



ADOPT LONDON WEST

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

OCTOBER 2019

Statement of Purpose Adopt London West

October 2019

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INTRODUCTION

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that it provides. This document is the Statement of Purpose for Adopt London West.

This statement can be used by children and young people and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

Adopt London West (ALW) is a specialist regional adoption agency partnership between Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow Councils hosted by Ealing, that provides a shared adoption service to the four partner Local Authorities, ALW commenced operation on 1st September 2019

The Regional Adoption Agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the 4 local authorities. The Head of Service is line managed by the Director of Children and Families and reports to the Partnership Board which is comprised of Senior Officers/Directors from each Local Authority.

In addition, the Adopt London Executive Board oversees effective collaboration across the 4 Adopt London Regions, Adopt London North, South, East and West to promote consistency of practice and quality of service across the 23 London

boroughs which are part of Adopt London. A shared Adopt London website provides advice, guidance and information to anyone who is interested in Adoption.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011;
- Care Planning Regulations 2010;
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013;
- Local Authority Regulations 2005;
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011;
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012;
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013;
- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Care Standards Act 2000.

Adoption Agencies are inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. ABOUT ADOPT LONDON WEST

Adopt London West is hosted by Ealing and brings together adoption services for Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham and Hounslow. We aim to provide the best quality support for adoptive families within our West London community. Adopt London West aims to be a therapeutically informed service and will seek to promote respectful, positive relationships with Adopters and Special Guardians.

We guide and support people who wish to adopt through our assessment process. This includes individual consultation and preparation training using a range of tools and materials to make sure our prospective adopters are well prepared and make the right decisions for them, we understand that each child and adoptive family is unique. We get to know our children and families well and work hard to match the right child to the right family. We aim to ensure that where possible adoptive families meet all the people who have been important to their child and support them through the exciting and sometimes anxious times of the initial meeting, introductions and moving in together as a new family.

We provide good quality adoption support. Adopters have access to a duty system which will be able to provide advice and guidance on a range of issues. We also provide:

- A local therapeutic surgery run by an independent charity PAC-UK, which provides confidential advice and counselling;
- An adoption support assessment to consider with Adopters or Special Guardians, the right kind of support that may benefit their family.
- Therapeutic support via an Adoption Support Fund funding application;
- Consultation with ALW's Clinical Psychologist regarding the most appropriate therapeutic intervention. This may be directly with the Psychologist or via an Adoption Support Social Worker;
- Six half-termly evening education support seminars facilitated by an Educational Psychologist
- Training on further developing adopters' therapeutic parenting skills via support seminars;
- A six week "Foundations for Attachment" training to develop adopters and special guardians understanding of how trauma affects children - available 3 times per year. We will endeavour to ensure families are offered a place within the first-year post placement;
- Linking with an experienced adopter who will provide informal support and guidance;
- Reimbursement of the adoption application fee;
- Support with facilitating contact arrangements – direct and indirect – via our letterbox service;
- A regular newsletter, with articles and training events taking place locally, as well as changes in legislation and new initiatives and resources; and

At least one annual fun event to enable adopters and their children to get together with other adoptive families.

3. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service: -

Values:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made

- The specific needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

Equality

The adoption service works within Equality Legislation and the policies of the London Borough of Ealing, the host Local Authority. The service works positively and respectfully with all families and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability taking into account the need to avoid undue delay.

4. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families & other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements & good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

Objectives of the agency

1. To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards.

2. To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
3. To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care.
4. To minimise delay in family finding, paying attention to the needs of the child at all times.
5. To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, their needs will change over time.
6. To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children in partnership with other agencies.
7. To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad
8. To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair.
9. That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaint's procedure is made available.
10. That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments and complaints

5. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Adopt London West is based at Ealing Council's main office building, Perceval House, 14-16 Uxbridge Road, W5 2HL

Head of Service – Debbie Gabriel

Team Manager – Recruitment and Assessment and Family Finding – Maggie Sutton

Team Managers – Adoption and Special Guardianship Support and Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) – Milena Bazelkova and Alison Field.

Business Manager – Roisin Burrell

Adopt London West provides an adoption service for: Children who need an adoptive family; Birth parents; Prospective and approved adopters; Children and adoptive parents who need adoption support services; Adopted adults and members of their birth families.

In addition, Adopt London West also provides Special Guardianship support services to families.

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families
- Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a home study, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation training
- Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption
Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them
- Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement.
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to the Intercountry Adoption Centre who offer specialist advice and support.
- The family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible
- Children's social workers and adoption social workers jointly undertake the task of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption.
- The responsibility for matching and supporting adoptive families is a shared task until the adoption order.
- Adoption letterbox service, direct contact support service and access to adoption archives. This enables adopted children to maintain contact with their birth families.
- Support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults wishing to find out about their birth families

6. NUMBERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF

Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, has overall responsibility for **Adopt London West**, she has 37 years' experience in Children's services and qualified as a Social Worker in 1994. Debbie has spent the last 14 years managing Adoption and Fostering Services.

