

London Borough of Newham

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

2017/2018



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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose explains our vision, objectives and services provided by Newham's Adoption Service. In doing so it sets out how the Service meets the requirement of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Children Act 1989, the Children & Families Act 2014, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011), the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 and other relevant legislation, regulations and guidance.

The Adoption Service is part of the Children and Young People's Service and its primary role is to find permanent homes for our looked after children via adoptive placements, Special Guardianship Orders or through long term fostering placements. The team also provides post adoption support.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually. It is available to staff, adopters, children and young people, other professionals and the public upon request.

2. Our Vision for Children and Young People

Our vision as set out in the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2016-2020 is to ensure that our young people have the skills, health and resilience to meet the challenges of adult life in the 21st century. Included in the strategy is Newham's Pledge which identifies four broad outcomes. The four outcomes are;

1. Health and wellbeing
2. Learning and achievement
3. Safety and stability
4. Resilience and responsibility

Our commitment to the vision and outcomes is crucial in relation to our looked after children as we are their corporate parent and the most important contribution we can make is finding them secure and suitable homes where they will thrive.

3. Our Objectives

The overarching aim of the Adoption Service is to find permanent, safe and loving families for our looked after children, which meet their diverse needs, enabling them to thrive and reach their full potential and become resilient adults.

We strive to not just meet but exceed the national minimum standards. We are committed to continuous improvement and want to maximise our achievements in the areas that make the most difference to children, young people and families.

Our primary objectives in support of this aim are

- a. earlier identification of children for whom adoption is the appropriate and most suitable option (National Minimum Standard (NMS) 1)
- b. streamlined recruitment and approval of adopters to ensure that we are better able to meet the needs of our looked after children (NMS 10 and 17)
- c. ensuring that the best possible match is made for every child and family (NMS 13 and 14)
- d. working together with the child's social worker to grow and develop adoption expertise throughout Newham's safeguarding services (NMS 4)
- e. providing high quality and effective post adoption support to assist our children and young people and families in becoming resilient and achieving their aspirations (NMS 15).

