



ADOPT LONDON WEST - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2023/2024



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INTRODUCTION

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives; a description of the service it provides, and the facilities that it provides. This document is the Statement of Purpose for Adopt London West.

This statement can be used by children; young people, and families as a guide to what they should expect the service to provide and to do.

Adopt London West (ALW) is a regional adoption agency partnership between Brent; Ealing; Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow Councils hosted by Ealing. It provides a shared adoption service to the four partner Local Authorities. ALW commenced operation on 1st September 2019.

The Regional Adoption Agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the four local authorities.

The Head of Service is line managed by the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and reports to the Partnership Board which is comprised of Senior Officers/Directors from each Local Authority.

In addition, the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board oversees effective collaboration across the four Adopt London Regions: Adopt London North, South, East and West to promote consistency of practice and quality of service across the 24 London boroughs which are part of the wider Adopt London partnership. A shared Adopt London website provides advice, guidance, and information to anyone who is interested in or affected by Adoption.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.
- Local Authority Regulations 2005.
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment Regulations 2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.
- Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- Care Standards Act 2000.
- Adoption Agencies are inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. ABOUT ADOPT LONDON WEST (ALW)

Adopt London West is hosted by London Borough of Ealing and brings together adoption and special guardian support services for Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, and Hounslow. We aim to provide the best quality support for adoptive and special guardianship families within our West London community so that children and young people living in these families can thrive. Adopt London West aims to be a therapeutically informed service and will seek to promote respectful, positive relationships with Adopters and Special Guardians and their families.

ALW guides and supports people who wish to adopt through the assessment process. This includes individual consultation and preparation training using a range of tools and materials to make sure our prospective adopters are well prepared and make the right decisions for them and the children who may be placed with them. We understand that each child and adoptive family is unique. We get to know our children and families well and work hard to match the right child to the right family. We aim to ensure that where possible, adoptive families meet all the people who have been important to their child and support them through the exciting and sometimes anxious times of the initial meeting; introductions and moving in together as a new family.

ALW practice model

ALW is committed to a practice approach that incorporates the principles of the Brighter Futures practice model used by the host LA, Ealing. Social workers are trained and supported in the delivery of Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP), they complete level one and two accredited training. An understanding of developmental trauma and the need to use a therapeutic parenting approach is a fundamental element of our approach.

Our practice recognises the importance of key relationships, for children with their birth families and foster carers and for prospective, approved adopters, special guardians and colleagues within the service, the importance of respectful, honest, and supportive relationships provides a framework to all the work we do.

ALW's Clinical Psychologists support the whole service to further develop a therapeutically informed approach, by providing a consultation service, which may include adopters, social workers and foster carers and supports the development of psychological formulations with social workers.

In addition, the Clinical Psychologists offer advice on transition planning and preparatory work with children including narrative life-story work.

We aim to provide good quality adoption and special guardianship support to families who require support at any stage of their journey, families have access to a helpline/duty system which will be able to provide advice and guidance on a range of issues. We also provide:

- A range of therapeutic services for birth family members, adoptees, special guardians, and the children they care for provided by an independent charity PAC-

UK, which provides confidential advice and counselling. These services are commissioned by ALW through an annual contract.

- A support assessment to jointly consider with Adopters or Special Guardians the right kind of support that may benefit their family.
- Therapeutic support via an Adoption Support Fund funding application.
- Consultation with ALW's Clinical Psychologist regarding the most appropriate therapeutic intervention. This may be directly with the Psychologist or via a Support Social Worker.
- Six half-termly evening education support seminars co-facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and Social Worker.
- Training on further developing parents' and special guardians' therapeutic parenting skills through a range of support seminars.
- A comprehensive webinar programme in partnership with We Are Family (WAF) which provides topical content commissioned based on adopters' feedback as to their priorities.
- "Foundations for Attachment" training to develop adopters' and special guardians' understanding of how trauma affects children - available 3 times per year. We will endeavour to ensure families are offered a place within a year of a child joining their new family, outcome measures have been introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the training offer.
- Linking with an experienced adopter who will provide informal support and guidance.
- Reimbursement of the adoption application fee.
- Support with facilitating contact arrangements both direct and indirect from our support workers.
- A regular newsletter, with articles and training events taking place locally, as well as changes in legislation, new initiatives, and resources.
- At least one annual fun event to enable special guardians and their children to get together with other families.
- Monthly support group for special guardians.
- Contract with Kinship Reach for special guardians.
- Supporting children and young people to access youth activities in the community.

3. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service: -

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond, and where possible this should be within their own family.

- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption (and special guardianship) process.
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be considered at all stages. Every child and family are different and need a bespoke approach.
- Delays in adoption (and permanency planning generally) can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic and cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised; positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The specific needs of children with a disability will be fully recognised and considered 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.
- The role of special guardians in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their parents 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 and special guardianship arrangements. They will be treated fairly, respectfully, openly and offered a supportive service.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

ALW operates within equality legislation and the policies of the London Borough of Ealing, the host Local Authority. The service works positively and respectfully with all families and partner agencies regardless of race, religion, language, culture, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs, considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability whilst acknowledging the need to avoid undue delay.

4. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

- Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which provides the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
- Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption and permanency via special guardianship orders are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.

Working in partnership with all stakeholders, including adoptive and special guardianship families, adoptees, birth family members & other adoption, kinship and support agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements & good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

Objectives of the Agency

- To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption, within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards.
- To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
- To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support, and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care.
- To minimise delay in family finding, always paying attention to, and prioritising the needs of the child.
- To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption, recognising that adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, and that their needs will change over time.
- To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters, and their children in partnership with other agencies.
- To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad.
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair.
- To ensure that concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaint's procedure is made available.
- To ensure that the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments, and complaints.

5. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Adopt London West is based at Ealing Council's main office building:

Perceval House,

14-16 Uxbridge Road,
London,
W5 2HL

Head of Service – Debbie Gabriel

Team Manager – Recruitment, Assessment and Preparation of Adopters –
Joanne Auburn

Team Manager – Early Permanence and Family Finding – Darla Steward

Team Managers – Adoption and Special Guardianship Support and Adoption
Support Services Advisor (ASSA) – Milena Bazelkova and
Alison Field

Business & Performance Manager – Chloe Fasan

Adopt London West provides an adoption service for:

- Children who need an adoptive family
- Birth family members
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who need adoption support services.
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families.

In addition, Adopt London West also provides Special Guardianship support services to families.

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families
- Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a home study, taking up references and statutory checks, and running preparation training.
- Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption.
- Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them.
- Advice, guidance, and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to the Intercountry Adoption Centre who offer specialist advice and support.
- The family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible
- Children's social workers and adoption social workers jointly undertake the task of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption.

- The responsibility for matching and supporting adoptive families is a shared task until the adoption order is granted.
- Support to maintain contact with birth families, this includes a “letterbox” service, and in some cases support with direct contact arrangements.
- Support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults wishing to find out about their birth families and facilitating access to adoption archives.

6. CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

The clinical psychology offer embeds two NHS employed clinical psychologists (equivalent to 1.0 WTE) alongside Adopt London West’s social care services which encompasses the recruitment of adopters, family finding and support services for adoptive and special guardian families in Ealing, Hounslow, Brent, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Clinical Psychology Provision

This is a Tier 2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); the service offers a range of provision to both social work staff and adoptive/special guardian families. Below includes an overview of the clinical psychology provision currently:

- Psychology consultation with social workers
- Supporting transitions from foster-carer to adoptive families
- Reflective practice for the recruitment and family finding social work team.
- Supporting the team manager/consultant practitioner to hold and maintain the structure for ‘group supervision’ for the support team.
- Training and workshops for staff
- Preparations groups for prospective adopters
- The development of practice guides
- Direct work with children, young people, and families (*funded via the Adoption Support Fund*); this includes:
 - i. *Assessment and Formulation model*; a four-session clinical psychology assessment (with an additional review appointment after a written report has been provided to the family) for adopted and special guardian families.
 - ii. *Foundations for Attachment*; a Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) informed programme, for those parenting children who have relationship difficulties, especially children who have experienced attachment difficulties, trauma, loss and/or early separation in their life. This is a nine-week programme and we approximately run four groups a year.

