



# **Adoption Agency**

## **Statement of Purpose**

**2017 - 2018**

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# **SLOUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRUST ADOPTION AGENCY**

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2015 – 2016**

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# **SLOUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRUST ADOPTION AGENCY**

## **Context**

Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) is a registered Adoption Agency, and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2012). The Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011 sets out the requirement for adoption agencies to compile a statement of purpose explaining what services are provided, the governing principles and details of the management of the service.

The statement of purpose is for:

- Children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Social workers internal and external to the agency
- Adoption panel members
- Elected Members
- SCST Board Members
- Ofsted
- Members of the public

## **The aims and objectives of the Agency**

The Adoption Service is part of a range of services delivered by SCST which primarily seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. We aim to treat everyone with respect and fairness.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for the service. Slough Children's Services Trust supports the basic principles that:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children, whenever possible, to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe, secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process
- Children's views should be listened to, recorded and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs
- In addressing the process of matching, the Agency will look at each child's needs holistically. No one aspect of their needs will take precedence over another where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all
- The Agency is proactive in seeking to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of each child's ethnic origins, culture, language and religion. However, no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be identified

The adoption team works in close partnership with children's teams across the service and meets regularly with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that any delay in achieving permanence is avoided. We have recently introduced regular tracking meetings along with performance surgeries to ensure that we are aware of children at the earliest opportunity and have additional scrutiny for the progression of the plans.

Appropriate support is provided to the prospective adopters recruited by the Agency following the placement of children, including commissioned work from the Cornerstone Partnership. The Agency works effectively with placing authorities to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement.

## National context

In 2012, the Government published 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay', which outlined proposals to accelerate the adoption process with the aim of more children being adopted and more rapidly. Slough Children's Services Trust (now providing services formally provided by Slough Borough Council) has a strong track record of successfully placing children and performed well in the adoption scorecards. We continually strive to improve our services and to deliver improved outcomes for our children and young people.

Our key areas for development are:

To focus on our more difficult to place children – we work with our colleagues within the Berkshire area and national partners including Coram and Buckinghamshire to prioritise and place those children.

- To consider fostering for adoption for children where this may be appropriate
- To continuously review practice and systems in order to ensure that the recruitment and approval of prospective adopters takes place within six months from the time of the acceptance of their Register of Interest in line with government guidelines

We were part of the pilot with the Cornerstone Partnership which was funded by the Department for Education (DfE), and we have subsequently commissioned further work from that agency to support our work which has the following objectives:

- Accelerate the placement/reduce the waiting time for children in particular for harder-to-place children
- Retain and build confidence of adopters as they move through the assessment and matching process by supporting and encouraging them on their journey
- Increase early placement stability
- Remove peripheral activity from social workers in order to increase their capacity to focus on the tasks that only social workers can do i.e.: child protection, adoption assessment and family finding tasks. An example of this is a dedicated Family Support Worker employed to be the consistent point of call for potential adopters contacting the agency with their enquiries.

## **Staffing**

The Adoption Agency work within Slough Children's Services Trust is undertaken by staff from the Family Placement Service. There is a specific, specialist post within the team responsible for providing adoption support services. There are dedicated workers that undertake adoption work (including the processing of non-agency adoptions), alongside their colleagues within the Family Placement Service who provide the following services: fostering, friends, family and connected persons, supported lodgings and home from home (short breaks respite).

All social work staff within Slough Children's Services Trust shares the same job descriptions commensurate to their posts. All staff are provided with a thorough induction and are supported by experienced staff to ensure that the principles and values of the agency are intrinsic in the way that the service works. Staff work in accordance with the agency's policies and procedures.

The Agency actively promotes opportunities for the professional development of adoption social workers and all other social care social workers and business support staff, in order to increase their knowledge of good practice and personal development and to strive for service improvement (for improved service delivery) at all times.

## **Policies and procedures**

The policies and procedures cover all of the Agency's activities for children, adopters, birth families, step-parent adopters and their children and are regularly updated to ensure that they reflect any developments in practice and legislation. Agency policies are available online internally and externally

## **Services provided by Slough Children's Services Trust Adoption Agency**

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

There is a free phone line for enquiries relating to adoption which is 0800 073 0291. There is specific information relating to adoption on the Slough Children's Services Trust website: [www.scstrust.co.uk](http://www.scstrust.co.uk)

- Prospective adopters receive a prompt and professional response. The initial enquiry is responded to within 48 hours of the initial contact and there is a dedicated worker in this role. An Information Pack will be sent

out within two working days of the telephone call, and if the enquiry is received by post or on-line, an Information Pack will be sent out within two working days of the contact. The Agency works in co-operation with the five unitary authorities within Berkshire to run a rolling programme of information meetings and preparation groups on a monthly basis. Additionally, SCST runs monthly joint adoption and fostering information sessions. Prospective adopters will be assessed by a two stage process that will take six months in total

Eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must be at least 21 years old (there is no upper age limit)
- At least one of the couple or the single applicant must be domiciled in the British Isles or both of the couple or the single applicant have been habitually resident for at least one year
- Neither applicant nor any adult member of their household can have been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence

All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an information meeting and an adopters' preparation group if they have not previously adopted a child through the Agency. Previous adopters and approved foster carers may be able to proceed straight to stage two and receive a tailored assessment to take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of the child they have previously adopted/fostered.

