

ADOPTION SERVICE



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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Fostering & Adoption Service
253 Preston Road
Brighton



Brighton and Hove
Children and Young People's
TRUST



1 Introduction

- 1.1** Brighton and Hove City Council is committed to providing a high quality adoption service. The statement of purpose will detail the aims and objectives of the service, quality assurance mechanisms, and the range of services provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth families.
- 1.2** The Statement of Purpose includes details of the staffing and organisational structure of the service, management arrangements, complaint procedures and the details of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). It should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose.
- 1.3** The principles within the statement of purpose apply to placements made with other adoption agencies and also non agency placements such as step parent, kinship and inter-country adoptions. These placements will receive the same high quality professional and management attention.

2 Key aims and principles

- 2.1** A child's welfare is the paramount consideration. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving and caring family, which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child or young person are at the centre of Brighton and Hove's Adoption Service. Children come from a wide range of cultural, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds, therefore the Adoption Service will endeavour to recruit carers who reflect this.
- 2.2** Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust (CYPT), with other agencies and community groups, will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children.
- 2.3** Where children or young people are not able to live safely with their birth parents then active consideration will always be given to that child being cared for within the wider family or friendship network. Family Group Conferences will be held whenever possible to enable the family to consider the best placement plan for a child. The CYPT will continue to develop services for family and friends carers.
- 2.4** Where children or young people are not able to remain with their birth family or be placed within the wider family network a family placement with foster carers or adoptive parents will be sought. Good childcare planning is essential to prevent children drifting in the care system. Delays in progressing permanence plans can have a severe impact on the health and development of children.

- 2.5** Birth parents and birth families will be provided with a service that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated in an open, fair and respectful manner throughout the adoption process
- 2.6** The views and wishes of the child should be sought by a range of age appropriate means. The Children's Rights Service and Advocacy Service will continue to play a key role in promoting the wishes and views of children in care and enabling their voice to be heard. The Independent Reviewing Officers will also ensure that a child's wishes have been sought and are included in the care planning process as appropriate. If adoption is agreed as the plan children will have his or her wishes and feelings recorded and taken into account. A range of age appropriate children's guides to adoption with key local information are available to all children where adoption is the plan.
- 2.7** The Adoption Service will aim to provide a diverse and wide range of adoptive placements to meet the needs of children who are being placed for adoption. The service will maintain a clear, inclusive and pro-active recruitment strategy to encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds and walks of life.
- 2.8** Prospective adoptive parents will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Enquiries will be responded to promptly and prospective adopters given full information about the recruitment, assessment training and approval procedures.
- 2.9** Adoptive carers will be carefully recruited and trained and given access to a range of adoption support services. It is recognised that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from a range of agencies and organisations that have to work together to meet the needs of those affected by adoption.
- 2.10** The preservation of adoptive families and the reduction of the risk of placements disrupting is a key aim of the service. The needs and background circumstances of children and their birth families will need to be fully assessed so that important matching considerations can be identified and children placed with adopters that are best able to meet their needs.
- 2.11** A range of adoption support services will be made available for children and adoptive families. If placements do disrupt in spite of intensive placement support, disruption meetings will be convened that are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer that has not been involved in the care planning process to date. All parties involved in the placement will be invited to attend and express their views and the views of the child will be sought. The disruption meeting will address the future needs of the child and the chair will ensure that a full record of the meeting takes place. Any lessons for future practice will be fully disseminated to all relevant parties.

- 2.12** Adoption support services are provided as required by the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 to all parties in the adoption process including adoptive adults, birth families as well as adoptive families.
- 2.13** The Adoption Service has a full information policy and will ensure that adoptive parents are given access to full information about the child prior to placement.
- 2.14** The Adoption Service values the role that experienced adopters, adopted adults and birth parents play in the training and preparation and support of new adoptive families and will continue to work to facilitate such contact.
- 2.15** Staff within the Adoption Service will receive supervision and access to a range of training opportunities to ensure they are well equipped to recruit, train, assess, and support adoptive families, family find and place children appropriately and provide support to adopted adults, birth families and others in the adoption process.