The agency employs 25 staff;

- 2.5 Team Managers,
- 12 Social Workers two of whom are Consultant Practitioners,
- Clinical Psychologist (part time yet to be recruited)
- 3.5 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Workers.
- Business Manager
- 3 Practice Support Officers

All social workers have a social work qualification and are registered with the HCPC (Health and Care Professionals Council) and have relevant experience in children and families service. They have an enhanced DBS check. The Head of Service acts as the Agency Decision Maker and the Adoption Support Team Managers act as the Adoption Support services advisor (ASSA)

7. THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Anyone interested in finding out more about adoption can access information on adopting with Adopt London West via our website or make contact through our duty service. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and either invited to an information session or should they so wish, offered an individual home visit.

PLEASE NOTE: Applications for adoptions from overseas Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adopt London West has a contract with the Intercountry Adoption Service (IAS) a specialist agency to undertake this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Initial discussion and home visit

The first discussion usually takes place over the telephone, we will take some more details and answer any questions. We will then arrange a home visit appointment. At this first home visit prospective adopters will be given more information about adoption, any specific circumstances will be discussed in more detail, and a shared decision will be made about whether it is right to proceed. This is a good opportunity for prospective adopters to ask questions and consider the potential impact of adoption on them, their family and any children they might adopt, both now and in the future. If adopting as a couple both partners will need to be present for the visit.

If we do not feel it is right for you to proceed with an adoption application at this point, the social worker will discuss this with the prospective adopters. We will send you a letter explaining our reasons and providing information about any other options available.

Next steps

If both the prospective adopter and the adoption social workers are happy to proceed they will be asked to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI) form. Once this is returned, we will write outlining the next stages of the process. Providing prospective adopters circumstances remain unchanged, they can submit the ROI form up to twelve months after the information meeting. The important thing is to do so when the timing is right. However, if circumstances do change before submitting the ROI form, we ask that prospective adopters get back in touch with us so that we can discuss the changes and arrange a further visit if needed.

The assessment

The adoption assessment is very detailed. It will take place over 6 to 8 months and will involve a detailed assessment of the prospective adoptive family, support networks and your lifestyle. This is essential to make sure we know our adopters as well as we know our children and make the right decisions

People who have adopted usually tell us the process was detailed and a bit daunting but was interesting and helped them to reflect on their life

The process takes place in 2 stages with a panel and agency decision at the end

Stage 1

Stage one of the process begins when we have received the Registration of Interest (ROI) form. This form will also give us all the information we need to arrange medicals, contact references, and undertake statutory checks. These checks will include a Disclosure and Barring Service check (checking for criminal records and convictions), health and address checks. We will also invite all prospective adopters to attend preparation groups and access further information and training. We aim to complete stage one within a couple of months. However, there are a number of factors that might not make this possible

Once we start on the checks, prospective adopters will be invited on our preparation training. Our preparation groups receive very positive feedback and those who are initially anxious about attending find them very interesting, informative and enjoyable. They also provide the opportunity to meet other prospective adoptive parents at a similar stage in the process. We are often told that lasting friendships are made at the preparation groups. Other people have also said that the three-day course gives them a much deeper understanding of adoption issues and what adoption will mean for them as a family.

Stage 2

The assessment is used to help prospective adopters to consider carefully and honestly what they want from adoption and what they can offer a child. Many of our children have had difficult life experiences and come from complex backgrounds. Prospective adopters will have time to think carefully about our children's needs and how they can meet them. We ask lots of detailed questions about family background, childhood and adult experiences, relationships, and present circumstances. For prospective adopters adopting as part of a couple, the social worker will see both partners together and individually. The assessment process is demanding and will take around four months to complete. There are very good reasons why everything is explored in depth with you in this way. Adoption is for life, and we must be sure our adopters are right for the role. Just as importantly, they must be as certain as they can be that adoption is right for them and that they can make the lifetime commitment required

As the assessment reaches its final stages the adoption social worker will start to put together the prospective adopter's report (PAR). This report details the potential as an adoptive parent along with the results of medical, police and authority check and personal references. It is important that your report clearly describes the sort of children you feel you could adopt. Your worker will have discussed their thoughts with you throughout the assessment and the report should therefore not contain any surprises. Prospective adopters will check the report and will have the opportunity to make written comments on it. These comments form part of the completed document.

The Adoption Panel

The adoption panel is made up of an independent chair, social workers, other professionals and independent people, including an adoptive parent and sometimes someone who has been adopted. A minimum of six members are required to be present for the panel to be large enough to make a decision. Panel members consider the prospective adopters report and consider if the prospective adopters should be approved to adopt. They will be invited to come to the panel meeting and will be given the opportunity to speak. The social worker will also be present to answer any further questioned and provide support. The panel will make their recommendation on suitability to adopt. The full minutes from the adoption panel meeting, your prospective adopters report and any associated paperwork will then be sent to the agency decision maker (ADM) for Adopt London West and they will formally decide whether to approve you to adopt, based on the above paperwork and the recommendation from the adoption panel.

What if the decision is no?

Some applicants decide adoption is not for them at some stage in the process. The assessment process is designed to give enough information to help prospective adopters to make their own decisions and we will support hem to withdraw if they decide it is not right for them or to take time out if it is simply not the right time.

Sometimes we feel adoption is not right or that the applicants do not have the ability to meet our children's needs. If we have any concerns, we will share these with you and discuss honestly what your options are. Usually these issues are identified very early on but occasionally later in the process.

If prospective adopters have begun formal stage 2 assessment, they have a right for the assessment be presented to panel even if the recommendation is not to approve.

There are also rare occasions when the agency decision maker may make the decision not to approve an adopter.

If prospective adopters are unhappy about the decision, they may make a formal complaint or refer to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) who will review all aspects of the work and decision making. More information will be given to you should you require it.

Independent Review Mechanism

The Contract Manager
Unit 4
Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Wortley
Leeds
LS12 6AJ

Email - irm@irm.org.uk

Telephone - 0845 450 3956 or 0113 2022080

Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/ children's plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged, and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights. A fast track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. Stage one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently in order to avoid delay. They will be offered training.

Second or subsequent adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and usually, we would usually expect there to be a 2 year age gap between their child and a potential new child. In this case, they would express an interest in adopting again and be offered a home visit to discuss their circumstances. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start the process. Depending on the circumstances of the family stage one and two of the process may run sequentially or concurrently.

They would be offered training. If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the home visit would involve the child's social worker too. In these cases, stage one and two would run concurrently.

8. BEYOND APPROVAL

Matching and support.

The adopter(s) social worker will help to identify suitable matches with a child/ren and will provide support and guidance throughout the whole process. All prospective adopters are referred to our other Adopt London partners and Link Maker, with their agreement, if no match has been identified within Adopt London West.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child. When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the letterbox system with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child.

A life appreciation day will often be arranged depending on the child's age and circumstances to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences. Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will also be discussed.

The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

Process for the matching of a child

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their social worker will attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker for the Local Authority who have responsibility for the child. The Agency Decision Maker will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

If a match is agreed an introduction planning meeting is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the Early Permanency Route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering. These differences will be carefully explained to prospective adoptive parents from the beginning of their adoption process.

Annual Reviews of Prospective adopters

In the event that it is not possible to move to a match within 12 months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review of the plans and checks, and references may need to be updated. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, an updated report will go to adoption panel for consideration.

Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or sometimes if more appropriate, once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. There are many benefits to be gained from meeting birth parents, including; helping to begin a relationship that may develop over time that is mutually supportive to the child, or if due to the particular circumstances that is not possible, then adoptive parents can talk to their child when

the time is right about meeting their birth family, some kind of direct contact usually helps in the exchange of information.

After placement

Visits will be made by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and prospective adopter(s). The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than every six weeks. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker for the prospective adopters. The 'Annex A' report for court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers. Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safe keeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later in life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

Contact and the letterbox service

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the agency. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact may include letterbox contact or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members. A letterbox service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent or any other relative or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of direct contact may be arranged where necessary and agreed.

9. ADOPTION SUPPORT

Adopt London West has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. This service is provided in partnership with a number of voluntary agencies & other providers who provide an independent service and other services. The adopters' social worker will ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations, e.g. PAC UK, New Family Social, "We are Family" and other services and are on the mailing list for any events organised through the adoption service.

The agency has a specialist Adoption and Special Guardianship support team, operating across the region who offer a range of Adoption and Special Guardianship support services.

They also signpost other services for those affected by adoption; including:

- Adoptive parents

- Adopted children and young people
- Birth parents
- Adopted adults

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the “Adoption Passport” according to individual circumstances for adoptive families: The adoption support team will undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family’s identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.

Other services available may include:

- Advice line and newsletter
- Training and Workshops
- Links with mental health and educational services
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- An annual social event for adoptive families
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements for adopted children & young people:
 - Social groups and activities
 - Training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children’s needs
 - Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories
 - Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children
 - Information about registering a veto

Services for birth relatives include:

- Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service via an independent agency.
- Support regarding letterbox and contact arrangements
- Support to birth parents when deciding to record on their child’s file whether or not they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18

For Adopted Adults:

- Support and advice on making decisions about contact with and from birth relatives

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via our Adoption Advice Line Telephone number: 0208 825 5241 website: www.adoptlondon.org.uk or by email: adoptlondonwest@ealing.gov.uk

10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training or through externally commissioned trainers. A management information system is in place which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption.

Adoption Agencies are monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted. There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals. Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice-yearly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chair and Agency Decision Maker. The Head of Service will submit a quarterly report to the Partnership Board and will provide an annual summary report. This will also be presented to each individual Local Authority Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Committee as required. A robust quality assurance framework will be implemented with regular auditing of files, plus evaluation feedback from adoptive parents and other service users.

11. CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of children for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the Complaints Procedures.

The service is inspected by OFSTED

Any person who has concerns about the service may contact OFSTED at

Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk