



ISLINGTON

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE ADOPTION SERVICE

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1. Aims and Objectives of the Adoption Service

- 1.1 Islington Council believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet their needs during childhood, and beyond. Where children cannot live with their own birth parents, Islington Council is committed to finding them a new family wherever possible.
- 1.2 The Adoption Service is committed to ensuring that children referred for adoption are able to live with an adoptive family as soon as possible and recognises that delays in achieving permanence is detrimental to a child's development.
- 1.3 The Adoption Service is committed to providing a service to adults in the community who would like to adopt. Whilst our primary aim is to match adopters with Islington's children or children from the UK, we are also able to offer assessments for adults wishing to adopt from overseas.
- 1.4 Children, birth parents and relatives, foster carers, adoptive parents and adopted people will receive a comprehensive service which promotes the welfare of children, supports families and treats all parties fairly, openly and with respect.
- 1.5 The Adoption Service is committed to ensuring that all efforts are made for children to be adopted by families who reflect their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious background. This will be reflected in:
- our assessments and approval process for children being considered for adoption
 - our family finding strategies employed to secure a family for a child who is to be adopted
 - our annual recruitment strategy for adoptive families
 - our assessment and approval process for children to be matched with proposed adoptive families.
- 1.6 Islington Council recognises the importance of delivering integrated services in order to meet the needs of children and adults. This can be especially important in the adoption processes where health and education services may have a key role to play. Therefore our services will be planned and provided in collaboration with other agencies and service user organisations where appropriate.
- 1.7 The following legislation provides the main statutory framework for the operation and delivery of the service:

- Adoption Act 1976, Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003 and 2005
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and 2005
- Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards regulations for Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales
- National Adoption Standards (2002)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991

(The Adoption and Children Act 2002 is due to be fully implemented on 30 December 2005).

- 1.8 The legislation outlined above is supported by practice guidance which is issued through the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).
- 1.9 Detail of all legislation and practice guidance can easily be accessed by visiting the DfES web site at: www.dfes.gov.uk/adoption.
- 1.10 The Statement of Purpose provides a general introduction and overview of the service. The following documents provide detailed policy and practice guidance for practitioners, managers and other interested parties:
- The Islington Adoption Procedures 2002
 - The Islington Adoption Support Procedures 2005
 - The Islington Adoption Procedures 2005 (which will come into effect in November 2005 and replace the 2002 procedures)
 - Constitution and Terms of Reference of Islington's Adoption and Permanence Panel 2005.
 - Islington's Looked After Children's Manual 2004
- 1.11 These documents will be made available upon request to the Adoption Service Manager.
- 1.12 This Statement of Purpose will outline the aims and objectives of the Adoption Service, quality assurance mechanisms, and the range of services provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth families.
- 1.13 The principles within this Statement of Purpose apply to all agency placements including inter-agency placements and also non agency placements such as step parent and inter-country adoptions. These placements will receive the same high quality professional and management attention.
- 1.14 This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually and agreed at the Executive Committee of Islington Council.

- 1.15 There will be two appendices which accompany this Statement of Purpose. As these contain information which may be subject to frequent change, these will not require approval from the Council's Executive to update. The appendices will include:
- Details of the organisational structure and staffing of the Adoption Service
 - Management contact details
 - Information about complaints and representations, including contact details for children or adults wishing to make a complaint.
 - Contact details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

Appendix B will be confidential but made available to the CSCI as it contains personal information about members of staff who work in the Adoption Service.

2. Our Commitment to Children

- 2.1 A plan to achieve permanence for a looked after child will be drawn up at their 4 month statutory review and reviewed at each subsequent review.
- 2.2 All decisions for children will be based on a rigorous assessment and care planning process.
- 2.3 Children with disabilities and special needs will be entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption as other children.
- 2.4 A plan for permanence will be based on the needs of the individual looked after child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved by return to birth family or through adoption or permanent foster care.
- 2.5 Adoption will be considered as a positive option for looked after children who are unable to return to live with their birth parents or be placed within their own family network.
- 2.6 The lifelong impact of severance of relationships with their birth family through adoption will be carefully considered in considering permanence plans.
- 2.7 Permanence Plans will normally include planning for more than one option at the same time to avoid delay. This means that a plan for

return to birth family can be pursued at the same time as a plan for adoption.