3 The Children

- 3.1** Adoption will be considered as a positive option for children in care that are unable to return to live with their birth parents or be placed with family or friends carers.
- 3.2** Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption and careful consideration will be given to recruiting carers that can meet the range of needs of all our children in care needing adoptive families.
- 3.3** All decisions for children will be based on a rigorous assessment and care planning process. Achieving permanence for children within the child's timescales is a key objective. A careful balance has to be achieved between allowing the birth family sufficient time with access to all appropriate support services to make the changes necessary to resume the care of their children safely and the need for children to have the opportunity to live in a stable and permanent family.
- 3.4** All children in care will have a care plan. The wishes of the child will be taken into account as appropriate in drawing up the care plan. The birth family should be involved in the care planning process and their views represented.
- 3.5** The care plan will be reviewed at every child in care review and at the 4 month review the plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan will be based on the needs of the individual child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved ideally by return to birth

family or if that is not possible through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up to expedite the permanence planning, which will be appropriately monitored and considered at every subsequent review.

- 3.6** Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a LAC review, plans will be made to present the plan for adoption to the Adoption & Permanence Panel within 2 months.
- 3.7** Every child will have their wishes and feelings regarding the plans for their future listened to in an age appropriate manner, recorded and taken into account. Where they are not acted upon reasons for this will be explained to the child and recorded on the file. The Children's Guide to Adoption is available to children and their carers when adoption is being considered as the plan. Children of a sufficient age and understanding will also be given details of other appropriate adoption support services such as the national telephone helpline Talk Adoption.
- 3.8** The National Adoption Standards in respect of planning for child will be followed and any delay in achieving those timescales will be monitored by fieldwork managers, Adoption and Permanence Panel and the Agency Decision Maker and reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency Report.
- 3.9** All children will have a named social worker responsible for them throughout the adoption process. The social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the child is well prepared before joining a new family. Age appropriate information will be given and foster carers will be trained and supported to enable them to help children prepare to move to a new adoptive family.
- 3.10** All children moving on to adoptive or permanent families should have a life story book, later life letter and be supported to retain key items and mementos from their past. Children should have access to specialist skilled help as appropriate to enable them to express their feelings about their past and plans for the future and be better placed to develop new attachments to permanent/adoptive families.
- 3.11** Where adoption is identified as a potential plan a referral should be made by the child's social worker to the appropriate Practice Manager in the Adoption and Permanence Team. This Practice Manager will oversee the referral and family finding process.
- 3.12** The Practice Manager will offer consultation and organise a Permanence Planning meeting as appropriate with the child's social worker and foster carers to consider the plans for the child, look at the matching considerations and devise a family finding strategy.
- 3.13** A social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Team will take responsibility for family finding and will work closely with the social

worker for the child and other key parties to the process. Clear and detailed matching criteria will be drawn up and children will be placed with families that are best able to meet their needs.

- 3.14** Children will not be left waiting for a 'perfect family'. Children should be placed with adoptive parents of an appropriate ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. However if no such match can be found within reasonable timescales, alternative adopters who can help a child understand and positively embrace their background and culture should be identified to avoid delay in the child moving to a permanent placement. These adopters should be provided with access to specific support services as necessary.
- 3.15** The family finding social worker will consider adoptive resources within the local pool of Brighton and Hove adopters, approved adopters within the South East Adoption Consortium, that Brighton and Hove belong to, as well as any resources identified by the National Adoption Register. If no local placements are available specific family finding activities will be undertaken by advertising for adopters within appropriate journals and contacting a wide range of adoption agencies.
- 3.16** The option of the child remaining on a permanent basis and achieving a permanent family ideally through adoption with their foster carers will always be considered and explored if appropriate. However other matching considerations such as the age and ethnicity of the child, the need to place siblings together if possible and the particular needs of the child and circumstances and family structure of the foster carers' family will also be taken into account.
- 3.17** The family finding social worker will take the lead in identifying appropriate families, liaising with the adopter's social worker and accompanying the child's social worker on meetings with the prospective adoptive family. The family finding social worker will remain involved until the match has been recommended at Panel and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 3.18** The Adoption Service will make it clear to potential adopters that it is a requirement that the child's name should be retained unless there is a very good reason not to. Any such reason needs to be discussed and agreed with the Adoption Service as it is a very clear expectation that the child retain and be known by the name given to him or her by their birth family.
- 3.19** Siblings should be placed together where at all possible and the needs of the different children taken into account. Taking decisions to separate siblings is a difficult task and training and guidance will be provided for staff on this issue. The impact of any decision on the ability to family find must also be taken into account. A decision to separate siblings should be fully recorded on the file and explained to the child as appropriate. A clear contact plan for maintaining the link

between siblings must be presented as part of the plan for adoption to the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

