

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE OF THE JOINT ADOPTION SERVICE FOR SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL AND THE BOROUGH OF TELFORD & WREKIN

1) Introduction

Since 1998 Adoption Services in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin have been provided jointly to both Local Authorities under the terms of a Service Level Agreement which is renewed every 5 years.

Prior to Local Government reorganisation in 1997 adoption services were provided by the Adoption Team on a county wide basis.

The nature of the service provided by the Joint Adoption team is laid out in Section 2 of this document.

2) Aims and Objectives of the Local Authority in relation to the Adoption Service.

The Joint Adoption Service of Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin aims to provide a service to all its customers that is user friendly, welcoming and non discriminatory.

The Joint Adoption Service aims to provide a comprehensive adoption service (under the terms of the Joint Arrangement between Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin) to all those who require or request it. The service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and a model of practice underpinned by comprehensive policy and procedure documents.

The nature of the work undertaken by the Joint 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, love and a resource 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 and children and young people with specific needs.

Counselling pregnant women who wish to place their babies for adoption.

Counselling birth families who are not voluntarily relinquishing their children for adoption.

Section 2 counselling for adopted adults. (Access to Birth Records)

Assessment, training, preparation and counselling of people who wish to adopt a child from abroad.

Providing an advice and consultancy service to area colleagues who are working with a child and its family where adoption is the plan.

Undertaking assessments and preparing reports for the court in step-parent adoption applications.

Preparing reports for adoption panel and the courts on all aspects of adoption work.

Preparing reports for and attending other Local Authority adoption panels 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 Shropshire/Telford & Wrekin approved family.

Offering an adoption support service after placement and post an order being made.

Utilising resources for and from the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium and the Adoption Register.

3) Name and address of Manager

Catherine Warner
The Joint Adoption Service
Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Observer House
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6BL

Telephone Number 01743 241915

4) Relevant qualifications and experience of manager

Certificate of Qualification in Social Work – 1984
Diploma in Applied Social Studies – 1984
1984 to 1986 Community Team, London Borough of Greenwich
1986 to 1988 London Borough of Greenwich, Fostering & Adoption Unit
1988 to 1990 Shropshire County Council Family Placement Team
1990 to 1991 Shropshire County Council Family Placement Team, Team Manager
1991 to 1993 Shropshire County Council County Adoption Team, Team Manager.
1993 to 1998 Shropshire County Council, County Adoption Team, Service Manager
1998 to present Shropshire County Council/Borough of Telford & Wrekin Joint Adoption Service, Head of Service

Since 1986 Catherine Warner has worked in the arena of family placement. Therefore, she has 21 years of experience working in the fostering and adoption

fields of a Local Authority. Since 1990 Catherine Warner has worked in a managerial capacity – firstly as a team manager of a fostering and adoption team and since 1993 she has been part of the Social Care and Safeguards Management Team of Shropshire County Council. Since 1998 her prime responsibility being the overall management and service development of the Joint Adoption Service for Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin. From 1997 Catherine Warner has been lead member for the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium. The Consortium is a group of 14 Local Authority and 4 Voluntary Adoption Agencies across the West Midlands. The primary aim of the Consortium is to increase the ‘pool’ of prospective adopters to enable West Midlands’ children/young people to have a greater chance of having their placement needs met. Catherine Warner is also the designated ‘link’ person for the Adoption Register with the prime responsibility of ensuring that regular and accurate information is sent to the Register, again to increase the chance of placement for children/young people and adoptive families.

5) Number, relevant qualifications and experience of the staff employed by the authority for the purposes of the adoption service

Currently the Joint Adoption Service has 12 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 Master of Science Social Work.

It is a requirement under the Adoption & Children Act 2002 that all staff working in the Joint Adoption Service must be 3 years post qualified with the majority of that 3 years post qualification working in a child care setting. Adoption staff are also involved in the department’s programme for Post Qualification training. All adoption staff must be registered with the GSCC.

Some staff have other relevant qualifications such as Advanced Diploma in the Setting up of Community Groups, MA Child Care Law & Practice etc. Some staff are in the process of obtaining further qualifications particularly in the arena of therapeutic services to children with attachment difficulties.

Three members of staff are qualified Practice Teachers and the Joint Adoption Service offers placements to approximately two DipSW students per year.

