

**Section 1**

**Part II: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2014/15**

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### CONTEXT

West Berkshire District Council through the power delegated to the Director of Communities Services, undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service. It seeks to operate within the requirements of:-

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (and accompanying regulations and guidance) (Amendment 2011)
- The Children Act 1989 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
- The Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and
- The Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 – England
- National Care Standards Commission (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The 1976 Adoption Act – Section 14
- Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2005
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (and associated child protection guidance)

- The Framework for the Assessment of children in need and their families
- Other relevant legislation and regulations and guidance

## **1 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

The Adoption Service is provided by the Family Placement Team of West Berkshire District Council. Other services provided by the Family Placement Team are:

- Post-adoption support services
- Special Guardianship services
- The Fostering Service
- Private Fostering services
- Supported accommodation (lodgings)
- Identification and oversight of placements with Independent Fostering Providers

### **The vision of the team is:-**

That West Berkshire will be regarded as having one of the best family placement teams in the country, offering a range of high quality and innovative services that provide safe and stable placements for children and young people. This will be achieved by a skilled, dedicated and motivated team of staff, carers and adopters working together, in partnership with a range of service providers, to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and their families. The Family Placement Team will be a valuable source of specialist knowledge within Children's Services. It will continually evaluate effectiveness and involve users and carers in planning and development to make sure the highest standards are maintained.

### **The core values of the team are:-**

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process
- Promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
- Work is undertaken to achieve the highest professional standards possible

- In determining a child's future through adoption the adoption service will work in partnership with the child, those with parental responsibility, prospective adopters and adoptive families

West Berkshire Council seeks to promote the upbringing of children by their birth families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family, a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. When adoption is being considered as part of the child's Care Plan, the Adoption Service undertakes to find a permanent alternative family. This family will give the child the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances. Where there is a plan for permanency for a child who is looked after the council's first consideration for a child under the age of 10 will be adoption.

The service is committed to ensuring that the adoption services provided for children and their families value diversity and promote equality. Each child and their family will have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The service seeks to ensure that all children are placed with adopters who provide an environment that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self worth.

### **The aims of the Adoption Service are:-**

- To ensure that all children in West Berkshire who require permanency by adoption are provided with an adoptive family who can meet all their identified needs and offer a secure, stable and loving environment throughout their childhood, into adolescence and beyond
- To ensure that there are sufficient numbers of adoptive families approved by West Berkshire to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption
- To ensure that a high standard of post placement support is provided for all West Berkshire children placed with adoptive families and children placed with adopters living in West Berkshire, to ensure the maximum success of the placement
- To ensure that there are effective and reliable systems in place for recording, managing and storing information about children placed for adoption and all those affected by the adoption process

### **The objectives of the Adoption Service are:**

- To prepare and assess prospective adoptive applicants applying to the Service who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
- To achieve the placement of the children being looked after by West Berkshire Council for whom adoption is part of their Care Plan, with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child.
- To support approved and waiting adopters in achieving the placement of appropriately matched children.
- To provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption by the agency and to their prospective or legal adopters during the pre adoption period and for the first three years post adoption.
- To provide a high standard of post adoption support to all children placed with adopters approved by, and/or living in, West Berkshire where the qualifying requirements for support are met.
- To provide a range of adoption support services in line with the authority's responsibilities under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and Section 14 of the Adoption Act 1976, in order to minimise the risk of disruption. These support services will look at adoptive families holistically.
- To fulfil the authority's duty under the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999 to provide or arrange to provide an inter-country adoption service.
- To provide post adoption support services to adults affected by adoption, including birth family members.
- To provide Schedule 2 counselling services to adopted adults in line with legislation.
- To provide effective and efficient systems for recording and storing information about West Berkshire children placed for adoption, their birth families and others affected by the adoption process.

### **The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

The Adoption Service operates as part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies Consortium together with the other five unitary authority adoption agencies in Berkshire: Wokingham, Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough and Bracknell Forest. Catholic Children's Society (Reading) is also an honorary

member. The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded proportionately by all six unitary authorities in order to provide a range of resources relating to adoption for the individual unitary authorities.

The Advisory Service currently comprises a Service Manager, an Adoption Consultant, a Project Worker, a Letterbox Co-ordinator, a Records Officer one day per week, (based at Darwin Close in Reading) and administrative staff.

The original Contract of Quality Standards set out for the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service was as follows:-

- Manage and service the two Berkshire Panels (including attendance by adoption applicants)
- Recruit and train Adoption Panel members
- Provide professional and administrative support for the two Adoption Panels
- Manage the Berkshire Letter Box service which facilitates the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families
- Provide specialist training on adoption issues for staff in the six Unitary Authorities
- Provide specialist advice and assistance on complex adoption matters to staff in the six unitary authorities
- Provide specialist counselling for adults seeking access to birth records
- Administer the closed children's records and adoption records
- Provide a social work service to the closed children's records and adoption records

These original areas of responsibility have been maintained and many have been further developed, particularly in the light of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

In addition the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service now:-

- Manages the 'Berkshire Adoption Exchange' – twice yearly events that bring together social workers from across the region in an effort to achieve the matching of children with approved adopters

- Facilitates 'Life Appreciation' meetings for children being placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities
- In the event of placement breakdown, chairs disruption meetings for children placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities
- Co-ordinates development of some pan-Berkshire Adoption Support Services to which all teams have access eg Birth Mothers' Support Group, Birth Fathers' Support Group and Birth Records Workshops
- Supervises direct contact arrangements that are set-up for children placed with adoptive families (pre and post Order)
- Facilitates the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Post Adoption Forum
- Organises the adopters' conference
- Hosts a birth parent project (aim – to offer both integrated independent approaches alongside consistent support and information to significant birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for a child)

The Adoption Panels for East and West Berkshire are shared with Reading Borough Council, Wokingham District Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council, Bracknell Forest Council and Slough Borough Council.

### **Post placement and post adoption services**

The Adoption Service is committed to providing post placement support services to all West Berkshire Council approved adopters who achieve the placement of a child(ren). Where children are placed from another local authority this will be at an advice level initially, and will include support in working with the placing authority.

The Adoption Service is similarly committed to providing Post Adoption services for all those living in the West Berkshire area whose lives have been affected by adoption, recognising the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees.

The Adoption Service is also committed to providing a counselling and support service to:-

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records

- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

### **Intercountry Adoption**

The Adoption Service is committed to fulfilling its duty under The Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999, to provide, or arrange to provide, an Inter-country Adoption Service. The Service, by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (PACT Reading), delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad. This service is reviewed on an annual basis.

## **2 NAME AND ADDRESS OF NOMINATED MANAGER:**

June Kemp  
Family Placement Team Manager  
West Berkshire Council  
Family Placement Team  
West Street House  
West Street, Newbury  
Berkshire, RG14 1BZ

The nominated manager reports to Sandra Dopson, Children's Services Manager. The Adoption Service Decision Maker is the Head of Children's Services.

## **3 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MANAGER**

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In the process of completing ILM level 5

