



# Adoption West – Voluntary Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose

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## 1. Introduction

The Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with the requirements set out in the law and regulations. These include:

- Children Act 1989
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002 (A & C Act)
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (AAR)
- Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) regulations 2012
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2014 (NMS)
- The Care Planning, placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013
- Care Planning, Placement and Case review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Adoption and Children Act Register (Search and Inspection) Regulations 2017

The Statement of Purpose is intended as a useful source of information for children, young people, adopters, prospective adopters, staff and other professionals. The statement provides information about Adoption West and the services we provide including the aims and objectives.

A copy of the Statement of Purpose is published on the Adoption West website and is made available upon request to:

- Ofsted
- Users of the service
- Any person working for the Adoption Agency
- Any child in receipt of a service from the Adoption Agency
- Any parent or guardian of any child receipt of a service from the Adoption Agency

Children and young people are also provided with age appropriate guides. This Statement of Purpose is reviewed annually by the Adoption West Board.

## 2. Principles

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their needs throughout their childhood and beyond.

- Where possible this should be within their birth family, however when this is not possible finding an adopted family should be given serious consideration for each child.
- The child's welfare should be the centre of the adoption process
- The child's wishes and feelings will be taken into consideration at all stages of the adoption process
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, gender identity and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

### **3. Adoption West**

Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) commissioned to deliver adoption services, by 6 local authorities – Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES), Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. It is a company limited by guarantee and is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency. Service delivery is defined by a contract that sets out specific performance measures and the reporting requirements of the RAA. The local authorities make up the controlling committee of company members with ultimate responsibility for organisational performance and appointment / dismissal of directors.

The service operates from 3 hub premises each comprising a multidisciplinary team of recruitment, assessment, matching and support staff. There is one Adoption/Permanence Panel.

**Adoption West primary address:**

Adoption West  
Floor 2, Old County Hall,  
Bythesea Rd,  
Trowbridge,  
Wiltshire  
BA14 8JN

Email: [info@adoptionwest.co.uk](mailto:info@adoptionwest.co.uk)

Website: [www.adoptionwest.co.uk](http://www.adoptionwest.co.uk)

The Responsible Individual is Andy Dempsey, Director,  
Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TG.  
Phone: 01452 583639

The Registered Manager is Alison Lewis, Adoption West Service Director.  
Floor 2, Old County Hall, Bythesea Rd, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN  
Phone: 03303 550333

**4. Our Ambition**

In collaboration with our partners, we aim to improve performance particularly:

- In reducing the time that children wait for adoptive placements
- In improving the experience for prospective adopters from initial inquiry, through the assessment process, panel approval and placement matching
- In the delivery of post adoption support services.

**5. Our vision**

Adoption West's overall vision and purpose is:

'Together we will deliver the best service, enabling children to live and flourish in adoptive families that provide them with security and lifelong relationships'

**6. Our aims and objectives**

Adoption West aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- More children will be identified earlier for an adoption plan

- We will recruit a larger pool of adopters with diverse skills and abilities including more adoptive parents able to consider “hard to place” children
- Fewer children will wait more than 6 months for an adoptive family
- Children will experience fewer moves before being settled into a permanent home
- Our adopters will be better prepared with relevant training and support
- There will be fewer disrupted adoptions
- We will be more efficient with our resources to achieve best value
- An increased range of post-adoption services will reach more adoptive families to improve the quality of family relationships
- Children and young people will have a strong sense of their identity

We aim to provide:

- High quality care in a safe, stable and nurturing family environment allowing children and young people to thrive and achieve.
- A commitment to a child/young person-centred approach.
- Stability and consistency in the lives of children to enable them to fulfil their potential.
- Respect for and promotion of the racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of children and young people.
- A commitment to the recruitment of adopters from diverse backgrounds with varied skills so that we can offer a range of placements for children and young people that enable genuine choice and maximum opportunities for appropriate matching in order to secure improved outcomes.
- A commitment to the recruitment of early permanence carers to offer children earlier placements, greater stability and fewer placement moves, where it has been assessed to be in the best interests of the child.
- A commitment to the timely family finding, matching and placement of children
- A commitment to increase the proportion of harder to place children including siblings to be matched with stable adoptive families
- An inclusive partnership-based approach which embraces children, their families, early permanence carers, the local authority and other agency colleagues, particularly, health, education and voluntary sector partners.
- A commitment to ongoing learning and training of adopters and early permanence carers and staff.
- High quality lifelong adoption supports sensitive and responsive to the needs of adopted children, adoptive parents and birth families
- A commitment to supporting adopted children and adults in learning about and understanding their identity and lifestory.

Agency objectives:

- To recruit, prepare, assess and support a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children with a plan for adoption.

