

A photograph of a woman with reddish-brown hair, smiling broadly, with a young child with curly brown hair sitting on her shoulders. The child is also smiling. The woman is wearing a blue top, and the child is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is plain white. A bright blue brushstroke-like graphic is at the bottom of the image.

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Staffordshire County Council Families & Communities Directorate

Families First - Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

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Section 1 - Aims of the Service and Context

1.1 Aims of Families First Service

Families First Service ensures that the needs of children, young people and families across Staffordshire are identified early, the right help is put in place and problems are stopped from getting worse.

Our approach is built on the solid foundations of an integrated, multi-agency 'Team around the Family' approach. Our professionals are based in localities so that the support families need is on their doorstep.

Families First Services work with universal services (e.g. schools and health services) to prevent, where possible, children, young people and families requiring more intensive support. Our teams also support universal services to develop early help initiatives and promote the use of the Early Help Assessment Framework when children, young people and families need additional help but do not meet social work thresholds.

If a child is facing more severe problems, Families First Services will work with partners to provide support to children and young people to keep them safe from harm and neglect.

Where children are not able to live with their birth parents every consideration will be given to securing their permanent care in a way that is both timely, and in the child's best interests.

Where the plan for a child is adoption, all realistic options for securing their permanence and security via other options will have been robustly explored and evidenced. The evidence will contain an analysis of the arguments for and against all of these options along with a fully reasoned recommendation as to why adoption is the right plan to meet the child's needs.

1.2 Aims of the Adoption Service

Staffordshire County Council believes that all children have the right to a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. We recognise that legal permanence is important to give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Adoption is the most secure and permanent way of providing a new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents or extended family members.

The Adoption Service will adhere to the following principles and values:

- Working to ensure that children are placed within their permanent adoptive families in a timely way.
- Putting the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child at the centre of the adoption process.
- Placing children within adoptive families who value and promote their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language.
- Placing brothers and sisters together **unless** this does not meet their individually assessed needs, or is not in their best interests.
- Treating people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- Matching children with approved adopters who can offer them a stable, permanent, loving and nurturing home.
- Ensuring that the assessment of adopters and adoption support considers the particular requirements of each individual child placed with adoptive families.

- Acknowledging the lifelong implications of adoption for birth relatives and ensuring that they are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- Acknowledging the lifelong implications of adoption for adoptive families and ensuring that they receive the right help and support to provide the best care possible for their child or children.

1.3 Functions of the Adoption Service

Staffordshire provides a County-wide Adoption Service with staff based in Stafford, Uttoxeter and Lichfield. The functions of the service include:

- Finding families for children where adoption is the plan. This group of children include sibling groups, children of black and minority ethnic backgrounds, children with special health or developmental needs, and children with disabilities. Family Finding can be internal (utilising prospective adopters assessed and approved by Staffordshire); or external (via national and regional links and partnerships i.e. First4Adoption, Adoption Link, Adoption Match, specialist publications, and Exchange and Activity Days).
- Recruiting, preparing, selecting and approving prospective adopters, including dual approved foster carers/adopters (For more information see care4child.website).
- Support & training to prospective adopters during the matching and transition phases of adoption.
- Adoption Support – there are a variety of services to adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth relatives (see section 3.4 – Post Adoption Support Team). We also provide a counselling service to adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.
- Adoption applications by foster carers, partners, relatives and non-relatives.
- Managing the adoption panel process
- Offer advice about adoption and permanence options to staff, managers, allied professionals and service users.
- Initial Intercounty adoption advice and guidance is provided by Adoption Matters on behalf of Staffordshire Adoption Agency. Any required follow-on work is completed by Staffordshire's Adoption Team.

1.4 Partnerships and Regionalisation

Staffordshire County Council is working closely with Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin authorities, our partners in the Regional Adoption and Permanency Partnership. This new partnership is working to fulfil the aims of the Government's adoption regionalisation agenda, as set out in the DfE publication [Adoption Regionalisation](#) (June 2015). The broad aim of the partnership is to develop and embed a regional approach to achieving permanency and stability for children who become looked after, and cannot return to their birth parents.

