



Corporate Parenting Service

Children's Social Care

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Milton Keynes Council
Children's Social Care
Saxon Court
502 Avebury Boulevard
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 3HS**

Signed:

**Nicky Rayner
Service Director, Children and Families**

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MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATUS AND CONSTITUTION

- 1.1.1 The body responsible for Milton Keynes Adoption Service is Milton Keynes Council, Children's Social Care, based at Saxon Court, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Central Milton Keynes MK9 3HS.
- 1.1.2 Milton Keynes Council has been a Unitary Authority since April 1997. Children and Families: Integrated Support and Social Care falls under the People directorate. The structure of the Directorate, which includes all services for children and their families, ensures that service provision facilitates joined up planning and service delivery.
- 1.1.3 Line management for the Service Director, Children and Families is with the Corporate Director, People, who is answerable to elected members.

SECTION 2

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

- 2.1.1 Adoption Services are based within Children's Social Care. Responsibility for the operational management and strategic direction of the service as a whole is through the Head of Service, Corporate Delivery who is directly accountable to the Service Director

- 2.1.2 The Team Manager for the Adoption Team has responsibility for three areas of adoption related work. These are general adoption work which includes family finding for those children where permanency through adoption is the agreed care plan, together with all training and assessment of prospective adopters; adoption support work which includes advice, support and training of adoptive families, a post adoption contact service, work with adults who were adopted and birth relatives of adult adopted people.

SECTION 3

PRINCIPLES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Principles

- 3.1.1 A child's welfare is the paramount consideration and children are entitled to grow up in a caring, loving family where their needs are fully met. Milton Keynes Council has a commitment to ensure that there is a comprehensive range of services available to support birth families provide safe and appropriate care for their children.
- 3.1.2 Children who come into local authority care are likely to be some of the most vulnerable and it is likely that they will have experienced disruption and trauma in their formative years and as a consequence have complex needs.
- 3.1.3 The first consideration when working with looked after children will be to endeavour to return them home to their own families. Where this cannot be safely achieved, alternative permanent arrangements will be pursued. Milton Keynes Council has a commitment to positively explore other family members or network carers to provide this permanence. Where this is not possible, then the need for a permanent home for some children will be met through adoption.
- 3.1.4 Birth families will be provided with information and support that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated in an open, fair manner throughout their involvement with the adoption service.
- 3.1.5 Milton Keynes Council acts as an Adoption Agency to provide those adoption services required of it under the Children and Young Persons, England, The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011, Adoption Guidance; Adoption and Children Act 2002, Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 and The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.
- 3.1.6 Milton Keynes Council fulfils a full range of duties and responsibilities under all of the above legislation and the Children Act 1989 in meeting the needs of those children who have been or may be adopted, of their parents and guardians and of those people who are or may be adoptive parents.
- 3.1.7 Milton Keynes Council strives to ensure that the work of the adoption team reflects identified needs and priorities, taking into account Children's Social Care service plans and objectives.

3.2 Aims

- 3.2.1 The fundamental aim of each adoptive placement is to safeguard and promote a child's welfare throughout their childhood and beyond by identifying adopters who are able to provide a safe, secure, stable and nurturing environment in order for the child to:

- Gain self-esteem, confidence and to fulfil their potential
- Have knowledge of their history including their ethnic, religious and cultural origins
- To retain links with their birth family through direct or indirect contact
- Respect the views and needs of others as being of equal value to their own.

3.2.2 The adoption service is committed to identifying loving, secure and permanent families for children unable to live with their families of origin in order that their social, emotional, educational, health and cultural needs are met through adoption.

3.2.3 The adoption service aims to recruit sufficient numbers of adopters to meet the need of Milton Keynes children. The service has a recruitment strategy which embraces prospective adopters from all backgrounds and walks of life.

3.2.4 In determining a child's future through adoption, Milton Keynes Council Children's Social Care will work in partnership with the child, those with parental responsibility, prospective adopters and adoptive families in a spirit of openness, as far is appropriate to the welfare and safety of the child.