- To ensure the earliest possible matching for children there will be a strong practice focus on early permanence.
- To develop a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with local authorities and other relevant agencies in keeping with the Adoption Minimum Standards.
- To ensure that Adoption West employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver a high standard of adoption services.
- To enable strong relationships with local authority childcare teams to minimise delay for children when finding adoptive placements
- To increase the proportion of harder to place children within appropriately matched adoptive families e.g. sibling groups by recruiting a diverse pool of adopters who have the skills and abilities to meet more complex need and develop support services to support more complex placements accordingly.
- To ensure strong partnerships with local authority agencies to ensure childcare planning processes provide the opportunity for adoption to be considered for every child who might benefit from it.
- To ensure strong partnership working with other Voluntary Adoption Agencies and RAAs to ensure there is a sufficient range of adopters and support services to meet the needs of children and their families.
- To ensure that applicants for inter-country adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.
- To ensure that non-agency partner adopters are provided with an appropriate service in line with the Court's expectations.
- To ensure that adopted adults are given the appropriate support and information to progress their search.
- To ensure 'best value' in the services provided by ensuring that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise available resources.
- To administer the Agency's Adoption Panel so that it is organised efficiently and is effective.
- To provide an independent counselling service to birth parents, adopters and adopted adults and children.
- To ensure arrangements for contact with the birth family are carefully considered and meet the child's individual needs.
- To meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services
- To ensure that accurate and up to date records and management information is kept in relation to individual children, adoptive parents and services and to maintain confidentiality and security of adoption records.
- To ensure that service users are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.

## **7. Ensuring our service meets user needs and achieves outcomes for children**

Adoption West will ensure that children who may need a permanent placement are identified early by providing specialist advice and support to help the local authority workers to understand the adoption process and the option of using an early permanence placement. Adoption West will then track and monitor the progress of all children with a plan for adoption, within the 6 AW local authority areas, to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays.

We will measure the effectiveness of our service provision using key performance measures. These will be reported by the Service Director, on a regular basis, to the Governance Board to demonstrate outcomes and service quality/effectiveness.

At regular and specific points in the journey of our adopters we will seek feedback from applicants on their experience of the services they have received. We will find creative ways to gather the views of children placed with early permanence carers or for adoption. The Adoption Panel will be asked for their feedback on the quality of the work being presented, reports, content, evidence of thorough and careful decision making and for their feedback on working with the Adoption West. All feedback received will be reported to the Adoption West Board and will be used to inform and drive service improvement.

## **8. Agency principles**

The Adoption Service aims to comply with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2003 (revised February 2011) and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The service will work to the principles which underpin the National Minimum Standards as set out in the 'Values Statement', see Appendix 1 – Adoption National Minimum Standards - Values Statement.

## **9. Organisational structure**

Adoption West is a regional adoption agency and registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency. The agency operates from three hub offices within the communities that we serve. Each office providing the range of adoption services; recruitment, assessment, family finding, adoption support to children, adopters and birth families. The three hubs are located in Bristol, Gloucester and Trowbridge. See Appendix 2 – Organisational Structure.

## **10. Governance arrangements**

Adoption West is managed and overseen by the Service Director who is accountable to the Adoption West Board. The Adoption West Board is comprised of six Board Directors, one from each partner local authority, a representative from the Voluntary Adoption Agency



sector, the chair of the Adoption West Adopters Advisory Board (supported by Adoption UK). There are additional board members with specialist functions including finance. The Board meets quarterly to monitor and evaluate the ongoing performance of the agency. See Appendix 3 - Governance Arrangements Diagram.

## **11. Management structure**

The senior management group comprises the Service Director who is the registered manager for the VAA, two Service Managers and a Business Manager. Adoption West operates over the three regional hubs as outlined above. Each hub is managed and overseen by a team manager who is supported by two deputy team managers they have responsibility for adopter assessment, recruitment and adoption support for their specified area. The hub manager is supervised and supported by a service manager who is responsible for adopter recruitment and adoption support services including the Birth Links service for adopted adults and birth family support. The Family Finding Service has staff located in each hub office and is managed regionally by a team manager. This service is managed by a service manager who is also responsible for Adoption Panels.

The VAA Registered Manager (Alison Lewis, Service Director) is a qualified social worker with over 36 years' experience of children and families statutory social work and in the voluntary sector including fourteen years as a practitioner and manager in adoption services. Alison Lewis has a BA (Hons) degree with CQSW (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) 1986 and a Diploma in Child Protection Studies 1990. Alison Completed the DfE/ Deloitte's Regional Adoption Agencies Leadership program in August 2019. She has been a manager in both local authority and the Voluntary Sector.

The VAA responsible individual role is held by the Chair of the Adoption West Board currently Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy for Gloucestershire Council and has significant experience in strategic management in children's services.

## **12. Agency Decision Maker**

The Agency Decision Makers for the approval of adopters are Alison Lewis the Adoption West Service Director and Alison Hall the service manager for family finding and panels.

