

Norfolk Adoption Service



Norfolk County Council

Statement of Purpose

2018/19



Norfolk County Council

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1. Foreword

Sara Tough Director of Children's Services

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.

In January 2018 Ofsted told us our adoption service is outstanding and that the service delivers positive and timely outcomes for our children who have a plan for adoption...

- **Our adoption performance is in the top 10% of England**
- **Foster to Adopt is making a real difference to children's lives**
- **Family finding profiles are thoughtful and well written**
- **The quality of transition has been transformed by our moving to adoption project in conjunction with UEA**
- **Post adoption support packages are comprehensive and individualised**

This provides a good foundation from which we will continue to improve the quality of our practice and deliver a creative Adoption service. Thank you for taking the time to find out more about adopting in Norfolk.

2. Introduction

The Adoption Service for Norfolk is part of the overarching Adoption and Fostering Service and works collaboratively with local services, schools voluntary and external agencies. Children's Services' vision is to be a consistent, caring and responsible parent to all children and young people in our care through to adulthood.

We are an outstanding Adoption Service as recognised by Ofsted in the Norfolk Children's Services Inspection November 2017. Ofsted told us that our adoption service is outstanding and that the service delivers positive and timely outcomes for our children who have a plan for adoption.

- **Our adoption performance is in the top 10% of England**
- **Foster to adopt is making a real difference to children's lives**
- **Family finding profiles are thoughtful and well written**
- **The quality of transition has been transformed by "Moving to Adoption" project in conjunction with the UEA**
- **Post adoption support packages are comprehensive and individualised.**

This provides a good foundation from which we will continue to improve the quality of our practice and deliver a creative Adoption Service, which by becoming an Adopter for Norfolk you are joining an outstanding provider.

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. The Adoption Service contributes to this vision by seeking to provide permanent families for children and young people who cannot live with their birth families, enabling them to thrive within a safe and secure environment.

Norfolk County Council has an Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team who support all potential adopters through the initial stages of an application. There is an Adoption Assessment team who assess potential families, make adoption placements and provide support to these families until one year after the granting of an adoption order. There is an Adoption Children's Team, to support the identification of an appropriate match for children. The Adoption Support Team provides support for birth families, adoptive families, children who are adopted and adult adoptees.

There is a two-step assessment process; Stage One is 'adopter-led' and Stage Two is 'agency-led'. We have a strong emphasis on customer service, mutual working agreements and a contractual approach to completing assessments. Timelines for completing each section of the assessment process, and procedures for prospective adopters to take time-limited breaks from assessment are provided. The Stage One recruitment process is managed within the joint Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Team and the Stage Two assessment is managed within the Adoption Assessment Teams.



The Adoption Service in Norfolk recognises the critical importance of achieving permanency for a child with a plan for adoption in a timely manner. We work proactively with national targets set for monitoring the performance of Local Authority Adoption Services (The Adoption Scorecard) in relation to the child's journey through care and the timeliness of matching with adoptive families.

The Adoption Service is fully engaged with the Adoption Change Agenda as set out in Regionalising Adoption, DfE June 2015, and Adoption: a vision for change, DfE March 2016.



Ricky Cooper
Head of Localities



Tracy Collins
Interim Head of Fostering and Adoption

Norfolk County Council is part of Adopt East, an alliance of Adoption Services (partners) and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Essex, Suffolk, Southend, Luton, Thurrock AdoptionPlus and Barnardo's. The priorities of the Alliance are as follows:

- **Decisions about placements are always made in the child's best interests**
- **Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence**
- **Social Workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care**
- **Matches are made without unnecessary delay**
- **Fostering for Adoption to offer children early permanence placements**
- **Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a high-quality specialist assessment of need**
- **The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy making and delivery of services.**



3. The Adoption Service Principles

The Adoption Service seeks to promote the principles and practice enshrined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Amendment) Regulations 2005
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2003
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services 2011
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) (Amendment Regulations 2007
- Adoption Support Agencies (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency regulations 2013
- Adoption Key List (Children's & Families Bill 2014)
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2014/2015
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2015



