

CONSIDER Adoption

Norfolk County Council Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose 2017-18



LOCAL AUTHORITY ADOPTION SERVICE REGULATIONS 2003

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Foreword from the Children's Services Executive Director – Matt Dunkley

Putting Children first

Adoption is of critical importance to Norfolk County Council. We have implemented the Government's Action Plan for Adoption. We always guarantee a warm welcome to prospective adopters. If you can demonstrate that you could meet the needs of a child or young person who is in the care of the Local Authority awaiting adoption, then we will consider your application.

Some of the children we need to place in families will have suffered trauma, grief and loss. Some will have experienced or witnessed abuse or lived in chaotic environments, which may have left them feeling vulnerable and unsafe. We are looking for prospective adopters who can provide children with a safe and stable home for them to grow and develop. You will need to help them feel comfortable in your home and their surroundings.

It's important to remember that we are not simply looking for people who have had straightforward lives. We will consider your family history sympathetically. Coming through and learning from difficulties or losses can be helpful experiences for adopting a child.

We welcome applications from adults over 21 years of age, from all walks of life and all ethnic backgrounds and religions. It doesn't matter if you are a home owner, tenant, or on housing benefit, employed or not employed. You need to have a genuine commitment to care for a child and lots of energy, understanding and patience. You need to have a spare bedroom in your home and sufficient time and space in your family to adopt a child.

Once a child has joined your family you will not be on your own. We can provide a range of adoption support services throughout childhood.

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Our Vision:

'Norfolk County Council will be a consistent, caring and responsible parent to all children and young people in our care through to adulthood. We Promise to put Children First and to work with them and the important people in their lives to ensure they are safe, happy and well. We will always be there at the right time to support children and young people to achieve their own personal ambitions by never giving up on them'

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The aims and objectives of Norfolk County Council Adoption Service are:

- ✓ For adopted children and young people to be happy members of a family, confident and achieving to their very best potential.
- ✓ Whatever their cultural background or disability, to identify and prepare children who need to join, and will benefit from, a permanent and legal adoptive family.
- ✓ To implement effective strategies for the recruitment of sufficient adopters able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.
- ✓ To aspire to achieving a successful outcome for each child placed with a new family, minimising the number of placement disruptions.
- ✓ To provide a comprehensive adoption support service to adopted children and their families and also to birth families.
- ✓ To provide intermediary services to adopted adults and to birth families.
- ✓ To maintain high standards of practice within the adoption service by, exceeding the National Adoption Minimum Standards and the challenges of timeliness.
- ✓ To promote opportunities for professional development of adoption workers, both social care and administrative staff, to increase their knowledge of good practice and personal development and to strive constantly for service improvement.
- ✓ Working to meet the challenges of the Adoption Scorecard.



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Last year we:

- ✓ Made 9 foster to adopt placements.
- ✓ Successfully applied for over £827,485 worth of therapy from the Adoption Support Fund.
- ✓ Attended permanence monitoring groups and permanence panel reclaiming permanence for our Looked after Children.
- ✓ Successfully bid with partners for DfE grants for the regionalisation of adoption agenda.
- ✓ Increased The Adoption Support Team by one social worker.
- ✓ Developed a pilot to deliver attachment friendly schools.
- ✓ Introduce and delivered Signs of Safety in our work.

This year we will:

- ✓ Target recruitment on BME groups, those with an offer to large sibling groups and children with a disability.
- ✓ Continue to recruit and champion foster to adopt placements.
- ✓ Embed procurement process around adoption support applications.
- ✓ Further develop attachment friendly schools project.
- ✓ Continue to work with partners to create a regional adoption agency.
- ✓ Work with colleagues to improve the quality of life story work
- ✓ Re launch our magazine for adopters side by side

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Prospective Adopters - Who are we looking for?

All sorts of people can make successful adoptive parents. Norfolk adoption service welcomes enquiries from people of any ethnic background, age, religion or sexual orientation and from people with disabilities. Applicants may be single, married or living with a partner and may or may not already have children in their family.

