

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

Updated February 2011

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

AIMS

Salford City Council's mission is "to create the best possible quality of life for the people of Salford"

The Children's Services Directorate works in partnership with children, their families and our partners to continuously improve the outcomes for all children and young people across the city. The Directorate wants children growing up in Salford to see and say that their city, home community and our services are great.

The Children's Services Directorate has made a series of pledges to its Looked after Children:

- We want our looked after children to be as healthy as other children. We want them to learn how to prevent ill health and how to stay healthy. When they are sick we want them to be able to access the appropriate medical advice and services as quickly as possible
- We want our looked after children to be safe
- We want our looked after children to have opportunity to achieve to their full potential in education, leisure and sport. We want them to have ambitious dreams for themselves and we want to have high ambitions for them
- We want our looked after children to be able to make a positive contribution to their own lives and to our community
- We want our looked after children to be successful and fulfilled in adult life. We want them to have full opportunity to take part in further and higher education when they leave school and to achieve meaningful employment
- We want our looked after children to know that they belong
- We will provide for our children by seeing each of them as an individual, having regard to disability and ethnicity and we will ensure that they can reach their full potential and do not suffer from discrimination.

The Adoption Service is part of the Children's Services Directorate Looked after Children Service.

The Looked after Children Service brings together placement and support services for children in the council's care under one umbrella so that the help children need to achieve good outcomes is holistic and co-ordinated.

The Looked after Children Service aims to provide children with safe, good quality placements which meet their needs and which can lead to the permanence and stability needed to promote good outcomes for the future.

Permanence can be achieved through a return home to birth parents, placement with a family member supported by a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order or through adoption outside the family. Where legal permanence cannot be achieved, or is not appropriate, the aim is to provide stable long term foster care for as many children as possible.

The Adoption Service supports and contributes to these aims by working to provide an effective, efficiently managed and high quality range of adoption services within available resources, to meet the needs of children who have a plan for adoption and ensure the best possible outcomes for them and to support all parties affected by adoption.

The Adoption Service has a core role in supporting the City Council as corporate parent for children who cannot live with their own families, who are in need of an adoptive family, and for whom it has responsibility.

DIRECTORATE OBJECTIVES

The Adoption Service will work towards the five outcomes for children set out by the government in 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' and given legal force in the Children Act 2004.

- ❑ **Be Healthy**
- ❑ **Stay Safe**
- ❑ **Enjoy and Achieve**
- ❑ **Make a Positive Contribution**
- ❑ **Achieve Economic Well – Being**

The service is a key part of the council's strategy to ensure that children who are unable to live with their birth family have security, stability and are cared for in a family setting.

The Adoption Service makes an important contribution in relation to the Directorate's performance against PSA Targets and key indicators of progress against which children's services are measured.

ADOPTION SERVICE OBJECTIVES

- ❑ To meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations and Guidance.
- ❑ To meet the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services and promote good practice in adoption.
- ❑ To have in place a recruitment strategy which ensures that a range of adoptive placements are available to meet the assessed needs of all children with a plan for adoption.
- ❑ To target recruitment on those prospective adopters most likely to meet the needs of the children waiting for families.
- ❑ To ensure that prospective adopters from all backgrounds are welcomed without prejudice, regardless of ethnic origin, age, disability, background, marital or employment status and considered on their individual merits.
- ❑ To ensure that anyone seeking to use adoption services is treated courteously and with respect and their enquiry is dealt with in a timely efficient manner.
- ❑ To ensure that the preparation process prepares adopters as well as possible for the task of parenting adopted children.
- ❑ To ensure that the child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process and that their wishes and feelings are taken into account.
- ❑ To provide a range of adoption support services aimed at preventing the disruption of adoptive placements and assisting adoptive families, adoptees and birth families with the lifelong impact of adoption.
- ❑ To influence the wider Directorate to ensure that adoption is considered as a positive option for achieving permanence for children who cannot be cared for within their family of birth.
- ❑ To influence the wider Directorate to make the decision about how best to meet each child's need for permanence in a timely way and after an assessment of the child's needs to which all relevant people have contributed.
- ❑ To engage in a child centred matching, introduction and placement process.
- ❑ To work to increase the percentage of children looked after who are adopted to meet both national and local targets

- ❑ To ensure that children with an adoption plan are placed without undue delay
- ❑ To work in partnership with other local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies as part of the regional Adoption 22 consortium.
- ❑ To take into account the views of service users and a range of professionals in developing and monitoring services.

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS OF CARE

Safeguarding personal information

Data Protection

The Children's Services Directorate has guidance for staff on the keeping, storage and handling of personal information for both electronic and manually recorded data. The Adoption Service will operate within this guidance and will take steps to ensure all personal information is appropriately safeguarded.

Confidentiality

The Children's Services Directorate operates a Confidentiality Code of Conduct applicable to all people, including adopters and prospective adopters and professionals in other agencies working to effect the placement of children, who have access to personal information held by the Children's Services Directorate.

Prospective adopters undertake, as part of their preparation and approval, to treat with the utmost confidence all information shared with them about children in need of adoptive placements and their birth families.

Recording Policy

The Children's Services Directorate has a recording policy which sets out in detail the requirements for record keeping with relevant safeguards, including security protocols for electronic records. Leaflets are available setting out how service users can access their records.

Partnership

The Adoption Service works in partnership with adopters and prospective adopters, children and young people and with other professionals in the City Council and external agencies, statutory and voluntary, involved in the delivery of adoption and wider Children's Services.

Adoption Social Workers undertake a liaison role with Children and Families Social Work teams to offer information and consultation on adoption issues.

The Adoption Service operates in partnership with other local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies as part of the Adoption 22 North West regional consortium.

The Adoption Service has full membership of the British Association for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF).

Maximising Life Chances

Education

The Children's Services Directorate promotes educational opportunities for looked after and adopted children with the aim of improving their educational attainments and life chances.