- 2.8 Time-scales set out in the National Adoption Standards 2002, will dictate the pace of expediting the plan, which will be carefully tracked, monitored and reviewed at least once every 4 weeks.
- 2.9 Children with a Permanence Plan that includes adoption will have an adoption plan drawn up to support their care plan, which will be reviewed at least once every four weeks.
- 2.10 We will encourage children's birth family members to be involved in the planning process and ensure that their views are recorded.
- 2.11 Where a plan for permanence includes adoption, arrangements will be made to present the Adoption Plan to the Adoption and Permanence Panel within 2 months.
- 2.12 The Adoption Plan will include an Adoption Action Plan, a BAAF Form E (detailing the needs of the child) and an Adoption Support Plan where support needs are identified.
- 2.13 Every child will have their wishes and feelings listened to in an age appropriate manner, recorded and taken into account regarding plans for their future. Where they are not acted upon reasons for this will be explained to the child and recorded on the file.
- 2.14 The BAAF Children's Guide and Information about the Adoption Service will be made available to children when adoption is being considered for them.
- 2.15 Children of a sufficient age and understanding will also be given information about Islington's complaints procedure, how to access an independent advocate, information about our Children's Active Involvement Service and contact details for CSCI and other useful telephone numbers.
- 2.16 All children will have a named social worker responsible for them throughout the adoption process. This social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the child is well prepared before joining a new family. Age appropriate information will be given and prospective adopters and foster carers will be trained and supported to enable children to prepare to move to a new adoptive family.
- 2.17 All children moving on to adoptive families must have a life story book and be supported to retain key items and mementoes from their past.
- 2.18 Examples may be drawings, photographs, important items of clothing (e.g. a child's first shoes), favourite books or a favourite toy. Small

items could be collected up into something that resembles a treasure box so they can be kept together securely.

- 2.19 Practitioners and carers will be provided with training, research materials and up-to-date literature to help them in undertaking life-story work with children.
- 2.20 Children will have access to specialist skilled help when they need this to enable them to express their feelings about their past and plans for the future and be better placed to develop new attachments to adoptive families.
- 2.21 A referral will be made to the Adoption Service within 24 hours of a review decision that adoption is to be part of the permanence plan.
- 2.22 The Adoption Service will allocate a named social worker (Adoption Social Worker), who will be responsible for working in partnership with the child's social worker to:
- find an adoptive family for the child
 - assist in the introduction of a child to an adoptive family
 - assist in the supervision of new placements until such time as an adoption order has been granted.
- 2.23 In order to achieve this, an initial Permanence Planning Meeting will be held with the child's social worker and any current foster carers to consider the plans for the child, establish the time scales within which the plan has to be achieved, examine in detail any specific matching requirements and devise a family finding strategy.
- 2.24 The BAAF Form E will detail matching criteria for the child, and children will be placed with families that are best able to meet their needs.
- 2.25 We will ensure that children are placed with families who have been fully assessed as suitable for caring for children and young people; this will include having received satisfactory responses on all statutory checks required (e.g. health and criminal records).
- 2.26 We will try wherever possible to keep siblings together and place them together for adoption. The decision to separate siblings will be based on rigorous assessment that must show either that to place siblings together would not be in their best interests, or that to insist on doing so would reduce the ability to secure an adoptive placement for a child. Permanent fostering must be re-considered as an alternative option to adoption where consideration is given to separating siblings.
- 2.27 Taking decisions to separate siblings is a difficult task and training and guidance will be provided for staff on this issue. A decision to

separate siblings should be fully recorded on the file and explained to the child as appropriate. A clear contact plan for maintaining the link between siblings must be presented as part of the plan for adoption to the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

