

**THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD
ADOPTION AGENCY
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2007 – 2008**

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1. Context

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead through the power delegated to the Director of Learning and Care, undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service. It seeks to operate within the requirements of:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Children Act 1989 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)

- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- The Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 (and accompanying regulations and guidance).
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying Adoption National Minimum Standards
- The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 – England
- National Care Standards Commission (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The 1976 Adoption Act – Section 14
- The Court Rules, Domestic Adoption and Placement for Adoption 2002
- Working together to safeguard children (and associated child protection guidance).
- The framework for the assessment of children in need and their families.
- Other relevant legislation and regulations and guidance.

2. The Aims and Objectives of the Agency

The Adoption Service is part of a range of Local Authority services, which primarily seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. Where the needs of a child are such that placement for adoption is the preferred option for the child the Adoption Agency undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances.

The priorities of the Adoption Agency are:

- i) To identify the children who are in the care of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child
- ii) To prepare and assess prospective adoptive applicants applying to the Agency who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally

- iii) To support approved and waiting adopters in achieving the placement of appropriately matched children
- iv) To provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption by the agency and to their prospective or legal adopters during the pre-adoption period and for the first three years post-adoption in order to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement
- v) To provide appropriate support to the prospective adopters recruited by the Agency following the placement of children and to work effectively with placing authorities in order to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement
- vi) To provide a range of Adoption Support Services in line with the Authority's responsibilities under the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and Section 14 of the 1976 Adoption Act and in order to minimise the risks of disruption

The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (Regulation 4) prescribe the persons to whom the Local Authority must extend Adoption Support Services. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. where there is a significant risk of disruption) the Authority may provide services to other parties

- vii) To fulfil its duty under The Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999, to provide, or arrange to provide, an Intercountry Adoption Service

The Agency, by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (Reading), delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad. However once a child is placed with prospective or legal adoptive parents who reside within the Maidenhead and Windsor and area the Authority undertakes any required supervision of or support to these placements

- viii) To maintain effective systems for recording, managing and keeping safe, information about children placed for adoption and adopters and information received from people affected by adoption

3. The Name and Address of the Registered Provider, the Responsible Individual and the Manager

The Registered Provider

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Adoption Agency:
Safeguarding and Specialist Services
Learning and Care Directorate
Town Hall

St Ives House, Maidenhead
Berkshire SL6 1RF

The Adoption Agency Decision-Maker

The Head of Safeguarding and Specialist Services, Heather Andrews

The Responsible Individual

The day-to-day management of the work of the Adoption Agency is undertaken by the Permanency and Placements Service Manager in consultation with the Team Manager, Adoption, Fostering and Respite Service and the Team Managers from the relevant children's team.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor is vested in the Team Manager, Adoption, Fostering and Respite Service.

The Manager

The Team Manager supervises the work of the staff within the Authority who undertake adoption and post-adoption work. She also provides specialist advice, information and assistance to other staff in the Authority on good practice in adoption and permanency work in order to ensure timely and effective provision of services to service users.

Registration

The Agency is registered with the Care Standards Authority under Part II of the Act. No conditions are in force in relation to this registration.

4. Staffing

Qualifications and experience of the manager

Name:	Ros Whittaker
Date Appointed:	August 2002
Qualification:	C.Q.S.W. Bristol University 1980 BA Oxford Brookes 1999 Certificate in Management Studies – Awarded March 2006
Relevant Experience:	Employed in the field of Fostering and Adoption since 1980

The number of staff working for the purposes of the Agency

The Adoption Agency work, within The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, is undertaken by the staff of the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service. The Team as a whole provides the full range of family placement services, including Fostering Services, Adoption Services and the processing of In-Family Adoptions.

All social work staff share the same generic job-description, however some workers have a caseload that reflects a heavier concentration on adoption, while others have a heavier focus on providing fostering services.

Staffing Position as at April 2007

Permanency and Placements Service Manager – temporary appointment	Sheila McKeand
Team Manager	Ros Whittaker
Assistant Team Manager	Marion Smalley
Admin Support	Claire Burns Linda Wallbank
Senior Practitioners	Gill Black Joanne Madden
Family Placement Workers	Sarah Taylor Samantha Watson Chris Palme Christine Burton Barbara Willsher sessional worker
Together with senior practitioner and sessional worker hours there are in total 6.38 fte social work staff	
Support Worker – full-time	Jenny Dean
Adoption Support Worker 22 hours	Liz James

The relevant qualifications and experience of the staff working for the purposes of the Agency

Each team member, with the exception of the admin. support workers and the team support worker, is social work trained, qualified and registered with the GSCC. They all have childcare experience and family placement experience. No one is newly qualified.

The Team's first Adoption Support Worker was appointed to post in November 2006. She gained her CQSW in 1974, and prior to her appointment had ten years' experience of adoption work.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve the Post Qualifying Award. At the

current time one social worker and one manager within the Team has achieved their PQ2 and one member of staff has achieved her PQ1. It is expected that she will complete her PQ2 (or equivalent) in 2007.

5. The Organisational Structure of the Agency

Please see organisational chart attached.