3.2.5 The adoption service ensures that the child's wishes and feelings are actively sought and fully taken into account throughout the process, giving due consideration to age and level of understanding. All children will have access to the Children's Rights Service and the Advocacy Service. Written information in the form of age appropriate Children's Guides are available to all children where adoption is the agreed care plan.

3.2.6 A child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted throughout the adoption process.

3.2.7 The role of the adopters in offering a permanent family to a child will be valued and respected. They will be treated considerately, fairly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

3.2.8 Our aim is to recognise and acknowledge adoption as a lifelong process and as such Milton Keynes Council Children's Social Care will support children, birth families and adopters to ensure that they have access to a range of professional services appropriate to their assessed needs.

3.3 Objectives

3.3.1 Children

To achieve permanence for looked after children in a timely manner. All looked after children will have permanence plan agreed at their four-month child care review. Where adoption is agreed at this or at a subsequent review, the plan should be presented to adoption panel within 6 weeks of the statutory review where adoption was recommended as the Permanence Plan.

To ensure that all children have a named social worker throughout the adoption process who will be responsible for ensuring that the child is well prepared before being placed with an adoptive family.

To family find for children needing permanence through adoption who are looked after or accommodated by Milton Keynes Council.

To identify appropriate adopters to meet the needs of children which includes careful and sensitive consideration of their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. However, children will not be left waiting for the 'perfect family' and if a match cannot be found within reasonable timescales, alternative adopters will be sought who have the capacity to promote and celebrate the child's heritage.

To work with other local authorities, consortium, partnership arrangements and voluntary adoption agencies in order to secure the best possible outcomes for children requiring permanence through adoption.

To make clear that a child's first name is retained. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 makes no provision in respect of forenames. Milton Keynes Council's philosophy is that a child's forename should be kept unless exceptional circumstances dictate that a change of forename would be in the interests of that child.

To give positive consideration for sibling groups to be placed together wherever possible. Careful assessments will be undertaken where separating siblings is being proposed and this will be considered by the adoption panel and the court process.

To ensure that contact plans, both direct and indirect, for children and their birth family are identified in care plans. There will be no presumption for or against contact. The child's welfare will be the paramount consideration in making such plans.

3.3.2 Birth families

To provide birth families access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the care plan for the child. This is currently provided by the Milton Keynes Council Adoption Team commissioning St Francis' Children's Society 'Birth Connections' and parents will be given information about this service.

To provide birth families with access to support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications and their right to seek legal advice.

To ensure that birth families are supported in agreed contact arrangements including the provision of expenses for transport.

To provide a 'Birth Relative Initiated Contact' service as requested. This service is provided for by adoption support within the Adoption Team.

To offer the opportunity for birth parents to meet the adopters of their child; unless there are exceptional circumstances which would make such a meeting unsafe and/or against the welfare of the child.

To ensure that birth parents are given information about the complaints procedure and their right to make representation and complaints.

3.3.3 Prospective Adopters

To ensure that applications from prospective adopters are welcomed irrespective of their marital status, ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation.

To ensure that prospective adopters are made aware and given information about the range of children waiting for adoption and the priority need to recruit adopters for children in the care of Milton Keynes and for sibling groups, children with disabilities and children from black and minority ethnic groups.

To provide well-prepared, trained and able adopter(s) which includes identifying a suitable match, in order that they can offer confident and thoughtful parenting to the children and young people placed with them.

To ensure that prospective adopters are given information about the complaints procedure and their right to make representation and complaints.

3.3.4 Approved Adopters and Adoptive Families

To provide full information about the matching, introduction and placement process including details of the Adoption 6 Consortium and National Adoption Register.

To support adopters after placement up until the adoption order and beyond as appropriate.

To provide access to on-going training and specialist services to adoptive families as part of the adoption support service.

SECTION 4

SERVICES AND FACILITIES PROVIDED

4.1 Provision of Service

4.1.1 The Adoption Team provides the following services and facilities:

- An initial visit to prospective adopters and a preparation course for adopters who are suitable to proceed at this stage.
- Undertaking of assessments of prospective adopters (subject to satisfactory status checks and completion of the preparation course).
- Assessment of non-agency adoption applications (step-parent adoption applications).
- Provision of post adoption support to adopters, adoptees and birth families.
- Provision of a contact information (letterbox) exchange for birth relatives and adopted children as well as supervision of direct contact arrangements where agreed.
- Provision of Schedule 2 counselling to adopted adults wishing to trace birth records and possible contact/reunion with birth relatives. There is also provision of an intermediary service under Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to birth relatives.
- Provision of a counselling service to birth parent/s who may wish to relinquish a child for adoption.
- Provision of an adoption duty system for adoption enquiries and any other issues in relation to adoption.
- To act as consultants to the family support teams within Children's Social Care in the care planning process when it has been identified that permanence planning is required for children.
- Consultation, information and advice to other teams within Children's Social Care and other agencies.
- Provision of an Adoption Panel to consider approval of adopters; whether children should be placed for adoption (in cases where there is no application for a Placement Order); and whether such children should be placed with particular adopters.

SECTION 5

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT OF ADOPTERS

5.1 Recruitment

- 5.1.1 Prospective adopters are assessed thoroughly, sensitively and professionally by staff who are appropriately qualified and supervised. The core of the assessment identifies what the carer(s) can offer children/young people who are requiring permanence through adoption. Applications from persons of diverse backgrounds and life experiences are encouraged.
- 5.1.2 Milton Keynes Council Adoption Service welcomes enquiries from all prospective adopters who feel they can offer a child/ren a family. We prioritise applications from people who are able to care for black and minority ethnic children, siblings groups, children over 4 years and children with disabilities, and those who feel able to consider Foster to Adopt or early concurrency.
- 5.1.3 Where a potential applicant decides, after receiving general information, that he or she would like to pursue an adoption further, he or she may approach the adoption agency for more detailed information about adoption.
- 5.1.4 This information should be provided within ten working days through an information session, a visit, pre-planned telephone call or similar arrangement with the potential adopter. This may need to take place in the evening or at the weekend to fit around the potential adopters' life style and working patterns. This is the minimum response at this stage; further information sessions may be provided if applicable.
- 5.1.5 Detailed information should enable potential adopters to consider better whether they want to proceed with the approval process and to reflect on the parenting needs of the children awaiting adoption. Detailed information should also enable them to consider their expectations of adoption, and the consequences for them and their family of caring for an adopted child who may have a range of complex needs.

5.2 Stage One - The Pre-Assessment Process

5.2.1 Purpose and Process

Stage One begins when the agency accepts the registration of interest in adoption and should normally take no more than **two months** to complete. It is during this stage that the prospective adopter will be exploring the extent of their interest in and capacity for adoption, prior to a firmer decision on whether to proceed to Stage Two - the Assessment Process. Stage One will focus on initial training and preparation, and on ascertaining, through prescribed checks and references, whether there is any absolute reason why the prospective adopter should not proceed further. The expectation is that the prospective adopter will be closely involved in the Stage One process and

agencies are expected to take into account fully the prospective adopter's wishes on how they wish to work through Stage One. All prescribed checks and references must be carried out during Stage One in parallel with initial training and preparation.

The agency will explain in detail the Stage One process and what will be required of the prospective adopter, and will draw up the Prospective Adopter Stage One Plan which will set out the responsibilities and expectations of both the prospective adopter and the agency during Stage One. This Plan must include:

- Information about the counselling, information and preparation for adoption to be provided;
- The procedure for carrying out police checks;
- Details of any training that the prospective adopter has agreed to undertake;
- Information about the role of the prospective adopter in the stage one process;
- Any applicable timescales;
- Information about the process for making representations (including a complaint); and
- Any other information that the agency considers relevant.

Whilst the importance of openness must be stressed to the prospective adopter, it should not be assumed that a failure to disclose information automatically implies that the prospective adopter is unsuitable. It will be necessary to discuss the matter and the reasons for non-disclosure.

Prospective adopters should be encouraged to use any other materials that offer them the opportunity to explore and reach an informed view about aspects of parenting and their parenting capacity and help them to identify their own training needs. A visit, meeting or pre-planned telephone call with the prospective adopter (whatever works best for them and best meets their preferences) should be undertaken to ensure that they have the opportunity to ask for more information or training based on their particular needs.