We are currently developing the governance arrangements for our new partnership, and beginning to establish the work programme for the coming period. The guiding principle for the partnership will be to integrate the work of partner agency services wherever this can demonstrate better outcomes for children.

Alongside our Regional Local Authority partners, Staffordshire's Adoption Service works proactively with a range of other partners in order to improve the range and quality of provision we offer. These partners include:

- The National, and the West Midlands Regional Adoption Leadership Boards
- Adoption West Midlands Consortium
- Midlands Family Placement Group

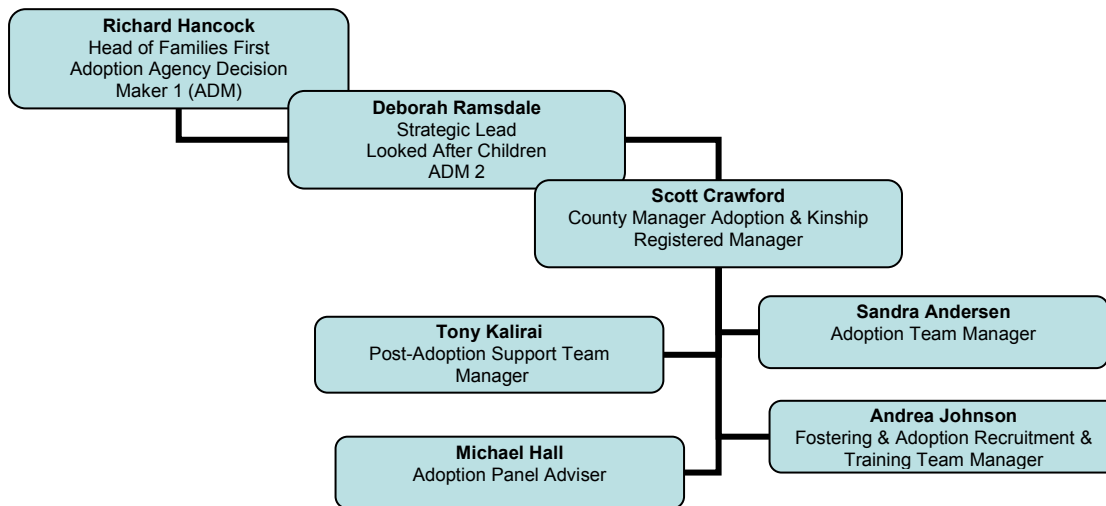
- Adoption Link
- National Adoption Register
- First4Adoption
- Adoption Matters
- Adoption UK
- Adoption Support Fund
- Sustain+ Specialist Mental Health Service
- Gateway Psychology
- Midlands Psychology
- The National Implementation Service for Evidence-based Practice

We also work with our colleagues in other Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies in order to maximise the opportunities to achieve the right match for children in a timely way, and support adopted children, adults and their families wherever they live.

Section 2 – Structure of the Service

Staffordshire’s Adoption Agency is part of Families First, which is the County Council’s Children’s Social Work service. The Registered Provider is:

Staffordshire County Council
 Staffordshire Place 1
 Stafford
 ST16 2DH



The Registered Manager for the Adoption Agency is:

Scott Crawford
 Staffordshire County Council
 Staffordshire Place 1
 Stafford,
 ST16 2DH

The Registered Manager has the following qualifications and experience:

BA (Hons) Humanities (Manchester Metropolitan 1991), Diploma in Social Work (Staffordshire University 1996), Level 4 Management Award (2005), and a Post Graduate Cert (M-Level) Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care (University of Birmingham 2012).

Scott has worked in social care and social work since 1991 in a variety of settings. He qualified as a Social Worker in 1996 and became a social work manager in 2002. Since this time Scott has managed across regulated provision for Looked after Children as a Team, Service and County Manager.

Section 3 – Teams and Functions

3.1 Adoption and Fostering Recruitment & Training Team

Team Manager: Andrea Johnson
Team Base: Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford

The Recruitment and Training Manager has the following qualifications: BA in Applied Social Studies and Diploma in Social Work (Bradford University 1997), Post Qualifying Award in Child Care (Leicester University 2001) Steps to Leadership (ILM 4 2009), Inspirational Leadership module (Staffordshire University 2010), ILM 5 in Leadership (Babbington Group 2016/17).

Andrea qualified in 1997 she has worked in care management and permanency work. She first became a Manager in 2003 and has managed 4 different teams in the following fields: Permanency, care management, family assessment and support and recruitment and training. She has been the Vice Chair of the Adoption Panel since 2010.

The recruitment team has two Senior Practitioners and six Social Workers who are all qualified. They are supported by a Recruitment Officer, three Family Support Workers and four Business Support Workers.

The Recruitment & Training Team are responsible for:

- Delivering a comprehensive pre and post-approval training programme for all adopters and foster carers.
- All associated marketing and branding activity for Staffordshire's Adoption & Fostering Agencies
- Responding to all initial enquiries about fostering and adoption
- Oversight of countywide support groups and celebration events
- Maintenance of website www.care4child.org

3.2 The Adoption Team

Team Manager: Sandra Andersen
Team Bases: Uttoxeter, Stafford, Lichfield

The Adoption Team Manager has the following qualifications: BA in Applied Social Studies and CQSW (Bradford University 1986), BA in Post Qualifying Studies in Health and Social Welfare and Child Care Award (Salford University 2002), Practice Teaching Award 2003, and MA in Child Care Law and Practice and the Advanced Award in Social Work (Keele University 2006).

Sandra has worked within Local Authority Children's Services for the past 30 years, 12 of these working as a Team Manager, or Group Manager. She has experience of working within the fields of child protection, fostering, Looked after Children and permanency planning and adoption.

There are 7 qualified Social Workers working within the Adoption Team across the county, in addition to 3 Senior Practitioners and a Team Co-ordinator, all of whom are social work qualified.

The Social Workers are supported by 3 Senior Family Support Workers who lead on family finding for children and adopters, and support the Social Workers. The team is supported by the equivalent of 2 full time Business Support Workers

The Adoption Team staff group has the combined experience of working in the field of adoption for over 140 years.

The Adoption Team is responsible for the assessment, training and provision of individual support to adoptive parents/families before and after placement. This includes the preparation of reports and statements for Adoption Panel and Court. Their work covers agency and non-agency adoptions, and intercountry adoption work.

The team is also involved in family finding for adopters and children. An approach to securing early permanence is undertaken in consultation with Social Work colleagues in the Children's Teams. A range of tools are used to assist in pursuing links and making matches between adopters and children including First4Adoption, the Adoption Match, Adoption Link, Exchange and Activity Days.

Alongside these activities, the team offers advice about adoption and permanence options to staff and managers within Families First, allied professionals and service users.

3.3 Adoption Panel

Adoption Panel Adviser: Michael Hall
Panel Team Base: Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford

Michael holds a Certificate in Social Services, a post qualification in Social Work and a Diploma in Ethics. He qualified, and has worked as a Social Worker since 1990. Michael has experience in adoption and fostering, and related panel work, child protection, court work, drugs work, hospital social work as well as children with disabilities.

The Adoption Panel Adviser quality assures all documentation relating to children's plans where an adoption decision is required from the Agency Decision-Maker.

The Adoption Panel is made up of adoption experts and experienced adopters and is independent of the adoption agency. It is their job to make a judgement on your suitability to be an adoptive parent. The Panel meets to consider all the evidence presented to them and then make a recommendation back to the agency.

The Adoption Panel will consider all applications from prospective adopters who have been assessed by Staffordshire Adoption Service. A recommendation is then made to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who makes the final decision about a prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child.

The Panel also consider matches between the child and approved adopters and make a recommendation on the suitability of the match to the ADM. Relinquished children are also presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation, prior to an approval from the ADM.

Reports where placements have disrupted or where there has been a referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) are presented to Panel. The Panel provides a 'critical friend' function to the agency, supporting it to learn lessons and develop future practice.

The Panel also performs a 'quality assurance' function, making six monthly reports to senior managers, which includes information about the quality of assessments, matching and adherence to statutory timescales.

3.4 Post-Adoption Support Team

Team Manager: Tony Kalirai

Team Base: Uttoxeter

Tony Kalirai has worked in children's social care since 1989 in a variety of roles from residential Social Worker, qualified field Social Worker to Team and Service Manager. Tony qualified as a Social Worker in 1994/5 with a Diploma in Social work and later completed a Diploma in Management Studies at Chesterfield College (level 5 management qualification), He has also completed a BA Hons in Business Management awarded by Leeds Metropolitan University (Leading in Managing Social Care). Tony has specialised in adoption work since 1999 and has been a manager in adoption since 2001. Tony has also worked in the voluntary sector as a Service Manager, developing and growing a successful Voluntary Adoption Agency.

In Staffordshire we have a range of support available to adoptive families and the birth relatives of adopted children.

The Adoption Support Team consists of:

- Adoption Support Manager
- 3 Adoption Support Social Workers and 1.8 senior practitioners
- 2 Senior Family Support Workers
- 3 Family Support Workers
- Business Support

We provide a range of services for both adoptive parents and their children, including;

- Information and advice about adoption issues
- Support for adoptive families who may be in need of additional support, including Theraplay, Non Violent Resistance Training (NVR), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) and Lego Therapy
- The team are all level 1 Theraplay trained
- Access to Sustain+ and third sector organisations providing Family Therapy and sensory assessments
- Access to the Adoption Support Fund for families requiring therapeutic services
- Support with understanding and managing emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Direct work with children/young people about their feelings
- Indirect work with children by guiding parents to use parenting model that will support their child/young person and achieve better outcomes and stronger attachments
- Lifestory work
- Support with contact arrangements including a confidential Post Box service

- Access to records under the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- Offer support to birth families with adoption related issues and with contact needs
- Regular support groups for adoptive parents who have children with therapeutic needs supported by both a Social Worker and a therapist.
- Regular support groups for adoptive parents with young children
- Family events twice a year
- Activity groups for adopted children during school holidays
- A regular newsletter
- Regular forums (supported via Adoption UK) for adopters who want to share their views, and influence or inform service development and delivery.
- Training
- Workshops on topics of interest to adoptive families

We also operate a Duty service on:

Tuesday 9am—1pm, Wednesday 1pm—5pm and Thursday 9am—1pm

The team can be contacted by:

- Post: Adoption Support Team, 63 High Street, Uttoxeter, ST14 7JQ
- Phone: 0845 3300 401
- E-mail: adoptionssupport@staffordshire.gov.uk

We can give advice over the telephone, refer on to other more appropriate services or take referrals for our own support provision.

Our service provides:

Support and Advice

Support is provided via a phone call to our duty Social Worker or it can involve visits to the family's home and work with other professionals.

Adoption Support Assessments

Social Workers on the team undertake adoption support assessments to understand the needs of families and access the right resources and interventions to support them. Where a request is received we will respond within 7 days by phone or in writing and aim to complete an adoption support assessment within 35 working days.

Access to the Adoption Support Fund

Following an adoption support assessment, it may be that families or their children require specialist therapeutic services in order to meet their needs. The Adoption Support Fund provides central funding for this type of provision, and where it is appropriate, the Adoption Support Team will make an application to the fund to support adopters and their children access the required specialist resources.

More details about the Adoption Support Fund can be found [here](#) or by visiting the first4adoption website

Practical Support, Direct Work and Therapeutic Interventions

There are a range of skilled adoption professionals in the team who provide a range support to adoptive families, from practical help and assistance through to more specialist interventions where there is an assessed need. The Adoption Support Team is committed to

offering adoptive families the right interventions to meet their children's needs. We work closely with partner and stakeholder services to deliver as broad a range of support where families need services that are not directly available through practitioners in the team.

Newsletter

A newsletter is distributed 2 times a year that provide updates concerning groups, training and adoption information and issues.

Groups

Support groups are provided during school holidays for children and young people who have been adopted. Two family days are held in the summer and a party is held in December for all families who wish to attend.

Workshops and consultation groups are also arranged periodically.

Training

Training is available for all adopters, along with regular workshops on relevant issues. The range of training available includes:

- AdOpt
- Children with Additional Needs
- First Aid
- Making Sense of Children's Behaviour
- Working with Education
- Attachment
- Caring for Children who Display Sexually Harmful Behaviour
- Impact of Domestic Violence on Children
- Preserving Memories
- Promoting Positive Behaviour
- E-Safety
- Impact of Trauma on Development
- Managing Complex Emotions
- Understanding and Dealing with Secondary Trauma

SUSTAIN+ (Specialist Mental Health Service)

The Adoption Support Team work closely with the Sustain+ service in Staffordshire, referring families on to them and undertaking joint work with them to support adopted children and young people.

Sustain+ practitioners work with Staffordshire carers and adopters, other professionals and children and young people who are adopted or Looked after. The service provides therapy and consultation to support children in their families and help them to overcome issues caused by trauma they may have experienced in early childhood. Practitioners from Sustain+ undertake direct therapeutic work with individual young people and family units.

Support with Education and the Virtual School

Staffordshire Virtual School for Looked after Children liaise closely with the Adoption Service, offering support, advice and signposting for adoptive parents in relation to education issues. Wherever possible, opportunities are identified in order to promote the needs of adoptive children alongside those of Looked after Children.

Information for adoptive parents is available on the Virtual School website: <http://education.staffordshire.gov.uk/Pupil-Support/SEN-and-Vulnerable-Children/Children-in-Care/Children-in-Care.aspx>

Training opportunities and other initiatives to support adoptive parents are promoted via the Adoption Service.

Post Box

We provide a confidential exchange of information between birth families and adoptive families where this has been agreed. It allows news to be sent at a planned time, between adopters and birth family via a confidential Post Box service.

Access to Records

We provide a service for adopted adults to have the opportunity to talk to someone about how adoption has affected them by:

- Information and advice about relevant adoption issues
- A full counselling service for those people over 18 years who wish to access their birth records
- An intermediary service for those wishing to make contact with members of their birth family
- Preparation and support for reunion
- Information about other organisations and services that can offer help.

Independent Service for Birth Relatives

Our Family Support Workers offer someone who is independent from the Social Work team who are responsible for the child's case. They provide information, advice and support. They help birth relatives to understand what adoption means and help them with letters to their birth children, where this is needed.

Section 4 - Quality of Provision

Our Adoption Services are delivered by appropriately qualified and experienced staff and managers, committed to delivering an excellent service to all children and adults who require our provision.

Ofsted undertake regular and timely inspections of the Adoption Service and provide a graded judgement of the provision within the integrated inspection framework for Children's Services. In January 2014 Ofsted awarded Staffordshire's Adoption Service a graded judgment of 'Good'.

Adoption Service managers routinely audit case records to ensure that the quality of service provision is of the appropriate standard. The outcomes of these audits are reported centrally to Families First as part of the organisational performance management arrangements.

Key service indicators, including progress towards the Adoption Leadership Board's performance targets, are reported quarterly to the Head of Families First as part of the Adoption Service's regular performance reviews.

The Adoption Panel Adviser quality assures all documentation relating to children's plans where an adoption decision is required from the Agency Decision-Maker.

The Adoption Panel provides feedback to the service on the quality of assessments, matching and child's documentation presented.

Service Feedback

- Service user feedback is proactively sought
- Feedback forms are sent out after the Adoption Order is granted, and at this stage service users are asked to comment on their experience of the service
- Children and Young people are engaged with and openly encouraged to comment on the service, appropriate to their age and understanding, their views informing future delivery and incorporated into training of carers
- The views of prospective adopters are proactively sought and listened to so that our services continue to improve. Evaluation forms are completed by prospective adopters/ carers who attend preparation and training groups
- Similarly feedback is sought regarding their experience at adoption panels
- We seek feedback and listen to and act upon learning from any complaints
- We involve adopters in training and hold focus groups involving adopters

Section 5 - Comments, Compliments and Complaints

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

There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all service users and adopters.

NOTE: In circumstances where the Agency Decision Maker is mindful not to approve adoptive applicants, the applicant can make representation to either the Agency or to the Indent Review Mechanism. Applicants will be provided with information about these processes.

5.1 Contact Details for Further Information

Further information about adoption can be found on the Government's **First4Adoption** website [here](#)

For further about Staffordshire Adoption Service contact

Scott Crawford

County Manager – Adoption & Kinship
Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire Place 1
Stafford,
ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276005

Email: scott.crawford@staffordshire.gov.uk

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

Staffordshire County Council
Customer Feedback and Complaints Manager
Customer Feedback and Complaints Team
Staffordshire County Council
Staffordshire Place 1
Stafford,

ST16 2DH

Telephone: 0300 111 8000

Email: complaints&customerfeedback@staffordshire.gov.uk

Staffordshire Adoption Service is inspected and regulated by:

OFSTED

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

Tel: 08456 404045

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Advice and assistance can be obtained via:

Children's Commissioner for England

Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0800 528 0731

Email: advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Online: <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/ask-question>

Independent Review Mechanism

Unit 4 Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ

Telephone: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate) or 0113 2022080

Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

Online <http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk>

Appendix 1 – Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment, Approval and Support for Prospective Adopters

1. Initial Enquiries

Potential adopters who make initial enquiries are sent a comprehensive pack of initial information, and are able to discuss their interest further with experienced adoption professionals by telephone. Potential adopters are invited to attend an Adoption Information Event where they have the opportunity to learn about the needs of the children being placed for adoption, the adoption process, who is eligible to adopt, and listen to experienced adoptive parents. Where they wish to proceed, an *Initial Information Giving* visit will be arranged within 10 working days. This visit will be conducted by an assessing Social Worker from the Adoption Team.

The purpose of this meeting is to provide detailed information, enable the prospective adopter to raise questions, and for the Adoption Social Worker to explore the person's motivation and capacity to adopt. If the enquiry is to progress a DBS form will be completed and verified during this visit.

Following this meeting a decision will be made as to whether to invite the potential adopters to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI) and apply for the first stage of the assessment.

Once the prospective adopter submits their ROI the Adoption Service will accept it within 5 days and provide confirmation in writing. The prospective adopter will be allocated an assessing Social Worker who will complete stage 1 of the assessment process with them.

Should the ROI not be accepted, the prospective adopter will be sent a letter outlining the reason. In these circumstances prospective adopters will be offered the choice of approaching another adoption agency or the National Gateway for Adoption.

The completed DBS form will be processed once the ROI form has been accepted. Once appropriate details have been taken the form is destroyed. Where issues arise as a result of the DBS enquiry, a risk assessment will be completed to inform the decision making process.

2. Stage 1 Assessment

The focus of stage 1 is on training and preparation in order to allow the prospective adopters to explore their initial interest in adoption and ensure that there is no evident reason from the checks and references for the adoption assessment not to continue.

Stage 1 begins when the ROI is accepted. It should take no longer than 2 months to complete. During this stage all required checks and references will be completed and preparation training undertaken. Information provided from the ROI, checks and references will be recorded onto the Prospective Adopter Report (PAR).

The assessing Social Worker will fully involve the prospective adopter in drawing up a *Stage 1 Agreement Plan* which will direct how the assessment will be undertaken.

Where it is clear that the stage 1 will take longer than 2 months (for example, if there are health issues where specialist advice is required) this will be recorded on the file along with

supporting evidence. Where this occurs the prospective adopters will be advised of the need to delay making the pre-assessment decision.

Preparation training is an essential element of stage 1 and will include contributions from experienced adoptive parents, foster carers who have moved children onto adoption, birth parents and adopted persons. Adopters will be invited to attend pre-approval adoption training over 3 days within this stage. A further pre-approval training day will be arranged during the course of the full assessment period. This day features practical exercises facilitated by the adoption support team and an experienced adopter; topics include therapeutic parenting, post adoption contact with birth family and life story work. Attendees are given support and guidance on how to help children regulate emotions. Guidance is also provided on the range of services offered by the adoption support team.

Further training and reading materials will be provided (including the government's e-learning modules which are available on the First4Adoption website) to help prospective adopters enhance their knowledge and understanding.

Written feedback from course leaders and participants' self-evaluation will be used to support the assessing Social Worker's analysis of prospective adopters.

After completing this stage the assessing Social Worker produces a summary of the key findings from the references, checks and preparation training. The Social Worker will provide a recommendation to the Adoption Team Manager about whether the prospective adopter should proceed to stage 2 or not. This is known as the *pre-assessment decision*

Where, at the end of 2 months, it is not possible to make a pre-assessment decision (for example, because the prospective adopter is not ready, or because there have been delays in the return of checks or references) the reason for this must be clearly outlined to them in writing.

If the Agency decides that a prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt at this point, the reason for this decision must be clearly conveyed to them in writing. Applicants have the right to make a complaint via the local authority's complaints procedure should this outcome arise (see Section 6 for details).

Where the Agency decides that the prospective adopters are suitable, they will be invited to move into Stage 2 of the assessment.

If the prospective adopters wish to take a break between stage 1 and stage 2 (or the Agency recommends such a break) they can do so for a period of up to 6 months without the need to recommence stage 1.

3. Stage 2 Assessment

Stage 2 focuses on more intensive training and assessment, and starts from the point that the pre-assessment decision is positive. The full stage 2 assessment will be completed within 4 months. This timescale may be extended in exceptional circumstances. The reason for any extensions will be recorded on the case file.

A stage 2 plan is drawn up to include a schedule of appointment dates, by the adoption Social Worker with the prospective adopter at the outset of stage 2. This will include making a date for the completed assessment to be presented to the Adoption Panel within 16 weeks (maximum) unless the prospective adopter requires more time.

To complete the assessment, the Adoption Social Worker will produce a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). This will include an assessment of the prospective adopter's strengths and vulnerabilities. If the Adoption Social Worker forms a view during the assessment that the prospective adopter may not be suitable to adopt, they should discuss their concerns with the Adoption Team Manager and together decide on the best course of action. Prospective adopters must be kept informed on how they are progressing throughout the assessment and any difficulties should be discussed openly.

Where there are issues of significant concern or where clarification is needed, the Team Manager may arrange for a second person to visit the prospective adopter to discuss these, but must remain mindful of the timeframe for the completion of Stage 2. The second person could be a Team Manager or another Adoption Social Worker. A visit by another person provides a second opinion where necessary before the report to the panel is finalised in cases where clarification is needed.

Once completed, the PAR will be shared with prospective adopters to enable them to provide their views and comments. They should have sight of the report 5 working days before its submission to the adoption panel.

4. Panel Process and Agency Decision

The Adoption Panel consider the application and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who makes the final decision about a prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child.

The prospective adopters receive notification of the outcome of their application from the ADM. Where applicants have not been approved, they can appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism (see section 5 above).

5. Support to Approved Adopters

Once approved additional training is available in order to help adoptive parents prepare for a placement. The subjects available include Moving children into new families, attachment and brain development, contact and caring for sibling groups.

Adopters also have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations. For example, they are provided with 1 year's subscription to Adoption UK.

The Adopter's Social Worker will advise the adopters about *post box contact*, and any other arrangements which are required to facilitate contact with birth parents.

A Family and Friends day is available to wider family members and friends of prospective adopters in order to help them develop a wider understanding of adoption and be able to support the adopters.

6. Linking and Matching

Once approved, Adoption Social Workers will work with adopters and other Social Workers to identify suitable matches to a child or children. Adopters will continue to be provided with support throughout this process.

The Adoption Team 'family find' for individual children and help promote the needs of children who are likely to need adoptive families. The team uses a variety of approaches to search for appropriate placements for children. For example, some children will be put forward at Exchange Days and Activity Days, others in specialist publications. All children's details will be placed on Adoption Match and Adoption Link as soon as the appropriate consent has been obtained and where Staffordshire prospective adopters have not already

been linked to them . Where approved adopters have not been linked, or are not yet being actively considered for a child they will also be placed on Adoption Match and Adoption Link (with their consent).

In order to make an informed decision, adopters are given all the available information known about a child (the Child Permanence Report,) as well as any other reports about the child's needs and requirements. All children have a full adoption medical and adopters are provided with this report and other health information.

Adopters meet with the Social Worker for the child and other relevant professionals (e.g. medical adviser, nursery/education staff) and the child's foster carer to ensure they receive all the available information about a child.

A *Child Appreciation meeting* will often be arranged depending on the child's age and circumstances. This meeting gives the prospective adopters the opportunity to meet with people who have been involved in the life of the child they are to be/have been matched with. Together they can learn about the experiences for the child when living with their birth family, and consider the impact of these now and into the future. It also allows for consideration to be given to the support needed for the child and their adopters, and gives permission for the prospective adopters to ask any questions that they may have about the child.

The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the Adoption Placement Report (APR) which will be seen by the prospective adopters prior to the Adoption Panel. An Adoption Support Plan will also be completed based on the identified needs of the child and the assessment of the adopters. Adopters have an opportunity to comment on the Adoption Placement Plan within the APR and Adoption Support Plan documents before they are presented to the Panel. The child's Social Worker, the prospective adopters and their Adoption Social Worker attend the Adoption Panel together. This process is the same as for Adopter approval, with recommendations being made to the ADM who will make the final decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

Once the matching decision has been made, a placement planning meeting is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. This meeting involves the foster carers for the child, the prospective adopters, the family finder and relevant Social Workers. A timetable and plan for the introductions, monitoring, review and support is agreed, and roles in relation to parental responsibility are clearly outlined.

Where the plan is for the adopters to meet the child's birth parents prior to an Adoption Order being granted, they will be supported by their Adoption Worker and the children's Social Worker.

7. Post Placement Support

The period between placement and legal adoption can be a stressful time. Adopters are given information about local and national support services and are fully involved in the planning of regular post placement support. We want to ensure that adopters feel well supported during this period.

Once the child has been placed for adoption, visits by both the child's Social Worker and the family's Adoption Social Worker will take place. The status of the child as a 'Looked after' Child will continue until such time as an Adoption Order is granted.

The child's *Statutory Review* will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be to the prospective adopters. At this time the *Annexe A Report* will be prepared for Court by the Social Workers for the adopters and the child.

The child's Social Worker will provide life story material, including a *life story book* and *later in life letter* to the adopters for safe keeping. This will be provided within 10 days of the Celebration hearing, which follows the granting of the *Adoption Order*.

Appendix 2 – Relevant Legislation

Adoption Service provisions are underpinned by the following legislation and guidance:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Registration of Foreign Adoptions Regulations 2003
- The Children and Adoption Act 2006
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005
- The Adoption with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- The Local Authority (Adoption) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2005
- The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005
- The Independent Review of Determination (Adoption) Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- The Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005
- The Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2010
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption July 2013
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013)
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2014
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Adoption Act 1976
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

Other relevant legislation and statutory guidance includes:

- National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990).
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- The Mental Capacity Act 2005
- The Children Act 2008
- IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance 2011