The preparation training includes a two day course in stage one and a one day course in stage two. As soon as prospective adopters begin the assessment process a mentor is assigned to them from Cornerstone, who will provide additional support. The material used in the two day course is designed to provide prospective adopters with information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children, both locally and nationally, who need adoptive parents. The one day course in stage two is focussed on attachment (using Dan Hughes material), brain development, fostering for adoption, the legal process, linking and matching and adoption support. The training material used is kept under regular review. Following approval, all adopters are offered a restorative parenting course as part of the SCST commissioned service from Cornerstone. The Agency is committed to seeking feedback from service users in order to inform future service provision and a fairly robust system is in place to seek feedback from prospective and legal adopters at key points in the adoption process.

Prospective adopters are assisted, through both the preparation groups and the home study process, to consider/ identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs. All prospective adopters who have previously stayed abroad for sometime will be required to obtain an overseas Police check.

A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption Regulations, Guidance and National Minimum Standards.

From 1 July 2013 the introduction of regulation 25A in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 enables approved adopters to be temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child by the local authority without being referred to a fostering panel.

Fostering for adoption protocols are in place following consultation with the unitary authorities in (across the) Berkshire (consortium) to offer a consistent approach.

An adopter recruitment strategy is in place, with certain activities geared to the recruitment of adoptive parents for Slough Children's Services Trust. We work closely with the SCST Head of Communications to ensure maximum impact of recruitment efforts, which include a variety of advertising in publications, press and radio, editorial features in local press, and running information events at local venues. The Agency has co-operated with consortium-wide initiatives, and seeks to maintain a level of public awareness of the wider national need for adopters

All adopters approved by the agency who are not linked or being actively considered for a potential match within three months of their approval are referred to the Adoption Register so that they can be made available for consideration by other placing authorities (subject to the adopters' consent). Adopters may also refer themselves to the Register. Children needing adoptive placements are also referred to the Register, if prospective adopters have not been identified for them via other sources within three months of their adoption plan having been approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

## **Adoption support services**

Slough Children's Services Trust is committed to providing the full range of adoption support services required by Regulations. These services are:

- Counselling, advice and information

- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child
- Services in relation to therapeutic needs of an adoptive child
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, including making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions

The Adoption Support Fund is part of a wider package of reforms introduced by the government through the Children and Families Act 2014, and became available in May 2015. The Trust has made 10 successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund since the adoption agency was established (October 2015).

While Slough Children's Services Trust seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Trust may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either local authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, Voluntary Adoption Agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Agency is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all children and families who are engaged with children's services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted children and their families also have access to mainstream services available to children and families with particular needs.

The Agency is also committed to providing counselling and support services to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is vested in the Practice Manager for Adoption Support, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the post adoption worker within the Adoption Team.. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level will be raised by the ASSA to the Head of Service, Placements & Resources.

## **Links to other agencies**

### **The other consortium agencies & local voluntary agencies**

The Agency is part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies Consortium and as such works in close co-operation with the five Unitary Authority Adoption Agencies within Berkshire, together with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service.

The Trust is currently exploring other strategic partnerships as it is no longer delivering a Local Authority adoption service.

### **The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by Slough Children's Services Trust together with the five Berkshire Unitary Authorities. Services provided include:

- Management, training, recruitment and co-ordination of Berkshire Joint Adoption Panels
- Management of the Berkshire Letterbox Service, including relevant administrative and professional tasks as required

- Management of the Birth Relative Project including relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption
- Management of post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement

## **Inter-country adoptions**

The Agency by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

## **Non-agency adoptions**

Slough Children's Services Trust provides a service to people applying for a non agency adoption (adoption not arranged through the adoption agency). Initial meetings and subsequent assessments are undertaken by staff experienced in this area of work and reports are provided to the court within timescales set. Adopters are made of their right to access Adoption Support Services. The prospective adopters are also made aware of other alternatives available to them via written information and during the meeting with the social worker.

## **Adoption panel and decision making**

The Agency shares a joint Adoption Panel with the Berkshire unitary authorities. The composition of the panel is in line with regulations, and the panels are held every two weeks. Additional panels can be arranged if needed. The role of the panel is to consider adopter approvals, matches, and if adoption is the best plan for a child that has been relinquished for adoption.

The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the Adoption Panel Adviser (Service Manager, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service), including maintaining the central list of panel members and ensuring that annual reviews of panel members and training requirements are maintained in accordance with regulations.

Panel members and the Adoption Agency's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the panel meeting.

The link worker for the applicants, or in her/ his absence, their manager will be present when an application is considered, to answer the panel's questions and

assist them in reaching a decision. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend Panel for their approval or when a specific match is being presented with a child/ren.

The recommendation of the panel is conveyed verbally to the applicants on the day of panel. The draft panel minutes are forwarded to the Panel Chair within four working days. The chair approves and finalizes the minutes before they are passed to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven working days of receiving the recommendation and final panel minutes, and this is conveyed to the applicants verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days, in line with regulatory requirements.

A decision as to whether a child who is the subject of care proceedings should be placed for adoption is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) at Slough Children's Services Trust. She is able to consult with the agency legal, medical and adoption advisors and to request any further information which is deemed necessary.

## **Safeguarding and promoting welfare**

The Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board provide the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Slough and the Adoption Agency ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance. Adoption panel members are also provided with safeguarding training as part of their programme. Panel members are also invited to attend Adoption Forums held on a quarterly basis with adoption staff from across Berkshire to provide joint training.

## **Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard**

- Performance is monitored nationally via Adoption Scorecards that assess the effectiveness of planning and permanency (including adoption) arrangements for children
- Annual data is sent to Ofsted
- Reports are provided on a bi-annual basis to SCST Board. Tracking meetings and performance surgeries are in place to capture key milestones in the child's journey in care, including adoption progress and to avoid any unnecessary delay.
- Feedback from service users is pro-actively sought in order to inform future service provision from children, prospective and approved adopters, birth parents, adult adoptees, following birth records counselling and feedback from birth relatives, following enquiries about tracing adopted relatives. In addition, feedback is obtained and collated from adopters who attend the Adoption Support Group meetings; adopters following Life Appreciation Days; and from foster carers, after children have been moved on to adoption placements, regarding their views on this process
- Children's wishes and feelings are also captured at events specifically organised for adoptive families.
- An Adopter Advisory Board chaired by the Head of Service for Placements and Resources has been established, for adopters to provide insight and challenge to the service and help us develop new processes.
- The Adoption Panel provides independent oversight of cases
- Chairing of adoption disruption meetings is undertaken independently

### **Evaluating and responding to feedback**

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Agency, this is referred to/considered by the relevant manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaising with external

agencies/ organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Agency to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be dealt with via Slough Children's Services Trust's complaints procedure.

## **Management of the service**

### **The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is:**

Nicola Clemo, Chief Executive

Slough Children's Services Trust, St. Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough,  
Berkshire, SL1 3UF

### **The Responsible Individual is:**

Jackie Pape, Head of Service, Placements & Resources

Slough Children's Services Trust, St. Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough,  
Berkshire SL1 3UF

The day to day management of the work of the Adoption Agency is undertaken by the Practice Managers, Family Placement Service (Adoption Team), in consultation with the Head of Service, Placements and Resources.

The Adoption Service employs qualified and experienced staff as follows:

Two part time Practice Managers (job share) and one Consultant Practitioner. One Practice Manager takes responsibility for adopters, and one for family finding

- The managers are registered social workers with significant experience of child care and family placement services
- Five full time social workers who are all qualified and experienced in adoption/family placement work. One social worker is a dedicated worker holding cases for children where there is a Placement Order granted.
- One Family Support Worker (part time)
- One dedicated Business Support Officer
- One dedicated life story worker
  
- All social workers are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC)
  
- Slough Children's Services Trust is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve post appropriate training . The Head of Service, who is the Responsible Individual undertook a Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in Social Work 2007- 2009. The Practice Manager responsible for adopters has a Practice Teaching Award. All staff in the Adoption Service has access to a comprehensive programme of

training, internally and externally and there is a training officer in post across SCST, and a dedicated training officer for the Family Placement Service.

## **The Complaints Procedure**

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents and where appropriate family members of children for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about the Trust's complaints procedure.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services and other relevant organisations.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process as appropriate. The Practice Managers of the Family Placement Service, along with the Head of Service, Placements and Resources monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Family Placement Service.

## **Details of the Registration Authority**

OFSTED

National Business Unit

Royal Exchange Buildings

St. Ann's Square

Manchester, M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## **Details of the Children's Commissioner for England**

Maggie Atkinson

Children's Commissioner for England

The Office of the Children's Commission

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London, SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)