Stage One ends with the Pre-Assessment Decision.

5.2.2 Pre-Assessment Information

The following information must be gathered during Stage One:

Information about the prospective adopter:

- Name, sex, date and place of birth and address including the local authority area;
- If the prospective adopter is married or has formed a civil partnership and is applying alone for an assessment of their suitability to adopt, the reasons for this;

- Details of any previous family court proceedings in which the prospective adopter has been involved;
- Names and addresses of three referees who will give personal references on the prospective adopter, not more than one of whom may be a relative;
- Name and address of the prospective adopter's registered medical practitioner;
- If the prospective adopter:
 - Is married, the date and place of the marriage;
 - Has formed a civil partnership, the date and place of registration of that partnership; or
 - Has a partner, details of that relationship.
- Details of any previous marriage, civil partnership or relationship;
- Whether the prospective adopter is domiciled or habitually resident in a part of the British Islands and if habitually resident for how long they have been habitually resident;
- Where the prospective adopter lives in another local authority area, it should be ascertained whether that local authority has any information about the prospective adopter which may be relevant to the assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt and, if so, a written report should be obtained from that authority setting out that information;
- The adoption agency may ask the prospective adopter to provide any further information the agency may reasonably require.
- Information about the home etc. of the prospective adopter:
- Details of other members of the prospective adopter's household (including any children of the prospective adopter whether or not resident in the household);
- Information about safety of the applicants' home and any pets/animals kept.

5.2.3 Police Checks

Criminal record checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service must be carried out on the prospective adopter and any adult members of their household.

5.2.4 Health Checks

The applicants will also be asked to arrange for an adoption medical examination and report from their G.P. (if this has not been done at an earlier stage), unless the Medical Adviser does not consider such a medical examination is necessary, for example where the applicant is a foster carer and a health report is already available.

Prospective adopters should have a reasonable expectation of continuing to enjoy good health. Some severe health conditions may raise a question about

the suitability of the prospective adopter, but each case will be considered on its own facts and with appropriate advice.

5.2.5 References

Applicants will have been asked to provide the names of three personal referees, who are adults, have known the applicant for at least two years and two of whom are not related to the applicant.

5.2.6 Counselling, Information and Preparation for Adoption

All prospective adopters will need some form of adoption preparation. The agency will need to decide its form and substance, arranging preparation that takes into account the prospective adopter's circumstances. Preparation should be designed to help prospective adopters make an informed decision about pursuing adoption based on an understanding of the qualities they have to offer a child.

5.2.7 Pre-Assessment Decision

The adoption agency must gather Stage One information and make a Pre-Assessment Decision as to whether the prospective adopter may be or is not suitable to adopt a child, within a period of eight weeks from the date on which the prospective adopter registered their interest in adopting a child (unless there are good reasons to extend that time period). If the time period is extended, the reasons must be recorded on the prospective adopter's case record, along with supporting evidence.

Where the Pre-Assessment Decision is that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child, the prospective adopter must be provided with a clear written explanation of the reasons why they will not be able to proceed to Stage Two. The pre-assessment decision may be made notwithstanding that not all of the required pre-assessment information has been gathered. Prospective adopters who wish to complain about this decision may make a complaint using the agency's local complaints procedure. They will also be able to raise general concerns about the process with the National Gateway for Adoption. The Independent Review Mechanism is not available for decisions made during Stage One.

5.3 Stage Two - the Assessment Process

5.3.1 Purpose and Process

Where the Pre-Assessment Decision is that the prospective adopter might be suitable to adopt a child, and they have notified the agency that they wish to

proceed, the application then proceeds to Stage Two of the process - the assessment process.

Stage Two is about intensive training and assessment. Intensive training should be provided as necessary and, in parallel, an assessment carried out of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt and a report produced of that assessment.

This stage should begin with a meeting or pre-planned 'phone call between the prospective adopter and the allocated social worker. The social worker should explain how Stage Two will operate and what will be required of the prospective adopter. The social worker should explain the decision-making process and the role of the Adoption Panel and the Independent Review Mechanism.