Prospective adopters play a crucial role in ensuring that children receive regular education appropriate to their needs and are encouraged to access learning opportunities available to them. The importance of this is considered during the preparation process.

Health

The Children's Services Directorate is committed to ensuring that the health needs of looked after and adopted children are identified and met. Information and advice on children's health is available from the Adoption Agency's Medical advisor, Dr. K Edynbry.

Prospective adopters play an important role in ensuring that children placed with them receive appropriate health care including statutory medicals, access to specialist care including CAMHS services, dental checks, optical checks and health promotion information.

Leisure

The Children's Services Directorate actively supports the inclusion of looked after and adopted children in leisure activities. The Adoption Service also organises and commissions events for adopted children and their adoptive families.

Promoting Independence

In recruiting adoptive families the Adoption Service aims to ensure that young people are provided with the best opportunity to grow into well-adjusted, healthy, adults with the ability to make relationships, take care of themselves and contribute to society. Adopters are encouraged to help young people develop a real sense of identity with knowledge about and pride in their origins and, where it is judged to be in the young person's best interests, to ensure that agreed contact arrangements with their families of origin are supported and facilitated

Safety and Security

Safe Care

The Adoption Service aims to provide adoptive placements for children which protect them from abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Some criminal offences such as serious/sexual crimes against children automatically debar people from becoming adoptive parents. Careful screening

of all prospective adopters is an essential part of the approval process and during the assessment the Adoption Social Worker will take up, amongst other checks, a Criminal Records Bureau check and follow up at least three personal references.

All prospective adopters consider safe care as part of the preparation process and during the home study will focus, with their Adoption Social Worker, on their own life experiences, strengths and vulnerabilities and how these might impact on their ability to deal with the challenges and demands of adoptive parenting.

As part of the Children's Services Directorate, the Adoption Service works closely with the Safeguarding Unit, in particular the Local Authority Designated Officer, in ensuring the protection of children, including those placed for adoption. Where allegations of abuse are made the safety and welfare of children is the paramount consideration. There is a LSCB approved procedure for dealing with allegations of abuse against prospective adopters in which the obligations of the adoption service to ensure that children are protected, and that support is available to prospective adopters, are laid out.

Control and Discipline

Training on behaviour management is included in the preparation process and there are opportunities for adopters to get together with others to consider how to handle certain behaviours once children have been placed.

The Adoption Service has a clear policy that corporal punishment in any form is not permitted. Prospective adopters are also not permitted to deprive children of food or restrict contact as punishment and should be sensitive to the child's past experience in determining the most appropriate sanctions.

Bullying

Salford City Council has an anti bullying strategy which seeks to address bullying in its widest sense. The Adoption Service fully supports this strategy and is opposed to bullying in all its forms. The Adoption Service believes that it is the right of all young people to live in an environment where they feel safe and are free from humiliation, oppression and abuse.

Adopters are expected to create an anti bullying and anti discriminatory climate in their homes and to set a positive example to young people in their attitude. They also play a key role in recognising bullying, reporting it appropriately and helping children deal with its impact, helping them develop strategies for dealing with any form of bullying or discrimination they may encounter.

Identity

Valuing Diversity

The Adoption Service aims to provide placements for children that will promote equality and value diversity. The recruitment strategy seeks to recruit a range of adopters from a range of backgrounds who can address the needs of children

arising from race, culture, ethnic origin, language, disability, gender and sexuality.

The Children's Services Directorate policy is that wherever possible, children will be placed with adopters of a matching racial and cultural heritage. Where this cannot be achieved, or would cause undue delay in achieving permanence, a plan will be formulated to ensure that children's needs in relation to their cultural, religious and racial identity are met, through the provision of services or appropriate support.

Contact

The Adoption Service is committed to ensuring that children in adoptive placements maintain contact with family members according to their individual adoption plan. Consideration of the importance of birth families and their life long importance in the adoption process is included in the preparation process. Support with ongoing contact arrangements will be considered and reviewed as part of the Adoption Support Plan.

Listening to children

The Children's Services Directorate actively promotes the ability of young people to express their views and works to ensure that young people are included in service planning and evaluation. The Adoption Service welcomes feedback from young people and adopted adults and encourages adopters to assist their adopted children to participate in any consultation opportunities.

Children's Rights and Advocacy Project

Young people looked after in adoptive placements have access to the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service delivered in partnership with The Children's Society.

SERVICES PROVIDED

The Family Placement Service provides Fostering and Adoption Services on a citywide basis for Salford City Council. The team is part of an integrated multi – disciplinary service for Looked After Children.

The following Adoption Services are provided:

- Information provision to enquirers with an interest in becoming adopters both domestic and inter-country
- Targeted recruitment of prospective adopters who are likely to be able to take those children who are in need of adoptive placements
- Preparation and training of prospective adopters
- An individual assessment process

- Family Finding for some children who are waiting for a suitable family
- A managed matching process for the placement of children with both in house and inter-agency adopters that ensures that the child's needs, wishes and feelings have been fully considered in relation to the placement
- Support of adopters
- Assistance to approved adopters in accessing relevant training.
- Provision of court reports in Care and Adoption Proceedings.
- Organisation and administration of the Directorate's Adoption Panel
- A counselling service for adoptees wishing to gain access to their birth records.
- A Non Agency adoption service to prospective adoptive parents who notify the city council of their intention to adopt, including welfare supervision and the provision of suitability reports.
- Counselling of birth parents wishing to relinquish a child to adoption.
- Post adoption support for adoptive families who have adopted through the agency or who qualify for support under the Adoption Support Regulations 2005 through residence in Salford.
- A specialist therapeutic adoption support service provided in partnership with CAMHS.
- Provision of information, advice, consultation and training for children and families social work staff and other professionals on adoption and permanence issues
- Contribution to policies, procedures and practice guidance in relation to children looked after, fostering and adoption
- Commissioning of adoption related services in the Voluntary sector and liaison with other adoption agencies in relation to services provided regionally.