6. Links to Other Agencies

The other consortium agencies & local voluntary agencies

The Agency is part of the Berkshire Local Authority Adoption Agencies Consortium and as such works in close co-operation with the other five Unitary Authority Adoption Agencies within Berkshire, with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and with the Catholic Children's Society (Reading) which is an honorary member of the Consortium

The Agency by arrangement with Parents and Children Together Adoption Agency (Reading) delegates to that Agency the work of providing services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

Where there is a need for any specific piece of work relating to the recruitment of applicants or the placing of a child(ren) to be carried out by staff independent of the Agency, or where specific expertise is required in relation to a particular case, the Agency seeks to make arrangements for this to be undertaken or provided by a neighbouring Local Authority Adoption Agency or by an Independent Adoption Agency, CCS (Reading) or PACT (Reading) or by a suitably qualified Independent Worker on a contractual basis, without undue delay.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead equally with the five other Berkshire Unitary Authorities (Wokingham District Council, Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Slough Borough Council). The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is the host authority

The service currently comprises of a Manager, an Adoption Consultant, a Project Worker, a Letterbox Co-ordinator, a Records Officer (1 day per week based at Darwin Close, Reading) and administrative staff.

The original Contract of Quality Standards set out for the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service was as follows:

- Recruit and train adoption Panel members
- Manage and service the two Berkshire Panels (including attendance by adoption applicants).

- Provide professional and administrative support for the 2 adoption Panels.
- Manage the Berkshire letter box service between adoptive families and birth families.
- Provide specialist training on adoption issues for staff in the 6 Unitary Authorities.
- Provide specialist advice and assistance on complex adoption matters to staff in the 6 unitary authorities.
- Provide specialist counselling for adults seeking access to birth records.
- Administer the closed children's records and adoption records.
- Provide a social work service to the closed children's records and adoption records.

These original areas of responsibility have been maintained and many have been further developed particularly in the light of The Adoption & Children Act 2002.

In addition the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service now:-

- Provides information and advise appertaining to all areas of adoption including legislation, guidance and best practice
- Manages the 'Berkshire Adoption Exchange' – twice yearly events that bring together social workers from across the region in an effort to achieve the matching of child(ren) with approved adopters
- Facilitates 'Life Appreciation' meetings for children being placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities
- Chairs disruption meetings for children placed by the six unitary authorities whose placements disrupt
- Co-ordinates development of some pan-Berkshire Adoption Support Services to which all teams have access e.g. Birth Mothers' Support Group, Birth Fathers' Support Group and Birth Records Workshops
- Supervises direct contact arrangements that are set up for children placed with adoptive families (post Order)
- Organises an Annual Adopters' Conference
- Hosts a Birth Parent Project (aim - to offer both an integrated independent approach alongside consistent support and information to significant birth family members when adoption has been formally identified as the plan for a child)

The National Adoption Register

The National Adoption Register is a National Database containing information on children waiting to be placed for adoption and on approved prospective adopters who are awaiting linking. The Register is operated by BAAF (British

Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) and generates suggested links between children and prospective adopters.

All approved adopters who are not linked or being actively considered for a potential match within three months of their approval are required at that stage to be referred to the Register so that they can be made available for consideration by other Placing Authorities (subject to the consent of the applicants). Placing authorities are likewise required to refer children needing placement to the Register if prospective adopters have not been identified for them via other sources within three months of their adoption plan having been considered by the placing authority's Adoption Panel and approved by the Agency Decision-Maker.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead seeks to be proactive in seeking to achieve appropriate placements for children needing placement for adoption both within the Authority, within the Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium and nationally. Therefore while all approved adopters are firstly considered for children originating from within the Consortium where a suitable linking is not identified within the first three months of applicants being approved they are advised to agree to their details being included on the Register. Likewise while approved and waiting families available from within the Consortium are firstly considered for any RBWM child needing placement, if a suitable match cannot be identified within a few weeks of adoption becoming the plan for a child an early referral to the Register will be considered alongside other placement options being pursued.

If the approval range of approved prospective adopters or the identified placement needs of a child are such that it is apparent that it is unlikely that a suitable 'match' will be identified within the Consortium referral to the Register will be considered immediately following Agency approval (of the prospective adopter(s) or the adoption plan for the child) in order to maximise the chances of an appropriate link being identified without undue delay.

7. Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard

The Agency is committed to seeking feedback from service users in order to inform future Service provision.

At the current time a robust system is in place to seek feedback from prospective and legal adopters at key points in the adoption process.

Systems are also in place to seek feedback from birth parents.

The Authority is committed to seeking feed-back from children being placed for adoption, however in recent years the number of children placed by the Agency has been low and the majority of these have been of a very young

age when they joined their adoptive families. They have therefore not been of an age and understanding to express an informed view.

The Authority is currently investing in extending its post adoption services and in line with this systems are being put in place to seek and monitor feed-back on the services provided to:

- Adoptive parents
- Adopted children
- Adult adoptees
- Birth relatives

Feedback from the Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service provides annual information about the feedback received from the birth parents/relatives and adopters to whom it provides services on behalf of The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's Adoption Agency. Feedback can additionally be sought in relation to a specific case and/or will be provided on specific issues arising if there appears to be reasons for concern about the nature or quality of any service offered or provided.

Feedback from adoptive parents

Adoptive parents are consulted on their view at five specific stages of the adoption process as well as having the opportunity to attend the Agency's Adoption Panel when their application to be approved to adopt is first considered and to give feed-back on how they experience the panel.

Following the preparation groups all applicants receive a visit from either the team manager or assistant team manager. This visit has a number of purposes, one of which is to seek feedback on how applicants have experienced the content and structure/management of the group. All applicants receive a visit from the team manager or the assistant team manager at the end of the homestudy process, prior to their application being considered by the Authority's Adoption Panel. This interview serves a number of purposes, one of which is to invite applicants to share their views about how the preparation/assessment process has been managed by the Authority and experienced by them.

All applicants who are engaged with the Agency are also asked to complete a questionnaire:

- after their application has been considered by the Adoption Panel.
- after they have been formally matched to a child(ren).
- after the Adoption Order(s) has been granted.

In addition the Adoption Advisory Service which manages the adoption panel on behalf of the Agency requests feed-back from all applicants who attend the

panel, via a questionnaire, after their application has been considered at panel.

Post approval reviews are also undertaken with all approved and waiting adopters in line with regulations. Reviews take place:

- whenever the agency considers it necessary
- not more than one year following approval and afterwards at intervals of not more than one year
- until a child is placed with the prospective adopters or the period of time for which approval was originally given expires, or they formally withdraw from the adoption process

Reviews are carried out by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager, Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service and usually involve a meeting with the prospective adopters. The views of the prospective adopters are always elicited and taken into account. If the prospective adopters wish to continue to be approved to adopt, a review report is compiled which is shared with them and they have the opportunity to comment on its contents.

At the current time prospective applicants who request an information pack but who do not then request a follow up visit are generally not followed up, however consideration is being given to whether this should be done.

Where applicants decide not to proceed or it is decided that an assessment cannot be offered after attending preparation groups, the reasons for this are usually known.

Where approved adopters decide to withdraw from the adoption process prior to achieving a placement the reasons for this are always discussed with them and recorded.

Feedback from birth parents

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service has a designated staff member who undertakes Birth Parent Counselling on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, thus removing the role from staff who have any level of involvement in placing the child(ren). This separation of roles appears to have assisted a number of the birth parents of children that the Authority has placed for adoption in accessing appropriate counselling and support.

When the Birth Parents Project Worker has concluded her involvement birth parents are asked to give their views on the service that they have received via a questionnaire.

Where birth parents are able to engage with the Authority or with the Birth Parent Project at the stage that plans are being made to place their child(ren) for adoption, their thoughts and wishes are proactively sought, both in terms of the adoption plan and in terms of the type of family they would wish their child(ren) to be placed in.

Except where birth parents sever all links with the Agency, contact is maintained with birth parents until the adoption of their child(ren) is legally concluded.

The Birth Parent Project Worker re-contacts all birth parents with whom she has been engaged once the legal adoption of their child(ren) has been concluded in order to advise them of the Post-Adoption Services available for birth parents both locally and nationally. This provides a further forum for obtaining feedback on services provided and on the Agency's approach and actions/conduct, which can be formally recorded/monitored.

Evaluating and responding to feedback

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Authority, this is referred to/checked out by the relevant Team Manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaison with external agencies/organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Authority to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Any expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint.'

8. Procedure for identifying the children being looked after by the authority who would benefit from placement for adoption and for achieving their placement with appropriate adoptive families

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead supports the basic principles that:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children whenever possible to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process
- Children's views should be listened to, recorded and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs

Making the plan for adoption

In line with regulations, all children in care have a Plan for Permanence considered in time for the four-month review (or sooner if return to the care of their birth parent(s) is clearly not an appropriate or achievable option).

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that all children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and

beyond. A spectrum of options exists ranging from reunification with their parents to adoption and the planning process serves to identify which option is most likely to meet each child's individual needs.

The Authority, while making all reasonable efforts to reunify looked after children with their families (unless this is clearly inappropriate for the child) is mindful of the need to balance the benefits of reunification against the significance of time moving quickly in a child's life.

Where the care plan for the child is to attempt reunification but the outcome is uncertain, contingency plans will be identified. This can mean that a parallel plan for adoption runs alongside the plan for rehabilitation and/or exploration of the extended family. If this is the case then some preparatory work in relation to adoption will begin, in order to avoid later delay for the child if a return to the birth family is not achieved.

If the assessments of the birth parent(s) and the known extended family members indicate that the child should not be returned to their care then permanence outside of the family will become the care plan. Whether adoption is the preferred placement option will depend on the child's age and an assessment of the child's parenting needs, his/her wishes and feelings and his/her potential to develop attachments to future carers/prospective adopters. The level of contact that is considered to be appropriate for the child with members of their birth family will need to be taken into consideration in making this decision.

The process following the decision that adoption is the plan for the child

Once a decision is made for the care plan for a child to be adoption a permanency-planning meeting is held. The purpose of this meeting is to agree the tasks that need to be done, timescales and who is responsible for completing different actions.

The work that needs to be done with or for the child will be identified. Wherever appropriate a counselling service will be provided for the child to explain the adoption process and the legal implications of adoption and to explore his/her wishes and feelings.

The work that needs to be done with the birth parent(s) and/or extended family members will also be identified and consideration given to contact arrangements both pre and post placement.

Arrangements will be made for the child to have an adoption medical unless he/she is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to have one.

Timescales for presentation to adoption panel will be considered alongside any court proceedings and appropriately dovetailed. Where care proceedings are on-going it is usual to present to adoption panel during the month prior to the final hearing. However, if all assessments have been completed presentation to panel can happen at an earlier stage.

Comment [R]: I've reverted to children in care as in the Green Paper

Reports for panel

The child's Permanence Report is written in line with the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 using the exemplar provided by the DfES or BAAF. (The completion of the report will be undertaken and supervised by appropriately qualified staff, in line with regulations).

Where the child is of an age to express an informed view on the adoption plan this will be recorded.

The birth parent(s)' views are ascertained where possible and they are given the opportunity to see what has been written about them and receive a copy of the report or the parts that are relevant to them.

Preparation for panel

Children who are being considered by panel with a view to adoption may wish to make a submission to the panel and will be supported in doing so. If an older child requests to attend panel, consideration will be given to the appropriateness of him/her doing so and how this could be best managed for him/her.

Panel

The social worker for the child and his/her supervisor or line manager, if appropriate attend the adoption panel and respond to any questions/issues/concerns that the panel may wish to raise in relation to the case and/or the adoption plan.

The panel will make a recommendation as to whether a child should be placed for adoption following consideration of the reports presented, the legal advice and any other information passed to it.

Where the panel makes a recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption it will consider, and may give advice to the agency about, contact arrangements and whether an application should be made by the authority for a placement order. (The Authority can only place a child for adoption if it has either the consent of the birth parent(s) or a Placement Order).

The Agency Decision-Maker will then make the agency decision within 7 working days of the Panel Meeting.

Relinquished babies

The Agency has specific procedures to deal with situations where birth mothers request that their unborn baby or young infant/child be placed for adoption.

Whilst these cases may appear to be relatively straightforward they often prove to be highly complex and this is taken into account when allocation is considered.

Providing the infant/child's parent(s) with practical and/or emotional support and appropriate information will often enable her/him to reconsider the long term implications of adoption for both the child and themselves and lead to the infant/child remaining with or returning to the care of the parent(s) rather than a premature decision being made at a time of crisis.

If the child is accommodated by the Authority every effort will be made to maintain contact between the birth parent(s) and the child until a final decision is reached.

If the birth parent(s) maintain the view that adoption is the preferred option for the child and it is not possible for the child to be appropriately placed within the extended family, then a plan for permanence outside of the family will be agreed and the child presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration.

The matching and linking process

The agency is always mindful of the negative impact of delay on children and will seek to ensure that appropriate placements are achieved for each child within six months of the Agency deciding that the child should be placed for adoption (or within three months if the child is aged under six months and the birth parent(s) is requesting that the child be placed) provided that doing so is not likely to be against the best interests of the child.

The matching criteria

When adoption becomes the plan for a child his/her individual placement needs will be identified and a written 'matching criteria' drawn up.

Where at all possible and if consistent with their individual assessed needs and welfare, the Authority will always seek to place siblings together. However the individual needs of different children within sibling pairs/groups will be assessed and given due consideration in reaching decisions as to whether they should be placed together or separately for adoption - where siblings are to be placed together it is recognised that each child will still have different needs and the matching criteria will reflect this.

A Family Finder will be allocated from the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service and she/he will assist the child's social worker in focusing on the child's background, earlier life experiences and presenting placement needs and in assessing what the longer-term implications of these are likely to be both for the child and for his/her future carers.

Consideration is given to what adoption support may be needed in order for the prospective adopter(s) to parent the child and this will include consideration of financial support.

Applications from current foster carer(s) or anyone with an established relationship with the child

If a child's current carer(s) or anyone else with an established relationship with the child indicate that they wish to be considered as potential adopter(s) for

the child, their application will be considered alongside other approved and waiting adopters available within the consortium and, depending on the placement needs of the child, approved and waiting adopters available outside the consortium.

Whilst acknowledging that the established relationship(s) and associated attachments may be significant, the agency must make sure that the family selected is the one that is likely to be best able to meet the child's identified short and long-term needs throughout his/her childhood and into adult life.

The matching process

In addressing questions of matching, the Agency will look at each child's needs holistically. No one set of needs will take precedence over another set of needs where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all.

The Agency is proactive in seeking to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of each child's ethnic origins, culture, language and religion. However no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be identified.

Once the matching criteria have been written and the first draft of the Child's Permanence report is available the Family Finder will consult the list of approved adopters available within the consortium and access appropriate prospective adopters' reports.

At the same time the child's profile will be circulated within the Consortium - this will not only identify approved and waiting adopters but also those still under assessment who it may be appropriate to consider.

If a child's placement needs are such that it appears unlikely that prospective adopter(s) will be identified from within the consortium, wider distribution of the profile will be actioned and the possibility of national advertising considered. Consideration will be given to whether the child's name should be placed on the National Adoption Register at an early stage. In such circumstances the viability of matching to available families is considered as an on-going process in order to reduce the risk of losing potential families who may be suitable for a hard to place child.

The Family Finder reads all prospective adopters' reports received alongside the matching criteria and eliminates the obviously unsuitable. The remaining prospective adopters' reports are shared in full with the child's social worker.

Having both read the prospective adopters' reports on the families available, the family finder and the child's social worker will meet to draw up an agreed shortlist of families who appear to have the potential to meet the child's placement needs.

