

2018

ADOPTION SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



WE ARE FAMILY – JOIN US

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 18 of the Adoption Services Minimum Standards 2014 (Care Standards Act, 2000) and regulations 2, 3 and 4 of the Local Authority Service (England) Regulations 2003. To be presented for approval by the Leicestershire County Council Executive.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The main aims of the Leicestershire County Council Adoption Service are to:

At Leicestershire County Council, we believe that our children deserve forever homes and that their parents and carers need access to the best support, training and resources to provide our children and young people with the best possible care. We will work together with our children and carers to ensure we achieve this – We are family

The main service objectives are to:

- To make effective and timely permanency decisions for children and young people.
- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council, which will meet needs, and support good outcomes, now and into the future.
- Meet the recruitment targets set out in this strategy, which are reflective of the needs analysis.
- For all Children's Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of connected carers and adopters, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care.

The Adoption Service works to core principles:

- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with connected carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging
- Children and young people's voice will be respected and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future and the provision of services
- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people.

The Adoption Service has three main priorities:

- *Permanence decision making* - the effective support and management oversight of children, young people and families where consideration is given to or the decision has been made to look after a child/young person. Discussions around permanence for a child or young person must be considered at the earliest opportunity.
- *Recruitment* - ensuring that where-ever possible family and friends (called connected carers) are considered and matched to care for children, when a child is unable to live with their parents. Where this is not possible, permanence through adoption or local authority care (as set out in the *Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Plan 2017-2021*) must be considered and achieved at the earliest opportunity.
- *Support* - It is acknowledged that children and young people, who have had difficult beginnings, require excellent placements and care, to establish a positive pathway to emotional health and wellbeing, and better outcomes for the future. With this in mind permanence should always be achieved with thought to the child's current needs, future needs and the knowledge, skills and experience of the adoptive parents or connected carers. Where the adoptive parents or connected carers require support and training to meet the needs of the child, this should be set out in the support plan and appropriate ongoing opportunities for learning made available to the adopters.

The Adoption Service has set targets to achieve best practice:

- Adoption Score card
- Performance measure A1- the average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family
- Performance measure A2- The average time between Leicestershire receiving court authority to place a child and Leicestershire Adoption Agency deciding upon a match to an adoptive family
- Performance measure A3- Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adopted family

Other targets are based on the drive to achieve adopter sufficiency:

- Number of children placed
- Number of sibling groups placed
- Number of children waiting
- Number of approved adopters
- Number of adopter enquiries

STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY

The Adoption Service aims to provide safe, secure and loving permanent homes for children who are unable to live with their birth families, through adoption. This will be achieved through compliance with, but not limited to, the standards, regulations and requirements below:

- The Adoption Act 1976
- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre and Post Commencement) Regulations 2005
- The Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Records Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children Act 2006
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2011
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and case Review and Fostering Services (Misc. Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Equality Act 2006 and 2010

The full list of practice standards can be found in the 'Growing Quality in Social Care Practice Standards':

“When you work here in Leicestershire you are signing up to a shared vision and mission for local children and their families”

PROGRESS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The performance and progress in recruitment and support of adopters will be monitored monthly, through agreed performance reports. The information will be used by managers and teams to review how recruitment and support is progressing, to make changes informed by the evidence of their work and actions, to maintain a focus on achieving the targets set and best outcomes for children and young people.

The same performance information will form part of the reporting data set provided to the Departmental Management Team to inform strategic direction for sufficiency services and provisions will strive to reach our vision:

Leicestershire is the best place for children and families

"Thank you so much for all the support - it really has made a difference... I felt I could trust you, and that you would always give a balanced and understanding, compassionate response...The advice you gave me on understanding and managing my daughter's behaviour (and on my own!), giving me much more confidence - you've been a rock!!

Message from Adopter J to the Adoption Support Worker



STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY

Leicestershire County Council is an approved adoption agency under Section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and will be inspected against the Care Standards Act 2001.

The management structure of the adoption service

The Adoption & Adoption Service is part of Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services, Permanence Unit.

The Registered Manager of the Adoption Service is:

Michelle Robinson, Service
Manager
Children and Family Services
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicestershire
LE3 8SA
Telephone (0116) 305 3051

Email:
Michelle.Robinson@leics.gov.uk

Key message from Service Manager, Michelle Robinson

“Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change.

There is a drive to increase the amount of children who are able to achieve early permanency via fostering to adopt. This is an implicit feature of our assessment and training programme to ensure that all adopters are fully informed of the risks and benefits of offering such placements. We routinely ensure that adopters have the opportunity to hear from others who have offered this type of placement within their training.

Leicestershire continues to work pro-actively with other Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies within the Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies process as Leicestershire remains committed to the needs of our children and ensuring that they continue to receive a high quality service.”

The organisational structure of the Adoption Service



ABOUT THE ADOPTION SERVICE

About the Recruitment Team

This is the first port of call for all potential adopters and foster carers. The team works with the Communications Team to encourage carers to approach Leicestershire. This team consists of:

- A Recruitment manager
- A recruitment support coordinator
- Initial home visit assessors (3), and
- A business support officer.

About the Assessment Team

In April 2015 the Fostering Assessment Team and Adoption Assessment Team integrated. The team currently assesses mainstream foster carers, adopters, step parent adoptions, private adoption assessments

The team consists of:

- A team manager
- A senior practitioner,
- And six assessing social workers.