- 3.20** Appropriate contact for children with their birth family will always have to be considered in the final care plan and welfare checklist for the child within the court proceedings. These plans will also be considered by the Adoption and Permanence Panel when the plan for the child is presented to Panel. When direct contact arrangements are planned to continue post adoption the aim should be to promote a positive sense of identity for the child, not rehabilitation to the birth family.
- 3.21** Indirect contact arrangements for the child with his or her birth family will be arranged via the Adoption Service's 'letterbox scheme'. The expectation is that letterbox arrangements will be put in place for all children where direct contact is not being maintained. It is recognised that the child's needs for contact and information about their birth family develop and change throughout their childhood and the adoption support social worker will facilitate this or organise access to specialist services to review contact and promote the setting up of appropriate direct or indirect contact arrangements.
- 3.22** Children with attachment difficulties and histories of a traumatic and disrupted past may need continued access to multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption. Adoption support needs for the child will be identified following an adoption support assessment and a plan will be drawn up in conjunction with the prospective adopters and key agencies. The Adoption Support Plan will be presented to Panel alongside the Adoption Placement Report. It is a requirement that the Adoption Placement Plan and the Adoption Support Plan are agreed with the prospective adopters before the commencement of introductions to the child. This adoption support plan will be kept under review.
- 3.23** Adoption files will be carefully stored and archived and information from the agency's records will be made available when they are of sufficient age and understanding. Adoption files will be retained for 100 years.

4 Birth Parents and Birth Families

- 4.1** Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications and their rights. A booklet for parents has been developed by the Adoption Service in consultation with legal services and with birth parents that have had a child placed for adoption. This booklet: 'A parent's guide to the various options for children who cannot live with their birth parents' will be given to all birth parents when a permanence plan is being considered for their child.

- 4.2** The views of birth families about the adoption and contact plans will be clearly recorded on the case file and within the Child's Permanence Report. Birth parents will be given sight of the relevant sections of this report to enable them to comment on its content prior to it being presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel.
- 4.3** The wishes and views of the birth parents will be taken into account in the planning of placements particularly in regard to religion.
- 4.4** Social workers for the child will make efforts to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth family about themselves and their history and encourage them to contribute to the child's life story material.
- 4.5** Staff within the Adoption Service will explain to adoptive parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and to provide this to the adopted child as appropriate.
- 4.6** Birth parents and other relatives will be given access to a support worker independent from the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. Birth parents will be provided with written information about the Brighton & Hove 'Birth Family Support and Information Service'. They will also be given information on the services they could access from the Post Adoption Centre as well as other organisations such as the Natural Parents Network and the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and their Parents.
- 4.7** Birth parents and appropriate relatives will be given the opportunity to meet the adoptive parents, usually prior to placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances that would make such a plan unsafe and against the best interest of the child.
- 4.8** The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with extended birth family members is recognised and will be supported as appropriate via letterbox or direct contact arrangements.
- 4.9** The Adoption Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and advice about agencies that can provide an intermediary service.
- 4.10** Birth parents and families will be advised of the complaints procedures and their right to make representation and complaints.

5 Prospective Adopters

- 5.1** Applications from prospective adopters will be welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It is recognised that a wide range of adopters are needed to meet the

needs of our looked after children and that these needs will determine the priority given to progressing applications from prospective adopters.

