

Cabinet –25 July 2012

Updated Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service

Portfolio: Councillor Rachel Andrew

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

It is a requirement under standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011, that the Cabinet of the local authority approves the statement of purpose and reviews them at least annually.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet approves the amendments to the statement of purpose for the adoption service in Walsall summarised at 3.2 of this report.

3. Report detail

3.1 The statement of purpose for Walsall Council Adoption Service is required under the Adoption Services: National Minimum Standards 2011. The information contained in the report, found at Appendix 1, covers the following areas:-

- the aims and objectives of the local authority in relation to the adoption service;
- number, relevant qualifications and experience of the staff employed by the authority for the purposes of the adoption service;
- systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services
- the procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing approving and supporting prospective adopters;
- information about adoption support services;
- service development
- inter-country adoptions
- complaints about the service and procedures
- contact information

It is available on the Walsall Council website.

3.2 The only amendments to the Statement of Purpose are in relation to the changes in Adoption Agency Standards and Regulations which came into effect on 1 April

2011, and there have been no other changes in the structure of the adoption service, or how the service is delivered.

4. Council priorities

The Statement of Purpose for the adoption service ensures that service users and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption service, and what services and facilities it provides. This supports the Council priority of ensuring that all children for whom adoption is the plan are placed in a timely and appropriate manner and that services are provided to everyone affected by adoption.

5. Risk Management

There are no risk management issues

6. Financial implications

None

7. Legal implications

The report satisfies the requirement under standard 18.3 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 that the executive side of the local authority approves the statement of purpose and reviews them at least annually.

8. Property implications

None

9. Staffing implications

None

10. Equality implications

The Statement of Purpose ensures that all those affected by the delivery of the adoption service in Walsall have equal access to all relevant information about the services and facilities it provides.

11. Consultation

None required

Background papers

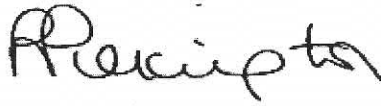
Updated Statement of Purpose for the adoption service

Author

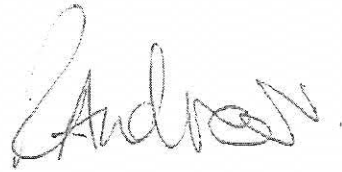
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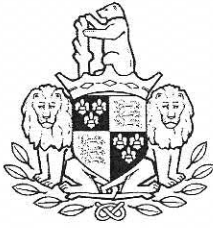
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Pauline Pilkington
Executive Director
22 June 2012



Councillor Rachel Andrew
Portfolio holder
13 July 2012



Walsall Council

WALSALL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

May 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

The Statement of Purpose for Walsall Council Adoption Service is required under the Adoption Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.

Standard 18 states that:

“The adoption agency and adoption support agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. “

“The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be outcome focussed and, for adoption agencies, show how the service will meet outcomes for children. “

“The adoption agency formally approves the statement of purpose and children’s guides, and reviews them at least annually. “

“The agency’s policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and volunteers accurately reflect the statement of purpose. “

It is available on the Walsall Council website.

The Children’s Guide to Adoption is given to children placed for adoption and the Children’s Guide to Adoption Support are given to children who are receiving adoption support.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY IN RELATION TO THE ADOPTION SERVICE.

Walsall Children’s Services aims to provide a service to all its customers that is user friendly, welcoming and non discriminatory.

The aims of the Adoption Service are based on the Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework and are encompassed in the Children and Young People’s Plan 2011 to 2014:

Our Vision

“We believe that all children and young people in Walsall have the right to be healthy, happy and safe, to be loved, valued and respected and to have high aspirations for a successful future. “

Values

“We respect all children, young people and their families – by listening carefully to their views and acting on them wherever possible. We are open and trustworthy – by making decisions transparently, involving others and doing what we say we will. We believe in the potential of all children – by doing all we can to support their development and talents. We are caring and responsible – by acting as good corporate parents and going the ‘extra mile’ in

our supportive approaches to all children. We will protect vulnerable children and young people – by taking firm urgent action when needed, sharing information and not tolerating oppressive behaviour. We engage with children and young people, helping to empower them through supporting their aspirations and giving them responsibility. We celebrate and support cultural diversity and children's sense of identity."