About the Permanence Team

The Permanence Team consists of:

- Two team managers (job share)
- A senior practitioner
- Permanence social workers (6)
- Post adoption support social workers (2)
- A Post Adoption Support Worker
- A Therapist
- A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Social worker
- A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Worker
- A Permanency Coordinator
- To birth records counsellors (job share).

Currently the Permanence Team holds responsibility for home-finding (matching), post adoption support (up to three years after the making of the Adoption Order) , processing of all Adoption Support Fund applications, Birth Records Counselling and Special Guardianship Order Support.

In addition to day to day operations, the team is very committed to ongoing developmental projects such as:

- Dedicated adoption assessment resource
- A Permanence Team that offers specialist social worker involvement to promote early permanence, consistently good quality CPRs, home finding across the Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and Lincolnshire region and post adoption support plans that reflect the child's needs 'yesterday, today and tomorrow'.
- One integrated adoption support offer (one team, lifelong support)
- The introduction of Adoption and SGO Support Workers who will offer regular contact with adopters post the final order for three years, to ensure the adoption support plan is appropriate and to support adopters to implement their training and skills
- The introduction of a therapist for adoption support post 3 year placement
- Partnership working with CORAM (Adoption Gateway, playgroups, parent and teen support groups)
- The use of *Theraplay* and *Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy* principles to ensure that the Permanence Team can appropriately support adopters to
- Further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in their practice.
- Clinical oversight of assessments (CAMHS).

In September 2018 a four-six month pilot will launch that sees completion of a range of functions (Child Permanence Reports, the Permanence Report, the Support Plan, Sibling Together or Apart Assessments and preparation of the child) transfer from one of the fieldwork teams to the Permanence Team. The aim is to improve:

- Early identification of children who may need an adoption family

- Timeliness (entry into care to placement)
- Quality and consistency of CPRs, Permanence Reports and Support Plans
- Adopters and children who feel more prepared and more confident.

THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE –

Recruitment – Customer Journey

The adoption assessment process is necessary for all potential adopters. Not every case follows exactly the same sequence, but the following list of stages provides a good insight of what is expected.

First Point of Contact

The Council has invested in a dedicated recruitment team, to enable and enhance the overall recruitment and experience of prospective adopters.

The priority for this team is to set out a friendly, informative, and welcoming first point of contact with the prospective adopter, which meets their needs and impacts on the customer decision to select Leicestershire County Council, over other agencies, for their journey to adopt or for Fostering to Adopt¹.

Leicestershire County Council recruits adopters through a number of methods:

- Digital media with a particular focus on the use of Facebook campaigns
- Social media platforms, including Twitter & Instagram
- Press releases and case studies
- Targeted media adverts

The recruitment team aim to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters within two hours (on working days between 8.30 to 4.00pm). Further information will be sent out by email or post if preferred. We have a dedicated enquiry line available should people wish to talk to the team as most people have lots of questions in the early stages of considering adoption. In addition to this, the service offers regular ‘find out about adoption’ events.

Information Events ‘Find out about adoption’ events

The service offers Information Events for prospective adopters, which are aimed at providing an overview of what adoption entails and how to start the journey of becoming adopters for Leicestershire County Council.

All enquirers are encouraged to attend a ‘find out about adoption’ event. However, should they wish to, prospective adopters can request an initial visit sooner. Currently, Adoption information events are held every 6 weeks, at County Hall. The events are relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity to hear from some previous adopters as well as the

¹ Early Permanence is an important part of Leicestershire County Council’s Care Placement Strategy, ensuring that more children can be placed with their potential permanent carers on a fostering basis whilst the Local Authority seeks a placement order from the court.

team about adoption, the application process and the amazing difference it makes to lives. Customer Feedback of those attending events indicates they are a valued part of the information sharing process, and that most prospective adopters are satisfied to wait until they have attended an event, however the option of an earlier initial visit is readily available.

The recruitment team for fostering and adoption can be contacted on 0116 305 05 05 or email to Fosteringandadoption@leics.gov.uk.

Initial Visit

Initial visits are completed to allow the service to make an early decision with the prospective adopter as to whether it is appropriate to progress to assessment. These visits are also an opportunity to explain the many benefits of adopting with Leicestershire County Council.

The team member will answer questions and provide information as well as go through questions to determine:

- The prospective carers understanding of adoption and the needs of looked after children.
- What the prospective carer hopes to achieve, their expectations of the application process and their overall motivation to adopt
- The prospective carers' skills and attributes that will sufficiently meet the needs of children waiting placement.

If the prospective adopter is interested in proceeding, they will complete a registration of interest form. This is the beginning of the stage 1 of the adoption application process. Within 5 days of the registration of interest being received, the adoption assessment manager will decide whether or not to accept it and applicants will be notified in writing.

The Council welcomes and will respond positively to enquiries from all prospective adopters, in order to find a wide range of potential placements to meet the needs of the children for whom we are responsible. Applicants have to be aged over 21 years to begin the process, but there is no upper age limit. Candidates do need to be in good health (as verified by a medical) and we do not, under BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) guidelines, consider anyone who smokes to adopt children less than five years old or any child with health concerns.

Prospective adopters are accepted from within the County although applicants from outside Leicestershire will be considered.

