



“Working in partnership for adoption services”

Joint Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

2017

JOINT ADOPTION SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose

The Joint Adoption Service is provided jointly to both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, however, Shropshire Council has management responsibility under the terms of a Joint Arrangement Agreement with the Telford & Wrekin Council, which is regularly reviewed. There are quarterly Adoption Service Management Meetings held comprising of membership from both Authorities. We are also part of the West Midlands Adoption Consortium and we are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for the children in our care: ensuring all children and young people are safe and well looked after in a supportive environment, narrowing the achievement gap in education and work, ensuring the emotional wellbeing of children & young people by focussing on prevention and early intervention, keeping more children healthy and reducing health inequalities. For those children who cannot return to their birth families we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and permanent substitute families.

The Adoption Team recruits and assesses prospective adopters who can meet the needs of those children for whom adoption is the plan, not only within Shropshire and Telford but nationally. Our recruitment strategy is flexible and reflects the diverse and often complex needs of these children.

The Statement of Purpose for Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council Joint Adoption Service is required under the Adoption Services: National Minimum Standards 2014. Standard 18 states that: “The adoption agency and adoption support agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance.” “The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be outcome focussed and, for adoption agencies, show how the service will meet outcomes for children.” “The adoption agency formally approves the statement of purpose and reviews this at least annually.”

“The agency’s policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and volunteers accurately reflect the statement of purpose.”

The Joint Adoption Service Statement of Purpose provides all service users and stakeholders with a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Adoption Agency. It details the service provision as required under the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations and the National Adoption Standards and is compliant with the legislation and regulations requirements:

- Children Act 1989
- United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2002
- Inter-Country Adoption Standards and Associated Regulations 2003
- Adoption Support Services Regulations and Standards 2003
- Children Act 2004
- National Minimum Adoption Standards 2014
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) regulations 2012
- The Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 •
Statutory Guidance on Adoption July 2013

1. Mission Statement:

Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council aim to provide a comprehensive range of high quality Adoption Support Services, available to all parties affected by the adoption process. The services are consistent with best practice and national and local standards and requirements. The aims of the Joint Adoption Service are underpinned by and encompassed in the Children and Young People's Plan 2014 to 2017.

2. Aims and Objectives:

- To contribute to the councils' duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their respective areas by ensuring that all children are able to fulfil their potential.
- To maximise the contribution adoption can make to promoting permanent, secure and loving adoptive families
- To carry out the councils' statutory duty towards children who are looked after and the councils' corporate parenting role under the Children Act 1989 by ensuring that children are placed with families and carers who can offer them safe, stable care and promote their life chances
- To actively promote adoption as a permanence option for looked after children who are unable to remain in their birth families, including older children and children with special needs

- To promote the right of every child to have a permanent, secure and loving family, which embraces individual needs and differences and reflects their ethnic origin, or if this is not possible, that will respects and positively promote the child's ethnicity, culture and identity.
- To ensure that all our services are accessible and delivered fairly, in accordance with the councils' equality policy, and that the service is open and reflects the diversity of all sections of the community.
- To ensure that all services are provided in a timely manner and service users are given the opportunity to comment on the services they receive and participate in service development.
- To provide a comprehensive range of adoption support services to all those affected by adoption, including independent counselling of birth relatives.
- To ensure that children's views and feelings are taken into account and that all children receive age appropriate information, life work and sensitively written life story books to help them understand their history and to prepare for their move to a permanent placement
- To have an effective recruitment strategy and good quality preparation and assessment processes to ensure that we inform and approve the best possible adopters
- To recruit enough adopters to ensure that we contribute to the national shortage of adopters and enable children whose care plan is adoption to be placed in a timely way.

3. Principles and Core Values:

We endorse the key principles that underpin the National Minimum Standards for Adoption:

- The child is the focus of the service and the child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Adopted children should 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.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process. No child should be considered too young to express their feelings, verbally or non-verbally, and age appropriate methods of communication should be used.