- 5.2** Prospective adoptive families will be given information about the type of children waiting for adoption and the specific need to recruit adopters offering placements for children from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, sibling groups, children over 2 years of age, and children with developmental uncertainty and special needs.
- 5.3** Prospective adopters will be given information about the fact that there are relatively few babies available for adoption and that in Brighton and Hove priority is given to placing babies with concurrent carers. These are foster carers, who are also approved as adoptive carers that are able to provide a permanent home to the child by adoption if rehabilitation work with the birth family is not successful. The duty social worker will be able to explain the particular challenges and expectations of both the concurrent and traditional route to adoption.
- 5.4** The Adoption and Permanence team will provide a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Initial details will be taken and information given about eligibility criteria. Full information packs will be sent out to potential adopters within 5 working days. These information packs will contain information about the assessment and training process, the types of children needing adoptive placements and adoption support services. All of this information for prospective adopters is also made available on the Fostering & Adoption website, www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk
- 5.5** Applicants must be over 21 years and legally domiciled in the UK and within a reasonable travelling distance of Brighton and Hove. Couples will normally have to have been in a stable and enduring relationship. Applicants that have infertility issues will normally be expected to have concluded any medical intervention and made a positive choice about adoption as a route to parenting.
- 5.6** The information material provided to prospective applicants gives details of issues relating to past criminal convictions, health and age considerations. The age of applicants is considered in relation to their energy and activity levels and the age of the child they wish to be considered for. Children under the age of 5 years and children with specific relevant health issues will not be placed in smoking household because of the well-recognised risks of passive smoking.
- 5.7** The Adoption Service has developed a conflict of interest policy that details the fact that certain staff groups in children services and certain elected members of the authority are not eligible for assessment by the authority because of the potential conflict of interest. They will be assisted to access services from neighbouring adoption agencies, or from member agencies of the Adoption South East Consortium.

- 5.8** Prospective adopters will be informed about the fact that Brighton and Hove is part of the Adoption South East Consortium with East Sussex, Kent, Medway and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. Once approved if they are not linked with a Brighton and Hove child within 3 weeks of approval their details will be circulated to Consortium members for consideration for their children. Information will also be given about the National Adoption Register.
- 5.9** If a prospective adoptive family is offering a particular resource that may result in them not being linked with a local child, e.g. because of their ethnic origin, they will be informed that their details will be circulated to other agencies with minimum delay to maximise the opportunity for them to be linked with an appropriate child.
- 5.10** Prospective adopters that decide to proceed following the provision of the information pack will be invited to an information session and then sent an adopter questionnaire. The Adoption and Permanence team provide a dedicated duty service for prospective adoptive applicants which is overseen by a Practice Manager with lead responsibility for recruitment. The team endeavours to respond speedily to all enquiries and offer a full opportunity for prospective applicants to discuss issues and ask questions about the adoption process at this early stage. If the applicants wish to proceed they will be offered an initial home assessment visit and then an invitation to a 'motivation and loss' group. Following this they will be invited to submit their formal application to be assessed as prospective adopters. If the Adoption Service feels it cannot prioritise or progress an application a full explanation will be given and recorded on the file. Applicants will be given details about the complaints procedures. Under certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the social worker to consult with the Agency Advisor (Adoption and Permanence) or the Adoption and Permanence Panel about an issue concerning an application.
- 5.11** The Adoption and Permanence Team have established a contract with Parents and Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter-country adopters on behalf of BHCC. PACT has considerable experience in this specialist area of work and will provide a timely and dedicated response to enquiries from people wishing to adopt from abroad.
- 5.12** The Adoption and Permanence team will also provide a duty service to give information, respond to enquiries and undertake the work required to progress step parent adoptions.
- 5.13** In situations where foster carers are being assessed as prospective adopters for the children in their care they will be entitled to access the same training and support services. Assessments will be conducted within timescales compliant with the National Adoption Standards.

- 5.14** Regular preparation training groups will be run for prospective adopters. The training groups will always include input from experienced adopters and birth parents and adopted adults where possible. Details of the scope and focus of these groups will be provided to applicants in advance. The preparation groups provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to consider in detail issues relating to adoption and meet other prospective adopters.
- 5.15** Views of prospective adopters about the content and running of the preparation group are canvassed at the end of the group. Prospective adopter views regarding the assessment process as a whole are sought during the second opinion visit undertaken by a manager within the adoption and permanence service at the end of the assessment process.
- 5.16** The assessment and approval process is comprehensive, thorough, fair and fully explained to applicants. The Adoption service will endeavour to work in partnership with applicants, however it is necessary for both parties to be clear that a risk assessment is being carried out when a home study assessment is being completed. Assessment will distinguish clearly between self-reported and independently evidenced information with verification of key aspects of the applicant's accounts.
- 5.17** The manager of the supervising social worker will meet the prospective applicants with the social worker at the outset of the assessment and again during the assessment as required. The manager will meet the applicants again towards the end of the assessment and prepare a second opinion report which will be appended to the prospective adopters report and made available to the applicants.
- 5.18** Applicants will receive a copy of the Prospective Adopter Report and have the opportunity to comment on it. Applicants are given full information about the Adoption and Permanence Panel and provided with a booklet about the Panel process. Applicants are encouraged and supported to attend. Panel will comment on the strengths and areas of potential difficulty in relation to the application and applicants are informed of Panel's recommendation immediately whenever possible. The decision of the Agency Decision Maker will be passed on to the applicants verbally within 24 hours of when it is made and followed up in writing within five working days.
- 5.19** Prospective adopters will be fully advised about the adoption support services provided by the local authority, the Post Adoption Centre and Adoption UK and other appropriate services.

