

Lewisham Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose 2012-2013



Why does Lewisham provide a Statement of Purpose?

The National Minimum Standards for Adoption set out the requirement for adoption agencies to compile a statement detailing what services are provided, the governing principles and who manages and provides the services. The statement of purpose is for:

- children and young people
- birth relatives
- prospective and approved adoptive families
- social workers working within Lewisham and in other authorities
- Councillors
- Adoption and Permanence Panel members
- Office for Standards in Children's Services, Education and Skills (Ofsted)
- members of the public.

Our aims and objectives

The Adoption and Adoption Support teams are committed to finding and supporting stable and secure adoption placements for children where the identified plan is adoption. A comprehensive range of services is provided to meet the lifelong needs of individuals whose lives are affected by adoption. We aim to treat all parties with fairness and respect and to ensure that the services provided meet needs in relation to race, culture, ethnicity, language, disability and sexuality.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for the service. The values that underpin the services include :

- all children are entitled to grow up as part of a stable and loving family
- where possible it is best for children to be brought up by their birth family
- the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration throughout the adoption process
- the matching of children with prospective adopters is given careful consideration in

relation to the racial, cultural, ethnic, language and special needs of each child in every case

- the teams work in close partnership with colleagues across Children's Social Care to ensure that delays in achieving permanence are avoided
- the lifelong implications of adoption require a range of services to meet the needs of individuals at different stages of the process
- adoptive parents will be supported and valued through the process of recruitment, matching, placement and beyond, based on assessed need.

All staff are provided with a thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled managers to promote these values and to work within the Council's equal opportunities policies. Staff are also provided with the Council's whistleblowing policy as part of their induction and this makes clear the responsibility for all staff to report areas of poor practice.

Policies and procedures

The policies and procedures cover all of the agency's activities for children, adopters, birth relatives, step-parent adopters and intercountry adopters and their children and are updated annually to reflect developments in practice.

Services provided by Lewisham Adoption Agency

All services provided are within the legal framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children Act 1989 and associated guidance and regulations.

A free phone line for enquiries relating to adoption is 0800 587 7392 and a website provides written information on the services www.lewisham.gov.uk/adoption. Prospective adopters receive a prompt and professional response and written information is sent out

within five working days, which outlines the process from initial enquiry to the making of an adoption order. Information evenings are held every six weeks and the recruitment of adopters is targeted to meet the needs of Lewisham's children. Lewisham is part of the South London Adoption Consortium and will provide advice to prospective applicants about the other local authorities within the consortium where applicants do not match the needs of Lewisham's children.

Prospective adopters will be assessed within eight months (from receipt of the written application to panel). Foster carers who are applying to adopt a child placed with them will be assessed within four months.

A full preparation training programme is offered to prospective adopters which runs over four days and covers a range of issues to help adopters understand the demands and rewards of adoption. The training programme focuses on the importance of building secure attachments and how to promote attachment with children who have had negative life experiences and whose histories may include parental drug and alcohol misuse, mental health difficulties or learning difficulties.

The training programme is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that comments from attendees are taken into account to continuously improve the quality of the training. Recruitment is continually kept under review and targeted to meet the needs of the children who are identified as in need of an adoptive family.

Once approved, adopters continue to receive support from their social worker and information about children needing adoption. They are referred to the South London Adoption Consortium and the Adoption Register after three months. They also go on the database of

the Adoption Support Team so that they can receive invitations to relevant events and further training.

Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Support Team has a range of services in place to support adoptive families and their children including counselling, advice and information, workshops/support groups, an annual family day, an annual conference, a newsletter, financial support and links with CAMHS. The team manages all post-adoption contact arrangements, direct and indirect. An allocated worker provides support to birth relatives and adopters to promote contact as a positive experience for the child.

Independent counselling is provided to birth parents who are losing a child/ren to adoption. Lewisham provides an intermediary service for birth relatives and adopted adults. Some group work is organised within the consortium, e.g. for adopted adults and adopted teenagers.

Birth parents are shown and given the opportunity to comment on what is written about them or their circumstances before information is passed to the Adoption Panel or to prospective adopters.

Lewisham Council supports ongoing contact arrangements as required. The Adoption Support Service facilitates both direct and indirect contact (through our letterbox service) between birth families, children and significant others.

The manager of the Adoption Support Team is also the Adoption Support Services Advisor for Lewisham.

Non-agency (including step-parent) adoptions

Lewisham provides a comprehensive service to people pursuing a non-agency adoption (which is an adoption not arranged through the adoption agency). Cases are promptly allocated to social workers experienced in this field and court reports are filed within required timescales. Adopters are made aware of their right to access Adoption Support services.