The Agency Decision Making responsibilities for all decisions relating to individual children, including the matching decision, remains with the 'home' local authority responsible and accountable for the child.

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Agency Decision Maker</b>
BANES	<a href="mailto:Lisa.Cragg@BATHNES.GOV.UK">Lisa.Cragg@BATHNES.GOV.UK</a>

Bristol	<a href="mailto:james.beardall@bristol.gov.uk">james.beardall@bristol.gov.uk</a>
Gloucestershire	<a href="mailto:julie.miles@gloucestershire.gov.uk">julie.miles@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:karen.goulding@gloucestershire.gov.uk">karen.goulding@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:rachel.townsend@gloucestershire.gov.uk">rachel.townsend@gloucestershire.gov.uk</a>
North Somerset	<a href="mailto:Becky.Hopkins@n-somerset.gov.uk">Becky.Hopkins@n-somerset.gov.uk</a>
South Gloucestershire	<a href="mailto:jo.cross@southglos.gov.uk">jo.cross@southglos.gov.uk</a>
Wiltshire	<a href="mailto:jen.salter@wiltshire.gov.uk">jen.salter@wiltshire.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:Netty.Lee@wiltshire.gov.uk">Netty.Lee@wiltshire.gov.uk</a>

### 13. Our social work team

Within each hub, a team manager manages the service provided to children and adopters, with the assistance of deputy team managers. The management team oversees the day-to-day management of the service. The social work teams are responsible for, the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and early permanence carers and support to adopted families. A centrally managed team with social workers in each hub undertakes family finding and matching for children. These roles are specialised within the social work teams. The social workers also supervise and support the early permanence carers in their fostering roles on behalf of the local authority which approves the carers as temporary foster carers.

All social work staff employed by Adoption West have a relevant qualification, either (BA, BSc or BSW) in social work, a master's degree (MA, MSc or MSW) in social work, or a DipSW, or CQSW. They are also registered with the Health and Social Care Council (HCPC) as required by law to enable them to practice. Social Workers are required to maintain their registration with the HCPC and to continue to develop their knowledge and skills while they are registered so that Adoption West can be confident that they are able to practise safely and effectively.

The qualifications of staff and their suitability to practice are checked at the time of recruitment and on an annual basis through the appraisal process.

Adoption Support workers work alongside social workers, providing support services such as letterbox, direct contact and lifestory work.

The core functions of the teams are to:

- **Recruit, train and assess** a sufficient number of adopters and early permanence carers.

- **Maintain a high-quality group** of adopters to ensure the full range of needs can be met to deliver positive outcomes for children in care within the region.
- Ensure an **appropriate range** of placements is available in the interests of matching assessed need, including racial, ethnic, religious and cultural factors.
- Promote and encourage **permanency** to offer a stable home for life for children.
- Ensure that Family Finding for children is undertaken in a timely way minimising delay for children and finding adoptive families that meet their diversity needs appropriately.
- To ensure that children are **matched** to adopters and early permanence carers that can meet their individual needs.
- Carry out an **Annual Review** of each adopter and early permanence carer
- Provide **preparation and on-going training** to potential adopters and early permanence carers in order to improve the outcomes for children in care.
- Deliver good quality **support and supervision to adopters and early permanence carers**
- Provide **assessments of need** and review of support plans as agreed with adopted families
- Support the **child's sense of identity** via lifestory work and letterbox and direct contact,
- Deliver good quality **support and development training** as outlined with the Adoption minimum standards to adopters and children
- Administer the use of the **Adoption Support fund (ASF)** to access therapy for children
- Identify **providers of therapeutic** services in the region
- Working in partnership with other professionals, teams and agencies on behalf of adopted families

## 14. Birth Links

A Birth Links team provides services to:

- adult adoptees in tracing birth records and links to intermediary support.
- Birth parents and family members

This service is managed by a deputy team manager and a Service Manager, thereby being independent from the line management of the teams and team managers.

## 15. Safeguarding Children

Adoption West has a safeguarding responsibility for all the children that use its services and with whom the agency has contact. This responsibility includes taking all possible steps to ensure their welfare and to protect them from harm.

By working to provide secure and stable early permanence and adoptive homes for children and working closely with adopters and local authority social workers we aim to achieve the best outcomes for children.

Our work is underpinned by the government guidance [Working together to safeguard children](#) and the Adoption West Safeguarding Policy is available on our website [www.adoptionwest.co.uk](http://www.adoptionwest.co.uk)

## **16. Equality and Diversity**

The Service aims to:

- Value and celebrate diversity and promote equality of opportunity.
- Ensure that all employees and service users including early permanence carers and children alike are treated equally with fairness.
- Treat all complainants in the same way in line with the Equality Act 2010. Any discrimination will be challenged, and actions taken accordingly.
- Ensure our working practices are characterised by flexibility, efficiency and excellence, the result of a supportive management style that enables its diverse work force to realise their full potential in serving our customers.
- Ensure our employee profile reflects diversity at every level of the organisation, and posts will be filled through a fair system of recruitment and promotion.