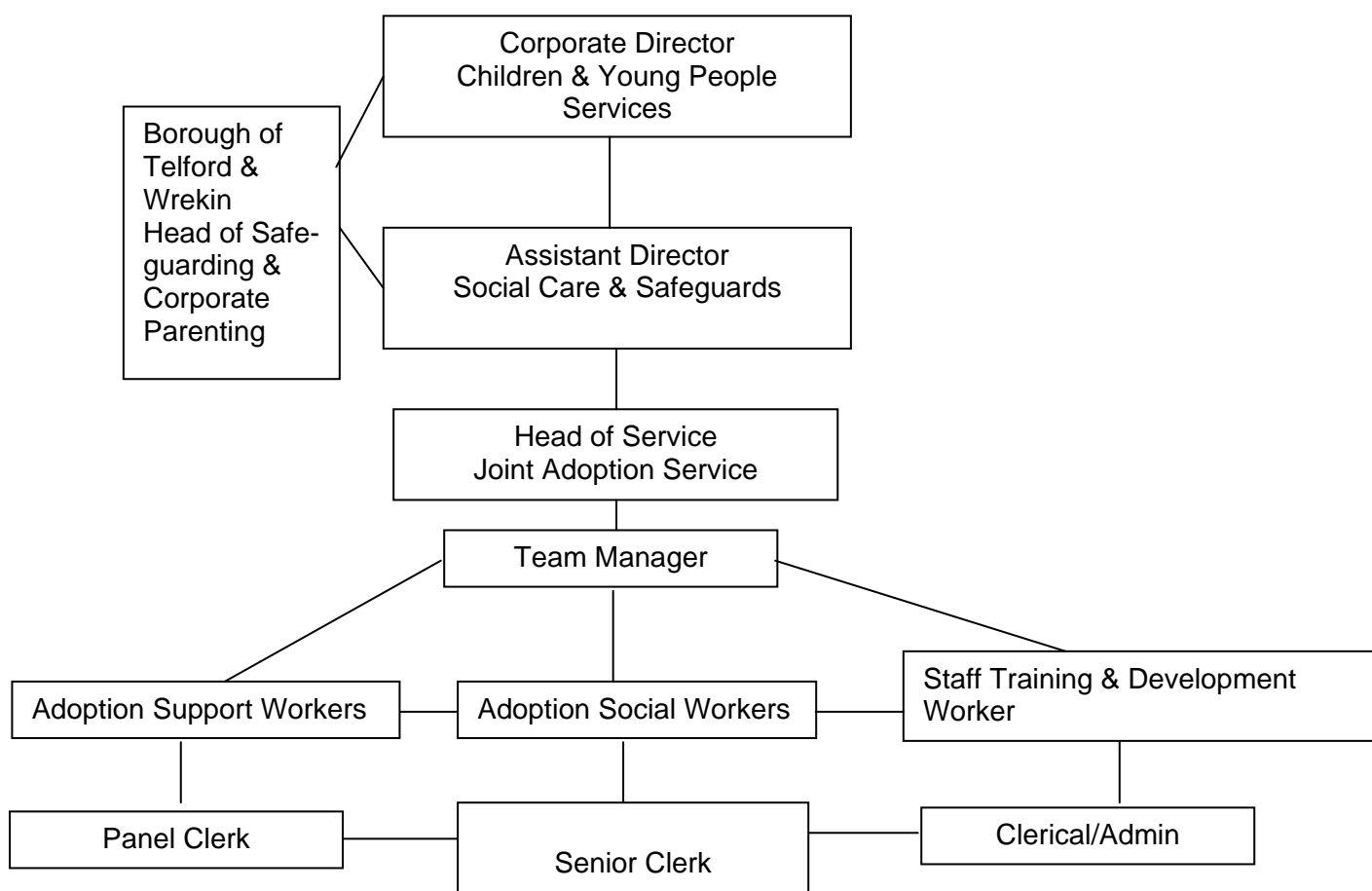
All social workers currently employed have a wide range of experience of working in the field of child care and family placement.

The opportunity exists for staff to undertake secondment into district child care teams in both Local Authorities and for district child care workers to be seconded into the Joint Adoption Service. Both Local Authorities strongly support this as a means of increasing experience and enabling staff to ‘keep in touch’ with new developments and working practices.

