

# Lewisham Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose 2014 - 2015



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## Why does Lewisham have a Statement of Purpose?

The National Minimum Standards for Adoption set out the requirement for adoption agencies to have a Statement of Purpose detailing the aims and objectives of the Adoption service, and sets out service provision.

The statement of purpose is for:

- children and young people;
- birth relatives;
- prospective and approved adoptive families;
- special guardians and foster carers;
- adopted adults;
- social workers and staff working for the purposes of Lewisham Adoption service;
- Councillors;
- Adoption and Permanence Panel members;
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted);
- members of the public

This statement of purpose is reviewed annually, and updated as required to incorporate any changes in policy and/or legislation. It is also subject to review and approval by elected members of London Borough of Lewisham.

## Values, aims and objectives

The London Borough of Lewisham understands that for vulnerable children and young people who become looked after that self development and security are fundamental to ensuring they are able to progress positively to lead fulfilling and happy lives. We work together with our partners to reach children for whom support and intervention is needed in the most timely and effective way and aim to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Where this is not possible, adoption can be an option to enable children to have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from

excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

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. The service is driven in its work by the ambition to achieve permanence for as many children as possible and as early as possible. To this end we are progressing a range of different ways to promote adoption and permanence for children including the 'Foster to Adopt' programme. We strive to recruit as many adopters as we can and are working in partnership with PACT (Parents and Children Together) and South London Adoption Consortium to find placements for those children who are harder to place.

A comprehensive range of services are 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 the services users' 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 all the child's identified needs

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with consideration of the special needs of each child in every case

- the teams work in close partnership with colleagues across Children's Social Care and with key partner agencies 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 given 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.

### The National context

In 2013, the Government published Adoption Reform Programme and provide special grant for local authorities to accelerate the adoption process with the aim of more children being adopted and more rapidly.

Lewisham has a strong track record of successfully placing children and is one of the highest performing local authorities in the recently published adoption Scorecards. We welcome the Government to improve the adoption system and we continually strive to improve our services and to deliver improved outcomes for our children and young people.

Our key areas for development are:

- **Concurrent Planning and Fostering for Adoption** – to develop our

concurrent planning and Fostering for Adoption for children and to ensure we are ready to implement any legislative change to enable adopters to be approved as foster carers.

- **Focus on our more difficult to place children** – working with regional and national partners to prioritise and place those children.

### Policies and procedures

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

### 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.

Information for enquiries relating to adoption can be accessed through:

- a free phone line: 0800 587 7392;
- email: [adoptioninfo@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:adoptioninfo@lewisham.gov.uk);
- a website providing written information on services: [www.lewisham.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/adoption)

Prospective adopters receive a prompt and professional response and written information within the timescale set out in the new Stage 1 & Stage 2 assessment process. This outlines the process from initial enquiry to the making of an adoption order. Information evenings are held every month for the recruitment of adopters. We seek to identify adopters for Lewisham children but we also assess adopters who can provide placements for children from other parts of the country.

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Lewisham is part of the South London Adoption Consortium and will provide advice to prospective applicants about the other local authorities and agencies within the consortium where applicants do not match the needs of Lewisham's children.

Prospective adopters will be assessed following the new Stage 1 and Stage 2 process (from receipt of the Registration of Interest form to ratification by the Adoption Agency Decision Maker). Second time adopters and foster carers who are applying to adopt a child placed with them will proceed straight to Stage 2 process and be assessed within four months.

A full preparation training programme is offered to prospective adopters which runs at both stages and post approval. The groups cover 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. In recognition of some prospective adopters may need further learning, we also provide e-learning courses to those who need them.

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. They also go on the database of the Adoption Support Team so that they can receive invitations to relevant events and further 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.

### **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, a newsletter, financial support and links with CAMHS (Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service). The team also supports Special Guardian families, post order.

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. 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 whose child/ren are placed for 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.

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

### **Non-agency 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

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timescales. Adopters are made aware of their right to access Adoption Support services.

### Inter-country adoptions

A voluntary agency called PACT (Parents and Children Together) provides a service 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. PACT provides initial information, preparation groups and an assessment service. 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 for Education, the Home Office, the Border Agency and the Intercountry Adoption Centre. **There are charges associated with intercountry adoption.**

### The Adoption and Permanence Panel and Decision-making

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. It is also attended by a Lewisham Councillor, and other members who have varied personal or professional experience of adoption. The panel includes a medical adviser who is a Senior Speciality Doctor in Community Paediatrics. There is an Adoption Adviser, one of the Adoption Team Managers, provides advice and information to the panel. The legal adviser (Principal Lawyer) to the panel who is employed by Lewisham is available for consultation during the panel meetings.

The Director of Children's Social Care meets with the chair of the panel once a year and undertakes an appraisal of the effectiveness of the chair annually. The appraisal of other panel

members are conducted by the Independent Chair and Panel Adviser.

The panel makes recommendations on the following issues:

- the approval of adopters.
- whether adoption is the best plan for a child who is not the subject of care proceedings.
- whether a match between a child/ren and particular adopters is right for them.

The adoption panel makes recommendations to the agency. The agency decision-maker considers recommendations from the panel and then makes a decision within 7 working days upon receiving the agreed minutes. The Agency Decision Maker is able to seek the advice of medical, legal and adoption advisors.

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.

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. The chair informs applicants of the recommendation immediately after the panel. 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.

A decision as to whether a child who is the subject of care proceedings should be placed for adoption is made by one of the three agency decision-makers (ADMs) in Lewisham. They meet weekly to avoid any delay in making decision on children's permanency plan. They are able to consult with the agency, legal,

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medical and adoption advisors and to request any further information which is deemed necessary.

### 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

The Department for Education has set in place a Scorecard system for assessing the effectiveness of planning and permanency (including adoption) arrangements for children who are looked after by the Local Authorities. In addition, clear priorities for improvement are set for the Adoption Service on an annual basis through discussion with the Director of Children's Social Care. These targets are set to ensure that decisions regarding children's futures are made promptly with a view to children being placed with their adoptive family as quickly as possible. Systems are in place within Children's Social Care so that children who may have adoption as their final care plan are tracked by the Adoption Team so that an adoptive family can be identified as soon as possible.

A range of mechanisms are in place to monitor and improve 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 and young people.

- The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership receives a performance monitoring report at each meeting
- The Adoption and Permanence Panel receives a six monthly report on activity.
- Quality issues are addressed through regular supervision and file audit.
- Feedback questionnaires are sent to prospective adopters after attending preparation groups and the Adoption and Permanence Panel.
- Children's Social Care undertakes telephone surveys of Adopters to learn from their experiences of the adoption journey in order to improve our processes and procedures.
- If an adoption placement breaks down, a meeting is held and independently chaired. The learning from this is then taken forward within the service to improve our practice. However, our adoptive placement very rarely break down and this is a key measure of our work.
- The Adoption and Permanence Panel provides independent oversight of cases.
- The Director of Children's Social Care observes the Panel once a year.
- Performance is monitored nationally via Scorecards, annual returns to the Department for Education, and voluntary 3 monthly 'snapshots' of service progress.
- Ofsted inspections of the Adoption Service and Adoption Support Service.

**Lewisham Adoption Service received a letter from the Children's minister, Mr Edward Timpson following the 2nd publication of the adoption scorecard.**

'it's good to see that you have met the 2010-13 threshold. In the meantime, I'd like us to think about how we can share the lessons from your success more widely'

We share our positive experience with our Consortium members and currently two of the members are adapting the Lewisham model to improve their practice.

### Management of the service

Overall responsibility for the Adoption Service is held by the Service Manager for Adoption, Looked After Children and Leaving Care, Tina Benjamin. The Service Manager is a Registered Social Worker with extensive experience of safeguarding and all aspects of services for looked after children.

In line with National Minimum Standards, the Agency Decision Maker is a senior person within the adoption agency, who is a social worker with at least 3 years post-qualifying experience and knowledge of permanency planning for children, adoption and childcare law and practice. Three Agency Decision Makers have been appointed on behalf of the Local Authority: Ian Smith, Director of Children's Social Care; Naeema Sarkar, Service Manager for Referral and Assessment; and the Service Manager for Quality Assurance (the post currently covered interim but the post holder will be Agency Decision Maker when we have permanent person in post).

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

- Two Adoption Team Managers, and one part time Adoption Support Manger. Team Managers are registered social workers and have extensive experience of child care and the adoption services over many years.
- Four full-time and six (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.
- Two business support staff provide administrative support to the team.

All social workers are registered with the Health and Care Professional Council. Three members of the team hold post qualifying awards in Childcare. Other staff have other post qualifying awards.

### Future Plans for the Adoption Service

We are ambitious to perform even better than we do at the moment and to give more children the opportunity to be adopted timely. With the Government's Adoption Reform Grant, we have invested in our recruitment activities, and have 50% increased in number of approved adopters and significant increased in number of children placed in adoptive families. We would like to continue to improve our recruitment process and provide a better support for adoptive families and birth families. We have plan in place with the Consortium to organise 'Activity Day' to place more children who are older and or have more complex needs.



## Where can we be found?

The Adoption and Adoption Support Teams are located at:

Children's Social Care  
1st 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  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Laurence House  
1 Catford Road  
London  
SE6 4RU

If the complaint relates to the Adoption and Permanence 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