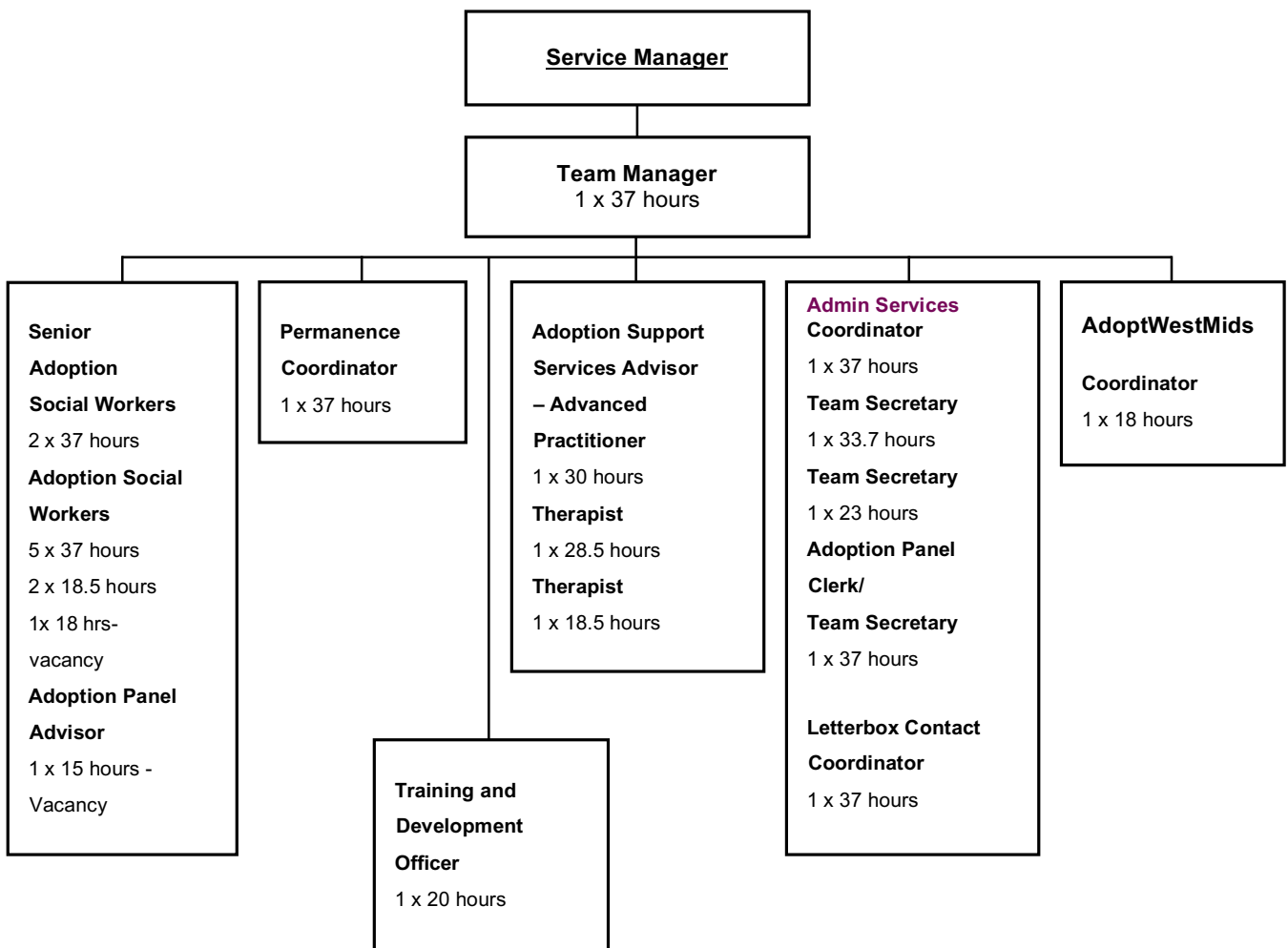
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- Positive significant relationships in a child's life are acknowledged and are preserved through appropriate contact arrangements.
- A positive partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, members of the Consortium, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies
- Adoption is a life-long commitment with far-reaching consequences for those who are affected. This is recognised by all involved in delivering adoption services,

Adoption services are delivered in a sensitive way and confidentiality is respected.

4. The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service:

Although the Joint Adoption Service is provided jointly to both Shropshire Council and the Telford & Wrekin Council, Shropshire Council has management responsibility under the terms of arrangement with the Telford & Wrekin Council which is regularly reviewed and has been in place since 1998. There are quarterly Adoption Service Management Meetings held comprising of membership from both Authorities, which scrutinises the effectiveness of the service to both authorities.