To put this into practice the service strives to promote the following principles:

- Choice and flexibility to ensure the service meets the individual needs of all children who are being looked after by the local authority or for whom adoption has been requested by the birth parent/s
- A creative approach to service delivery and problem solving
- Planning based on clear processes and partnerships to maximise its effectiveness
- Commitment to ongoing improvement against national and service internal standards
- Commitment to promoting a trained work- and carer-force, whose skills are fully utilised and who are able to develop a sense of pride and achievement in their work
- Values of respect, quality and equality.

Based on these principles, Walsall Children's Services aims to provide a comprehensive adoption service to all those who require or request it. The service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and comprehensive policies and procedures.

The nature of the work undertaken by the Adoption Service is as follows:-

- To provide a child/children/young person with a permanent family by adoption, which will meet the needs of that child//children/young person for stability, security and love into their adulthood and beyond
- The recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a wide range of prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of babies, children and young people, which recognise the life long implications of adoption for all those affected
- Counselling pregnant women and - wherever possible – their partners and extended families, where they wish to consider placing their baby for adoption
- Counselling birth families who lose or are at risk of losing their children to adoption through court orders
- Providing counselling for adopted adults, their birth relatives and significant others effected by adoption in accordance with schedule 2 of the Adoption Act 2002.
- Providing an advice and consultancy service to social work colleagues who are working with a child and its family where adoption is the plan

- Undertaking assessments and preparing reports for the court in stepparent, inter-country and other non-agency adoption proceedings
- Preparing reports for Walsall and other agencies' adoption panels and the courts on all aspects of adoption work
- Attending Walsall's adoption panel and the courts on all aspects of adoption work
- Preparing reports for and attending other Local Authority adoption panels when a match has been recommended for a Walsall Council approved family
- Offering a comprehensive adoption support service to all those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2003 both prior to and after an adoption order has been made
- Utilising resources for and from the Adoption West Midlands Consortium

4. NUMBER, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE STAFF EMPLOYED BY THE AUTHORITY FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Currently the Adoption Service has ten qualified social workers (including the team manager) whose qualifications range from the Certificate of Social Services to Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, the Diploma in Social Work and Support and Master of Science (Social Work). There are also two family support officer posts and one post for adoption life story work.

Social workers who are required to complete reports in relation to prospective adopters, adoption placement and any other reports that are required by the Adoption Service must have three years post qualifying experience in child care social work (including direct experience of adoption work). If they do not have this relevant experience, then they can undertake this work under the supervision of a worker who fulfils the above requirement.

Social workers in the Adoption Service are also involved in the authority's programme for Post Qualification training.

Some workers have other relevant qualifications, including the PQ (post qualifying) awards and the MA Child Care Law & Practice etc. Some workers are in the process of obtaining further qualification particularly in the arena of therapeutic services to children with attachment difficulties.

All social workers currently employed have a wide range of experience of working in the field of childcare and family placement and the Adoption Service benefits from a stable staff group.

Through supervision and training, Walsall Council Children's Services ensures that staff have the skills and knowledge to work effectively with adoption cases. The training available is reviewed regularly to make sure that it remains in line with practice and legal developments.

Employee Performance Assessments plans are an integral part of staff development and progression. These are reviewed on a six monthly basis.

The service ensures that appropriate written procedural and practice guidance is available to staff and that this is updated regularly in light of practice and legal changes.

All policies and procedures pertaining to the delivery of Adoption Services are include in the Children's services procedures manual .This is accessible by all staff via the intranet

5. THE SYSTEM IN PLACE TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO ENSURE THAT SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ADOPTION SERVICE ARE EFFECTIVE AND THE QUALITIES OF THOSE SERVICES ARE OF AN APPROPRIATE STANDARD.

All workers have monthly supervision and an annual employee performance assessment interview which is reviewed on a 6 monthly basis.

Information about all children and prospective adoptive families is recorded on the adoption service database.

The adoption panel receives an annual report about its activity and performance. The panel takes a pro-active role on meeting its obligations to monitor the service's performance against the National Minimum Standards. To this effect, it receives routine information about whether time scales have been met for each individual case presented to it.