Our practice is guided by the principles of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and Foster Care:

- The needs, rights, safety and welfare of children are our paramount concern.
- We welcome all prospective adopters and carers and treat each with respect at all times, providing information and feedback in an honest and timely manner.
- We recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for all parties and offer sustained and effective support services to adopters, carers, and adopted children and adults.
- We treat birth families fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process, ensuring access to appropriate and timely support in line with good practice and statutory regulations.
- We offer birth parents and relatives support and counselling, including access to records and intermediary services.
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- We offer birth parents and relatives support and counselling, including access to records and intermediary services.
- We work towards rehabilitation using concurrent planning if that is in children's best interests and achievable within the prescribed timescales, including supervised contact and coaching to help the parents develop their parenting skills.
- We apply equal opportunities and value diversity welcoming adopters from all ethnic, religious, language, racial and social backgrounds.
- The needs, rights, safety and welfare of children are our paramount concern.
- We welcome all prospective adopters and carers and treat each with respect at all times, providing information and feedback in an honest and timely manner.
- We recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for all parties and offer sustained and effective support services to adopters, carers, and adopted children and adults.

4. Key Aims and Objectives

- ✓ To provide a service responsive to the needs of children, who require a permanent family placement, recruiting sufficient adopters to meet those need.
- ✓ 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 value adopters, providing them with a high standard of support and guidance through individual sessions with their link social worker, support groups and pre- and post-approval training, to ensure they are well prepared and supported for the task of becoming adoptive parents.
- ✓ To offer a service to those wishing to adopt from overseas or those wishing to pursue non-agency adoption.
- ✓ To provide an intermediary service to birth families as outlined in the adoption support policy.
- ✓ To offer a service in line with access to records for adoptions both pre-commencement and post commencement.
- ✓ To provide, on request, an assessment of needs for adoption support services for all adopted people, adopters and birth parents.
- ✓ To work in partnership with all those affected by adoption and provide information and advice on all adoption matters to the general public and other professionals.
- ✓ To ensure all information/records will be treated confidentially and held securely.
- ✓ To promote current government policy in achieving a wider, more diverse pool of adoptive parents who are able to provide lifetime care for children who have been looked after.
- ✓ To maintain high standards of practice within the adoption service by exceeding the National Adoption Minimum Standards and the challenges of timeliness.
- ✓ To provide intermediary services to adopted adults and to birth families.



- ✓ 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.
- ✓ To provide an adoptive family committed to maintaining contact arrangements in line with the child's needs.
- ✓ To place siblings together wherever possible and where it is in the best interests of each child.
- ✓ To employ an innovative range of family finding techniques including the use Adoption Match, Link Maker and a range of adopter-led matching activities.



5. Management and Staffing

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.



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 an experienced adoptive parent with a legal background, who has been a Norfolk Adoption Panel member for more than a decade and was previously Vice Chair. The Panel Advisor role is filled by an experienced child care manager.

The Norfolk County Council Adoption Agency is part of the Adopt East Alliance. Children who cannot be placed within their home area would be referred to the Alliance as an identified priority.

All social work staff are required to have the Diploma in Social Work or equivalent on appointment and are registered with the HCPC. All staff are subject to satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced disclosure checks. All social work staff meet the requirements required under the Restriction of Preparation of Adoption Reports regulations 2005

The Adoption Service comprises three teams:

**Janet Barker & Ben Albery
Team Manager, Adoption Recruitment**

Children's Services
Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk NR1 2DH

Tel: 01603 306408
E: janet.barker@norfolk.gov.uk

**Rachael Agnew
Team Manager, Adoption Family Finding**

Children's Services
Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich,
Norfolk NR1 2DH

Tel: 01603 638345
E: rachael.agnew@norfolk.gov.uk

**Michelle Brady
Team Manager, Adoption Support**

Children's Services
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County Hall
Martineau Lane
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Tel: 01603 306653
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6. Adoption Activity to 31st March 2018



This year we will:

- Utilise the regional opportunities through the Adopt East Alliance to improve our practice, develop regional marketing and recruitment opportunities, align some of our processes and explore a regional approach to the procurement of adoption support.
- Continue to recruit and champion foster to adopt support.
- Develop our marketing and recruitment approach to further target BME groups, children with disabilities and those with an offer to large sibling groups.