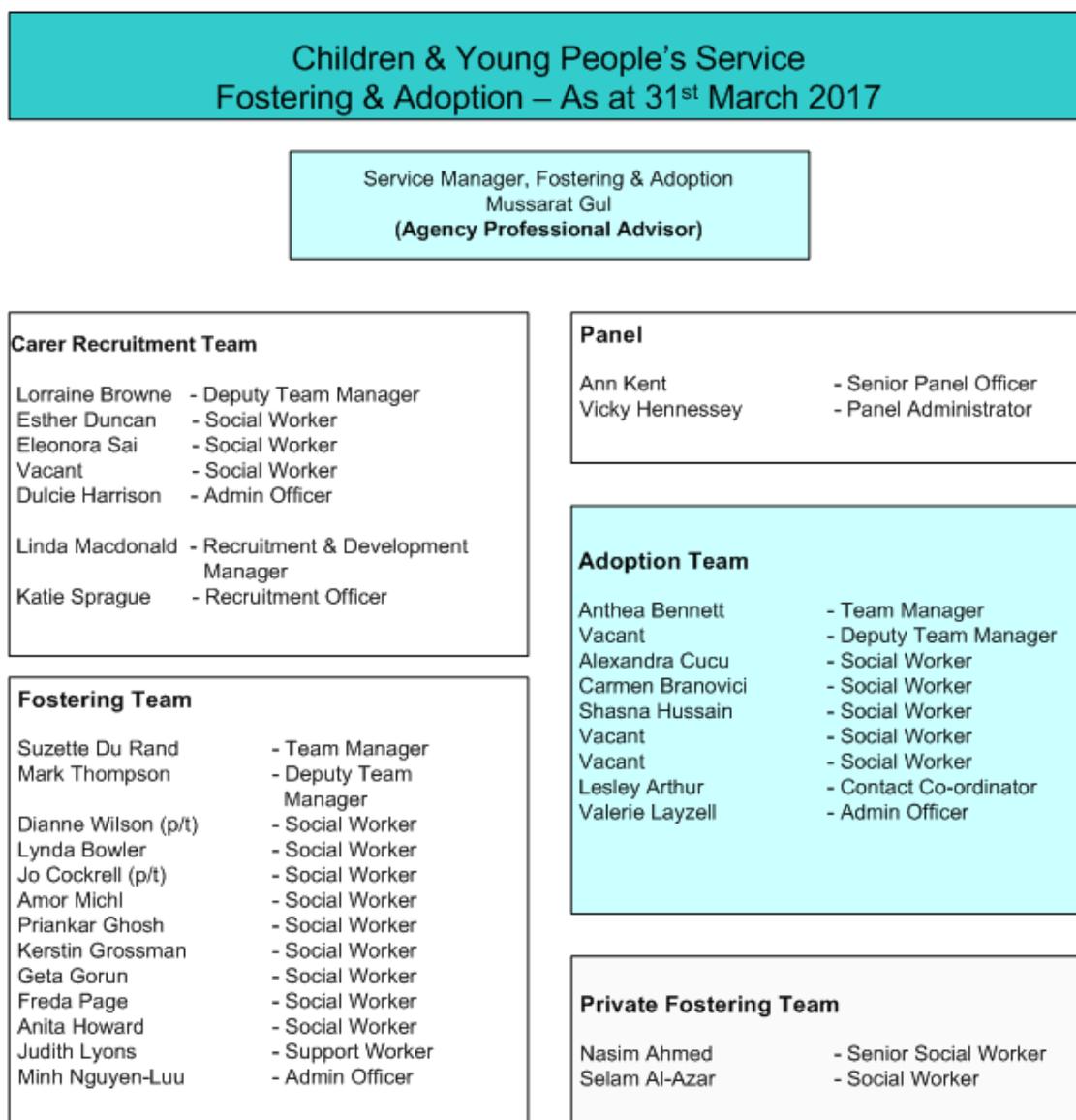
4. Our Principles and Approach

- ❖ Adopters will only be recruited where we are certain they can provide a high standard of care and quality, loving environment for the child. We will proactively seek to reduce barriers to the best prospective carers becoming adopters
- ❖ Due to the complexities of placing a child with their new adoptive family, we will only consider applications from individuals and couples who live outside of Newham
- ❖ Adoptive families who can meet the child's needs will not be excluded for reasons such as being older, single, or of a different ethnicity to the child, unless those certain characteristics are necessary to meet that child's particular needs
- ❖ We will take into account the child's wishes and feelings whenever we consider a match for the child. We will consult regularly to ensure we are taking the child's wishes and feelings into consideration
- ❖ We put a supportive and sensitive framework in place for birth families wherever parents are considering relinquishing their baby, to provide guidance and counselling
- ❖ Where it is possible and consistent with the child's best interest, we will try to place siblings together.
- ❖ We will make the child's life story central to our recruitment and support for a new family for the child, enabling the child to understand their history and origins
- ❖ We always consider a child's age, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture sexuality, language, disability and any other characteristics when we are matching the child to an approved adoptive family.
- ❖ Our effective partnership working with other agencies both within Newham and outside the borough, ensures the best outcomes for the child, birth family and adoptive families
- ❖ We respect and protect the right to privacy for our children and their families including their feelings and wishes, their personal data and their right to pursue their own lives and develop successfully

- ❖ We will provide an effective and sensitive set of post adoption services, including supporting the family to develop but also to facilitate the contact between adoptive families and birth family members. This will include support and signposting to trace birth families as far as possible
- ❖ We extended our support to birth relatives of the child being placed for adoption or with a plan of adoption.
- ❖ We ensure that whenever children and families come into contact with our service they interact with experienced, skilled members of staff and panel members who are capable of understanding their needs and making the right decisions on the child's behalf
- ❖ Adopters and staff will be valued supported and provided with effective training to enable them to provide safe and effective care
- ❖ We will commission services only where we are certain that our partners can provide a high quality and value for money service. We monitor our commissioned services closely to ensure they share our values and principles
- ❖ We will be strong advocates to raise the profile of adoption within Newham's communities to dispel any myths and preconceptions concerning adoption and to access families who may not otherwise have considered adoption to find out more
- ❖ Our service is monitored against a range of performance indicators and quality standards to ensure consistent and sustained improvement.

5. Our Staff

The structure chart below shows the staffing levels within the Adoption Service and Placement Services, as at 31st March 2017.



The management team of the Adoption Service consists of:

Jacquie Burke (Director of Operations Children's Social Care & Safeguarding) qualified as a social worker from Goldsmiths College in 1990. Her social work career has been exclusively in children's services with practice and management roles in the statutory and voluntary sector and CAMHS. Jacquie was the UK lead for Safeguarding in Barnardo's and held 3 Head of Service positions in London authorities prior to becoming Deputy Director, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding in Newham in January 2016.

Jacquie is one of the Agency Decision Makers and is a permanent employee.