When potential matches have been identified

Once a list of potentially suitable families has been identified the family finder for the child will contact the link worker(s) for each of the families under consideration to confirm the way forward. Possible outcomes at this stage are:

- prospective adopter(s)' approving agency does not wish to proceed
- placing authority does not wish to proceed
- placing authority wishes to visit a number of families prior to a linking meeting
- placing authority wishes to visit the family of first choice prior to a linking meeting
- placing authority wishes to hold a linking meeting to which link worker(s) are invited

The linking meeting

A formal linking meeting is held in relation to every child for placement, chaired by a senior member of staff.

In addition to the Chair, the meeting should be attended by the child's social worker; the family finder and any of their supervisors/managers appropriate and the link workers for the shortlisted adoptive families.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the likely capacity of each family to meet the child's current and anticipated longer term needs is carefully and objectively considered. The needs of the child requiring placement must be the absolute priority.

The linking meeting may identify:

- no family being considered is likely to meet the needs of the child
- a family of first choice
- more than one family is potentially suitable

Process following the linking meeting and prior to presentation at the adoption panel

Where the linking meeting identifies that no family being considered is likely to meet the needs of the child family finding will continue to be pursued.

Where the linking meeting identifies one or more families as being a potentially suitable match for the child any necessary visits will be arranged.

Following the meeting and any subsequent visit(s) a family of first choice will usually be formally identified. The decision will be made at a meeting involving as a minimum the child's social worker, the family finder and the person who chaired the linking meeting.

Once prospective adopter(s) are identified as the family of first choice then full written information will be shared with them including the Child's Permanence Report, medical information, any psychological assessment(s) and any other information that the agency considers relevant.

Where information on a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications of it, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people (professionals, other adopters, foster carers) who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. A meeting with the agency's medical adviser will be arranged prior to any proposed match being presented to the Adoption Panel.

The Adoption Placement Report will be written by an appropriately qualified and experienced worker (or where this is not possible the worker will be supervised by someone who has the required level of qualification and experience).

The Adoption Placement Report will detail the reasons for proposing the placement and the views of the prospective adopter(s).

Note – except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. the placement of a profoundly disabled child) it is not usual practice for the prospective adopter(s) to meet the child prior to the adoption panel considering the proposed match and the Agency Decision-Maker subsequently reaching his/her decision.

The Adoption Support Plan will be written at this stage and presented to the Adoption Panel alongside the Adoption Placement report. The Adoption Support Plan identifies the child and the prospective adopter(s)' anticipated support needs both in the immediate post-placement period and in the longer-term and how these will be addressed by both the Placing Authority and the Agency that holds responsibility for the prospective adopter(s) – the Local Authority in whose area the prospective adopters live may also have a role in supporting the placement if they are not the prospective adopter(s)' approving agency should be consulted in the drawing-up of the Plan.

The Plan also details any arrangements to be put in place in order to maintain a level of direct or indirect contact between the prospective adopter(s) on behalf of the child, and any members of the birth family. The child's needs, welfare, wishes and safety will be the most important concerns when considering the possibility of maintaining links between the child and his/her birth family members post-placement whether by indirect or direct contact.

The prospective adopter(s) will be consulted in the writing of the plan and their likely support needs discussed. The Plan will include details of the process by which it will be reviewed.

Panel

The social worker for the child and the link worker for the prospective adopter(s) will both attend the adoption panel. The family finder may also attend if he/she has direct knowledge of either the child or the prospective adopter(s) or if he/she is in a better position than the child's social worker to respond to questions about the matching process.

All workers must be prepared to respond to any questions/issues/concerns that the panel members may wish to raise in relation to the proposed link.

The panel will make a recommendation following consideration of all the information available. The panel can recommend that a proposed match is approved, that it is deferred, or that it is not approved.

Panel may also give advice about the proposals for adoption support services, contact arrangements and whether the parental responsibility of any parent(s) or guardian(s) or the prospective adopter(s) should be restricted and if so the extent of any such restriction.

The final decision in respect of any proposed match rests with the Adoption Agency Decision-Maker. If the panel recommends that a match is approved and this is endorsed by the Agency Decision-Maker then the placement planning and introductory process can proceed.

Process following the approval of a proposed match

Following the approval of a proposed match the child will be informed in a way appropriate to his/her age and level of understanding.

Before introductions begin work will be undertaken with the child to fully prepare him/her not only for joining a new family but for joining the particular family with whom he/she has been matched. Each child will be offered support by a named social worker in preparing to move and in managing the impact of the changes that placement will necessitate, which might also include termination of previous direct contact with birth parent(s), sibling(s) and/or other family members as well as loss of previous carer(s).

It is expected that similar work will also be undertaken with the prospective adopter(s) by their approving agency. Consideration will be given to holding a Life Appreciation Day to assist the prospective adopter(s) in becoming fully aware of the child's history, needs, behaviours and potential areas of difficulty. Even if this results in the prospective adopter(s) deciding to withdraw, it is preferable that they do so at this stage rather than the child experiencing further rejection.

Planning the introductions

A placement planning meeting takes place as soon as the appropriate preparation of the child and the prospective adopter(s) has been completed and a formal inter-agency meeting will also take place if the child is being placed with prospective adopter(s) approved by another agency. In some

circumstances this can be combined with the placement planning meeting if the approving agency is within the Berkshire Consortium

The planning meeting will agree a plan of introductions between the child and the prospective adopter(s) which must include a minimum of one formal review of the introductions before placement. It will also identify what other meetings should take place during the introductory period and what information is outstanding. Arrangements will usually be made for the prospective adopter(s) to meet significant members of the child's birth family if this is not inappropriate and other meetings will be scheduled with any other significant people e.g. teacher(s), therapist(s) etc

In agreeing the programme of introductions between the child and the prospective adopter(s) the length and pace of the introductions will be primarily dictated by the needs and responses of the child.