Stage 1 Assessment

Stage 1 is to be completed within 2 months of the initial enquiry. During this period, the service will complete statutory checks and references including:

- Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check
- Six written personal references of whom at least three have are visited

- Employment references
- School references (if the candidates have children of school age)
- Local authority checks
- Medical checks (paid for by the applicant)
- In addition, DBS checks will be completed on other persons in the prospective adopters' household aged 16 and over.
- In addition, if the prospective adopter has been in a previous relationship, their former partner will be contacted and all birth children, where applicable, will be interviewed.

The applicant will be asked to attend one (two day) preparation training even and will be asked to provide the following²:

- A completed Health and Safety Checklist
- A pet questionnaire (if appropriate)
- A chronology
- A family tree
- Details of their support network
- Child care experience
- Any reading or additional training completed
- Financial circumstances form.

The Adoption Assessment Team Manager will then decide whether the applicants can progress to Stage 2. She will not be able to make this decision if the training or the necessary checks and documents have not been completed, or if issues identified in Stage 1 indicate significant concerns (relating to safety or the applicant's ability to meet the needs of children in our care).

The applicant will be informed in writing of the decision and advised of other agencies they can apply to if Leicestershire's adoption service with either unable or unwilling to process with an assessment (Stage 2).

If the decision is that the applicant can proceed to Stage 2, they must confirm with the adoption assessment team manager that they wish to do so within 6 months of receiving the letter.

Assessment

Once applicants confirm that they wish to proceed they will be allocated an assessment social worker who will complete an adoption assessment agreement with them. S/he will check all references and using information collated in Stage 1 and through direct work with the applicant, completes an assessment. The assessment social worker will complete a Prospective Adopter's Report and visit the personal referees. A second opinion or an Attachment Style Interview will be undertaken if appropriate.

² Help can be provided to complete these.

The service recognises the sensitive nature of information shared by prospective adopters and will treat all candidates with respect and all information will be handled sensitively and shared only in relation to matters of approval and home finding for a child.

Primary considerations:

- The prospective adopters ability to offer a safe, secure and loving home to a child
- All applicants will have undergone a medical assessment. Issues such as smoking. Diet, weight, alcohol consumption and past/ongoing illness will be discussed as part of the assessment reported to Panel
- Applicant's or family member's criminal convictions will also be considered as to ensure that the prospective adopters will meet the safeguarding threshold.
-

During this period of assessment the applicants will attend one (two day) preparation training. Topics that will be covered with the assessing social worker or in group discussion include:

- Prospective adopter assessment process and requirements
- Why children need adoption, their experiences and the impact
- Separation and loss
- Attachment and bonding
- Medical and background issues affecting the child's development/behaviour
- Safe care and caring
- Parenting/Adoptive Parenting tasks
- Life story work and preparing children for placement
- Case studies for approval and matching children
- Role of the Adoption Panel
- Introductions for child into placement
- Contact
- Post placement support
- Rights and needs of adopted adults and access to records

The assessment will be completed within 4 months as stipulated by DfE Statutory Guidance on Adoption (July 2013). If this is not possible, the reasons for the delay will be recorded and all parties kept informed.

Panel and Approval

Leicestershire County Council's adoption service has an independent panel with a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience. The panels undertake the following functions:

- Whether adoption is in the child's best interests, where a child has been relinquished for adoption by their birth parents
- To consider reports on potential adopters and recommend whether they should be approved.

The panel meetings 2 per month, although additional panels can be arranged as required. The panel satisfies both the Adoption and Fostering Regulations, in order to consider and make recommendations, about permanence plans for children.

Each Adoption and Permanence Panel is run in accordance with Regulation 4 and 6³, drawing members from a 'Central List'; and whilst there is no maximum number of members, the quorum for each meeting is three members, as long as the chair or vice chair, a social worker and an independent member are present and all papers are presented to members five days prior to panel.

The panel membership consists of the following:

- Independent Panel Chair
- Vice Chair
- Medical Advisor
- Independent Members – with personal or professional experience of adoption or fostering
- Children's Services representatives – which includes adoption social workers fostering social workers and social workers with childcare experience.

A professional panel advisor and minute taker will be in attendance. A legal advisor is available to attend if necessary.

The panels undertake the following functions:

- Whether adoption is in the child's best interests, for a child has been relinquished for adoption by their birth parents
- To consider reports on potential adopters and recommend whether they should be approved.
- To review the approval of waiting adopters where the adopter wishes to change their approval either for age of child or number that they wish to adopt
- To consider matches between adopters and children and to make recommendations with regard to these.
- To receive disruption reports.
- To consider the six monthly reports about the work of the Panel
- To terminate approval, where necessary.
- To consider matches between adopters and the children in which the local authority has a responsibility for.

Applicants can choose whether or not they attend panel, with regards to approval or subsequent matching, in person. Panel Members make a recommendation and it is the role of the Agency Decision Maker to make the final decision, within a maximum of seven working days of receipt of the final copy of the Panel minutes. This decision must be conveyed verbally within two working days and then confirmed in writing, within five working days.

If the application has been successful, the candidates will also be informed about the National Adoption Register and its' use.

Where a candidate has been unsuccessful in their application to adopt the Agency Decision Maker's reasons why they were not approved will be made known to them within the above time scales.

³ Regulation 4 and 6 specifies: All members 'must' be drawn from a central list; the Chair or Vice Chair must be present; the Social Worker must have at least 3 years post qualifying experience.

