced Social Workers
- 11.5 Social Workers
- 1 Adoption Recruitment Coordinator

The Practice Group Leads, Advanced Practitioners, Adoption Support Services Advisor and all social work staff have first qualifications in social work and are registered with the Health Professionals Care Council. All meet the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011) with regard to the preparation of adoption reports. The Adoption Support Services Advisor has a Certificate in Health and Social Care Studies.

The Head of Service / Registered Manager has a Diploma in Health and Social Care Management and social work qualification.

A business support team of 6 Practice Coordinators supports the Adoption Service and Adoption Panel.

All staff, including sessional and temporary staff have enhanced DBS checks.

4.1 Names and contact details of key adoption roles

The responsible manager Southwark Adoption Agency is:

Alasdair Smith, Head of Service alasdair.smith@southwark.gov.uk 0207 525 0654

The Agency Adoption Advisors are:

Pam Walton, Practice Group Lead pam.walton@southwark.gov.uk 0207 525 1909

Helen Woolgar, Practice Group Lead helen.woolgar@southwark.gov.uk 0207 525 1973

Helen Woolgar is also the Adoption Support Services Advisor

The Adoption Agency Decision Makers are:

Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care

Alasdair Smith, Head of Service, Permanence

The Independent Chair of Southwark's Adoption Panel is Bernard Monaghan

The Adoption Service is based, and can be contacted at:

47b East Dulwich Road
East Dulwich
London
SE22 9AN

Reception Tel. No. 020 7525 0900

5. SERVICES PROVIDED

5.1 Recruitment

A recruitment strategy is agreed each year based on the needs of the children to be adopted and lessons learnt from the past. Criteria for recruitment are kept under review depending on the needs of children on referral. Advertising campaigns are conducted for general recruitment to a pool and for specific children needing families.

The key messages of the recruitment strategy are:

Is this the right time to adopt?

We need people that can provide the most needy children in Southwark with a secure and loving family.

Everyone has the right to complete their family. Come and talk to us if you're considering adopting a child.

Our children come from diverse backgrounds so we are looking for people like you to help change their life.

We are knowledgeable and experienced in adoption, so make Southwark Council your first point of call for adoption.

We provide strong and valued support for adopters.

The Adoption Service through Southwark Council's Communications Team aims to broadcast the message that we seek individuals and couples, from whatever background, who wish to make a permanent commitment to a child or sibling group through adoption. There is particular focus on seeking adopters for black and mixed race children and for those interested in adopting older children with higher needs.

There is an emphasis on recruiting adopters for harder to place children. This means

children of black or minority ethnicity particularly boys

children over 2 years old with significantly higher needs

sibling groups – usually 2 but can be more

Adopters for specific children looked after by Southwark are routinely sought by both advertising in the specialist Adoption journals 'Be My Parent' and Adoption Today as well as putting information on their website and using Adoption Link.

Southwark subscribes utilises all modern media methods and practice to find families for its children.

Southwark is part of the South London Adoption Consortium, where members share information on approved families and children on a monthly basis and actively work with each other to strengthen adoption within the region.

Enquiry systems are in place to respond promptly to enquiries. Enquiries can be made by phone, letter, fax, email, or in person. Enquirers are given appropriate advice if they are not considered to be suitable to adopt and the reasons given (for example if the enquirer is living in obviously unsuitable accommodation). Enquirers are normally invited to an Information evening where they are able to obtain information from specialist adoption social workers and from experienced adopters. Those who have adopted previously or who are foster carers for Southwark children would get a more tailored approach depending on their previous experience while meeting all the relevant statutory and standard requirements.

Adoption Information Sessions are held a minimum of six times per year, providing an overview of the assessment, approval and matching process as well as information about the backgrounds of children in care and the opportunity to meet with an adopter. Less formal drop-in sessions are held twice a week in the local area and are a much valued way of prospective adopters taking initial steps on their journey.

The Assessing Social workers discuss what applicants can offer in terms of the known profiles of need for children approved for adoption. If they do not meet Southwark's current need or anticipated need they will be advised of other Adoption Agencies who may be better able to support their accept their application. If the application meets the profile of need, the family will be contacted and arrangements made for an initial visit at home by a family placement social worker to make a preliminary assessment.