7. 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:

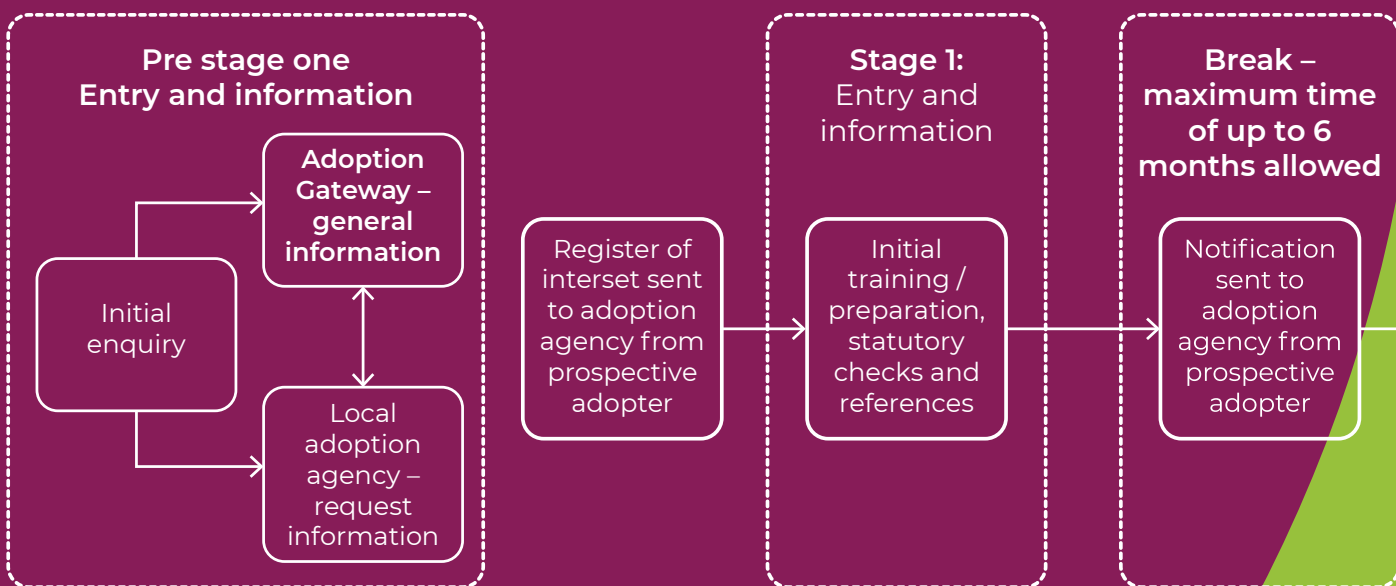
- ✓ Provide a safe, stable, loving family life
- ✓ Have plenty of time and energy to spare
- ✓ 'Stand in the shoes' of a child and understand how he or she may be feeling
- ✓ Help children feel good about themselves
- ✓ Encourage a child's education, hobbies and interests
- ✓ Keep a child safe and promote 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.



