

Learning and Children's Services



**ROYAL BOROUGH
OF
KINGSTON UPON THAMES**

DIRECTORATE OF LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**ADOPTION AGENCY
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
2011 -2012**



**ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES
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**ADOPTION AGENCY
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ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES DIRECTORATE OF LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

ADOPTION AGENCY STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Statement of Purpose relates to the Adoption Services provided by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames as required under the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations and the National Adoption Standards 2011. The statement aims to give all service users and stakeholders a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Adoption Agency and details the service provision.

1. Mission Statement:

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames aims to provide a comprehensive range of high quality Adoption and Adoption Support Services, available to all parties affected by the adoption process, that are consistent with best practice and national and departmental standards and requirements.

2. Aims and Objectives:

- To contribute to the council's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the borough by ensuring that all children are able to fulfil their potential under the Every Child Matters outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and enjoying economic wellbeing.
- To maximise the contribution adoption can make to promoting permanent, secure and loving adoptive families
- To carry out the council's statutory duty towards children who are looked after and the council's corporate parenting role under the Children Act 1989 by ensuring that they are placed with families and carers who can offer them safe, stable care and promote their life chances.
- To actively promote adoption as a permanence option for looked after children who are unable to remain in their birth families, including older children and children with disabilities,
- To promote the right of every child to have a permanent, secure and loving family, which embraces individual needs and differences and reflects their ethnic origin, or if this is not possible, that will respects and positively promote the child's ethnicity, culture and identity.
- To ensure that all our services are accessible and delivered fairly, in accordance with the council's equality policy, and that the service is open and reflects the diversity of all sections of the community.
- To ensure that all services are provided in a timely manner and service users are given the opportunity to comment on the services they receive and participate in service development.
- To provide consistently high quality services and support to individuals and families who wish to adopt domestically through the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames as an Adoption Agency, or for Borough residents in non-Agency adoptions other than those wishing to adopt from overseas. The latter are referred to the Inter country Adoption Centre, a specialist Adoption Agency.
- To provide a comprehensive range of adoption support services to all those affected by adoption, including independent counselling of birth relatives.

- To ensure that children's views and feelings are taken into account and that all children receive age appropriate life work and sensitively written life story books to help them understand their history and to prepare for their move to a permanent placement
- To have an effective recruitment strategy and good quality preparation and assessment processes to ensure that we approve the best possible adopters, so that we place children whose care plan is adoption in a timely way.

3. Principles and Core Values:

- The child is the focus of the service and the child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process. No child should be considered too young to express their feelings, verbally or non verbally, and age appropriate methods of communication should be used.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- Positive significant relationships in a child's life are acknowledged and are preserved through appropriate contact arrangements.
- A positive partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, members of the Consortium, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies
- Adoption is a life-long commitment with far-reaching consequences for those who are affected. This is recognised by staff involved in delivering adoption services,
- Adoption services are delivered in a sensitive way and confidentiality is respected.

4. The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service:

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Adoption Service is located within the Children's Social Care Section of the Learning and Children's Services Directorate. This Service is managed by the Director, who is also the Registered Adoption Provider. The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is currently the Director of Learning and Children.

The Adoption Team is managed by the Team Leader, and she is responsible to the Service Manager, Looked After Children, who is in turn responsible to the Head of Service.

Organisational Structure:

Name	Designation
Duncan Clark	Director of Learning & Children
Vacancy (covered by Duncan Clark)	Head of Children's Social Care
Mark Jowett	Service Manager Looked After Children
Joy Rees	Team Leader Adoption

5. The Adoption Team

The Adoption Team in Kingston was reorganisation earlier this year, as part of the whole service restructuring. The team was part of the Fostering and Adoption Services, lead by the Adoption and Fostering Manager, with a deputy for adoption and one for fostering. The Adoption Team now stands alone, although there are still close links with our colleagues in the Fostering Team and we share Business Support Workers. The former Manager of the Adoption and Fostering Team retired this year and the current Team Leader Adoption was appointed on 1st March 2011.

The Adoption Team continues to be based in Guildhall 2 in Kingston town centre and it is managed on a day-to-day basis, by the Adoption Team Leader. The Team Leader is also the Adoption Agency Panel Adviser. The Team Leader and all of the Adoption Social Workers are all qualified social workers, very experienced in adoption work, registered with the GSCC and qualified under the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005, as they all have at least the 3 years of relevant adoption work.

The Adoption Team has 4.5 FTE permanent, social workers, including the Team Leader. The Adoption Team consists of a full time Team Leader, an Adoption Support Service Advisor (ASSA), 0.8 FTE (4 days a week), 2 full time Adoption Social Workers and a part time Adoption Social Worker/ Adoption Support Worker 0.8 FTE in total (3 days a week adoption work and 1 day for adoption support). This is a very stable group of workers and apart from the change of management, staff turnover has been infrequent.