6 Adoptive Parents

- 6.1** Approved adopters will be given full information about the matching, introduction and placement process including information on the

Consortium and National Adoption Register. Key documents are made available to all newly approved adopters in the Brighton & Hove Adopters Post Approval Pack issued immediately following approval.

- 6.2** BHCC has detailed procedures for staff about the matching, placement and introduction procedures. Guidance is also available for other authorities and agencies when a match is being considered for a child with inter agency adopters.
- 6.3** An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel for consideration and then to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision. A full Adoption Placement Report will be completed which details the positive factors about the match, any potential areas of risk/difficulty, information on any other possible matches that have been considered and the adoption support services that will need to be made available to the family. The prospective adopters will have an adoption placement plan, which will include the adoption support plan, provided for them prior to the introduction process commencing.
- 6.4** As well as having full information about the child's history prior to the match the prospective adopters will also have the opportunity to meet the child's foster carers, seek information from the Medical Advisor and meet any other key professionals.
- 6.5** The Adoption Service will provide access to ongoing training and specialist services to adoptive families as part of the adoption support service and the role of the Adoption Support Service Advisor will be explained to all adoptive families.
- 6.6** The Adoption Service will work with other agencies and key stake holder groups, including Adoption UK, to continue to review and develop adoption support services.
- 6.7** The Adoption Service currently provides a range of adoption support groups, a newsletter and occasional social opportunities for adopters and their families to meet together.
- 6.8** There is a service level agreement with the Post Adoption Centre to provide local surgeries that can be used by adoptive families, adopted adults, birth families and adoption professionals. The PAC also provides a helpline and a range of training courses for professionals and all parties in the adoption circle. Newly approved adopters will be encouraged to become members of Adoption UK and benefit from the various support services it provides. The Adoption Service will pay their membership fee to this organisation for their first year post approval.
- 6.9** The Adoption Support Services Advisor will oversee the provision of adoption support services. The service will also be responsible for undertaking adoption support assessments, advising and supporting

adopters and their children, contributing to training and workshops for adoptive families and professionals, offering advice and consultation on adoption related matters, undertaking specialist pieces of work for court and managing direct and indirect post adoption contact.

- 6.10** The Adoption Support service will also provide a specific service to adoptive families to support and advise on schooling and education issues. An Adoption Support teacher will take the lead in developing this dedicated provision.
- 6.11** Adoptive parents will be supported to enable the child to maintain any appropriate contact arrangements, either direct or indirect, with birth family members or significant others such as previous foster carers. It is recognised that contact arrangements need to be carefully and sensitively managed and kept under review and will need to adapt over time to meet the child's needs.

7 Adopted Adults

- 7.1** The Adoption service will provide a service to adopted adults that are seeking to find out information about their past history from case records held by Brighton and Hove City Council. The Service does not currently offer an intermediary service as defined within the Adoption & Children Act 2002 but will provide details of other agencies that are approved to provide such a service.
- 7.2** Adopted adults will also be given information about the services they can receive through the agreement Brighton and Hove has with the Post Adoption Centre. They will also be given information on the services available from key voluntary user groups such as NORCAP.
- 7.3** The Adoption Service will also continue to involve adopted adults in the preparation training groups run for prospective adopters, recognising the significance of adopters understanding the lifelong impact of adoption for any child that is adopted.
- 7.4** The Adoption Service will from time to time commission the Post Adoption Centre to run specific local workshops for adopted adults.