6) The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service

Although the Joint Adoption Service is provided jointly to both Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire County Council has management responsibility under the terms of this Service Level Agreement with the Borough of Telford & Wrekin which is renewed on a 5 year basis.

The following demonstrates the organisational structure:



7) 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 Quality of those Services if of an Appropriate Standard.

7.1 All staff have regular supervision and an Annual Performance Review.

7.2 Information about all children and prospective adoptive families is recorded on the adoption service data base.

- 7.3** The data base provides the Head of Service Adoption with the comprehensive detailed information that is required to be delivered to County and Borough Councillors, in their role as Corporate Parents, on a regular basis.
- 7.4** The Adoption Panel receives an annual report about its activity and performance.
- 7.5** All prospective adopters are interviewed during the preparation course in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the delivery of the training.
- 7.6** All prospective adopters are advised of the department's complaints procedure and given information about how to make a complaint.
- 7.7** All prospective adoptive parents are asked to provide feedback regarding their attendance at adoption panel.
- 7.8** All prospective adoptive parents are required to give written feedback after each training session – six in total. The purpose of asking for feedback is that at the end of each training course an evaluation is carried out regarding the effectiveness of the course and participants views are considered to see if changes need to be made.
- 7.9** Children referred to the Adoption Service will have a permanence plan which was made at the four month review. Once a permanence plan recommends adoption, the child will be monitored through the reviewing process.
- 7.10** Monthly referral meetings are held which review the progress of every child referred to the service requiring a placement.
- 7.11** The referral meetings also consider approved prospective adoptive parents who do not have placements and identify their progress.
- 7.12** An audit of our practice as measured against the National Standards has been carried out and an action plan devised to ensure compliance.
- 7.13** A regular monitoring and evaluation exercise is to be carried out, by way of a questionnaire, sent to a random selection of service users, birth parents, children (if of sufficient age and understanding) prospective adopters, approved adopters, step-parent adopters, adult adoptees seeking counselling and area colleagues. Information from the questionnaires will be used to shape services.
- 7.14** On a strategic level activity in the adoption service will be reported to and monitored through the Children & Young Persons' Strategic Partnership Group of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire County Council's Children's Trust and to each Authorities Scrutiny Panel.

- 7.15** Targets and developments in relation to adoption services form a part of the Children & Young People's Plan for both Local Authorities and performance is monitored accordingly.
- 7.16** All adoption agencies (both Voluntary and Local Authority) are subject to regular inspection (on a 3 year basis, based on the National Minimum Standards for Adoption) regulatory assessment and must be registered as 'fit for purpose'.
- 7.17** The key lines of regulatory assessment are now measured against the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.
- (i) Being healthy** – there are no adoption standards matched to this outcome. However, it has been agreed that all Medical Reports of children are scrutinised by the Medical Adviser to the panel. All children placed for adoption have regular health assessments up to an order being granted.
 - (ii) Staying Safe** – the agency is child focused and ensures the welfare of children is safeguarded. The agency places children with adoptive families who have been positively recruited, thoroughly assessed, prepared and approved through robust systems and processes that ensure the needs of children and adopters are at the heart of the adoption process.
 - (iii) Enjoying and Achieving** – The agency ensures that adopters are actively supported using innovative ways to help maintain placements and ensure positive outcomes for children in adoptive placements.
 - (iv) Making a Positive Contribution** – The agency actively support birth families through the adoption process, confidently involving birth families in the planning, sharing of information, matching and placing of children. Service users are made aware of the services they are entitled to and are actively supported and encouraged in seeking out those services, which will further support them through the adoption process.
 - (v) Achieving Economic Well Being** – There are no adoption standards matched to this outcome. However, financial support is available to adoptive parents and their child based on an assessment of need.
 - (i) Management**– The agency is managed in an effective and efficient way. The management structure is strong and stable and staff are safe, skilled and knowledgeable to work with children. The staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and ensure good outcomes are achieved through placing children with adoptive families who have been thoroughly assessed and vetted.

The outcome descriptors are Excellent, Good, Adequate and Poor. The individual outcome descriptors go together to make up an overall Quality rating.

When an inspection is concluded reports will be presented to both

Local Authorities, published on the Internet and made available to members of the public.