Paula Swindlehurst (Head of Corporate Parenting – Interim) qualified as a social worker in 1995 and holds a Diploma in Social Work (1995), a BA Hons in Social Work (1997), a Postgraduate Child Care Award in Social Work, an MA in Process Consultancy and a Postgraduate Leadership Certificate. Her career has been predominantly in children's social care with a range of leadership posts in numerous local authorities. Paula has been in post since September 2017.

Paula is also one of the Agency Decision Makers.

Mussarat Gul (Service Manager, Placement Services) qualified in 1997 and holds a Diploma in Social Work. She also holds an MSc in Social Work, a DMS and MBA in public services. She has fourteen years experience in childcare starting her social work career in the Amber Project, a residential unit which undertook court directed assessments. She then went on to manage the adolescent team for children in need.

She has managed Placement Services since 2010, prior to which she held the post of Senior Manager of the Adoption Team since 2007. She has been a panel member for both the fostering and adoption panels and is currently the Professional Advisor for the Adoption Panel. Mussarat is a permanent employee.

Anthea Bennett (Practice Leader, Adoption) qualified in 2002 and holds a Diploma in Social Work. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work, and National Vocational Qualification Level 3 in Early Years and Education. She has eighteen years experience in childcare and has been employed as a Team Manager of the Adoption Team since February 2010, prior to which she held the post of Practice Manager of the Team from March 2007. Before working in the adoption team, Anthea was a child protection practitioner within the Safeguarding and Intervention Team. Anthea is the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) and is the professional advisor for '*Should be Placed for Adoption*' decisions. Anthea is a permanent employee.

The registered person for the Adoption Service is the London Borough of Newham, the registered manager is Anthea Bennett and the registered individual is Mussarat Gul.

6. Our Services

Newham's Adoption Service provides the following

a. Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.

The Carer Recruitment Team works to a Recruitment and Retention Strategy that is updated bi-annually. The strategy recognises the need to recruit adopters from within Newham and further afield, in order to meet the very varied needs of the children requiring adoptive homes.

The assessment and approval process is as follows:

Adoption Process

We have 6 months to assess prospective adopters and the trigger for this timescale starts from the receipt of the Registration of Interest and Stage One Agreement

Preliminary Stage

Initial contact received via a telephone call, a website directed email or a prepaid business card received through the post or at a recruitment event

Telephone interview takes place as soon as enquiry is received. Detailed recruitment brochure sent to suitable applicants

Home visit is undertaken with prospective adopters.

Three day Adoption training attended. Registration of Interest form and Stage One Agreement completed.

Stage One commences

Stage One commences upon receipt of completed Registration of Interest and Stage One Agreement

References and checks are undertaken

Applicants attends Preparation Group training

Stage Two commences

After completion of Preparation Group training, suitable applicants are required to sign the Notification giving permission to take applicant to Stage Two

Stage Two commences upon receipt of the signed Notification

Assessment commences

Assessment completed and quality check is carried out by Service

Assessment taken to Panel

Final decision made by Agency Decision Maker

Adopter is approved

A recruitment brochure is sent out to all prospective adopters who meet the basic criteria on the day of their initial enquiry. This enables prospective adopters to be informed of the assessment process prior to the initial visit taking place.

The three day preparation group training is delivered by Barnardo's and other prospective adopters from the boroughs that make up the North East London Adoption Group, also attend this training.

We aim to approve adopters in six months from the date of their application form.

b. Inter-country adoption enquiries

We also receive enquiries from individuals and couples who wish to adopt a child from overseas. We have a service level agreement with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre to provide a comprehensive advice and assessment service on all aspects of adopting a child from abroad. Enquiries received relating to inter-country adoption, are therefore signposted to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre.

The Inter-Country Adoption Centre will provide information, carry out viability assessments, adoption preparation, prospective adopters report and approval at the ICA's panel.

Inter-Country Adoption applications fall into four main groups

- An individual or couple who are UK citizens and living in the UK wishing to adopt a child from abroad.
- An individual or couple who are UK citizens and living abroad, wishing to adopt a child from the UK.
- A non UK individual or couple living abroad wishing to adopt a child who is a UK citizen and is living in the UK.
- An individual or couple who are UK citizens and living abroad, wishing to adopt a child from the country where they are living or another country abroad.

In practice, only applications from the first group have generally been received in Newham and applications from the other categories are rare.

c. Family Finding for all children with an adoption or long term fostering decision.

The family finding social workers with the Adoption Team, work closely with the allocated social worker for the child, attending reviews and meeting the current carers.