SERVICES COMMISSIONED

Post Adoption Support and Intermediary Services

Some post adoption support services are also commissioned from After Adoption, a registered voluntary adoption support agency, including search and intermediary services for adopted adults.

Inter country adoption

A service for prospective adopters who wish to adopt a child from abroad is provided through an arrangement with the Nugent Care Society. Prospective adopters can approach the Nugent Care Society directly to receive advice regarding inter-country adoption.

Prospective adopters can apply to the Nugent Care Society to be assessed and approved. When a placement is made Salford City Council will arrange to delegate statutory functions to the Nugent Care Society

Birth parent counselling

A counselling and support service for birth parents losing children through adoption is provided through a contractual arrangement with Caritas Salford.

Reporting and monitoring arrangements are in place for all commissioned services.

STATISTICAL SUMMARY

	March 2009	March 2010
Adopters awaiting placement	11	15
Adopters approved in the year	20	20
Number of children placed for adoption	20	22
Number of children agreed as in need of adoption during year at panel	19	33
Number of plan changes from adoption	6	6
Number of children linked with adopters during year	31	27
Number of children linked with in house adopters	18	22
Number of other LA children placed with Salford approved adopters	4	3
Number of inter-agency links made during the year	13	5
Number of children placed with adopters during the year	28	30
Number of adoption placement disruptions	0	0
Number of adoption orders granted	32	29
% Looked after children adopted or SGO	10.4%	11.4%
% children placed within 12 months of agency decision (SHOBPA)	62%	59%

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Business Planning

The performance of the Adoption Service is monitored through the Directorate's Business Planning processes, through national indicators and Local area Agreement targets. Statistical information on all aspects of the service is collected and analysed and contributes to service planning. An annual Business Plan is produced which evaluates the work of the team during the year and plans future development.

Supervision

All staff employed in the service receive regular individual supervision in accordance with the Directorate's supervision policy.

Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panel acts as an important quality control mechanism and provides feedback to the agency about the quality of work. The panel also considers reports on any placement disruptions and advises on any lessons that can be learnt for future practice.

The Head of Service, Looked after Children acts as Agency Decision Maker for the Adoption Panel and is therefore able to monitor the quality of the team's work through reports being presented to the panel and through regular meetings with the panel chairs at which performance issues are discussed.

The Team Manager for Adoption acts as the panel adviser and sits on the Adoption Panel.

Feedback

Feedback is also actively sought and welcomed from service users.

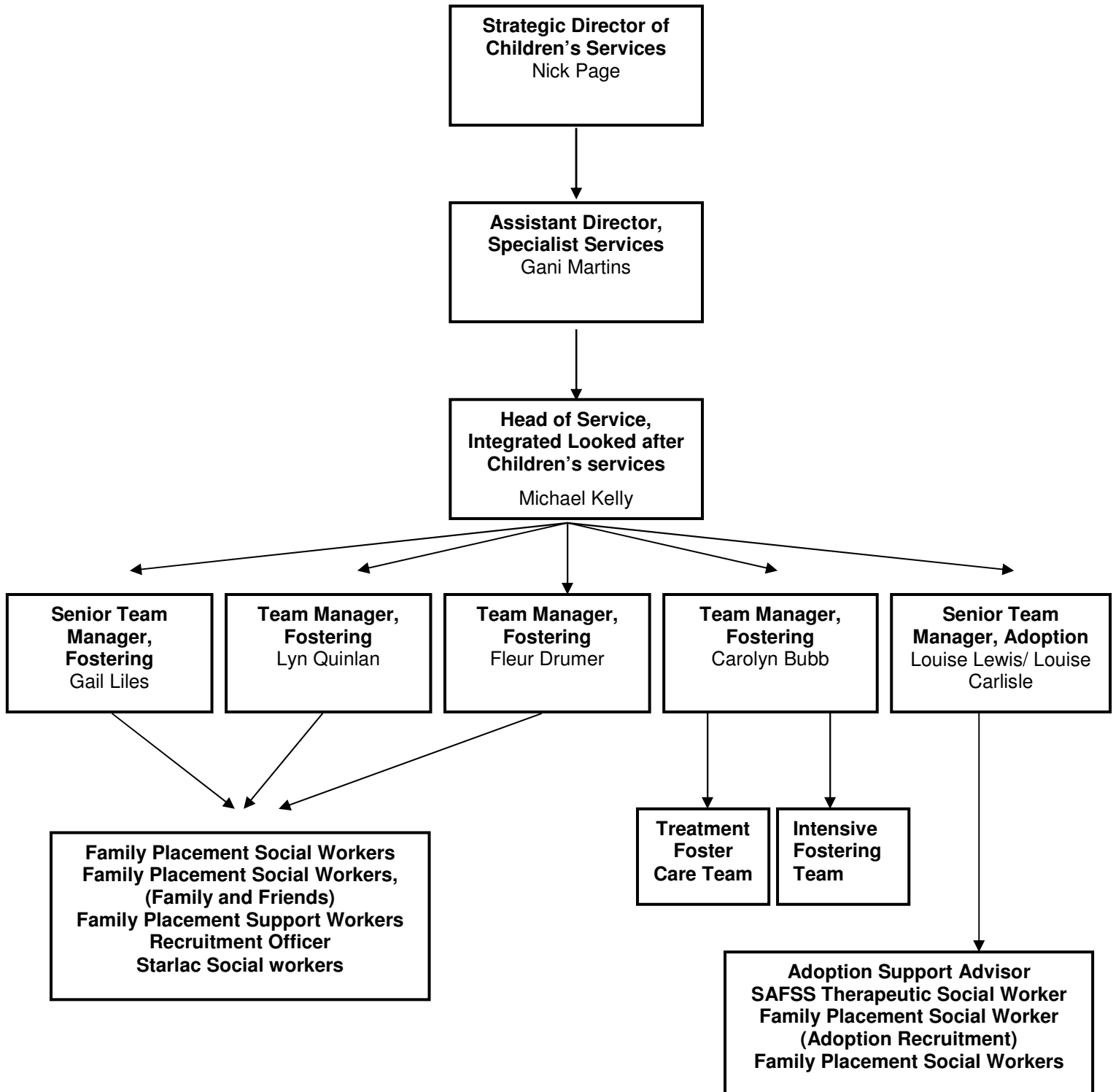
Evaluation forms are completed by:

- Enquirers regarding their initial contact with the agency
- Enquirers attending Open Meetings
- Prospective adopters following attendance at preparation groups
- Applicants who attend panel

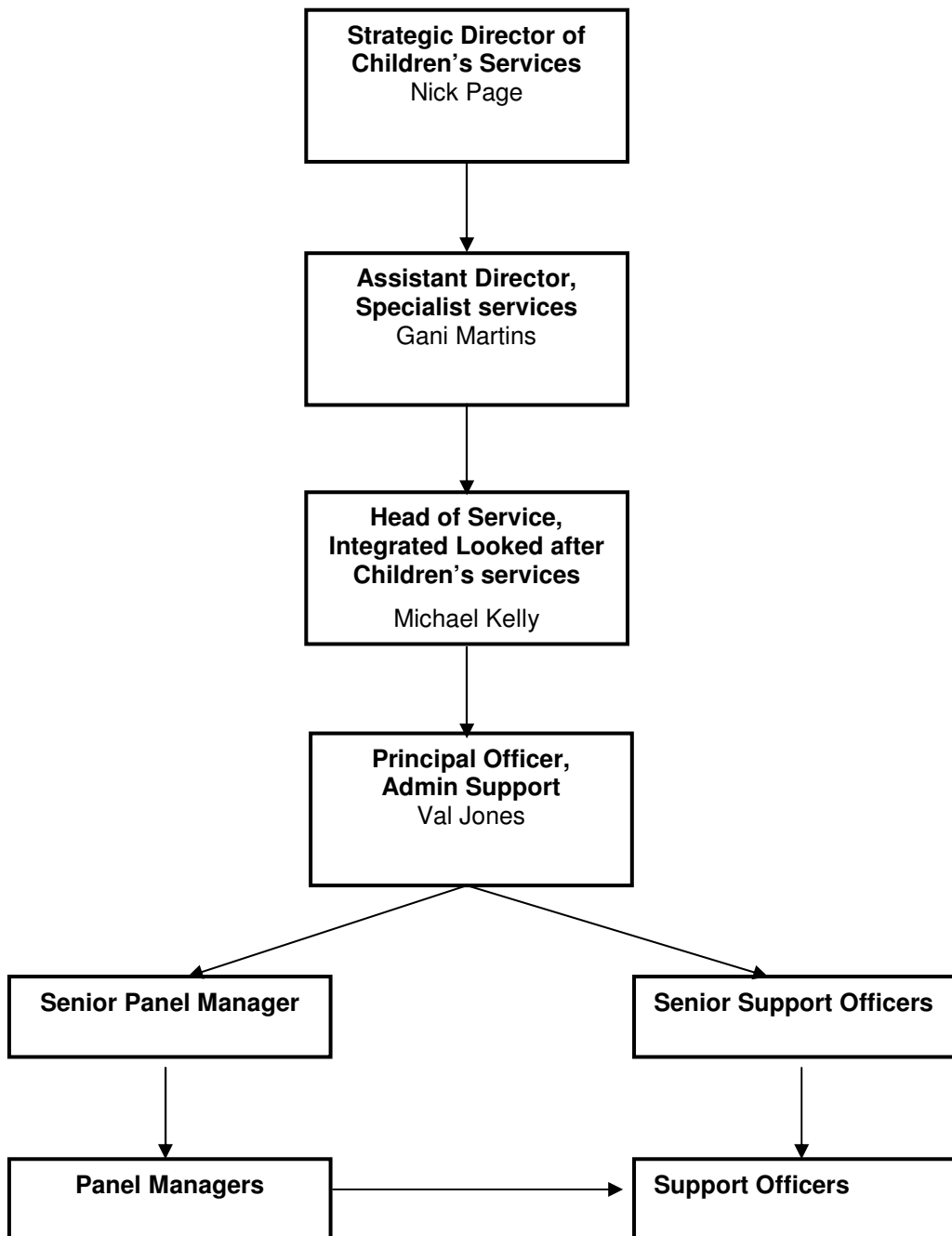
A final visit is undertaken by a Team Manager at the conclusion of the assessment process when adopters are invited to comment on their experience of the agency to date.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURE

Operational Staff



Administrative Staff



STAFFING

The Adoption Service operates as part of the Family Placement Service. Adoption work is undertaken by the Adoption Team which includes:

Operational Staff

Head of Service, Integrated Looked After Children Services

The post holder is the nominated manager for both the Adoption and Fostering Services and is responsible for the strategic planning and development of Family Placement Services and the operational work of the team. The post holder also has strategic responsibility for the Residential Service, the Looked after Children Social Work Team, the Leaving care service (Next Step) specialist Health, Education and CAMHS support teams and the overall service for Looked after Children.

The current post holder is Michael Kelly. Mr. Kelly has been a qualified social worker since 1990 and has worked in various positions throughout Salford Children's services since 1980. He has worked in residential care services, Children and Families social work, managed residential and support services and the leaving care social work service, before taking up his current post in October 2011. Mr. Kelly holds an NVQ Level 5 in Strategic Management and is registered with the GSCC as a social worker.

Senior Team Manager (Adoption)

The Senior Team Manager is responsible for the operational management of the team and has additional responsibility for overall development of their designated service and performance management.