Reviews of approved adopters, who do not have a child placed with them, will be conducted by the authority on an annual basis. Where prospective adopters do not have a child placed, an update report may be presented to the Adoption Panel, if there has been a significant change of circumstances – the Adoption Panel will consider whether continued approval is recommended.

Appeal

Once an application, from a prospective adopter, has been accepted and if that application is subsequently rejected, the prospective adopters have the right of appeal to the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism), information of which can be found in the appendices.

Applicants may request a review of the decision of the Agency Decision Maker within forty days, from which the Agency Decision Maker will give a final decision. The applicant can also have the decision reviewed independently by the Independent Review Mechanism, within forty days of notification (details to be found in the Complaints section).

If the applicants wish to make a complaint about standards of service provision or a conduct issues, a complaint can be made through Leicestershire County Council Children's Services complaint's process (attached).

Preparation of Adopters

All prospective adopters are expected to attend 2 days preparation groups, during stage 2 of their adoption assessment. The preparation groups are held throughout the year and involve contributions from individuals concerned in all aspects of the adoption process.

Foster carers wishing to adopt a child they currently have in placement and people wishing to adopt for a second time do not have to attend the preparation groups but their worker will discuss with them what their training need might be. There is an expectation that any additional training thought to be necessary will be undertaken.

Where foster carers are accepted to adopt a child in their care, consideration will be given to the specific long term needs of that child to include:

- The quality of attachment between the child and their carers
- The child's wishes and feelings
- The ability of the fostering household to provide permanent care, and
- The impact on the child of being adopted into that household.

Home Finding

Leicestershire's adoption service have dedicated home finding social workers (permanence social workers) who strive to find secure and loving families for every child with a plan for adoption in Leicestershire. They offer a unique service by identifying links between children and adoptive parents at the earliest opportunity.

To do this, the adoption service manager or team manager attend the Children's Decision Meeting (CDM). CDM is chaired by the Head of Service (Fieldwork) who, with the presenting service manager, is responsible for the child's plan and has a number of functions in relation to the child/young person. The CDM's primary function is decision making and ensuring proactive care planning which promotes permanence at the earliest opportunity. The CDM functions outcomes include:

- Tracking of the Public Law Outline (PLO) process
- Initial endorsement of the proposed care plan which may include twin-tracking, and or additional comments from panel members
- Where the long term plan is for the child to live outside their own family, it will be necessary to fully explore extended family options or adoption

The adoption service manager or team manager attending CDM will ensure that the adoption service engages with the field work team (child's social worker) at the earliest appropriate date to prepare processes that are necessary to ensure best matching such as preparation of the Child Permanence Report, Sibling Together or Apart assessment, transition preparation planning.

Leicestershire County Council's adoption service uses a number of mechanisms to ensure that the best possible match is identified for the child or children. This includes:

- Internal home finding meetings, by matching Leicestershire's children needing adoptive home with Leicestershire County Council's assessed adopters;
- Cooperation across Leicestershire, Leicester City, Rutland and Lincolnshire's adoption services – sharing of the child's information at a regional home finding meeting. A number of voluntary adoption agencies attend this meeting to improve the match options.
- Use of Link Maker – Link Maker is an on-line portal that joins up children's social care across the United Kingdom to increase placement choice.
- East Midlands Adoption Consortium (EMAC) home finding groups where Leicestershire, Leicester, Lincolnshire and Rutland (LLLR) and Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) come together.

Placement guidance includes:

- The Adoption Panel will consider plans for contact between the child and members of the birth family and comment on their suitability.
- When considering a particular adoption placement for a child, the Adoption Panel will receive a report which clearly sets out the assessed needs of the child and the ability of the proposed family to meet those needs. The Panel will consider whether the caring potential of the family is such that they are the best possible match for the child. Prospective adopters are invited to give their views about the proposed placement and to attend the Panel where the proposed link is discussed.
- Wherever possible, sibling groups of children requiring adoption will be placed together. Before a decision is made that this is not in the children's best interests, a thorough assessment of the sibling relationship will be undertaken. If the children are to be placed separately, full reasons will be given by the Agency Decision Maker and will be made available to the children.
- Following advice from the panel medical advisor, and in accordance with BAAF guidelines, it is the practice in Derbyshire not to place children under 5 years or any children with known health concerns in households where people smoke.
- When seeking placements for children from minority ethnic backgrounds, a placement does not necessarily have to be with adopters whose ethnic background reflects that of a child. This will usually be preferred but we will look for placements where adopters are able to meet the needs of children from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Role of the Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Makers are responsible for all adoption panel decisions and provide independent oversight of panel business including approvals, incidents, complaints, allegations, resignations and de-registrations.

Oversight includes:

- Adopter carer approval – recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM
- Fostering to Adopt - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM
- Match - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM
- Disruption - recommendation by Adoption Panel – decision ADM

The Agency Decision Makers are:

- Assistant Director, Childrens Social Care – Sharon Cooke
- Agency Decision Maker (delegated responsibility) – Helen Gronhaug.

They may also comment on plans relating to siblings being placed together, contact with birth family members and adoption support needs.

Supporting adopters and our adopted children

Leicestershire's Fostering and Adoption Service works in partnership with children and young people, their families and carers to provide safe, caring homes which value the differences in children and young people and help them to achieve their full potential.

The Council believes in our children and young people's ability to succeed in all areas of their life and aim to provide the advice and support they need to do this, with a particular focus on their emotional wellbeing and education.

The Council recognizes that all children in permanent homes including adoption, fostering and those living with connected carers, experience a range of difficulties because many of these children have developed coping strategies that mean they find it difficult to form relationships and can display challenging behaviour. Leicestershire's *Permanence Passport* provides an overview of the support that adopters, connected carers and foster carers are entitled to and the additional support offered by Leicestershire County Council.

Adoption Assessment of Need

Adoptive families – parents of adoptive children aged 0-17 years of age living in Leicestershire for whom Leicestershire County Council has a duty (excluding children placed by another authority where it is not yet three years post the making of the adoption Order) - have a legal right, as and when they request it, to a Statutory Assessment of Need from the local authority responsible for their post-adoption support. For the first three years after the adoption order is granted, the local authority responsible for placing the adopted child is responsible for the statutory assessment. After that, the responsibility lies with the local authority where the adoptive family lives (except in respect of financial support where decision made prior to Adoption).

Parents can self-refer or a professional can refer on their behalf, with parental consent. In Leicestershire, this assessment is completed by a fieldwork social worker who has access to the advice and support of therapists should this be needed. The social worker is responsible

for advising the family of the outcome of the assessment and for providing the parents (and child where appropriate) with a copy of the report.

In some instances, the family agrees that a statutory assessment is not required and that early help services are best placed to meet the needs. In such instances, the family will be supported to explore support services within their community or may be referred to Leicestershire County Council's early help provision, called Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF).

Adoption families have a legal right, as and when they request it, to a Statutory Assessment of Need from the local authority responsible for their post-adoption support.



Families who are ineligible for an assessment will receive advice about how to access support from other services and/or will be advised how to make contact with the responsible authority.

Adoption allowances

Regular financial support can be paid on a weekly or monthly basis to eligible adoptive parents before and after the Adoption Order is granted, under the [Adoption Support Services \(Local Authorities\) Regulation 2005](#)

This is designed to encourage adoption of children who might otherwise not be adopted due to the extra costs associated with looking after them. The amount payable is determined and paid by the local authority looking after the child before adoption (the placing authority), and is means-tested. The allowance is subject to annual review that takes into account the child's needs.

Settling-in grants and Discretionary Payments

New adoptive parents and foster carers (including Family and Friends Connected Carers) may be eligible for a settling-in grant to help pay for large items such as a bed for your child's bedroom, or car seats. The adoptive parent or carer can ask their social worker how to apply for it. The settling-in grant is discretionary.

Most discretionary decisions (except those made on an emergency basis to secure a child's safety) to make these payments are made by Panel on a case by case basis, taking into account the child or young person's need, care plan and family circumstances that may impact on that need.

Essentially, the service becomes aware of the child's identified need through a number of ways e.g. from the foster carer or the adoptive parent. At this point the Supervising Social Worker or Adoption Social Worker will explore and assess the need. Assuming agreement that the need requires the additional payment, the foster carer or adoptive parent/s completes the Additional Payments form to notify the service of the need, how the need

will be met and the cost of doing so. The Team Manager will review the submission and will either turn down the request or will recommend payment to Panel for consideration.

Rejection of the request for the discretionary payment attracts an automatic right of appeal to the Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service.

Other important points:

Exemptions to the above payment exist and include emergency accommodation of children, additional holiday payments to foster carers and capital loans.

Discretionary payments cannot be used to commission services that are otherwise the responsibility of another authority such as education or health services.

Previously, LCC operated a system of grants to meet this need. This is no longer the case.

Adoption support fund from your local authority

Although the local authority is legally required to carry out the assessment, they are currently not legally required to provide the support that an assessment may reveal they need. If Leicestershire County Council decides to provide post-adoption support, the support can be delivered directly or commissioned from another agency. The means of delivery may be subject to pre-existing commissioning arrangements.

The Adoption Support Fund is available for children living in England up to the age of 21 who are adopted and previously in LA care, adopted from overseas or subject of an SGO and previously looked after.

“A very high proportion of parents (using the fund) believe that the ASF had helped their child... with the greatest improvement being the parents’ understanding of their child’s needs” Evaluation of the ASF 2017



Applications to the Adoption Support Fund are directly and specifically related to assessment of emotional need and the provision of appropriate therapeutic support to adoptive families and those caring for children with other permanence orders (such as [Special Guardianship Order](#) and [Child Arrangements Order](#)).

Life Story Work

Life story work helps children separated from their birth families to make sense of their past experiences. Some children may be too young to remember or understand what happened in their lives. Information about their past and heritage may be missing or forgotten. A life story book is prepared by a social worker or support worker, the foster carer and the permanent carer (adoptive parent or other carer). The book includes:

- Significant events in the child’s life
- Significant information like descriptions of their family, where they were born and

care history.

The Life Story work may also take the form of or include a scrapbook, photo album, interactive DC, collection of personal items and [Signs of Safety](#) work like Words and Pictures.

The child's social worker is expected to start Life Story Work when the child has a plan for adoption or permanency away from the birth family. At the point of the Adoption Order being made, the adoptive parents and child should be in receipt of the Life Story work and Letter for Life.

Life Story work is an important part of a child's journey and helps the child understand where they have come from and who they are. Adoptive parents will be supported by the adoption social worker to understand the importance of this work and how best to use it as the child grows and their emotional needs change.

"Life story work is so much more than just completing a book that outlines events in a child's life... life story work should make a child feel supported and nurtured," Community Cares 5 June 2017

Bye - Bye



Self-help offer for all children and young people living in Leicestershire

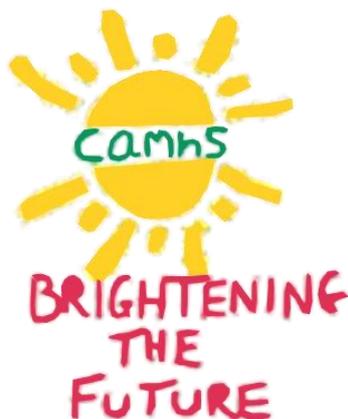
During 2016 the Council worked with partners across Leicestershire to identify services to help parents and children access support independently. For this reason, [Kooth](#) was launched in Leicestershire. Kooth is an online counselling and emotional well-being support service for children and young people available free. The service offers a team of accredited counsellors, therapists and support workers who provide guided and outcome-focused support for each individual.



"It means a lot to know Kooth is there even if others can't be," Jessie, 12 years old

Therapeutic Consultation sessions

In 2016 we introduced consultation sessions, delivered by CAMHS for social worker and carers, to promote understanding of our children's emotional needs and how to meet these needs. These sessions have proven to be very popular with general feedback indicating that the advice received enables the child's network to understand their needs and how best to meet these needs.



This service continues to be offered and social workers can book a consultation session by sending an email request to fpsadmin@leics.gov.uk quoting reference: Booking Consultation Session in the email subject header.

Therapeutic support

Leicestershire County Council recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be taken when working with children and young people who have had difficult life experiences and have experienced multiple losses. We also recognise that not all children and young people need the specialist services of CAMHS and quite often, need help to make sense of their experiences before permanence (with whom they will be living) has been decided. This support helps the child or young person prepare for their new family and the changes they will need to make.

As such, when it is identified through assessment that a child or young person or their families will require therapeutic services, consideration needs to be given about how best to meet this need i.e.

- Through community services
- Mentors /Pastoral staff /Key adults /ELSA trained Learning Support Assistant /Pastoral team etc.
- Completion of life story work or Words and Pictures by the child's social worker or other worker
- The Adoption Team, therapeutic worker
- CAMHS
- Another provision (There will be times when the need will be best met through a private provider).

In order to meet an assessed emotional or behavioural need where it is felt that a provider outside the County Council's direct provision is best placed to meet the need, a therapeutic intervention fund has been created. After approval by Panel or a designated manager, £450 per child or family member per year for therapeutic intervention will be assigned. In each case, and where the therapist recommends that further work is required, an additional £450 may be allocated for continued intervention (subject to approval by Panel or the designated manager).

The social worker will work with the carer or parents and where appropriate, the child or young person, or the school to identify the therapist best suited to the need and to ensure that the therapist is appropriately accredited. The social worker, parent or carer and school should always consider the Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) Score, where this has been completed (children aged 3-16). The SDQ is a short behavioural screening questionnaire. It is used within research, evaluating treatment outcome and as part of clinical assessment in order to examine a child's emotional well-being.

The role of the therapeutic worker in the adoption team

Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within Leicestershire for a number of reasons, such as to help our adopter parents in a way that takes into consideration the trauma their children have suffered or the impact that care has had on their child's health and development.

The adoption social worker offers support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases where adoption disruption has taken place or disruption is a threat. These referrals come directly to the permanence team, through First Response. After this 3 year period, referrals are taken through First Response and a fieldwork social work service is available to families at risk of adoption disruption – this includes active intervention, signposting to support networks and providers, and respite or accommodation of the child or children in the most extreme cases.

Some adopted children and their families require specialist counselling and therapy to help them make sense of their experiences and losses. Some of the most complex cases may be worked by fieldwork social work or early help teams with advice from the Post Adoption Support Worker depending on the level and complexity of need.

Referrals to the Adoption Support Fund can be made through the allocated fieldwork social worker with the support and guidance from the Post Adoption Social Worker. Once the assessment of need is completed and a specific proposal of therapeutic intervention identified, the application will be processed through the Post Adoption Support service.

Adoption child care support worker

This worker visits the adoptive parents and child/ren 6 weeks after the point of placing and will provide a series of contacts or visits to ensure that adopters feel supported in nurturing their relationship with their children, and any early vulnerabilities and difficulties can be quickly identified and support put in place to support the carers. Telephone contact will also be made with adopters at 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, 30 months and 36 months. The purpose of these calls is to maintain long arm support contact with adoptive/SGO/CAO families where the local authority has been a party. , offering advice and support around post adoption/SGO support services, training and our regular post support meet ups, for example the summer picnic or Christmas party. In addition to this, these calls offer an opportunity to carers for discussing any presenting needs before crisis point so that interventions can be inputted to maintain stability in placements. The Adoption Support Plan will be routinely reviewed throughout this period to ensure that it remains appropriate and relevant to the needs of the child and supports adopters to meet those needs.

Adoption Birth Records Counselling

Providing birth record counselling and access to information is of vital importance in enabling adopted adults to understand the circumstances of their adoption and to enhance their sense of identity.

If adopted adults require access to their adoption records they may request this service from the agency involved in their adoption.

In order to access birth records counselling services, an adopted adult needs to make a referral to the Permanence Team directly to request this.