8) The Procedures for Recruiting, Preparing, Assessing, Approving and Supporting Prospective Adopters

- 8.1** In its work as an Adoption Agency, the main consideration of the Joint Adoption Service will be to provide adoptive families for children that will allow them to grow up in a secure and positive environment and to reach their potential in all aspects of their lives.
- 8.2** The needs of children who require adoptive placements are diverse and complex. In order to meet these needs, the Joint Adoption Service will work flexibly and be willing to consider all options that offer the potential to provide a suitable adoptive home for a child.
- 8.3** The Joint Adoption Service will respond positively to applications to become adopters from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion in order to provide the maximum opportunity for children to be successfully adopted.
- 8.4** The Joint Adoption Service will monitor its work in the area of adoption and take steps to continually improve its service.
- 8.5** The Joint Adoption Service will provide training, preparation and support to adopters.
- 8.6** The Joint Adoption Service will provide information about its services as an adoption agency and will work in an open and fair way with all users of the service.
- 8.7** Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin are adoption agencies and have responsibility for all aspects of arranging placements of children with prospective adopters in accordance with the relevant legislation. This document gives an overview of the Joint Adoption Service's policies in this area of its work.
- 8.8** Adoption is a complex process. It is also an area where practice and legislation changes over time. In line with the Adoption & Children Act 2002 the Joint Adoption Service will review and update its policies and procedures as required.
- 8.9** Nationally, interest in adoption is currently very high following publication of several reports on children in public care, related television programmes and the implementation of the National Standards on Adoption and the Adoption Register. The part that adoption can play in achieving secure permanent families for children who cannot live with their birth families is

also an important part of the Government's modernisation of child care services.

- 8.10** It is important that all those who currently are, or may potentially be involved in any way in the adoption of children in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin are aware of this Statement of Purpose document. The authority will make this document readily available to users of its services, other organisations and the general public.

Main Aim and Principles of the Adoption Service

- 8.11** The main aim of the Joint Adoption Service is to provide stable, secure adoptive families for children who are unable, for whatever reason, to remain with their family of origin and for whom adoption is judged to provide the best alternative to secure their long-term well-being.

Permanent placement by adoption is the preferred first option for Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.

- 8.12** The Joint Adoption Service will ensure that all those who use its adoption service have equal opportunity to benefit from the services provided.
- 8.13** The Joint Adoption Service will fulfil its duties as an Adoption Agency in ways that respect all users of the service.
- 8.14** The Joint Adoption Service will undertake to provide clear information about its services and to keep those involved in a particular adoption situation informed of what is happening unless legislation specifically prevents this, or doing so poses a risk to the child or his or her carers.
- 8.15** The Joint Adoption Service will keep records of its work and ensure that rules governing the use and retention of information are adhered to. File audits are regularly undertaken under the Every Child Matters agenda.

Service Planning Information

- 8.16** The Joint Adoption Service will ensure that information systems exist for identifying children requiring adoption, tracking their progress through the different stages of the adoption process, monitoring the time taken to achieve adoption against agreed targets and identifying resource shortfalls. Regular meetings are held with District Manager to track children in the Looked After System. Liaison with both Authorities Independent Reviewing Units is undertaken
- 8.17** Senior officers responsible for children's services in both Local Authorities will monitor children in the adoption system to ensure that delays are minimised and children's placement needs are met.
- 8.18** Members, in their role as corporate parents, will be informed on a regular basis about activity in the adoption service.

- 8.19** Information about children requiring adoption will be used to recruit prospective adopters to ensure that wherever possible children can be appropriately placed within a timescale that is suitable to their age and circumstances. If a suitable placement cannot be identified from within the Joint Adoption Service's 'pool' of adopters, the Joint Adoption Service will look to other Local Authorities through the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium and the Adoption Register and specialist agencies to assist in finding an adoptive placement.
- 8.20** Annual targets for recruitment of adoptive carers will be set based on an analysis of placement need in the coming year.

Adoption Panel Arrangements

- 8.21** The Adoption Agencies' Regulations require that all adoption agencies must establish a panel to consider the circumstances of children who may require adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the placement of approved children with specific adopters. This panel makes recommendations to Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin's designated 'decision maker' on adoption matters who is then responsible for agreeing (or not) the panel recommendation.
- 8.22** In Shropshire the designated decision maker is the Corporate Director of the Children and Young People Services Directorate. In the Borough of Telford & Wrekin it is the Head of Safeguarding & Corporate Parenting.
- 8.23** The Head of Service of the Joint Adoption Service will ensure that the training needs of Panel members are regularly considered and that opportunities for training are provided.
- 8.24** The Head of Service of the Joint Adoption Service will provide an annual report on the work of the panel each year for consideration by Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin in April each year.
- 8.25** Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin will, in discussion with the independent chair, ensure that there is a balanced representation on the panel.

All panel members, including the independent chair, will be subject to annual performance reviews.

Meeting the needs of children

- 8.26** Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin have adoption as an integral part of their placement strategies and will always primarily consider and pursue adoption for children who are looked after and unable to return to their family of origin. Exceptions to this must be demonstrated based on the needs of the child, the wider family context and the professional judgement of workers. However, this should be by exception, not based on the fact that making an adoptive placement might prove difficult, complex or legally challenging.

- 8.27** In reaching a decision about adoption, Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin will consider the views and wishes of the child, his or her family and current carers.
- 8.28** When considering a particular adoptive placement for a child Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin will look carefully at the assessed needs of that child and the caring potential of the adoptive family to ensure that it is the best available match and that it will meet the assessed needs of the child. Arrangements for introducing children to adoptive carers will be undertaken through a planned process that takes account of the individual circumstances and needs of the child and adopters.
- 8.29** When seeking placements for black or dual heritage children, a placement with a family whose ethnic background reflects that of the child will usually be preferred but trans-racial placements with adopters who have proven knowledge and skill in meeting the needs of black and dual heritage children will be considered.
- 8.30** Wherever possible sibling groups of children requiring adoption will be placed together. Before a decision is made that this is not possible or is not in the children's best interests, a thorough assessment will be undertaken of the sibling relationships and presented to adoption panel who will make a recommendation on the appropriateness or not of the plan. Where children are placed separately, the Joint Adoption Service will seek to ensure that contact between the children will be retained in some form.
- 8.31** The Joint Adoption Service will thoroughly assess the needs of children prior to placement and take steps to ensure that the child is prepared for the move to an adoptive home.
- 8.32** The Joint Adoption Service will support the child in placement through an allocated Case Manager. An adoption social worker will provide advice and support to the adoptive parents. In certain circumstances children and adoptive families will be supported by the adoption support team. Reviews will continue until an adoption order is made.
- 8.33** All children who are to be adopted will undergo a full medical assessment before panel. Information from the assessment will be available to the adoptive parents prior to placement being agreed. Arrangements will be made by the medical adviser to ensure that the appropriate medical practitioners follow up health issues that require ongoing treatment.
- 8.34** The authority recognises the importance of providing adoptive homes which promote and celebrate learning and achievement and consideration of the educational needs of children will also form an important part of the process of planning an adoption placement. Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin will seek to ensure that where children move from one area to another as a result of being placed for adoption, their assessed educational needs will be appropriately met in the new location.

- 8.35** Where a particular religion or faith is specified for a child by his or her parents, the Joint Adoption Service will seek a placement that is committed to enabling the child to be brought up with an awareness of his, or her, religious background and given opportunities to follow that persuasion if he or she wishes to do so. This will frequently involve placing with adopters of the same religion or faith.
- 8.36** The majority of children available for adoption will need contact with members of their birth family either directly or indirectly. As part of the planning for the child, social workers will assess whether contact with members of the child's birth family will be in his or her best interests and, if so, the form that contact should take. A clear plan will be drawn up in respect of ongoing contact before placement so that prospective adopters understand their commitment in this respect before a final decision is reached on the suitability of the placement.

Arrangements for the Approval of Adopters

- 8.37** All people who approach the Joint Adoption Service expressing an interest in adopting will be given information about the service, verbally and in writing and offered an opportunity to attend an Information Evening. At least 3 are held each year.
- 8.38** Applicants who wish to be approved as adopters will be given equal consideration irrespective of their race, religion, gender, sexuality or disability provided they can meet the needs of children who require adoption. In law no adult below the age of 21 years may adopt a child.
- 8.39** The Joint Adoption Service will only assess and take to panel prospective adopters whom it judges are likely to be used to provide placements for children requiring adoption. Where the number of applications exceeds the anticipated need for placements (mainly in respect of healthy, young, single children and babies and children from abroad) the Joint Adoption Service will select applicants to go forward for assessment in accordance with the needs of the children we are currently seeking to place.
- 8.40** Adopters who are approved by Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin are able to pursue possible placements from other Local Authorities mainly through the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium and the Adoption Register.
- 8.41** The assessment and preparation of prospective adopters will be done using a framework provided by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). This requires that prospective adopters have time to reflect, discuss and ask questions about adoption and as such will take some time to complete.

