Family Services

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1. Introduction

The Statement of Purpose ("the Statement") has been written in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and relevant statutory provisions. It will detail what services are provided, the governing principals and who manages and provides the services.

The Statement is to be read by the following:

- Children and young people
- Prospective and approved adoptive families
- Birth family members
- Social workers working for Barnet and other local authorities.
- Councillors
- Adoption and Fostering Panel members
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills (Ofsted) Members of the public
- Special Guardians

The statement is available on Barnet's internet – www.barnet.gov.uk/adoption
The Statement is reviewed and revised, if necessary, at regular intervals and Ofsted will be notified of any revisions.

2. Principles of the Adoption Service

We are committed to delivering services in line with the following principles and values:

- The child's welfare is paramount, and his or her wishes and feelings should be taken into account according to age and understanding.
- Wherever possible it is best for children to be brought up by their own birth family.
- A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are all important
 factors to consider in finding a new family. Where possible the adoptive family should
 reflect this, but 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.
- Plans will be expedited in a timely way to avoid delays; recognising the detrimental impact that delay can have on a child.
- Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption.
- Every effort should be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- Every child is entitled to information about his or her birth family in order to promote a sense of identity, and arrangements will be made for on-going contact direct or indirect unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this.

- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that ensure that they are listened to and provided with support throughout the process.
- Prospective adoptive parents should be valued and respected. The service will welcome applicants regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, class or marital status.
- Services will be delivered effectively and efficiently, in a fair and accessible manner that does not discriminate against groups or individuals, and respects confidentiality.
- To work effectively staff must have access to appropriate supervision, training and development opportunities.
- The service will be planned and provided in collaboration with other relevant agencies and organisations.
- The service will monitor and review services, listen to service users, and constantly strive to make improvements.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Adoption Service

Any provision of adoption services falls under the National Minimum Standards 2014¹ and alongside the adoption regulations, forms the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

The Adoption Service in Barnet is committed to providing a high quality range of adoption and adoption support services for children unable to live with their birth families. We believe that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their emotional, physical and developmental needs throughout their life. When children cannot achieve this within their own birth families, we are committed to finding them such a family.

Our Aims

- Ensure that all children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and
 effective care for the duration of their childhood.
- Identify the needs of children arising from race, ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language, and meet these as far as possible.
- Treat birth families fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process and ensure they have access to appropriate support services.
- Ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents are welcomed, responded to promptly, and given clear information about the services available.
- Provide effective, high quality support to adopters and children who have been adopted.

¹ http://www.minimumstandards.org/adoption nms.pdf

• Provide counselling, advice and support to adopted adults and their families in recognition of the lifelong impact of adoption.

Our Objectives

- To increase the number of children adopted from the care system, in line with national and local targets.
- To minimise the delay in achieving a permanent placement where adoption is identified as being in the child's best interests.
- To recruit or assess a sufficient number of adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children needing adoptive families.
- To complete assessments of prospective adopters within six months from the date of their application.
- To provide a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies.
- To work effectively with colleagues in the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) to achieve our common aims and objectives.
- To commission an effective service to provide independent support to birth families where adoption is identified as a plan.
- To commission an effective specialist service to undertake work around inter-country adoption.
- To recruit and retain high quality staff and to supervise and support these staff with appropriate training and development opportunities.

4. Current Position

The Government has placed a high priority on adoption reform. The main aims of reform were to reduce delay and secure early permanence for children and expedite the approval process for adopters.

A number of papers and guidance were published by Government including:

- Adoption: Getting It Right, Making It Work July 2014
- Adoption Statutory Guidance Autumn 2014
- The Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Adoption Support Services (Amendment) Regulations 2014
- The Adoption and Children Act Register Regulations 2014
- Statutory Guidance on Court Orders and Pre-Proceedings 2014

The Children and Families Act 2014 also enacted some key legislative changes which included:

- Encouragement of placement of Looked After Children with prospective adopters (i.e. 'fostering for adoption');
- Repeal of requirement to give due consideration to ethnicity;
- Requirement for local authorities to make arrangements for recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters;
- Expedited approval process for prospective adopters;
- Duty to provide information to prospective adopters; and
- There is a robust quality assurance process in place before evidence is filed at court.

Care and Permanence planning across the service is commenced at an early stage and progress is tracked at a weekly meeting, chaired by a senior manager.

5. The Adoption Team

The Adoption Team is managed within the Family Services Division of the London Borough of Barnet, and is led by the Adoption Team Manager who is accountable to the Head of Service. The Head of Service is accountable to the Director of Children's Social Care.

The registered manager of the service is the Team Manager and the responsible individual is the Head of Service. The Agency Decision Maker is the Director Children's Social Care. The ASSA is the Adoption Team Manager who also has responsibility for Adoption Support.

The Adoption Team consists of 4.5 FTE Adoption social workers and 3 FTE Post Permanence social workers as well as a social work assistant post. Attached to the team are a further two social work assistants who are responsible for all life story work. A Campaigns and Communication Officer is shared with and managed by the Fostering Recruitment Team Manager

The team consists of very experienced social workers, who are all registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) with post qualified experience ranging from 29 to 7 years. All staff members receive regular supervision from the Team Manager.

There is an emphasis on learning and professional development and social workers are encouraged to extend their knowledge and skills in this specialist area of work. This is achieved primarily through the comprehensive training programme that is arranged through the NLAFC.

6. Services Provided

London Borough of Barnet through its adoption service provides services to the following:

Children where the plan is for adoption

- Birth families of children being adopted
- Prospective adopters²
- Approved adopters
- Non-agency adoptions
- Adoptive families
- Adopted adults
- Special Guardians
- Children in Adoption and Special Guardianship placements

Children where the plan is for adoption

The Adoption Service is committed to placing children with adoptive families without delay where this is the plan. To achieve this we work closely with social workers in the Intervention and Planning teams who lead the planning for permanence process with individual children.

The Social Worker for the child will ascertain their views and feelings concerning adoption, based on his or her age and understanding, and this will influence the care plan and be incorporated into the Child's Permanency Report.

The Adoption Team Manager will be aware of all children where there is the potential for adoption to be the care plan via the weekly Permanency tracking meetings. Monthly Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs) are held with the Adoption Team and social worker to ensure that there is no delay in securing permanence for the child once the final decision has been made. The family finding will be allocated to an Adoption social worker as soon as it is clear that the care plan for the child may be adoption.

In the first instance an adoptive family for the child will be sought from within the group of adopters approved by the agency or adopters in the process of being assessed. To avoid delay we aim to match prior to the making of a Placement Order so introductions to a new family can take place as soon as we have legal permission.

Where there is not a suitable match within Barnet, adopters will be sought from our partners within the NLAFC. There are a range of practical processes for achieving this including sharing the profiles of children and adopters at managers meetings; adoption exchange days and the circulation of flyers. If it is not possible to find a placement in this way, then children's profiles are uploaded to Linkmaker and may be advertised in specialist press. The process for matching children with adopters follows an established written policy and procedure that includes information sharing, matching meetings and a recommendation from the Adoption Panel.

Birth families of children being adopted

The social worker for the child is responsible for working closely with birth parents and other relatives in relation to the proposed adoption of their child. This includes providing information about the process, as well as listening to their views and feelings and incorporating these into the Child's Permanency Report.

It is recognised that birth families need advice and counselling from a source that is independent of the local authority, and there is a legal requirement to provide this. Barnet achieve this by commissioning an independent service through the NLAFC. The current provider is PAC-UK who runs counselling sessions as well as a range of other services throughout the Consortium.

North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium

As part of the new adoption reforms implemented by the Government to expedite approval for adopters and reduce delay, the NLAFC members agreed to centralise the recruitment into two teams. Barnet are members of the 'North' team along with Enfield and Haringey. Fortnightly information sessions are held in either the 'North' or 'South' team which comprises Camden, Hackney and Islington. Expressions of Interest are divided equally between the 6 boroughs, taking into account geographical location and capacity.

Further as part of the NLAFC partnership, the two social workers dedicated to family finding have regular meetings with their colleagues in other boroughs which ensure that a possibility of a match is maximised across the consortium.

Approved adopters

On approval, adopters become eligible for a range of support services, some of which are provided directly by the team, and some of which are provided through collaborative work with the NLAFC. Adopters are given an adoption pack to inform them of the services available that provides welfare rights advice and guidance on the legal process.

Barnet has established an annual newsletter to provide adoptive families with information. This is managed by sending information, including dates for adoption exchange days, and training and workshops that are available, to approved adopters via emails and letters. The training programme is delivered through agreements with the NLAFC and this year covers topics including:

- the education of adopted children;
- telling children about their adoptive history; and contact.

Barnet arranges social events for adopters and Special Guardian's, including summer parties. However, the majority of the work with approved adopters and Special Guardian's is in relation to specific children. Before a match is agreed, adopters are given full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and to give an opportunity to discuss this and to think about the implications for them and their family.

They will be involved in discussions on how they can best maintain links, including contact, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.

When a placement is made the Adoption team works closely with the adopters and the Education Service to ensure that children and young people have a stable school place and appropriate educational support. There are also links with Barnet Health Authority to ensure adopted children's have access to specialist health services where these are needed. Where therapeutic support is indicated pre or post placement, an application to the Adoption Support Fund is made to secure the funding required in order for the work to be undertaken. Specific case support will be provided where there are difficulties within the placement, or the adoption appears vulnerable. We aim to have a focused and seamless adoption support service.

In cases where children are to be placed under a Special Guardianship Order, liaison with children's social workers and SGO assessors to look at the support needs highlighted in the support plan that accompanies the assessment ensures that these families receive the same high level of support as that offered to adoptive families.

Financial Support

Financial support is provided to eligible adoptive families through the adoption allowance scheme, which includes an annual review of their continuing need for an allowance. There is now standardised adoption allowance guidance used throughout the NLAFC. New adopters may be provided with a grant to purchase new equipment to help them with the task of caring for a child, and their expenses of travel and reasonable subsistence during introductions are also reimbursed. If required Barnet also pays the adopters legal expenses in contested adoption hearings and routinely pays the fee for the Adoption Order application.

Non-Agency and Inter-country Adoptions

The Adoption Team is responsible for providing a service to Barnet residents in relation to non-agency adoptions. The NLAFC commissions an independent agency, the IAC, to undertake all aspects of preparing and assessing applicants who wish to adopt a child from overseas. When the adopters return to the UK with a child the Adoption Team provides the welfare supervision of the placement and provides the report for the court proceedings. Barnet's Conference and Reviewing Team also reviews these placements once the family have brought the child into the country. In adoptions where the child is not in the local authority care, usually step-parent adoptions, court reports are prepared by social workers in the Adoption Team.

7. Adoption and Post Permanence Support

The Adoption and Post Permanence Support Team coordinates contact, both direct and indirect between adoptive families and birth relatives, and does this through the

administration of a letter-box contact scheme, as well as direct work with adopters, children and birth families. Adoption and Post Permanence Support runs a number of events for service users including:

Support Groups:

- Adoptive Parents Bi-monthly in Barnet and in Enfield
- Children and Teenagers
 — Children's Therapeutic Groups in 8 week blocks funded through the Adoption Support Fund and delivered by Body and Soul. Parent support group runs alongside
- Adopted Adults Bi-monthly (run jointly with NLAFC)
- Parents of teenagers monthly group run jointly with NLAFC
- Birth relatives This is organised by the PAC-UK (via NLAFC contract)
- Special Guardians- Monthly Support groups delivered by Kinship Connected in all six of the boroughs comprising the NLAFC.

Adoption Children's Party:

Barnet holds an annual party for adopters and adopted children. This is a social event for the adopted community to meet up and talk to each other in a less formal environment.

Special Guardian's Children's Party

During 2019 NLAFC is holding 1 event for Special Guardians and their children.

Free Training for Adopters and Special Guardians:

- Newly approved adopters 3 times a year (run through NLAFC)
- Adopters 5-7 times a year and each local authority takes responsibility for 1-2 sessions (run through NLAFC)
- Adopting Changes Biannual 6 weekly course (run through NLAFC)
- 3 training courses for Special Guardians delivered throughout the year by NLAFC workers
- Specific training courses for both adopters and Special Guardians funded via the Adoption Support Fund

Training for Professionals

Foster carers- transitions to Adoption delivered jointly with fostering staff

Therapeutic Services

Any required therapeutic needs are assessed by a social worker from the post permanence team and once an intervention has been agreed an application for funding is made to the Adoption Support Fund. If necessary, match funding may be agreed for those who require services over and above the funding level offered by the ASF. Therapeutic services are subject to regular review and further applications are made if indicated.

PAC-UK

NLAFC has a contract with PAC-UK to offer counselling services to parents, adopted adults, birth relatives and special guardians. There are monthly surgeries in Barnet, Enfield, Hackney and more frequently in Kentish Town.

PAC-UK also offers a service to birth family members whose children have plans of adoption for up to 2 years following referral. There is a protocol where children's social workers refer birthparents following decisions that children will not be returning home.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Assessments

When contacted by adoptive or special guardianship families we undertake an assessment to determine what the families need for support. Sometimes these requests are straightforward and can be dealt with via a single discreet piece of work and no full assessment is undertaken in these instances. However, when the situation is more complex and/or a number of agencies are involved – we will assess the situation either jointly or in collaboration with these other agencies. The outcome of these assessments can be an offer of services including therapy, mentoring, family work, consultation to school or assistance with contact.

Since the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund, Barnet has made good use of the fund in order to provide therapeutic services for adopted children and their parents. This includes therapy, therapeutic life-story work, specialist training courses and assessments for neurological difficulties or sensory processing disorders.

Barnet welcomes the scope of the fund being extended to pre-placement Adoptive families, families who have adopted children from overseas and to Special Guardianship families.

Life-Story Work

All adopted children require skilled life-story work in order to make sense of the past. Children's social workers carefully prepare children to understand why they cannot return to their birth parents. Adoptive parents need the information, tools and skills to talk to their children about the past. Without this adopted children are likely to struggle to form trusting relationships, to understand their own narratives or to make sense of the trauma and abuse in their past. There is an additional risk that they will endanger themselves by seeking out birth family members in adolescence without any understanding of the reality of what that means.

The Adoption Support team has two Life Story workers. At the time of matching, a life story worker is allocated to each child. These workers meet with Adoptive families, carefully examine the records, sometimes meet/talk with birth family members to get accurate information about children's histories. They then produce age appropriate letters and books in close conjunction with adoptive parents. These books are completed using the Joy Rees model. The later-in-life letters are written to be shared with a child around the age of 12 years.

The Post Permanency team delivers an annual training for Adoptive parents on how to talk to children about the past. This is offered to parents in NLAFC.

The Post Permanency team is also able to deliver therapeutic life story work to older children on request or to apply to the ASF for a therapist to deliver this.

Support for adoptive parents in their children's schools

In addition to training for parents and regarding the needs of children who have experienced developmental trauma/ who have attachment difficulties, social workers can attend schools to support parents in meetings at the schools.

Adopted adults

The Adoption Support Team provides Birth record counselling for adopted adults and their birth relatives. This can lead to the provision of a search, intermediary and reunion service. If the adopted adult/ birth relative cannot be easily traced people are referred onto registered agencies who they can choose to pay for a search. The client can then ask Barnet Adoption Support team or PAC-UK to act as an intermediary.

The NLAFC organises a support group for adopted adults that started in late 2008 and has met bi-monthly since then, with positive feedback from participants. Barnet also subscribes to PAC-UK which provides a free outreach service for persons who are adopted and their birth family members.

Requests for records are dealt with by the Post Permanency team. Once it has been ascertained that the requestor is a registered Adoption Support agency the file is redacted to remove third party information, checks are done to see if any Veto has been placed on file and the information is forwarded to the requestor.

Letterbox and Services to Birth Relatives (of adopted children)

The team has a dedicated Letterbox coordinator to ensure that indirect contact between adopted children and their birth relatives. The coordinator also offers a dedicated service to adopters and birth relatives visiting them in their homes and offering counselling as well as support for direct contact arrangements. The flow of information between adoptive and birth families is carefully monitored and checked to ensure that adopted children's needs are prioritised at all times.

Contact Mediation (for Special Guardians)

At the current time Barnet Family Resource centre has developed a service with the Post Permanence to offer short term supervised contact and mediation sessions to improve the quality of contact between children placed with special guardians and their birth parents. The service is very helpful in cases where there are disagreements between family members that impact upon the well-being of the children concerned.

Handbook

The six boroughs have collaborated together to write a single adoption support handbook for all adoptive parents to be given at the time of approval. This provides parents with an understanding of the issues facing adopted children included difficulties in school; contact; identity formation and lifestory as well an overview of the services available in their own local area, as well as within the wider NLAFC area. The Handbook is updated annually.

8. The Adoption and Fostering Panel

The Adoption and Fostering Panel sits on a monthly basis and where required will provide additional panels. It operates within the relevant regulations and statutory guidance. In January 2018, the Adoption and Fostering Panels were amalgamated and new members recruited to reflect the change of the Panel remit. The panel has an independent chair and a vice chair and up to 6 other members with personal or professional experience of adoption and fostering. The Adoption Panel also receives advice from a legal advisor and a representative from Health. The Agency Advisor sits on the Adoption and Fostering Panel to provide advice, guidance and information to Panel and social workers attending.

The membership of the Adoption and Fostering Panel reflects the diversity of the local community. Training for panel members takes place at least once a year, and members, including the chair, are subject to annual appraisals.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel makes recommendations on the following Adoption issues;

- whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt; including dual approval in order to offer early permanence;
- whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a particular child;
- that when parents are relinquishing the child for adoption, adoption is the best plan for the child.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel is clear in stipulating their reasons in making these recommendations. They are expected to also advise about restricting the exercise of parental responsibility and about appropriate arrangements for contact. Having considered each case, the Adoption and Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker for them to consider and make the final decision.

9. Monitoring and Evaluating Service Provision

The Adoption Service has a range of measures in place to monitor and evaluate practice on an on-going basis. At a team level this achieved through the operation of established policies and procedures, on-going staff supervision, annual staff appraisals, monitoring of complaints and compliments, and through regularly conducted case file audits.

Prospective adopters are also consulted periodically, especially at adopter's social events. They are asked to complete evaluation forms after they have attended the Adoption and Fostering Panel which are reviewed and considered by the Adoption Team Manager.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel has a crucial role in scrutinising work. The Chair provides quality assurance feedback to the agency though the monitoring meetings, produces an annual report that includes a range of statistical data on the work of the Adoption and Fostering Panel, and provides an independent perspective on the team's work. The Adoption and Fostering Panel also receives reports on the progress of children and prospective adopters awaiting placement and adoption.

Children's social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers oversee and monitor care plans for those children where adoption has been identified as the plan, and will make representations about plans, progress and timescales. The majority of cases are also before the courts so the children's court-appointed guardians and the court themselves offer scrutiny of the work being undertaken. Also monthly PPMs will ensure that the social worker and Adoption Team have a forum to challenge each other over case issues and take appropriate steps to resolve them.

The weekly Permanence tracking meeting is now embedded, where senior managers from across the Service scrutinise all care plans. This is an opportunity for social workers to attend and raise more complex case issues and for the monitoring of all children within care to ensure that the most appropriate permanency plan is developed as soon as possible.

An Agency Advisor monitors and quality assures work produced by social workers. It is also an opportunity for social workers to seek practical advice and guidance on processes and procedure and relevant documents such as the Child Permanency Report.

There are arrangements in place to monitor the quality of services where they are commissioned on behalf of the adoption service. The PAC (birth family counselling) project manager provided quarterly reports and presents in person at the NLAFC team managers group.

10. Complaints, Compliments and Appeals

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption service, the Barnet Adoption Team welcomes and encourages feedback from service users, providers and partner agencies. We recognise that children, their birth parents, adoptive parents and prospective adopters are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, to therefore inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

The Adoption Service is always keen to receive feedback of a positive or negative nature, and can be contacted by letter, telephone or e-mail as follows:

Adoption Service

Building 2 North London Business Park (NLBP), Oakleigh Road South, London, N11 1NP

Telephone: 020 8359 5705 E-mail: adoption@barnet.gov.uk

Web: http://www.barnet.gov.uk/info/160/adoption/352/adoption

Alternatively, or where complaints cannot be resolved directly with the Adoption Team, Barnet has an independent complaints service based at:

Complaints Officer

Barnet's Children's Social Care London Borough of Barnet, Building 2, North London Business Park, Oakleigh Road South, London, N11 1NP

Telephone: 020 8359 7008

E-mail: childrens.service.complaints@barnet.gov.uk

The complaints service will ensure that the complaint is dealt with in a fair and just manner and according to guidance. There is a leaflet advising upon the procedure for complaint that is made available by the Adoption Service.

Complaints to the service are monitored and recorded, and Ofsted are informed of each complaint at the earliest opportunity.

When applicants to become adopters are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the Adoption Panel and/or the decision of the Agency Decision Maker; they are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process will be provided by the Adoption Service or can be accessed from:

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956 Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

Web: http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

11. Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

The London Child Protection Procedures provide the procedural guidance for safeguarding children. We provide regular child protection training for all staff and ensure they are updated about good practice. There is a close liaison between all children teams and the safeguarding section so that everyone is kept fully informed and aware of child protection issues.

12. The Registration Authority

Ofsted is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. They can be contacted at:

Ofsted National Business Unit Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester, M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@Ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.Ofsted.gov.uk

13. Useful Links

The following agencies and organisations may be of interest:

Office for the Children's Rights Director

Ofsted

Aviation House

125 Kingsway

London, WC2B 6SE

Tel: 0800 528 0731

Web: http://www.rights4me.org

Department for Education – Children and Young People

Web: http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/adoption

Adoption UK

Linden House 55 The Green South Bar Street Banbury, OX16 9AB

Tel: 01295 752240

Web: http://www.adoptionuk.org

North London Adoption Consortium

3 Elwood Street London, N5 1EB

Tel: 0800 6940101

Web: http://www.adoptionnorthlondon.org