The Team is supported by a staffing equivalent of approximately 1.5 full time business support staff: - a Letter Box Coordinator/Administrator, a Adoption Panel Administrator a Publicity and Recruitment Officer and a Finance Officer. (The latter 2 are based in the Placement Team)

The Adoption Team:

Name	Designation
Joy Rees	Team Leader & Adoption Panel Adviser
Margaret Phelps	Adoption Support Service Adviser(P/T)
Sarah-Jane Hopkins	Adoption Social Worker
Charlotte Watts	Adoption Social Worker
Maggie Laurence	Adoption Social Worker/Adoption Support (P/T)
Support Staff	Designation
Gina Hook	Letter Box Coordinator & Administrator (P/T)
Miranda Waller	Adoption Panel Administrator (P/T)
Irene Dickenson	Finance Officer (P/T)
Chris Appleyard	Recruitment & Publicity Officer (P/T)

In line with Kingston's policy and guidelines, all staff receive regular supervision and the Team Leader is approachable and available for consultation and advice in between the planned supervision sessions. They have annual appraisals and their training needs are regularly reviewed and they are actively encouraged to seek further appropriate training both internally and externally. Staff are expected to share learning outcomes to benefit the team and when relevant with social workers in the wider service. All of the Adoption Social Workers hold Post Qualifying awards including PO1's and PQ Childcare. One of the full time social workers hold a PQ Specialist award. The ASSA is also a BACS Register Counsellor and is trained in 'theraplay' techniques.

Two qualified, registered and appropriately experienced workers are also currently employed through Kingston staff bank on a sessional basis. One provides, as statutorily required, the independent counselling service for birth relatives, while the other supervises 2 of the long standing post adoption direct contact arrangements between adopted children and members of their birth families. All other direct contacts are supervised by the ASSA or the part time Adoption Support Worker

6. Inter Team and Inter Agency Working

The Adoption Team is committed to keeping the child as the focus. To achieve this we strive to ensure that we maintain good working relationships with colleagues in the Safeguarding Teams, in the Looked After Teams and in the Fostering Team. We are accessible and approachable and through Permanency Consultation Meetings we hope to become involved in formulating the best possible care plans for looked after children, so that when appropriate adoption can be considered in a timely manner, as a positive option.

The Royal Borough of Kingston also works closely with our partner agencies in the SW London Adoption Consortium. This consists of Kingston and 3 neighbouring London Boroughs, Sutton, Merton and Richmond, and a Voluntary Adoption Agency, Action for Children. The Consortium aims to develop joint initiatives to improve practice and to speed up the process of adoption for children in member boroughs. These arrangements includes sharing information about children and details of approved adopters waiting for placement, participation in joint advertising and recruitment initiatives, as well as developing and sharing good practice. The members also pool resources to enable us to provide a more comprehensive range of adoption support services, for children and for adults affected by adoption.

For children we are not able to place with Kingston approved adopters or through the SW London Consortium, we avoid any unnecessary delay by referring directly to the Adoption Register and concurrently approaching other Adoption Agencies, including specialist Voluntary Adoption Agencies and featuring those children in appropriate publications.

7. Adoption Service Users

Adoption Services are provided for:

- Children whose care plans are adoption or are likely to become adoption
- Birth relatives of children whose care plan is adoption
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families
- Colleagues within the Royal Borough of Kingston and in other agencies

8. Adoption Services Provided

Children needing adoptive placements:

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

If we cannot place a child with Kingston Adopters, to avoid delays and provide the best possible family we refer the child to the Adoption Register, to our partners in the SW Consortium and to other Adoption Agencies nationally, including and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The Royal Borough of Kingston's Recruitment Strategy provides full details.

We place a relatively small number of children for adoption each year and the profile of children needing adoptive placements has changed considerably in recent years, and we need to recruit a wide range of adopters. We rarely place voluntarily relinquished babies or very young children, and we need adopters who can consider older children, sibling groups, children whose future development is uncertain and those from black and minority ethnic groups. All of these children will have experienced some level of neglect and or abuse and have been subject to care proceedings. They will currently be living with foster carers but need permanent adoptive parents.

Adoption Support Services:

Working with our Consortium partners, the Adoption Team provides a comprehensive and continually developing range of adoption support services for children, adoptive parents, birth relatives and anyone who has been affected by adoption. This includes counselling, information and advice, support groups, training courses and workshops and access to birth records.

We also hold regular groups for adoptive families, a drop in for parents and toddlers, activity groups for teenagers and children and organise an annual adoption party for adopted children and their families.

We administer a confidential Letter Box Service to facilitate indirect contact between birth families and adoptive parents on behalf of their children and we also facilitate, support and supervise direct contact arrangements.