Six monthly adoption service reports are presented to Cabinet in relation to the management and outcomes of the adoption service

All prospective adopters attend an adoption preparation and assessment course. Evaluation forms are provided throughout the course which enables the trainers to monitor the effectiveness and quality of delivery of the training.

All prospective adoptive parents are required to give written feedback after each training session. This feedback informs both course developments and the skills and learning needs of applicants.

All enquirers are advised of the service's complaints procedure (see appendix 3) and encouraged to provide feedback of their experiences of the service. To this end, all enquirers who receive an initial visit are given a feedback form requesting their comments.

All prospective adoptive parents are asked to provide feedback regarding their attendance at adoption panel. The panel are provided with this feedback through the annual report.

We regularly ask panel members for their feedback on the process of the panel and evaluate this to continuously improve the effectiveness of the panel; permanence is normally made at the four-month review. Once an Adoption Plan has been made it is monitored in accordance with the regulatory requirements. Panel specifically monitor that the child's and parent's views have been sought. The plan for the child is also monitored through the

statutory reviewing process. Adoption services are developed and monitored within the Children's Service Plan.

The adoption service works with the Performance and Outcomes Team to develop systems which monitor the service quality to ensure continuous improvement.

Mechanisms are in place which regularly audits the delivery and development of the adoption service against National Minimum standards and the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

6. THE PROCEDURES FOR RECRUITING, PREPARING, ASSESSING, APPROVING AND SUPPORTING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

The agreed policies and procedures governing the functioning of the adoption service are included in the Children's Service Procedure Manual.

The key features covered by the policies and procedures are highlighted below.

Recruitment, assessment and training

- In accordance with the Children Act 1989, the needs of the child are paramount when seeking adoptive families. Priority is given to applicants who can meet the needs of the Walsall children awaiting adoption.
- Recruitment of adoptive parents is based on recruitment targets that reflect the needs of the children who need permanent families. These targets may change from time to time. A copy of the targets is held on the Adoption Service enquiry duty file.
- Adoptive parents are recruited to provide permanent families for children with a wide range of needs, taking account of their gender, ethnicity, language, religion, background experiences and disability.
- Enquiries are welcomed from all sections of the community who may be able to meet the needs of Looked After children. Children needing adoptive families come from a wide variety of backgrounds and an infinite variety of needs. The agency therefore embraces the diversity of applicants who have differing life experiences and a range of skills.
- Applications from foster carers who already care for the child where the plan is adoption are welcomed. In such circumstances they will be considered as new applicants.
- Applications are welcomed from people who live both in and outside the Walsall area. However it is recognised that the assessed placement needs of children are often best met in adoptive placements outside the Walsall area. Reciprocal arrangements are in use with the Black

Country, West Midlands and National consortia. Where there is an expression of interest in a particular child/children and the family are not approved adopters and live a considerable distance away, issues need to be considered with regard to the assessment, support and attendance of training. In such cases an initial visit to ascertain details and to check out the practicalities may be necessary to determine whether the assessment may proceed.

- While it is recognised that the needs of most children will be served more effectively by adoption within the U.K it may in specific circumstances be appropriate to consider applicants not domiciled in the U.K to meet a child's particular needs with respect to race and culture.
- Enquirers who are still having investigations or treatment in the hope of achieving a pregnancy will need to be informed that we would not consider proceeding with any application until treatment has ended. It is essential that applicants recognise and come to terms with their infertility e.g. the grieving process before moving on to start the adoption process. If treatment has ended this will need to be ascertained at the initial visit stage.
- During the initial visit the social worker will ensure that the enquirer is fully aware of:
 - a) the assessment process including details as required in the prospective adopters report and the timescales
 - b) the training requirements
 - c) the needs of children waiting
- If following the initial visit a decision is made to proceed with the assessment, the enquirers are invited to make a formal application
- If a joint application is made, it is an expectation for both applicants to attend the training course and their commitment is discussed at the visit. If for any reason there are difficulties in attending, this is brought to the Team Manager's attention for further consideration.
- Walsall runs its courses jointly with the neighbouring local authorities to avoid delay for applicants. Enquirers are given the choice of attending a course within Walsall or in another location in the Black Country.
- The applicant's identity is verified at a follow up meeting with the applicants after the initial home visit through sight of full birth certificates as the preferred option or photo card driving licence.
- The applicants are also invited to complete the medical declaration form. This is particularly important if the applicants have any particular medical problems. In such cases they will be informed that we suggest referral to the agencies Medical Adviser and that a full medical may be suggested at this stage (e.g. forms A.H).

- On satisfactory completion of the preparation course a worker is allocated in order to begin the assessment. The worker will make contact and on the first assessment visit, plans for the assessment are made and a number of appointment dates are arranged in advance.
- The social worker will make a full assessment using the prospective adopters report as a model.
- During the process of the assessment the social worker will ensure that:
 - a) They interview three referees, one of whom is a relative.
 - b) In the cases of a joint application they interview the applicants separately at least once.
 - c) Ex-partners where there has been joint parenting in previous partnerships are contacted by the service and may be interviewed.
 - d) All household members are interviewed accordingly, including children, and the following checks are completed: Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau; NSPCC; Area Health Checks; Local Authority and Education if applicants have children under 16.
 - e) The applicants are given the appropriate medical forms (forms A.H) the covering letter and the fee claim form in order to arrange medicals with their own G.P.
 - f) Applicants are advised that they will need to provide a fully detailed account of their employment history. Any gaps in employment may be checked. Any applicants who have previously worked with children on either a voluntary basis or paid employment need to know that we may contact the appropriate agency.
- Where there are concerns about an application the adoption service can present a brief report to the adoption panel the purpose of this report is to give a prospective adopter an opportunity for this application to be considered by the adoption panel.
- Once the full information is gathered the social worker completes the prospective adopters' report, the social worker visits the applicants and shares with them the details with the exception of confidential material. (This would include the statutory reference details, interviews with referees and the medical adviser's comments). The assessing social worker will discuss the medical advisers' comments with the applicants.
- The applicants receive a copy of the prospective adopters' report and are invited to forward their comments in writing within 10 days. The applicants also sign the prospective adopters' report accordingly to confirm that they have read its contents.
- Applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel themselves if they wish, in order to answer any questions themselves and to meet with the

members who will be making the recommendations with regard to their application. Not all applicants will wish to attend. They may also waive their right to do this.

- The legal requirement is that anyone applying to the court for an adoption order must be at least 21 years old unless he/she is the parent of the child. Whilst there is no legal upper age limit applicants should generally be of an age to reflect that of a child's potential birth parent.

Support to placements

- Following attendance at an adoption preparation and assessment course, all prospective adoptive carers will have an allocated adoption social worker. Once a placement has been made the child's social worker will be involved in supervising the child in placement as required by the adoption legislation. The focus of the supervision is to promote secure attachments for the child, guidance is provided to the social worker.
- Children placed for adoption are subject to statutory reviews under the Adoption Agencies' Regulations (amended 1997). This process involves an independent reviewing officer to ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for his or her future are progressing satisfactorily.
- Where a placement for adoption ends in an unplanned way or there is an imminent risk of it doing so, the service will convene a meeting to consider what has happened and to help with planning for the future. Reports of placements that end in this way and the outcome of subsequent meetings will be considered by the adoption panel.
- The Agency recognises the need to be flexible in arranging comprehensive support to adoption placements. In order to achieve this, an adoption support plan is compiled for each child placed, which details the support to be provided including financial support. Details of these arrangements are covered in Walsall's multi-agency adoption support strategy (available as a separate document).

7. ADOPTION SUPPORT

- Following the inspection of the Adoption Service by Ofsted in December 2007, the decision was made to integrate adoption support services within the adoption team. Previously it was located within the permanence support team within the Fostering Service.
- This was effective from September 2008.
- Since October 2005, the Adoption Service has ensured that all new adoptive placements have an adoption support plan, which specifies Walsall's and other key agencies' future commitments to the placement in terms of practical and professional support, allowances, involvement

in any contact arrangements, specialist medical or therapeutic inputs and general advice. The plan is subject to review every 12 months.

- Where families seek assistance after the adoption has taken place, the service will respond in a way that recognises the special circumstances of adoptive families. In circumstances where families are seeking specialist help for their children, this will be considered subject to an assessment unless it has already been agreed as part of the post adoption plan.
- Walsall Adoption Service provides a 'letterbox' (indirect written contact) facility through which birth families and adoptive children and families can communicate as part of an agreed plan.
- The service provides a counselling service for adult adoptees who wish to seek information about their birth parents, in accordance with Section 98 of the Adoption Act 2002.
- The service provides assistance and counselling to birth relatives who seek information about their adult adopted children in accordance with the schedule 2 of the Adoption Act 2002.
- In line with the adoption support services regulations, the agency arranges regular peer support meetings these meetings provide opportunities for adopters to meet both with adoption social workers and other adopters. These meetings are mainly informal organised with other adopters, but should there be a need for a more focused meeting this is arranged. Every year the Adoption Service arranges a social event for adoptive families.
- A review of the post adoption service has identified the need for further training events for adoptive parents, to be arranged during the course of the year.

8. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- The Walsall Adoption Service will be inspected at a minimum, every three years by **OFSTED** according to the standards laid down in the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2011.
- To ensure that the adoption service meet these standards, work is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the Quality and Performance unit develop a tool for ongoing audits of the service.
- The service is working jointly with other organisations and particularly with the Black Country Authorities and the West Midlands Consortium, to develop services where it is clear that doing so will provide benefits for children requiring adoption in Borough of Walsall.
- The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting provides bi-annual reports to the Cabinet in relation to their role as corporate parents within the

adoption service including information about numbers of children waiting for adoption at different stages in the process.

- Walsall Children's Services has ensured that adoption is included in all its major plans for children, in particular The Children's Services Plan.

9. INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTIONS

- The service undertakes assessments on people wishing to adopt a child from a country outside of the United Kingdom. In such cases a set charge is made for the work involved, which includes undertaking the assessment, consideration by Walsall Adoption Panel, following up references and statutory checks and all administration.
- Where people are seeking to adopt a related child from overseas the set charge will usually apply, although the Adoption Service may reduce or waive the fee in exceptional circumstances.

10. COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE SERVICE

Walsall Council Children's Services Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

In most cases the local manager responsible for the service will be able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction.

Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the response at this stage, you can ask for your complaint to be formally investigated

This investigation will be carried out by an officer from the Customer Care Team who is not directly involved with this service. This officer will prepare a report and, after considering the facts, we will write to you with the outcome.

You will have the right, if you prefer, to ask for a formal investigation of your complaint from the start.

Stage 3

If you are still unhappy then you have the right to ask for your complaint to be considered by the Complaints Review Panel. The Panel has three members, two of whom are local councillors and a third member who chairs the Panel and is entirely independent of Social Services and the Council.

If your complaint reaches this stage, the Consumer Relations Officer will contact you to explain what happens.

How long will it take?

An acknowledgement will be sent to you within 5 working days and a full reply within a further 15 working days. If the complaint is a complex one you will be told of any delay and advised when a full reply can be expected.

What if I am still not satisfied?

This is as far as your complaint can go within Children's Services, but if you remain dissatisfied, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman looks into complaints about local councils.

The kinds of complaints they deal with are:
If the Council

- does something wrong
- does something they should not have done
- fails to do something it should have done

Contact the Customer Care Team who will send you a copy of the Ombudsman's leaflet "Complaint about the Council."

Contact details for Customer Care Team

**Council House
Lichfield Street
Walsall WS1 1TW**

**Tel: 01922 650489
Fax: 01922 614210**

10. CONTACT DETAILS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

**Adoption Service
Pinfold Health Centre
Field Road
Bloxwich
Walsall
WS3 3JJ**

11. THE ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR OFSTED:-

**Cumberland Place
Nottingham
NG1 6HJ**

**Telephone No. 08456 404040
Fax No. 08456 404049
Email enquiries @ofsted.gov.uk
Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk**

**National Youth Advisory Service
Telephone No. 0800 616101**