A decision must be reached as to whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child within four months of the date on which the agency received the prospective adopter's notification that they wish to proceed with the assessment process (six months if there are exceptional circumstances). Reasons for any extensions should be recorded on the prospective adopter's case file.

Stage Two will end with the Agency Decision Maker's decision about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child.

5.3.2 Assessment

In conducting the assessment, the social worker should analyse and consider the information they ascertain from and about the prospective adopter, including any issues identified during the adoption preparation. The approach should be objective and inquiring, with information evaluated and its accuracy and consistency checked.

The assessment must be carried out by a qualified social worker with suitable experience. The assessment will comprise a series of interviews, the majority of which will take place in the applicants' home. As well as the joint and family interviews, applicants should be interviewed individually at least once and all other members of the household will also be interviewed individually, including the children.

The areas covered in interviews will follow the subject areas:

- Individual profiles of all members of the household, including a photograph and physical description, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, religious persuasion personality and interests, relationship (if any) to the child;
- Information about the home, the local community and the neighbourhood;
- Details of education and employment - past and present;
- Income and expenditure;

- Details of past and present relationships;
- Motivation to adopt/childlessness;
- Parenting capacity, experience of being parented and experience with children;
- Support network, including wider family network;
- Views and feelings about adoption and its significance, attitudes to birth families and approach to openness in adoption and contact;
- Views about parental responsibility and what it means;
- Views about a suitable home environment for the child;
- Views about the importance and value of education;
- Views and feelings about the importance of a child's religious and cultural upbringing;
- Any other information which indicates how the prospective adopter and anybody else living in the household is likely to relate to a child placed for adoption;
- Any other relevant information which might assist Adoption and Permanency Panel or the adoption agency.

As part of the assessment:

- A chronology of key events in the applicants life from birth must be compiled, showing his or her educational, employment, marital and relationship history and addresses for the previous 10 years; any gaps and/or unusual patterns should be explored;
- Applicants' views and ideas should be backed up by evidence where possible;
- Where an applicant has been divorced or separated, factors contributing to the breakdown of the relationship should be verified. This is particularly important where there were children in the household;
- The adequacy and safety of the prospective adoptive home and transport will be assessed including inspecting any car insurance and MOT documents.

The assessment will consider the likely need for adoption support services of the prospective adopters and any member of their family. As part of this, the family's finances and the criteria for financial support should also be discussed.

Where the prospective adopters live outside the county, the social worker should ascertain the extent of any support services identified as necessary in their local area.

The assessment will also cover the applicants' willingness to notify the adoption agency if the adopted child dies during childhood or soon afterwards, their views on post-adoption contact and their willingness to pass on information to birth parents about the progress of the adopted child. These issues should be specifically incorporated in their Prospective Adopters Report presented to the Adoption and Permanency Panel.

5.3.3 Fostering for Adoption

Discussion should take place with the prospective adopter about whether they may be interested in fostering a child for whom adoption is thought to be a likely outcome. This can be where, although the child's plan is likely to become adoption, other options have not yet been ruled out for that child. There is no need for the agency to assess and approve the prospective adopter as a temporary foster carer at the same time as they are carrying out the adopter approval process although they can do so if they and the prospective adopter wish to do so. The child's local authority can arrange for the foster care assessment and approval of an approved adopter.

Fostering for Adoption carers should have access to appropriate supplementary/ specific preparation sessions as well as the usual preparation and training package available to all adopters. Meeting other adopters who have experience of these types of placements is an important part of this preparation. There should be appropriate exploration of the capacity of the foster carers/prospective adopters to manage the emotional and practical tasks of being foster carers until and if placement for adoption is agreed by the court. It is important to ensure that carers are fully informed about the nature of the placement, their role in that placement as foster carers and their understanding of the possibility of the court deciding to pursue an alternative plan to adoption.

The agency should indicate on the Prospective Adopter's Report if the prospective adopter is interested in Fostering for Adoption. This will allow prospective adopters to be matched with a child requiring a Fostering for Adoption placement.

5.4 Fast-Track Procedure for Approved Foster Carers and Previous Adopters Who Wish to Adopt

The requirements are modified for applicants who are approved foster carers or previous adopters. (This does not apply to Connected Persons or to prospective adopters given temporary approval as foster carers, under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended)).

There is no requirement to carry out police checks or to gather the specified information in relation to the prospective adopter and their household, unless it is considered to be necessary. The need for such checks and references should be assessed in each individual case. This may depend on the time since approval and, in the case of foster carers, the time since a child was placed with them.

There is no requirement to provide counselling, information and preparation for adoption.

The preliminary Pre-Assessment Decision stage is not necessary, and the assessment process progresses straight to preparation of the Prospective Adopter's Report.

Any necessary additional training should be provided, such as where the prospective adopters are seeking to adopt a child with needs which are very different to those of the child they have fostered/adopted.

The decision as to whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child must be made within four months of the date on which the prospective adopter registered their interest in adopting a child. This includes the time taken to access information from adoption agencies and fostering services which have 15 working days to provide such information.

5.5 The Prospective Adopter's Report

The information gathered during Stage One (the pre-assessment stage) and Stage Two (the assessment stage), including the checks and personal references, will form the basis of the Prospective Adopter's Report together with any other relevant information.

The social worker who assesses the prospective adopter should draft the Prospective Adopter's Report highlighting any issues of concern and submit it to their team manager. Where there are any issues of significant concern or where clarification is needed, the manager may arrange for a second person to visit the prospective adopter to discuss these but must remain mindful of the timeframe for Stage Two. The second person could be a team manager or another adoption social worker. A visit by another person provides a second opinion where necessary before the report to the panel is finalised in cases where clarification is needed but should not be routinely carried out. The author of the report and the countersigning officer should both sign and date the report, state their qualifications and experience, and confirm that they are suitably qualified to prepare the report.

Where information received during the assessment leads the agency to consider that the prospective adopter is unlikely to be considered suitable to adopt a child, a 'brief Prospective Adopter's Report' may be prepared regardless of whether or not all the required assessment information has been obtained. A decision not to complete the full assessment is a serious step to take and advice should first be sought from the social work team leader or line manager. Depending on the nature of the information, advice may also need to be sought from the agency's medical adviser or legal adviser, or both. The concerns should be explained to the prospective adopter and they should be offered counselling, involving other professionals as appropriate. As a result of the counselling and advice, the prospective adopter may decide to withdraw their application. If they decide not to withdraw their application, the brief prospective adopter's report should be prepared.

The report will also include a summary by the Medical Adviser of the health report obtained on the applicant/s.

SECTION 6

6.1 SUPPORT TO ADOPTERS

- 6.1.1 The regulatory framework for adoption support is laid down in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, First Revision: February 2011 and the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005. This places a duty on local authorities to include the provision of adoption support services. They are required to make a range of adoption support services in their area to meet the needs of people affected by adoption.
- 6.1.2 Support is provided throughout the process to become approved as an adopter. Once approved, agreements are devised to meet the support needs of individual adopter/s. Once a child is placed for adoption, this agreement is reviewed. Either party may request additional visits. It is recognised that adoption is a lifelong process and throughout the adoption 'journey', the adopter(s) and/or the adopted person may need advice, guidance and support.
- 6.1.3 Out of hours support is available to adopters and other service users via Milton Keynes Council Emergency Social Work Team. In situations of expected need specific arrangements may be made with the social worker/s involved.
- 6.1.4 Milton Keynes Council provides financial support in respect of adoption allowances (where appropriate and agreed) and 'setting up' costs to assist with the purchase of equipment, bedding etc.

SECTION 7

7.1 ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

- 7.1.1 Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003, Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and Adoption Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002, First revision: February 2011 place a duty on local authorities to undertake assessments of need if requested by an adopter, child or birth relative (in relation to contact) and to provide services to meet that need where it deems it to be appropriate.
- 7.1.2 Milton Keynes Council Children's Social Care has a dedicated Adoption Support Co-ordinator post. This role involves undertaking assessments of needs of adopters and/or their children as well as providing advice and support to those adoptive families where appropriate or if not, signposting to other relevant services.
- 7.1.3 Milton Keynes Council also commission two voluntary adoption agencies to undertake some of its adoption support work.
- 7.1.4 The Post Adoption Centre provides counselling services for people affected by adoption. They also run an outreach surgery in Milton Keynes once a month. Counselling sessions are available to adoptive families and individuals affected by adoption.
- 7.1.5 St Francis' Children's Society through the 'Birth Connections' provide independent support, advice and counselling for birth relatives whose child has or is to be adopted, made subject of a Special Guardianship Order or a Residence Order.
- 7.1.6 Milton Keynes Council has an agreement with Parents and Children Together (PACT) to undertake all assessments of prospective adopter(s) who wish to adopt a child from overseas. PACT also undertakes the welfare supervision of any child who has been placed from overseas in an adoptive placement.
- 7.1.7 Milton Keynes Council has a statutory duty to provide information and counselling for adults who were adopted as children (before 12.11.1975) under Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Adopted adults and their adult birth relatives have a right to request an intermediary service under Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. There are social workers who undertake this area of the work as part of adoption support.
- 7.1.8 Ongoing contact between a child and their birth family or any other significant person is considered as part of the adoption support plan when a child is being adopted. This can be via an information exchange (indirect) or face-to-face (direct) contact. This service is managed within adoption support.

SECTION 8

8.1 ADOPTION & PERMANENCE PANEL

- 8.1.1 The Adoption & Permanence Panel has a vital role in both the permanent placement of children looked after by Milton Keynes Council and the determination of whether people are suitable to be approved as adopters.
- 8.1.2 The panel has an independent chair who is suitably qualified and experienced. The panel chair has a crucial role in facilitating the making of well thought through and evidenced recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.
- 8.1.3 The panel has an Agency Adoption Adviser who is not a panel member and therefore does not take part in recommendations. The role includes maintaining an overview of the quality of the reports presented to panel, the administration of the panel and to give advice that panel may request in relation to any case or generally.
- 8.1.4 The panel chair and agency adviser undertake an annual review of panel members.
- 8.1.5 The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker, currently the Service Director, Children and Families on:
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption (in cases where no Placement Order need be applied for)
 - The suitability of people to be approved as adopter/s
 - The suitability of a match for a particular child with approved adopter/s.
- 8.1.6 The panel has a monitoring role by:
- Considering a prospective adopter's review report where the agency has the opinion that they are no longer suitable to adopt a child.
 - Receiving reports where a child's placement has disrupted
 - Receiving feedback from social workers and applicants attending panel
 - Monitoring compliance with targets set for progressing permanence plans for looked after children and these performance indicators are reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 8.1.7 The panel convenes once every three weeks to consider the cases presented.
- 8.1.8 The panel also monitors the quality and effectiveness of the adoption services with the assistance of the agency adoption adviser and by the annual adoption agency report.

SECTION 9

9.1 STAFFING

9.1.1 Adoption Team

Milton Keynes Council Adoption Team has the following complement of staff:

Team Manager	1 full time
Adoption Social Workers	
Senior Practitioners	1 full time
Social Worker	1 full time
Social Workers	1 part time
Adoption Support Workers	
Adoption Support Co-ordinator	1 full time
Senior Practitioner	2 part time
Social Worker	1 full time
Social Work Assistants	1 full time
Play therapist	1 part time

Up to date staffing details can be requested directly from the Team Manager, Adoption. Her contact details are:

- E-mail: maria.jewell@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01908 253404
- Fax: 01908 253251

Address: Milton Keynes Council, Strategy, Commissioning and Quality, Level 3, Saxon Court, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Central Milton Keynes MK9 3HS

9.1.2 All staff have a co-ordinated induction programme, to introduce them to the policies and procedures of Milton Keynes Council and Children's Social Care.

9.1.3 In line with Children's Social Care supervision policy, all staff receive regular formal supervision from their line manager on a monthly basis. Discussions and decisions are formally recorded and the signed supervision sheet is retained in the relevant staff file. Informal discussions occur at other times during the month as needed.

- 9.1.4 All staff have an annual appraisal to consider progress over the year and to reflect on achievements and difficulties encountered. The appraisal also considers areas for development and targets for actions to be undertaken.
- 9.1.5 All staff have access to a comprehensive annual training programme and they are encouraged to pursue further training and qualifications. This includes courses on particular aspects of practice issues or development as well as the post qualifying Child Care Award.
- 9.1.6 The Adoption Team welcomes regular student placements from the Degree in Social Work programme which enriches the whole team's practice.
- 9.1.7 All staff undertaking assessment of prospective adopters are qualified social workers and are registered with the HCPC.
- 9.1.8 There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the adoption service.

SECTION 10

10.1 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SERVICES

- 10.1.1 Milton Keynes Council Adoption Agency is subject to all Council systems of monitoring and review including internal audit processes.
- 10.1.2 Performance Data, NI61 is collected and returned to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Outcomes and developments in the service are reported through Children's Social Care Management Team, Adoption & Permanence Panel and the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 10.1.3 Children's Social Care produce an annual Service Plan which is monitored by Children's Social Care Management Team, Directorate Management Team and the Lead Cabinet Member for children.
- 10.1.4 An annual Adoption Agency Report is produced. This report is presented to the Children's Social Care Managers, Lead Cabinet Member for children and to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

SECTION 11

11.1 COMPLAINTS

Complaints Procedures

- 11.1.1 Most complaints are resolved in a timely and professional manner and records are kept of all complaints, compliments and representations made to the service. There are clear procedures for responding to complaints and the Adoption Agency uses the complaints process used for all services users.
- 11.1.2 If resolution is not possible then all service users have access to the formal complaints process. Children can complain through the Children Act procedures or adults can do this on their behalf. Children can also access advocacy through the National Youth Advocacy Service.
- 11.1.3 If an adopter has a complaint about the way in which the Council has supported them, these are investigated through the Corporate Complaint procedure. There are three stages to this procedure but these are different from the Children Act Complaint Procedure:
- Stage 1 - the person receiving the complaint would investigate and respond.
- Stage 2 - the person who is the line manager to the stage 1 investigator would investigate the complaint and respond.
- Stage 3 - the Corporate Director will decide who should investigate the complaint i.e. a senior officer independent of the service or department. If the adopter complaining remains dissatisfied they can then take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 11.1.4 Milton Keynes Council has a Customer Care Manager whose role is to oversee all complaints made. The Customer Care Manager can be contacted on: 01908 253443

11.2 Inspections by Ofsted

- 11.2.1 Ofsted inspect local authority adoption services once every three years. The purpose of the inspection is to ensure that adoption services continue to meet the National Minimum Standards and the needs of children and young people who use the service.
- 11.2.2 Following an inspection the report becomes a public document and this can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

11.2.3 Ofsted can be contacted in the following ways:

Website:

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone:

0300 123 1231

Email:

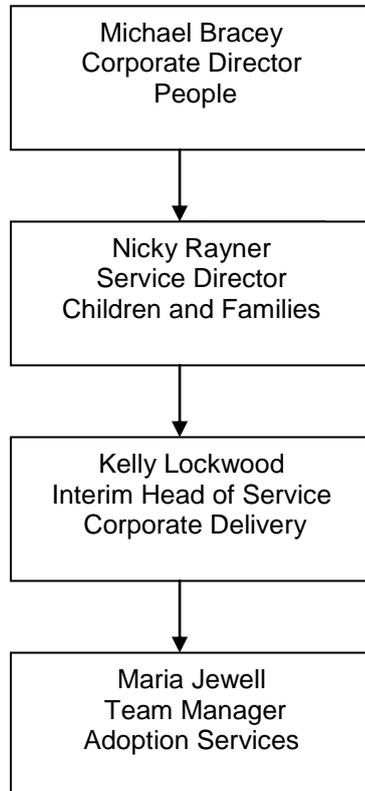
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

11.3 Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

- 11.3.1 The Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption) Regulations give prospective adopter(s) the right to refer their case to the review panel where an agency proposes not to approve them as suitable to adopt a child. This is known as a 'qualifying determination'.
- 11.3.2 The prospective adopter(s) has to make a choice whether to make representations to the adoption agency **OR** to the IRM. There is no right to make representations to the agency and apply to the review panel for a review of the agency's determination.

Appendix 1

**Line Management Structure Chart
Adoption Services**



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