- iii. *Other Therapeutic Interventions:* The range of direct interventions include Dyadic Developmental Practice/ Parenting/ Psychotherapy (DDP); Narrative therapy; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); Mentalisation based approaches; Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR); Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT); and Compassion Focussed Therapy (CFT). These interventions are funded through the Adoption Support Fund from the child/young person's intervention grant.

7. NUMBERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF

Debbie Gabriel, Head of Service, has overall responsibility for Adopt London West. She has over forty years' experience working in children's social care services, qualified as a Social Worker in 1994 and has spent the last eighteen years managing Adoption and Fostering Services.

Joanne Auburn, Team Manager, Adopter Recruitment and Assessment has worked in social care services for twenty years, she qualified as a social worker in 2010 and has worked in Adoption for seven years, five years of this time as a manager.

Darla Steward, Team Manager, Family Finding and Early Permanence completed a bachelor's degree in child and Families Studies with a Minor in Psychology in 2004 and a master's degree Social Work in 2006 in the United States. She has since worked in the UK for the last seventeen years with Children and Families following the journey of the child through Children Looked After, Connected Persons, Fostering and Adoption Teams. Darla has held a management position for the last ten years.

Alison Field, Team Manager, Adoption and Special Guardianship support has worked in Fostering & Adoption services for thirty three years after qualifying as a Social Worker in 1990. Alison has been a manager for twenty three years.

Milena Bazelkova, Team Manager, Adoption and Special Guardianship Support and Adoption Panel Advisor, obtained a master's degree in social work in the USA, she has twenty years post qualifying experience in adoption and permanence.

Chloe Fasan, Business and Performance Manager has worked in children's social care services for four years. Chloe obtained a Business with Law degree in 2012 and has over 10 years Business related experience and qualifications.

Dr Mel Jarvis, Clinical Psychologist has twelve years' experience working with children and families across different settings, including, parent -infant psychotherapy and CAMHS and Social Care (adoption and child protection teams) Mel qualified as a Clinical Psychologist in 2019, her area of interests includes, working with children with developmental trauma, their families and professional networks and supporting the development of trauma informed practice.

Dr Nedah Basit, Clinical Psychologist has thirteen years of experience of working with children and families across different settings, including, community based CAMHS,

services integrated within children and families social care, and in-patient services. Nedah qualified as a clinical psychologist in 2017, her areas of work include working children and young people who have experienced difficult and harmful early care experiences and supporting them and their families and professional networks. Within her work, she predominately uses Dyadic Developmental Practice, Systematic and Narrative ways of working.

The agency employs **31 staff** (27.5 FTE)

- 3.5 Team Managers
- 2 Consultant Practitioners
- 12 Social Workers
- 1 FTE Clinical Psychologist
- 3.5 Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Workers.
- 1 Business & Performance Manager
- 4 Practice Support Coordinators
- 1 Marketing & Communications Officer (part time)

All social workers have a social work qualification and are registered with Social Work England and have relevant experience in children and families' service. They have an enhanced DBS check. The Head of Service acts as the Agency Decision Maker and the Adoption Support Team Managers act as the Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA)

8. THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Anyone interested in finding out more about adoption can access information on adopting with Adopt London West via our website or make contact through our enquiry line. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and either invited to an information session or should they so wish, offered an individual home visit.

PLEASE NOTE: Applications for adoption from overseas- Inter-country adoption, is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adopt London West has a contract with the Intercountry Adoption Service (IAS) a specialist agency to undertake this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Initial discussion and home visit

The first discussion usually takes place over the telephone with a Practice Support Coordinator, who will be able to answer most initial questions, they will then suggest attending an information session.

Following attendance at an information event, there are likely to be more information sharing discussions with a social worker or manager, this may include a home visit. A more detailed discussion about the individual circumstances of a family will take place and advice and recommendations offered regarding further preparation and or research may be suggested before a shared decision on proceeding with the adoption enquiry will usually be reached.

This is a good opportunity for prospective adopters to ask questions and consider the potential impact of adoption on them, their family, and any children they might adopt both now and in the future. If adopting as a couple both partners will need to be present for the visit.

Next steps

To progress into the formal stages of assessment, prospective adopters will submit a Registration of Interest (ROI) form. ALW will either accept the ROI or give clear written reasons why it is not considered to be appropriate to proceed with the enquiry.

If the ROI is accepted then Stage 1 of the assessment process commences, this stage should last two months.

Formal assessment

The adoption assessment process is detailed, intense and requires time and commitment from the allocated social worker and prospective adopters. The process will involve a detailed assessment of the prospective adoptive family, support networks and lifestyle. This is essential to make sure we know our adopters as well as we know our children and to ensure that make the right decisions for the children requiring adoptive families.

Adopters usually tell us that the process was detailed and a bit daunting but was interesting and helped them to reflect on their life and help them think more about the parents they want to be.

The process takes place in 2 stages, an independent panel makes a recommendation at the end of the process before a final decision is made on suitability.

Stage 1

Stage one of the process begins when we have received the Registration of Interest (ROI) form. This form will also give us all the information we need to arrange medicals, contact references, and undertake statutory checks. These checks will include a Disclosure and Barring Service check (checking for criminal records and convictions), health and address checks. We will also invite all prospective adopters to attend preparation groups and access further information and training. We aim to complete

stage one within two months. However, there are a number of factors that might not make this possible.

Once we start on the checks, prospective adopters will be invited on our preparation training. Our preparation groups receive very positive feedback and those who are initially anxious about attending find them very interesting, informative, and enjoyable. They also provide the opportunity to meet other prospective adoptive parents at a similar stage in the process. We are often told that lasting friendships are made at the preparation groups. Other people have also said that the three-day course gives them a much deeper understanding of adoption issues and what adoption will mean for them as a family.

Stage 2

The assessment is used to help prospective adopters to consider carefully and honestly what they expect from adoption and what they can offer a child. Many children have had difficult life experiences and come from complex backgrounds. Prospective adopters will have time to think carefully about the children's needs and how they can meet them. We ask lots of detailed questions about family background, childhood and adult experiences, relationships, and present circumstances.

For prospective adopters adopting as part of a couple, the social worker will see both partners together and individually. The assessment process is demanding and will take around four months to complete. There are very good reasons why everything is explored in depth with you in this way. Adoption is for life, and we must be sure that adopters are suitable to care for vulnerable children. Just as importantly, prospective adopters must be as certain as they can be that adoption is right for them and that they can make the lifetime commitment required.

As the assessment reaches its final stages the adoption social worker will complete the prospective adopter's report (PAR). This report details the potential as an adoptive parent along with the results of medical, DBS and local authority checks and personal references.

It is important that the report clearly describes the sort of children the applicants feel they could adopt. The Social worker will have discussed their thoughts with them throughout the assessment and the report should therefore not contain any surprises. Prospective adopters will check the report and will have the opportunity to make written comments on it. These comments form part of the completed document.

The Adoption Panel

The adoption panel is made up of an independent chair, social workers, an adoptive parent and an adopted adult. A minimum of five panel members are required to be present for the panel to be quorate to make a recommendation on the suitability of applicants. In cases of dual approval as temporary foster carers with the view to adopt,

when families are considering early permanence, the quoracy requirement is 6 panel members.

Panel members consider the prospective adopters' report and other supporting documents and consider if the prospective adopters are suitable to be approved to adopt. Applicants are invited and encouraged to attend panel and invited to contribute but are not required to do so. The social worker will also be present to answer any further questions and provide support. The panel will make their verbal recommendation on suitability to adopt at the time of the meeting. The full minutes from the adoption panel meeting, the prospective adopters' report and any associated paperwork will then be sent to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for Adopt London West, and they will make a formal decision whether to approve applicants as suitable to adopt, based on the above paperwork and the recommendation from the adoption panel. A written decision and reasons for this is sent to the applicants, confirming their approval.

What if the decision is no?

Some applicants decide adoption is not for them at some stage in the process. The assessment process is designed to give enough information to help prospective adopters to make their own decisions and we will support them to withdraw if they decide it is not right for them or to take time out if it is simply not the right time.

Sometimes we feel adoption is not right or that the applicants do not have the ability to meet the needs of vulnerable children. If we have any concerns, we will share these with the applicants and discuss honestly what the options are. Usually, these issues are identified very early on but occasionally later in the process.

If prospective adopters have begun the formal stage 2 assessment, they have a right for the assessment be presented to panel even if the recommendation is not to approve them as suitable to adopt.

There are also rare occasions when the agency decision maker may make the decision not to approve an adopter.

If prospective adopters are unhappy about the decision, they may make a formal complaint or refer to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) who will review all aspects of the work and decision making. More information will be given to the applicants should they require it.

Independent Review Mechanism

The Contract Manager
Unit 4
Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Wortley

Leeds
LS12 6AJ

Email - irm@irm.org.uk

Telephone - 0845 450 3956 or 0113 2022080

Adoption by existing foster carers

Sometimes foster carers who are looking after a child may decide that they wish to be considered as potential adopters for the child in their care. Foster carers will usually discuss their wishes with their allocated Supervising Social Worker, following which they will be advised to submit in writing their wish to be considered.

A planning meeting will follow to discuss how to progress the assessment, foster carers will be informed of their legal status and may be offered independent legal advice. If all parties are happy to proceed, a fast-track assessment will begin, and the foster carers will be offered additional training if necessary.

Stage one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently in order to avoid delay.

Second time or subsequent adopters

Those who have already adopted and wish to adopt another child will also be fast tracked through the process if after initial exploration it is agreed they are likely to be suitable.

Depending on the circumstances of the family stage one and two of the process may run sequentially or concurrently.

Training on adopting again will be offered, this is a useful refresher and will focus specifically on the individual needs of both children, the adopted child already in the family and how they can be supported and prepared for a sister or brother joining the family.

9. BEYOND APPROVAL

Matching and support

The adopter(s) social worker will help to identify children whose needs are compatible with the adopters' skills and preferences. The social worker will provide support and guidance throughout this potentially difficult process, adopters may be one of several families being considered for a child and therefore, face disappointment if they are not the family selected.

All prospective adopters are referred to our other Adopt London partners and Link Maker, with their agreement, if no match has been identified within Adopt London West.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child. When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the letterbox system with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child.

A child appreciation day will often be arranged depending on the child's age and circumstances to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will also be discussed.

The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

Process for the matching of a child

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their social worker will attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker for the Local Authority who have responsibility for the child. The Agency Decision Maker will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

If a match is agreed an introduction planning meeting is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will agree a plan for the detailed introduction process, this is likely to involve an initial "chemistry" meeting with the child and some play dates as a way of building connections and familiarity with the child before formal introductions begin, the plan will be closely monitored to ensure everyone feels comfortable and supported.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are dually approved as Early Permanence carers, are second time adopters, or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering. These differences will be carefully explained to prospective adoptive parents from the beginning of their adoption process.

Transition planning for children

ALW follows the University of East Anglia “Moving to Adoption” transition planning model for children, training was delivered to Adopt London staff by Professor Beth Neil in October 2020. This model is based on research which has evidenced that moving children to their adoptive families works better if it is managed more gently and over longer periods of time. The model emphasises the value of the child’s relationship with their foster carers and also the loss that foster carers experience when a child who they have cared for over some time leaves their family.

Annual Reviews of Adopters if no child has been placed.

If it has not been possible to move to a match within twelve months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review with the adopter/s. The process is an opportunity for all to explore the reasons for no suitable match being identified and consider if further training or support may be helpful. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, an updated report will go to adoption panel for consideration, checks and references may need to be updated as part of this process.

Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child’s birth parents either prior to placement, or sometimes, if more appropriate, later once birth parents may be more able to accept the plan of adoption, it is likely that a social worker will support the initial meeting in a suitable venue. There are many benefits to be gained from meeting birth parents, including helping to begin a relationship that may develop over time that is mutually supportive to the child.

If due to individual circumstances, meeting the birth parents is not possible, social workers will still encourage some level of contact with other members of the birth family, some kind of direct contact usually helps in the exchange of information in the longer term.

After placement

Visits will be made by both the child’s social worker and the family’s adoption social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and prospective adopter(s). The child remains a ‘looked after’ child until an Adoption Order is made.

The child must be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child’s first statutory review at four weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than every six weeks.

The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker to the prospective adopters.

The Rule 14:11 - Annex A, report for court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers. Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safe keeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later in life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

Contact and the letterbox service

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the agency. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed, however, this may change over time.

Contact may include letterbox contact, or more direct contact via phone, video or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including birth parents, siblings, or extended family members. A letterbox service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent or any other relative or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of direct contact may be arranged where necessary and agreed.

10. ADOPTION SUPPORT

Adopt London West has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. This service is provided by ALW social workers and support workers and in partnership with a number of voluntary agencies or other providers.

The adopters' social worker will ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations, for example, PAC UK, New Family Social, "We Are Family" and other services and are on the mailing list for any events organised through the adoption service.

The agency has a specialist Adoption and Special Guardianship support team, operating across the region who offer a range of Adoption and Special Guardianship support services.

They also signpost to other services for those affected by adoption, including:

- Adoptive parents
- Adopted children and young people.
- Birth parents and family members
- Adopted adults.

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the "Adoption Passport" according to individual circumstances for adoptive families: The

adoption support team will undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.

Other services available may include:

- Advice line and newsletter
- Training and Workshops
- Links with mental health and educational services
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- An annual social event for adoptive families through our partnership with We Are Family
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements for adopted children & young people.
- Social groups and activities
- Training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs.
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories
- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children.
- Information to adopted adults about registering a veto in relation to contact.

Services for birth relatives include:

- Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service via an independent agency
- Support regarding letterbox and contact arrangements
- Support to birth parents when deciding to record on their child's file whether or not they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18.

For Adopted Adults:

- Access to their adoption file and support in understanding the reasons for their adoption.
- Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service via an independent agency
- Support and advice on making decisions about contact with and from birth relatives.

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via:

- Adoption Advice Line Telephone number: 0208 825 5241
- Website: www.adoptlondon.org.uk

- Email: adoptlondonwest@ealing.gov.uk

11. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT

Special Guardianship is a positive, preferred permanence option for many children who cannot live with their birth parents. Special Guardianship offers children the opportunity to grow up in the care of a close family member or to remain within their wider kinship extended family or friendship network. There are many benefits to children of remaining within their network, being placed with trusted adults who reflect their cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds can provide a secure sense of belonging which promotes a positive self-identity and resilience in children.

We recognise that the support needs of Special Guardians are different to adopters although some aspects may be similar. Special Guardians are more likely to be directly involved in facilitating contact between the children they care for and their parents, there are other widely recognised specific challenges experienced by Special Guardians.

To reflect these differences, ALW offers more personal support through a monthly Special Guardianship Support Group that is co-facilitated by a peer Special Guardian and a social worker. Peer support between Special Guardians is a priority for ALW and a small grant to support Special Guardians to support each other has been agreed.

In addition, ALW commission support services from “Kinship” a nationally recognised and respected organisation that has considerable expertise, influence and provides advocacy for Special Guardians.

While acknowledging that many Special Guardians are experienced parents already, ALW offer a Foundations for Attachment training course to Special Guardians. This training is co-facilitated by social workers and a clinical psychologist and offers participants an introduction to the impact of emotional trauma and therapeutic parenting techniques that may be different to those used in parenting their own children.

In addition, ALW offers half termly education support groups jointly facilitated by an Educational Psychologist and a Social worker.

Other support services may include:

- Advice line and newsletter
- Training and Workshops
- Links with mental health and educational services
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between special guardians, the children they care for and parents and other birth relatives.
- An annual social event for special guardianship families

- Training and advice for schools to help teachers understand the needs of children living in special guardianship families.
- Working with children in their special guardianship families around understanding their life stories
- Signposting to other organisations offering advice and support to help children.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training or through externally commissioned trainers. A management information system is in place which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption.

Adoption Agencies are monitored by external inspections carried out in each partner Local Authority by Ofsted. There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals. Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice-yearly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chair and Agency Decision Maker.

The Head of Service submits a quarterly report to the Partnership Board and will provide an annual summary report. This will also be presented to each individual Local Authority Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Parenting Committee as required.

A robust quality assurance framework will be implemented with regular auditing of files, plus evaluation feedback from adoptive parents and other service users.

12. CONCERNS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of children for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the Complaints Procedures.

Complaints - Children's social care - Ealing Council

The service is inspected by **OFSTED**

Any person who has concerns about the service may contact **OFSTED** at:

Address: Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk