

Statement of Purpose

April 2024 /25



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with underpinning legislation, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, and the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005.
- 1.2 It has also been written in accordance with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards 2014 for Adoption Services.
- 1.3 Adoption Now was established in November 2017 and combines the Local Authority Adoption Services of Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Bolton, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside. There are two voluntary adoption agency partners Adoption Matters and Caritas Care. The shared adoption service is hosted by Bolton Council and is a Hub and Spoke model with its main Hub in Bolton. There are three teams (Adoption Support, Recruitment and Assessment and Care Planning and Family Finding) supported by five team managers. There is also a panel advisor that supports all Adoption Now adoption panels. The managers are supported by the RAA Head of Service and a Deputy.
- 1.4 Adoption Now Hub is based at: -

Howell Croft, Howell Croft North, Bolton.
- 1.5 Adoption Now works closely with each Local Authority's Children's Social Care Service and reflects each Council's commitment to 'Best Practice' in the provision of an Adoption Agency.

The six Local Authorities believe that children should experience permanence and security throughout their childhood and that it is best for a child to live within their birth family, if it is safe to do so. Where this is not possible, all six Councils aim to provide, in conjunction with Adoption Now, permanent alternative families who will promote the child's well-being and development by providing the highest possible standards of care to meet his, her or their individual assessed needs.

2. Vision for the Service

In *Children's social care reform: a vision for change (2016)* the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020. In respect of adoption, the government's vision is for an adoption system where:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence.
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality, evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care.
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay.
- Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

The vision of Adoption Now is to

- Provide all children who have a plan for adoption with an adoptive family that meets their needs.
- Ensure that those affected by adoption receive the information, support and advice that they need to understand their adoption journey.
- Ensure that families are well prepared, enabled and supported to care for the children who are placed with them throughout their childhood.

3. Aims

3.1 The main aim of Adoption Now is to provide a child focused and efficient service which will be evidenced in the following ways:

- The successful placement of every child with a plan for adoption with an appropriate family as quickly as possible.
- Increased numbers of adopters being recruited through timely assessment, provision of appropriate training and support which prepares adopters well and enables children to achieve permanence in loving and nurturing families.
- Provision of high quality post adoption support for all affected by adoption including the provision of therapeutic support.

3.2 To provide an effective, flexible shared adoption agency where the needs of individual children can be met within the legal security of adoption.

3.3 To ensure that adoption is considered as an option for all children requiring permanent alternative care away from their birth family.

3.4 To provide a proactive and professional family finding service which seeks to match individual children with prospective adoptive families that have been assessed as able to meet their needs.

3.5 To ensure that the recruitment, preparation, training and support given to prospective adopters is comprehensive and meets families' needs so that they can be successful adopters.

3.6 To provide a responsive and comprehensive adoption support service to children, their birth families and adoptive families living in Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside. To support those who require advice, counselling, practical or emotional support. In addition, to provide adoption support services to children and their adoptive families placed by Adoption Now outside of the boundary of the six Local Authorities where appropriate.

3.7 To provide a signposting service for any person requesting an Adoption Intermediary Service. This is not provided by Adoption Now.

3.8 To signpost prospective adopters who are interested in Inter-Country Adoption to the relevant commissioned Adoption Agency.

- 3.9 To provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to access their files or trace their birth family. To support adults who access their files, to provide them with a copy of all the relevant information about their birth family and also the reasons why they were adopted.
- 3.10 To provide an Adoption Panel Advisor and Adoption Support Service Advisor to ensure that the quality of the shared service is supported and developed across the six authorities.
- 3.11 To increase the numbers of children placed in early permanence placements such as concurrent placements or fostering to adopt placements.
- 3.12 To support the care planning process within each local authority to ensure that adoption is considered at all stages within the care planning process for children who are unlikely to be able to remain at home with birth parents or family members.
- 3.13 To work closely with voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that they are aware of the needs of the children within the six local authorities and are recruiting adopters to meet their needs.

4. Objectives

- 4.1 To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.
- 4.2 To recruit and maintain sufficient numbers of prospective and approved adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children within the six local authorities who have a plan for adoption. This recruitment should whenever possible reflect the ethnicity, culture, religion and language needs of the children.
- 4.3 To provide an efficient and effective service for prospective adopters. This service to include, information, preparation, assessment and ongoing support.
- 4.4 To offer a service to birth families who wish to relinquish children for adoption.
- 4.5 To develop and deliver a range of adoption support services to adopters, adopted children and their birth families in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance.
- 4.6 To provide a signposting service for adopted adults searching for their birth family and for birth family members who are searching for an adopted adult.
- 4.7 To provide a post adoption letter box scheme as appropriate for all children placed for adoption and support other arrangements for maintaining birth family connections.
- 4.8 To ensure that staff working in the shared adoption service have the necessary qualifications, knowledge, skills and training to deliver an effective service.
- 4.9 To provide information and advice to those seeking to adopt from overseas. This service is being provided by the Inter Country Adoption Centre.

5. Principles and Values

5.1 The work of Adoption Now is underpinned by the following values and beliefs.

(a) Children

- Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all their needs in terms of stability and security, that promotes their physical, social and emotional development and that offers a supportive lifelong relationship.
- Where a child's needs cannot be met within their birth family, adoption may offer the best alternative to meet their needs.
- In all planning for children, the child's welfare is paramount, and their wishes and feelings should always be sought and taken into account in decision making, in accordance with their age and understanding.
- Children are entitled to be treated with respect; diversity and difference should be valued and enjoyed. A child's sense of identity and self-respect needs to be actively promoted in particular with regards to ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and ability.
- Children should only be separated from their siblings where clear evidence supports doing so on the basis of the child's assessed needs.
- Every child is entitled to information about his/her birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- Ongoing meaningful relationships with birth family (direct or indirect) should be encouraged if compatible with the child's needs.

(b) Adopters

- The role of the adoptive parent in offering a permanent family to a child will be valued and respected.
- All adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. No applicant will be discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, culture, disability, sexuality, gender, age, financial status or marital status.
- All applicants are entitled to know what issues will be taken into account in their assessment, including age, health, relationships and family history. Applicants will be regarded as partners in the assessment process and will be kept fully informed of their progress, and of any concerns identified in the assessment.

(c) Birth Families

- Wherever possible, Adoption Now will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for children.
- Birth families will be treated fairly, openly and with respect, and their relationship with their child will be acknowledged.

- Birth families will be kept fully informed of the adoption process, the legal implications and their rights.
- Birth families will be given such information about their child's adoptive parents as is compatible with the child's and the adoptive family's safety and security.
- Birth families will have access to independent counselling and advice if required. A Service Level Agreement is in place with PAC UK-Family Action to provide this.

6. Diversity

- 6.1 Each Council has a Corporate Diversity and Equalities Strategy and Adoption Now will work towards achieving their stated objectives. These can be accessed via each Council's internet sites.
- 6.2 Adoption Now has a key role to play through the provision of placements that are able to meet a diverse range of individual needs.
- 6.3 Adoption Now will ensure it provides services in a way which appropriately meets the needs of all individuals, and that its structure, policies and procedures do not discriminate against disadvantaged groups.

7. Service Manager

- 7.1 The host Authority for Adoption Now is Bolton.
- 7.2 The Interim Head of Service of Adoption Now is Katrina Williams.

Qualifications

B.Ed Hons 1993

Masters in Social Work (Distinction) 2007

NVQ level 5 management

Experience

Katrina has worked in management roles in various settings since 1995, bringing these skills into the Social Care arena in 2007. Since that time, she has worked as both a social worker and manager in various children's social work teams before becoming a manager in adoption services in 2014. Since the formation of Adoption Now, Katrina has supported the then Head of Service as deputy Head of Service before being made Interim Head of Service in 2023. Her role since 2017 has included Agency Decision Maker.

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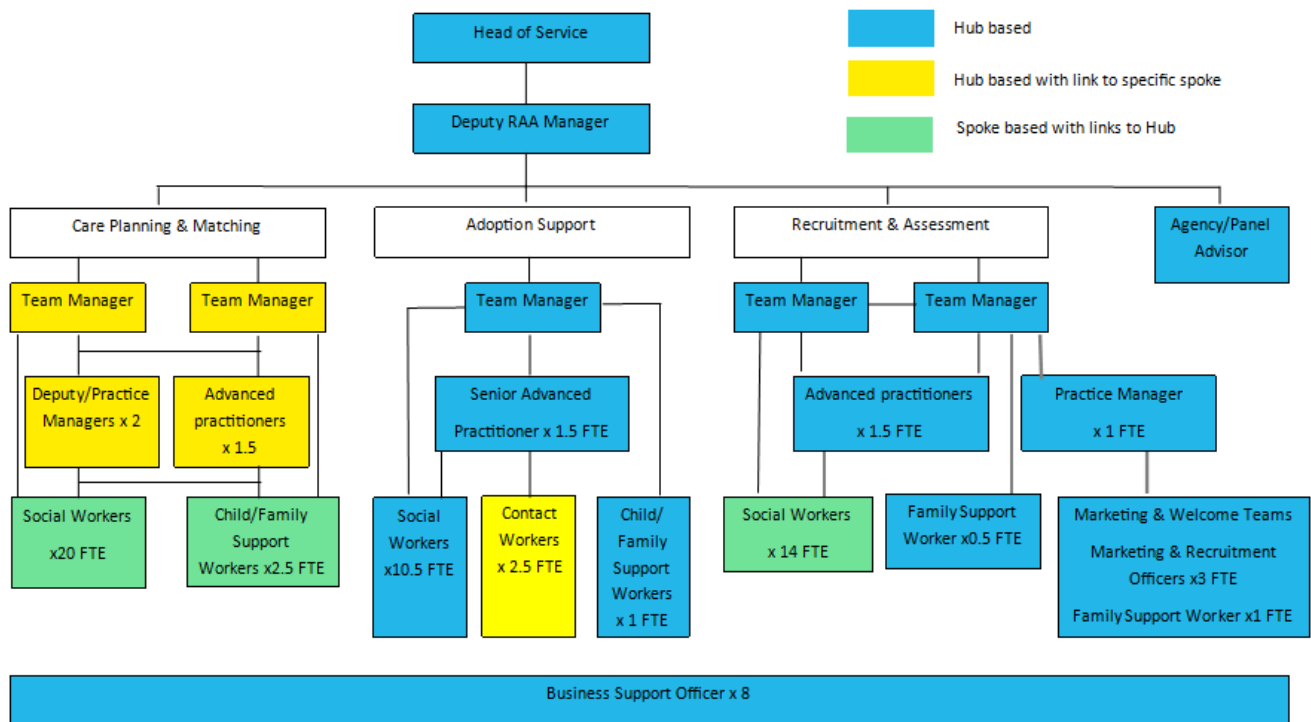
Email: Katrina.williams@adoptionnow.org.uk

8. Structure of the Service

- 8.1 Bolton, Bury, Blackburn with Darwen, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside local authority adoption services collaborated to establish Adoption Now. This shared adoption service is hosted by Bolton and has three dedicated social work teams – Recruitment and Assessment, Adoption Support and Care Planning and Family Finding.
- 8.2 The Team managers of Adoption Now are responsible for the day to day running of the service in conjunction with the Deputy Head of Service and the Head of Service.
- 8.3 The Head of Adoption Now is supported by the Deputy Head of Service and Team Managers, a Senior Lead Administrator and a Panel Adviser. These managers are in turn supported by deputy's and advanced practitioners, recruitment officers and a business support team.
- 8.4 Adoption Now has six named agency decision makers for children's matches and two named decision makers for adopter approvals (the Head of Service and Deputy Head of Service for Adoption Now).
- 8.5 Adoption Now holds children's cases from point of placement order for four of the local authorities which are Blackburn with Darwen, Bury, Tameside and Oldham. Lines of responsibility remain clear with close liaison between line managers and senior managers in each local authority particularly around matters relating to care planning and safeguarding.
- 8.6 Adoption Now works closely with its VAA partners to ensure that children with a plan for adoption find placements as quickly as possible.

8.7 Adoption Now staffing structure

Adoption Now Organisational Structure



8.8 Staff: Names, Role, Qualifications, Experience - anonymised

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Katrina Williams FT	Interim Head of Adoption Now Agency Decision maker – adopter approval.	B.Ed hons, MA Social Work, Practice Educator Award, credits towards PQ, NVQ level 5 management, Level 1 Solution Focused Brief Intervention, TLSW Richard Rose Foundation Level. Over 15 years of Social Work and Management experience across First Response, Safeguarding and Adoption teams.
Interim Vacancy FT due to acting up – Agency Cover	Deputy Head of Service Agency Decision Maker – adopter approval	CQSW 1989. BA (Hons) in Social Science 2:1 1986. NVQ 5 in operational Management, and Regional Adoption Agency Leaders Leadership Programme 2019. 40 years of experience in social care, including residential care, safeguarding Social Worker, Fostering. Kinship Care and Adoption Social Worker and Manager.
Panel Advisor FT	Panel advisor	Dip SW 2002, PQ 2005, NVQ 4 management. Social Work experience in Education Welfare and Adoption, plus Management experience within Adoption.

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Care Planning and family finding team		
Team Manager FT	Team Manager	Diploma in Social Work 2005. PQ and Practice Educator qualifications. 21 years of experience pre and post qualifying in Social Care including safeguarding, court work, case holding as a social worker. Experience of management within adoption and with looked after children.
Team Manager FT	Team Manager	BSc Hons Counselling and Social Science, MA (hons) Social Work, Practice Educator Level 1. 12 years Social Work experience across fostering, Connected Persons, Post Placement, SGO and Adoption. Fostering panel member for 9 years. Management experience in adoption. Pathways Leadership Managers programme.
Vacant Position FT – unappointed at present	Deputy Manager	
Advanced Practitioner PT	Advanced Practitioner	BA (Hons) in Social Work obtained in 2013. 10 years Social Work experience across safeguarding, court and quality assurance. Practice Educator Level 1.
Advanced Practitioner FT	Advanced Practitioner	BA (Hons) in Social Work, PQ Specialist Award. Social Work experience across Children in Care and Adoption, plus supervisory experience in adoption.
Practice Manager FT	Practice Manager	BSc (Hons) in Social Work. PQ Consolidation. Practice Educator. Social Work Accreditation NASS. 14 years post qualifying experience in safeguarding and all areas of Adoption, plus panel membership on fostering panel for three years.
Social Worker PT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT	Social Workers	All hold relevant Social Work qualifications. In addition between them they have qualifications and experience in Practice Teacher Award, Virtual Reality in Adoption, SaMC.

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Social Worker FT – PT secondment to project until Aug 2024 – cover by in house Social Worker Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT – currently off sick, expected return in May 2024 Vacant Post PT – cover by Agency Social Worker Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Vacant Post PT - cover by Temporary Social Worker Social Worker FT Social Worker FT Social Worker FT –maternity leave until end Aug 2024 - cover by Agency Social Worker Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Vacant Post PT – cover by in house in house social worker Social Worker FT Vacant Post FT – cover by Agency Social Worker Vacant Post PT – cover by Agency Social Worker Social Worker PT		
Family Support Worker FT Family Support Worker FT Child Support Worker PT	Support Workers	Between them they have qualifications and experience in Theraplay level 1, DDP level 1, TLSW Richard Rose Foundation Level, Webster Stratton,

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Recruitment and assessment team		
Team Manager FT	Team Manager	BA (Hons) in Psychology, CQSW, Certificate in Applied Social Studies, Diploma in Family Placement, Practice Teachers Award and QCF Level 5 in Management of Children's and Young Peoples Services. Worked for Children's Services in North West Local Authorities for over 35 years in a variety of roles including Social Work Management.
Team Manager FT	Team Manager	LLB Honours degree, MA in Social Work. Management qualification. Social Work experience across Children and Families and Adoption, with management experience within Adoption.
Advanced Practitioner PT	Advanced Practitioner	MA (Hons) in Social Work in 2010, Postgraduate Cert in Applied Social Work Practice in 2016. 13 years' experience in social work for children in care, child protection and adoption teams
Team Manager FT – long term sick – cover by in house Social Worker with agency social worker backfill	Advanced Practitioner	BA (Hons) in Social Work in 2011, NVQ 4 in Management Standards. Over 35 years' experience in social care working in residential, fostering and adoption
Practice Manager FT	Practice Manager (Welcome Team)	MA in Social Work. 7+ years experience as qualified social worker spanning front door, safeguarding and adoption.
Social Worker FT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT Social Worker FT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker FT – seconded to project 4 days per week – cover by Agency Social Worker Social Worker FT Social Worker FT	Social Workers	All hold relevant social work qualifications. Between them they hold qualifications and have experience in Practice Teacher Award, Virtual Reality within Adoption, Using Principles of Adult Attachment Theory in Assessment, DDP level 1, SaMC.

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Social Worker FT		
Marketing and Recruitment Worker FT	Marketing and Welcome Team	Journalism degree and experience in local authority communications departments.
Marketing and Recruitment Worker PT		Marketing qualifications and experience.
Marketing and Recruitment Worker FT		10 years involved in the photography business, creating bespoke imagery, video & audio for local business & their campaigns.
Marketing and Recruitment Worker PT		
Support Worker PT Support Worker PT	Welcome Team	Experience of supporting adoptive families and children
Family Support Worker PT	Family Support Worker	Adopter, Trained in Peer Mentoring
Adoption Support		
Team Manager FT	Team Manager	BSc in Social Work (with DIPWS), PQSW, Foundation Counselling Practice Educator (Not certified), NVR – Foundation level. DDP 1, Module one – TLSW (Richard Rose model), working towards Level 5 NVQ Management and Leadership. 20- years of experience as a social worker on CIN, CP, Court Proceedings and Adoption. Management experience in Adoption and specifically in Adoption Support.
Advanced Practitioner FT – long term sick – in house cover 1 day per week by Advanced Practitioner	Deputy Team Manager	BA (Hons) Social Policy, C.Q.S.W, Advanced Diploma in Social Work (Children and Families), Diploma in Performance Management, PQ1, PQ2-6, NVR Level 1, DDP Level 1, Expert Witness to the North Wales Child Abuse Enquiry, over 35 years experience as a practitioner and manager across generic child care, looked after children, First Response and Adoption and Fostering.
Advanced Practitioner PT	Advance Practitioner	B.A. Sociology, MA Social Work, Consolidation Award credits towards PQ, DDP level 1, TLSW Richard Rose Level 1, NVR level 1. Over 12 years of Social Work experience across Safeguarding, Court Proceedings, LAC and Adoption teams.
Social Worker PT Vacant Post FT Social Worker PT	Social Workers	

Name	Role	Qualification/Experience
Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Social Worker PT Vacant Post FT – covered by Agency Social Worker Vacant Post PT – appointed to, awaiting start date Social Worker FT Social Worker PT Temporary Vacant Post PT – Temporary Social Worker starting in June 2024 Social Worker FT Social Worker FT		All hold relevant Social Work qualifications. In addition between them they have qualifications and experience in Practice Teacher Award, DDP level 1, working towards DDP level 2, Train the Trainer – Kim Goulding, NVR Foundation Level, TLSW Richard Rose Foundation Level, working towards Diploma in TLSW Richard Rose, Theraplay level 1, working towards Thearaplay level 2, Counselling level 1, Webster Stratton Basic and Advanced Triple P Group and Teens, Virtual Reality in Adoption, SaMC.
Family Support Worker PT Family Support Worker PT	Family support worker	Between them, DDP level 1, TLSW Richard Rose Foundation Level, Independent Domestic Violence Counsellor, NVR Foundation Level.
Contact Co-ordinators		
Co-ordinator FT Co-ordinator FT Co-ordinator PT	Contact Co-ordinators	Experienced senior administrators and letterbox co-ordinators. SaMC trained.
Business Support Staff		
Administrator FT	Senior Lead Administrator	Appropriately qualified and experienced.
Administrator FT	Lead Administrator - Finance	Appropriately qualified and experienced.
Administrator FT Administrator FT Administrator FT	Lead Administrator - Panels	Appropriately qualified and experienced.
Administrator PT Administrator FT Administrator PT Administrator FT	Administrator	Appropriately qualified and experienced.
Peer Mentoring Team		
Vacant Post PT - unappointed	Peer Mentoring Co-ordinator	
16 adopters	Volunteer Mentors	Adopters, trained in Peer Mentoring

9. Services Provided to Children

- 9.1 The Adoption Service provides services to children requiring an adoptive placement. These children have an identified care plan of adoption or are relinquished children.
- 9.2 In accordance with the Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012, only children with a plan for adoption which required no application for a Placement Order (children whose mother has requested they be placed for adoption) can be considered by an Adoption Panel in respect of the agency decision that they should be placed for adoption.
- 9.3 In all other cases when an adoption plan is considered, there is an alternative process in place concluding with the decision of the Agency Decision Maker as to whether the plan should be adoption or not and this decision being presented to court. An Agency Decision Maker from within the relevant Local Authority makes all decisions in relation to should be placed and matches relating to children from that local authority.
- 9.4 The Family Finding and Care Planning Team from Adoption Now attends each Local Authority's early planning meetings for children whose plan may be adoption and in this way are informed of the children that may eventually have a plan for adoption. Information about these children is then shared with Adoption Now via Early Permanence Tracking meetings and informal discussions. This enables family finding to commence at the earliest point and the sufficiency of adopters to be monitored. Joint tracking meetings with each Local Authority at least quarterly ensure that the Local Authority and Adoption Now can engage in healthy challenge if delay is identified.
- 9.5 Profiling meetings are held for children when the plan for adoption is clear. All involved professionals and carers are invited to this meeting to share all known information about each child in order to gain a full picture of their needs.
- 9.6 The search for an adoptive family for a child pursues all avenues available to ensure that any delay is minimised.
- 9.7 Children's profiles are shared with Recruitment Social Workers, with priority children who are waiting longer identified and profiled in person a monthly meetings, and where appropriate, children are profiled at regular meetings with our VAA partners. Children and adopter profiles are uploaded to Link Maker. Children will also be featured at both in house and national Adoption Exchange Days, and relevant profiles are circulated monthly to other Regional Adoption Agencies across the North West. Consideration is given to profiling the child/ren in certain publications if family finding is proving to be extremely difficult. Where appropriate, children attend inhouse or regional Adoption Fun days, and on occasion, national Activity Days to enhance our ability to find them a family. All adopters are encouraged to attend all of these events.
- 9.8 When a prospective adoptive family is identified, the relevant paperwork is prepared, and the case is presented to the Adoption Panel for a recommendation. The Agency Decision Maker for the Child's Local Authority then approves the match if s/he agrees with the recommendation. Prior to any match, consultations are held between the relevant social workers and the Adoption Support team as well as between adopters and the child's Medical Advisor.
- 9.9 When appropriate a Life Appreciation Day is held which provides the adopters with a greater insight into the lived experience and family background of the child. Virtual Reality headsets can also be used to help bring this alive.

- 9.10 Once the match is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker a series of introductions take place: if these are successful the child is then placed with the adoptive family.
- 9.11 The child's Social Worker supports the placement together with the adoptive family's social worker until the Adoption Order is granted. Where appropriate early support is established pre order from the Adoption Support team.
- 9.12 Families are actively recruited for Foster to Adopt placements to ensure, where appropriate, a child can be placed with their potential adopters at the earliest opportunity to minimise the amount of moves they experience and establish security as soon as possible. External Foster to Adopt placements are also considered where there is no appropriate inhouse provision. A mini-team including Care Planning and Recruitment social workers supports the making of such placements. Concurrent placements are also available through one of the Partner Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

10. Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment, Support and Approval of Adoptive Parents.

- 10.1 Adoption Now has a recruitment strategy that reflects the needs of the six local authorities it serves. This is updated annually. Regular recruitment campaigns run to capture the interest of prospective adopters. A variety of media is used during the campaigns which are focused around the needs of children waiting and those who are likely to be referred to the service.
- 10.2 Prospective adopters who make contact with the service, either by telephone or on the internet are initially given an information pack to consider. Regular information evenings are also held online. If having read the information pack, they wish to proceed with an application; they then return an expression of interest form.
- 10.3 On receipt of this expression of interest form, a recruitment and assessing social worker, or suitably experienced worker will telephone the prospective adopter within **10 working days** and provide them with further information. If the prospective adopters wish to proceed, a recruitment social worker, or suitably experienced worker, will arrange an initial visit. This visit will inform the decision making if the prospective adopter wishes to progress to Stage 1.
- 10.4 Following the receipt of a 'Registration of Interest' the shared adoption service has to acknowledge receipt of the form and decide if they will accept or decline the application within **5 working days**.
- 10.5 If Adoption Now accepts the application this is the start of **Stage 1**. The Service must at the start of this stage complete an assessment agreement with the applicant/s setting out the responsibilities of the Agency and the prospective adopter/s. This stage is **2 months** in length, and adopters are required to complete their own research and portfolio of evidence. Adoption Now will complete Statutory Checks, Health and Safety Assessment and provide Preparation for Adoption Training for applicants at this stage.
- 10.6 At the end of **Stage 1** there will be a meeting held with the prospective adopter/s and the Shared Adoption Service must decide and inform the applicant/s if they can progress to **Stage 2** or if they need to complete further work. If the decision is that the applicant/s can progress, a second assessment agreement must be agreed.

- 10.7 Following this, adopters are allocated a social worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team who will work with them to complete the assessment for their application. Additional suitably qualified independent social workers are commissioned when necessary. Virtual Reality headsets are used with most adopters to help enhance their understanding. **Stage 2** of the process must be completed within **4 months** in order to meet the stipulated timescales within the Statutory Guidance.
- 10.8 Once completed the assessment and related documents are presented to the Adoption Now Panel for their recommendation. The applicants are fully involved in their assessment which is an open process. Applicants are invited and encouraged to attend the panel. Timescales for assessments are in accordance with Regulations and National Minimum Standards. An Agency Decision Maker from within Adoption now ratifies the recommendation of panel if they are in agreement.
- 10.9 If applicants are not approved and wish to appeal this decision, they will be given information about the **Independent Review Mechanism**. This is a review body, operated by the Coram Children's Legal Centre on behalf of the Secretary of State. The Independent Review Mechanism can advise the Adoption Agency to reconsider the decision but does not have the authority to overturn the decision made originally by the Adoption Agency.

11. Post Placement and Post Adoption Support

Adoption Now provides the full range of Services as required under Adoption Support Regulations 2005.

11.1 **Financial Support**

Assessments for financial support are carried out by the child's social worker and where financial support is awarded, this is reviewed annually.

11.2 **Assistance with Contact**

Adoption Now runs a letterbox service for children from each of the six local authorities. The Adoption Now Support Workers will also assist birth families to write their letters if this service is required. The contact coordinators based in Adoption Now also manage a range of other contact arrangements such as viewing of photographs, coordinating and supervising contact, supporting families where it is appropriate for face to face contact with birth relatives to be re-established.

11.3 **Post Approval Training and Workshops**

Parenting courses and workshops are provided post approval for adoptive families on a variety of topics for example, attachment issues, talking to your child about adoption, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and the issues that may arise due to this. A training plan exists and sets out available training and workshops available for adoptive families. In addition, a variety of social events run throughout the year to enable adoptive families to get together informally. We value opportunities to stay in touch with families and encourage them to ask for assistance as early as possible. Training and events include a variety of online and face to face formats.

11.4 **Counselling for Birth Parents**

The Adoption Service has a service level agreement with PAC-UK/First Families to provide counselling for birth parents that have had a child adopted. This service provides independent information and individual support to birth parents.

11.5 **Post placement and Post Adoption Support to adoptive families**

Both children placed for adoption and the prospective adopters retain the support of a social worker until the making of an Adoption Order. Following this they also retain the services of the adoption support team staff where required. These staff will provide both practical support and offer advice about behavioural or relationship issues and will work with other professionals and the carers to provide the necessary support to the adoptive family.

Where there is disruption between placement and the making of an Adoption Order, there are processes in place for undertaking independently chaired disruption meetings. Findings from any such disruptions are used to change practice or procedure if any failures or lessons are learned.

11.6 **Counselling, Advice and Information**

This is provided via the post adoption workers within the team. They offer advice and support in respect of Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives, access to records and adoption counselling where appropriate.

11.7 **Peer Mentoring**

Peer mentoring is available from a team of trained volunteers to support adopters through the assessment process and post placement/adoption. This service provides them an opportunity for some low-level emotional support, to be able to discuss concerns or worries and ask questions from people who have gone through similar experiences.

11.8 **Assessing the Needs for Adoption Support Services – Post Adoption**

An adoptive family can ask for an assessment of need for adoption support services at any time whilst the child is under 18 years of age and up to 25 years of age where the young person has a disability. An adopted adult aged between 18 and 21 (or 25 with a disability) can also request an assessment independently. If this is within three years of the order, the placing authority adoption service will be responsible for arranging the assessment but may ask another authority to do this on its behalf. After three years, the request for an assessment should be made to the adoption service in whose area the family is living. Within the Bolton, Bury, Blackburn with Darwen, Rochdale, Tameside and Oldham areas this Adoption Service will be Adoption Now. However, the placing authority retains responsibility for any ongoing financial commitment at the time of the child's adoption. Virtual Reality headsets are used in some cases to help enhance adoptive parents' understanding of their child's previous lived experiences to help them make sense of behaviours and responses.

11.8 **Where a request is received by Adoption Now for an assessment of Adoption Support Needs**, the adoption worker will undertake a comprehensive assessment of need.

The assessment will include the following elements:

- The needs of the person being assessed and how they might be met.
- The needs of the adoptive family and how they might be met.
- The needs, including developmental needs, of an adopted child and how they might be met.

- The parenting capacity of the adoptive parent.
- Wider family and environmental factors.
- The circumstances that led to the child being placed for adoption
- Any previous assessment of needs for adoption support services.

Once the assessment has been completed, the following steps will be taken:

- If the proposal is to provide services, the Adoption Service will provide an adoption support plan in writing. The Adoption Support plan will include:
 1. The services to be provided
 2. What it is expected the service will achieve
 3. How the success of the service will be measured and evaluated
 4. The timescales for providing the service; when and for how long.
 5. When and how the plan will be reviewed.
 6. The named person that will monitor the provision of the services according to the plan and undertake reviews.

It should be noted that, whilst an adoption agency has a duty to assess the need for adoption support services if requested, there is no statutory obligation to provide these services even if identified as appropriate. However, Adoption Now recognises the uniqueness of the adoption relationship and the lifetime commitment involved and accepts its general responsibility to do everything possible to support adoptive families to ensure successful outcomes.

Where a support plan is agreed consideration will be given to making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.

12. Adoption Panel

- 12.1 Adoption Now has four panels that meet weekly with an optional fifth panel should business determine the need for another panel and to prevent any delays occurring. Further panels are arranged in exceptional circumstances where required. The Adoption Panel is a body of people who consider all the relevant information presented to them in order: -
- To consider whether an adoptive applicant should be approved as a suitable adopter.
 - To consider prospective matches between children and adoptive parents.
 - To consider a child's plan for adoption where no application for a Placement Order is made.

The panel makes a recommendation to the relevant Agency Decision Maker.

12.2 The key functions of the Adoption Panel are to:

- Ensure all relevant information has been provided and is of sufficient quality
- Ensure that the agency have followed the guidance and regulations in terms of children whose plan is adoption.
- Consider all the information about each case
- Provide the Agency with a recommendation in each case
- Offer Advice to the agency on each case.

12.3 In order to conform to the Adoption Agency Standards 2011, the adoption panel must consist of an Independent Chair, or Vice Chair, Independent Members, and a Social Worker with relevant adoption experience. Medical advice is also required, and the Medical advisor is a Panel member. Legal advice is required when considering if a child's plan should be adoption; however legal advisors are not required to attend panel, but if they do they are not Panel members. When panel is considering approvals or matches panel may obtain legal advice where it considers necessary.

The Agency Advisor should attend Panel but is not a Panel member.

12.4 Panel members must complete relevant training. There must also be Panel training at least annually.

12.5 Panel members have an annual appraisal, conducted by the Panel Chair and Agency Advisor. The Panel Chair has an annual appraisal conducted by the Agency Decision Maker, and all Panel Members contribute to this appraisal.

12.6 Each Local Authority must appoint an Agency Decision Maker, and named deputy if they wish. The relevant Local Authority Agency Decision Maker will agree/disagree with the recommendations from the Adoption Now Panel in relation to matches and should be placed decisions. The Head of Service for Adoption Now is the Agency Decision Maker for adopter approvals with a named Deputy being the Deputy Head of Service.

13. Arrangements to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the services provided.

13.1 The effectiveness of Adoption Now services and how well they serve children will be considered as part of the Ofsted inspections for each Local Authority.

13.2 Adoption Now is hosted by Bolton Council as the host local authority. A Management Board has been established consisting of senior representatives from each local authority and this Board meets every other month. The Management Board has overall accountability and monitors and controls the activities of the service, setting performance objectives and targets. The Management Board provides scrutiny, challenge and strategic direction, and approves the Adoption Now Development Plan.

13.3 Quarterly the Head of Adoption Now and Deputy Head of Service meet with the Heads of Service within each local authority and discuss operational matters and performance targets.

13.4 Six monthly reports are provided to the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services in each of the six local authorities. It is the responsibility of the Board member for each respective authority to ensure that these are presented, discussed and noted: **NMS Standard 25 (2014)**. These reports include quality assurance information provided on a 6-monthly basis by the panel chair to the agency.

14. Complaints Procedures

14.1 The shared adoption service has a clear complaints procedure, based on the procedure currently in use in Bolton. This procedure deals with complaints received from service users from the six local authorities where these relate to Adoption Now. Records of these complaints will be kept in accordance with **Regulation 17 (AAR 2003) and NMS Standard 26 (2014)**.

14.2 On receipt of a complaint, the matter is, where possible, dealt with informally by the Team Manager responsible. In the event that the complaint is of sufficient concern that informal resolution is inappropriate, or cannot be resolved informally, then it will be referred to the

Complaints Team (Social Care),
Bolton Council.

The Complaints Team will ensure the formal complaint is allocated for investigation and liaise with the complainant directly.

[Ofsted Complaints](#) or call 0300 123 1231 between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday.

14.3 Where the complaint cannot be resolved following investigation at stage 1, the complainant has the option of requesting a stage 2 investigation, followed by a stage 3 Review Panel and ultimately a referral to the Ombudsman's Office.

14.4 Safeguarding

Bolton has a Safeguarding Unit and Safeguarding Board and the procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse or neglect for children placed for adoption. These procedures will be followed by social workers within Adoption Now. If a child has been placed with prospective adopters, a prompt referral will be made to the Local Authority where the child is placed, in order for the allegation to be investigated under that Authority's procedure. Full co-operation will be given by the shared adoption service to the Authority investigating the allegation with regard to information about the child.

14.5 If an allegation is made against a professional working with a child, the Local Authority that employs the professional will take responsibility for undertaking the investigation. It is unlikely that a Child Protection Conference will be needed as children to be placed for adoption are 'Looked After Children', but in this unlikely event advice would be sought from the Bolton Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) as to which Local Authority should convene the Conference.

Bolton's Local Authority Designated Officer will offer assistance and advice to Adoption Now staff. The Bolton Safeguarding Unit operates a Duty Advice line and advice will be made available to staff, when requested, of the shared adoption service.

15. Arrangements for approval and review of Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed by Adoption Now on an annual basis in consultation with staff members and Adoption Panel members. Any changes or proposed amendments to the Statement of Purpose will be submitted to the Adoption Now Board for consideration and Cabinet/Executive members for approval.

16. Arrangements for distribution of Statement of Purpose

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be given to each local authority Board member and placed on the shared drive for Adoption Now so it is accessible by all Adoption Now staff. An anonymised version will be placed on the Adoption Now website.

It will be made available, upon request, to:

- Any person working for the purposes of the Adoption service
- Any adopter or prospective adopter of the Adoption Service
- Any child placed with an adopter by the Adoption Service
- The parent of a child placed for adoption or with a plan of adoption.

Katrina Williams
April 2024