Service Structure:



5. The Adoption Team

All of the Adoption Social Workers are qualified, very experienced in adoption work, and registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). They are also qualified under the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005, as they have all been qualified for at least 3 years and have the required experience in adoption work.

Some staff are in the process of obtaining further qualifications, particularly in the arena of therapeutic services to children with attachment difficulties.

In addition the Joint Adoption Service has the capacity to offer placements to approximately two Social Work students per year and this is an area that is valued by the team and Universities.

6. The System in Place to Monitor and Evaluate the Provision of Services to ensure that Services provided by the Adoption Service are Effective and the Quality of those Services is of an Appropriate Standard

In line with policy and guidelines, all staff receive regular supervision and as the team is accommodated in an open plan office, the Managers are available for consultation and advice in between the planned supervision sessions. Staff have annual appraisals and their training needs are regularly reviewed and they are actively encouraged to seek further appropriate learning opportunities both internally and externally. Staff are expected to share learning outcomes to benefit the team and when relevant with social workers in the wider service.

In addition to social work practice assurance through supervision, training and learning opportunities the following is also in place:

- Information about all children and prospective adoptive families is recorded on the adoption service data base. The data base provides the Adoption Team Manager with the comprehensive detailed information that is required to be delivered to Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Borough Councillors, in their role as Corporate Parents, on a regular basis.
- The Adoption Panel receives an annual report about activity and performance.
- The Adoption Panel provides quality assurance feedback to the Joint Adoption Service every 6 months on the quality of reports presented to Panel.
- All prospective adopters are interviewed during the preparation course in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery of the training.
- All prospective adopters are advised of the department's complaints procedure and given information about how to make a complaint.
- All prospective adoptive parents are asked to provide feedback regarding their attendance at adoption panel.
- All prospective adoptive parents are required to give written feedback after each training session – six in total. The purpose of asking for feedback is that at the end of

each training course an evaluation is carried out regarding the effectiveness of the course and participants views are considered to see if changes need to be made.

- Children referred to the Adoption Service will have a permanence plan which was made at the four month review. Once a permanence plan recommends adoption, the child will be monitored through the reviewing process.
- Monthly referral meetings are held, which review the progress of every child referred to the service requiring adoption.
- The referral meetings also consider approved prospective adoptive parents who do not have placements and identify their progress.
- A regular monitoring and evaluation exercise is to be carried out, by way of a questionnaire, sent to a random selection of service users, birth parents, children (if of sufficient age and understanding) prospective adopters, approved adopters, step-parent adopters, adult adoptees seeking counselling and area colleagues. Information from the questionnaires will be used to shape services.
- All adoption agencies (both Voluntary and Local Authority) are subject to regular inspection (on a 3 year basis, based on the National Minimum Standards for Adoption) regulatory assessment and must be registered as 'fit for purpose'.
- The key lines of regulatory assessment are measured against the Shropshire's Children, Young People and families plan for which the aims are:

(i) To ensure all children and young people are safe and well looked after in a supportive environment

(ii) Narrowing the achievement gap in education and work

(iii) Ensuring the emotional wellbeing of children & young people by focussing on prevention and early intervention

(iv) Keeping more children healthy and reducing health inequalities.

Management – The agency is managed in an effective and efficient way. The management structure is strong and stable and staff are safe, skilled and knowledgeable to work with children. The staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and ensure good outcomes are achieved through placing children with adoptive families who have been thoroughly assessed and vetted.

7. Inter Team and Inter Agency Working

The Joint Adoption Service is committed to keeping the child at the centre of our work. To achieve this we strive to ensure that we maintain good working relationships with colleagues in the Referral and Assessment Teams, Looked after Children and Fostering Teams. We are accessible and approachable and through our Permanency Co-ordinator we become involved in formulating the best possible care plans for looked after children, so that when appropriate adoption can be considered in a timely manner, as a positive option.

8. The Procedures for Recruiting, Preparing, Assessing, Approving and Supporting Prospective Adopters

In its work as an Adoption Agency, the main consideration of the Joint Adoption Service will be to provide adoptive families for children that will allow them to grow up in a secure and positive environment and to reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.