A profile of the child is produced for advertising and information purposes. The family finding social worker will look for suitable adopters in a variety of ways through consideration of Newham approved Adopters, the North East London Adoption Group, the National Adoption Register and Specialist Adoption Agencies. Additionally specific advertising may take place in the press or in publications appropriate to the specific needs and heritage of the child.

The family finding social worker will be closely involved in the process of taking the proposed matching of child to adopters to panel for their recommendation. Once the recommendation is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, they will help plan the introduction process and the arrangements for the child to move to the adopter's home.

In addition, relinquished babies are directly allocated to a social worker within the Adoption Team and then all aspects of work involved with a looked after child, family finding, matching and moving to final placement and moving to the Adoption Order are undertaken within the Adoption Team.

We will fast track second time adopter assessments for further siblings ensuring the process takes no longer than three months.

We have introduced an early warning notification procedure whereby Safeguarding Services and Independent Reviewing Officers must alert the Adoption Service where they identify children whose care plan is likely to be adoption, prior to the case being presented to court. This enables us to start the joint planning process which minimises drift.

Concurrent planning for babies and toddlers will take place where we consider prospective adopters can care for the child on a fostering basis in anticipation of the Court's placement order. Concurrent planning is an option for children who are unlikely to return to their birth family. The advantages of the child being placed on a fostering basis with their prospective adopters (who are considered to be a good match for the child) is the stability and consistency the child will have with their prospective adopters, avoiding changes of placement and the instability that can cause.

Age appropriate information brochures are given to children with a '*should be placed for adoption*' decision.

d. Training opportunities for approved adoptive parents and special guardians.

Approved adopters are encouraged to access a range of training. The annual training schedule is open to both approved adopters and foster carers and covers subjects such as Safeguarding children, First Aid, Managing Challenging Behaviour and Letterbox Contact.

e. Support for adopted children and families who have adopted a Newham child and children placed via Special Guardianship Orders.

This is provided in a number of ways and is essential to the long term stability and success of permanent placements. Social workers provide emotional support and practical advice to adopters through regular visits and telephone availability.

We have a policy for adoption/SGO allowances which enables lump sum payments e.g. for adaptations to a home or to extend accommodation so that a child with disabilities or a sibling group can be adopted. The subject of an adoption allowance is discussed at the home visit by the family finding social worker, when a match is considered, if appropriate. Allowances for SGOs are discussed and decided during the assessment process.

The Service also has a number of nomination rights to social housing each year. This is called the FOSTAD scheme. Only prospective or approved adopters who are adopting a child that is considered '*hard to place*' are considered for this scheme.

Newham has an agreement with the Post Adoption Centre in London which enables adopters, adopted children and birth parents to access more specialist services and input. In addition, we will also consider the commissioning of similar services for adopters with Newham children placed outside the London area. These take a wider approach to the support that may be needed to sustain the adoptive placement and identify local services which may be suitable, look more imaginatively at methods of financial support and aim to build resilience and self support system for adopters.

f. Access to counselling services for adults involved in the adoption process

The Adoption Team provides Schedule 2 Counselling for adopted adults, and intermediary services for birth relatives and adopted adults. When counselling needs are identified, these may be arranged from a suitable agency or individual, as appropriate. In line with legislation, the Adoption Team has introduced post adoption support plans.

Anyone affected by adoption can request an adoption support assessment, via the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA).

g. A contact support service for all parties involved in direct or indirect contact for adopted children.

We facilitate a contact service between birth families and the adoptive family. Contact can either be direct or indirect. An example of direct (face to face) contact is when a child gets to see members of his/her birth family, normally once or twice a year. Usually this type of contact is with the birth brothers or sisters who are also living away from their birth families.

The second type of contact is indirect contact. This is when letters, cards, photographs and sometimes small gifts are exchanged. This type of contact is called letterbox contact.

Having some form of contact with birth family members, does benefit most children. The aim of the letterbox scheme is to help children feel both accepted in their adoptive family and comfortable about their roots and origins. If in years to come adopted young people are thinking about meeting with their birth relatives, having participated in contact over the years will make them more confident about what to expect.

Contact of any kind is agreed during the care proceedings and determined by the court. Contact is only set up with the belief that it is in the child's best interest.

Both adopters and birth family members will receive a brochure outlining why contact is set up and the benefits for the adoptive child, once a child is placed with their adoptive family.

h. Assistance to access to birth records and counselling for adult adoptees.

The Adoption Team also receive requests from adopted adults who are trying to trace birth family and to birth parents or relatives who are trying to trace an adopted adult.