Prior to the placement being effected the prospective adopter(s) are provided with full written information in respect of the child including the Adoption Placement Plan and a written statement by the Authority detailing how Parental Responsibility for the child is to be shared. The agency may only place the child with the prospective adopter(s) when the prospective adopter(s) have notified the agency that they wish to proceed with the placement, therefore a letter detailing the terms of the placement is sent to the prospective adopter(s) in duplicate prior to the proposed date of placement and they are required to sign and return one copy to the authority before the placement is effected.

Before the agency places the child formal notifications are sent to the prospective adopter(s) G.P, their Local Authority, the Primary Care Trust in whose area the prospective adopter(s) reside and where necessary to the prospective adopter(s)' Local Education Authority.

The prospective adopter(s) are also given written details of how and where to access support following the placement of the child including details of who to contact for advice/support outside of normal office hours.

On the day that the child is placed the transfer of care is supervised by a social worker from the authority.

Support and actions following placement

Following a placement being effected the child's social worker retains responsibility for monitoring the child's welfare while the prospective adopter(s)' link worker is primarily responsible for supporting them.

Placing Authorities are legally required to visit and see any child placed under Adoption Regulations within one week of placement and at least once a week until the first review. The child's social worker will usually undertake these visits. Where this is not possible arrangements are made for another worker to undertake the visits on his/her behalf.

Visits by the child's social worker are usually dovetailed with those made by the prospective adopter(s)' link worker. In some instances joint visits will be made.

As part of each visit the child's social worker will usually ensure that the child is seen without the prospective adopter(s) being present unless the child is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to see the social worker alone

While supervision of the child's welfare rests with the placing authority, it can, by agreement, be delegated to the prospective adopter(s)' approving agency, however good practice suggests that the placing authority should always retain a significant role in the supervision of the placement and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead never routinely asks another Authority to undertake Welfare Supervision of a child's pre-adoption placement on the Authority's behalf.

All placing authorities are legally required to review the placements of all children placed for adoption within certain time frames:

1st review not more than 4 weeks after the date of placement

2nd review not more than 3 months after the first review

3rd and subsequent reviews within 6 months of the previous review

The Authority ensures that reviews are held in line with regulations. All reviews are independently chaired and every effort is made to ensure that the prospective adopter(s), the child's social worker and the prospective adopter(s)' link worker are all present – a review will be rearranged if at least one of the prospective adopters is not able to attend. Reviews will always focus on the child's welfare within the placement.

The Authority will support an adoption application being progressed in respect of a child as and when it is apparent that adoption by the prospective adopter(s) will be in the best interests of the child.

9. Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

Recruitment of adopters

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's overarching strategy on the recruitment of prospective adopters is contained in the Children and Young Person's Plan with the details outlined in the agency Adoption Policy.

The Agency to date has not needed to invest heavily in general recruitment of adoptive parents, although co-operating with county wide initiatives and maintaining a level of public awareness of the wider national need for adopters. Recruitment initiatives, if undertaken, are concentrated around National Adoption Week which happens in the autumn of each year.

The Authority has experienced a fairly steady level of enquiries and in 2006 – 7 seventy nine enquiries about adoption were received.

All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice and responded to promptly and impartially. They are given/sent clear written information about adoption in general, children who need adoptive families, the agency's expectations of adopters, the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval process and the subsequent matching and placing process.

The Authority's information pack is reviewed regularly.

While the Agency is committed to providing a service to adults within the Royal Borough's community who are wishing to adopt, this service has to be managed within the financial constraints under which the Authority operates and balanced against the needs of other Service Users. The Agency is not always able to accept/process applications from all those who apply to be considered as prospective adopters. Any decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application is based on:

- The minimum legal and Agency criteria
- The Agency's priority areas for recruitment
- The advice given by the CSCI on the appropriate number for an agency of this size

Applications are prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:

- Single children aged 4 years or over.
- Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged 4 years or over.
- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- Children from minority ethnic groups.
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support.
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care.
- Children who have an identified physical or learning disability.
- Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties.

All applicants are expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there is not complete background and/or health information.

Preparation of Applicants

All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an adopters' Preparation Group if they have not previously adopted a child(ren) through the Agency. The material used is designed to provide prospective applicants with information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children, both within Berkshire and nationally, who need adoptive parents. The training material used was reviewed in 2006 in the light of new BAAF materials then available.

The purpose of the group is meet the legal requirement to provide prospective applicants with the information that they need about adoption in general, the Adoption Agency and the profile and needs of children requiring placement. This will enable them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application and to prepare applicants for the assessment and approval process and the adoption task. However, the prospective applicants understand that in attending the group there is no commitment on either side to furthering the matter.

The Agency works collaboratively with three other Berkshire Unitary Authorities (Slough, West Berkshire and Bracknell-Forest) in running preparation groups, each taking responsibility on a rotating basis for delivering the sessions. Depending on demand there are usually four preparation groups running each year. Where the wait for a group would entail prospective applicants experiencing an unacceptable delay, places are sought on another more immediate group run by the two unitaries, Wokingham and Reading, who operate independently.