- The needs of children who require adoptive placements are diverse and complex. In order to meet these needs, the Joint Adoption Service will work flexibly and be willing to consider all options that offer the potential to provide a suitable adoptive home for a child.
- The Joint Adoption Service will respond positively to applications to become adopters from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion in order to provide the maximum opportunity for children to be successfully adopted. In order to achieve this in the most timely, effective and efficient manner possible the service employs the services of a professional marketing agency, On –Trac.
- The Joint Adoption Service will monitor its work in the area of adoption and take steps to continually improve its service.
- The Joint Adoption Service will provide training, preparation and support to adopters.
- The Joint Adoption Service will provide information about its services as an adoption agency and will work in an open and fair way with all users of the service.

- Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council operate a joint adoption service (but with each having their own Agency Decision Maker) and has responsibility for all aspects of arranging placements of children with prospective adopters in accordance with the relevant legislation. This document gives an overview of the Joint Adoption Service's policies in this area of its work.
- Adoption is a complex process. It is also an area where practice and legislation changes over time and the policies and procedures are updated as required.
- Nationally, interest in adoption is high following publication of several reports on children in public care, related television programmes and the implementation of the National Standards on Adoption and the Adoption Register. The part that adoption can play in achieving secure permanent families for children who cannot live with their birth families is also an important part of the Government's modernisation of child care services.

It is important that all those who currently are, or may potentially be involved in any way in the adoption of children in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin are aware of this Statement of Purpose document. The authority will make this document readily available to users of its services, other organisations and the general public.

9. Adoption Services Provided

Adoption Services are provided for:

- Children whose care plans are adoption or are likely to become adoption
- Birth relatives of children whose care plan is adoption
- Birth parents who are considering relinquishing their baby/child
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families
- Colleagues within Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin and in other agencies

Children needing adoptive placements:

We are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for the children in our care and for those children who cannot return to their birth families we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and permanent substitute families. For those children who have or are likely to have a 'should be adopted decision', the Adoption Team recruits and assesses prospective adopters who can

meet the needs of those children. We are also mindful of the national shortage of adopters and aim to recruit more adopters than we need, for children placed with other local authorities.

The profile of children needing adoptive placements has changed considerably in recent years, and we need to recruit a wide range of adopters to reflect these changes. We need adopters who can consider older children, sibling groups, children whose future development is uncertain and those from black and minority ethnic groups. All of these children will have experienced some level of neglect and or abuse and are subject to care proceedings. Many have delayed development. They will currently be living with foster carers but need permanent adoptive parents.

Adoption Support Services:

Adoptive families, adopted adults or birth relatives can ask for an assessment of needs at any time after the adoption. The ASSA or an Adoption Social Worker undertakes the assessment and if appropriate draws up a support plan.

Working with our partners, the Joint Adoption Service provides a comprehensive and continually developing range of adoption support services for children, adoptive parents, birth relatives and anyone who has been affected by adoption. This includes counselling, information and advice, various therapeutic interventions (such as Thera play, EDMR, filial therapy etc.), support groups, training courses and workshops and access to birth records.

We hold regular support groups for adoptive families and organise bi annual adoption events for adopted children and their families.

We administer a confidential Information exchange (Letter Box) service to facilitate indirect contact between birth families and adoptive parents on behalf of their children and we also facilitate, and can support direct contact arrangements as long as these are still in the best interest of the child.

The Joint Adoption Service has a Service Level Agreement with an Independent Adoption Agency (After Adoption) to provide an independent support service to birth relatives whose child is being placed for adoption or who has been adopted. The Independent Adoption Agency currently awarded this contract also provides an Intermediary Service for birth relatives who wish to contact an adopted adult. All requests for Intermediary Services are referred to this service for which a small charge is levied by the Independent Adoption Agency.

Non Agency Adoptions:

- **Overseas Adoption**

The Joint Adoption Service will undertake assessment reports for people wishing to adopt a child from a country outside of the United Kingdom (although allocation of these assessments may be subject to a waiting list in light of the children currently referred to the service who require a placement). In such cases a set charge will be made for the work involved, which will include undertaking the assessment, consideration by the Joint Adoption Panel, following up references and statutory checks and all administration.

Applicants wishing to adopt a child from abroad will undertake training and preparation courses provided by the Inter-Country Adoption Centre. Specific information about inter-country adoption and the processes involved can be obtained from the Joint Adoption Service and is also published on the Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council web sites.

