

Statement of Purpose

Adopt London North

Version: April 2024

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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 North.

Children and young people, and families can use this statement as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

Adopt London North (ALN) is a specialist Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) partnership between the London Boroughs of **Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey** and **Islington** and is hosted by the London Borough of Islington. It provides a shared adoption service to all six partner local authorities. ALN commenced operation on 2nd October 2019.

The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) operates under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements, the budget, staffing and funding contributions for the six local authorities. The Head of Service is line managed by the Director of Safeguarding and Family Support from the host borough, and reports to the Governance Board, which is comprised of Directors from each local authority.

In addition, the Adopt London Executive Board oversees effective collaboration across the four Adopt London regions:

Adopt London North

Adopt London South

Adopt London East

Adopt London West

Together they promote increasing consistency of practice and quality of service in adoption across the 24 London boroughs represented by Adopt London. A shared [Adopt London website](#) provides advice, guidance and information to anyone who is interested in adopting or whose lives are impacted by adoption and may be eligible to access support services from Adopt London.

The Statement of Purpose is 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

The work and performance of Regional Adoption Agencies is considered by Ofsted whenever they inspect the local authority services for children in care in any of the constituent authorities.

About Adopt London North

Adopt London North is hosted by Islington and brings together adoption services for Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington. We aim to provide the best quality support for adoptive families within our North London community. Adopt London North aims to be a therapeutically informed service and seeks to promote respectful, positive relationships with adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth parents impacted by adoption.

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 equipped. 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. The needs of the children in our region in need of adoptive families are central to all we do. When a child and adoptive parents are matched together, we aim to ensure that adoptive families meet as many of the people who have been important to their child as possible, and support them through the emotionally complex period of the initial meeting, introductions, and process of joining together as a new family.

We also provide adoption support. Adopters have access to a duty system, which can give advice and guidance on a range of issues. We also provide:

- A local therapeutic phone line run by an independent adoption-specialist charity PAC-UK, which provides confidential advice and counselling.
- An adoption support assessment to consider with adoptive parents the right kind of support that may benefit their family.
- Therapeutic support via an Adoption Support Fund application.
- Support with facilitating contact arrangements – direct and indirect.
- A newsletter, with articles and training events taking place locally, as well as changes in legislation and new initiatives and resources.
- Specialist workshops to support Life Story work and discussions with adopted children.
- Specialist in-depth programmes of training such as the Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violent Resistance.
- Linking (virtually and in-person) with other adoptive parents, both new and experienced, through our partnership with We Are Family, the peer-to-peer adopter support network for London.
- A comprehensive and innovative webinar training programme provided with our partners We Are Family enabling access live or on-demand to around 20 expert webinars a year.
- An Adopt London choir who meet virtually with occasional in-person meet ups / performances.

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 wherever possible this should be within their own family or kinship network. Adoption may be a care plan for a child where this is not possible.

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 meet these needs.

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 Islington, the host local authority. The service works positively and respectfully with all families and partner agencies regardless of ethnicity, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.

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

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:

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.

Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.

Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

Objectives of the agency

- To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption, with a focus on the needs of the children with adoption care plans in North London.
- To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
- 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.
- To minimise delay in family finding, paying attention to the needs of the child at all times.
- 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.
- To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children in partnership with other agencies.
- To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad.
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaint's procedure is made available.
- 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.

Organisational Structure of the agency and service

Adopt London North is based at:
The Laycock Centre
Laycock Street
London, N1 1TH

Head of Service	Lydia Samuel
Service Manager	Teresa Stratford
Team Manager, Recruitment and Assessment	Sophie House
Acting Team Manager, Family Finding	Michael Hooper
Team Managers, Adoption Support	Jennifer Muthanna Angela Gazza
Team Manager, Adoption Panel	Julie-Anne Saunders
Business Manager	Sarah Lyons

Adopt London North 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 North also provides services to families wanting to access non-agency adoption through the courts, such as step-parent adoption.

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 (ICA) who offer specialist advice and support on our behalf.
- 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 is granted.
- 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.

Management, numbers and qualifications of staff

Lydia Samuel, Head of Service, has overall responsibility for Adopt London North. She has 16 years' experience as a qualified Social Worker in a variety of Children's Services roles, the last 10 of these managing adoption and permanency services.

The agency employs 42 permanent members of staff. Some staff work part time. The full-time equivalent roles in the agency are:

- 1 Head of Service
- 1 Service Manager
- 1 Business Manager
- 5 Team Managers
- 3 Practice Managers
- 17 Social Workers
- 1 Adoption Practitioner
- 1 Adoption Marketing Officer
- 5 Adoption Business Coordinators.

All social workers have a social work qualification, professional registration with Social Work England and relevant experience in children and families services.

All staff in the agency have an enhanced DBS check.

The Head of Service acts as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for adopter approval decisions. The ADM for children's match decisions is the relevant senior manager in the child's local authority. The Adoption Support Team Managers act as the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA).

The service to prospective adopters

Anyone interested in finding out more about adoption can access information on adopting with Adopt London North via the Adopt London website or make contact through our duty service;

020 7527 4777 (press option 1)

adoptlondonnorth@islington.gov.uk

www.adoptlondon.org.uk

At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and invited to an information session.

Applications for adoptions from an overseas country will be referred to a specialist agency. Each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adopt London North has a contract with the Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) to undertake this work on our behalf, for which applicants pay a fee.

