

Adoption South East Statement of Purpose

1.0. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. It is a requirement of the national minimum standards for adoption services that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and of the facilities that it provides. It can be used by children and young people, and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.
- 1.2. This document is the Statement of Purpose for Adoption South East.
- 1.3. Adoption South East came into being on the 1st April 2020. It is a shared adoption service across the region working on behalf of East and West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and Surrey Councils. The Head of Service reports quarterly to an Executive Board made up of the Directors of Children's Services (DCS) of the four partner Local Authorities. The Chair of the Executive Board is Alison Jeffries, DCS for East Sussex

We operate a hybrid approach in our work which can adapt to changing public health measures and requirements to maintain our service delivery as well as offering an inclusive approach to service provision.

- 1.4. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.
- 1.5. This statement of purpose has been produced in accordance with
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.
 - Care Planning Regulations 2010.
 - Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011).
 - Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2013.
 - Local Authority Regulations 2005.
 - Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendments) Regulations 2011.
 - Adoption Agencies' (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
 - Care planning, Placement and Care and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.
 - Adoption and CHILDREN Act 2002
 - Care Standards Act 2000.
- 1.6. Adoption South East is not registered as an Adoption Agency and therefore is not inspected in its own right by Ofsted.

2.0. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

2.1 The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our services.

2.2. Principles and Values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs of the services.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered support.

2.3. Equal Opportunities

2.3.1 The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of all four partner local authorities. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, disability, sex, gender, sexual orientation/ preference or age.

2.3.2. Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family without delay which adequately meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, sex, gender and disability, and which does not make assumptions about their sexual orientation or preference.

3.0. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

3.1 Aims of the Agency



Adoption South East is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and of the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

- 3.2. Ensuring the provision of a high quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children and young people who are looked after and who need adoptive families.
- 3.4. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
- 3.5. Working in partnership with adoptive families and agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the partner agencies and the RAA.
- 3.6. **Objectives of the Agency**
 - To recruit, assess and provide adopters who meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by national adoption standards.
 - To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
 - To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care.
 - To minimise delay in finding adoptive families for children, prioritising the needs of the child at all times.
 - To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption, recognising that adoption has evolving and lifelong implications for all those involved.
 - To provide a range of adoption support service to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children in partnership with other agencies.
 - To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad.
 - To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair.
 - That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaints process is made available.
 - That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with and learns from those in receipt of their services through consultation, comments, compliments and complaints.

4.0. **ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OFFICE BASES**

- 4.1. The offices of Adoption South East are based in the following locations;

Hub - County Hall, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1UE

<https://goo.gl/maps/gRmX9AdsEMvVKdHZ8>



Woking – Quadrant Court, 35 Guildford Rd, Woking GU22 7QQ
(<https://goo.gl/maps/qqSXz5p7aH8gtyKr9>)

Horsham - County Hall North, 4th Floor, Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham RH12 1XH
(<https://goo.gl/maps/LJNXH9gXtCmNUJ9i7>)

Eastbourne- interim care of County Hall Hub - County Hall, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1UE (<https://goo.gl/maps/gRmX9AdsEMvVKdHZ8>)

Brighton- Portslade Hub, Mile Oak Road, Portslade, BN41 2PG
(<https://goo.gl/maps/bWYSX4nDFCNUoi458>)

- 4.2. Adoption South East employs 125 staff. All adoption social workers have a social work qualification and are registered with Social Work England. The Head of Service acts as Agency Decision Maker in relation to Adopter Approvals and Reviews.

5.0. THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- 5.1.1 Recruitment, Preparation and Assessment of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a Prospective Adopter Assessment and report, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation training.
- 5.1.2 Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption. Children's social workers (Local Authority) and adoption social workers (Regional Adoption Agency) undertake the tasks of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption. The responsibility of matching and supporting adoptive families is a shared task until the adoption order is made.
- 5.1.3 Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them.
- 5.1.4 Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement, this includes workshops and training and support groups.
- 5.1.5 Those wishing to adopt from overseas (who are referred to another agency to provide a specialist service, under contract to Adoption South East).
- 5.1.6 Non agency adoption work for the four partner agencies (step parent adoption and foster carers who apply directly to the Court).
- 5.1.7 The adoption letterbox and direct contact service enables adopted children to maintain connections via their adoptive parents with their birth families.
- 5.1.8 ASE provide access to adoption records, support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults to access their adoption records to find out about their birth families are provided.
- 5.1.9 Information about all aspects of the adoption service can be accessed via the ASE adoption enquiry line, the website or via the Facebook page ([Adoption South East | Facebook](#)).

5.1.10 All enquiries are followed through by an adoption case worker. An interpreter can be made available. It is a requirement that prospective adopters have functional English for the purposes of preparation training, assessment and support.

6.0. THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

6.1. Enquiries and first contact

Enquirers can access information on adoption with ASE via the Regional Agency Website; www.adoptionsoutheast.org or by making contact with the dedicated advice line (0300 330 9470). The process can be found at <https://www.adoptionsoutheast.org.uk/process>

6.3. Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adoption South East has a contract with another agency to provide this work (<http://www.icacentre.org.uk/>). Applicants pay a fee for their assessment services, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc. Applicants may wish to discuss the relative merits of overseas and domestic adoption, in which case they are encouraged to contact the ASE enquiries line and ask to discuss this with a social worker.

6.4. Information events

Enquirers are invited to attend or access an information event.

6.5. Initial Ready to Adopt Appointment (R2A)

Enquirers may attend a weekly ASE presentation virtually which highlights the needs of our children, the adoption process and support available to adoptive families. Following this the enquirer may have a one to one meeting with an ASE social worker to help them to consider whether adoption is for them and whether the timing is right to make an application. They may request to make an application (referred to as registering their interest) following this meeting.

6.6. Stage One process

Following statutory guidance, this is a two-month process in which initial background checks are taken up - including DBS (data and barring service) and personal references are also obtained. Applicants also undergo a health assessment, complete a series of self-assessment exercises and attend training to help deepen their understanding of the role of the adoptive parent and the needs of adopted children. Stage One is intended to be an adopter led process, with the adopter

providing information that informs the Agency's decision whether or not to progress to Stage Two. The Agency provides feedback on its reasons if it is not able to offer progression to Stage Two and will give advice to the applicant if they are minded to reapply at a later time or to approach other agencies.

6.7. Stage Two – the assessment process

In Stage Two a Social Worker is allocated to the applicants to undertake a prospective adopter assessment. This assessment covers the applicant's journey through life to date, their personal insight and capacity for reflection and open communication, as well as their current circumstances and motivation to adopt. The assessing social worker also considers the extent of existing childcare experience and the applicants potential for parenting a child through adoption, mindful of the additional requirements this can involve such as supporting the child to make sense of their story, managing contact with key people from the child's past and supporting any additional needs the child has. The assessment will also cover the applicant's willingness to provide an early permanence placement for a child (by fostering the child pending the outcome of decision making about the child's future) for which additional training will be provided. The prospective adopter assessment typically involves meeting the social worker for 8 – 12 sessions. These are conducted in person at the applicant's homes, in the office, and virtually. Where the applicants are parents already the children of the household are always interviewed to give their views on the proposed adoption (as are any children living elsewhere) and school references are required. Where applicants apply as a couple the social worker will meet each partner individually on at least one occasion. Personal referees are also interviewed to give their view of the applicants and their ability to welcome a child into their family through adoption. At the end of the assessment a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) is written and shared with the applicants for their comment and approval. Applicants may request amendments before the report is submitted for consideration by one of the three ASE Adoption Panels. Stage Two should in most instances be completed within four months. However, the timescale is for guidance and should not constrain the quality of the assessment.

6.8. Adoption by Existing Foster Carers

When a foster carers request consideration to adopt children already living in their care ASE works with the local authority for the child. ASE then completes a viability assessment with the child's social worker seeking the views of the relevant fostering service and child social worker. Where the viability assessment is positive, and where the plan for the child is agreed by the LA to be adoption by their foster carer, a Stage Two assessment is undertaken. The training needs of the foster carers are considered within the assessment - including the option to offer the training provided

to other adoption applicants. However, training and development opportunities can be offered on a bespoke basis where indicated. The application is presented to adoption panel as with any other application, but this may also be heard alongside a recommendation to the same panel to match the foster carers with the child they hope to adopt.

6.9. Second time or subsequent adopters

When adoptive parents make an initial request to adopt another child this is managed through an initial enquiry. They then are offered a Ready to Adopt interview to make an initial assessment of whether the time is right for the family to re-enter the application process. As with first time applications entry to the application process is dependent on the service accepting an application (registration of interest). As second time applicants the adopters access Stage Two directly for a “fast track” assessment. As with foster carer applicants all standard checks and references are taken up concurrently in the assessment process, the aim is to complete the assessment within four months.

6.10. Subsequent sibling adoption

When a LA children's team is considering adoption as a possible plan for a child where those parents have had previous children adopted, they have a duty to consider whether the child might be placed for adoption alongside an elder birth sibling. In these circumstances, once it is established by the LA that they have consent from the parent or the permission of the Court to inform the adopters of the pregnancy or birth, ASE will make contact with the previous adopters to explore with them whether they may wish to be considered. If they wish to find out more, ASE will complete a viability assessment with those adopters in order to establish the remit of the assessment and the likely timescales and processes that will need to be completed. The outcome of this viability assessment will be considered by the LA children's team to consider against the range of possible plans for the child and determining how best to meet their assessed and emerging needs. Where the plan is to pursue the adopters of the sibling, Adoption South East will aim to complete the fast track assessment within four months, and will work with the LA children's team to consider early permanence placement options.

6.11. Adoption Panel – Approval

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following;

- Approval to adopt
- Continuation of assessment following a brief report to panel

- Reviews of approved adopters
- The match of a child with prospective adopters
- Children whose birth parents request adoption (the Child's Agency Decision Maker)

6.11.1. In addition to their recommendation in relation to individual cases, Panel has the responsibility to quality assure the work and practice of the adoption agency.

6.11.2. Adoption South East convenes panels regularly across the region in order to conduct panel business without delay for children or prospective adopters. The panels are designated as Woking, Uckfield and Horsham panels, the panels are held virtually, reflecting adopters' preferences, makes best use of resources and reduces the carbon footprint of this aspect of our work. Each Panel has an independent Chair, with significant experience of adoption and family placement. Panel members are drawn from a central list, which ensures that each panel meeting has representatives with personal experience of adoption, as well as professionals who bring adoption knowledge and experience.

6.11.3. All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel considering their application in order to ensure transparency. The Panel recommendation should not be influenced by their decision to attend or otherwise. Panel questions are directed to the assessing social worker/s with opportunity given to the applicants to give their views also. The Panel recommendation should be based upon the social work assessment and supporting evidence. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information presented at Panel. The Agency Decision Maker may not agree the Panel's recommendation and may make a decision different to that recommended by the Panel. The Agency Decision will be made within seven working days of receipt of the agreed minutes of the Adoption panel meeting.

6.12. Agency Decision Making

6.12.1. The Head of Service for the RAA acts as the Agency Decision Maker for approval of prospective adopters. The decision on whether a child should be placed for adoption and with respect of the suitability of a proposed match is made by an Agency Decision Maker in the child's home local authority. Decisions are notified to prospective adopters by the Adoption Social Worker, who is informed of the decision on the day of the Agency Decision. The Child's Social Worker verbally informs the birth parents and child (depending on age and understanding) of the match decision within two working days of the decision being made, and this is confirmed in writing within five working days.

6.12.2. In relation to approvals, where applicants are not recommended as suitable to adopt by the Panel, or where the Agency Decision Maker does not accept a positive recommendation by the Panel, applicants have access to the Independent Review Mechanism. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism/about>) Alternately, applicants may make representation directly to the Agency Decision Maker if they do not wish to access the Independent Review Mechanism.

6.13. Following approval at Panel

6.13.1 Following approval, the Adoption Social Worker completes a matching plan with the approved adopters which sets out how they will work together in partnership to support their being matched with a child from one of the partner local authorities or another local authority. The matching plan should be considered a dynamic plan - which is regularly reviewed and updated pending the prospective adopters successfully being matched or leaving the adoption process. The Adopters profile and matching criteria should be shared with the ASE Family Finding and Matching Hub to support matching and any changes swiftly communicated.

6.13.2. In the event of any significant changes to the applicant's household such as change of membership, relationship breakdown, disruption of an adoptive placement or applicant pregnancy a review of approval should be undertaken and considered by the agency. For applicants who are not yet matched following approval, review of approval is routinely undertaken at a 12 month interval and will be presented to the Adoption Panel who will recommend whether approval should be continued to the Agency Decision Maker. If termination of approval is recommended, access to the IRM is available.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism/about>)

7.0. BEYOND APPROVAL

7.1. Further to approval as adopters, ASE will agree a linking and matching plan with adopters; this will take into account any matching criteria recommended by the Panel and any additional work identified by the Agency Decision Maker. This post approval plan will detail the contact between ASE and Adopters, and establish adopters' wishes in relation to when they are notified about when they are being considered as a possible link for a child and will note where adopters wish to pursue their own links initially (adopter led matching).

- 7.2.** The adopter(s)' social worker will help to identify suitable matches with a child/ren and / or explore links with children identified by the adopters. They will work with adopters to assess the appropriateness of potential identified matches and support a timely process. This is referred to as professionally led matching. All adopters are considered when the family finding team are looking for families for children. Weekly family finding meetings consider possible links between children who need families and approved adopters, and adopters who are approaching the end of their assessment process where they are to be recommended as Suitable to Adopt.
- 7.3.** In addition to consideration for children from within the four Local Authority partner agencies, adopters are able to register with Linkmaker, a specialist linking and matching database service in order to conduct their own search for a child (adopter led matching) and to make themselves available to children from beyond the Adoption South East boundary. Adopters' wishes in relation to leading their own linking process will be recorded on the Post Approval plan and the extent of professional support will be discussed where adopters will be looking to adopt children from other Agencies.

8.0 PROCESS OF MATCHING OF A CHILD

8.1. Fostering for Adoption

- 8.1.1.** Fostering for Adoption is used where the Agency has completed its assessments within legal proceedings, and where it has made the decision that the care plan will be adoption.
- 8.1.2.** Specific approval is given to an approved adopter as a foster carer for the specific child. This approval is made by the Agency Decision Maker for the child, according to the policy and practice of that Local Authority .
- 8.1.3.** Fostering for Adoption is distinct from concurrency; when a child is placed with an approved adopter prior to agency assessments being completed and prior to the agency decision that adoption is in the best interest of the child. ASE prepares and assesses prospective adopters for fostering for adoption, it does not prepare and assess for concurrency, however we will work to support such a plan if that is requested by the Local Authority for the child.
- 8.1.4.** Where it is assessed by the child's social work team that the child should be placed for early permanence, ASE will identify families who meet the child's broader matching criteria alongside being open to offering to a fostering for adoption placement. Whilst early permanence is of significant importance, it should not automatically override other matching considerations and will be considered alongside these when identifying the most suitable match.

- 8.1.5. ASE will provide consultation to social work teams where required to assist in planning for a specific fostering for adoption placement.
- 8.1.6. The ASE adoption social worker will supervise the placement under fostering regulations and within the policy and practice of the local authority partner placing the child. The approving LA should regard the foster to adopt carer as any other foster carer in terms of support and procedures.

8.2. ASE led matches

- 8.2.1. Where there are suitable ASE adopter resources, approved and approaching approval, to meet the needs of a child, ASE Family Finding and Matching Team identifies two adopter households at their weekly meeting. The adoption social workers for the potential links complete a linking grid, mapped against the assessed needs of the child, to evidence how their adopter household could meet the needs of the child, by the Wednesday of the following week.
- 8.2.2. The Family Finding Team Manager of the child's ASE spoke decides on the preferred adopter household on the basis of this information. The recommendation and linking grid is then shared with the child's social worker and team manager alongside the Prospective Adopter Report for the identified adopter household. The child's social worker and team manager decide on whether to explore this link further before an approach about the child is made to the adopters.
- 8.2.3. The ASE Matching Plan with adopters which is made post approval will determine at what stage in the linking process an adopter wishes to be notified that they are being considered for a child.
- 8.2.4. The child's social worker and adoption social worker then visit the adopter household to share information about the child and for the child's social worker to learn more about the adopters.
- 8.2.5. If the adopters and social workers then wish to continue with the exploration of the proposed match, fact finding meetings are undertaken between the proposed adopters and relevant professionals, to include the medical advisor, foster carers, nursery or school.
- 8.2.6. Planning will also be undertaken for the adopters to have sight of the child. This sighting must **not** happen until **after** the Matching Meeting has been held and the proposed adopters identified as the preferred option for the child.
- 8.2.7. If the adopters wish to proceed with the potential match after further exploration, a Matching Meeting is held between professionals, where the formal decision to

recommend the match to Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker is made. This meeting reviews the draft Adoption Support Plan which is part of the Adoption Placement Report presented to Adoption Panel.

8.2.8. Further to the recommendation of the Adoption Panel to the Agency Decision Maker, an Adoption Placement Planning Meeting with adopters and professionals, is held no later than three days after the ADM approval of the match to formalise the draft Adoption Placement Plan.

8.3. Adopter led matches - ASE children

8.3.1. Adopters can join Linkmaker post approval and are invited first to consider the children for whom ASE are seeking adopters. If adopters wish to be considered for a child for whom ASE is family finding, they should discuss this with their social worker so that they can be considered by ASE as a potential match. The adopters would be considered for a potential match in the same way as ASE led matches.

8.4. Adopter led matches- out of county children

8.4.1. Adopters may look further than ASE and find a child they wish to adopt from another Regional Adoption Agency Local Authority or Voluntary Adoption Agency. Adopters are encouraged to speak with their adoption social worker about their interest in the child.

8.4.2. The adoption social worker will liaise with the social work team for the child and support the adopters throughout the process, ensuring that relevant information is shared, ongoing assessment of the suitability of the match is completed and support provided.

8.4.3. ASE is first and foremost a service for the children resident within its own geographical boundaries. Whilst support will be provided to adopters who are looking for children in other agencies, ASE children will take priority for ASE adoption social work resources.

8.5. Interagency matches

8.5.1. In the event that there are no ASE adopters immediately available to meet the needs of a child with a care plan for adoption, the ASE family finding worker requests permission for interagency funding from the Family Finding and Matching Service Manager as soon as this becomes evident in order to avoid delay for the child.

8.5.2. Where it is known that a family will be hard to find within ASE resources due to the particular needs and profile of a child, a concurrent approach will be taken to ensure the best chance of finding an adoptive family for the child. Interagency in principle

funding will be agreed for these children from the outset of ASE involvement with them. Interagency family finding then takes place alongside ongoing review of available ASE families, and any potential matches are considered alongside ASE families to ensure the strongest match for a child, using the ASE matching grid.

- 8.5.3.** The decision to proceed with an interagency match is made at a matching review meeting between the family finding social worker and the Service Manager lead for family finding.

8.6. Adoption Panel Matching

- 8.6.1.** Adoption Matches are presented to the ASE Adoption Panel for their consideration and recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.
- 8.6.2.** In addition to the consideration of the suitability of the match, the Adoption Panel will also consider the adoption support plan for the proposed family placement, and they will consider the planned delegation of Parental Responsibility to the adopters, within the provisions of the Placement Order. They may make additional recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to either of these aspects.
- 8.6.3.** Decision Making for children to be placed for adoption and for children to be matched with adopters is undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's home local authority. The ADM may set expectations in relation to the planning and support for the placement which must be taken into account in subsequent planning and actions.
- 8.6.4.** There is no appeals process or recourse to the Independent Review Mechanism for adopters in relation to matching Agency Decisions.
- 8.6.5.** Decisions are notified to a child's birth parents, by the child's social worker. Decisions are notified to prospective adopters by the adoption social worker. Social workers will be informed of the decision on the day of the Agency Decision and must inform the birth parents, adoptive parents, and child verbally within two working days of the decision being made. Written confirmation will be provided within five working days. The Agency Decision will be made within seven working days of receipt of the agreed minutes of the Adoption Panel meeting. Minutes will be agreed by Panel Chairs within three working days of the Panel meeting.
- 9.0. Annual reviews of approved prospective adopters**
- 9.1.** In the event that approved adopters have not been matched with a child within 12 months of their approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review with the adopters. Checks and references may need to be updated. If there

have been no significant changes since the date of approval, the Adoption Service Manager will agree that the review has been completed.

- 9.2. If there have been significant changes in the circumstances of the adopters, then the review will be agreed by the Service Manager and then presented to the Adoption Panel for their recommendation in relation to continued approval of the adopters. The panel recommendation will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision as to whether the adopters remain approved as Suitable to Adopt.
- 9.3. Whilst the approval of an adopter is not time limited within the regulatory framework, if a match has not been agreed with adopters two years after approval the second annual review must be presented to the Panel for their consideration and recommendation in relation to the currency of the original assessment.
- 9.4. Where the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to continue the approval of the prospective adopters, the prospective adopters will have full access to the Independent Review Mechanism should they wish the decision to be reviewed independently.

10.0 MEETING BIRTH PARENTS

- 10.1. In the interests of promoting open adoption and supporting the integration of the child's identity, adopters are expected to meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement of a child, or more usually once the child is placed and settled.
- 10.2. Any risks will be fully assessed and shared with full transparency with the adopters. Where the risk to placement security and wellbeing of any of the participants is considered too great, and cannot be mitigated, this will be reviewed and agreed by the Team Manager for the adoption Social Worker.
- 10.3. The adoptive and birth parents will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The purpose of meeting birth parents is to lay foundations for future arrangement for keeping in touch (contact) and so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family from the position of experience.

11.0 PLACING A CHILD FOR ADOPTION

After placement

- 11.1. Once a child is placed for adoption, their adoptive parents assume a degree of parental responsibility. This is shared with the birth parents under the terms of the Placement Order, and is managed by the Child's home local authority, their corporate parent who holds the controlling share of Parental Responsibility for the child.

- 11.2.** This arrangement requires that the Corporate Parent ensures that the child is having their needs met in full, and that there is adequate support in place for the child and for their adoptive parents. To these ends, the child's social worker will meet their statutory duties and continue to visit the child at agreed intervals; the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory adoption placement review at four weeks after placement. Variation to the visiting pattern will then be discussed at that Review meeting which is chaired by the child's independent reviewing officer (IRO) who will consider the needs and circumstances of the child and adoptive family and arrive at an agreed visiting schedule with the social worker, which will continue up until the point of the Adoption Order being made by the Court.
- 11.3.** There are no statutory visiting schedules for the adoption social worker however the practice requirement is for at least weekly meaningful contact until the first review at which point the support needs of the placement will be considered with the IRO and Prospective Adopters. The purpose of adoption social work visits are to ensure proactive support to the placement and the emerging relationships, to provide parent coaching where helpful, and to assess for the purposes of reporting to the Court once the Adoption Application is made.
- 11.4.** Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safe keeping for the child in the future before the Adoption Order is made. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is also completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

12.0 ADOPTION ORDER

- 12.1.** Once the child has had their home with the prospective adopters for ten weeks, the prospective adopter may make their application to the Court for an Adoption Order.
- 12.2.** The ASE Social Worker will provide assistance to the adopter to navigate the process.
- 12.3.** Prospective Adopters will fund and effect their own applications.
- 12.4.** ASE Social Worker will meet their reporting duties as determined by the Court timetable further to the application being made.

13.0 KEEPING IN TOUCH (CONTACT AND LETTERBOX SERVICE)

- 13.1.** Support for adoptive and birth parents to keep in touch over the course of the child's minority are provided by Adoption South East. All such arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is assessed at the time to serve the best

interests of the child. To this end they must take into account what can realistically be maintained and committed to by the birth parent/s and by the adoptive parents.

- 13.2. These plans and arrangements will be detailed in the Adoption Support Plan.
- 13.3. Families may keep in touch through letterbox arrangements and/or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of their family, including parents, siblings or extended family members.
- 13.4. Where birth parents are unable or unwilling to keep in touch via a letterbox arrangement, this might be set up with another relevant relative.
- 13.5. Support, facilitation and where assessed the supervision of face-to-face meetings may be arranged and provided. Changes to agreements will form part of a review within an adoption support plan.

14.0 ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICE

- 14.1. Adoption South East has a strong commitment to provide a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. These services can be found at <https://www.adoptionsoutheast.org.uk/support>
- 14.2. Adoption Support is provided by social workers and adoption support workers with significant experience of working with adoptive families. Adoption South East does not operate a separate adoption support team, rather all practitioners support a range of adoption related work.
- 14.3. Adoption Support includes signposting to other services for those affected by adoption as well as meeting statutory duties to assess adoption support needs and providing services directly to families.

14.4. For adoptive families

When requested the adoption support worker will undertake an assessment of adoption support needs with the family and will agree a support package based upon the assessed and agreed needs of the family. This will include consideration of whether an application should be made to the Adoption Support Fund.

14.5 For adopted adults

The RAA will support adopted adults who are resident within one of the four Local Authorities to access their adoption records and to receive birth records counselling where this is required or requested. The RAA will also provide file summaries on

behalf of Local Authorities for adopted adults receiving their birth records counselling in other parts of the country.

15.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 15.1.** The work of the ASE is overseen and monitored by the service managers and the Head of Service. Quality Assurance activity will include: regular effective supervision of staff, file audits, thematic reviews, monitoring of feedback from service users, monitoring of complaints and allegations against staff or adopters or carers, maintaining data on the work of the agency and management oversight of these.
- 15.2.** Regular meetings of managers and staff take place across ASE focussing on particular areas of work, at which processes, and practice are reviewed, updated and developed.
- 15.3.** The work of the ASE is reported to and overseen by regular meetings of the High-Level Workshop and the Executive Board.
- 15.4.** ASE will provide an annual report that includes statistics and details of activity in the following areas of work:- recruitment of adopters; family finding for children who need adoption; adoption support; post adoption contact; inter country adoption; feedback; complaints and allegations. The reports are provided to each Local Authority in the partnership in line with their wider reporting cycles and are available to service users, other agencies and stakeholders.
- 15.5.** The work of ASE is reported to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board in a quarterly return in order that its adoption work can be monitored nationally by the Board and by OFSTED.
- 15.6.** The work of ASE is monitored by external inspections of the partner LAs carried out by Ofsted.
- 15.7.** There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals.
- 15.8.** Regular feedback is received from the adoption panels and twice yearly meetings are held between the management team, panel chairs and agency decision makers.
- 15.9.** The Head of Service submits a quarterly report to the Executive Board and provides it with an annual review and plan. These can also be taken to individual LA scrutiny boards.

15.10. A robust quality assurance framework is in place with regular auditing of files, plus evaluation feedback from adoptive parents and other service users. This is held centrally and is undertaken at key points in the adoption process.

16.0 CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

16.1 All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all parents of children for whom the agency is implementing a plan for adoption are provided with written information about the complaints procedures, including contact details for the customer relations team. All young people for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedures of their respective local authorities and also informed of the role of the Children's Rights Commissioner (<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/>).

16.2 A summary of the complaints procedure

Our complaints processes are coordinated by East Sussex County Council's Children's Services Customer Relations Team on behalf of the partnership. The ASE Complaints Officer. They can be contacted on the following email complaintsandfeedback@adoptionsoutheast.org.uk The details and outcomes are reported to the ASE Head of Service and summaries are made available to the partners by the executive board.

The complaints procedures is attached in Annexe 1

Ofsted Contact Details

- **Phone:** 0300 123 1231
- **Email:** enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- **Online Enquiry Form:** [contact.form](#)
- **Address:** Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1

Date of agreement – 25 September 2020

Date of next review – July 2024