We will provide counselling to the individual wishing to trace a relative and access information from a variety of sources to help individuals begin the tracing process.

People who were adopted before 12th November 1975 are required to see a counsellor before they can be given access to their birth records. People who were adopted after 11th November 1975, may choose whether or not they would like to see a counsellor before they are given the information that will lead them to their birth record.

On reaching the age of 18, adults whose adoptions took place on or after 30th December 2005 have the right to receive from the adoption agency:

- A copy of their birth certificate
- The information originally contained in the permanence report prepared for the adoption Panel
- Copy of court documents relating to the adoption which do not contain protected information.

Written information will be provided to the adopted person about the availability of counselling but there is no legal requirement to receive it before being given the requested information.

7. Better outcomes for our children

After the coalition Government took office in 2010, the *Every Child Matters* programme was replaced with *Help Children Achieve More*. However the principles of the five outcomes which were at the heart of the *Every Child Matters* agenda still **tends to** act as guidance to children's services. These outcomes together with the Adoption National Minimum Standards (revised 2014), have formed the standards by which we measure the success of our adoption services.

The framework of the five outcomes are as follows;

- **Being healthy:** enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle. We support our adopted children to be healthy by ensuring that the homes they will live in are safe and secure, and that the adoptive parents know how to provide medication and seek access to healthcare as necessary. We also have a medical advisor to our adoption panel who makes sure that the children's health needs are able to be met by the prospective adopters
- **Staying safe:** being protected from harm and neglect. We ensure our children stay safe by checking every potential adopter carefully to make sure they can keep children safe. We also ensure that everyone working with the child or looking to adopt is trained to ensure the child's safety and social workers keep closely in contact with children in case they have any concerns. Advice is always available to all of our looked after and adopted children and carers
- **Enjoying and achieving:** getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood. We believe in providing an environment in which our adoptive families can enjoy their time together and help the children to do well and achieve in education or in work. We make sure that prospective adopters are able to provide everything the child needs to help them do well in school, and will often support families with extra teaching or equipment if necessary. Newham's Children Looked After Support Programme will continue to work with adopted children for as long as they need the extra help
- **Making a positive contribution:** being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour. Part of the post-adoption support we offer will help children stay on a safe path and make sure that they have leisure and cultural opportunities and are allowed to decide things for themselves. Every child should be supported to make friends, and adoptive families are encouraged to provide this wherever possible
- **Achieving economic well-being:** not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life. We make sure that all the adopting families we approve are able to provide for the needs of children and are able to provide adequate housing and financial support for the children placed with them. Again, we will always support the adoptive family to go the extra mile where we can.

8. Comments and Complaints

If a comment or complaint about the service is received, it is the responsibility of the Team Manager of the relevant team to try to put right any concerns raised by service users.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at this first stage, it may become necessary for the complaint to be formally registered with the

Complaints and Member Enquiries Team

London Borough of Newham
Newham Dockside, 4th Floor West
1000 Dockside Road
London E16 2QU.

Telephone: 020 8430 2000

Email: customerrelations.team@newham.gov.uk

A copy of the leaflet setting out how to make a complaint is made available to applicants during their assessment.

If a child or young person makes a complaint about services provided for them, then the Children Act complaints procedure is followed. All children and young people can access an advocate via the Children's Rights Service. The Children's Rights Service will support children and young people in making complaints on their behalf and support them throughout the process of getting a solution.

Their contact details are

Newham Children's Rights Service

The Web Building, Ground Floor,
49-51 The Broadway,
Stratford
London E15 4BQ.

Telephone: 020 3373 1502

Freephone: 0800 0131650

Email: childrensrights@newham.gov.uk

9. Review and inspection

Applicants who are seeking to become an adopter and are turned down for approval on the decision of the Agency Decision Maker, are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales, is made available to applicants during their assessment and is again enclosed with the Agency Decision Maker's letter, if not approved.

The IRM's contact details are as follows

Contract Manager
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Wortley
Leeds LS12 6AJ.

Telephone: 0870 034 6420
Fax: 0870 034 6421
Email: irm@baaf.org.uk
Website: www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

Ofsted are responsible for the inspection of Newham Adoption Service. Significant incidents are reported to them.

The local Ofsted office responsible for inspecting our services is:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD.

Telephone – 0300 1211231
Email – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

10. Our contact details

Our contact details are

Newham Adoption Service
London Borough of Newham
Newham Dockside
Second Floor, East Wing
1000 Dockside Road
London E16 2QU.

Telephone: 020 8430 2000

Email: adoptionsupportteam@newham.gov.uk