Where people are seeking to adopt a related child from overseas the set charge will usually apply although the Joint Adoption Service may reduce or waive the fee in exceptional circumstances.

- **Step-parent and kinship adoptions**

Area residents who enquire about other non-agency adoptions, usually step parent or kinship enquires, are given information by the Joint Adoption Service Staff or they can view information on our website. If appropriate they are offered an office appointment to discuss their specific circumstances and are advised about procedures and about the status of non-related children.

The relevant assessment, statutory checks and Court reports are undertaken in non-agency adoptions when area residents have given notification of their intention to apply to adopt. This includes step-parent adoptions, adoptions of a close relative such as a niece, nephew or grandchild and children who have been adopted in another country and the adoption is not recognised in the UK.

10. The Adoption Process for Agency Adoptions

Under the government adoption reform programme, the new recruitment and assessment process with shorter timescales was introduced in July 2013.

- **Stage 1 Assessment**

After completion of the initial pre -stage, prospective applicants who are likely to meet the needs of children needing an adoptive placement are invited to submit a 'Registration of Interest' and they can begin Stage 1 of the adoption process. This stage is very much adopter led and should be completed in 2 months. It is a time for them to do more research while statutory checks and references are taken out, including medicals and DBS checks. If all checks are satisfactory, applicants are advised that they are / are not in a position to move to stage 2 and are invited to stage 2 of the assessment process as appropriate. Applicants are also engaged in the preparation training at this stage.

- **Stage 2 Assessment**

Applicants can take a break for up to 6 months between Stage 1 and 2, but if the applicants and we feel they are ready to proceed they are invited to put in a formal application and during this stage the prospective adopters complete any of the outstanding preparation training course left over from stage 1. We do this in this way to reduce any unnecessary delay.

The preparation course gives perspective adopters the opportunity of exploring all aspects of adoption today and they are able to consider adoption from many different perspectives. They are able to hear directly from adopters, adoptees and birth relatives.

The home study, a very thorough and detailed assessment, is also completed in this stage. This process may seem intrusive, but it is absolutely essential for the welfare and safety of children that a consistent and searching assessment is conducted. This assessment should ensure that adopters are realistic, have the capacity to meet the needs of any child placed with them, and that they are able to respond to the lifelong issues associated with adoption.

The information gathered during the preparation and assessment period is used to compile the Prospective Adopter's Report. The applicants contribute directly to this report and they are able to read and comment on this before it is presented to the Adoption Panel. The aim is to meet the 4 months standard for completion for Stage 2, unless there are evidenced reasons for delay.

- **Fast Tracking**

For 2nd time adopters or foster carers who wish to consider adopting a child they are currently fostering, the adoption assessment process is more condensed. Stage 1 and 2 is completed concurrently and we aim to complete the assessment within 4 months.

- **Fostering to Adopt and Concurrency**

The possibility of fostering a child prior to adoption or offering a concurrency placement will also be explored with applicants during the assessment process. These options are usually considered for new-born babies or young children, when the agency has a care plan of adoption but the care proceedings have not been concluded, so we do not have the authority of the court to place the child for adoption. If such children can be placed directly with potential adopters, initially on a fostering basis, it prevents a change of placement for the child if the court ultimately agrees the plan of adoption. The benefits for the child are obvious and as a result we aim to recruit adopters who can meet this option.

- **The Adoption Panel**

Recommendations about whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt are made by the Adoption Panel. Also recommendations about suitability of matches for adoption are also heard by the panel; and adoption plans for those children relinquished by their birth parent(s) where there is no court involvement.

The Panel members have a wide range of experiences and include adoptive parents and other relevant professionals. Members are drawn from a central list and the panel chair is independent of the council. The panel is a joint Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Adoption Panel and meets once a month. Extraordinary panels are arranged as needed.

All prospective adopters are invited to attend the Panel when their application is considered and are informed of Panel's recommendation on the same day. The Agency Decision Maker makes decisions within 7 working days of receiving the Panel's minutes and decisions are confirmed to applicants, verbally within 2 days, and in writing within 5 working days.

With their knowledge and agreement all approved adopters' details are added to the Adoption Support mailing list and they are invited to adoption support groups and events run in the area including any training and workshops.

- **Independent Review Mechanism**

Should the adoption panel not recommend approval and the Agency Decision Maker agrees with this, the applicants can apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for this to be reviewed. Written information about this process is given to all applicants during their assessment.

