

# **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

## **WILTSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE**

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2020

# Adoption

## Statement of Purpose

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## **1. Introduction**

Wiltshire Council is a partner in the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption West.

The Council is an Adoption Agency providing a service to children who require adoptive families.

The National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014 set out the requirement for adoption agencies to compile a statement detailing what services are provided, the governing principles and who manages and provides the services. The Statement of Purpose is for:

- Children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Prospective and approved adoptive families
- Social workers working within Wiltshire and in other authorities
- Councillors
- Adoption Panel members
- Office for Standards in Children's Services Education and Skills (Ofsted)
- Members of the public

*The Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014, Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003, Adoption support agencies (England) and adoption agencies regulations 2005 and the Adoption & Children Act 2002.*

Wiltshire Council's Adoption Service statement of purpose is reviewed annually.

The statement of purpose is endorsed by the Families and Children's Services Senior Management Team.

Copies of the statement of purpose are available to childcare team managers and social workers involved with the adoption process. It is also provided to families and children where required. It is available on the Wiltshire Council website.

## **2. The Service**

Wiltshire Council's Families and Children's Service is committed to providing high quality standards of care to looked after and adopted children in order to maximise their life chances and ensure that they have the opportunity to achieve best outcomes.

The Service aims to:

- Provide a range of safe, secure and enduring adoptive placements to meet the assessed needs of children waiting to be adopted in order to promote and safeguard their welfare.
- Working with Adoption West, ensure that adoptive placements promote stability and positive outcomes for children by working in partnership with adopted children, adoptive parents, birth families and other professionals in the adoption and adoption support processes.
- Fully develop the role of the Local Authority as a 'Corporate Parent' in achieving positive outcomes for children needing permanent placements in line with the council's objectives.

### **3. Aims of the Service**

The overall aim is to help children and young people who are adopted to attain the highest possible standards of health, development and educational attainment. Working in partnership with Adoption West, the Service will:

- Ensure that the safety needs, wishes and welfare of the child are kept at the centre of the adoption process at all times.
- Ensure that where it is not possible for children to live safely with their birth families they are provided with a permanent, stable, alternative family through adoption or special guardianship.
- Ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process and have access to independent counselling and adoption support services.
- Ensure that the timescales set out in Regulations are met, and where it is not possible the reasons must be clearly recorded.
- Monitor performance against the achievement of these timescales.

### **4. Objectives of the Service**

- To increase the number of children adopted from the care system, in line with local and government targets.
- To ensure Adoption West has a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to offer placement choice in order to meet the assessed needs of the children requiring adoptive families.
- To ensure that Adoption West develops a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies, in order to support adoptive placements and avoid placement breakdowns.
- To ensure that the adoption agency employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver the adoption service.
- To ensure that adoptive parents, supported by Adoption West, will be supported and valued through the process of recruitment, matching, placement and beyond, based on assessed need.
- To ensure that birth families wishing to seek information about an adopted relative are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.

## **5. Policy and Procedure**

The procedures for achieving permanence through adoption cover all of the agency's activities for children. The main functions pertaining to adopters, birth relatives, step-parent adopters and inter-country adopters and their children are provided by Adoption West.

## **6. Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare**

The Wiltshire Safeguarding Vulnerable People Panel provides the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Wiltshire and the adoption agency ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance.

## **7. Principles of the Service**

### The Child

- The child's welfare is paramount in all decisions about their future.
- The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and taken into consideration, according to their age and understanding.
- Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all the needs of the child in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, physical, social and emotional development and that promotes a supportive lifelong relationship.
- Children and young people should not be in public care throughout their childhood.
- A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic background are all important factors to consider in finding a new family. The adoptive family should reflect this, if this can be found without unnecessary delay. No child should be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and parents do not share the same racial or cultural background.
- Every effort will be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs. Where this is not possible, the reasons for the decision to separate them will be clearly recorded on the child's file.
- All children who have adoption as their plan receive a copy of the Adoption West children's guide to adoption.

### The Birth Family

- The local authority will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for their child.
- Every child is entitled to information about their birth family in order to promote their sense of identity.
- There will be arrangements for ongoing contact, direct or indirect, between the child and birth family unless this would not be in the child's best interest.
- The birth family's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and taken into consideration at all stages in the process.

## The Adopters (through Adoption West)

- Adopters are assessed and approved, supervised and supported by Adoption West.
- All prospective adopters will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- Priority for undertaking assessments will be given to those with the skills and experience to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption.
- Adoptive parents and prospective adopters should be consulted with, provided with information, and have their views sought and taken into account throughout their involvement with the Service.
- Adoption support services will be provided, as appropriate, to promote the stability of placements and ensure good outcomes for children.

## General

- The local authority will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the needs of children and all other relevant parties in the adoption process are met.
- All the parties to the adoption process are entitled to an assessment of their need for adoption support services, including financial support.
- Birth parents will have access to the Council's Complaints Procedure.

## **8. Management Structure in Wiltshire Council**

Case holding responsibility for children who require adoptive families is held within the Support and Safeguarding part of the Families and Children's Service apart from where a child is relinquished when responsibility is held in the relevant Child in Care Team. All managers and social workers in these teams are appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out this work.

The Director of the Families and Children's Service has overall responsibility for the adoption service in Wiltshire. The Heads of Service and Director are the Agency Decision Makers and the Service Manager, Safeguarding and Support Services is the adoption lead and acts as agency advisor.

## **9. Operational Functions**

The Families and Children's Service delivers all of the child facing adoption services for Wiltshire Council.

The Independent Reviewing Service has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of children's adoption plans, conducting the Children Looked After reviews until the Adoption Order is made and ensuring the timescales are adhered to.

The Permanency Options Meeting for a child oversees the family finding process, tracks the progress of individual children and adopters in order to expedite placements and to review the effectiveness of the family finding process. The meeting is chaired and attended by those who need to be involved in planning for the child and who can make appropriate decisions, including representatives from Adoption West where applicable.

Wiltshire provides a comprehensive set of relevant adoption procedures for staff to assist them in their adoption work. The procedures are available on the intranet, which means they can be easily and regularly updated in line with changes in legislation and practice.

Members of staff are provided with an induction programme and support from experienced managers to promote these values and to work within the Council's equal opportunities policies.

Staff are also provided with the Council's whistle blowing policy as part of their induction and this makes clear the responsibility for all staff to report areas of poor practice.

## **10. Strategic and Developmental Function**

Working with Adoption West, adoption is promoted as a positive route to permanence for children who are not able to live safely with their parents or wider family members. Staff working with this group of children can access support, guidance and training relevant to adoption practice.

Wiltshire Council is represented on the Adoption West Board of Governors, the Adoption West Scrutiny Group and the Adoption West Service Leads Group. There are regular liaison meetings between Adoption West staff and managers and the Council's ADMs, managers and staff.

## **11. The Adoption Panel**

The Adoption Panel and its functions are provided by Adoption West. Wiltshire social workers will attend Panel when a match between a child and adopters is being considered. All other management, maintenance and development of the Panel is carried out by Adoption West.

## **12. The Agency Decision**

Agency Decisions about the matching of children is carried out by the Wiltshire Council ADM as the local authority retains case responsibility for children. Other ADM decisions are made by Adoption West.

## **13. Adoption Website**

The Council website contains information about adoption and a link to the Adoption West website, <https://adoptionwest.co.uk/>

## **14. Adoption Support**

The Adoption Support service rests with Adoption West. It has a range of services in place, or that can be accessed, to support adoptive families and their children including counselling, advice and information, workshops, support groups, family days and events, an annual conference. Newsletter, financial support and links with Wiltshire's Virtual School Team and CAMHS.

Contact is promoted as a positive experience for the child and as maintaining an important connection with the child's past for their future identity. An allocated adoption social worker provides support to birth relatives and Adoption Support provides this for adopters. An independent social worker specialising in birth relative support is offered to birth parents or other relatives who are losing a child or children to adoption. Birth parents, siblings and grandparents are offered individual and occasionally group work.

Wiltshire Council supports ongoing contact arrangements as required.

The Adoption Support Service facilitates both direct and indirect contact (through the post-box service) between birth families, children and significant others. The Council will provide information for this as required.

Adoption West, working with the Council, has developed Life Story Work practice and provided workshops for staff, adopters and birth family to ensure that all adopters have a high-quality life story book for their child and all adopted children have their life history recorded in an accessible, high quality and flexible format.

### **15. Systems for monitoring and evaluating adoption services.**

An annual report and an interim six-month report is provided to Cabinet.

The supervision and annual appraisal system for all staff assures the monitoring of individual performance and identification of training needs to compensate for any gaps in knowledge.

Training on adoption issues is part of the 'training pathway' for staff involved in adoption work and staff complete post-training evaluation forms.

There is regular tracking activity completed to ensure that a child's journey to adoption is timely or where appropriate, action is taken to move a child's plan away from adoption.

### **16. The Complaints Process**

Parents and families can make a complaint through the Council's complaint process.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the **Customer Complaints Manager at Wiltshire Council** who can be contacted on **Tel: 01225 718446 / 713020 or via the Council website.**

There is a leaflet available for children and young people, which explains the complaints process and how to make a complaint. Information regarding complaints, comments and seeking advice is contained in the children's guide to adoption and the children's guide to adoption support.

### **17. The Registration Authority**



Ofsted is an independent non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. Their aim is to “inspect and regulate to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people and in education and skills for learners of all ages”.

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