

# **LONDON BOROUGH OF EALING**

## **ADOPTION SERVICE**

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**2015-2016**

Carolyn Fair

May 2011

Updated September 2015

## **Introduction**

- 1.1 The London Borough of Ealing, through the power delegated to the Director of Children's Services, undertakes to provide a comprehensive Adoption Service. It seeks to operate within the legislative requirements of the following:

### **Acts:**

- . The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- . The Children Act 1989
- . The Care Standards Act 2000
- . The Children Act 2004
- . The Children Act 2008
- . The Mental Capacity Act 2005
- . The Human Rights Act 1998
- . Data Protection Act 1998
- . Freedom of Information Act

### **Statutory Instruments:**

- . The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- . The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- . The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- . The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005
- . The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005
- . The Independent Review of Determination (Adoption) Regulations 2005
- . The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- . The Local Authority (Adoption) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2005

- . The Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2005
- . The Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005
- . The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- . The Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- . The Adoption and Children (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 2005
- . The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003
- . The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- . The Adoption (Bringing Child(ren) into the United Kingdom) Regulations 2003
- . The Registration of Foreign Adoptions Regulations 2003
- . The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- . The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- . National Care Standards Commission Regulations 2003 – England
- . The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

### **Government Guidance**

- . Adoption Guidance 2013
- . IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance 2011
- . Practice Guidance – Preparing and Assessing Prospective Adopters (2006)
- . Practice Guidance on Assessing the Support Needs of Adoptive Families (2008)
- . Practice Guidance on Adoption: Access to Information and Intermediary Services

- . Working Together to Safeguard Children (and associated child protection guidance)
- . The Children Act 1989 Guidance Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010
- . Family Procedure (Adoption) Rules 2005
- . Adoption and Children Act 2002 Practice Directions
- . The Court Rules, Domestic Adoption and Placement for Adoption 2002
- . Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families
- . Care Matters – Time for Change 2007

**Standards:**

- . Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- . Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011

The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by the Children and Young People Plan (2011-14); The Workforce Development Strategy (2014-16) and the Ealing Sufficiency Strategy (2014-17).

- 1.2 This Statement of Purpose is divided into two parts. Part one sets out the broad aims and objectives of the service, the management structures, the services provided, the principles and standards of care that are expected, the procedures for recruiting, approving, training, and supporting adoptive families, and the procedures for complaints. Part two consists of a schedule listing the relevant policies, procedures and guidance that govern and inform the adoption service.
- 1.3 A copy of this will be provided to the Ofsted and be available to:-
- All staff working for the adoption agency
  - Adopters
  - Any child placed for adoption
  - Any parent of a child placed in an adoptive placement
  - Other adoption agencies
  - Adoption and Permanence Panel members