The important thing is that adopters have the potential to meet the needs of the children who are waiting for secure and trusting families.



What skills do adopters need?

- ✓ As can be seen from the flowchart which follows, Norfolk adoption service prepares and trains prospective adopters for the task of looking after, and claiming, children born to another family. The process helps applicants think about their strengths and skills and any areas where they may need more information or experience.
- ✓ Adoptive applicants don't have to be perfect. Nobody is. Often people who have had difficulties in their lives and have worked through them are stronger as a result.

By the time applicants are ready to adopt, we trust that they will be able to:

- ✓ *Provide a safe, stable, loving family life*
- ✓ *Have plenty of time and energy to spare*
- ✓ *'Stand in the shoes' of a child and understand how he or she may be feeling*
- ✓ *Help children feel good about themselves*
- ✓ *Encourage a child's education, hobbies and interests*
- ✓ *Keep a child safe and promote a healthy lifestyle*
- ✓ *Help a child feel a positive sense of who they are and where they have come from*
- ✓ *Tell their child about their background and sometimes keep in contact with important birth family members*
- ✓ *Be firm sometimes but also be able to negotiate and compromise*
- ✓ *Cope with the unexpected*
- ✓ *Stay calm and positive when things are not going according to plan*
- ✓ *Ask for help if they need it.*

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The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

The Adoption Service aims to recruit a wide range of families to meet the differing needs of children requiring adoptive homes. The agency will welcome all enquiries. Anyone who uses the adoption service will be treated with respect and honesty.

The agency's strategy for recruiting prospective adopters is to prioritise applicants to reflect the needs of looked after children waiting for adoption at any one time.

Publicity and recruitment materials and leaflets have been produced to support good communication with prospective adopters and more accurately represent the profiles of children waiting to be adopted.

Details of the process for recruiting, assessing, preparing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in the Adoption Service's procedures, available on request to the public, professionals and other agencies.

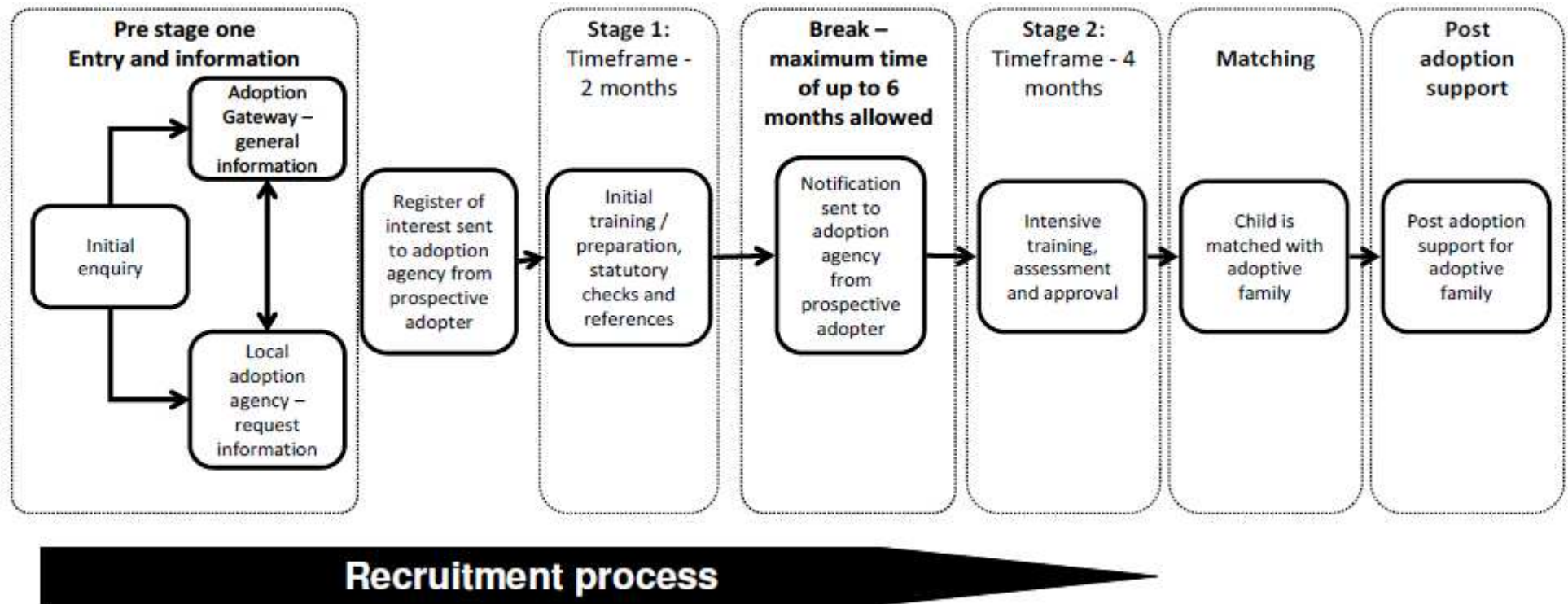
We aim to work in partnership and will seek your views about the assessment process and our relationship with you at regular intervals.