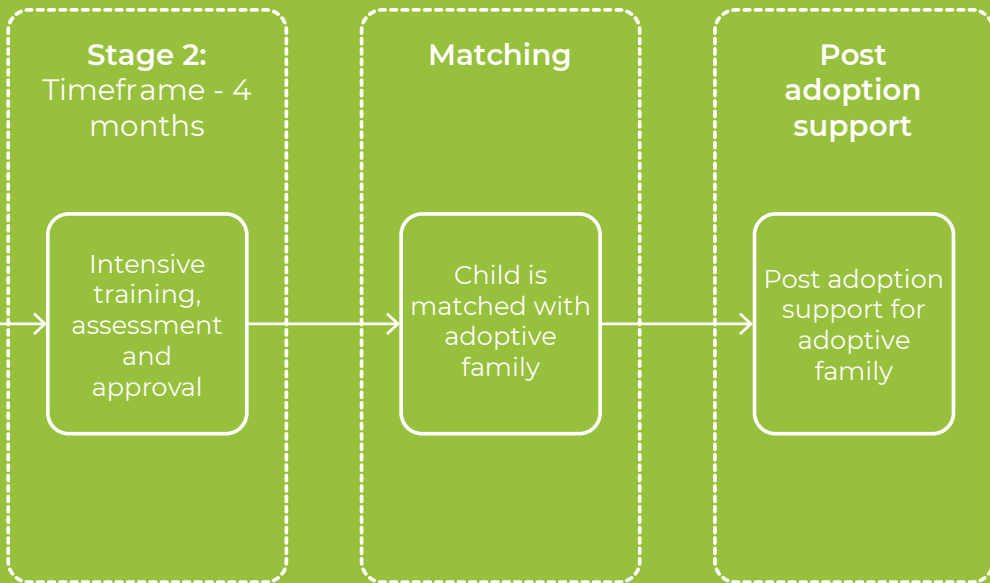
8. The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

- 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.

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



RECRUITMENT PROCESS





9. Key Aims and Objectives

- All children who are placed for adoption will have their plan agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Once the ADM has made the decision that a child should be placed for adoption, the child is allocated an Adoption Social Worker. This worker is either from the Family Finding Team or the Adoption Assessment Team. The role of the Adoption Social Worker is to ensure that a placement is identified in a timely manner and that children are appropriately prepared for placement and transitions.
- A tracking meeting is held on a fortnightly basis, with the Team Managers and the panel advisor to ensure that children's plans for adoption are progressing appropriately and that there is no delay. The Adoption Service has evidenced a consistently strong performance in the recruitment of prospective adopters and in seeking to place for adoption older children, those in sibling groups and children with complex needs.
- Following approval, a Matching Agreement outlining how Norfolk Adoption Agency will assist adopters in finding the right child for them is completed. Adopters may choose to be referred to the Adoption Match and Adoption Link maker with their consent. Their details will be passed onto see if they have children who may be a suitable match.



- Family finding is a shared activity across the Adoption Service. Adopter-led matching events are regularly held within the region involving adopters and children to further support linking and matching.
- Where there are potential links between children and Norfolk adopters, the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) is sent to the children's social worker and manager for their consideration. Timescales of five working days for selection are in place to avoid delay and ensure that decisions are made quickly about any potential links.

10. Early Permanence

- Early Permanence (Foster to Adopt) is embedded within the adoption service. From the point of enquiry, prospective adopters are provided with information about early permanence. Early permanence carers are approved adopters who have the skills, emotional resilience and willingness to be able to offer a child a loving and nurturing home. However, they also need to manage living with the uncertainty that the child may be returned to their birth family or moved to an alternative placement with other family/connected people.
- The dually-approved carers are supported by an adoption social worker who provides intensive advice and support. The adoption social worker provides a fostering handbook and details regarding fostering requirements. Information about any available support groups and training courses is also provided. They continue to offer support up until the point of an adoption matching panel or if the child leaves the early permanence placement.
- Once an approved adopter, dually approved carers receive information about children needing early permanence placements. Information is shared with adopters about the child. The adoption social worker supports the carers in helping them decide if they feel that they are able to meet the child's needs and manage the particular set of circumstances around the child. A meeting or a telephone call with the Medical Advisor is arranged to share information regarding the child's health needs and background.
- If the child's social worker feels that the carers are a good match and that they are able to meet all of the child's needs, then (wherever possible) there is a Pre-Matching meeting where arrangements are considered regarding the placement of the child and if possible, a transitions plan put in place for the child to move to the dually approved carers. Whilst fostering the child, the carers are kept updated about the care plan. If the court decides that the child should be adopted, then the adoption social worker, in agreement with the child's social worker will recommend that the carers attend matching panel. If this match is approved the placement will cease to be a fostering placement and it becomes an adoption placement.

11. Support

- Each adopter has a named link worker, usually the assessment team social worker who visits regularly to offer support, advice and guidance. The link worker will remain involved up to the adoption order being granted and by arrangement for 12 months thereafter following the order being granted. This support may be provided by the link social worker or the Adoption Support Team.
- All adopters have access to an assessment of need for adoption support when matched with a child and again at the point a child is placed. This assessment and any support services are again reviewed at the point of application for an adoption order. Once an adoption order is granted, adopters (including inter-county adopters) have access to an assessment of need from the appropriate agency, although this does not give an automatic right to a service.
- In making assessments and formulating adoption support plans there may be also consultation with partner agencies with the consent of the adopter(s). The resulting plan will be sent in writing to the adopters who will be invited to comment on the plan. A signed copy of the agreed plan will be kept on file. All adoption support plans are reviewed regularly or when there are changes to the family's circumstances. In the event that a one-off service is requested a detailed plan may not be required. In such cases a letter of notification will be sent to the adopters who will be asked to sign that they are in agreement to the service being provided.

11. Training

The Adoption Service offers regular training and preparation sessions for adopters at all stages of the process. Following the initial preparation training, other programmes and learning opportunities are available to prospective and approved adopters. These include training on the following:

- **Background factors affecting adopted children (e.g. impact of alcohol/substance abuse, domestic violence and/or parental mental health)**
- **Children's needs**
- **Building a secure base and resilience in adopted children**
- **The experience of adopting sibling groups**
- **Adopting with a birth child in the family**
- **Adoption for single carers**
- **Early Permanence – Foster to Adopt including transitions from fostering to adoption**
- **Team around the Child training**



The Adoption Support Team also offers regular training and support sessions for adoptive parents as part of a holistic programme of support. This includes the following:

- **Consultation sessions for members of adoptive families**
- **Consultation sessions in relation to the adopted child experience in school**
- **Therapeutic life story work**
- **Attachment focussed family therapy**
- **Teenagers – in terms of social media, birth family contact**
- **Therapeutic parenting**
- **Contact and telling**
- **Managing challenging behaviour**
- **Social Networking**
- **Theraplay**
- **Foster to Adopt**

Adopters are encouraged to take part in specialist training and to offer mentoring for other adopters coming through the process. The Adoption Panel has training in accordance with regulations; it has a specific programme of learning and development for panel members, who are also invited to adoption service events and training.

12. Adoption Support Fund

The implementation of the Adoption Support Fund in May 2015 has helped many families and individuals in Norfolk access a wider variety of therapeutic services. The overall aim is to help children to recover from their previous experiences and bond with their adoptive families. For further information see: <http://www.adoptionsupportfund.co.uk/>.

Contact

- **In all cases of direct contact between a child and birth family members, a key worker from the Adoption Support Team can be allocated to support those arrangements, if assessed as required.**
- **Financial support may also be available under the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005. This support is means tested on an annual basis.**





13. Monitoring and Evaluation

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

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 adherence to the Performance Development Framework.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Adopters evaluate training, preparation and assessment groups to inform future service development. There are regular focus groups of adopters which meet with the Adoption Service to co-produce improvements and implement new models of practice. This also includes adopter's participation in workstream activities and the Adopt East Alliance Project.
- ✓ Attendance at Panel by adopters is also evaluated for user satisfaction. The chair of the Adoption Panel prepares an Annual Report on the work of the Adoption Panel.
- ✓ The submitted work of the Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for children's care plan for adoption is quality assured by the Panel Advisor and the ADM adviser and reported to the Head of Adoption and Fostering. Quarterly panel management meetings are held to monitor panel activity and to assure quality outcomes for children with a plan for adoption.
- ✓ All reports submitted to the Adoption Panel and the ADM for children's care plans are quality assured by their operational managers, the panel and ADM advisors. Quality assurance reports are sent to children's social workers and managers for each report submitted.
- ✓ The work of the Adoption Agency is reported on an annual basis to elected members through the Children Services Committee Panel.

We also maintain our quality by:

- ✓ The independent Adoption 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 external clinical psychologist who provides therapy supervision and consultation.
- ✓ Collective scrutiny of regional practice and service delivery through membership of the AdoptEast Alliance.
- ✓ Comprehensive, regular inspection by OFSTED which measures the agency's performance against the adoption national minimum standards and regulations. In 2017 Ofsted rated the Adoption Service as Outstanding.

14. Service Feedback and User Involvement

- The Adoption Service aims to seek views from a range of service users, including representatives from other agencies, from adopters, from young people and from adult adoptees, and birth relatives.
- Service user feedback is proactively sought and listened to so that our services continue to improve, including:
 - ✓ Evaluation forms are completed by prospective adopters/carers who attend preparation and training groups. Similarly, feedback will be sought regarding their experience at panel.
 - ✓ 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.
 - ✓ Undertaking periodic user satisfaction surveys of adopters over a period of years asking for information on the quality of adoption support received and their overall experiences (both positive and negative) of the adoption and concurrent planning process, with an opportunity to make suggestions and improvements.
 - ✓ 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.
- We seek feedback from the Advocacy Service, outcome of complaints and lessons from disruption meetings.
- We seek feedback and issue leaflets at all stages of delivery listening to complaints and compliments and ensuring our services continually improve.

15. Recording and Access to Records

- The Adoption Service has a responsibility to maintain accurate records on all adopters and to ensure that information is shared with the user wherever possible. There is a statutory requirement to retain files for 100 years following adoption order. Adopters have a right to access to their records. Adopted children also have a right to access their record when they are 18 years old.
- There are specific safe and secure facilities for the storage and archiving of adoption files. All files are indexed and categorised for ease of retrieval, which can normally be accomplished within 48 hours of request.



16. Safeguarding

- Children placed for adoption both pre- and post-adoption and those in receipt of adoption support services are subject to Norfolk's Local Safeguarding Childrens Board (NSCB) Child Protection procedures.
- It is also Norfolk Policy to refer allegations and concerns to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) alongside safeguarding procedures. Whenever an allegation is made that a child placed with adopters may be suffering abuse or neglect, these procedures will be followed. The matter will be investigated, and adopters will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and the implications for their circumstances. In accordance with the procedures, consideration will be given first and foremost to safeguarding the child but also to the support needs of the adopters. Written records will be kept of any allegation of abuse.
- Where persons working for the adoption service, prospective adopters and children who have been placed for adoption have concerns about the welfare and safety of the child, they must refer the matter to Children's Services for investigation.





17. 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 Managing Directors 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:

Norfolk County Council has a designated Compliments & Complaints Team which coordinates the investigation of complaints made by prospective and approved foster carers. All complaints are logged by the team. Children, young people or their representative can make a complaint by using the local rate number 0344 800 8020 or accessing the Norfolk County Council website 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 Head of Fostering and Adoption 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 can 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.

18. Contact Details for OFSTED and the Children's Commissioner

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



OFSTED National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Anne's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 40 40 40
e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



If a child has any serious concerns relating to the agency, they can contact the Children's Commissioner of England. The details are:

Office of the Children's Commissioner

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

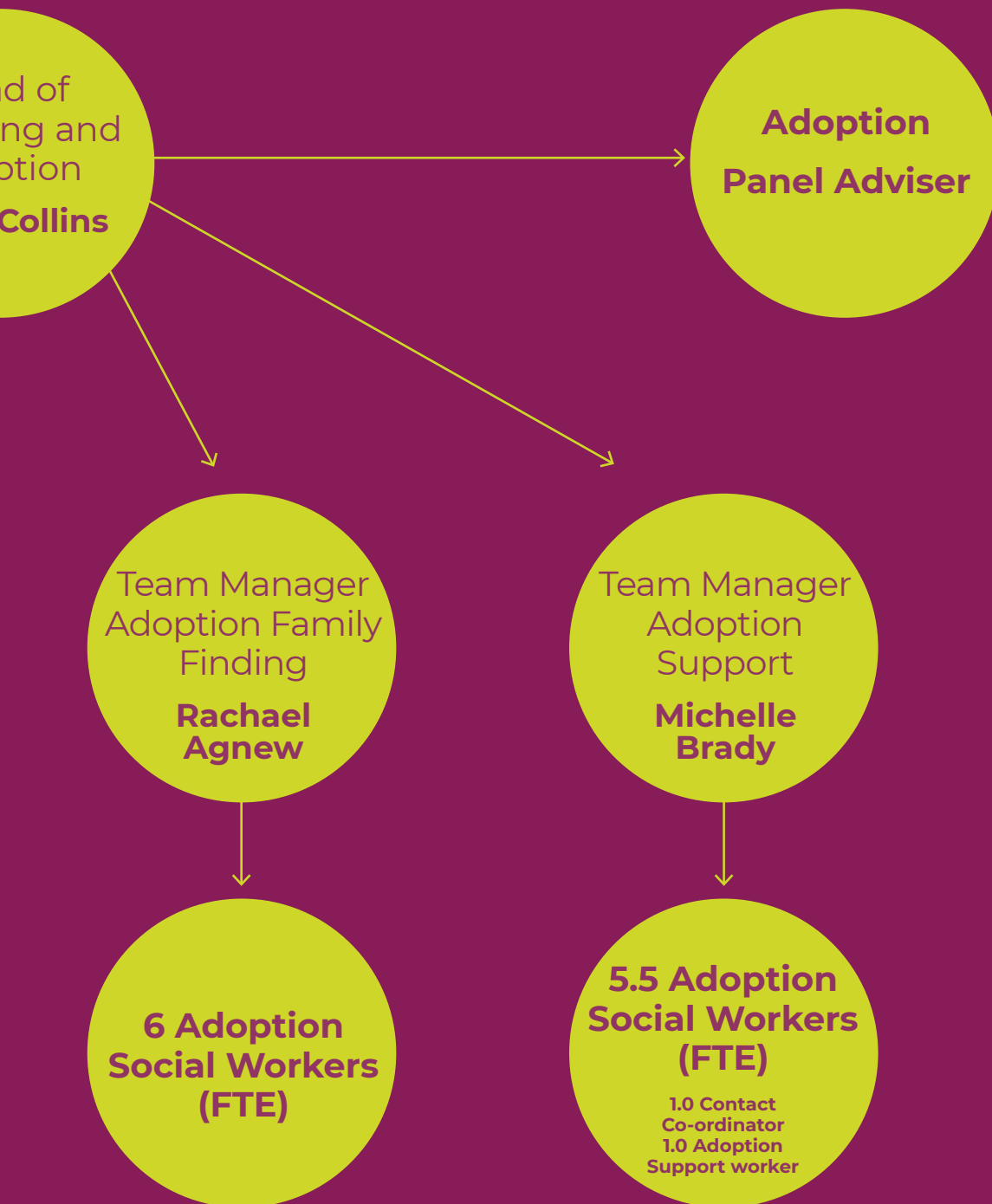


Norfolk County Council



Appendix 1: The Structure of the Adoption Service







Norfolk
**Adoption
Service**



Norfolk County Council