- **Matching and Placement**

Approved adopters will be considered for any suitable Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin children. A matching meeting will be held which will look at any prospective adopters who have been put forward for a child and a decision made about the most suitable family for each particular child. The prospective adopters will see all relevant information and reports including the Child's Placement Report, have discussion with their adoption worker, the child's social worker and meetings will be arranged with the child's foster carer, medical adviser and anyone else of significance.

A Child appreciation meeting/ placement planning meeting will be convened. A child centred detailed plan of introductions will be drawn up in collaboration with the foster carer and the adopters. The plan is reviewed mid-way and if all are in agreement the moving day will be confirmed.

On presenting a proposed match to the Adoption Panel an Adoption Placement Report is presented highlighting the placement support requirements, including financial support, proposed contact arrangements with birth family, therapeutic support needed, and recommendations about referrals to any specialist agency. This report is sent to the prospective adopters, prior to submission to Panel, allowing the required time for them to read and add their written comments.

The Adoption Panel makes the recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision. The prospective adopters are again invited to attend this panel.

If the placement is approved a life history \

If approved adopters are not matched locally within 3 months of approval, their approval details will be forwarded to the Adoption Register if they are in agreement, thereby extending the range of potential placement matches for them.

- **Annual Reviews**

There is a legal requirement that all approved adopters awaiting a placement are reviewed at least annually by their approving agency, or when there is a significant change to circumstance. In effect, this seldom happens as most approved adopters are matched with children within a few months of approval.

Annual Reviews are only presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation if it is felt that the prospective adopters approval to adopt should be terminated; however, the Joint Adoption

Panel has sight of all reviews in order that it can be kept up-to-date of all cases it has considered and reasons for delay.

13. Quality Assurance and Monitoring

There are systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services and to ensure that the services provided by the Adoption Service are effective and the quality is of an appropriate standard. There are several components to monitoring the Adoption Service.

The Children's Statutory Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers and the Permanency Planning process ensures that monitoring an individual child's progress towards adoption is scrutinised.

The services provided for adults and children - prospective adopters, adopters seeking support, birth families, adopted children and adults - are all regularly monitored in a variety of ways to determine the initial response times, completion of assessments and the quality of support offered. Feedback is encouraged and evaluation forms are routinely given all service users. Both verbal and written comments are noted and are used to monitor our services and to make improvement when necessary

The Adoption Panel has a Quality Assurance role. It is independently chaired as legally required and receives relevant reports concerning the suitability of prospective adopters to adopt a child and the placement of a child with particular prospective adopters. As such, the Panel is able to scrutinise on a case-by-case basis the effectiveness of the adoption service in terms of seeing the best possible outcomes for adopters and for children who cannot remain with their birth parents. Any concerns are referred back to the agency via the Panel Adviser or directly by the Panel Chair.

The Adoption Panel Adviser also quality assures the reports presented to the Adoption Panel and the Panel Chair collates feedback on behalf of all of the panel members about time scales, about the standard of reports and the quality and consistency of the work and planning for children. The Adoption Agency Decision Maker also meets with the Independent Adoption Panel Chair to monitor the work of the Panel.

As a department of the Local Authority, Learning and Children's Services operates within the framework of regulation and statutory guidance that applies to all local authorities. The Adoption Agency is also subject to regular scrutiny by the Department of Education and Ofsted via regular data collection and annual returns and the publication of scorecards.

There are also inspections by Ofsted, as part of the broader Children's Services inspections, and our services are considered to ensure that the Joint Adoption Service complies with National Minimum Standards for Local Authorities Adoption Agencies in England and Wales.

14. Complaints

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. In the first instance, any complaint received will be dealt with in this way and efforts will be made to resolve the issue to everyone's satisfaction. The Councils have a corporate complaints procedure that operates if no resolution can be achieved at this stage.

Where a complaint against an adoptive parent constitutes a child protection allegation this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

15. Service and Other Agency Contact Details

Joint Adoption Service

Mount McKinley
Anchorage Avenue
Shrewsbury Business Park
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6FG

01743 250138

ss-adoption@shropshire.gov.uk

Ofsted

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Coram & British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (Coram/BAAF)

www.Coram/baaf.org.uk

Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC)

www.icacentre.org.uk