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Flowchart of steps in recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

The Adoption process



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Services provided by Norfolk Adoption Service

The Adoption Service in Norfolk consists of three social work teams which deliver the following:

- The recruitment, training and assessment of prospective adopters, including inter-country and in-family applicants
- The preparation of children when required for an adoptive placement
- Placement of children with approved prospective adopters
- Counselling for birth families relinquishing a child for adoption
- Consultation to child care social work teams in respect of adoption issues
- Services to other professionals including facilitation of the independent Adoption and Permanence Panel and completion of reports for Courts; participation in the Eastern Region Adoption Consortium
- Provide a range of helpful support to adoptive families
- An assessment of need post adoption and planned services in consultation with the family
- A Letterbox contact arrangement for exchange of information between adoptive and birth families
- Facilitation of any arrangements for direct contact between adoptive and birth families as appropriate for the child
- Access to birth records and information for Adopted Adults
- Intermediary services for birth families and Adopted Adults
- Therapeutic provision for children where required pre and post adoptive placement.



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Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Norfolk's Adoption Service receives regular internal and external scrutiny to ensure that services are robust and of good quality.

Internal monitoring is achieved by:

- ✓ Collection and scrutiny of data, recording outcomes for children and adopters.
- ✓ Tracking systems to measure the timescales involved for providing services.
- ✓ Quarterly performance board which reviews outcomes to allow performance to be checked against key performance indicators and national standards
- ✓ The three adoption teams meet regularly and take part in practice development together
- ✓ Gathering of service user feedback at different stages of the adoption process
- ✓ Statutory reviews and planning meetings provide a structure for the agency to record progress in individual cases
- ✓ Staff performance is routinely monitored during regular supervision sessions and annual appraisals with line managers
- ✓ Elected Members scrutinise the Agency's output through attendance at adoption panels and the Agency's Annual Reports and the review of the Statement of Purpose & Function.
- ✓ Auditing of case files.



We also maintain our quality by:

- ✓ The independent Adoption & Permanence Panels which closely examine the quality of cases referred to Panel, with annual review between the Panel Chair and agency managers and decision-maker
- ✓ Input from specialist external agency staff (e.g. Family Futures) who provide clinical supervision of some aspects of practice and training opportunities
- ✓ Collective scrutiny of regional practice and service delivery through membership of the Eastern Counties Adoption Consortium which includes several other local authority and voluntary adoption agencies
- ✓ Comprehensive, regular inspection by OFSTED which measures the agency's performance against the adoption national minimum standards and regulations.

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How to Make a Compliment, Complaint or Challenge a Decision

While Norfolk's Adoption Service endeavours to get things right first time, every time, there may be occasions where service users wish to make a complaint. This section sets out the procedures in place, should this situation arise.

The complaints procedure

Norfolk County Council has a designated Compliments & Complaints Team which coordinates the investigation of representations made by prospective and approved adopters. All compliments and complaints are logged by the team.