Adoptive families, adopted adults or birth relatives can ask for an assessment of needs at any time after the adoption. The ASSA or Adoption Support Worker undertakes the assessment and if appropriate draws up a support plan. The range of service we offer can include advice, counselling, accessing records, offering a drop in session with an Educational Psychologist, arranging a consultation with a Child and Family Psychotherapist with particular knowledge of adoption issues, liaising with the school or referring the family to another service or agency e.g CAMHS.

Non Agency Adoptions:

- **Intercountry Adoptions**

Borough resident who are interested in pursuing an Intercountry Adoption are referred directly to the Inter Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Registered Adoption Agency. This agency, now a Registered Adoption Agency, has accepted applications from Kingston residents since 1 April 2009 and RBK's contract with them was renewed this year. Prospective adopters attend the Adoption Information Meeting there, and they also provide the preparation groups and complete the assessment and home study.

Kingston Adoption Team become involved when notification is received about a proposed placement of a child. The Adoption Team is then responsible for the welfare supervision visits and depending on which country is involved, and whether it is a Hague or Non-Hague adoption, we will prepare the Annex A report for the Court, and provide post placement reports for the originating county

- **Step-parent and kin adoptions**

Borough residents who enquire about other non-agency adoptions, often step parent enquires, are given information by the Adoption Duty Officer. They can download information from the website or can be sent an information pack. Where appropriate they are offered an office interview by appointment to discuss their specific circumstances and are advised about procedures and about the status of non-related children.

The relevant Court reports are undertaken in non-agency adoptions where Borough residents have given notification of their intention to apply to adopt. This includes step-parent adoptions, adoptions of a close relative such as a niece, nephew or grandchild and children who have been adopted in another country.

9. The Adoption Process

Recruitment

Our recruitment strategy is transparent and inclusive and we welcome applications for all sectors of the community and do not discriminate on grounds of age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion or disability. Our strategy is flexible, constantly subject to review and reflects the diverse and often complex needs of the children who need an adoptive family. (Recruitment Strategy Revised August 2011)

Anyone interested in becoming an adoptive parent is treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect. Kingston is a relatively small agency, and we need to prioritise the needs of the children we are currently working with and we hope to attract applications from and target prospective adopters who are best able to meet the needs of these children. The profile of the children in Kingston, reflects the national trends. The majority of initial enquires are from those wishing to adopt a healthy young child, while Kingston currently need adopters for older children, children with disabilities or with very uncertain development, siblings and children from black and ethnic minority groups.

We have some telephone enquires but most came via email. Either way, following an initial telephone discussion with the duty officer, and if required, written information about the adoption process is sent within 5 working days. Many enquirers have already downloaded

this information themselves from the regularly updated adoption website.

After the preliminary discussion and reading the information pack, anyone wishing to hear more about adopting with Kingston is invited to an Adoption Information Meeting. This gives prospective adopters the chance to hear more about adoption, to ask any questions and they also have the opportunity of hearing from experienced adopters. For those who wish to proceed further and who meet the current criteria an Adoption Counselling Interview is offered.

Borough residents are also invited to the Adoption Information Meeting and are offered a Counselling Interview but we are clear from the outset that we will not be able to progress their application as the birth relatives of the children we place are also borough residents.

Preparation and Assessment

After completion of these initial stages, prospective adopters who are likely to meet the needs of Kingston children needing an adoptive placement, are asked to submit a written application form and are also invited to the Adoption Preparation Group. An enhanced Criminal Record Bureau check is initiated and references are taken up.

The Preparation Groups are thorough and gives perspective adopters the opportunity of exploring all aspects of adoption today and they are able to hear about adoption from many different perspectives. They are able to hear directly from adopters, adoptees and birth relatives. This is followed by the home study and again this is a very thorough and detailed assessment. Some applicants may find this process difficult and intrusive, but it is absolutely essential for the welfare and safety of the child that a consistent and searching assessment is conducted. Proper assessment should ensure that adopters are realistic and have the capacity to meet the needs of any child placed with them and are able to respond to the lifelong issues associated with adoption.

The information gathered during the preparation and assessment period is used to compile the Prospective Adopter's Report. The applicants contribute directly to this report and they are able to read and comment on this before it is presented to the Adoption Panel. The aim is to meet the 8 months standard for completion after receipt of the formal application unless there are evidenced reasons for delay.

The Adoption Panel

Recommendations about whether prospective adopters should be approved to adopt are made by the Adoption Panel. The Panel members have a wide range of experiences and include adopted adults and adoptive parents. Members are drawn from a central list and the panel chair is independent of the council. The panel meets once a month.

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

Following approval adopters will receive a post approval information pack which includes three years subscription to Adoption UK. For domestic adopters there is a minimum 6-weekly contact by telephone or e-mail and a home visit or office interview every 3 months with their Adoption Worker.

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

Independent Review Mechanism

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

Matching and Placement

Approved adopters will be considered for any suitable Kingston children. The prospective adopters will see all relevant information and reports including the Child's Placement Report, have discussion with their adoption worker, the family finding social worker, the child's social worker and meetings will be arranged with the child's foster carer, medical adviser and anyone else of significance.

A selection meeting is held to ensure that the child's needs are clearly identified and that the applicants are the best 'match'. On presenting a proposed match to the Adoption Panel an Adoption Placement Report is presented highlighting the placement support requirements, including financial support, contact with birth family, therapeutic support needed, referral to any specialist agency, etc. This report is sent to the prospective adopters, prior to submission to Panel, for them to add their written comments.

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

If the placement is approved a placement planning meeting will be arranged and if appropriate and possible a life appreciation day will be convened. A child centred detailed plan of introductions will be drawn up in collaboration with the foster carer and the adopters. The plan is reviewed mid way and if all are in arrangement the moving day will be confirmed.

The Kingston ASSA offers a Theraplay session as part of adoption support to new adoption placements of Kingston children to help promote the attunement and attachment process.

If approved Kingston adopters are not being considered for a specific Kingston child and again with their consent, their approval details will be forwarded to the South West London Adoption Consortium and three months after their approval, to the Adoption Register, thereby extending the range of potential placement matches for them

There is a legal requirement that all approved adopters awaiting a placement are reviewed annually by their approving agency. The review is only presented to the Adoption Panel if it is felt that the prospective adopters should no longer be approved to adopt.

10. Quality Assurance and Monitoring

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

The Children's Statutory Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers and the Permanency Planning process ensures that monitoring an individual child's progress towards adoption is part of the Royal Borough of Kingston's scrutiny programme for Children's Services.

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

The Adoption Panel is independently chaired as legally required and receives relevant reports concerning whether a child should be adopted, the suitability of prospective adopters to adopt a child and the placement of a child with particular prospective adopters. As such, the Panel is able to scrutinise on a case by case basis the effectiveness of the adoption service in terms of seeing the best possible outcomes for adopters and for children who cannot remain with their birth parents. The Panel is required by legislation to monitor the outcomes for children for whom it has made recommendations. The outcomes are recorded in the Panel minutes.

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

The whole of the Adoption Agency is also subject to three yearly inspections by Ofsted and our services are considered to ensure that Kingston complies with National Minimum Standards for Local Authorities Adoption Agencies in England and Wales. .

As a department of the Local Authority, Learning and Children's Services operates within the framework of regulation and statutory guidance that applies to all local Authorities. The Safeguarding Services also make annual returns to the Department for Education as required concerning the adoptions of children in care.

The Overview Commission of elected members examines and reviews the activity of the Service through receiving the annual report of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel Report as part of the Looked After Children Service Report. The Executive of the Council makes any decisions it is required to in respect of the Adoption Service under the Council's own standing orders or as prescribed by legislation or regulation.

11. Complaints

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against an adopter will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis. The Council has a corporate complaints procedure that operates if no resolution can be achieved at this stage.

Where a complaint against an adoptive parent constitutes a child protection allegation this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under the Council's own and London Safeguarding Children procedures.

There is a guide for RBK service users called 'Have Your Say.' This leaflet includes details of how to complain. It is included in all adoption information packs, is available in our reception area and is available for service users at any time.

RBK employs a Children's Participation and Development Officer who provides an advocacy service for children and young people living in the Borough. There is information in RBK's Children's Guide to Adoption advising children how to contact an independent advocate and other outlets like Childline. There is also a Children's complaint leaflet.

Complaints are monitored by Complaints and Information Access Officer. Ofsted is concerned with ensuring the full application of required standards and good practice guidance and can also investigate matters referred to it under local complaints' procedures

During the year 2010/11 the Adoption Service received the following number of complaints:

Stage 1- Informal: 0

Stage 2- Formal: 0

Stage 3- Review: 0

12. Address and Contact Details

Adoption Team

First Floor West
Guildhall 2,
High Street
Kingston upon Thames
KT1 1EU

☎ 020 8547 5004

Email: adoption@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

Web: www.kingston.gov.uk/adoption

Ofsted

☎ 0845 404040

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

Email: www.baaf.org.uk

Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC)

Email: www.icacentre.org.uk

This Statement of Purpose is subject to annual review and endorsement by the Lead Member for Children and Young People.

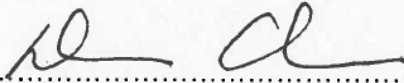
Joy Rees

Team Leader Adoption

November 2011

Approval Sheet

Adoption Service Statement of Purpose

 5/12/2011.

Duncan Clark
Director of Learning and Children's Services

Date

 5th December 2011

Councillor Patricia Bamford
Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services

Date