## **Part One**

### **2.0 Overall Aims and Objectives of the Adoption Service**

2.1 The aims and objectives of Ealing's adoption service are:

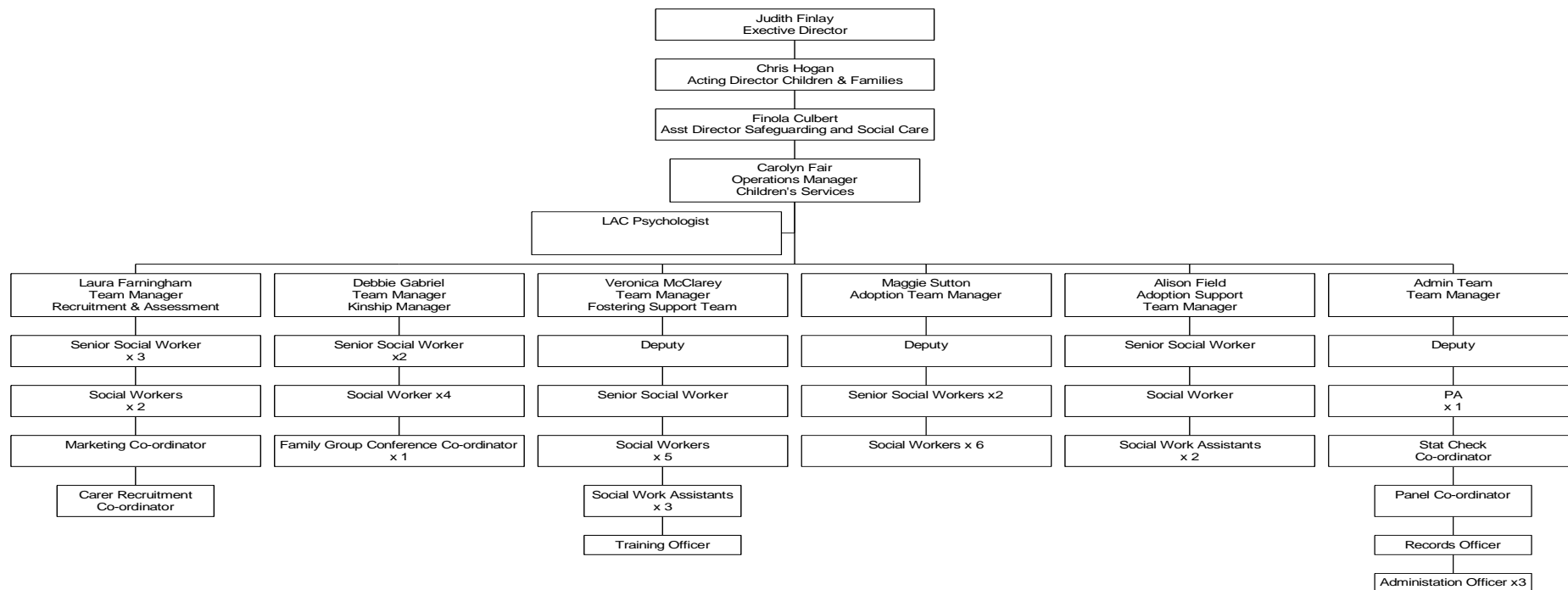
- 2.1.1 To provide a high quality adoption service for children that ensures their assessed needs, wishes, welfare and safety are at the centre of the adoption process.
- 2.1.2 Adoption will be considered as a positive option for all looked after children who are unable to return to live permanently with their birth family.
- 2.1.3 To identify the needs of looked after children waiting for adoption and to recruit the maximum number of adopters who can meet the diverse needs of Ealing's children.
- 2.1.4 To actively prevent delays for looked after children being placed for adoption.
- 2.1.5 To welcome applications from people wishing to be assessed as prospective adopters regardless of marital status, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- 2.1.6 To assess, prepare and support prospective adoptive families to meet the needs of children who are waiting for adoption.
- 2.1.7 To work in partnership with prospective adopters, children and their families, other professionals and agencies. Written information will be provided to adopters, birth parents and children on the adoption process.
- 2.1.8 To provide an advice service on adoption and permanency issues to other professionals within the Department and within professional networks.

- 2.1.9 To place children with adopters who are capable of providing safe, nurturing care in order to enable each child to achieve his or her full potential.
- 2.1.10 To ensure that children with disabilities and additional needs will be entitled to the same opportunities for adoption as non-disabled children.
- 2.1.11 To ensure that placements will reflect the child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language unless this is not possible within a realistic timescale for the child, in which case the reasons why will be explained to the child having regard to his or her age and understanding and adopters will be given guidance to ensure the child's heritage and identity is supported .
- 2.1.12 To ensure that children will be placed with their brothers and sisters unless this does not meet their assessed needs. Where this is not possible within a realistic timescale the reasons why will be explained to the child and contact between them will be promoted.
- 2.1.13 To ensure that each child and family is prepared for adoption and that a suitable period of introductions occurs and that the settling in period is fully supported.
- 2.1.14 To promote and facilitate post adoption contact between children and their birth parents and relatives where it is assessed as being in their best interests.
- 2.1.15 To provide a comprehensive Adoption Support Service in line with the Adoption legislation, Regulations and Guidelines.
- 2.1.16 To offer training to and service Ealing's Adoption & Permanency Panel.
- 2.1.17 To provide an assessment and support service to inter country adopters. In particular, to be aware of the issues pertaining to inter-country adoptions, and to offer appropriate training in preparation groups to prospective inter-country adopters.
- 2.1.18 To provide intermediary services for adults
- 2.1.19 To provide an Access to Records Service

### 3.0 **The Organisational Structure of the Service**

3.1 The Adoption Service is part of Ealing's Children & Families division. The structure of the service and how it relates to the business group is shown in the diagram below.

### 3.2 Management Structure





3.3 The Operations Manager of Children's Placement Services, Ms. Carolyn Fair is responsible for the Adoption service. The Adoption and Permanency service consists of four teams, which are managed by 3 full time and 1 part-time managers. These are:

1. Recruitment Team
2. Adoption & Permanency Team
3. Adoption support Team
4. Kinship Team

Adoption and permanency work is undertaken by these four teams.

3.4 The service is based at:

Perceval House  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Uxbridge Road  
Ealing  
London W5

3.5 The adoption service works in collaboration with the area children's social work teams to ultimately ensure the welfare of children placed. We aim to work together with other professionals within and outside the council to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children in Ealing. We work within a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory framework.

3.6 The adoption team receives all referrals for adoption placements and is responsible for facilitating effective and timely permanency planning and family finding for looked after children

3.7 The recruitment team undertakes all publicity and marketing to recruit prospective adopters and takes responsibility for running monthly information sessions for potential adopters, which are attended by social workers from the adoption team.

- 3.8 The adoption team and adoption support team are responsible for the assessment and preparation of all potential domestic and inter-country adopters and facilitating suitable matching of placements.
- 3.9 The adoption support team is responsible for the assessment and preparation of all inter-country adopters. Where there is no capacity within the adoption support team, a pool of sessional workers recruited by the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium is also able to undertake inter-country adoption work. Ealing is a subscribing member of the Inter-Country Adoption Centre who provides information sessions and preparation groups to applicants. The work is overseen and managed by the Adoption Support Team Manager.
- 3.10 The Adoption Support Team provides a comprehensive support service for adopters, children and birth family members, including facilitating any post adoption contact, assessment of adoption support needs, and direct work with children and families. In addition the team undertakes access to birth records and offers intermediary services.
- 3.11 The Kinship team is engaged in the assessment and placement of children within their kinship network under Fostering and Special Guardianship regulations. They also offer support to children and families where children are looked after either under a fostering arrangement with a view to permanency or subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
- 3.12 Ealing is a founder member of the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium. This is made up of eight West London boroughs and two voluntary agencies. The consortium is innovative in its joint working and promotes best value and best practice across all member agencies.

#### **4.0 Procedure for Monitoring and Controlling the Activities of the adoption service and Ensuring Quality of Performance**

- 4.1 The following systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the service:
- 4.1.1 An annual report on the activity of the adoption service is submitted to the Director of Children and Families and the Lead Council Member for Children and Families.
  - 4.1.2 The bi-annual report of the adoption panel is presented to the Agency decision maker and adoption panel members.
  - 4.1.3 A quarterly report is presented to the Operations Manager of Children's Placements Services and to the Adoption Panel detailing the numbers of children waiting for a permanent placement, matching and placement dates, Adoption Order dates, any breakdowns in placements, and timescales achieved.
  - 4.1.4 A six-monthly report on team activity and outcomes is presented to the lead member and a quarterly update on adoption performance is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Council.
  - 4.1.5 Management information is correlated and there are monthly reports on the numbers of children placed for adoption, numbers adopted, ethnicity, and timescales.
  - 4.1.6 A database is maintained of adoption applicants, ethnicity, responses, outcomes and timescales.
  - 4.1.7 Systems are in place to monitor the department's needs for placements. The recruitment strategy is reviewed six monthly. This information is used to inform recruitment and contracting with providers.

## **5.0 Ensuring accountability of staff**

- 5.1 There are clear lines of accountability and management of the service.
- 5.2 There are annual performance appraisals for all staff, setting and reviewing targets, which are in line with departmental, and service targets and objectives. These appraisals ensure that staffs are well trained and competent in delivering a quality adoption service.
- 5.3 Each member of staff is given supervision by their line manager on a three-four weekly basis, with a review of tasks and monitoring of targets.
- 5.4 The adoption service ensures that there are comprehensive and up to date records on all children placed, prospective and approved adopters with whom Ealing has worked. This information is accessible in line with data protection requirements.
- 5.5 There are clear written policies and procedures for staff within the adoption service including the adoption panel. These are available on request to service users.
- 5.6 Written information is given to birth parents about adoption and contact with their birth children; all children receive a leaflet which explains adoption to them and adopters are given written information both before and after approval.
- 5.7 All staff and adopters and panel members have a valid CRB check.
- 5.8 Allegations against adopters/staff are investigated under departmental procedures.
- 5.9 The Customer Care and Complaints Section maintain records of complaints, their outcomes, and praise.

## **6.0 Planning for looked after children**

- 6.1 The adoption social worker/family finder is responsible for setting up and participating in the permanency planning meetings, matching and selection, introduction and progress meetings. A child's need for a permanent home will be considered no later than at the child's second Statutory Looked After Review. If the decision is made that an adoption plan is appropriate, a referral will be made to the Adoption Team. A permanency-planning meeting will be arranged within three weeks of the referral being received by the Adoption Team.
- 6.2 The Agency Decision Maker will consider and agree an Adoption Plan when all other possibilities of return to the birth family have been ruled out. The service aims to match children with prospective adopters within 12 months of the adoption plan having been agreed.

## **7.0 Adopters**

- 7.1 All placements up until the adoption order is made are monitored and supported.
- 7.2 The adoption agency has access to specialist advisors. These include psychologists for looked after children, a medical advisor, looked after children nurse, substance misuse advisor and a specialist education team. In addition the service has commissioned a counselling service from Post Adoption Centre, and by subscribing to the Post Adoption Centre and Inter-Country Adoption Centre, Ealing families and children can access a range of additional services. Where necessary other specialist services are also accessed.
- 7.3 The adoption service has a clear policy for the support of adopters ensuring each adopter is allocated a social worker up until the adoption order is made and beyond when appropriate and in line with any adoption support plan.

## **8.0 Financial procedures**

- 8.1 Regular budget monitoring information itemises amounts paid for a variety of services and totals paid in adoption allowances. Expenditure and budget allocation information is updated monthly in the Finance Section.
- 8.2 Adoption allowances are paid weekly using an electronic payment system, and amounts and any changes are checked and signed for by managers. Adoptive families are informed by letter of any changes in payments.
- 8.3 All families in receipt of financial support undergo an annual financial review.
- 8.4 Inter-country adopters are charged a fee for their assessment. Information regarding the fees is included in the information pack that is sent to prospective adopters. Charges are reviewed and agreed within the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium.
- 8.5 Inter-agency financial agreement meetings are held, and charges and expectations of timescales for payment are recorded on BAAF Form H1.

## **9.0 Procedures for recruiting, preparing and assessing adopters and supporting adoptive parents**

- 9.1 Recruitment - The team has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally. Further details can be found in Ealing's Fostering & Adoption Recruitment Strategy.

## 10.0 Assessment

- 10.1 The recruitment and assessment policy details the procedures for the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters. By way of brief summary: written information is sent in response to all initial enquiries and monthly information sessions are held to which all applicants are invited to attend. An initial visit is then undertaken and a decision made as to whether the application will proceed. Prospective applicants are invited to attend a preparation-training group and sent an application pack. Following the preparation group the prospective adopters and the team would decide whether to proceed with a formal assessment.
- 10.2 An adopter's assessment will be completed within the timescales outlined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Guidance and Regulations. Completed assessments will be presented to the Adoption & Permanency Panel within 6 months to make a recommendation to the agency (London Borough of Ealing) as to whether or not prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child. Prospective adopters will be notified of this decision in writing within 7 days.
- 10.3 Once approved, the social worker will seek to identify a suitable child, starting with local children, and then extending the search through the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium and the National Adoption Register. Once a family has been selected, details of this match will be presented to the Panel who will make a recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will in turn make a decision about ratifying that recommendation within 7 days of the date of the panel.
- 10.4 If the match is approved there is a planning meeting and a period of introductions. The child will then be placed in accordance with the Adoption Regulations.