Initial appointments (usually home visits) are offered to those who complete an initial enquiry form and are interested in registering their interest to adopt with Southwark. Social workers discuss the outcome of these appointments with their manager and a decision is made about whether to proceed with the application.

Applicants are given the opportunity to meet with an experienced adoptive parent within two months of their enquiry if they have not already done so at an Information meeting.

5.2 Learning and Preparation – Stage 1

The formal Registration of Interest to adopt must be completed on a specific Southwark form for that purpose. All those whose Registration of Interest is accepted are assigned a named worker who helps them with their learning and self-evaluation. They are required to complete a workbook, introduced to other learning materials and invited to a preparation course. The course uses the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) preparation model, materials and workbooks.

During Stage 1, for safeguarding and verification purposes a number of checks are undertaken including for example DBS, Social Services, NSPCC, and the local education authority. Two or three personal references are requested and these referees visited. A family member will also be asked to act as a referee, and will usually be visited. The current employer will be contacted to verify the national insurance number and asked if they wish to comment on the interest expressed by the prospective adopter. All employers will be contacted if the applicant has worked with children or vulnerable adults and asked if they have comments to make; the applicant's GP will undertake an adoption medical. Previous partners will be contacted if they parented a child with the applicant.

Preparation courses are run frequently in Southwark but if prospective adopters are unable to attend our courses they are supported to attend courses run by other agencies within the South London Adoption Consortium to prevent delay.

During Stage 1 people may feel that adoption is not for them at this time. Those who do not feel ready to proceed have detailed information about what it takes to be an adopter and are encouraged to return if and when they feel ready. Those who are not ready to proceed in the view of the Adoption Service will be advised about actions they can take to assist them in preparation for an adoptive assessment at some time in the future.

5.3 Assessment – Stage 2

Adopters' assessments are completed using the Prospective Adopters Report format developed in Southwark. Assessments are completed within four months from initial assessment visit following signing of Stage 2 agreement to approval unless the prospective adopter requests the assessment and approval is delayed for a clear reason (e.g. significant life event). Prospective adopters are encouraged to think about what they have to offer in terms of their personal experience, faith, culture, ethnic origin, knowledge and skills gained through their lives. If there are areas which need development, we work with them to explore ways of adding to their competencies and building their capacity. We have an open inclusive approach, evaluating applicants for what they have to offer.

Prospective adopters are required to have sufficient time and space to meet the demands of adoption. All applicants are encouraged to think carefully about their support networks, including family, and single-sex households are asked to consider who will provide role models for a different gender to them.

Prospective adopters are given a copy of their assessment report with two weeks to add their comments. Prospective adopters are invited and encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel when their approval as adopters is being considered.

5.4 Adoption Panel

Southwark's Adoption Panel meets on the first and third Thursday of each month and at other times if necessary to prevent delay for children. Southwark's Panels are properly constituted under the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011). There is an independent chair for the panel (not employed by the authority) who has substantial specialist knowledge and experience of adoption. There is a Consultant Paediatrician medical advisor available to the Panel, there are two Agency Adoption Advisors who have management responsibility for the Adoption Service, and there are specialists in education, social work and the law as well as an experienced adopter and at least one adult who experienced adoption as a child.

At this panel, the recommendation will be made as to whether the applicants should be approved as adopters. Recommendations are made solely on the basis of parenting capacity demonstrating suitability to be an adopter. All Adoption Panel papers and the final minutes will then be passed to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision. Applicants will be informed of this decision in within five working days.

Where the decision is made that the prospective adopters should not be approved as adopters, the applicants have 40 days to make further representations to the agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). All prospective adopters are given information about the IRM and the Southwark Complaints Procedure.

5.5 Post-approval and adoption support

Identifying support needs to sustain lifelong placements is an integral part of the adoption service and assessment process.

All approved adopters have an allocated social worker in the Adoption Service. Once approved, this worker helps them consider children and works jointly with the child's social worker where a child is identified as a possible placement.