Intercountry adoptions

A service is offered to those residents of Lewisham wishing to adopt a child from overseas. In some cases a child may be known to the applicant or be a relative. Applicants are referred to a voluntary agency called PACT (Parents and Children Together) for preparation groups. Adopters and children adopted from overseas are offered help and advice from the Adoption Support Team. Further information can be found on the websites of the Department of Education, the Home Office and the Intercountry Adoption Centre. **There are charges associated with intercountry adoption.**

The Adoption and Permanence Panel

Lewisham's Adoption and Permanence Panel is held every two weeks and is conducted in line with Government regulations and good practice guidance. The panel has an independent chair and a range of other members with different personal or professional experience of adoption and a Lewisham councillor. The panel includes a medical adviser who is a consultant paediatrician. There is a legal adviser (Principal Lawyer) to the panel who is employed by Lewisham but is not a panel member. The panel also has an Adoption Adviser who is one of the Adoption Team Managers, who provides advice and information to the panel.

The panel makes recommendations on the following issues:

- the approval of adopters
- that adoption is the best plan for a child/ren
- that a match between a child/ren and particular adopters is right for them

The panel also offers advice regarding adoption support plans, contact arrangements or any other issue of concern which it feels that the agency needs to address. The Director of Children's Social Care is the Agency Decision Maker and considers the recommendations from the panel and then makes his decision within 7 working days. The Director meets with the chair of the panel twice a year and undertakes an appraisal of the effectiveness of the chair.

Prospective adopters attend the panel when their approval is being considered, and approved adopters attend the panel meeting when a match with a specific child is being considered. Applicants are told the recommendation immediately after the panel by the chair. All applicants who attend are asked to complete a feedback form so that we can consider ways of improving the process and ensuring that everyone involved can make the best contribution to this important area of decision-making in children's lives.

Safeguarding and promoting welfare

The London Child Protection Procedures provide the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Lewisham and the adoption agency ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance. Safeguarding issues are also part of the training programme for Adoption and Permanence Panel members.

Monitoring and evaluation of service provision

Targets for the Adoption Service are set on an annual basis through discussion with the Director of Children's Social Care.

A range of mechanisms are in place to monitor the performance of the service. For example:

- An annual report on the agency's performance is submitted to Councillors.
- The Director of Children's Social Care shares performance information with the lead member for children & young people.
- The Children and Young Peoples' Strategic Partnership receives a performance monitoring report at each meeting
- The service has systems to capture key milestones in the adoption process.
- Quality issues are addressed through regular supervision and file audit.
- Feedback questionnaires are sent to adopters after preparation groups and those who attend the Adoption Panel.
- On the occasion of a disruption, disruption meetings are chaired independently.
- The Adoption Panel provide independent oversight of cases.
- The Service Manager and the Director of Children's Social Care observe the Panel twice a year.

Management of the service

Overall responsibility for the Adoption Service is held by Gerry Aitken, Service Manager,

Adoption, Looked After Children & Leaving Care.

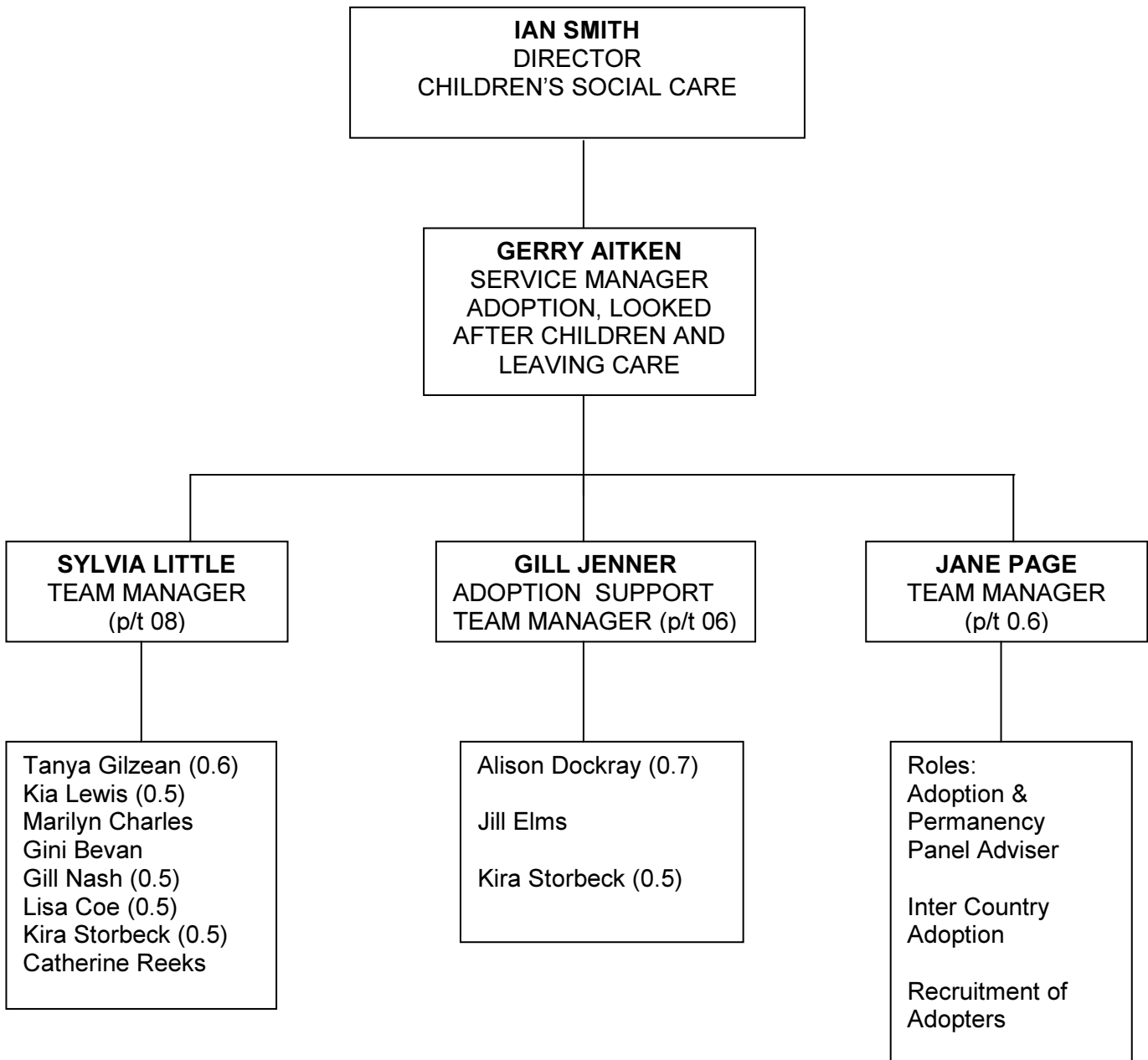
Gerry Aitken obtained a Diploma in Social Work in 1997 and is a registered social worker. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters degree in Development Management. He has extensive experience as a practitioner and manager in Local Authority Children's Services.

The Agency Decision Maker on behalf of the Local Authority is Ian Smith, Director of Children's Social Care.

The Adoption Service employs qualified and experienced staff as follows:-

- Three Team Managers, equivalent to two full time posts
- Team Managers are registered social workers and have extensive experience of child care and the adoption services over many years.
- Four full-time and five (full time equivalent of 2.3 posts) part-time social workers who are all qualified and experienced in adoption work.
- Three adoption support workers who are all qualified social workers who have relevant experience.
- All social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council. Three members of the team hold post qualifying awards in Child Care. Other staff have other post qualifying awards.
- Two business support staff provide administrative support to the team.

Lewisham Adoption Agency Structure Chart



Where can we be found?

The Adoption and Adoption Support Teams are located at:

Children's Social Care
3rd Floor, Laurence House
1 Catford Road
London SE6 4RU
0208 314 6887

How to complain

Any service user can complain if they are unhappy with the service the agency provides. In the first instance, service users are encouraged to talk about the problem with the social worker to see if they can resolve the problem. If the service user is not satisfied, the formal complaints process offers three stages.

Complaints Team
Lewisham Council
3rd Floor Laurence House
1 Catford Road
London
SE6 4RU

If the complaint relates to the Adoption Panel's decision not to approve an adoptive applicant, the applicant can ask for the case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism. Details of this process will be provided on request from the Adoption Team Managers.

Independent Reviewing Officers chair Looked After Children's reviews prior to an Adoption Order being made and ensure that children and their adopters are fully informed of the complaints process. Details of the complaints procedure are included in the information packs sent to all prospective adopters.

Regulation and Inspection

Responsibility for the regulation and inspection of adoption agencies is undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education (known as Ofsted).

Concerns, complaints and allegations about registered services including adoption agencies can be directed to Ofsted particularly where it is not possible for them to be resolved directly with the agency.

For advice and information on how Ofsted can help, they can be contacted at:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone : 0300 123 1231

or via the website at www.ofsted.gov.uk