Adoption Intermediary services

An adopted adult and their adult relatives can ask for an intermediary agency to trace, and establish whether contact would be welcome with a birth relative. This service is not provided by Leicestershire County Council. Some initial advice may be given but as with other local authorities, the Adoption Agency signposts adoptees who request this service from a third sector agencies.

If the adopted adult does not want to establish contact with a birth relative but simply wants to make it easier for their birth relatives to find him or her, the adopted adult can place their details on the Adoption Contact Register (ACR) held by the Register General.

The adopted adult needs to write to the Registrar General and obtain a form CR part 1 which he or she will need to complete and provide certificates proving his or her relationship to the adopted adult.

General Register Office (ACR)
Adoptions Section
Smedley Hydro
Trafalgar Road
Southport
Merseyside
PR8 2HH

Keeping in Touch

Leicestershire's Adoption Agency is working with business partners to improve on-line information to encourage families to self-help and to attend adoption support groups, and to make use of the Virtual School where advice and support regarding education is required. In addition to this, the Agency has introduced a newsletter to help adopted families feel connected and to make 'reaching out' easier. The newsletter highlights adoption events sponsored by the Adoption Agency, to encourage sharing and support amongst families who have experience and knowledge. Information about the events for foster carers is advertised in *Fostering News*.

The newsletter also provides handy hints, updates and articles about staff and carers. All new foster carers are automatically signed up for *Fostering News*, they don't have to request it. It is also published on the Portal – all new foster carers are invited to register to access the Portal.

Support to birth parents and family in Adoption

Birth Parents are routinely offered support prior to the adoption of their children to help them understand why adoption has been chosen as the appropriate plan for their children and to help them contribute to the care planning. This support is offered through a leaflet provided at the point of Agency Decision Maker (ADM) ratifying a care plan of adoption. Such requests are presented to the Service Manager for Adoption by the child/ren's social worker.

Similarly, if a birth parent or birth family requires counselling to help them deal with the loss of their child, the Adoption Team will complete an assessment and present the recommendation to the Service Manager for Adoption.

The LA has a duty to offer to assess the support needs of anyone affected by an adoption placement: this includes birth parents who can ask to be assessed for support services.

Letterbox contact

The Letterbox is a system that helps birth relatives and adoptive parents to stay in contact by exchanging written information. The frequency with which information is exchanged via the Letterbox will be discussed and agreed on when the adoption is being planned. This will usually happen once or twice a year.

Information is sent through Leicestershire County Council's Letterbox coordinator, who passes this on to the birth or adoptive parents. This means they can stay in touch via a confidential service. The coordinator checks everything that is sent via the Letterbox to make sure it doesn't contain anything inappropriate (e.g. if the relative accidentally writes their address in the letter). Using the Letterbox is free of charge and completely confidential

In the past it was believed that adopted children needed a 'clean break', and all ties with their birth family were cut. It is now agreed that many children benefit from a more open attitude towards adoption and the Letterbox service was set up in recognition of this.

Who can use the Letterbox?

The Letterbox service can be used by anyone who has been important in the life of an adopted child, so long as it will be helpful to continue written contact. This can be any relative including birth parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles. If a child is the subject of a Care Order the care plan will usually reflect who will be involved in letterbox contact

Once the child has been formally matched with an adoptive family, the adoptive and birth families will complete a written agreement with their social workers. This will describe the frequency and type of contact that will take place after the adoption. It will clarify the details of any Letterbox contact including:

- How often it will take place
- Whether the exchange will be two-way with both the adoptive parents and birth relatives sending information, or one-way with only the adoptive parents sending information
- Photographs will not usually be exchanged in order to protect the child

Our letterbox coordinator will receive a copy of this agreement to keep on file.

We recognise that children's needs change over time, and Letterbox contact may not always be appropriate. If birth relatives or adopters wish to stop this contact and withdraw from the agreement then a social worker will discuss with them whether this is in the child's best interests. If they decide to withdraw permanently then the other person will be informed.

Where can the birth parents, adoptive parent get support or advice?

There may be times when either the birth or adopted parent feels concerned or distressed and needs advice or assistance with Letterbox contact or any other aspect of adoption.

The parents can contact the Post-Adoption Support Team for assistance. The telephone number is: 0116 3053052

Or

E-mail: Adoptionsupport@leics.gov.uk.

Social Media

Social network sites are changing what happens after adoption. Birth parents can contact their birth children, and vice versa, easily. In many instances when the birth child reaches out to their birth family, it is because they need answers. Adoptive parents and carers can help their children use these sites affectively and safely. Where there is a risk, the child needs to be helped to understand risk and manage complex situations that may arise from unplanned or unmediated contact. For advice and support families can contact the Post-Adoption Support Team. The telephone number is: 0116 3053052

Or

E-mail: Adoptionsupport@leics.gov.uk.

There is also useful training and online resources through adoption UK and guidance through Coram BAAF specifically in relation to social media in adoption and permanence placements.

Community events hosted by Leicestershire County Council

There are a range of regular support services that adoptive families can access. The Post-Adoption Support Team offer biannual 'meet ups' for adopters. It is hoped that this will be extended to four events, likely to be at Christmas and during spring, summer holidays and autumn. We also send newsletters out quarterly that includes information on local groups, for example the monthly stay and play hosted by Coram in Shepshed and supported by Leicestershire County Council that is open to all our adoptive families. Adopters are signed up for the newsletter when their adoption orders are granted and are advised of upcoming events through the newsletter.

Training

The Adoption and Fostering Service has a dedicated training officer who ensures training is delivered for all our carers which includes Leicestershire's foster carers, Kinship/Connected foster carers, supported lodgings providers, specialist carers and those carers who have legally secured permanence for the children in their care through Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders and Child Arrangements Orders and Adoption.

Our rich training programme offers the following:

- 150 on-learning courses that can be done at home, libraries or on smart phones)
- 2 free online courses for all carers and are based on current trending topics which changes every 12 weeks
- 45 'live' courses in venues booked by the training officer
- 2 information & learning event/fayres
- NHS Diana training for short-break carers
- Family and Friend SGO carers and adoptive parents can access all 'live training' free of charge, subject to availability.
- Training delivered by the Virtual School regarding the barriers to learning and strategies to support children in care/previously looked after.

The Service uses surveys to establish what our carers and parents training support needs are. On this basis, we review our training offer at the end of each financial year.

Our training is publicized through newsletters where you will receive guidance about how to book onto training.

Education and the adopted child

Because of their previous experiences, some adopted children and those with a care history may need additional support at school.

Leicestershire County Council has a specific responsibility to support the educational achievement of those children whose plans are for adoption. This includes ensuring that children are placed with adopters who demonstrate a high commitment to education. Prior to placement the Adoption Support Plan will contain a thorough assessment of the child's vulnerabilities, including current and possible future educational support needs. Once the Adoption Order has been granted, the adoptive parent(s) take on full responsibility for the child or young person.

Following the publication of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 the remit of the Virtual School includes offering advice and guidance about adopted children living in Virtual School's geographic area. The Virtual School can be contacted by the child's school or adoptive parents – telephone number: 0116 3056097.

In the early years, children aged two years old who have been adopted from care are entitled to a [free early education place](#). They can also benefit from the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) when they are aged three and four years old. This is additional funding for providers of early education (such as your child's nursery) to help improve the education they provide for children who need more support. If the adoptive parent would like the nursery or childminder to claim the EYPP, they will need to tell them that your child is adopted. Useful links can be found at [Help Paying for Childcare](#).

When the adopted child reaches school age, they are entitled to priority admission to the school of the adoptive parents' choice.

The child's state funded school can also claim the pupil premium plus, providing the parent lets the school know that your child is adopted before the annual January census. The funding helps schools provide additional support for vulnerable children to improve their education. Further information can be found at [Pupil Premium Plus](#).

Disruption

Breakdown of placement can happen in the early days of the placement or years after the child has been legally adopted. Disruption may have many causes, but steps can be taken to reduce the risks including:

- Ensure full information about the child is shared with the adopter or carer
- Prepare the child for his or her new home
- Recognise emotional risk and help the carer or parent understand how they can use therapeutic parenting, life story work and Words and Pictures to help the child or young person
- Use other sources of advice and support to help the family understand and meet one another's needs, like support groups, training and access to therapeutic advice
- Recognise the impact of emotional development and the changing need for information and understanding as the child becomes a young adult.
- Collaborative working with the Virtual School to minimize disruption to education and school moves are carefully planned to ensure a positive transition.
- Well thought out Introduction Plans that take into account the transference of attachments and encourage an organic development of the relationship between child and parent through play dates and bespoke introduction planning
- Matching Meetings to ensure the best possible match is made by thoroughly evidencing decision making
- Encouraging informal 'meet and greets' with the foster carer before panel to ensure that adopters have a true account of the child
- A planned 'observation' of the child to enable adopters to see the reality of the agreed match.

At times, the child or young person returns to local authority care or requires a change of foster placement. Where this happens, the Council will work with the parent or carer to enable the child's return to the adoptive parents care. This support may take a number of forms (e.g. social worker, support worker, CAMHS, therapeutic intervention).

CORAM

Coram is one of the UK's first children's charities. During 2016 the Council met with Coram and agreed to pursue a closer working relationship. This will include improving the adoption offer through the use of Coram provisions such as:

- Parenting Skill Training for children age 3-9 years
- Parenting Skill Training for children approaching adolescents
- Support Group for Teens
- Play Events
- Adoption Support Gateway – clinical assessment and advice provided to the social worker and parent.

COMPLAINTS

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service, the detail of which is contained in the guide for staff 'Handling Comments and Complaints'.

It is a three stage process:

Stage 1 - Informal or problem solving

Stage 2 - Formal stage at which an independent investigating officer is appointed

Stage 3 - A formal review by a panel of independent members, chaired by an independent individual

Complaints can be made by contacting the Complaints Manager - County Hall:

Tel: 0116 305 5875

Or

Complaints Manager
Social Care Service
FREEPOST LE 1779
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester LE3 8XR

Applicants for adoption and adoption who are turned down by the Adoption or Adoption Panel and/or the Agency Decision Maker are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), details of which are provided to prospective foster carers and adopters. Representation to the IRM can only take place during stage two of the assessment process.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Leicestershire Adoption Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption approval process.

Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the Adoption Service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

OFSTED

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is Ofsted. The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. This number manages all general enquiries and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or write to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Adoption Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

The Statement of Purpose and other information are available on the Leicestershire County Council website.

A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

Michelle Robinson, Service Manager
Children and Family Services
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicestershire
LE3 8SA
Telephone (0116) 305 3051

Email: Michelle.Robinson@leics.gov.uk