The adoption social worker and the child's social worker carry out a needs assessment to consider support to the placement immediately and in the future. A variety of issues must be considered including financial support (one-off payments and on-going); health, therapeutic and educational needs, identity issues and life story work and contact; counselling; advice and general information. These are all outlined in the Southwark Adoption Placement Report for each child placed for adoption.

Various resources are available to Children Looked After by Southwark including the Agency Medical Adviser, Carelink Therapeutic Services and the Children Looked After Educational Advisors. Any or all of these can provide appropriate support to the adoptive child, including after adoption.

Adopters who live in Southwark are provided with a service until a child is 18 years of age. Where a child is placed with adopters who live outside the borough, support by the Southwark adoption social worker may continue for a period of three years from the date of the Adoption Order, if the adopters request it. After that time any further support is provided by the local authority in which they reside.

5.6 Matching children with families

At the point of considering the linking of a child, prospective approved adopters will be given full written information about the child, their background and needs and an opportunity to discuss this privately and with their adoption social worker. There would also be opportunity to meet with the Agency Medical and Education Advisor if requested.

If a decision is made to proceed a matching meeting is held. The proposed match is then considered by the Adoption Panel. Approved adopters will be supported throughout the process including the introductions when both the child is ready for placement and the applicants are happy to proceed, the child is placed. The child will be supported and prepared by their social worker and foster carer.

The child's placement will be reviewed in accordance with the requirements of the Looked After Children's Statutory Reviewing Process. The prospective adopter's social worker and the child's social worker will provide on-going support for the placement until Adoption Order. The adoption social worker will continue to provide support as needed.

5.7 Overseas Adoption

Southwark has a service level agreement with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre who offer a comprehensive specialist service and all enquiries about this are given their contact details.

Telephone: 020 8449 2562

info@icacentre.org.uk

6. MONITORING & EVALUATING THE SERVICE

The child's care plan sets out roles and responsibilities of the various professionals involved at any point in time. All care plans are reviewed as required by regulation and chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Family-finding plans for children are monitored through regular progress meetings following the referral meeting during a Permanence Consultation with the Adoption Service and at child in care reviews. The child's progress is closely tracked by the Adoption Service through delivery of its tracking strategy. Additionally the monthly Adoption Taskforce chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care regularly considers individual children for whom plans are at risk of delay.

Children and carers are provided with information as to how to make a complaint and this is clarified and reinforced at each review.

Management information on the performance of the Adoption Service is reported regularly to the Management Team and to the Director, Children's Specialist Services through the Adoption Taskforce which meets monthly. The Director keeps the Cabinet Member for Children's Services apprised of Adoption Service performance through their regular performance monitoring meetings. Reports dealing with the performance of the Adoption Service, any proposed changes and national policy and best practice issues are presented to the Executive side of the Council.

The Adoption Panel chair meets with the Agency Decision Maker and key managers to provide timely feedback on the experience of the panel and the adoption process and standards. Six monthly reports are provided by the chair raising quality assurance strengths and areas for improvement.

Adopters views are routinely sought about their experience of the adoption service and used to improve its performance.

7. COMPLAINTS

Southwark's Adoption Service aims to provide the best possible service. If anyone approaching or using the service is unhappy with any aspect of the service or decision made they can make a complaint.

Most people don't like to complain but sometimes things do go wrong or can be done differently. It is the responsibility of the staff and managers in the Adoption Service to try to put right any concerns that people may have at the time they are raised.

All those involved with Southwark Adoption Service are encouraged to raise concerns early directly with those who are delivering the particular service to promote early resolution.

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. Those complaining have the 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 which overall is guided by Southwark's Customer Services Complaints Procedure.

All formal complaints can be sent to:

The Complaints Officer
Southwark Council
160 Tooley Street
London
London SE1 2TZ

Telephone: 020 7525 0042 e-mail complaints@southwark.gov.uk

Further information about complaints is detailed on the following webpage:

www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200025/comments_and_complaints

8. REGISTRATION

Ofsted is the registration authority for Southwark's Adoption Service.

Their address is:

Ofsted,
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M12WD

Telephone 0300 123 4666 Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk