

**Swindon Borough Council
Children Services**



Children & Young People Services Directorate
Civic Offices, Euclid Street, Swindon SN1 2JH

ADOPTION SERVICE

Statement of Purpose

January 2013

SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL
Adoption Service
Statement of Purpose

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SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE

Legal Context

The functions of Swindon Borough Council – ‘The Local Authority’ – as an approved adoption agency are governed by the provisions of the *Adoption and Children Act 2002* and accompanying Regulations and Guidance. This legislation came fully into effect on 30th December 2005, with updated guidance issued in February 2011.

This Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of *The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003*, and fulfils the Agencies duties and responsibilities as set out in Standard 1 of the accompanying Adoption National Minimum Standards, published under the provisions of Sections 23(1) and 49(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Statement further seeks to reflect the Council’s commitment to ‘Best Practice’ in Adoption work, as defined by *National Adoption Standards for England*, published in August 2001.

This Statement is informed by, and builds on, the Agency’s adoption procedures and policy statements developed in line with the 2002 legislation and subsequent guidance.

Aims and Objectives

Swindon Borough Council, in its work with children and their families, seeks to ensure that all children grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their needs for security, stability and quality care throughout childhood and into adulthood. Where children are unable, for whatever reason, to live within their own birth family, a range of services and resources will be provided, designed to assist families in resuming the care of their children. Where that is not possible, the Council aims through its Adoption Service to find permanent alternative families who will promote the child’s well-being and development by providing the highest possible standards of care according to his or her individual assessed needs.

The specific objectives of the Adoption Service are:

- To ensure that adoption is considered as an option for all children requiring permanent alternative care away from their own birth family.
- To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process
- To ensure that decision-making in respect of permanence plans for children takes place within prescribed time-scales where this is consistent with the needs and interests of the child.
- To recruit and maintain sufficient numbers and diversity of prospective and approved adopters to meet the assessed needs of Swindon children, including such factors as ethnicity, culture, religion and language.
- To provide an efficient and effective service to prospective adopters, including those interested in Inter-Country Adoption.

- Where compatible with the above objectives, to increase the number of children adopted from the care system, in line with government targets.
- To develop and deliver a range of adoption support services to adopters, adopted children, and their birth families, in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance.
- To ensure that staff involved in adoption work have the necessary qualifications, knowledge, skills, and training to deliver an effective service.

Principles and Values

The work of Swindon Council's Adoption Service is underpinned by the following values and beliefs:

A) Children:

- ❖ Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all their needs in terms of stability and security, that promotes their physical, social and emotional development, and that offers a supportive lifelong relationship.
- ❖ Where those needs cannot be met within a child's own birth family, adoption may offer the best alternative for meeting those needs.
- ❖ In all planning for children, the child's welfare is the paramount consideration.
- ❖ A child's own wishes and feelings should always be sought and taken into account in decision-making, according to the child's age and understanding.
- ❖ Children are entitled to be treated with respect; diversity and difference should be valued and enjoyed.
- ❖ A child's sense of identity and self-respect needs to be actively promoted through particular awareness of issues of ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, ability and sexual orientation.
- ❖ Children should only be separated from their siblings where clear evidence supports doing so on the basis of the children's individual assessed needs.
- ❖ Every child is entitled to information about his/her birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- ❖ On-going contact with birth relatives should be encouraged if compatible with the child's need for physical safety and emotional security.

B) Adopters:

- ❖ The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child will be valued and respected.
- ❖ All adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. No applicant will be discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity, culture, language, sexuality, gender, financial status or marital status.
- ❖ All applicants are entitled to know what issues will be taken into account in their assessment, including age, health, relationships, and family history. Applicants will be regarded as partners in the assessment process, and will be kept fully informed of their progress, and of any concerns identified in the assessment.

- ❖ The Adoption Service is primarily concerned with finding suitable families for children, not meeting the needs of prospective adopters. All enquiries and applications for adoption will be prioritised for allocation according to the current needs of children awaiting adoptive homes.

C) Birth Families

- ❖ Wherever possible, the Adoption Service will work in partnership with birth parents and other family members to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for the child
- ❖ Birth families will be treated fairly, openly and with respect, and their relationship with their child will be acknowledged.
- ❖ Birth families will be kept fully informed of the adoption process, the legal implications, and their rights.
- ❖ Birth families will be given such information about their child's adoptive parents as is compatible with the child's, and the adoptive families, safety and security.
- ❖ Birth families will be given access to independent professional social work help and advice, including counselling services, if required.

D) General

- ❖ Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved. The Adoption Agency will engage with other organisations, professionals and individuals to ensure that support services are available as needed to all parties in the adoption process - children, adopters, and birth families.
- ❖ All parties to the adoption process will have access to the Agency's own complaints procedures and to external complaints mechanisms as set out in legislation and regulations.

Agency Management, Staffing and Organisational Structure.

A. Management of the Service

Arrangements for the management of the Adoption Service are delegated through the Board Director - Commissioning to the Service Director, Head of Children & Families who is also the "Agency Decision-Maker".

Responsibility for the operational management and strategic direction of the Adoption Service as a whole is exercised through two service managers, the post-holders being directly accountable to the Service Director:

The Head of Community Social Care supervises the managers of the Assessment and Referral Team and two Community (Fieldwork) Teams responsible for the initial case planning in respect of Children in Need, which may include children in the early stages of Care and for whom Adoption is the identified plan. A dedicated Fieldwork Team working specifically with Children in Care and their families is accountable to the Head of Children and Young People in Care who also supervises the manager of the Family Placement Team, responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training and support of adopters (and foster carers), and for identifying potential matches between prospective adopters and children for whom a decision has been made that they should be placed for Adoption. The selection of suitable 'matches' to be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration is the joint

responsibility of the relevant Fieldwork Team and Family Placement Team.

The appointed Manager of Swindon's Adoption Service, (*as required under Regulation 5(1). LAAS (England) Regulations 2003*) is:

Name: Terry Scragg (Head of Children & Young People in Care)

Date of Appointment: 12th July 2004

Qualifications: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

/Diploma in Social Work -1982

Post-Grad. Diploma in Management Studies – 1999

Relevant Experience: Terry has extensive experience in child care social work as a field social worker and has held various management posts with Swindon Borough Council since 1986. He was appointed to the post of Service Manager with the Council in February 1998 and assumed responsibility for the management of the Adoption Service in July 2004.

B. Organisational Structure

Fieldwork

Every looked-after child in Swindon has an allocated social worker, who is responsible through established management and supervisory arrangements for case planning and implementation, including permanence planning for those children who have been assessed as unable to return to the care of their own birth families. These social workers may be based in one of two Community Fieldwork Teams, or in the Children in Care Team based in the same offices as the Family Placement Team. There is in addition a separate Disabled Children's Team working from a separate office base, with children for some of whom the care plan may be adoption. Workers in these teams are responsible for supporting birth relatives in accessing the independent support services that have been commissioned in accordance with regulations.

All social workers involved in adoption work are professionally qualified, and all have access to regular supervision from qualified and experienced Team Managers and/or Assistant Team Managers.

Family Placement

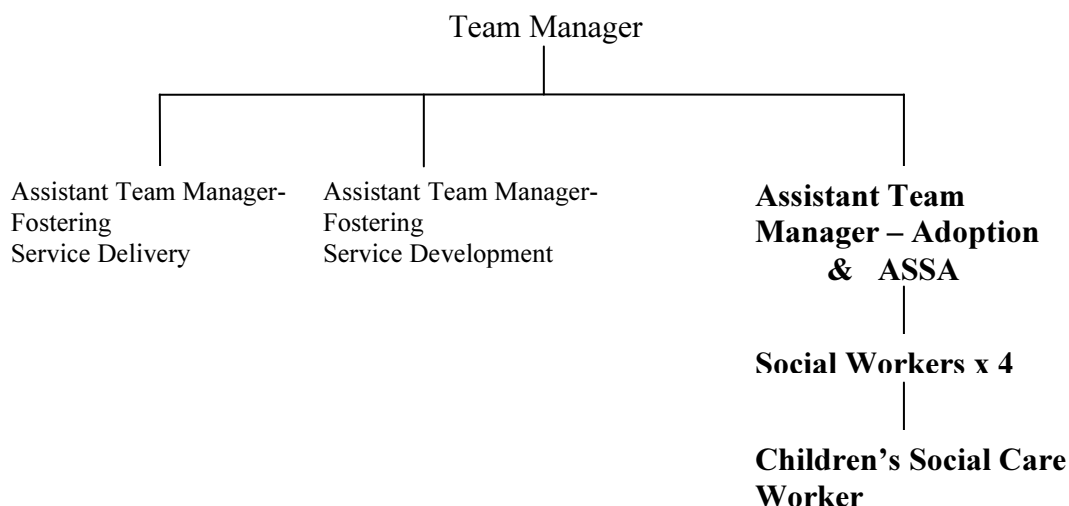
The assessment, training and support of adopters and prospective adopters is undertaken by the Adoption Section within Family Placement Team, with other workers having similar responsibilities in respect of the Borough's Fostering Service. Recruitment activity and some training is shared jointly with the Fostering Service workers. The Adoption Section also has primary responsibility for 'Homefinding' for those children for whom adoption is the plan, involving the matching of the child's needs (as assessed by the child's social worker) with the skills, abilities – and preferences – of the Agency's approved adopters.

Where a suitable local match cannot be identified, the section will initiate a wider search, utilising regional and national resources such as the South West Adoption Consortium (of which Swindon Borough Council is a subscribing member), the National Adoption Register, the BAAF 'Be My Parent' publication and other avenues as necessary.

The Adoption Section also carries responsibility for the management of the agency's 'letterbox' service, providing for the exchange of written information between adopted children and their birth families.

The Section also delivers at no charge the agency's statutory responsibilities for providing counselling and assistance to adopted adults seeking information and access to, their birth records (*Schedule 2, Adoption & Children Act 2002*). Adoption agencies can additionally, if they choose, provide intermediary services to support adopted people and their relatives to make contact with each other. Swindon Borough Council has elected **not** to register as a provider of Intermediary Services. However these services are available from local adoption support services agencies.

- C. Staffing:** The Adoption Section forms one discrete part of the Family Placement Team whose composition is as follows:



Administrative staff work across the whole family placement team, but with one member designated as the Adoption Panel Clerk

The team is structured in such a way as to ensure that staff caseloads reflect individual skills and experience and, where consistent with the needs of the service, personal preferences. There is flexibility built into the structure to allow other team members to develop experience and expertise in this area. When necessary, experienced and suitably qualified sessional staff will be employed to meet any identified shortfall in service provision.

Qualifications and Experience:

All operational staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW / DipSW and it is a requirement of employment within the Family Placement Team that staff will have had a minimum of two years' experience in child care social work or closely allied field. None of those team members with particular responsibility for adoption work has less than ten years such experience. 2 members of the wider team hold the Post-

Qualifying award in Child Care; a further 4 hold the PQ1 (Child Care) award. 3 members hold the post-qualifying Practice Teachers Award.

The team has traditionally low staff turnover, and currently the length of service in Family Placement for all members ranges from minimum two years to nearly 20 years. The team therefore operates from a very high skills and experience base. The team manager and assistant team manager (adoption) have between them over 70 years' experience in child care social work, and the Team Manager has been in a family placement management post for 15 years. The Team Manager holds NVQ level 5 in Operational Management.

The Adoption Panel

Swindon Borough Council has its own independently-chaired Adoption Panel, constituted in accordance with current regulations. Panel membership is drawn from a central list of suitably-qualified individuals, but with a 'core' composition as attached at Appendix 1. The chief functions of the panel in relation to children and families are:

- *To recommend whether or not a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child*
(it may also consider and give advice about the number /age-range/sex/ likely needs and background of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt)
- *To recommend whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter.*

Note: Changes in legislation in September 2012 removed from Adoption Panels their role in making recommendations about whether children should be placed for adoption, except in the case children who have been voluntarily relinquished by their birth parents.

The panel must also consider, and may give advice to the agency about:

- The authority's proposal for the provision of adoption support services for the adoptive family.
- The arrangements the agency proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child
- Whether the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or the prospective adopter, should be restricted, and to what extent.

The panel will make its recommendations based on detailed written reports prepared by the child's social worker and / or adopter's social worker, who will also attend the meeting in person. In considering the approval of prospective adopters, and when considering a proposed match with a particular child, the applicants are also invited to attend the panel meeting in person.

The Panel's recommendations are referred to the *Agency Decision Maker* for a final decision; in Swindon this role is held by the Service Director, Head of Children & Families

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service Provision.

Work with Children and their Families

All social workers with case-holding responsibility for looked-after children hold a professional qualification. There are established agency policies and procedures providing for regular supervision and annual appraisal of staff. Practice guidance and tools have been developed for regular auditing of case files by Team Managers and Service Managers.

All case planning concerning looked after children requires the involvement of the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager; plans for achieving permanence, including adoption, are made in accordance with regulatory requirements and guidance.

Children for whom adoption is the plan remain children in care until such time as the Adoption Order is made, and prior to placement for adoption remain subject to statutory review at the prescribed intervals set out in the *Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991*. Following placement with the adoptive family, but prior to the making of an adoption order, reviews will be held in accordance with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers managed within the Department's Quality Assurance Team.

Work with prospective and approved Adopters.

All social workers undertaking assessments of prospective adopters are professionally qualified, and have a minimum of 3 years post-qualification child care experience. There are established agency policies and procedures providing for regular supervision and annual appraisal of staff. Case files are maintained with clear guidance issued as to structure and organisation, and practice guidance and tools have been developed for regular auditing by Team Managers and Service Managers.

All reports to be presented to the Adoption Panel are scrutinised by Team Manager / Assistant Team Managers for quality control purposes. Preparation Courses which form part of the assessment of prospective adopters are co-led by Adoption Social Workers and an experienced adopter, who will contribute to the assessment report, thus providing an additional objective perspective to the report. All assessment is undertaken in accordance with practice guidance on Preparing and Assessing Prospective Adopters published by DfES in 2006.

The Adoption Panel provides an additional 'quality control' function in relation to all aspects of the Adoption Service, by offering commentary on reports submitted. Comments are fed back to the Agency Decision-Maker, who reads all relevant panel paperwork.

The panel receives regular (2-monthly) feedback on children for whom placement for adoption has been agreed but are still awaiting placement. It also receives annual update reports on approved adopters still awaiting a placement.

An annual report for Members is prepared by the Panel Chair; this provides a summary of any issues raised relating to agency practice. Six-monthly reports on the Adoption Service are presented to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Board by the Manager of the Family Placement Team.

Training programmes for all staff involved in adoption work – including panel members – are developed in conjunction with the Council's Learning and Development Team and form part of the core 'pathway training' for both new and experienced staff. The panel chair contributes to such training. All relevant operational staff have received training on the Adoption and Children Act 2005.

The Adoption Service is subject to regular inspection by OFSTED. The last such inspection took place in October 2009, and rated the service as 'Outstanding'

Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Service has appointed an Adoption Support Services Advisor in accordance with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (Reg.6). The role is currently held by Lesley Harwood, Assistant Team Manager (Adoption) in the Family Placement Team - Tel No. (01793) 463125

The Adoption Service is committed to ensuring as far as possible that appropriate support is offered to all parties - the child, his/her birth family, and the adopters – at all stages of the adoption process before, during and after adoption, for as long as is needed. The service continues to work with partner agencies, including schools, education, health and mental health services, to ensure the availability of appropriate services and resources.

Identifying and planning for those support needs is critical to the successful outcome of every adoption placement. For children, this process starts from the earliest point of the department's involvement; by the time a child is referred to the Adoption Panel for consideration of placement for adoption, a comprehensive assessment of needs will have been completed and incorporated in the Child's Permanence Report. Similarly, the support needs of prospective adopters will have formed an integral part of their assessment and approval and will be identified in the Prospective Adopters Report. These two elements will be brought together during the matching process, and the support services to be provided will be clearly set out in the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Placement Plan. These reports will indicate whether an identified service might need to last more than 3 years and a commitment can be made to provide this.

The support needs of birth families will similarly be considered throughout the process, including most importantly arrangements for contact between the birth family and the child post-placement.

Swindon Adoption Service will retain responsibility for the provision of support services for three years after an adoption order has been made for all children placed by the Service, (including those placed with Adopters approved by another agency), and for as long as needed for all children / families living within the Authority's boundaries. Primary responsibility for co-ordinating the delivery of the agreed support

services during the post-placement / pre-adoption stage rests jointly with the child's social worker and the adopters' supervising social worker. *Post*-adoption, support will be provided according to the individual needs of the case, in consultation with the Agency's Adoption Support Advisor. The following services are available:

a) For Adopters & Adoptive Families

Post-Approval Training

The Agency offers a range of training opportunities to approved adopters, on subjects such as "Attachment"; "managing challenging behaviour"; and "valuing diversity". Training may be delivered both 'in-house' and externally purchased. Inclusion in all training is free to participants.

A 3- module programme has recently been introduced within the Adoption Team designed to assist newly-approved adopters with the practices and procedures involved in 'Seeking, Matching, and Attaching' with children awaiting adoption.

Adoption UK

Adoption UK and Swindon Borough are working in partnership to provide local group meetings and a 'buddying' service for all adopters whether or not they are members of Adoption UK.

Swindon Borough Council will pay at least two year's individual member's subscription to 'Adoption UK' for Swindon approved adopters and adopters resident in Swindon which entitles them to receive regular mailings and to participate in Support Groups organised regionally. Adoption UK can also provide individual support to adopters, accessed through their regional co-ordinator, herself an experienced adopter.

"After Adoption"

From April 1st 2013 Swindon Borough Council has contracted with this agency for the provision of Independent Adoption Support Services to all parties to Adoption who are either residents of the Borough or with whom the Agency were involved in placement arrangements. The agreement includes the provision of Intermediary Services by After Adoption on our behalf. Leaflets advising of the range of services will be freely available.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

The mental health needs of looked after children are a high priority for CAMHS provision in Swindon. Services are provided through a multi-disciplinary team of child psychiatrists and therapists based at Marlborough House. In addition to the range of services available to all Swindon residents, 2 joint-funded posts have been established to provide specific advice and support to foster carers and adopters, to assist them in understanding and managing unusual or difficult behaviours. Access to this provision can be fast-tracked, and there is no requirement for the child themselves to be a patient of the service. However, this facility also provides for rapid access to therapeutic services for the child where appropriate.

Other Therapeutic Services:

Ear-marked funding is available for the purchase of specialist therapeutic intervention to assist adopters and children struggling with attachment difficulties.

Financial Support

Financial support may be available to adopters under the terms specified in the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 paras. 8 – 12, subject to individual assessment of need.

Out of Hours Support

Emergency Duty Service

Swindon Borough Council has a team of social workers available outside office hours to offer emergency social work support to all client groups. The service can offer telephone advice, and has access to placement information and emergency placements with foster carers. In extreme circumstances, EDS workers will visit to offer assistance and support to adopters.

Family Placement Out of Hours Service

In addition to the above Emergency Duty Service, the Family Placement Team also operates a full-time out-of-hours support service to both foster carers and adopters in the form of a telephone advice line staffed on a voluntary rota basis by members of the team. The service is available exclusively to foster carers and adopters. The service does not however provide for home visits, and in the event of a crisis necessitating direct action the duty officer will refer on to the Emergency Duty Service.

Engaging our partner agencies such as Health and Education, to ensure the provision of universal services, along with relevant voluntary and independent agencies, remains a key component of our developing support services.

b) For Birth Families

In addition to the ongoing involvement of the child's social worker, the following independent services have been commissioned to provide support services:

“After Adoption”

The Adoption Service has contracted with After Adoption to provide independent support and counselling to the birth parents of children placed for adoption, and can offer this service to other birth relatives by arrangement. The support offered includes:

- Individual Counselling
- Group for parents whose children have been adopted.
- Supervision of contact post-adoption
- Assistance with ‘letter-box’ contact (eg help with letter-writing)
- Provision of Intermediary Services for Adults wishing to trace birth relatives.

Natural Parents Network

Swindon Adoption Service has subscribed as an agency to the NPN and has also paid advance fees for 15 individual memberships giving immediate access to the organization's services and resources.

Financial Support

The Adoption Service will meet the reasonable costs incurred by birth families in contact arrangements with their adopted children where these are by agreement or subject of a Contact Order made by the Court.

Assessing Needs for Adoption Support Services – Post-Adoption

An adoptive family can ask for an assessment of need for adoption support services at any time while the child is under 18. If this is within 3 years of the adoption order, the placing authority will be responsible for arranging the assessment, but may ask another authority to do this on its behalf. After that time, the request for an assessment should be made to the Adoption Service in whose area the family is living. However, Swindon will retain responsibility for any on-going financial commitment made at the time of the child's placement for adoption or in the subsequent three years.

Where a request is received by Swindon Adoption Service for an assessment of Adoption Support Needs, the Adoption Support Services Advisor will determine how the assessment will be undertaken. Where the request occurs within the first year of the Adoption Order being made, the assessment may be undertaken by the child's social worker or the Adopter's Family Placement Officer. After the first year, unless there has been on-going involvement with the family, the initial assessment will be undertaken by one of the adoption workers in the Family Placement Team. The assessment will build on the assessments and needs identified at the time of matching and placement and include the following elements:

- The needs of the person being assessed and how they might be met.
- The needs of the adoptive family and how they might be met.
- The needs, including developmental needs, of an adoptive child and how they might be met.
- The parenting capacity of the adoptive parent.
- Wider family and environmental factors.
- The circumstances that led to the child being so placed and matched
- Any previous assessment of needs for adoption support services

Once the assessment has been completed the following steps will be taken:

- The person/adoptive family who have been assessed must be given formal notice of the proposed decision and allow time for representations to be made.
- If the proposal is to provide services, the local authority must provide an adoption support plan in writing except where the service is provided on only one occasion or the service is only advice and information. The adoption support plan should include:

- The services to be provided
- What it is hoped the service will achieve.
- How the success of the service will be measured and evaluated
- The timescales for providing the service – when and for how long.
- When and how the plan will be reviewed
- Who is the named person who will monitor the provision of the services according to the plan?

It should be noted that, whilst the Adoption Agency has a duty to assess the need for adoption services if requested, there is no statutory obligation to provide those services even if identified as appropriate. However, Swindon Adoption Service recognizes the uniqueness of the adoptive relationship and the lifetime commitment involved, and accepts its general responsibility to do everything possible to support adoptive families to ensure successful outcomes. The aim is to provide an environment where adoptive families are encouraged to keep in touch with the adoption team so that they can be supported to access and use services which are:

- Responsive to their needs
- Prevent difficulties increasing
- Part of the ongoing programme of support and training available to all adopters
- Provided by other parts of Children Services and Primary Care Trust delivered in integrated teams.

In this way we aim to make assessment a continuous process of dialogue built on the assessment of adoption support needs identified at matching and placement. Essential to this process is recognition that adoption always brings challenges and that adoptive family's benefit from being part of the "adoption community". In Swindon this adoption community is fostered by activities for adoptive families during school holidays, and training and support sessions for adopters as well as adoptive families having a named adoption worker who they can access directly.

Recruitment, Assessment, Preparation, Approval and Support of Prospective Adopters

Recruitment activity takes a number of forms, and includes advertising in and beyond the immediate Swindon area into the neighbouring authorities of Wiltshire, West Berkshire Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire. Enquiries may however also be accepted from further afield – due to its geographical size, a significant proportion of Swindon children awaiting adoption need placements outside the town boundaries.

Enquirers are first sent an information pack, containing a list of future dates of information meetings and a reply slip confirming their preferred date for attendance. Following attendance at an information meeting, applicants will be invited to complete a brief questionnaire indicating if they wish to pursue their interest. On return of the questionnaire they will be offered information and counselling appointment with a family placement officer, usually at the applicant's home. Based on this interview, a decision will be taken whether to invite the prospective adopter to apply for an assessment of their suitability to adopt, and what priority should be given to such application.

The full assessment may take up to eight months and includes:

- Enhanced CRB checks and checks of social services and local agency records.
- Training based on the BAAF 'Preparing to Adopt' modular course programme.
- Social work interviews - individual and whole family. (The 'Home Study')
- Medical reports based on a full examination by the applicants' GP and reviewed by the agency medical advisor
- (At least) three personal references (including one family reference) in writing and follow-up interviews.
- Checks on gaps in Employment / CV and personal history.
- Assessment report following British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering "Prospective Adopters Report" (PAR) requirements or other prescribed format.

All prospective adopter assessments, including those of applicants interested in Inter-Country Adoption, are undertaken by social workers in the Adoption Team.

On completion of the assessment report, the application is considered by the agency's adoption panel (see above). Applicants are invited to attend the panel in person, and are provided in advance with an information leaflet explaining the purpose of the meeting and the panel procedures. Applicants will have had prior sight of the assessment report, and opportunity to comment on it in writing if they wish. They also have the opportunity to address any issues at the meeting.

When arriving at recommendations about individual applications the Panel is guided by the panel advisor who is responsible for ensuring that recommendations are consistent with statutory requirements, national standards, research evidence and borough council policy. In the event of disagreement, the Panel may make a request through the Chairperson for further expert advice or additional information. The Panel has immediate access to expert legal and medical advice. If consensus cannot be reached, individual members of the Panel can have their views clearly recorded in the Panel minutes.

The Panel's recommendations about approval are fully minuted by the panel clerk and passed, through the Panel Chairperson, to the Director of Children and Families who will make the final decision on behalf of the agency. Where there has been lack of consensus about the recommendation or particular difficulties about reaching a recommendation this is drawn to the attention of the Director by the Chairperson.

Where the agency considers that the applicants are not suitable to adopt, the applicants may make representation to the agency requesting further consideration, or seek an independent review of the decision, as set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. Further details about the options will be provided on request.

Following approval, the adopters will continue to be supported by an allocated Supervising Social Worker whose task is to assist them in identifying a suitable match with a child / children awaiting adoption. The worker will also assist in assessing any adoption support needs arising from a proposed match, and identifying how these will be met. Approved Adopters will be offered opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of adoption through access to on-going training, both before and after a placement has been made.

The Supervising Social Worker will remain allocated to the family until an Adoption Order has been made, and beyond if necessary, subject to any other adoption support services being provided.

Complaints Procedure.

All adult parties to the Adoption Process (Adopters and Birth Families) have access to the agency's established complaints procedures, about which written information is available on request. The leaflet includes the address and telephone number of OFSTED. The staff are fully conversant with the procedures, and comprehensive guidance exists on how complaints should be handled.

All looked after children, including those placed for adoption, have a copy of the 'Children's Guide to the Fostering Service' which contains information on how to make a complaint.

A 'Children's Guide to Adoption' is given to every child placed for adoption (or to their prospective adopter), and includes the name and address of the Children's Right Director at OFSTED.

In summary, the Borough's complaints procedure involves three stages: Where the complaint cannot be resolved by the relevant Team Manager within 10 days (or a negotiated longer period (Stage 1) an Independent Manager will be appointed to investigate (Stage 2). This should take no longer than three months. If the complainant is still not satisfied, referral to an Independent Review Panel can be requested which will consider the complaint and make recommendations to the Director of Children Services. The Director will then confirm the outcome in writing.

Customers of Council Services can refer more serious or unresolved complaints to the Ombudsman.

Any complaint or concern about a child involving possible injury or harm to a child will be investigated under existing Multi-Agency Child Protection Procedures.

Graham Senior
Manager, Family Placement Team

January 2013

Panel Composition

Swindon's Adoption Panel is made up as follows:

CHAIRPERSON

Peter Wrighton (Independent Member)

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

**Janice Cox (Adopter)
Pia Pennington (Adopter)
Heather Pardoe (Birth Parent)
Sue Thurtle (Education)**

COUNCIL MEMBERS

**Cllr Joe Tray (Children's Champion)
Cllr Fionuala Foley (Children's Champion)**

SOCIAL SERVICES STAFF

**Debbie Deimert (Principal Officer – Social Work)
Cheryl Keller (Assistant Team Manager, Family Placement Team)**

MEDICAL ADVISOR

Dr Janet King – Consultant Paediatrician

PANEL ADVISORS (Non-Panel Members)

**Andrew Ferguson - Legal Advisor
(SBC Head of Litigation & Personal Services)
Graham Senior - Professional Advisor
(SBC Family Placement Team Manager)**

CLERK TO THE PANEL

**Amy Prictor - (Family Placement Team
Business Support Administrator.)**

OFSTED

From April 2007 OFSTED has been the public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting Adoption services provided by both Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

All enquiries or contact with OFSTED should be addressed to:

OFSTED
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Anne's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 40 40 40

**The Office Address of the Children's Rights Director
- Dr Roger Morgan, OBE is:**

**Office of the Children's Rights Director
OFSTED
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE**

Telephone No. 0800 528 0731

Contact can also be made via the website: www.rights4me.org