However, the Joint Adoption Service is committed to reducing unnecessary delay and will monitor and report on the length of time assessments take against targets.

- 8.42** All prospective adopters will be expected to undertake pre-approval training before commencing their assessment. Details of the training will be provided by the Joint Adoption Service as part of their initial information to enquirers. Further training will be available post approval as part of the adoption support offered. Applicants wishing to adopt a child from abroad will undertake training and preparation courses provided by the Inter-Country Adoption Centre. Specific information about inter-country adoption and the processes involved can be obtained from the Joint Adoption Service and is also published on the Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin web sites.
- 8.43** The Joint Adoption Service does not automatically exclude any applications on the basis of one particular health or lifestyle issue. All applicants will be medically assessed and details of that assessment considered by the panel. While the panel will consider such issues as smoking, weight, alcohol consumption, previous illnesses, criminal convictions and family history, it will do so only to enable it to reach a decision on whether, on balance, the placement is likely to be able to provide a safe, loving and secure home for the child to grow up in.
- 8.44** In accordance with advice from the Department of Health, medical reports may be sought before assessments are undertaken if health issues are anticipated. In such cases the Joint Adoption Service will consider the views of its medical adviser before deciding whether to commence the assessment.
- 8.45** Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin have a policy which means that children aged under five and all children with known respiratory or hearing problems will not be placed in households where people smoke.
- 8.46** Circumstances may occur in which foster carers for a particular child wish to be considered as adoptive parents for that child. Where this occurs the policy and procedure for foster carers who wish to adopt will be followed.
- 8.47** Where prospective adopters are not approved following recommendation by the adoption panel and the decision of the Agency, they will be given the opportunity to make representations in accordance with a process laid down in government guidance.

Support to placements

- 8.48** Based on assessments carried out under the Adoption Support Regulations there may be a need to give financial support to some adoption situations. To fulfil this, the Joint Adoption Service has a scheme for the payment of financial support in specified circumstances.

The payment of financial support is the responsibility of the placing agency if agreed at the time of placement or within three years of the adoption order being made. If financial support is agreed post three years of an order being made it is the responsibility of the agency within which the child

currently lives.

Full details of how the scheme operates are available in a separate document.

Financial setting-up arrangements for placements are payable in some circumstances and are payable from income generated from Inter-Agency placements.

The Annual Report will include information about the number, amount paid and to which families in respect of which children setting-up grants are paid.

- 8.49** Following attendance at a training group all adoptive carers will have an allocated adoption social worker. Once a placement has taken place the child's case manager will be involved in supervising the child in placement as required by the Adoption legislation.
- 8.50** Children placed for adoption in Shropshire County Council/Borough of Telford & Wrekin will be subject to statutory reviews under the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This will involve an independent reviewing officer from the respective Local Authority to ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for his or her future are progressing satisfactorily.
- 8.51** Where a placement for adoption ends in an unplanned way or there is an imminent risk of it doing so, the Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin Joint Adoption 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.

Post Adoption Support

- 8.52** The Joint Adoption Service have an Adoption Support Services Adviser whose primary role is to:-
- (i)** give advice and information to people affected by adoption
 - (ii)** give advice, information and assistance to other staff in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin on assessments of need for adoption support services, the availability of services locally and effective planning for service delivery
 - (iii)** give advice on good practice in adoption where needed
 - (iv)** consult with, and give advice, information and assistance to other Local Authorities as appropriate, particularly in relation to inter-agency placements and the provision of services

- 8.53** In the Joint Adoption Service the Adoption Support Services Adviser is also responsible for managing the adoption support workers whose primary role is to:-
- (i)** undertake assessments of need for adoption support services
 - (ii)** signpost relevant parties to support services
 - (iii)** provide direct work with children and families
 - (iv)** Work in conjunction with colleagues from area and specialist teams i.e. CAMHS, LAC Team, Education, Corporate Parenting etc., to provide a service which meets identified needs
- 8.54** All adoptive placements will include a post-adoption plan which will specify as clearly as possible Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin's 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 will be subject to review through the adoption support services' adviser.
- 8.55** Where families seek assistance after the adoption has taken place the Joint Adoption Service undertake an assessment of their need for adoption support. Based on that assessment a support plan will be devised if necessary.
- 8.56** The Joint Adoption Service is providing a 'letterbox' (indirect written contact) facility through which birth families and adoptive children and families can communicate as part of an agreed plan at adoption.
- 8.57** The Joint Adoption Service provides a counselling service for adult adoptees who wish to seek information about their birth parents, in accordance with Section 2 of the Adoption & Children Act 2002.
- 8.58** As part of post adoption support the Joint Adoption Service arranges regular meetings to which adopters are invited. These meetings provide opportunities for adopters to meet both with adoption social workers and other adopters. These meetings are mainly informal but should there be a need for a more focused meeting this will be arranged. Every year the Joint Adoption Service arranges a picnic for adoptive families and a Christmas party.
- 8.59** As part of the post adoption service further training events are arranged during the course of the year. The Joint Adoption Service has a three year agreement with Adoption UK to provide 'a Piece of Cake' training to adopters.
- 8.60** The Joint Adoption Service has a Service Level Agreement with an Independent Adoption Agency to provide an independent support service to birth relatives whose child is being placed for adoption or who has been

adopted.

- 8.61** The Service Level Agreement is for a period of five years and is subject to Annual Review.
- 8.62** Annual reports regarding take up of the service, services required, outcomes and financial information will be presented to the Management Group.
- 8.63** The Independent Adoption Agency currently awarded this contract also provides an Intermediary Service for birth relatives who wish to contact an adopted adult. All requests for intermediary services are referred to this service for which a small charge is levied by the Independent Adoption Agency.

Service Development

- 8.64** The Joint 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 2003.
- 8.65** The Joint Adoption Service will work jointly with other organisations and particularly with the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium, and authorities to develop services where it is clear that doing so will provide benefits for children requiring adoption in Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin.
- 8.66** The Head of Service, Adoption will provide regular reports to County and Borough Councillors in their role as corporate parents on the adoption service including information about numbers of children waiting for adoption at different stages in the process. Work will also be undertaken with elected members to help them understand how the adoption process works and some of the main issues for staff working in this area.
- 8.67** Shropshire County Council and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin will ensure that adoption is included in all its major plans for children, in particular The Children's Services Plan.

Staff

- 8.68** Through supervision and training, Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin will ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to work effectively with adoption cases. From time to time reviews of the training available will take place to make sure that it remains in line with practice and legal developments.
- 8.69** The Joint Adoption Service will ensure that appropriate written procedural and practice guidance is available to staff and that this is updated regularly in light of practice and legal changes.

Overseas Adoptions

- 8.70** The Joint Adoption Service will undertake assessment reports for people wishing to adopt a child from a country outside of the United Kingdom (although allocation of these assessments may be subject to a waiting list in light of the children currently referred to the service who require a placement). In such cases a set charge will be made for the work involved which will include undertaking the assessment, consideration by the Joint Adoption Panel, following up references and statutory checks and all administration.
- 8.71** Where people are seeking to adopt a related child from overseas the set charge will usually apply although the Joint Adoption Service may reduce or waive the fee in exceptional circumstances.
- 8.72** The Authority publishes information on its arrangements for undertaking work on overseas adoptions.

9) Summary of Complaints Procedure

- 9.1** The Complaints Procedure has 2 stages, informal and formal.

9.2 Informal Complaints

These complaints are usually dealt with by the Manager of the Service concerned and within given timescales

9.3 Formal complaints

If the complaint is of a serious nature or if a complainant is not satisfied by the response or action taken the manager, the complaint can be registered as a formal complaint with the relevant Local Authority's Complaints' Department.

- 9.4** Leaflets explaining how to register a complaint and the relevant department's complaints' procedure will be produced upon request.

10) Name and Address of Ofsted

Ofsted
Building C,
Cumberland place,
Park Row,
Nottingham
NG1 6HJ

Tel. 08456404040
Fax. 08456404049

Signed on behalf of Shropshire
County Council

Signed on behalf of The Borough of
Telford & Wrekin

Ann Hartley
County Councillor
Portfolio Holder
Social Care & Health

Ian Fletcher
Borough Councillor
Portfolio Holder
Social Care & Health

Date

Date