## **17. Recruitment of Adopters**

Recruitment is targeted, based on knowledge of children likely to be placed for adoption on a regional basis. By tracking the children that 'should be placed for adoption' and building a comprehensive picture of the regional need for adoptive placements, Adoption West is developing a more realistic picture of placement requirements. This information informs the recruitment of adopters and enables prospective adopters to gain a better understanding of adoption activity in the region. Adoption West involves partners in the information gathering and recruitment process so that all relevant agencies are able to provide services to meet local need.

The RAA engages proactively with partner agencies to ensure the timely placement of children to ensure a broad range of appropriate prospective adopters are available for children to be placed.

The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in detail in the Adoption West Procedures.

## Recruitment

The team depends upon a variety of methods to attract interest from members of the public, including:

- Word of mouth
- Social media
- Local press and radio advertisements
- General publicity via posters and leaflets in public places
- News releases
- Information on Adoption West website
- Specific recruitment campaigns
- Specific advertising of children/sibling groups
- Event stands
- Working at a national level with regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies

Please see the 'Recruitment Strategy' for further details

Information is provided on the Adoption West website [www.adoptionwest.co.uk](http://www.adoptionwest.co.uk) regarding adoption and early permanence, and further information is provided through initial conversations and literature for prospective adopters.

## Early Permanence

Adoption West takes a proactive approach to early permanence. All children and adopters are considered for early permanence unless there are reasons not to do so. The aim is to enable more children to benefit from early placements with potential adopters.

Early permanence is an 'opt out' option in Adoption West, all adopters are invited to consider early permanence and to attend initial training.

Should a prospective adopter decide they do not wish to consider early permanence, or their circumstances do not meet requirements for early permanence, they may 'opt out' and continue their assessment as prospective adopters only.

## 18. Accessing Adoption West services

Each hub office has a duty system in place:

**Monday to Thursday 9.00 am to 4.30 am  
Friday 9.00 am – 4.00 pm**

The duty worker is a qualified social worker or experienced support worker who can provide advice regarding adoption support issues and information to those enquiring to adopt. The duty worker will respond to all enquiries which can be via telephone, e-mail or the website.

A duty worker will make contact within 24 hrs of the enquiry.

**Adoption support enquiries** - advise, information about support services and/or sign posting to other agencies will be provided. Consideration will be given to whether an assessment of need is required, if agreed an appointment for this will be provided and the timescale for the appointment will be discussed and agreed with the caller. An appointment will be within a six week period.

### **Enquiries to adopt (Pre stage 1)**

- You can view the information session and book a Q and A session with a social worker directly from the Adoption West website
- Following this you can complete the enquiry form on the website and a social worker will then call you to have a discussion about the adoption process and answer any personal queries.
- Following this discussion if you have all the information, you need you can submit a Registration of Interest.
- The Adoption West manager will accept or decline the ROI within 5 working days.
- When accepted the enquirer is considered as a prospective adopter and starts Stage 1 of the process. A Social Worker is allocated to undertake the initial work.

### **19. Assessment, Approval and Family Finding**

The adoption assessment process is divided into stages, we aim to complete:

- Stage 1 within 2 months of registration of interest, and
- Stage 2 within 4 months of completing Stage 1.

Prospective adopters can choose to have a break in the assessment process between stage 1 and 2 for up to six months. Stage 2 will be completed within 4 months of the date at which it is agreed with the adopters that the assessment will resume for Stage 2. A break of longer than six months

#### **Stage 1**

- The prospective adopter will receive the letter of acceptance to stage 1
- A meeting will be arranged with a social worker to discuss the process including the completion of the prospective adopter's workbook and the stage 1 agreement

- The prospective adopters will be invited to the Preparation Course – one day, and the half a day of Early Permanence training – “An introduction to early permanence”.
- All checks and references will be completed including DBS and medical

Applicants, and any household members over the age of 18, must consent to an ‘Enhanced’ Disclosure by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) LAC (97) 17 which specifies offences that automatically exclude an individual from becoming a early permanence carer or an adopter.

The end of Stage 1 a review meeting with manager, worker and applicants will be held. At this point the prospective adopters may choose to ‘opt out’ of early permanence. Applicants can have the opportunity to go on hold between stage 1 and 2 for up to six months, if this suits their circumstances.

If the agency has reasons not to progress an applicant to stage 2 of the process, they will be advised in writing of this and will have recourse to the Adoption West complaints process.

When the applicants are progressed to stage 2, the allocated social worker will initiate the Stage 2 acceptance letter, including the Adoption Preparation Course for Stage 2 and Friends and Family training

If prospective adopters decide to continue with an early permanence assessment the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) will be completed and their suitability as early permanence carers will be assessed as part of the adoption assessment process.

### **Stage 2 Process:**

- The allocated worker will commence the assessment and completes the Stage 2 Agreement – this will be approximately 6 sessions being a mix of in person and virtual, plus a minimum of 3 reference visits, observations of any .
- A potential panel date will be allocated at this point.
- Additional Early Permanence assessment and questions will be completed within the report.
- The applicants will be linked with experienced adopters and or early permanence carers.
- The prospective adopters will be invited to a further 3-day preparation course over 3 weeks.
- The prospective adopters who wish to provide an early permanence placement will be invited to a one-day specific training course.
- A Mid-Point Review will be held with the Manager and the applicants – a phone call or face to face - (at this meeting the panel date will be confirmed).
- The Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) is completed with applicants
- Panel Preparation Meeting will be held to prepare for Adoption/Permanence Panel
- The prospective adopters attend Adoption Panel, if they wish.

- The Agency Decision Maker will confirm approval of the prospective adopters or make a "qualifying determination". A Qualifying determination is made by an adoption agency when it considers a prospective or existing adopter is not suitable to adopt a child.

### **Second or subsequent adopters**

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and there is a 2 year average age gap between that child and a potential new child.

They are invited to write to express an interest in adopting again and will be offered a home visit to discuss their circumstances.

If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start in stage 2. All checks and references including a new medical and DBs will be completed in stage 2.

They will be offered training. If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the home visit would include the child's social worker.

### **Adoption by existing foster carers**

Foster carers will notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/ren's plan is for adoption, a meeting will be held between workers from Adoption West, the local authority fostering team and the child's social worker to consider next steps. This will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

A fast track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adopters. The process will start at the beginning of stage two (as above). The foster carers will be offered prospective adopter training.

Specific guidance for these circumstances has been agreed by Adoption West and all six local authorities and will be shared with foster carers.

### **Inter-country adoption**

Adoption West has currently commissioned a service with IAC – The Centre for Adoption. This service provides:

- The IAC Advice Line which is staffed by qualified and experienced intercountry adoption Social Workers and overseen by a dedicated manager.
- Information Sessions, Preparation Courses and Assessments of Suitability that have an exclusively intercountry adoption focus.

- IAC's specialist Medical Advisors, Social Workers and Adoption Panel members who have many years of experience in intercountry adoption and the issues affecting children being placed from overseas.
- After placement and post order support and prepare progress reports on children's placements for those overseas countries which require them.
- Intercountry Adoption Support Workshops are provided which bring an exclusively international adoption perspective.

More Information about intercountry adoption can be found on the Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) website [IAC : The Centre for Adoption \(iaccentre.org.uk\)](http://iaccentre.org.uk)

### **Non-Agency Partner Adoptions (often referred to as step-parent adoptions)**

Enquiries received through the Adoption West duty process and/or the local authority will be responded to by an Adoption West social worker, who will provide initial information and guidance. If the applicants decide to proceed and make an application to the court Adoption West will be requested to undertake an assessment and complete a report providing the court with a recommendation.

### **Matching and Family Finding**

By working closely with local authorities and maintaining thorough tracking processes regarding individual children's plans Adoption West is able to undertake early work on planning for adoption. The family finding service plans for each child as soon as they are known, and work begins to identify a family to match their needs working across the RAA including VAA partners. Based on the analysis of potential matches identified locally, the RAA can simultaneously consider the national adopter pool for potential families

## **20. Adoption Support Services**

Parenting an adopted child who may have complex needs can be challenging and adoptive families are likely to need professional advice and help at some time. Adoption West will work with families in order to better meet these challenges.

Adoption West has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. This service is provided in partnership with a number of voluntary sector agencies and other independent providers. Social workers and support staff in the adoption support teams have additional qualifications including DDP level 1 and 2, Non Violent Resistance (NVR) and Theraplay.

Adoption Support Services is delivered through a 3-tier model of service delivery, across the 3 hub offices.

### **Tier 1 – Universal accessed by all adopters these include:**

- Events for adopters and children e.g. seasonal gatherings, conferences
- Newsletter / information & guidance
- Support groups / forums
- Training (incl. parenting programmes)

These activities are planned regionally and delivered locally by the staff in each hub as well as by Voluntary Agency partners.

### **Tier 2 – Social Work Assessment / Intervention required**

These services are delivered locally in each office by social workers and support worker for families with emerging adoption support issues/concerns

- Requests for assessment of need – completed by social worker
- Social Work support – multi agency working and providing adoption knowledge to supporting children, families and the professional network in terms of understanding the long-term impacts of early life trauma, separation, loss and attachments issues
- Support with contact issues
- Life-story work post order
- Access to VSO for support to address education issues
- Access to Therapeutic Consultation
- Specialist groups – NVR, Parenting Our Teens, Groups for young people
- Current commissioned services are being considered including specific partnership arrangements with CAMHS.

### **Tier 3 – Specialist Therapeutic Intervention**

Following an assessment of need completed by Adoption West, specialist therapeutic services are identified and funded through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) in place until 2020.

Adoption West in conjunction with partner agencies and local providers is working to establish specialist therapeutic services through commissioning arrangements across the RAA using the common framework for commissioning services.

### **Letterbox / contact with birth families**

Letterbox and direct contact arrangements across the 6 local authorities is provided by the RAA staffed by administrators and support workers with management oversight from a hub manager or deputy.

## 21. Adoption Panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- people to be approved as adoptive parents
- whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- approval of the match between children and adopters and
- the placement of children for adoption where their birth parents request adoption to be the plan often referred to as relinquished for adoption

Adoption West administers three Adoption Panels, with one Central List of panel members. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic the panels are currently operating virtually via MS Teams. The panel meets on approximately 5 occasions per month.

Independent of the Adoption Agency, the Adoption Panel plays an important role in the scrutiny of the proposals presented to determine whether all the issues have been appropriately clarified and whether the proposal is sound. The panels have an Independent Chair with significant experience of adoption work. The Adoption Panel has access to medical and legal advice to assist in their recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Adoption Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as a result of their deliberations. The Adoption Panel will make its recommendations based on detailed written reports, the applicants are invited to attend the Panel in person.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the district. Panel members are required to undertake training, at least annually, and attend an annual appraisal.

The Adoption Panel delivers an independent quality assurance role that provides Adoption West with valuable feedback on the quality of adoption work across the whole service and is used to inform the development and improvement of services to children and adopters. Where this feedback refers to the service provided by a local authority this is fed back to the respective manager responsible for adoption work in that authority.

If the Agency Decision Maker does not approve the prospective adopter as suitable, the prospective adopter may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for an independent review of the proposed agency decision and the prospective adopter's case. This information is provided to adopters in writing following the outcome of the Agency Decision.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)  
Unit 4 Pavilion Business Park  
Royds Hall Road  
Wortley  
LEEDS  
LS12 6AJ  
Tel No: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate) or 0113 2022080  
Fax: 0845 450 3957 or 0113 2637414  
**Email:** [irm@irm.org.uk](mailto:irm@irm.org.uk)  
**Website:** [www.independenreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independenreviewmechanism.org.uk)

## **22. Annual Review of Prospective Adopters**

Where prospective adopters do not have a child placed with 12 months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager along with the adopters will undertake a review. This review reflects their current circumstances to ensure they wish to continue with the process of adopting, all checks and references are up to date and that their approval terms remain appropriate.

Annual reviews are also an opportunity for the prospective adopter/s to comment on the service they receive, and to identify any perceived gaps in service provision, resources, training or support.

## **23. Commissioning Arrangements**

Commissioning arrangements are in place to establish a standard regional offer covering the following areas:

- Adopter Advisory Board which provide the means for participation by adopters in governance and development of Adoption West Services
- adoption support services via CSS Adoption Bristol
- therapeutic support provision (ASF providers)
- intercountry adoption
- licenses / subscriptions

Commissioning arrangements will be monitored and managed to ensure high quality, good value services are being provided regionally.

## 24. Complaints

Adoption West wants to listen to the views of those people who use its services and to respond quickly. We will ensure that:

- Adopters and Early Permanence Carers are provided with the Complaints Policy
- Complaint investigations are completed promptly.
- Action taken to follow up complaints and outcomes are monitored by the management team.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- the standard of service you should expect from us
- the behaviour of our staff in delivering that service
- any action, or lack of action, by our staff or others engaged on behalf of Adoption West

Anyone who is dissatisfied about any aspect of our service that they have not been able to resolve immediately with the member of staff concerned, should use the Adoption West Complaints process set out in the Complaints Policy. Full details of the Complaints Policy can be found within Adoption West policies and on the Adoption West website, prospective adopters will be given information about the Complaints Policy when they begin an assessment.

## 25. Monitoring and Evaluating Outcomes

Adoption West are committed to maintaining high standards and to continually striving to improve the services we provide to children, adopters and early permanence carers. Our adoption service has several ways we monitor the service we provide;

- Monitoring reports are submitted to the management team and the Adoption West Board.
- In partnership with the local authorities Adoption West reports to a Scrutiny Panel comprising elected members from each council and service users
- Feedback from children, adopters and early permanence carers
- Staff supervision, linked to the appraisal system
- Monthly recorded visits to early permanence carers, and shared with the approving local authority fostering team,
- Annual reviews,
- Bi-annual Adoption Panel Report
- Feedback from training sessions
- Complaints, compliments, and their outcomes
- Managers monitor data about incidents of concern in adoption, including allegations and disruption in any placement.



## 26. Ofsted Inspection

Adoption West must comply with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations and must meet the national minimum standards for adoption and will be inspected accordingly under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) for each partner local authority and independently as a voluntary adoption agency .

Ofsted can be contacted at:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD  
Tel: 0300 123 1231  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## Coram BAAF

Adoption West is a member of Coram BAAF. This is a national organisation providing general advice, information, training, research and further reading about all aspects of early permanence and adoption practice. The website is informative and a helpful resource for training purposes.

Website: [www.corambaaf.org.uk](http://www.corambaaf.org.uk)

## 27. Appendices

1. Values and Principles of Operation
2. Organisation Structure
3. Governance Arrangements
4. List of Adoption West Directors

## Appendix 1 –

### VALUES STATEMENT



### Values Statement (Adoption - National Minimum Standards 2014)

#### Values – Children

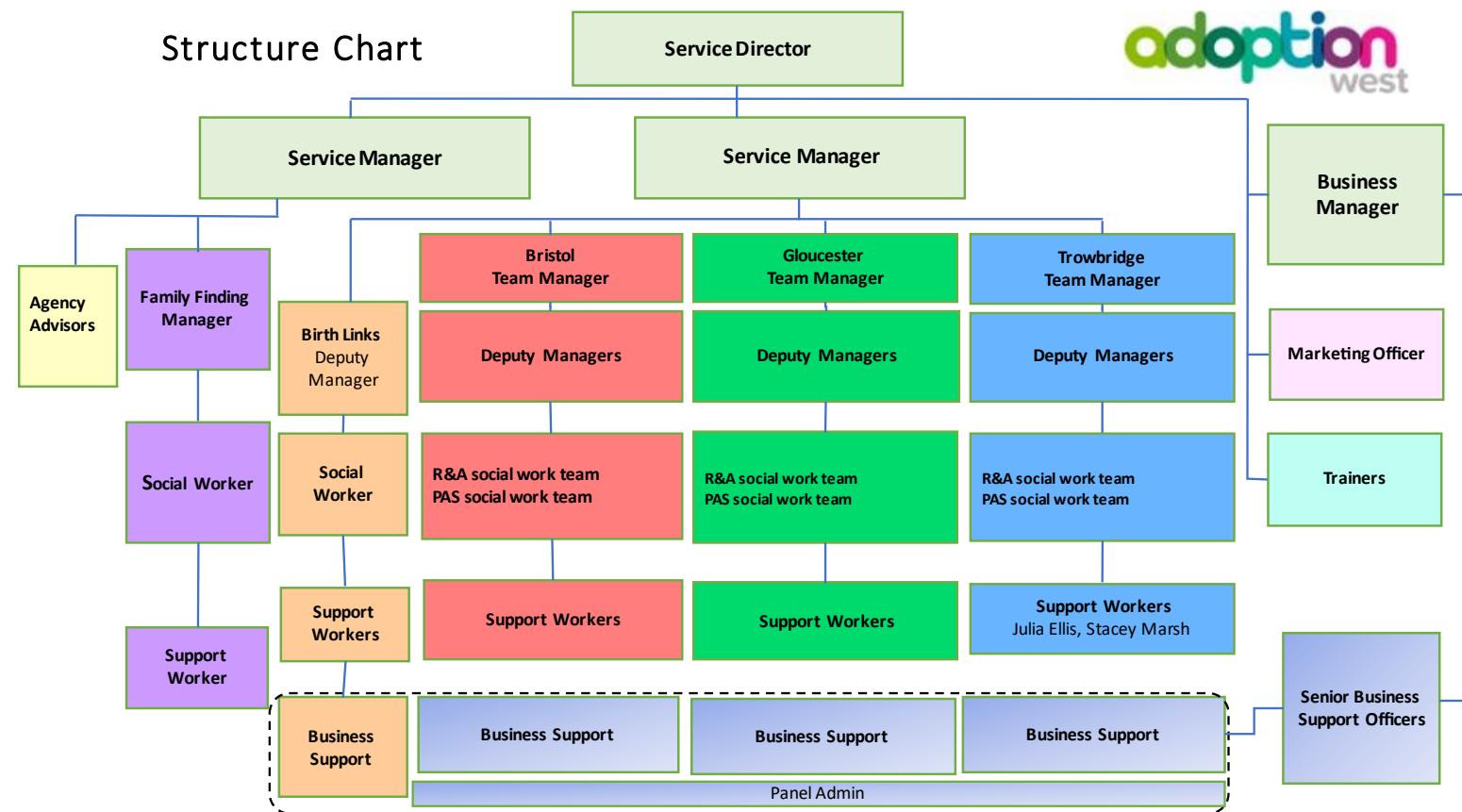
- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.

- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

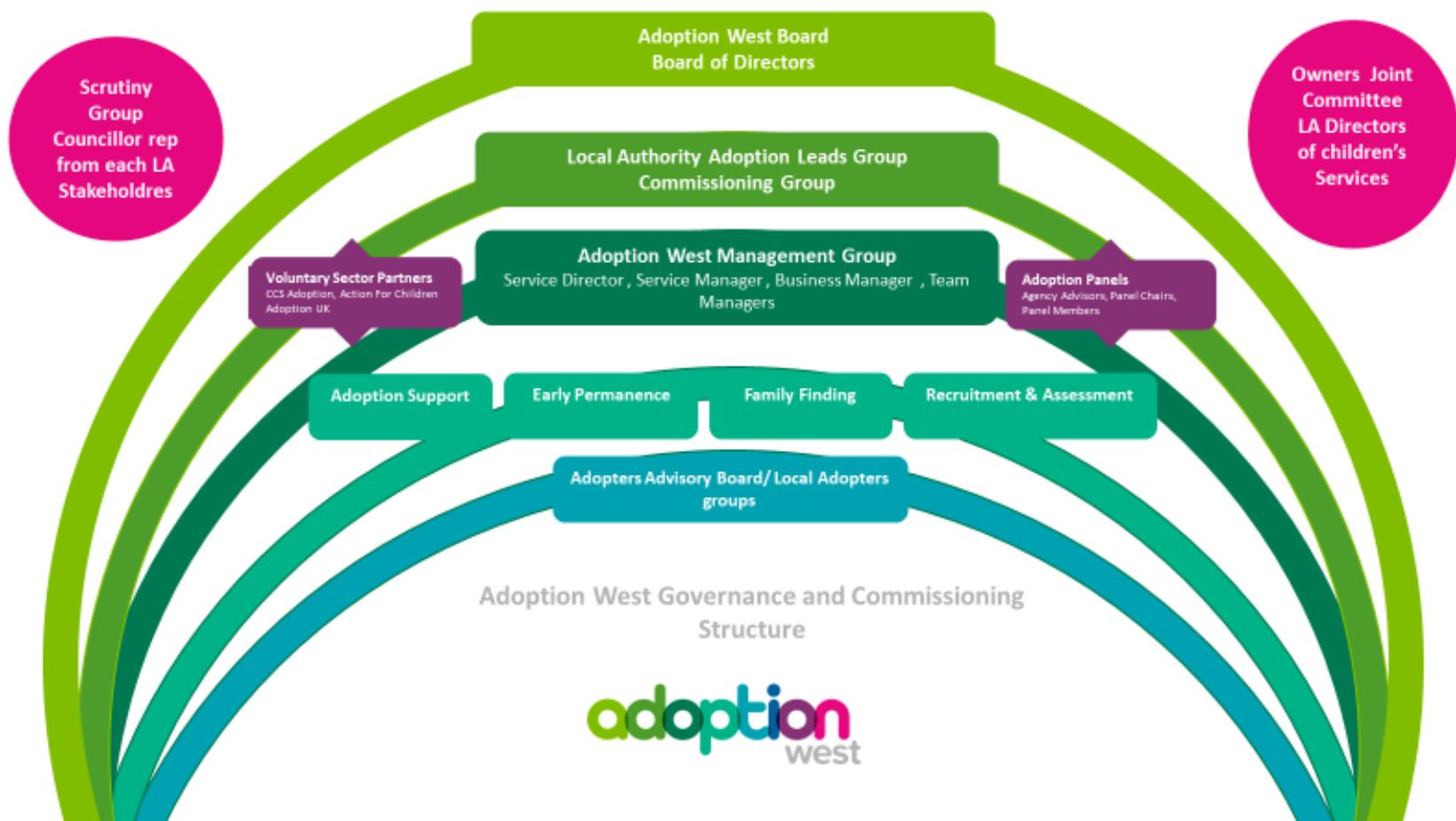
#### Values – adopted adults and birth relatives

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Agencies have a duty to provide services that considers the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

## Appendix 2. Adoption West Structure Chart



## Appendix 3 - Adoption West Governance and Commissioning Structure



#### **Appendix 4. List of Adoption West Directors**

Title	First name(s)	Surname	Local Authority	Position	Is this person disqualified?
Ms	Mary	Kearney Knowles	Bath and NE Somerset	Director	No
Ms	Fiona	Tudge	Bristol	Director	No
Mr	Andrew	Dempsey	Gloucestershire	Director	No
Ms	Becky	Hopkins	North Somerset	Director	No
Ms	Joanna	Cross	South Gloucestershire	Director	No
Mr	Martin	Davis	Wiltshire	Director	No