The Senior Team Manager post is currently job shared. Each of the post holders has substantial experience in children and families social work, adoption and fostering, is a qualified social worker registered with the GSCC and holds NVQ Level 5 in Management.

Each post holder has responsibility for designated staff and areas of the adoption service.

Adoption Support Services Advisor

The role of the Adoption Support Services Advisor is to develop, co-ordinate and plan Post Adoption Services at both a strategic and an individual level. The post is a key contact point for information and advice for adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives. This work includes signposting people to other services, assessments for post adoption support, direct service provision to individual families, looking at post adoption contact issues and access to birth record enquiries. The Adoption Support Advisor is a qualified, experienced social worker with a therapeutic background and registered with the GSCC.

Post Adoption Support Worker

This post is responsible for the administration and co-ordination of the letter box contact scheme and the development and maintenance of information systems for the post adoption service. The post holder works alongside the ASSA and also undertakes other aspects of post adoption work supervised by the ASSA. This post does not require a social work qualification

Family Placement Social Worker (Adoption Recruitment and Family Finding)

This post carries responsibility for developing and implementing a needs led recruitment strategy and for family finding on an inter-agency basis for children in need of adoptive placement. This is a qualified social work post with a requirement for registration with the GSCC. The current post holder is a Senior Practitioner with substantial experience of adoption.

Family Placement Social Workers (Adoption)

6 Family Placement Social Workers (Adoption) work primarily within the Adoption Service and undertake all aspects of adoption work including training, assessment and support of adoptive parents, post adoption support work, access to birth records counselling and non agency adoption work.

Staff recruited to the team meets the requirements of the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 and are qualified social workers registered with the GSCC, with at least 3 years experience as children and families social workers.

Therapeutic Social Worker (Adoption Support)

The Salford Adoptive Families Support Service (SAFSS) team includes a Therapeutic Social Worker post. The post holder offers advice and support to social workers and adoptive families with regard to adoption issues, is involved with pre approval and post approval training and can be involved in direct work with children when required.

7 Family Placement Support Workers

The role of Family Placement Support Workers is to provide practical and emotional support to foster carers and some adoptive parents. Family Placement Support Workers are not social work qualified but have experience in working with children.

Recruitment Officer

The Recruitment Officer is primarily responsible for foster carer recruitment including advertising and publicity and initial visits to prospective foster carers but also has some input into the recruitment of adoptive families.

Administrative Staff

Principal Officer, Family Placement & Residential Admin Support

The Principal Officer, Admin Support is responsible for the day to day management of the administrative team, management information and provides administrative support to the Head of Service.

Senior Panel Manager

The Senior Panel Manager is responsible for the organisation minutes and monitoring of the Adoption and Permanence Panel, fostering panel, fostering reviews and access to care panels. The manager is also responsible for the compilation of statistical information.

2 Panel Managers

The Panel Managers are responsible for the organisation and minutes of the panels. The post holder deputises for the Senior Panel Manager when necessary.

2 Senior Support Officers

1 Senior Support Officer is primarily responsible for supporting the Recruitment and Training of Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents. 1 Senior Support Officer works primarily within the Adoption and fostering service as Panel Manager.

5 Support Officers

There are 5 Support Officer Posts within the Fostering and Adoption Services each carrying out designated functions.

Fostering Team

From time to time suitably qualified and experienced members of the Fostering Team are involved in adoption work. Advice and Support is made available to them from the Senior Team Manager, Adoption or the Head of Service, Looked after Children. Full details of Fostering Team members are included in the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose which is updated annually.

Qualifications and Hours of Work

Family Placement Team Turnpike House, 631 Eccles New Road, Salford, M50 1SW			
Position	Name/s of post holder/s	Hours	Relevant Qualifications
Head of service, Integrated Looked After children's services	Michael Kelly	36	CSS NVQ Level 5 Strategic Management
Senior team manager (Fostering)	Gail Liles	36	BA (Hons) CQSW PQ Child Care Award NVQ Level 5 Strategic Management
Senior team managers (Adoption and Permanence) (job share)	Louise Lewis	22.2	BA (Hons) CQSW NVQ Level 5 Operational Management
	Louise Carlisle	25.2	BA (Hons) CQSW NVQ Level 5 Operational Management
Team managers, Fostering	Lyn Quinlan	36	BA (Hons) CSS NVQ Level 5 Strategic Management
	Fleur Drumer	36	DIPSW PQ Child Care Award
	Carolyn Bubb (Treatment Foster Care and Focus schemes)	36	BA (Hons) Youth and Community Work Diploma DIPSW PQ Child Care Award
Family Placement Social Worker (Adoption Recruitment and Family Finding)	Pat Grigg	36	BA (Hons) CQSW PQ Child Care Award
Family Placement Social Workers (Adoption and Permanence) 6 posts	Sheila Daly	28.8	DIPSW PQ1
	Kristen Rumsey	36	BA (Hons) DIPSW, PQ1
	Mark Tobin	36	DIPSW PQ1
	Dawn Tunnicliffe	36	BA (Hons) DIPSW PQ Child Care Award
	Ian Williams	36	BA (Hons) DIPSW PQ Child Care Award BSL Level 1
Adoption Support Services Advisor	Carole Pelling	36	BA (Hons) CQSW PQ Child Care Award
Post Adoption Support Worker	Caroline Simpson	36	Level 2 Counselling Concepts RSA 3 (Typing)
Therapeutic Social Worker SAFSS (Job share)	Vacancy	18	
	Joanne Farraker	18	BA (Hons) DIPSW Post Graduate Diploma (Play Therapy)