8 Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 8.1** Brighton and Hove have key quality assurance mechanisms in place in relation to adoption work. A Development Manager is employed who does not have operational responsibility for the Adoption and Permanence Team to act as Agency Advisor to Panel and Agency.
- 8.2** The Agency Advisor will read all the paperwork for Panel and take up quality assurance issues with staff and managers and withdraw assessments from Panel if further work is needed. The Agency Advisor

oversees the timetabling of the Panel agenda to ensure that sufficient time is given to consider each item on the agenda.

- 8.3** The Agency Advisor will ensure policy and practice issues are picked up and disseminated to staff in fieldwork and family placement teams. The Agency Advisor will also act as a consultant to all staff and managers in the department on issues relating to adoption and permanence policy and practice.
- 8.4** The Agency Advisor will recruit members of the Panel in line with Adoption regulations and will provide training and induction as necessary and organise for all Panel members to have the opportunity for regular training input on key areas of adoption practice to ensure that they are kept updated on changes in legislation and regulations. One of the training sessions during the year for Panel members will be held jointly with the Adoption and Permanence team.
- 8.5** Brighton and Hove employs a suitably qualified and experienced person to act as independent chair of the Adoption and Permanence Panel. The chair also has a clear quality assurance role and will take up issues directly with the Agency Advisor or Agency Decision Maker as necessary. The chair will also provide a separate report on the activities of Panel as part of the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.6** Brighton and Hove's Adoption and Permanence Panel meets on a fortnightly basis to ensure that there is no delay in considering children for adoption, approval of adopters and matching.
- 8.7** Brighton and Hove has clear written policies and procedures relating to the constitution of Panel and decision making. Staff and prospective or approved adopters attending Panel are asked to complete evaluation forms and their views are taken into account when reviewing the functioning of Panel and the role of the chair.
- 8.8** The Panel will receive progress reports on a six monthly basis on children who have been, or are to be, placed for adoption up until the adoption order is granted. Panel will also monitor compliance with the targets set for progressing permanence plans for looked after children. Individual issues will be addressed with appropriate staff and managers and the overall performance will be reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.9** Panel will also monitor compliance with the standards in relation to the assessment of adopters. An annual review will be organised if adopters do not have a child placed within their first year of approval.
- 8.10** Panel members will receive all the documentation for Panel in good time to allow time to read and fully consider the issues.

- 8.11** Panel will make a recommendation and convey that to the staff member or adoptive applicant at Panel. They will be informed when the meeting will take place with the Agency Decision Maker which will be within 5 working days of the Panel. The decision will be reported back to applicants, where appropriate birth parents and staff verbally within 24 hours and followed up in writing within 5 days.
- 8.12** The Agency Advisor will meet with the Agency Decision Maker and ensure that the decision maker has the details of the Panel discussion and recommendation to inform the decision making. A copy of the panel minutes will be provided to the Agency Decision Maker.

9 Staff within the Adoption and Permanence Service

- 9.1** Brighton and Hove employ sufficient staff to work within the Fostering and Adoption Service and the staffing structure is kept under review.
- 9.2** All staff undertaking assessments of adoptive applicants are social work qualified and General Social Care Council registered with access to appropriate training, supervision and support.
- 9.3** Staff within the team undertake recruitment, training and assessment of carers, supervision and support of placements (pre and post adoption and with permanent foster carers) supervision of Inter Country Adoption Placements pre adoption order, adoption support assessments and specific adoption support interventions, step parent adoption assessments, family finding and birth records counselling work.
- 9.4** Staff within the service work closely with colleagues within the Fostering Service and with fieldwork teams. Staff have access to training courses and are kept updated on developments in practice and legislative changes.
- 9.5** The Service Manager for the Adoption and Permanence Team has responsibility for the Adoption and Permanence Team and the Family and Friends Team.
- 9.6** Managers within the service are all qualified and experienced social work practitioners and have access to a range of managerial training courses. The Head of Service is an experienced manager with a management and social work qualification. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service.
- 9.7** The Adoption Support Services Advisor within the service will meet with the Assistant Director for Children's' Social Care within the Children and Young People's Trust on a quarterly basis to update on key practice and operational issues and to ensure that any issues of a strategic nature are taken forward.

- 9.8** The Head of Service is Sharon Donnelly and the Adoption & Permanence Service Manager is Karen Devine. They can be contacted at the Fostering and Adoption Service, Brighton and Hove City Council, 253 Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SE. Telephone number 01273 295444, email sharon.donnelly@brighton-hove.gov.uk or karen.devine@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- 9.9** A structure chart for the Fostering and Adoption service is appended to this statement of purpose.

10 Monitoring & Evaluation

- 10.1** The Adoption Service produces an annual recruitment strategy and progress in relation to recruitment activity is reported on at the monthly Fostering & Adoption Management Team Meeting. The Service Manager meets fortnightly with the Practice Managers to discuss allocation issues and review workloads. There is a caseload weighting system in place within the Service.
- 10.2** The Agency Advisor has a key quality assurance role and reads all the reports that are going before Panel. The advisor also has a broader role in policy development and ensuring practice issues are disseminated within the Fostering & Adoption service and Area Teams. The Chair of Panel is an independent and experienced manager and therefore also plays a quality assurance role. Panel regularly raise issues with the Agency Decision Maker about aspects of practice and the Chair of Panel provides a report to accompany the Adoption Agency Report to the lead cabinet member.
- 10.3** The Fostering & Adoption Service Management team undertake a regular file audit programme and ensure that all files of carers and adopters are audited at least two yearly.
- 10.4** Regular meetings are held with lead elected members of the Children and Young People's Trust and senior managers within the Department to ensure that members are kept up to date on key service developments. Issues related to the work of the Fostering & Adoption service are reported on at these meetings as appropriate.
- 10.5** The management team, including Service Managers, Practice Managers and Agency Advisors meet regularly with the Head of Service to discuss operational and policy matters and ensure the continued integrated development of the service. All staff have access to regular supervision and there is a performance and development process in place across the authority.

- 10.6** The Service is required to produce annual service improvement objectives which form part of the business plan for the Children & Young People's Trust.

11 Complaints procedures

- 11.1** Users of the Adoption Service, including children, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and adopted adults, are provided with copies of the complaints procedure, advised how to access the procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with services provided. Service users are advised that independent sources of support are available to help them make a complaint and advocate on their behalf if they feel unconfident making a complaint by themselves, including access to the Post Adoption Centre and the Children's Rights Service. Service users are advised that the Customer Services Manager who oversees the complaints procedure can be contacted at:

Brighton & Hove City Council
Kings House
Grand Ave
Hove

Or by writing to Standards & Complaints, Freepost SEA2560, Brighton
BN1 1ZW

The Freephone number is 0500 291229

Information about the complaints process can be found by going to the
City Council website: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk

or the Fostering & Adoption Service website:

www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk

Complaints can also be emailed to complaints@brighton-hove.gov.uk

- 11.2** Most complaints are resolved informally and speedily by the local manager and records are kept of all complaints, compliments and representations made to the Service. There are clear procedures in place for responding to complaints. Formal Stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within 2 working days and should be responded to within 10 working days. If someone is still unhappy after the complaint has been dealt with at Stage 1 they can ask for Stage 2 investigation. The Standards and Complaints team will aim to conclude all Stage 2 investigations within 20 working days. Members of the public can complain to the local Ombudsman at any time. However the Ombudsman will usually want the Council to have chance to investigate the complaint first.
- 11.3** The Complaints procedure for Children's Services is currently being revised nationally and the Department will produce new complaints leaflets as soon as these have been finalised. The Department produces separate complaints leaflets for children and young people

and information about how to complain is also included in the Children's Guides to adoption.

- 11.4 The Service reports annually on complaints within the Adoption Agency Report that goes to the lead cabinet member for the Children & Young People's Trust . Corporately records of complaints, compliments and representation are reported on regularly.
- 11.5 The Management team within the Fostering and Adoption Service regularly discuss any issues arising from complaints, standards of care, or allegations against carers to ensure any lessons learnt can be disseminated and changes in practice made.

12 Ofsted

- 12.1 The Adoption Service will be inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the Regulations and the National Adoption Minimum Standards. These inspections will take place on a 3 yearly basis. Inspections reports are public documents.
- 12.2 Ofsted can be contacted at:

Ofsted South Region

Freshford House
Radcliffe Way
Bristol
BF1 6NL

Telephone – 08456 404040
Email – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Fostering and Adoption Service
Structure Chart Sept