## **4 STAFFING OF THE ADOPTION AGENCY**

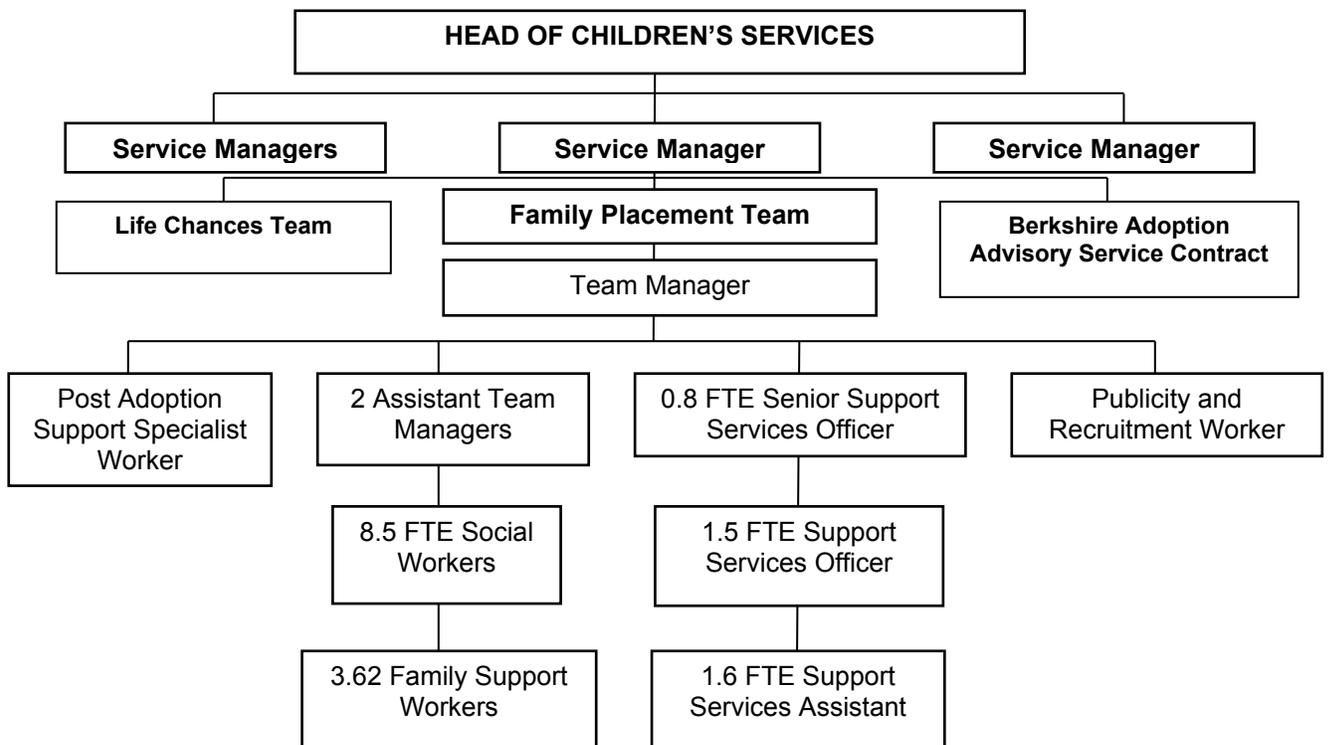
The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

- 1 Team Manager
- 2 Assistant Team Managers
- 1 Specialist Post Adoption Support Social Worker

- 8.5 FTE Family Placement Social Workers
- 3.62 FTE Family Support Workers
- 1 Publicity and Recruitment Worker
- 4.09 FTE Support Services Staff

All members of the team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services and other Family Placement Team responsibilities. All Social Workers within the Family Placement Team who undertake adoption work hold a professional social work qualification ie CQSW, CSS, DipSw, and are registered by the HCPC. They have a good understanding of adoption issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

**The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service**



**5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SERVICES PROVIDED**

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of systems being in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided

are effective and the quality is of an appropriate standard. The Service is committed to seeking feedback from all users of the Service including users of the post-adoption support services in order to inform future provision.

The Authority is currently looking at how we deliver post adoption support services to include the involvement of the Family Resource Team (FRS). This will include a Post Adoption Champion within FRS who attends conferences and shares info/resources with the wider team. They will be involved in early intervention to assist families who are struggling and avoid potential adoptions breakdowns.

Workers will be provided with training in Dan Hughes, Margo Sutherland, and Trauma Recovery to so will be better equipped then to deal with issues relating to adoption.

We are hoping to develop more specific training after the preparation group and more direct work before and after matching. We are planning to put systems in place to seek and monitor feed-back on the services provided.

### **Feedback from the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service provides annual information about the feedback received from the birth parents/relatives and adopters to whom it provides services on behalf of West Berkshire District Council's Adoption Agency. Feedback can additionally be sought in relation to a specific case and/or will be provided on specific issues arising if there appear to be reasons for concern about the nature or quality of any service offered or provided.

### **Feedback from prospective applicants and adoptive parents**

Feedback from prospective applicants is obtained at various stages during the assessment process:

- Following attendance at the initial information session
- Following an initial visit
- Following attendance at the preparation training group (three days)
- During the Second Opinion Visit (if deemed necessary) at the conclusion of the home study assessment.
- Following approval at Adoption Panel
- Following the placement of a child with the adopters

- Following the granting of an Adoption Order

Adoptive parents attend Adoption Panel both at the time of their initial approval and when being matched with a child/ren.

Some applicants receive a visit from the Team Manager or one of the Assistant Team Managers at the end of the home study process, prior to their application being considered by the Authority's Adoption Panel. This interview is not a statutory requirement but may be necessary in some cases if issues need further exploration.

Post approval reviews are also undertaken with all approved and waiting adopters in line with the regulations.

Reviews take place:-

- Whenever the agency considers it necessary
- Not more than one year following approval
- At intervals of not more than one year until a child is placed with the prospective adopters or the period of time for which approval was originally given expires, or they formally withdraw from the adoption process

Reviews are carried out by the Family Placement Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager and involve a meeting with the prospective adopters. The views of the prospective adopters are always elicited and taken into account. If the prospective adopters wish to continue to be approved to adopt, a review report is compiled which is shared with them and they have the opportunity to comment on its contents.

After the Adoption Order has been made, the Post Adoption Support Plan which is developed for the Adoption Panel at the time of matching the child and prospective family is reviewed annually. This annual review is conducted by the post adoption support worker and feedback on the post adoption services delivered is gathered at this time.

### **Feedback from birth parents**

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service has a designated staff member who undertakes Birth Parent Counselling on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, thus removing the role from staff who have any level of involvement in placing the child(ren). This separation of roles appears to have assisted a number of the birth parents of children that the Authority has placed for adoption in accessing appropriate counselling and support.

When the Birth Parents' Project Worker has concluded her involvement, birth parents are asked to give their views on the service that they have received via a questionnaire.

Where birth parents are able to engage with the Authority or with the Birth Parent Project at the stage that plans are being made to place their child(ren) for adoption, their thoughts and wishes are proactively sought, both in terms of the adoption plan and in terms of the type of family in which they would wish their child(ren) to be placed. This information is included in the Child Placement Report which should be signed by the birth family.

Except where birth parents sever all links with the Agency, contact is maintained with birth parents until the adoption of their child(ren) is legally concluded.

The Birth Parent Project Worker re-contacts all birth parents with whom he/she has been engaged once the legal adoption of their child(ren) has been concluded in order to advise them of the Adoption Support Services available for birth parents both locally and nationally. This provides a further forum for obtaining feedback on services provided which is then formally recorded/monitored.

### **Adoption inspection**

An Ofsted inspection was completed in February 2011. The outcome of this inspection was "Outstanding."

### **Evaluating and responding to feedback**

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Authority, this is referred to/checked out by the relevant Team Manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaison with external agencies/organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Authority to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be referred to the Authority's Complaints Officer (see section 8 below).

Statistical information is maintained on feedback from Service Users.

## **6 PROCEDURES IN RELATION TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS**

### **Recruitment of adopters**

In January 2013 the Government published Further Action on Adoption: *Finding More Loving Homes* which further details plans to speed up the adoption process

by increasing the number of adopters. In July 2013 a new two stage assessment process was introduced by the Government.

As a result there have been a number of changes that the Family Placement Team needed to implement over the past year in order to comply with and improve this process.

The Berkshire Consortium of unitaries has worked hard in standardising the process for adoption recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters and they continue to work closely together to deliver information sessions, preparation training and providing each other with prospective adopters who live outside of the immediate local authority area from whence the children originate.

The Adoption Service has always been mindful of the period of time that children with special placement needs may wait for placements. In order to prevent 'undue delay' in placing such children, the Service has always pursued specific initiatives in order to attract interest from appropriate families. Where children are unlikely to be able to be linked via the Berkshire Adoption Consortium, agreement is sought at an early stage for these children to be featured in national journals and publications, and fliers detailing the child(ren)'s specific placement needs are sent to other agencies.

The Adoption Service's decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application will be based on:-

- The minimum legal and Service criteria
- The Service's priority areas for recruitment applicable at the time

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

- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties
- Children from minority ethnic groups
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability

- Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties
- Children aged five years or over
- Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged five years or over

All applicants will be expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex histories and children who have incomplete background and/or health information.

The Service seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, detailed within the BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR). The 'home study' assessment is usually undertaken by a family placement social worker, with a 'second opinion' being provided by one of the managers if this is deemed necessary. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

While the Adoption Service does not subscribe to the pure model of competency based assessments, prospective adopters are assisted, through the two stage assessment process and preparation group to provide evidence to support their application. This helps to consider/identify the competences and strengths that they have, and those that they will need to develop, if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.

Prospective adopters are kept informed of their progress throughout. The Adoption Service seeks to balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays. The Service seeks to present the applicants to the Service's adoption panel for consideration within six months of receiving their Registration of Interest.

All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and the subsequent matching and placing process. The authority's information pack is reviewed on an annual basis.

The Agency is part of the Berkshire Adoption Consortium which for the purposes of recruitment and training involves the areas of Bracknell, Wokingham, Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough. These authorities jointly run Information Sessions for adopters ensuring that there is a session every month. It is not compulsory that potential adopters attend Information Sessions, however all those enquiring

about adoption are encouraged to attend as it provides an opportunity for them to meet with other potential adopters.

Regardless of whether the potential adopter/s have attended an Information Session they must be offered the opportunity to meet with a social worker in their own home to discuss their interest in adoption and their individual situation. The Regulations require that this visit takes place within 10 working days of the potential adopter/s returning the completed Adoption Enquiry Progression Form or otherwise requesting further information.

At the initial visit the worker explains the adoption process in detail and responds to any questions that the potential adopter/s have about adoption or the adoption process. Discussions take place to ascertain if there is any reason to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed at this time.

Where there is nothing to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed a Registration of Interest Form is provided to the potential adopter/s. On receipt of the Registration of Interest Form the Agency must decide within five working days whether or not to accept it.

### **Assessment of applicants**

**Stage One** – Pre-assessment process - this stage starts from the day that the agency accepts the Registration of Interest Form and it should usually take no more than two months to complete. A worker must be identified at this stage to support the applicant/s through Stage One and complete with the Prospective Adopters a Stage One Plan. .

A Stage One visit should be completed within five working days. A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all prospective adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards. All information provided by prospective adopters is verified where possible in line with good practice.

Stage One must include: DBS on applicant/s and anyone else over the age of 16 years living within the household, an Adoption medical, Local authority checks, Ofsted, NSPCC, Probation and Overseas checks, Personal references (written references only at this stage), A preparation group and any other preparation/training. All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend a preparation group. The material used is designed to provide prospective applicants with information about the adoption process, information on children both within Berkshire and nationally who need adoptive parents, and about the potential issues involved in raising adopted children. It was revised in 2005 in the light of new training material which became available from British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The Adoption Service works in co-operation with

five other Berkshire Unitary Authorities regarding preparation groups. All prospective applicants are given the opportunity to meet with existing adopters during the preparation groups.

A review meeting with the prospective adopter(s) takes place towards the end of the two month period to review the prospective adopter(s)' progress and their readiness to progress to Stage Two of the process. The prospective adopters will be encouraged to complete a Self-Evaluation and Reflection form.

If the Agency considers, during Stage One, that an application needs to be put on hold whilst issues arising are addressed, or the Agency considers that the prospective adopter(s) are unsuitable to continue with the process, applicants are informed in writing. If the prospective adopter(s) wish to take a break between Stage One and Stage Two or the Agency recommends a break (eg bereavement, finance issue, illness etc.) this is subject to a maximum of six months.

If prospective adopter(s) complete Stage One satisfactorily (as agreed in the Stage One Plan) they notify the Agency that they wish to proceed to Stage Two. Before Stage Two can be started the applicants must have completed chronologies, family trees, eco-map, financial statement, an Experian Statement (one for each applicant if a couple) which details the applicant's financial history and County Court Judgements (if any), completed prompt sheets and a completed self-evaluation and reflection form.

**Stage Two** - following receipt of the notification that the prospective adopter(s) wish to progress to Stage Two the Team Manager confirms the Agency's decision regarding their progression. The Agency then has four months to complete the assessment including the Adoption Panel hearing the case and the Agency Decision Maker making the Agency Decision. In exceptional circumstances this can be extended but this should be agreed with the Team Manager and the reasons for the extension must be recorded on the case file. Stage Two includes Intensive training and completion of a Home Study assessment.

The prospective adopter(s) should be given five working days to read their report/s to enable them to consider the report/s and to make any comments. These views are incorporated into the report that is presented to the panel.

The prospective adopter(s) must be notified in writing of the panel decision within five working days following receipt of the final panel minutes.

If during the completion of Stage Two the prospective adopter(s) are assessed to be unsuitable then they will be able to make representation to the Agency or to request a review by the IRM. The prospective adopter(s) will also be able to raise general concerns about the process with the National Gateway.

### **Approval processes**

All prospective adoptive applicants seeking approval will have their application presented to the Adoption Service's Adoption Panel for consideration. The Service shares a joint Adoption Panel with Wokingham District and Reading Borough Councils (in accordance with Regulation 3.5 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005). The composition of the Panel is in line with Regulations and is held monthly. Additional Panels are arranged if needed. The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the professional adviser (Senior Adoption Consultant, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service).

Panel members and the Adoption Service's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the panel meeting. The supervising social worker for the applicants or, in her/his absence, her/his family placement line manager, will be present when an application is considered to answer the panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend the panel at which their application is to be heard. Adopters are also able to attend the panel which hears the match between themselves and a child/ren.

The recommendation of the panel is conveyed to the applicants verbally on the day of panel by the Panel Chair and to the Adoption Service Decision Maker by Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service within 24 hours (draft minutes will be forwarded within four working days). The Decision Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven days after receipt of the final panel minutes.

The Adoption Service Decision Maker will convey their decision in writing (e-mail, fax or memo) to the applicants' supervising social worker and the Family Placement Team Manager. The Team Manager ensures that letters confirming the Service's decision are sent to the adoptive applicants. In the event of an application being deferred or turned down, prospective adopters are informed of their right to make representation. This can be either to their own agency or to the Independent Review Mechanism operated by BAAF.

Adopters are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they remain suitable to adopt and relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover placement of children from abroad. Adopters are not approved for a specific age range but must meet the general criteria for adoption. Panel may give advice as to the age range and numbers of children they consider most suitable for the adopters.

All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of a child(ren) via the Berkshire Adoption Consortium. However, if a suitable placement is not

identified within the first three months of the applicants' approval, approved adopters will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing agencies via the National Adoption Register. This is a national database, operated by BAAF, and contains information both about children waiting to be placed for adoption and approved prospective adopters who are waiting for a match.

Approved applicants whose range of approval suggests that they are unlikely to be 'matched' to a child(ren) via the consortium within the first three months of their approval will be referred to the register at an earlier stage to be 'made live' (subject to the agreement of the other member agencies).

**Second or Subsequent Adoption Applications and applications from Foster Carers** - will be fast tracked and completed within four months. Applicants who do qualify for fast tracking bypass Stage One of the process but must receive a tailored assessment to take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of any children in their family.

Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care will be welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster carers who are interested in adopting children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters. Foster carers who wish to be approved as agency adopters must complete the same preparation and assessment as any other adoptive applicant. It is expected that such an application would be discussed in full with the appropriate supervising social worker. Generally it is expected that such an application would not be considered where a child had been in placement for less than a year (this is the period of time that courts consider appropriate before they will consider an application from a foster carer to adopt).

**Fostering for adoption (including concurrency)** - Discussions should take place with the prospective adopter(s) around whether they may be interested in considering the placement of a child for whom adoption is thought to be the likely outcome, but where the placing authority has not yet ruled out other possible placement options for the child. Such placements are known as Fostering for Adoption and include practices such as concurrent planning.

The Prospective Adopter's Report should include details of whether the prospective adopter(s) may consider this option and if so what the parameters are around this.

**People Who Wish to Adopt from Overseas** - If an enquiry is received from prospective applicant/s who indicate that they wish to adopt a child/ren from overseas they will still be offered the opportunity to receive information about domestic adoption from the Agency. If the prospective applicant/s remain clear

that they wish to adopt from abroad then they are referred to a voluntary agency called PACT.

At the current time the Adoption Service delegates the preparation and assessment of Inter-country Adoption applicants to a local voluntary adoption agency. The contract in place with this agency is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the work undertaken is in line with the requirements of the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999 and the Inter-country Adoption Agency (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003 and accompanying guidance.

### **Support to prospective adopters**

Approved adopters are given clear information about the matching, introduction and placement process. All approved and waiting adopters have a named supervising social worker who will provide regular support throughout the post approval period. This social worker will assist applicants in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and will objectively evaluate whether it is appropriate to pursue possible matches.

Where information about a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate its implications the Adoption Service will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision about whether or not to proceed. The Agency makes arrangements for adopters to meet with the Medical Adviser prior to the match at panel as well as the current foster carer of the child, ensuring that the adopters receive all the information that they need prior to the matching panel, in addition to the comprehensive written information that they also receive.

The Adoption Service will assess the risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these. The Service will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption.

Where adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Adoption Service will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to promote the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about and connection to their origins. The Service will seek to assist adopters to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.

The Adoption Service will ensure that adoptive parents are informed, prior to a placement, about support services that are available within the area and how they

might access these services, should they or the child require specialist support after the Adoption Order has been made. The Service will also ensure that prospective adopters are aware of what (if any) Adoption Allowances may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. The Service will ensure that adopters are aware of any benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.

Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Adoption Service will continue to receive supervising social worker support from an identified social worker within the Family Placement Team, until such time as the legal adoption is concluded.

It is the expectation of the Adoption Service that all children placed with West Berkshire Council approved adopters will have a named social worker who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting her/him within the placement. Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive situation within the family.

The Adoption Service will encourage adopters to formally sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members if this was agreed at the time of placement and will support them in facilitating these arrangements. The Service will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on progressing the application to adopt to the appropriate court at the appropriate time. (The Service will negotiate whether the court application fee is to be met by the applicants or by the placing agency.)

The Adoption Service recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid placement breakdowns. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or maltreatment and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten placements, whatever services have been made available.

Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity, the Service will seek to ensure that:-

- Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child
- The child's welfare remains the first consideration
- The review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports, focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child

- The possibility of placement breakdown is acknowledged and planned appropriately
- If a disruption occurs, a disruption meeting is held, chaired by the BAAS, in order to assist the responsible agency in gathering as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future

## **7 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

The Agency recognises that the Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on every Local Authority to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs in relation to adoption of:-

- Children who have been or may be adopted
- The birth relatives of such children (ie relatives within the meaning of Section 14.4 (1) of the Act)
- Any person with whom the adopted child has a relationship which appears to the Local Authority to be beneficial to the welfare of the child
- Persons who have adopted or may adopt a child
- Any children of such persons (whether by birth or adoption)

In addition, the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2005, require Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of a range of Adoption Support Services and places duties on Local Authorities to carry out assessments of need for Adoption Support Services and having carried out an assessment to decide whether to provide any services. Moreover, Local Authorities must act reasonably in deciding whether to provide Adoption Support Services following an assessment, although there is an assumption that an assessment of need for a service will not automatically result in the provision of that service.

While the Agency recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees, in reaching any decision as to what services to provide the Authority will take into account both the circumstances of each individual case and the resources that are available locally.

West Berkshire District Council is committed to providing the full range of Adoption Support Services that Local Authorities are required by Regulations to provide, following an assessment. These services are:-

- Financial support (ASR 3.1.a)
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption (ASR 3.1.b)
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child (ASR 3.1.c)
- Therapeutic services for adoptive children (ASR 3.1.d)
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care (ASR 3.1.e)
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)
- Counselling, advice and information

While the Council seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Authority may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either other Local Authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, Voluntary Adoption Agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Authority's full range of Adoption Support Services is not available to those involved in adoptions by a step-parent or intercountry adopter. In these cases, services provided are limited to counselling, advice and information.

The Authority is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all child(ren) and families who are engaged with the Children's Services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted child(ren) and their families also have access to mainstream services available to child(ren) and families with particular needs.

The Agency is also committed to providing counselling and support service to:-

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support

- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

### **Adult adoptees**

The Local Authority is responsible for providing a birth records counselling service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing, on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records. In the case of persons adopted before 12th November 1975, the Agency provides counselling in line with relevant legal requirements before sharing any information available. Counselling is also provided for adult adoptees adopted after that date if this is requested and the Agency encourages adoptees to make use of this service.

Where an adult adoptee who does not live in the West Berkshire District Council area is seeking information from his/her adoption records and West Berkshire District Council is the Appropriate Adoption Agency, advice and counselling about the process is provided and the Authority co-operates in providing information from its records to any Adoption Support Agency involved or to the Local Authority in whose area the adoptee lives, in order to facilitate him/her accessing his/her adoption records.

When the Agency is approached by another Adoption Agency seeking information from the adoption case records for an adoptee who remains under the age of 18 the Agency will only release information if there are clear reasons to suggest that this would be in keeping with the best interests of the young person and with the consent of the adoptive parent(s).

If an adoptee is seeking to trace a birth relative(s) he/she is informed that the Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, however, if he/she is able to provide the name and address of the person whom he/she wishes to contact the agency will, where staffing permits, provide an intermediary service. Alternatively the Agency will provide details of other agencies and organisations that provide tracing and/or intermediary services or that might be able to offer additional support appropriate to the individual's needs. All adoptees are provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

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### **Intermediary services for birth relatives**

Where a birth parent, sibling or grandparent of an adopted person lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area and is wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling/grand-child he/she is offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not generally in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted him/herself. Birth relatives are provided with a list of Registered Adoption Support Agencies and encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General.

The Agency only routinely provides intermediary services where the following criteria are met:

- The birth relative lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area
- The birth relative is able to provide the name and address of the person with whom they wish to make contact
- The birth relative is able to provide evidence of their relationship to the adoptee
- The adopted person is over the age of 18 and lives within the West Berkshire District Council Area

If the Agency is acting as an intermediary, if contact with the adopted person is established and if he/she wishes to have contact with his/her birth relative(s) all parties are offered support prior to and following any reunion. While the Agency is acting as an intermediary, support will be made available to any involved party if their circumstances suggest that this would be helpful.

## **8 THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

All prospective adopters engaging with the Adoption Service and all birth parents of children for whom the Service is planning adoption are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details for accessing the Complaints and Public Information Manager for Children and Young People's Services. All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedures and of the role of West Berkshire Council's Children's Rights Officer, and how they can contact her/him should they wish to do so.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process on engagement.

The Family Placement Team Manager monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Family Placement Team.

## **9 DETAILS OF THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY**

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

Tel 0300 123 1231

**June Kemp**  
**Team Manager**  
**Family Placement Team**  
**31 March 2014**