Family placement support workers 5 posts	Janice Boulger	36	NVQ 4 in health & social care City and Guilds in community care NVQ 2 Mentoring
	Viv Hoy	36	Diploma in counselling NVQ
	Katrina Jackson	22	NNEB CPQS
	Tracey Morris	29	NNEB Currently progressing NVQ level 4 in health & social care
	Judith Whittleworth	18.5	NNEB CPQS
Recruitment officer	Emma Harris	36	BA (Hons)
Principal Officer, Admin Support – Family Placement & Residential	Val Jones	36	HNC Public Administration ECDL NVQ Level 4 Operational Management NVQ A1 Assessors Award
Senior Panel Manager (Fostering Panel) & (Adoption and Permanence Panel)	Helen Perry	36	NVQ 2 Business and Administration
Panel Manager	Karen Lever	36	NEBSM RSA 1,2 WP101 NVQ Level 2 Team Leader
Panel Manager	Sophie Beccera-Adams	36	
Senior Support Officer (Recruitment and Training)	Catherine McCormick	36	NEBSM D32/D33 assessor IPD
Senior Support Officer (Adoption)[Panel Manager]	Christine Edwards	36	RSA1 Typing
Support officers 5 posts	Mary Cameron	36	HNC Business RSAs WP101
	Kate Dickson	36	GCSEs Currently progressing NVQ in Business and Administration
	Stacey Hughes	36	GCSEs A Level Currently progressing ECDL
	Sharon Gresty	36	CSEs City and Guilds Diploma in Business Studies

All staff are recruited in accordance with the council's Recruitment and Selection Code of Practice and procedures. Specific arrangements are in place to meet the requirements of regulated services.

RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS

Background

Recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval practice is underpinned by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its associated Regulations and Guidance and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.

The Directorate's aim is to recruit a wide range of adoptive families in order to have a choice of adoptive placements to meet the individual needs of any relinquished infant and every looked after child with a plan for adoption.

The targeted recruitment of appropriate adopters is a major priority for the Adoption Service and is continually monitored to ensure that resources are used as effectively as possible.

The recruitment strategy is based on an understanding of the needs of the looked after children who have adoption as their plan. The service currently needs to recruit more adopters for children of all ages, however, there are particular shortages of adopters able to take sibling groups, children aged 5+ (particularly boys), disabled children and children with challenging behaviour. The service is particularly keen to increase the numbers of adopters who are black or from minority ethnic backgrounds and families which reflect the dual heritage of many of the children in need of adoptive placements.

The recruitment of adopters is a continuous activity. Specific or targeted campaigns also take place as appropriate.

Adopters are recruited through a variety of means including the Council website, advertising, editorial and features in newspapers, magazines and specialist journals, leaflets and fliers, posters, bus advertising, yellow pages, television and radio, car parking tickets, promotional materials and personal recommendation. Images used in advertising and publicity try to reflect the range of adopters who need to be recruited.

The Adoption Service recognises and values the contribution of existing adopters to the recruitment process and actively supports their involvement in recruitment and preparation activity.

The Adoption Service is also committed to taking advantage of opportunities for collaborative working with other local authorities and voluntary agencies in the recruitment of adopters and actively supports regional and national recruitment initiatives.

Salford Adoption Service is part of a regional consortium of 22 North West adoption agencies, Adoption 22. Adoption 22 operates a secure, shared web based database to facilitate the matching of children and adoptive families across the region.

The Adoption Service also actively uses the National Adoption Register to maximise placement opportunities.

Recruitment Process

Applications are welcome from individuals and families from all parts of the community and all cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, regardless of marital status, employment, gender, sexuality or disability. Applicants must be over 21 years old and in reasonable health to provide care for a child. A criminal record is not a barrier to application but anyone who has been convicted of an offence against a child and some serious offences against adults is excluded from becoming an adopter.

The purpose of the recruitment process is to provide information about the need for adopters, the tasks involved in parenting children not born to you and the support available, so that members of the public are enabled to make an informed decision whether to apply to adopt. It is also an opportunity for unsuitable applicants to be screened or counselled out.

Enquirers are able to telephone a dedicated hotline, which is staffed during normal office hours. Calls are answered by a member of the administrative staff who is trained and informed in the relevant issues and is able to advise enquirers about their application. All enquirers are sent an information pack within 24 hours of their initial phone call.

Enquirers are then invited to an Adoption Open Evening at which they have the chance to meet other people who have adopted and find out more about becoming an adoptive parent. Information is available about children in need of adoptive placements and there is also an opportunity for enquirers to discuss their individual circumstances with a Family Placement Social Worker.

Open Evenings are held approximately 5 times per year.

Enquirers who indicate their continuing interest are then visited at home by a Family Placement Social Worker from the Adoption Team.

The purpose of the visit is to:

- Provide information about adoption to assist enquirers with deciding if adoption is appropriate for them
- Provide preliminary information about the qualities needed to adopt, the expectations of adoptive parents, and the support and training that is available in carrying out the role
- Explain the application, assessment and approval process

- Begin to identify potentially problematic issues that may impact on the applicant's suitability.

At the conclusion of this visit enquirers are invited to attend Preparation Groups

ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF ADOPTERS

Assessment and approval of adopters is carried out in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.

All prospective adopters are required to attend preparation groups held over one full day followed by 4 evenings at intervals during the year. The overall aims of the preparation groups are to ensure that applicants can learn more about the children who need families and have sufficient information to decide whether they have the qualities to become an adoptive parent. Each preparation course is led by 2 Adoption Social Workers with a contribution from experienced adopters. A course handbook is available which details the purpose and content of the group sessions. Information about applicants' contribution in preparation groups is fed into the assessment process by the group leaders.

Following this, prospective adopters are invited to make a formal written application which includes giving information to enable the required checks to be undertaken. These include a medical with the applicant's own doctor and a Criminal Bureau Records check as certain serious/sexual offences rule out taking an application further. Less serious offences are discussed and are balanced against the skills and qualities being offered. Applicants are asked to nominate 3 referees (one of whom can be a relative) who know them well and can provide an opinion as to the applicant's suitability to adopt.

A full range of safeguarding checks is routinely carried out on all applicants to adopt:

- Identity checks e.g. Passport, Driving License, Birth certificate, utility bills.
- Documentation to support any name changes, naturalisation etc.
- Confirmation of National Insurance Number
- Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure on each applicant, all members of their household aged 16 or over and any family members or friends who will be closely involved in the care of the children.
- Marriage and Divorce Certificates where relevant.
- Written references from 2 unrelated personal referees who know the applicant/s well and can comment on their relationships with children and other adults. These referees are then visited and their views discussed

- A third reference which can be from a relative who will be interviewed wherever possible.
- Statutory references; NSPCC, Health Visiting Service, Social Services, Probation, Education.
- Employer reference from current or most recent employer and any employer where the applicant has worked with children or vulnerable adults
- Medical examination with the applicant's own G.P. with comments by the agency medical advisor.

Assessments of all prospective adopters are carried out by qualified social workers using BAAF Form PAR, a copy of which is usually given to applicants as a guide to the areas to be covered.

During the assessment all members of the household, including birth children, are interviewed and their views obtained. Adult children who no longer live at home are interviewed wherever practical and feedback sought about their experiences of being parented by the applicant/s. Ex partners are also interviewed unless there is explicit reason not to do so with the agreement of a Family Placement Team Manager.

Where necessary the assessing Family Placement Social Worker seeks additional information from schools, other professionals or extended family members who have knowledge of the applicant/s and their parenting abilities.

A Health and Safety checklist is completed covering all aspects of home safety. Safety assessments of family pets are also made, particularly where dogs are kept.

During the course of the assessment expert advice is available from the Head of Service, Looked after Children and the Safeguarding Unit. Other expert input is sought as necessary.

Subject to the requirements of legislation and guidance on the disclosure of records, the PAR is shared with the applicant/s who have up to 28 days to make suggestions for amendments. Information given in confidence by referees is not disclosed although referees are encouraged to share this with applicants where this will assist the assessment and decision making process. Applicants are entitled and encouraged to make their own written contributions to the PAR.

At the conclusion of the assessment process a final visit is made by an Adoption Team Manager. This visit aims to ensure the fullest information is available to the Adoption and Permanence Panel particularly on any issues that may prove problematic. It also serves as a quality control and feedback mechanism for the work of individual Family Placement Social Workers.

The Adoption Panel

All completed assessments are presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel for recommendation regarding the applicants' suitability to adopt. The Adoption and Permanence Panel is made up of people who have either personal knowledge of adoption or who have a professional expertise in this area. The panel is constituted as required by the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It is chaired by someone independent of the City Council and many of the panel members are also required to be independent of the Directorate.

The role of the panel is to consider each application and to make a recommendation as to whether or not the applicant is suitable to adopt. In each case the panel gives advice about the number and age of children applicants would be best suited to care for.

The panel also considers and makes recommendations about which children's needs will be best met by an adoptive placement and which adoptive family is best able to meet each child's needs. It gives advice about contact arrangements for children to be placed for adoption.

Applicants are invited to attend in person so that they can meet panel members and make their own representation in relation to the outcome. The final decision regarding approval is made by Head of Service, Looked after Children who is the agency decision maker. Written confirmation of the agency decision is sent to all applicants.

Applicants who are not considered suitable to adopt have a right of appeal either by representation to the agency for their case to be reconsidered, or to an independent body through the Independent Review Mechanism.

The Independent Review Mechanism is operated by BAAF and contact details are given in the section on complaints. The Independent Review Mechanism allows access to a further panel that will make a new recommendation back to the agency for consideration.

ADOPTER TRAINING

The Adoption Service is committed to providing high quality training for adopters both to prepare them for adopting and to assist and support them in the task of caring for their adopted children.

Preparation training

All adopters are required to attend preparation training as part of the preparation, assessment and approval process.

Additional Training

All approved adopters have access to additional training. This is intended to build on the knowledge gained during the preparation groups and to enable adopters to develop their skills as they gain practical experience of parenting. Individual adopters are invited to attend relevant training events organised by external providers. SAFSS offer parenting courses to adopters with placements. Salford and Manchester CAMHS jointly offer a number of specialist training sessions to waiting adopters. A range of materials is also available within the Family Placement Team to help adoptive parents expand their knowledge and develop their skills either independently or with the assistance of their Family Placement Social Worker.

SUPPORT OF ADOPTERS

Adoption Support Plan

All adopters, once they are matched with a child or children, have an Adoption Support Plan drawn up. This covers their needs in relation to the child or children placed and is presented to the Adoption Panel and to the Agency Decision Maker as part of the process of agreeing the specific placement. The plan is then implemented by a range of people and by access to a range of support services. Where responsibility for adoption support will eventually pass to another local authority through residence in that area consultation is made with the relevant adoption agency in drawing up the plan so that needs and responsibilities are clear.

Family Placement Social Worker

The primary responsibility of the Family Placement Social Worker is to the welfare of the child in placement. However, the Family Placement Social Worker has a key role in the preparation and assessment of adopters and in assisting them through the matching and placement process. They are also responsible for ensuring a plan for post placement and post adoption support is drawn up and implemented. The Family Placement Social Worker acts as a link with the Directorate and will give advice on departmental policy and procedure, adopter finance issues and the expectations of adopters.

Adoption Support Services Advisor

The Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) has an advisory and co-ordinating role and will act as a central point of contact for anyone wishing to access adoption support services. The Adoption Support Services Advisor will assist with the assessment of support needs and in ensuring appropriate services can be accessed.

Post Adoption Support Worker

The Post Adoption Support Worker has responsibility for the co-ordination and maintenance of the letter box contact scheme and can offer individual support and advice to adopters and birth relatives undertaking letter box contact. The Post Adoption Support Worker also works alongside the ASSA in offering advice and support to adoptive families.