Children, young people or their representative can make a compliment or complaint by using the local rate number 0344 800 2020 or accessing the Norfolk County Council website www.norfolk.gov.uk

The key features of this complaints procedure are:

- ✓ Most issues can be resolved informally by the manager responsible for the service within 10 working days.
- ✓ If the case is not resolved, an independent person completes an investigation within a further 25 working days.
- ✓ If the issue remains contentious, the Chief Executive's Department commissions another investigation to make recommendations to be considered by a Panel of three independent people.

Children and young people wishing to make a compliment or complaint must either be receiving or seeking a service from Norfolk County Council Children's Services.

Any individual or group, other than children and young people, receiving or seeking a service from Norfolk County Council, who wish to make a complaint, can do so by writing to:

Compliments and Complaints Manager, FREEPOST IH 2076
Norwich NR1 2BR or at www.norfolk.gov.uk

Challenges to decisions regarding suitability to adopt

If prospective adoptive enquirers are assessed as unsuitable as adopters before having a formal application accepted, they can seek to have the decision reviewed by a Team Manager.

If still negative, the enquirer(s) can ask for the decision to be referred to the Operational Manager (Adoption, Fostering & Residential Care) for final adjudication. If this reviewing officer upholds the original decision, there is no further ground for appeal.

If a formal application to adopt is accepted by the adoption agency, and doubts regarding suitability subsequently arise, the applicants are able to insist that their assessment as adopters is presented to the Adoption & Permanence Panel.

If the Panel recommends that the applicants are unsuitable as adopters, the case can be referred to an independent Panel through the Independent Review Mechanism.

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Any serious concerns regarding the agency's practice can be referred to the OfSTED inspectorate. The main office for the OFSTED adoption inspectorate service is:

OFSTED National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Anne's Square
Manchester M2 7LA
Tel: 0300 123 1231
e-mail address: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



If a child has any serious concerns relating to the adoption agency, they can contact the Children's Commissioner themselves.

The details are:

Children's Commissioner
Tel: 0800 5280731 (free phone)
e-mail: rights4me.org
website: www.rights4me.org

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Adoption Service Management Arrangements

The OfSTED named, responsible manager and adoption support services advisor is the head of social work resources.

Pen picture of Peter Ronan – Head of Social Work Resources:

- History Honours Degree (University of East Anglia, 1984)
- Diploma in Social Work (CETSW No 41175, 1993)
- Certificate in Management (NEBS NC970000221711051098, 1998)
- HCPC Council Registered Social Worker (Registration Number SW31989. Renewal Date 13/11/2014)
- Enhanced DBS July 2016

Peter has worked for Norfolk County Council since 1988 beginning in a residential children's home.

Peter chaired Foster Panels (1997 – 2000) and took on management responsibility for home care. Peter became the responsible individual for Children's Services Homecare, a service that has been constantly rated as 'outstanding' (3 teams) and 'good' (one team).

Peter became a key member of Norfolk Children's Safeguarding Board, acting as Chair of the Southern Local Safeguarding Group and leading and managing 5 child protection teams across the Southern area.

Peter brings a strong understanding of the families Looked After Children come from, detailed working knowledge of child protection and court process in adoption, fostering and residential care.

Since coming into his current post in June 2011, Peter has put continuous improvement at the heart of all three services he manages, and there are active improvement plans for each of the three Children's Services in place.

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The Adoption Recruitment Team takes a lead role in recruiting, assessing, training and approving prospective adopters. Other functions include providing the in-family (step-parent) assessment and court service and inter-country adoption.

The Adoption Children's Team specialises in family finding for children with complex needs, on a regional and national basis. A full matching, support and court reporting service is provided. These children can require therapeutic input to prepare them for placement and ongoing support

The Adoption Support Team provides post-adoption support services after an assessment of need. Such services can include casework, provision of therapy, support groups and links with trained 'buddies'. Counselling adopted adults regarding their personal histories, acting as intermediaries for birth relatives seeking contact with their adopted relations and delivering the 'letterbox' exchange of information between adopters and birth family members are vital components of the wider adoption support service.