- 2.28 Children will not be left waiting for a 'perfect family'. Children should be placed, wherever possible, with adoptive or permanent foster families that offer a good match in relation to ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. However, if no such match can be found, alternative adopters who can help a child understand their background and culture should be identified to avoid delay in the child being able to live with a permanent substitute family.
- 2.29 The Adoption Social Worker will consider families within the local pool of Islington approved adopters, those within the North London Adoption Consortium, of which Islington is a member, as well as any families identified by the National Adoption Register.
- 2.30 Specific family finding activities will be undertaken, if necessary, by advertising for adopters in appropriate journals and by contacting a wide range of adoption agencies. National and local media, and specialist press, may be used to try to find a family for a child, where other routes have proven to be unsuccessful (for example, for a child from a particular racial or religious background, where it has proven difficult to find an appropriate match). Children of sufficient age and understanding will be consulted about having their photograph used for any advertising.
- 2.31 The option of the child remaining on a permanent basis with existing foster carers through adoption will always be considered and explored if appropriate.
- 2.32 Matching considerations such as the age of the child, the need to place siblings together, the particular needs of the child, and the circumstances and structure of the foster carers' family will have to be taken into account.
- 2.33 All children will be referred to the National Adoption Register within three months of the decision being made that adoption is in their best interest provided no family has been identified and they have not been placed for adoption; however, the following criteria must be met:
- A Care Order must be in place with an agreed plan for adoption, **or**
 - An Interim Care Order is in place and we have the consent of the parents and that of the court **or**
 - The child is accommodated under section 20 (CA1989) and parental consent has been given (this is most often in the case of relinquished babies).

- 2.34 Where young babies are highly likely (over 80% chance) to be adopted, we will aim to place them with concurrent carers, who are approved for fostering and adoption, where they can potentially remain for the rest of their life. Concurrent carers are approved, assessed and made available to Islington through a contracted agency.
- 2.35 The Adoption Service will make it clear to potential adopters for a child that it is a requirement that the child's first name should be retained unless there is a very good reason to change it; for example, if it would make the child easily identifiable.
- 2.36 Appropriate contact for children with their birth family will always have to be considered in the final care plan to the court. The Adoption and Permanence Panel will also consider these plans whenever a child's adoption plan is presented before them.
- 2.37 Where direct contact arrangements are to continue post adoption, the aim should be to promote a positive sense of identity for the child, not maintaining relationships in order to facilitate rehabilitation to the birth family.
- 2.38 Indirect contact arrangements for an adopted child with his or her birth family will be arranged via the Adoption Support Service's 'letterbox scheme'. The expectation is that letterbox arrangements will be put in place for all children where direct contact is not being maintained.
- 2.39 It is recognised that a child's need for contact and information about their birth family will develop and change throughout their childhood. The adoption support social worker will facilitate this or organise access to specialist services to review contact plans and promote the setting up of appropriate direct or indirect contact arrangements.
- 2.40 Children with attachment difficulties and histories of a traumatic and disrupted past may need continued access to specialist multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption. Adoption support needs for the child will be identified in the Adoption Support Plan when the plan for the child is presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel and reviewed once a child has been adopted. Children may need access to ongoing therapeutic and health services and specific support within their school, and these should be identified and will be provided for.
- 2.41 Children's adoption files will be carefully stored and archived and information from the agency's records will be made available to children when they are of a sufficient age and understanding. Adoption files will be retained for 100 years.

3. Our Commitment to Birth Families

- 3.1 Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access independent support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications of adoption and their rights as soon as adoption is being considered for their child. Birth parents will be provided with written information about this service, as well as other services they can access nationally.
- 3.2 The views of birth families about the adoption and contact plans will be clearly recorded on their child's file and the BAAF Form E when the plan for the child is presented to Adoption and Permanence Panel.
- 3.3 Information about prospective adopters will be shared with birth parents as much as possible, subject to safeguarding the safety and welfare of the child, and their views recorded and included in information for the Adoption and Permanence Panel.
- 3.4 Birth parents and appropriate relatives will be given the opportunity to meet the adoptive parents for their child, normally prior to placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances that would make such a plan unsafe and against the best interest of the child.
- 3.5 The wishes and views of the birth parents will be taken into account in the adoption planning process, particularly with regard to religion.
- 3.6 Social workers for the child will make efforts to obtain clear and appropriate information from birth family members about themselves and their history and encourage them to contribute to the child's life story material.
- 3.7 Staff in the Adoption Service will explain to adoptive parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and provide this to the child as appropriate.
- 3.8 The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with extended birth family members, particularly birth grandparents, is recognised and will be supported as appropriate and included in letterbox or direct contact arrangements and detailed in the Adoption Support Plan. This will also include details of any support birth relatives may need to enable them to meet the contact plans.
- 3.9 The Adoption Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and will provide intermediary services in accordance with guidance document "Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives" (DOH 2000) and guidance issued under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

- 3.10 Birth parents and families will be advised of the complaints procedure and their right to make representation and complaints.

4. Our Commitment to Prospective Adopters

- 4.1 We will welcome applications from prospective adopters regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. However, it is recognised that a wide range of adopters are needed to meet the needs of our looked after children and that these needs will determine the priority given to progressing applications from prospective adopters.
- 4.2 Therefore, priority will normally be given to prospective adoptive families offering placements for children over two years of age, with disabilities and special needs, sibling groups, and children from black and ethnic minorities.
- 4.3 Prospective adopters will be advised that there are few babies available for adoption and that prospective applicants for white babies will only be given priority for assessment if they live in the local area. All prospective applicants wishing to adopt babies will be advised of possible delay in progressing their application because of this.
- 4.4 The Adoption Service will provide a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Initial details will be taken and information given about eligibility criteria. Full information packs will be sent out to potential adopters within five working days. These information packs will contain information about the assessment and training process, the types of children needing adoptive placements, our adoption support services as well as our complaints procedure.
- 4.5 Applicants must be aged over 21 years and legally domiciled in the UK and within a reasonable travelling distance of Islington. Couples will normally have to have been in a relationship for a reasonable length of time, usually at least 3 years. Couples that have infertility issues will normally be expected to have concluded any medical intervention and made a positive choice about adoption as a route to parenting.
- 4.6 The information material to prospective applicants will provide details of issues relating to past criminal convictions, health and age considerations.
- 4.7 The age of applicants is considered in relation to their energy and activity levels and the age of the child they wish to be considered for. Children under the age of 2 years and children with specific relevant health issues may not be placed in smoking household; we will take into account the well-recognised risks of passive smoking.

- 4.8 The Adoption Service has a policy that certain staff groups within Children's Services and elected Members of the authority are not eligible for assessment by the authority because of the potential for conflict of interest.
- 4.9 Prospective adopters will be informed about the fact that Islington is part of the North London Adoption Consortium with Barnet, Enfield, Camden, Haringey, Norwood Adoption and Parents for Children.
- 4.10 Once approved and subject to their consent, if they are not linked with an Islington child within three months of approval their details will be circulated to Consortium members and to the National Adoption Register.
- 4.11 If a prospective adoptive family is offering a particular resource that may result in them not being linked with a local child they will be informed that their details will be circulated to other agencies with minimum delay to maximise the opportunity for them to be appropriately linked with a child.
- 4.12 Prospective adopters who decide to proceed with their application having received the information pack will either be invited to attend an information meeting or be offered an initial home assessment visit, which should take place within one month of the initial inquiry.
- 4.13 If the Adoption Service is of the view that it cannot prioritise or progress an application at any stage, a full explanation will be given to the applicants in writing and recorded on the file.
- 4.14 Access to specific advice and information will be made available if prospective applicants are unsure as to whether they wish to consider inter-country or domestic adoption.
- 4.15 We have a contract through our consortium with an agency that specialises in inter-country adoption and all enquiries and referrals for assessment regarding adopting a child from overseas will be responded to and undertaken by them.
- 4.16 Where the specialist agency is unable to assist we will consider providing this service in-house wherever possible, but applicants will be informed that as the assessment will not enable the adoption of a looked after child, this will not be seen as a priority assessment and there may be some delay in its commencement. Fees will be charged for assessments of adopters wishing to adopt from another country.
- 4.17 The Adoption Service will also provide information and respond to enquiries in respect of step-parent adoptions. Responsibility for the supervision and assessment of step-parent adoptions rests with the

appropriate Children & Families team based at our Essex Road offices.

- 4.18 Where our current foster carers are being assessed as prospective adopters for the children already in their care, they will be entitled to access the same training and support services as prospective adopters. Assessments will be conducted within time-scales compliant with the National Adoption Standards.
- 4.19 Preparation training groups for prospective adopters will be run monthly, except August and December, jointly with members of the North London Adoption Consortium. The training groups will always include input from experienced adopters and details of the content of these groups will be provided to applicants in advance.
- 4.20 The preparation groups will provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to consider in detail issues relating to adoption, meet other prospective adopters and help them to decide whether they wish to proceed by making a formal application to be assessed as adoptive parents.
- 4.21 Social workers who facilitate the training will form a view about whether an applicant is likely to be successful in pursuing their application to adopt and on occasion we may come to a view at this stage that an applicant is not suitable. Our reasons will be given verbally and in writing and applicants will be advised of what they can do, should they be unhappy with our decision.
- 4.22 We will canvas the views of prospective adopters about the content and running of the group.
- 4.23 The assessment and approval process will be comprehensive, thorough, fair and fully explained to applicants. The Adoption Service will work in partnership with applicants.
- 4.24 However, it will be made clear to prospective adopters that a risk assessment is being carried out when a home study assessment is being completed.
- 4.25 Assessments will distinguish clearly between self-reported and independently evidenced information, with verification of key aspects of the applicants' accounts.
- 4.26 The assessment will be completed using the appropriate BAAF Form F including the competencies. Applicants will receive a copy of the completed assessment and have the opportunity to comment on it.
- 4.27 Applicants will be given full information about the Adoption and Permanence Panel and encouraged to attend.

- 4.28 The Adoption and Permanence Panel will comment on the strengths and potential areas of difficulty or concern in the application and applicants are informed about Panel's recommendation on the day. The decision of the Agency Decision-Maker will be conveyed to applicants verbally on the day that it is made and followed up in writing within 7 working days.
- 4.29 Applicants will be advised of their right to an independent review if they are not approved by the Adoption and Permanence Panel and provided with relevant contact information.
- 4.30 Prospective adopters will also be advised about other services provided by national adoption support agencies, for example Adopt UK.

5. Our Commitment to Approved Adopters

- 5.1 Approved adopters will be given full information about the matching, introduction and placement process including information on the Consortium and purpose and function of the National Adoption Register.
- 5.4 We will actively encourage approved adopters to give consent to their details being submitted to the National Adoption Register where we have not been able to identify a match with an Islington child or a child within our consortium, within three months of being approved.
- 5.5 Approved adopters will also be advised that they may submit their own details to the register after they have been approved for 3 months.
- 5.6 Islington has detailed procedures for staff to follow in respect of the matching, placement and introduction process.
- 5.7 Within this process we will ensure that where there is a proposal to match a child with approved adopters who do not accurately reflect that child's ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious background, robust plans are put in place that address these issues and maximise the ability of the adopters to meet that child's needs.
- 5.8 An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel for consideration.
- 5.9 Proposed adopters for a child will be invited to attend the Panel hearing for the match.
- 5.10 A full matching report will be completed which details the positive factors about the match, any risk areas, information on any other

possible matches that have been considered, along with a proposed Adoption Support Plan that details the adoption support services that will be made available to the family, the child and the birth family.

- 5.11 We will provide approved adopters with full information about the child's history prior to the match.
- 5.12 Approved adopters will also have the opportunity to meet the child's foster carers, seek information from the Medical Advisor and meet any other key professionals.

6. The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 6.1 Islington's Adoption and Permanence Panel meets every two weeks to make recommendations to the Agency Decision-Maker in respect of all matters concerning adoption.
- 6.2 The Agency Decision-Maker for Islington is the Director of Children's Services. (This responsibility is delegated to the Assistant Director of the Children and Families Service in the absence of the Director).
- 6.3 An elected member, who is also a member of the Council's Corporate Parenting Group, will participate as a member of the Adoption and Permanence Panel and therefore have an detailed insight of the current issues regarding the adoption processes for Islington Council.
- 6.4 Part of the role of the Panel is to monitor the National Adoption Standards and relevant time scales in considering best interest decisions for children, approvals for prospective families and matching of children with approved families.
- 6.5 The Panel is chaired by an independently employed social worker, who has substantial experience of working in children's social work services, including adoption, and at senior management level.
- 6.6 The Panel has a Professional Advisor who is employed by the Council and a member of the Adoption Service. He or she will audit paperwork being submitted to Panel and take up quality assurance issues with staff and managers and withdraw assessments from Panel if further work is needed.
- 6.7 The Professional Advisor oversees the time tabling of the Panel agenda to ensure that sufficient time is given to consider each item on the agenda. The Professional Advisor will ensure policy and practice issues are picked up and disseminated to staff.

- 6.8 The Professional Advisor, together with the Chair of the Panel, will recruit members of the Panel in line with Adoption Regulations and will:
- provide induction and training as necessary
 - organise for Panel members to have the opportunity for regular training input on key areas of practice relating to adoption
 - ensure that panel members are kept updated on changes in legislation and regulations
 - ensure that for at least one of the training sessions during the year, Panel members will come together with the staff of the Adoption Service.
- 6.9 The Chair of the Panel also has a clear quality assurance role and will take up issues directly with the Professional Advisor or Agency Decision-Maker as necessary.
- 6.10 The Chair will provide an annual report on the activities of the Panel to the Service Manager for the Adoption Service. This report will form part of the Annual Adoption Service Report, which is presented to the Corporate Parenting Group by the Service Manager for Looked After Children. The Corporate Parenting Group will also receive a mid-year report from the Service Manager to report on progress against targets and highlight important issues.
- 6.11 Staff and prospective or approved adopters who attend Panel will be provided with evaluation forms for feedback purposes on their experience of the Panel. Their feedback will be taken into account and reported on through the annual Panel report.
- 6.12 Once a decision has been made that adoption is in the best interests of a child, the Panel will receive progress reports on that child on a three monthly basis. This will be either until such time as an Adoption Order is made or until there is an agreement that the plan for adoption should be changed.
- 6.13 Where the plan for adoption changes, the Panel will be asked to rescind the original decision, which then has to be endorsed by the agency-decision maker.
- 6.14 Panel will receive 6 monthly progress reports on approved adopters until a child is placed and an Adoption Order is made. If prospective adopters have not had a child placed within two years they will have to be re-assessed.
- 6.15 Panel members will receive all documentation for Panel in good time to allow for reading and full consideration of the issues.

- 6.16 Panel will make a recommendation, which will be conveyed to the staff member and adoptive applicant at Panel. They will be informed of the date of the meeting with the Agency Decision-Maker, which will be within 7 working days of the Panel recommendation. The decision will be reported back to applicants and staff verbally and followed up in writing within 7 working days.
- 6.17 The Professional Advisor or a Manager of the Adoption Service (in his or her absence), will meet with the Agency Decision-Maker and ensure that detail of the Panel discussion and recommendations are available to inform decision making.
- 6.18 The Panel Administrator will act as the Adoption Register Coordinator for the purpose of making referrals to the register within required time scales for children approved for adoption and approved adopters.
- 6.19 Detailed information about the functioning of Islington's Adoption and Permanence Panel can be found in its Constitution and Terms of Reference document, a copy of which can be made available on request to the Professional Advisor or Manager of the Adoption Service.

7. Adoption Support Services

7.1 Aims and Objectives of the Service

- 7.1.1 The provisions of our Adoption Support Services are set out in statute through:
- The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003
 - The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
 - The Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - Practice guidance in support of this legislation, issued through the Department for Education and Skills.
- 7.1.2 Our Adoption Support Service aims to meet the needs of adoptive families in the community by offering a range of services. This includes children, adopters and birth relatives.
- 7.1.3 Our Adoption Support Service recognises that adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. We will try to ensure that services offered are appropriate and sensitive to these different needs. Where necessary specialist services will be employed, for example by arranging interpreting services or making referrals to

services that are designed to meet the needs of specific cultural or religious groups.

- 7.1.4 Our Adoption Support Service recognises that adoptive families may need support at different stages of a child's development and that the kinds of support services required may differ from family to family.
- 7.1.5 Equally, birth relatives and adopted adults may need support at different times and their needs may vary greatly from person to person.
- 7.1.6 The Adoption Support Service will work with other agencies and key stake holder groups to continue to review and develop adoption support services.

7.2 Provision of Services

- 7.2.1 The current range of services provided can be divided into 7 broad categories.

1) Information and Advice Service

Information about our Adoption Support Service will be given to birth relatives, prospective adopters, approved adopters as well as distributed locally for adoptive families and birth families, who may not be aware of these services

The Adoption Support staff will offer general advice and information by telephone for adoptive families, adopted adults and their birth relatives.

Our Adoption Support staff will ensure that anyone who contacts the Adoption Support Service will be sign-posted towards, and encouraged to access, relevant support services. This may be services provided within the community by other agencies or services provided by the Adoption Support Service itself.

The Adoption Support Service will ensure that where issues relating to service eligibility criteria require clarification, this will be resolved within 24 hours of the original referral having been received and the outcome communicated to the referrer.

2) Services to adopted adults and birth relatives

The Adoption Support Service recognises that adults who have been affected by adoption may be living with unresolved issues to do with adoption; this could have a profound and negative impact on their lives.

The Adoption Service will provide an information service to adopted adults seeking to obtain information about their past from case records or to trace their birth family.

Adopted adults will also be given information about other services available from key voluntary user groups such as the Post Adoption Centre and NORCAP.

The Adoption Support Service will ensure that birth relatives are able to access intermediary services to let adopted adults know of their interest in contact.

Information will be provided to adopted adults and birth relatives about making use of the Adoption Contact register.

3) Assessment Services

For most adoptive families assessments for adoption support will have been undertaken and agreed by the time a child is placed with an adoptive family.

The Adoption Support Service will undertake a formal assessment where

- there is a significant change in circumstances of a family already in receipt of services, requiring a re-assessment of their need for support services
- there is a need for adoption support services for a family not known to the adoption support service.

As a general guide, the Adoption Support Service will normally only undertake formal assessments where the provision of services are likely to include financial, therapeutic or contact support services.

The provision of intermediary support services to adopted adults and birth relatives, the general giving of information and advice to people affected by adoption will not require a formal assessment to be undertaken.

4) Financial Services

There is a duty on us to assess the need for financial assistance in order to enable adoptive families to meet the needs of their children. This will normally be assessed prior to a child being placed.

Financial support provided as a result of an assessment, may take the form of an agreed regular set allowance (adoption allowance) or may include one-off payments that may be time-limited.

Where an assessment leads to the provision of an adoption allowance, this will be reviewed at least once every year.

5) Therapeutic support services

The Adoption Support Service recognises that adoptive families may at times require access to specialist services to support them. This is due to the fact that many children who are adopted come into their adoptive families with early life experiences of abuse and/or neglect, that may have resulted in a range of developmental difficulties such as difficulties with attachment. It is not always possible to predict when such difficulties may require the provision of specialist support services. Sometimes difficulties do not manifest themselves until a child reaches adolescence or adulthood.

Our Adoption Support Service, in partnership with our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, has a family therapist employed on a part time basis who will support families directly or make referrals, in conjunction with the adoption support advisor, on their behalf to ensure they are able to have access to therapeutic support where this is needed.

6) Contact support services

Arrangements for contact between adopted children and their birth relatives should be planned for and agreed at the time the plan for adoption is presented to the court and must be made on the basis that they are in the long term best interests of the child. Contact is about meeting the needs of children, not adults.

The Adoption Support Service recognises that contact is an evolving process that requires regular review and may require changes over time in a child's life, but must nevertheless always remain based on what is in the best interests of the child.

The Adoption Support Service will co-ordinate and facilitate contact arrangements to take place, where this has been agreed as part of the child's adoption support plan.

Adoptive parents, children and birth relatives will be supported to enable the child to maintain any appropriate contact arrangements, either direct or indirect, with birth family members or significant others such as previous foster carers.

Indirect contact can involve the exchange of letters, photographs, children's pictures, videos, small presents and gift vouchers dependent on individual agreements.

Direct contact involves face to face meetings between a child and their birth relatives, previous foster carer/s or other significant people in a child's life.

7) Adopter support services

The Adoption Service will provide access to ongoing training and specialist services to adoptive families as part of its adoption support service.

The Adoption support service will provide support groups for adopters and arrange special events from time to time, for example an annual picnic.

Where an assessment of need for adoptions support, results in an agreement to deliver support services, an adoption support plan will be drawn up.

7.3 Adoption Support Plans

7.3.1 An Adoption Support Plan will set out clearly:

- The objectives of the adoption support services provided
- The time scale for carrying out the plan
- Those responsible for implementation
- The criteria to evaluate the success of the plan
- The procedures for reviewing the services and the plan

7.3.2 The Adoption Support Service may delegate or contract out provision of services to a third party e.g. voluntary adoption agency, independent provider or local strategic partnership (Consortium).

7.3.3 The Adoption Support Service will act on behalf of families to undertake negotiations with local authorities where there are cross boundary issues and/or where an assessment suggests that the delivery of services are required locally to where the family lives.

7.3.4 The Adoption Support Service will also undertake financial negotiations with other local authorities, where it is agreed that another local authority will provide adoption support services on our behalf.

- 7.3.5 Adoption Support Plans will be drawn up in partnership with the adoptive family and any representatives of agencies that are to contribute to the service delivery.
- 7.3.6 Children of sufficient age and understanding will be fully consulted in the planning and delivery of adoption support services and their wishes and feelings taken into account in the decision-making process.

8. Delivering a Quality Service

- 8.1 The Adoption Service is registered under the Care Standards Act 2000, with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).
- 8.2 The Commission for Social Care Inspection is the independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. The CSCI is responsible for the inspection of registered Adoption Agencies within this remit.
- 8.3 The National Minimum Standards regulations for Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales (Care Standards Act 2000) form the basis for inspection of the service.
- 8.4 The Adoption Service has welcomed the setting of national minimum standards for adoption agencies and has incorporated them for use in setting up its internal quality assurance framework.
- 8.5 The Service Manager responsible for the Adoption Service will ensure that internal audits are undertaken every 6 months to measure the delivery of our service against the standards.
- 8.6 Audits will be undertaken by different managers within the Adoption Service who hold designated areas of responsibility within the service.
- 8.7 The outcome of each audit will be assessed by the Service Manager.
- 8.8 Where a standard is either not met or partially met, targets will be set to ensure that standards are met. This can be achieved through a number of different routes, for example:
- Annual Service Unit Plan
 - Performance Appraisals
 - Individual Supervision
 - Team or Individual training and development activities

8.9 In addition, the Adoption Service has a number of other systems in place that measure delivery against the national minimum standards as well as against Council policy and procedure, these are:

- File audit forms on individual case files for children and for prospective adopters.
- A tracking system and action plans for children referred for adoption against time scales.
- A tracking system and action plans for prospective adopters against time scales.
- A referral and assessment tracker for the adoption support service
- A complaints tracker for ensuring that complaints received are dealt with in set time scales and are compliant with the Council's complaints procedure
- A staff recruitment tracker to ensure staff employed have all their statutory checks completed before they are able to start working
- A staff training and development tracker that enables effective planning to be undertaken to ensure staff and Panel members are kept abreast of developments in legislation and practice. It also ensures that qualification requirements for specified posts are monitored for compliance.

9. Staffing

- 9.1 We will ensure that there are sufficient staff to work in the Adoption Service and that the staffing structure outlined in Appendix B is kept under review to ensure that it is best positioned to meet the needs of the children and adults for whom we provide our services.
- 9.2 There will be clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service.
- 9.3 We will ensure that staff are recruited in line with the Council's recruitment and selection procedures and that statutory checks are carried out to ensure that prospective staff are suitable for working with children and families, before they are able to work for us.
- 9.4 We will ensure that all our social workers are registered as social workers with the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

- 9.5 All our staff will be expected to follow the code of conduct of Islington Council and in addition our registered social workers will be expected to adhere specifically to the Code of Conduct as set out by the GSCC.
- 9.6 All our staff will be expected to be committed to the Council's stated aims in relation to ensuring equal opportunities for staff and service users. This is provided in detail in its policy "Dignity for All – promoting equality & valuing diversity." In line with this policy, we will ensure that:
- Staff experience fairness and equality of treatment in the workplace
 - Customers receive fair and equal access to council services
 - Staff and customers are treated with dignity and respect
- 9.7 We will ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct for Employers as set out by the GSCC.
- 9.8 We will ensure that our staff are provided with access to appropriate training, supervision and support to ensure that our service users receive a service that is of a high quality standard.
- 9.9 Where social work students or unregistered social care staff contribute to assessments or work directly with families, they will be closely supervised by a registered social worker and their assessments or reports will always be countersigned by a registered social worker.
- 9.10 Our staff will work in partnership with other professionals both within Islington Children's Services and externally.
- 9.11 The Registered Manager and Registered Provider will be experienced managers and social work practitioners, who will be provided with qualifying management training where they do not already have such qualifications at the time of their appointment.
- 9.12 Experienced social work practitioners, employed as Deputy Managers, will have access to managerial training courses and/or management development opportunities.
- 9.13 Detailed information about the current management and staffing arrangements for the service can be found in Appendix B. Due to the confidentiality of the information in this Appendix, it not for public distribution but will be made available to the CSCI on inspection.

Appendices

These are contained in separate documents