Family Placement Support Worker

The role of the Family Placement Support Worker is to provide emotional and practical support to specific foster carers and occasionally adopters in their task of looking after children. Involvement will usually be for a time limited period or a specific piece of work.

Duty Family Placement Social Worker

The Family Placement Team operates a duty system from 8.30 a.m. – 4.30 p.m. Monday to Friday. A Family Placement Social Worker is available to answer calls from foster carers and adopters and deal with emergencies.

Child's Social worker

Social workers for children in need of adoptive placements have an important role to play. They provide essential information about the child, the family background and it is an important part of their role to represent the wishes and feelings of the child especially where the child is very young and less able to do this. Together with members of the Family Placement Team, the child's social worker works to find the right adoptive family for each child, to help establish the child within that family and ensure that support needs have been identified and are being met. Prior to an Adoption Order being granted the child's social worker will carry out statutory requirements in relation to the child and will assist the adopters in making their application to court for an Adoption Order within an agreed timescale.

Support Groups

Adopters are able to access support groups via an arrangement with After Adoption. Groups are also available for children and young people.

Peer Support

Adopters are encouraged to form supportive links with one another and share their learning and experience of caring for adopted children and young people. Adoption Social Workers take an active role in facilitating contact between adopters and identifying contacts between adopters that may prove beneficial.

STARLAC Service

The STARLAC team provide clinical psychology and therapeutic social work services for looked after children in Salford. The project works with foster carers, and social workers to improve mental health and promote permanency for children and young people. Advice is available to carers about dealing with behavioural and attachment difficulties and to promote the stability of the placement.

Salford Adoptive Families Support Service (SAFSS)

The Salford Adoptive Families Support Service is a specialist post adoption psychological and therapeutic social work service provided in partnership with the CAMHS service. The service offers consultation and input to the preparation of children and adopters prior to placement. It is an entitlement service which offers early intervention and post adoption support for children identified as having, or likely to have significant emotional or behavioural difficulties with the aim of promoting stable successful adoption placements.

The Cornerstone Project

The Cornerstone Project is a partnership between Barnardo's and the Children's Services Directorate. It has been developed to provide a therapeutic service to children, their families and carers where there has been an experience of sexual abuse. Consultation and support can be offered to professionals, foster carers or adoptive parents caring for sexually abused children or to help parents or carers deal with the impact of abuse on their family.

Education Services

Children's educational needs are fully considered as part of the matching process and post adoption support planning.

Prospective adoptive parents and children placed with them are entitled to support from services for looked after children while the child is placed prior to an Adoption Order being granted. Assistance will also be given with accessing mainstream education services and with ensuring all appropriate arrangements have been made for the child's education prior to the granting of the order. Where adoptive parents live in another local authority area liaison will be facilitated between the relevant education services.

The Adoption and Permanence panel includes an Education Advisor who is available to assist in accessing appropriate services.

Medical Advisor

Information, advice and support regarding children's health issues are available to adopters and social workers from the agency's medical advisor. An

appointment with the medical advisor is offered to all prospective adopters prior to the placement of any child where there are health related issues.

Health Co-ordinator

Information, advice and support regarding health issues are available to social workers and prospective adopters from the Health Co-ordinator for looked after children.

A multi-agency Health Protocol for looked after children is in place. Children's health needs are considered as part of placement and post adoption support planning and adopters are assisted to access appropriate services.

Emergency Duty Team

The Children's Services Directorate operates an out of hours Emergency Duty Social Work Team. This service is available to prospective adopters in a crisis situation where immediate intervention is necessary to ensure safety.

Financial Support

Financial circumstances should not deter prospective adopters from applying to adopt. Financial help is available both through the local authority placing the child and the tax and benefits system.

Adoption allowances may be paid to adoptive parents by the local authority that places the child under certain circumstances, where it is considered that an adoption would not otherwise be possible or practical.

The circumstances in which an adoption allowance can be paid, the procedure for determining whether an allowance should be paid and how much are all set out in the Adoption Support Regulations 2003.

There are specific arrangements in place for foster carers who adopt children in their care which ensure they are not financially disadvantaged through adoption.

Financial assistance for essential equipment to help with caring for children may be available as a one off payment at the time of making the placement and is considered as part of the matching process.

COMPLAINTS

The Children's Services Directorate welcomes complaints, comments and suggestions about services from service users, their families, carers or representatives. The complaints procedure recognises the vulnerability of complainants and the need to resolve complaints at the most informal level possible. Adopters and prospective adopters are clearly entitled to use the

complaints procedure if they feel they cannot resolve a difficulty with the individuals concerned or their managers.

A simplified procedure is available to children and young people who can fill in a prepaid card and send it to the Customer First Officer.

The Customer First Officer, Diana Dawson, is based in Minerva House and can be contacted by telephone on 0161 778 0480 or by e [mail to: diana.dawson@salford.gov.uk](mailto:diana.dawson@salford.gov.uk)

Adoptive applicants who are dissatisfied with the agency's decision regarding their suitability can apply for a review of their case by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Information on the IRM can be obtained from the agency or the IRM website www.irm-adoption.org.uk. The IRM can be contacted at:

Dolphin House, 54 Coventry Road, Birmingham B10 0RX
Tel: 0121 766 8086 | Fax: 0121 766 8557 | Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

CHILDREN'S GUIDE

A Children's Guide to the Adoption Service is available.

OFSTED

The Fostering Service is inspected by OFSTED who are also responsible for the investigation of complaints about the Adoption Service and can be contacted as follows:

E Mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 08456 404045

In writing: Ofsted,
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square,
Manchester,
M2 7LA

Reports on the Inspection of the Adoption Service are available to download from: www.ofsted.gov.uk

There is a Children's Rights Director within OFSTED whose role is to make sure that children and young people's views are heard. He can be contacted as follows:

The Office of the Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Tel: 0800 528 0731

There is an online contact form available on the website
www.rights4me.org