

### 1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

#### 1.1 Aims and Objectives

**Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate's primary aim is to provide services to children that will help achieve the aims and outcomes of "Every Child Matters" namely that every child will have the support they need to:**

**Be healthy**

**Stay safe**

**Enjoy and achieve**

**Make a positive contribution**

**Achieve economic well being.**

**The aim of the Adoption agency is to achieve these outcomes by ensuring each child has the opportunity to grow up as part of a family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.**

The Adoption Service aims to provide services that are user friendly, welcoming and non-discriminatory based on consultation with all users.

The Adoption Service aims to provide a comprehensive adoption service to all those eligible who require or request it. Eligibility is normally determined by residence in Staffordshire. However individuals living outside Staffordshire whose adoptions were made by the agency or where adoption records are held by the agency may be eligible for a service. The service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and a model of practice underpinned by comprehensive policy and procedure documents.

The objectives are:

- To provide a permanent family by means of adoption, which will meet the needs of that child/children/young person for stability, security, love and be a resource into their adulthood and beyond.
- To identify children for whom the possible plan is adoption, and to work with them and their carers to enhance the prospects of a successful adoption.
- To recruit, assess, train, prepare and support a wide range of prospective adoptive parents in order to meet the placement needs of babies and children and young people with specific needs. We will prioritise the assessments of prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting.

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- To maintain a high standard of assessment which focuses on ability to meet the assessed needs of children, understanding of the adoption task and personal fitness to be an adoptive parent.
- To provide high quality, relevant training/preparation courses which promote knowledge and competence
- To support birth parents, children and adoptive parents before, during and beyond the adoption process
- To provide Adoption Support services to adopted adults which enhance their understanding of circumstances surrounding their adoption, and support them should they seek a reunion with members of their birth families.
- To work within the following timescales:
  - a) A permanence plan will be made at the 4 month review
  - b) The plan for adoption will be presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel within 2 months of the review at which adoption is identified as the plan
  - c) A permanence plan will be made at the 4 month review
  - d) The plan for adoption will be presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel within 2 months of the review at which adoption is identified as the plan
  - e) Within 6 months of a court decision that a child should be placed for adoption the child will be matched with suitable prospective adoptive parents
- For a relinquished infant under 6 months of age, a match will be identified within 3 months of the decision that the child should be placed for adoption.

### 1.2 Where Adoption is the Plan

Staffordshire County Council's adoption agency will adhere to the following principles and values.

Staffordshire Adoption Agency is committed:

- To placing children with adoptive/permanent families which reflect their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. However, a time limit for achieving this will be agreed by adoption panel dependent on the child's timescales. Twin track family finding will begin if it seems unlikely that this can be achieved. Assessment of adopters and adoption support plans will consider the particular requirements of a trans-cultural placement.

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- To placing brothers/sisters together unless this does not meet their individually assessed needs.
- To placing the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the (looked after) child at the centre of the adoption process.
- To treating people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- To matching children with approved adopters who can offer them a stable and permanent home. Help and support will be provided to achieve a successful and lasting placement.
- To acknowledging the life long implications of adoption for birth relatives. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

### 1.3 Organisational Structure

The Principal Child Care Manager, Family Placement, is responsible for the strategic development of the service ensuring that it meets and complies with statutory requirements and National Standards. As a member of children's Services Management Team contributions are made to the planning and decision making concerning Children's Services, ensuring that issues relating to Fostering, Adoption and Permanence are raised and any implications considered. The manager also acts as Adviser to the Adoption & Permanence Panel.

The Child Care Development Manager offers support to the Principal Child Care Manager, deputising in her absence. The main responsibility is the development of the fostering services, which involves collaboration with Area Teams, Residential Services and colleagues in Health and Education. Regular meetings are held with the 4 Fostering & Permanency teams to ensure consistency in the delivery of the fostering service.

The Family Placement Service is comprised of 6 teams.

All the teams are managed by a Children Service Manager and, if applicable, an Assistant Children Services Manager. The managers either already have or are in the process of completing, an appropriate management qualification.

Family Placement Social workers have a recognised social work qualification, experience of working with children and families and skills in assessment.

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### Recruitment Team (Based at Madford Retail Park Stafford )

The Madford Team consists of 9 social workers and has countywide responsibility for the following functions:

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy for both fostering and adoption. The recruitment bus, Reggie, enables all communities within Staffordshire to be reached.
- Production of recruitment and publicity material
- Co-ordination of campaigns including specific advertising
- Development and co-ordination of 'Children's Profiling' meetings
- Running a free phone enquiry line, staffed by experienced social workers during office hours and an answer-phone at other times.
- Responding to initial enquiries about fostering and adoption and undertaking initial home visits
- Delivery of a comprehensive preparation course for prospective adopters
- Co-ordination and delivery of a comprehensive post approval training package for all foster carers, which approved adopters, are welcome to attend. There are plans to establish specific training for adopters.
- Management of the family placement information page on Staffordshire's web site and maintenance of the interactive site.
- Liaison with the Adoption Team to ensure that the placement needs of Staffordshire children is reflected in the recruitment strategy
- prioritisation of applications to ensure those applicants offering a specialist resource are referred early for assessment

### Adoption Options

The Adoption Service has been centralised into one team and is managed by a Children Services Manager. The team has 7 full-time equivalent adoption social workers and 2 adoption support workers.

All members of the team are qualified Social Workers. Most have at least three years post qualifying experience. The Children's Services Manager is a qualified Social Worker, with over 20 years experience of adoption and fostering work. The Manager has NVQ level 4 in Management.

The team has the following responsibilities:

- Assessments of all adoptive applicants
- Assessments of inter-country adoptive applicants.
- Family finding for children for whom adoption is the plan
- Involvement in the recruitment of adoptive families, in conjunction with Madford team

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- Regularly featuring individual children in specialist publications and promoting the work of the team
- Involvement in 'Children's Profiling' meetings
- Staffing a dedicated line for Asian carers who are interested in fostering or adoption
- Involvement in the running of a support group for Asian carers and continuing development of links with the Asian community locally
- Contribution to the preparation training for adoptive applicants
- Development and maintenance of a support group for approved adopters pre-placement
- Development of Adoption Support systems including support groups and post approval training
- Specialist Adoption Support workers
- Post box service for indirect contact between birth parents and adopters
- Advice to Adopted Adults and other adults affected by adoption.
- Liaison with 'After Adoption' concerning the range of services they offer to ensure they complement in-house provision

There are four fostering and permanency teams two based in Uttoxeter and two in Lichfield. The adoption team work closely with the permanency social workers whose primary task is to eliminate case drift for that looked after children age 12 and under. Where the goal is permanence, (either adoption or long term fostering), their planning and decision-making is actively managed and progressed in accordance with timescales set out in the National Minimum Adoption Standards and Court protocol.

The Permanency social workers will also become involved where there is twin tracked planning and the plan for the child is either a return to birth parents or permanency via fostering or adoption.

The tasks include:

- Collation of information for and writing of the Child's Permanence report.
- Independent counselling and support of birth parents
- Direct preparation of children for permanent placement through life story work
- Close working with area social work colleagues, foster carer and fostering and adoption social workers to ensure that plans are progressed appropriately
- Involvement in family finding and matching process
- Presentation of relevant reports to panel
- Case holding responsibility for children once the court process has been completed, offering support until the adoption order is granted.

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The effectiveness and quality of the service is monitored through statistics and information generated via our management information system and our performance in relation to PAF indicators. Quarterly and Annual Reports are produced for Senior Managers and council committees, including the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Staff performance is monitored through the supervision process and quality control systems are in place to scrutinise individual reports through the Adoption team manager, Panel Advisor, the Adoption Panel, which is independently chaired, and the Agency Decision Maker. Applicants to adopt are invited to give feedback on their experience of the application, assessment and panel processes, following their attendance at panel.

The service, through inspection reports and the development of an action plan, strives to take improve its performance.

### 1.4 **Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

Staffordshire welcomes feedback on the services it provides to children, adopters and birth parents, to enable improvements to be made.

There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all users and carers. There are 3 stages to the complaints procedure:

#### Stage 1

The complaint will be dealt with by the appropriate member of staff or manager to see if the problem can be sorted out informally.

#### Stage 2

If the complainant is not happy with the response at Stage 1 the matter can be formally investigated at Stage 2. Some concerns are immediately dealt with at this stage.

An investigation will take place and a complaints officer will prepare a report, which is presented to the senior manager of the service concerned, for them to make a response to the complainant.

#### Stage 3

If the complainant is still unhappy about the outcome the complaint can be heard by an independent Complaints Review Panel.

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At all 3 stages of the procedure the service will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days and will aim to respond fully in 28 days. If this is not possible the complainant will be kept informed of the progress.

In circumstances where the agency decision maker is minded not to approve an adoptive applicant there is a different process to be followed. The applicant can either make representation to the agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism. Information regarding these processes will be given where appropriate and can be accessed at [www.irm-adoption.org.uk](http://www.irm-adoption.org.uk)

To make a complaint or representation about the Adoption Service contact:

Staffordshire County Council  
Complaints and Representations  
Walton Buildings  
PO Box 11  
Martin Street  
Stafford  
ST16 2LH

### 1.16 Contact details for Further Information

Principal Child Care Manager, Family Placement Services  
Social Care & Health Directorate  
Walton Building  
PO Box 11  
Martin Street,  
Stafford  
ST16 2LH

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The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) can be contacted at:

CSCI  
Stafford Office  
Dyson Court Staffordshire Technology Park  
Beaconside  
Stafford  
ST18 0ES