

Family Adoption Links Leicester City Adoption Service

Annual Statement of Purpose 2023/24



Purpose

As an Adoption Service in England we are required to produce a written Statement of Purpose each year which sets out details of our services and how we will meet our commitment to providing high-quality care and support for our children, young people and adopters.

The Statement of Purpose is available to all staff, prospective adopters, children and young people, parents and other professionals in a variety of formats. You can find the most up to date copy on our website www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption.

Summary

Leicester City Council is part of Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Leicester City Council, Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council and Northamptonshire Children's Trust. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

The service allows our children and young people to live in safe, stable and appropriately matched families. Our aim for children who are cared for is that they will have a clear understanding of why they are looked after by the local authority, be given an opportunity to make sense of their experiences, knowing who is there to support them to achieve their goals and lead successful lives.

The Statement of Purpose explains the aims, objectives and services provided, as well as details about our complaints and quality assurance services.

The primary aim of the Adoption Service is to ensure that children, who are referred for an adoptive placement, are placed within a caring and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

We are committed to supporting our adoptive families and continue to develop our support offer. More information about the adoption service and the support offered can be found on our websites <https://familyadoptionlinks.org.uk/> www.leicester.gov.uk/adoption.

If you have any questions about the information contained in this Statement of Purpose, please contact the adoption team on 0116 454 4550.

Our Vision, Principles and Values

The primary aim of the Adoption Service is to ensure that children, who are referred for an adoptive placement, are placed within a caring and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

The service aims to:

- Place children at the centre of the adoption process and always act in their best interests, ensuring the process is timely and avoids delay.
- Have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Ensure matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Recruit high quality adoptive families to meet the needs of children referred for adoption, whilst recognising that family life can be experienced in different ways.
- Provide a range of services and information to adoptive families, birth families and adoptive children.
- Provide a range of post adoption support services for families and children to ensure adoptive placements are successful.
- Provide a service that meets statutory requirements and National Minimum Standards.
- Ensure adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- Have the same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Ensure Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters

Objectives of the Service

- To ensure children's needs have been fully assessed and an adoption plan is in the child's best interest.
- To provide a suitable adoptive placement for every child with a plan for adoption.
- To ensure, that the views of children and young people have been listened to and have been given due consideration in any decisions that are taken about their future.
- To regularly publicise adoption services to enable all members of the community to consider adoption as a positive option, and to recruit carers from a wide variety of backgrounds to meet children's individual needs.
- To recruit adopters who will respect a child's birth and family origins, and who will bring up an adopted child knowing and understanding their origins.
- To recruit adopters who will respect the diverse cultures and lifestyles within society, and who will bring up children who will respect these differences.

- To recruit adopters who will respect a young person's choice, in terms of sexuality, gender and religion.
- To recruit, train and retain highly skilled and appropriately qualified staff that understand the adoption process, and can support family placements.

Principles

The Adoption Service believes that: -

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes, and feelings will be actively sought and fully considered at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays in adoption can have a negative impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children and young people's ethnic origin, gender, sexuality, religion and language should be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made about them.
- The ongoing needs of children should be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made, recognising any disabilities and learning difficulties.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family should be valued and respected.
- Children have the right to grow up knowing they are adopted and should have access to information about their family of birth.
- Where appropriate children should continue to have contact, either directly or indirectly, with those family members who are significant to them.

Standards of Care

The Adoption Service aims to provide safe, secure and high-quality care in family settings for children whom a plan for adoption has been agreed. This will be achieved to the standards set out in the Adoption Services Regulations 2002, 2011 and The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 (referred to as the "Regulations"), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005), The National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2014) and The Statutory Guidance amended (2011) and July (2013 and 2014).

The Service

Service Manager: Georgina Oreffo

Telephone: 0116 454 4506

Family Adoption Links is a regional adoption partnership which includes Leicester City Council, Social Care and Education.

The Agency Decision Maker on behalf of the Local Authority is Kate Wells, Head of Service, Child Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

The Adoption Service Team

The Adoption Service includes qualified and experienced staff as follows:

- Team Manager: who is responsible for the day to day work of the Adoption Assessment Team.
- Three full-time and four part-time qualified, Social Work England registered social workers with experience in adoption work.
- One part time Adoption Support Worker.
- One full and two part time Admin and Business Support Officers.

Governance and Management

The RAA will be accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is responsible for delivering the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for Looked After Children. The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops.

The Board includes representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency. The FAL Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority. The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each LA. Each partner LA retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager.

The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

Service Functions

The service provides: -

- Recruitment and assessment of adoptive families; including publicity, information giving and attendance at regular drop-in sessions across Leicester and Leicestershire.
- Assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive families, which includes visiting their homes, undertaking a home study assessment, references, checks, and preparation groups.
- Support for approved families awaiting placement. In conjunction with the Children and Families Support Team (CFST), advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and post placement; this includes workshops and events for adoptive families.
- Delivering training and educational events and providing guidance for departmental staff that are preparing and supporting children, their parents and carers during the adoption process.
- Provision of adoption support services to adoptive families and birth relatives.
- Facilitation of direct and indirect contact arrangements and in a limited number of cases, supervision of contact.
- Provision of a specialist consultation and advice service.
- Counselling, information, and advice in relation to the following: -
- Birth parents, (First Families) whose children might be adopted
- Prospective adopters and Adults who have been adopted, including access to birth records counselling.

Safeguarding Arrangements

Leicester Children's Social Care & Early Help Service and its Adoption Service are part of Leicester's Safeguarding Children Partnership Board arrangements.

The assessment of adopters includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited.

Training is mandatory and covers specific areas such as safer caring, the implications of looking after children who have been impacted by trauma and the implications of how a child's attachment may have been affected in their early years.

Allegations that are made against adopters prior to an order being made are investigated using an established procedure by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process to ensure its timeliness. Where allegations are made following the granting of an adoption order these are managed using standard Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board procedures.

Recruitment

The Adoption Service welcomes enquiries from people from all backgrounds, whether single, in a relationship, or married, and regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race or religion. There is no upper age limit for a prospective adopter(s), but adopters need to be in good general health with lots of energy and love to give to a child.

In addition to our comprehensive websites, an information leaflet and brochure is available to explain what adoption involves and the processes that prospective adopters will need to go through.

The Adoption Service has a well-defined recruitment strategy whose aim is to prioritise the recruitment of adopters who can best meet the needs of all children requiring adoption.

In addition to our own information on adoption, “First 4 Adoption”, the Government’s ‘adoption gateway’ provides information for those interested in adopting. The national helpline is on 0300 222 0022.

Leicester City Council is a subscribing member of ‘New Family Social’ which is a UK-wide support network run by, and for, LGBT+ adopters and prospective adopters. More information about the support network can be obtained on their website together with clear information about the adoption process.

The role of Adoption Panel

Leicester City Adoption Panel is constituted in accordance with regulations. (Standard 17)

The adoption panel only considers:

- whether a child who is looked after by Leicester City Council should be placed for adoption, where a parent relinquishes their child or consents that adoption is the best outcome for their child.
- recommending whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt, and
- recommending whether adopters are suitable for a particular child or children (matching).
- the general running of the adoption service and to receive reports giving over-view information about the general running of the team.

Prospective adopters and approved adopters who are to be matched with a child are encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel.

The Adoption Panel is governed by guidance and regulations. Panel members include:

- An independent chair
- Independent Vice Chair
- Social workers with experience of adoption and other relevant specialisms
- Medical adviser
- Independent Members (not employed by the Adoption Service and who may have personal experience of adoption or other relevant experience).
- Panel Adviser

The adoption panel meets at least monthly and occasionally twice monthly to ensure the adoption work of the Adoption Agency is not subject to delay.

Following a recommendation by the Adoption Panel, the papers and minutes of the meeting will be passed to the “Agency Decision Maker” (ADM) who has responsibility for decision making on behalf of the Agency. The decisions are made following consultation with the panel adviser and access to the panel minutes. Decisions are made within seven days of the approved minutes of the panel recommendation. The decision will be put in writing to the prospective adopter(s).

Reports on children for whom an Adoption Plan is proposed are considered directly by the Agency Decision Maker after a comprehensive quality assurance process. Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.

Monitoring the Quality of the Adoption Service

The quality of the Adoption Service’s work and standards are regularly monitored: -

- The managers of the service ensure that staff are appropriately skilled, trained and supervised in accordance with the City Council policy to ensure they are fulfilling statutory compliance and meeting the quality standards required by Leicester City Council.
- The work of the adoption team is governed by Adoption Standards, Guidance and Regulations. The Regional Adoption Agency also submits information against national performance indicators.
- The work of the adoption team is monitored to ensure appropriate timescales are adhered to.
- The Adoption Panel independently scrutinise all assessments and judgements made about voluntarily relinquished children being considered for adoption, and those of prospective adoptive parents.
- The Adoption Panel scrutinise all reports on children at the point of matching for adoption. The Adoption Panel has a critical role to play in the provision of independent expert oversight.

- Adoption Panel members are appraised annually, and the performance of the Panel reviewed to ensure that it carries out its role efficiently and effectively.
- The Agency Decision Maker observes at least one panel each year and attends relevant training days.
- The Adoption Service is subject to inspection by Ofsted according to national guidelines.
- Feedback is gathered throughout the process by evaluation and questionnaires.
- Case files are subject to regular internal quality assurance audits.
- The performance of the Adoption Agency is published by the Department for Education on behalf of the Government.

Complaints Procedure

Any formal complaints are considered through the Local Authority complaints procedure. Copies of the procedure and complaints forms can be requested from the Adoption Team Telephone: 0116 454 5440.

All complaints and matters of concern are treated with respect and will be dealt with as promptly as possible, within specified timescales. The adoption service aims to resolve problems in the first instance by informal negotiation. A central record will be kept of all complaints as part of the agency's quality management process; these records are open to inspection by Ofsted.

Children who are already placed in adoptive placements (i.e. children in the care of the Local Authority) have access to the Council's Children's Rights Officer, who will assist any child in making a complaint if they wish and support them throughout the process.

Post Adoption Support

As part of Family Adoption Links, the post adoption support in Leicester is provided by the Children and Families Support Team (CFST).

The Team of ten workers is supported by two part time Team Managers.

The team has a range of qualified Mental Health Practitioners, Adoption Support Workers, Social Workers and a Post Special Guardianship Support Worker. These full time and part time workers provide post adoption support services alongside other placement services.

Services to Adopted People

Adults who have been adopted can approach the Registrar General when they are 18 years old and ask for details from their original birth certificate. Once they have obtained this information a request can be made to the service for a Birth Records Counselling Service. This involves obtaining a file from either the local archive or from another adoption agency. This work is provided on a statutory basis.

First Family Support

A requirement of National Adoption Standards is to offer independent counselling to birth parents during care proceedings where a plan of adoption is proposed. Counselling for birth parents, independent of the adoption process is provided in Leicester through the Children and Families Support Team. A leaflet explaining the service is available.

Contact Services

There are now over 550 adoption post box arrangements. The post box enables written (indirect) information to pass between adoptive families and children's birth families via the adoption team. These arrangements provide confidentiality for adoptive families and can sometimes involve the exchange of information from adoptive families between several birth relatives of the adopted child. An email facility is available that is popular amongst adopters for the exchange of indirect contact material.

Of those contact arrangements in place, 2% involve direct contact arrangements which require supervision and support from post adoption support services. A leaflet on the Post Box Scheme is available.

Services to Children

The service provides additional support to parents through the Contact Scheme. We have access to a supply of books, and other media platforms for direct work with children. Counselling is possible with older children. Children participate in social events such as the annual party, summer event and "Play and Stay".

Services to adoptive families

Family Adoption Links keep in touch with adoptive families through our regular newsletter called "Thrive". This provides details of activities and relevant articles about adoption.

The service continues to organise on-line therapeutic training relevant to adopters. The team has restarted a rolling training programme to enhance the understanding of attachment issues as well as develop skills to parent traumatised children. Learning in the company of other adopters is experienced as supportive and sometimes useful on-going contacts are established. Other professionals including schoolteachers, health visitors, adoption panel members and social workers can also attend this training and helps build positive professional relationships which are supportive of adopted children and families.

The adoption support workers provide training to other departmental staff; for example, writing Life Story Books. An information booklet for schools on adoption issues is available to schools attended by children who have been adopted. Training has been provided to schools by the team on attachment issues and how to respond to these. The Virtual School Team (for Children Looked After) can provide additional advice and support in school to assist adoptive children's transition to a new school.

The Service has access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) through the Young People's Team, to respond to the needs of adoptive families. The Educational Psychology Services from the city and the county also contribute to post adoption placement support.

Adoption Support Fund

CFST undertakes post adoption assessments of need and makes applications to the Adoption Support Fund where appropriate. The Adoption Support Fund enables adoptive families to be able to access therapeutic adoption support, following assessment of support needs after the child is made subject to an Adoption Order.

OFSTED Inspection

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting the Adoption Agency. The last inspection of Leicester City Council local authority children's services took place in 2021. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers was judged to be **good**.

Ofsted's stated:

Early consideration is given to permanence planning in all situations regardless of the circumstances, including to support reunification with parents. Regular permanence planning meetings help to drive progress and ensure that all necessary assessments are taking place or commissioned accordingly. Delay in achieving permanence for children is rare. Once decisions have been made for permanence for children, these are progressed in a timely manner. This is the case irrespective of which permanence option is identified to be in the best interests of the child. Children's life-story work is sensitively and imaginatively completed for children with permanence decisions, to ensure that they have a comprehensive understanding of their families and experiences.

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers and adopters is thorough, timely and analytical. Training builds their confidence and enables children to be well matched to their carers or adopters.

Ofsted will also receive and may investigate any complaints about the Adoption Service. They can be contacted at: -

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Review of the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose

The Adoption Service reviews the Statement of Purpose on an annual basis to ensure its aims, objectives, services and facilities provided remain appropriate to the care of children and young people. The next review is due in April 2024.

The Adoption Service maintains a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that support the management of the Service, and the care of children.