Prospective applicants are usually given the opportunity to meet with existing adopters during the preparation groups, where this is not possible, subject to their progressing an application with the agency, this is offered during the subsequent homestudy period.

Assessment of Applicants

The Agency will prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.

Where it has been agreed that the applicants will be assessed by the Agency as prospective adopters they are invited to make a full application after completing preparation groups (CRB and Local Authority checks are taken up prior to group attendance).

When the Agency decides not to proceed with an application, applicants will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to them.

The Agency seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, detailed within the BAAF Form F.

The 'homestudy' assessment is usually undertaken by a specific worker, with a 'Second Opinion' being provided by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager. Social workers undertaking the assessment of prospective adopters will usually have experience of adoption and family placement work and be trained and experienced in assessment. Where this is not the case they will be supervised and supported by a worker with the appropriate level of knowledge, experience and training.

Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.

While the Agency does not subscribe to the pure model of competency based assessments, prospective adopters are assisted, through both the preparation groups and the homestudy process, to consider/identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.

A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

In working with adoptive applicants the Agency seeks to balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays. Applicants are kept informed of the progress of their application throughout.

Wherever possible the Agency seeks to present applicants to the Agency's Adoption Panel for consideration, within six months of receiving their completed application.

Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care are welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster carers who make application to adopt children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters.

All adoptive applicants receive a copy of both their assessment report and the second opinion report in respect of their application, at least 10 days prior to the reports being submitted to the Adoption Panel and they are invited to send their views on the report in writing to the agency, any comments are then considered by the Adoption Panel at the time that the application is considered.

At the current time the Agency delegates the preparation and assessment of Intercountry Adoption applicants to a local Voluntary Adoption Agency. (See Section 8 above). The Agency regularly reviews the Contract in place with this Agency to ensure that the work undertaken with enquirers and applicants is in line with the requirements of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 and the Intercountry Adoption Agency (Hague Convention) Regulation 2003 and accompanying guidance

Approval processes

All adoptive applicants seeking approval have their application presented to the Agency's Adoption Panel for consideration.

The Agency shares a joint Adoption Panel with Slough Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council. The composition of the Panel is in line with Regulations. Panel is held monthly. Additional Panels are arranged if needed.

The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the Adoption Panel Adviser (Service Manager, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service).

Panel members and the Adoption Agency's Decision-Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the Panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the Panel meeting.

The link worker for the applicants, or in her/his absence, her/his Team Manager will be present when an application is considered to answer the Panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision.

Applicants are given the opportunity to represent themselves at Panel.

The recommendation of the Panel is conveyed to the applicants on the day of Panel and to the Adoption Agency Decision-Maker by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service within 24 hours (draft Minutes will be forwarded within four working days).

The Decision-Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven days of the Panel meeting.

The Decision-Maker will convey his decision in writing (e-mail, fax or memo) to the applicants' link worker and the Team Manager (Adoption & Permanence).

The Team Manager ensures letters confirming the Agency's decision are sent to the applicants.

In the event of an application being deferred or turned down, adoptive applicants are informed of their right to make representation or complaint.

Prospective adopters are normally approved for three years unless specific circumstances suggest a shorter approval period to be appropriate.

Approval relates only to the placement of children from within the UK and does not cover placement of children from abroad.

All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of a child(ren) via the Berkshire Local Authorities Adoption Consortium. However, if a suitable placement is not identified within the first three months of their approval, prospective adopters will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing Agencies via the National Adoption Register (see section 8 above).

Support to prospective adopters approved by the agency

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.

All approved and waiting adopters have a named social worker (link worker) who provides them with regular support throughout the post approval period and assists them in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and to objectively evaluate whether it is appropriate to pursue possible linkings.

Where, prospective adopters are considering a child(ren) the agency will seek to ensure that they are provided with as much written information as is available to help them to understand the needs and background of the child(ren) and will provide the opportunity for them to discuss the details and the implications for them and their family. Where information about a child(ren) is shared either verbally or in writing prospective adopters will be informed of the need to keep all information confidential and not to share details with anyone outside of their immediate family, unless they are ultimately matched to the child(ren). Where prospective adopters are identified as being the placement of choice for a child(ren) the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan will be discussed with them and their views obtained (their views should be taken into account prior to the reports being finalised for presentation to panel). The agency will seek to ensure that they are provided with the Adoption Placement Report at least 10 days prior to the papers being submitted to the Placing Authority's Adoption Panel for consideration of the proposed link and that they are invited to give their views on it in writing

Where information on a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications of it, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. Where there are significant medical issues, a meeting with the Placing Authority's Medical Adviser will be sought.

The Agency will assess the risks there may be to the prospective adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these.

The Agency will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and the future adoption of the child.

Where prospective adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Agency will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to foster the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about and connection to his origins. The Agency will seek to help prospective

adopters, to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.

The Agency will ensure that prospective adoptive parents are informed prior to a placement about support services that are available within the area, should they or the child require specialist support after placement or after any future Adoption Order has been made and how they might access these services – the Agency will seek to contribute to the Adoption Support Plan drawn up by the Placing Authority.

The Agency will ensure that prospective adopters are aware of what (if any) adoption allowances may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. The Agency will also ensure that prospective adopters are aware of any Department of Work and Pensions benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.

Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Agency will continue to receive link-work support from an identified social worker within the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service, until such time as the legal adoption is concluded.

All adopters within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead area will also have access to the CAMHS Team should they require specific advice/support in relation to the emotional and/or behavioural development of any child placed with them.

All children placed with The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead approved adopters will have a named social worker who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting him within the placement.

The Agency will encourage adopters to formally sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members that is agreed at the time of placement and will support them in facilitating these arrangements.

Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive situation within the family.

The Agency will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on progressing an application to adopt to the appropriate Court at the appropriate time. (The Agency will expect the court application fee to be met by the Placing Authority).

The Agency recognises that timely and effective support can help to avoid placement breakdowns. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or maltreatment and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten placement, whatever services have been made available.

Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity, the Agency will seek to ensure that:

- The child's welfare remains the first consideration.
- Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child.
- The review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child.
- The possibility of placement breakdown is acknowledged and planned appropriately.
- If a disruption occurs a disruption meeting is held in order to assist the responsible Agency in gathering as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future.

10. Adoption Support Services

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 places a duty on every Local Authority to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs in relation to adoption of:

- Children who have been or may be adopted
- The birth relatives of such children (i.e. relatives within the meaning of Section 14.4 (1) of the Act)
- Any person with whom the adopted child has a relationship which appears to the Local Authority to be beneficial to the welfare of the child
- Persons who have adopted or may adopt a child
- Any children of such persons (whether by birth or adoption)

In addition, the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2005, require Local Authorities to make arrangements for the provision of a range of Adoption Support Services and places duties on Local Authorities to carry out assessments of need for Adoption Support Services and having carried out an assessment to decide whether to provide any services. Moreover, Local Authorities must act reasonably in deciding whether to provide Adoption Support Services following an assessment, although there is a presumption that an assessment of need for a service will not automatically result in the provision of that service

While the Agency recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees, in reaching any decision as to what services to provide the Authority will take into account both the circumstances of each individual case and the resources that are available locally.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is committed to providing the full range of Adoption Support Services that Local Authorities are required by Regulations to provide. These services are:

- Financial support (ASR 3.1.a)
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption (ASR 3.1.b)
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child (ASR 3.1.c)
- Therapeutic services for adoptive children (ASR 3.1.d)
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care (ASR 3.1.e)
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions (ASR 3.1.f)
- Counselling, advice and information

While the Council seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Authority may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either other Local Authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, Voluntary Adoption Agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Authority's full range of Adoption Support Services are not available to those involved in adoptions by:

- a birth parent
- a step-parent.

In these cases services provided are limited to counselling, advice and information.

The Authority is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all child(ren) and families who are engaged with the Safeguarding and Specialist Services recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted child(ren) and their families also have access to mainstream services available to child(ren) and families with particular needs.

The Agency is also committed to providing counselling and support service to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support

- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records.
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives.
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service.

Adult adoptees

The Local Authority is responsible for providing a birth records counselling service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records. In the case of persons adopted before 12th November 1975, the Agency provides counselling in line with relevant legal requirements before sharing any information available.

Counselling is also provided for adult adoptees adopted after that date if this is requested and the Agency encourages adoptees to make use of this service.

Where an adult adoptee who does not live in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead area is seeking information from his/her adoption records, and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is the appropriate Adoption Agency, advice and counselling about the process is provided. The Authority also co-operates in providing information from its records to any Adoption Support Agency involved or to the Local Authority in whose area the adoptee lives, in order to facilitate him/her accessing his/her adoption records.

When the Agency is approached by another Adoption Agency seeking information from the adoption case records for an adoptee who remains under the age of 18 the Agency will only release information if there are clear reasons to suggest that this would be in keeping with the best interests of the young person and with the consent of the adoptive parent(s).

If an adoptee is seeking to trace a birth relative(s) he/she is informed that the Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, however if he/she is able to provide the name and address of the person who he/she wishes to contact the agency will, where staffing permits, provide an intermediary service. Alternatively the Agency provides details of other agencies and organisations that provide tracing and/or intermediary services or that might be able to offer additional support appropriate to the individual's needs.

All adoptees are provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

Intermediary services for birth relatives

Where a birth parent or sibling or grandparent of an adopted person lives within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead area and is wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling/grand-child he/she is offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not generally in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted him/herself.

Birth relatives are provided with a list of Registered Adoption Support Agencies and encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General.

The Agency only routinely provides intermediary services where the following criteria are met:

- The birth relative lives within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead area
- The birth relative is able to provide the name and address of the person who they wish to make contact with
- The birth relative is able to provide evidence of their relationship to the adoptee
- The adopted person is over the age of 18 and was originally placed for adoption by The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

All birth relatives seeking to achieve a reunion are advised to become members of NORCAP.

If the Agency is acting as an intermediary, contact with the adopted person is established and he/she wishes to have contact with his/her birth relative(s) all parties are offered support prior to and following any reunion.

11. The Complaints Procedure

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 Customer Care Co-ordinator.

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.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process on engagement.

The Team Manager monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service.

12. Details of the Registration Authority

Southern Region Office

Freshford House Redcliffe Way,

Bristol BS1 6NL

Ros Whittaker, Team Manager Fostering, Adoption and Respite Service

April 2007