Norfolk also has service level agreements with Family Futures and Barnardos for the provision of support services for adopted adults, birth family members as well as adoptive families.

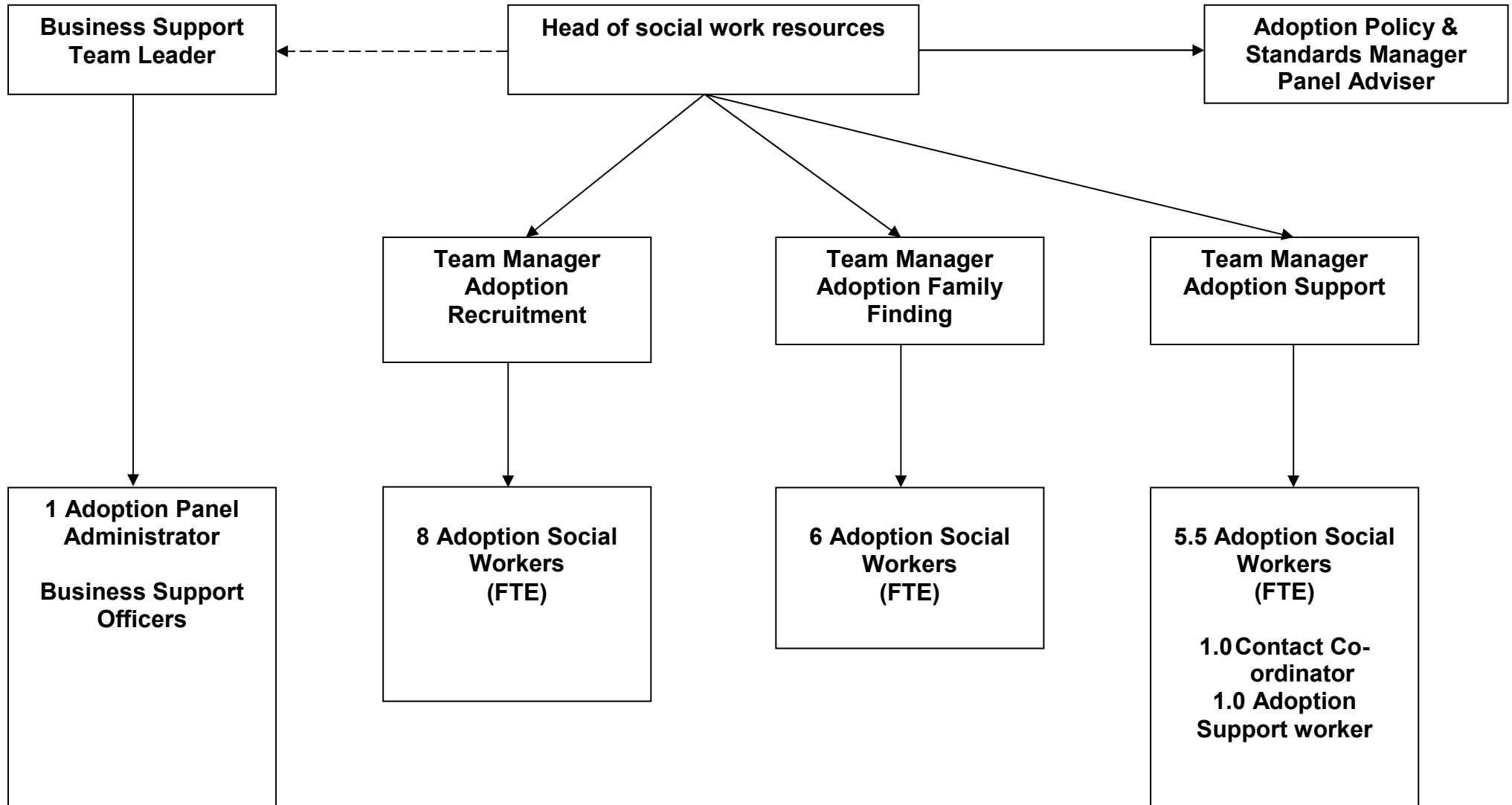
The Adoption Panel, commissioned by the adoption agency, meets once a week to make independent recommendations on the suitability of applicants as adopters and the quality of matches between families and children. The independent chair is a skilled, experienced adoption consultant. The Panel Advisor role is filled by the Policy & Standards Manager who is also an experienced child care manager.

The Norfolk County Council Adoption Agency is part of the regional East Anglian Consortium of Adoption Agencies consisting of three neighbouring local authorities and three voluntary adoption agencies. Children who cannot be placed within their 'home' area would be referred to the consortium as an identified priority.



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**Diagram 1: The Structure of the Adoption & Family Finding Unit
(from 1 April 2013)**



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Appendix One – Adoption Focussed Staff Employed by Norfolk Adoption Service

POSITION	QUALIFICATIONS	TOTAL SERVICE IN CHILD CARE	EXPERIENCE IN ADOPTION
Social Worker	Diploma of Higher Education in Social Work Studies, Diploma in Social Work, BA (Hons) in Specialist Practice (Children + Families)	15.5 years	3 years
Team Manager, Children's Team	MA DipSW Child Care Award	21 years	12 years
Social Worker	DipSw ; MA in Social Work , PQ Child Care Award BA (Hons)	18 years	14 years
Senior Social Worker	Diploma In Social Work Diploma in Higher Education Degree in Specialist Practice Working with Children and Families Theraplay® Practitioner Level 1 and 2	16 years	10 years
Social Worker	BSc Psychosocial Studies (Hons) MA/DipSW Social worker PQ1. Theraplay Practitioner	16 years	13 years
Senior social worker	BA Applied Social Studies; CQSW and PQSW	24 years	14 years
	CQSW	10 years	7 years

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	MPhil Diploma in Therapeutic & Educational Application of The Arts		
Team Manager Adoption Support Team (Job share)	Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy	11 years	8 years
Agency Panel Advisor	BA Hons Eng Lit DipSW and MA PQ award	17 years	17 years
Social Worker	BSc Psychosocial Sciences MA in Social Work	9 years	3 years
Social Worker	Diploma in Social Work Post Grad Diploma in Play Therapy Introduction to Theraplay Introduction to Filial Therapy	19 years	12 years
Social Worker	BA Hons in social work and welfare studies. Masters degree in social work.	9 years	4.5 years
Social Worker	MSc in Social Work	13 years	5.5 years
Senior Social worker	B.A Hons M.A. CQSW DASS	25 years	15 years
Senior social worker	NNEB CQSW	24 years	14 years
Adoption Support Worker	BA (Hons) Social Studies NVQ 3 Group and Foster Care Associate Theraplay	19 years	12 years

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	Therapist		
Social worker	Diploma in Social Work. Foundation in Art Therapy.	19 years	6 years
Social worker	BSC Psychology BA Hons in Social Work	6 years	3 years
Senior Social Worker	DipSW, DipHE, Practice Teaching Award	25 years	8 years
Senior Social Worker	MA DipSW DDP1 & 2; NPP 1 & 2; Theraplay 1 Dissociation(RM)	16 years	8 Years
Social Worker	BA (Hons) Psychology MA Social Work	15 years	8 years
Social Worker	BA (Hons) Communication Studies MA in Social Work	10 years	3 years
Social Worker	Dip/S.W. Dip/H.E.	27 years	3 years
Social Worker	University degree in social work/social pedagogy. Teachers degree Cert. in foundation course in systemic therapy. Cert. in foundation course music therapeutic methods and RA Forest school practitioner level 3	12 years	2.5 years
Social Worker	Diploma in Social work/HE PQ in social work BA Specialist practise module- practice education Cert. in counselling skills	6 years	6 years
Social Worker	BA Hons in social work	15 years	2 years

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Team Manager, Recruitment Team	DipSW; MA Social Worker Child care Award PQ in Advanced practice	21 years	13 years
Social worker	BSc Psychosocial Science MA Social Worker	3.5 years	2 years
Social Worker	BSc (Hons)Psychology MA Social Work ABE; ASI	7 years	2 years