## **11.0 Adoption Support**

- 11.1 The supervising social worker will continue to support the prospective adopters until an Adoption Order has been made.
- 11.2 An assessment of the need for adoption support will be completed for all children for whom adoption is the plan and will be presented with the proposed match to the Adoption & Permanency Panel. The adoption support plan will be reviewed at the child's initial statutory review and at every subsequent review until the Adoption Order is made or if there is a significant change in circumstances. The review of adoption support plans following the adoption order will be by request from adoptive parents.
- 11.3 Financial support may be available to support adoption placements. This is means tested and consideration is given to the circumstances of the adoptive family and the needs of the child. The scheme aims to facilitate the adoption of children whose needs may involve additional costs. It is not applicable to all children. Financial support is reviewed each year.
- 11.4 A full assessment of the child's need for post adoption contact will be undertaken. Decisions about contact will always be based on the best interests of the child, in consultation with and agreement of the adoptive family. This is normally a voluntary agreement.
- 11.5 The birth family and adoptive family may exchange letters and photographs by mutual agreement, via a service called "letterbox". The adoption support team will act as the post box and forward correspondence to the families. If direct contact is to be maintained between the children and his or her birth parents or family, if assessed as necessary the Adoption Support team will help facilitate this by providing support and/or supervision.



11.6 A support and counselling service for birth parents and relatives is available within Ealing, through the Post Adoption Service, which the London Borough of Ealing has commissioned to provide this service.

## **12.0 Access to Records**

12.1 A comprehensive service is available to adopted adults requesting access to their records. Further details can be found in the procedure Access to Records and Information for Adopted Adults and Birth Relatives.

## **13.0 The Adoption & Permanency Panel**

13.1 Ealing Council's Adoption & Permanency Panel meet every three weeks to make recommendations to the Director of Children and Families in respect of the approval of prospective adopters and the placement of children with specific families. Additional panels are convened as necessary.

13.2 The composition of the panel is in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011 and includes independent members. The chair of the panel is an independent person with significant experience of adoption work and skills to ensure that the panel's work is carried out efficiently and sensitively.

13.3 The Adoption & Permanency Panel receives all necessary information on prospective adopters within 6 weeks of the completion of the assessment report.

13.4 Panel recommendations are be conveyed orally to all those involved within 24 hours. The Agency decision maker makes a decision within 7 working days of the adoption panel recommendations. Decisions are conveyed orally to all those involved within 2 working days and confirmed in writing within 7 working days.

13.5 Applicants or birth parents will have 28 days to raise any objections to the Agency Decision Maker. All correspondence will be acknowledged within 3 working days and answered formally within 14 working days.

- 13.6 When a child has been made the subject of an adoption plan, 3 monthly progress reports are presented back to the Adoption Panel until an adoption order is made.
- 13.7 Approved adopters who have not had a child placed within one year will be reviewed annually.
- 13.8 A separate adoption file will be created for every child once an adoption plan has been approved by the Agency. Once an adoption order is made the file will be placed in the Records Archive for 100 years.
- 13.9 There is an established Central list for membership of Adoption Panel. The Independent panel chair and all members of the central list are annually appraised and training is identified as part of that appraisal.

#### **14.0 Complaints**

- 14.1 All complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets Departmental and National requirements. Children, their birth family and adopters will all be given a copy of Ealing Council's complaint leaflet.
- 14.2 Children will be made aware of the national telephone help line, 'Talk Adoption', the complaints procedure, children's rights services and of their right to make representations and complaints. Birth families and adopters will be advised of the complaints procedure and their right to make representations and complaints.

## Part Two

### **Schedule listing the relevant policies, procedures and guidance governing and informing the Adoption and Permanency Team and its service delivery:**

- Assessment & Recruitment of Agency Adoptive parents
- Placement for adoption
- Adoption reviews
- Monitoring and supervision of Agency Adoptive Placements
- Disruption of Agency Adoptive Placements
- Non Agency Adoptions
- Adoption Policy
- Adoption Support Services
- Adoption case records
- Trans-racial Placement Policy
- Adoption Allowance Procedure
- Adoption & Permanency Panel Policy
- Access to birth Records/adoption Case Records
- Intermediary services
- Inter-Country Adoption
- Identity & Life History Work Procedure
- Assessment Framework Procedures
- Assessing siblings for permanent placement: practice guidance
- Allegations and Complaints against Foster Carers and Prospective Adopters
- London Child Protection Procedures
- Complaints policy
- Children's Guide to being looked after

- Children's guide to adoption
- Children's Guide to adoption support
- Children's Complaints Leaflet
- Parents Guide to Adoption
- Information for parents if your child is being adopted
- Information on Post Adoption contact for Adopters and Birth Families
- Prospective Adopters Enquiry Pack
- The Approved Adopters Handbook
- Special Guardianship