Initial discussion and home visit

After attendance at an information session, prospective adopters are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) if they wish to pursue adoption with the agency. The agency offers an appointment to meet all prospective adopters for an initial meeting to discuss their application to adopt in detail. These meetings usually take place virtually with two social workers, but can take place in the prospective adopter's home or the ALN offices. During this first meeting 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 meeting provides 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 meeting.

Next steps

Those who feel ready to proceed beyond the enquiry stage will be asked to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI) form. Once this is returned with relevant supporting paperwork the agency will respond in writing to confirm our decision to start an assessment in stage 1 and to outline the next steps of the process.

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 to make the right decisions when matching children and planning support.

People who have adopted usually tell us the assessment process was detailed and a bit daunting, but was interesting and positively helped them to reflect on their life and prepare for parenthood.

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

Stage 1

Stage 1 of the process begins when we have received the Registration of Interest (ROI) form. This form will 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 (DBS) check (checking for criminal records and convictions), health and address checks. We will also invite all prospective adopters to undertake individual learning and reflection through a workbook. We aim to complete Stage 1 within a couple of months. However, there are a number of factors that might not make this possible.

Either during stage 1 or early in stage 2, prospective adopters are invited on our foundation and preparation training. Our preparation groups receive very positive feedback and those who are initially anxious about attending usually 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. Adopters can find that lasting friendships are made at the preparation groups. Others have also said that the three-day course gave 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. Most 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 checks 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 adoptive parents and 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 questions 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 North, 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 them 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 the formal stage 2 assessment, they have a right for the assessment to 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 a decision not to approve in stage 2 of the process, 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. The possibilities will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights. Where a decision is made to proceed with a full adoption assessment of foster carers, a fast-track process may be possible depending on how long ago the fostering approval took place and the quality of assessment. If a fast-track process is used, stage 1 and 2 of the adoption processes will take place concurrently in order to avoid delay, and they will also be offered training alongside.

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 expect there to be a minimum 2.5 year age gap between the child already adopted and a potential new child. Second-time adopters should express an interest in adopting again and will be offered a meeting to discuss their circumstances. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the Registration of Interest (ROI) form and start the process. Depending on the circumstances of the family, stage 1 and 2 of the process may run sequentially or concurrently and the family would be offered training according to their needs. If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply but would be considered on an individual basis. This assessment would be given high priority by the agency, and the initially meeting would normally also involve the child's social worker.

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 will be referred to our Adopt London partners and may search nationally through Link Maker and other family finding resources if no match has been identified within Adopt London North.

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 (CPR) 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.

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 (APR), which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel. Their 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 (ADM) for the local authority who have responsibility for the child. The ADM will make the final decision about whether the adopters are a suitable match 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 of the placement.

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 as relevant throughout 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 family finding plans and will review whether any checks and references need to be updated. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, or there is a significant change of circumstances, an updated report will be prepared by the adoption social worker and will be presented to the adoption panel for consideration.

Meeting birth parents

Wherever possible to do so, 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. The meeting will be well planned and will be supported by social workers in a suitable venue. There are many benefits to be gained from adoptive parents meeting birth parents. The benefits include the opportunity to begin a relationship that may develop over time in a way that is mutually supportive to the child. Even where a relationship cannot or does not develop over time, the first meeting enables the adoptive parents to talk to their child from their personal experience about meeting their birth family.

After placement

Visits will be made by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker after the child has moved in. 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 four 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 and can be read by the child when they are older.

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.

Adoption Support

Adopt London North has an adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. Adopters can contact our duty service:

020 7527 4777 (press option 2)

adoptionsupportduty@islington.gov.uk

This service offers a range of adoption support services and also works closely with a number of voluntary agencies & other providers who can provide other support. 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 are on the mailing list for any events and training organised through the adoption service.

The adoption support service also provide direct services and signposting for those affected by adoption including:

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

Wherever necessary the adoption support team will undertake an assessment of need with an adoptive family who require support, and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs. Assessments will also 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
- Social events for adoptive families
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding

their life stories

- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children.

Services for birth relatives

Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service via an independent agency, PAC-UK.

Birth parents support group provided by PAC-UK.

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

Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service via an independent agency, PAC-UK.

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

Support to access adoption records.

Three specialist support groups for adoptees.

Monitoring and evaluation of Adopt London North

The work of the agency is overseen strategically by the Governance Board, which meets regularly throughout the year. The quality of practice and impact on children is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Board.

The Head of Service submits update reports to the Governance Board and provides an annual report detailing the work of Adopt London North over the preceding 12 months. This annual report will also be available to each individual Corporate Parenting Committee.

The work of adoption agencies is monitored through external inspections carried out by Ofsted. The work of Adopt London North is considered by Ofsted as part of its inspections of our partner boroughs. Any person who has concerns about the service that they want to report to Ofsted may contact:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

0300 123 1231

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

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 quarterly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chair and Agency Decision Maker.

Concerns and complaints

All clients working with Adopt London North will have access on request to written information about the complaint procedure, including contact details for the Complaints Officer. The formal complaints procedure and contact details are outlined here:

<https://www.islington.gov.uk/contact-us/comments-and-complaints-info/childrens-social-care-complaints-process>

Anyone who has concerns about their experience of working with Adopt London North is encouraged to first make contact with the relevant Team Manager, Service Manager or the Head of Service, who will provide an opportunity to detail your concerns and try to reach a resolution. Any manager may be contacted through our phone line or email:

020 7527 4777

adoptlondonnorth@islington.gov.uk