



Regional Adoption Agency

Statement of Purpose

Adoption is Life Changing



2024/25



Gateshead Council



Newcastle City Council



Northumberland County Council



North Tyneside Council



South Tyneside Council

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1. Who is this Statement of Purpose for?

This document has been produced to meet the legal requirement that Adopt North East explain in writing what its aims and objectives are and provides a description of the services it provides. It is written so that children, young people, families and professionals can use it as a **guide** to what they can and should expect from Adopt North East.

2. What is Adopt North East?

Adopt North East is a Regional Adoption Agency based in the North East of England. It was created in December 2018 in response to the legal requirement that the authorities regionalise their adoption services. It is a **partnership of five Local Authorities**: Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council.

3. What is the aim of Adopt North East?

In joining their adoption services together and forming a Regional Adoption Agency, the vision and ambition of the five partner Local Authorities is for Adopt North East to achieve ***'excellent adoption services that transform children's and families lives for the better'***.

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

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards for care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

4. What are the objectives of Adopt North East?

The **six objectives** of Adopt North East established by the Executive Board for 2023-2025 are:

1. More Adopters
2. Earlier Placements
3. Stronger Support
4. Better Practice
5. Deeper Partnerships
6. Greater Feedback

5. What are the Values of Adopt North East?

The values of Adopt North East are a set of beliefs that have been written down in statement form to guide the attitudes and actions of the Agency. These statements of intent inform the way in which the Agency does all that it does and enables the Agency to hold itself and be held to account.

Everyone:

- Will be treated with respect and not experience discrimination or disadvantage because of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age or any other unjustifiable reason.

Children:

- Will always be at the centre of the work of Adopt North East
- Will be listened to and have their wishes and feelings taken into account
- Will have their welfare, safety and needs given absolute priority
- Will be adopted as quickly as possible without unnecessary delay
- Will not be separated from their siblings unless it is in their best interests to do so

Adopters:

- Will be valued, listened to and respected and treated with dignity throughout their adoption journey
- Will be assessed without delay
- Will be provided with help, care and support which meets their needs
- Will have decisions about them made with care, transparency and which are fair, evidence-based, reasonable and proportionate
- Will have records written about them which are clear, timely and easy to understand

Birth Families and Relatives

- Will be valued, listened to and respected and treated with compassion
- Will be provided with help, care and support which meets their needs

Our Staff:

- Will be ambitious for children
- Will work to the highest professional standards
- Will ensure that information is recorded, stored and used in compliance with information governance best practice
- Will be supported to develop their passion and expertise in adoption work
- Will be encouraged to be innovative and creative in the interests of children
- Will be provided with high quality, regular, reflective and directive Supervision

Our Partner Local Authorities

- Will provide effective oversight, challenge and scrutiny regarding the operation, performance and financial management of the Agency
- Will be committed to actively supporting the Agency to meet the aims and objectives of the partnership for children and families

6. What does Adopt North East do?

Adopt North East has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions.

Adopt North East has primary responsibility for family finding for all children with a plan of adoption, but the five partner Local Authorities retain overall responsibility for children in their care.

Adopt North East provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted children, adopted adults and birth relatives.

7. Where is Adopt North East based?

Adopt North East staff are based in modern, accessible office accommodation situated to the **east of Newcastle City Centre** in the **Cobalt Business Park**. The offices include desks for the staff, a number of meeting rooms and a room which can accommodate Adoption Panel. The offices have free car parking and are a 20-minute walk from the Northumberland Park Metro station. There are also regular buses from the city centre.

Adopt North East has a dedicated **Training Room** at the Linskill Centre, North Shields. The room accommodates and is equipped for large group events including preparatory training, adopter support groups and Information Events. There is an on-site cafeteria and free car parking.

7.1 Office Address Details

Adopt North East
Floor 3
Quadrant West
Quick Silver Way
Cobalt Business Park
North Tyneside
NE27 0BY
0191 643 5000

7.2 Training Address Details

Adopt North East (Room 11A)
Linskill Centre
Linskill Terrace
North Shields
NE30 2AY
0191 257 8000

8. Who works for Adopt North East?

Adopt North East has a staff group of approximately 50, including over 30 Qualified Social Workers. All Qualified Social Work staff hold a recognised qualification in social work and are registered with Social Work England. All staff are subject to Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks upon commencement of employment and checked thereafter on a three-year rolling basis.

The Agency is split into **3 service-specific delivery areas**: Recruitment, Assessment and Support, Family Finding and Post Adoption Support. The Teams are supported by a dedicated service-wide Business Support Team.

The teams are all managed by knowledgeable and experienced **Team Managers**.

A Team Manager also acts as the dedicated **Agency Advisor** to the Adoption Panel and has specific responsibility for the **Central List of Panel Members** and **Panel training**.

The Agency is managed by a **Senior Manager** who also acts as the **Agency Decision Maker**. The Senior Manager is also part of the North Tyneside Council Children's Services Senior Management Team.

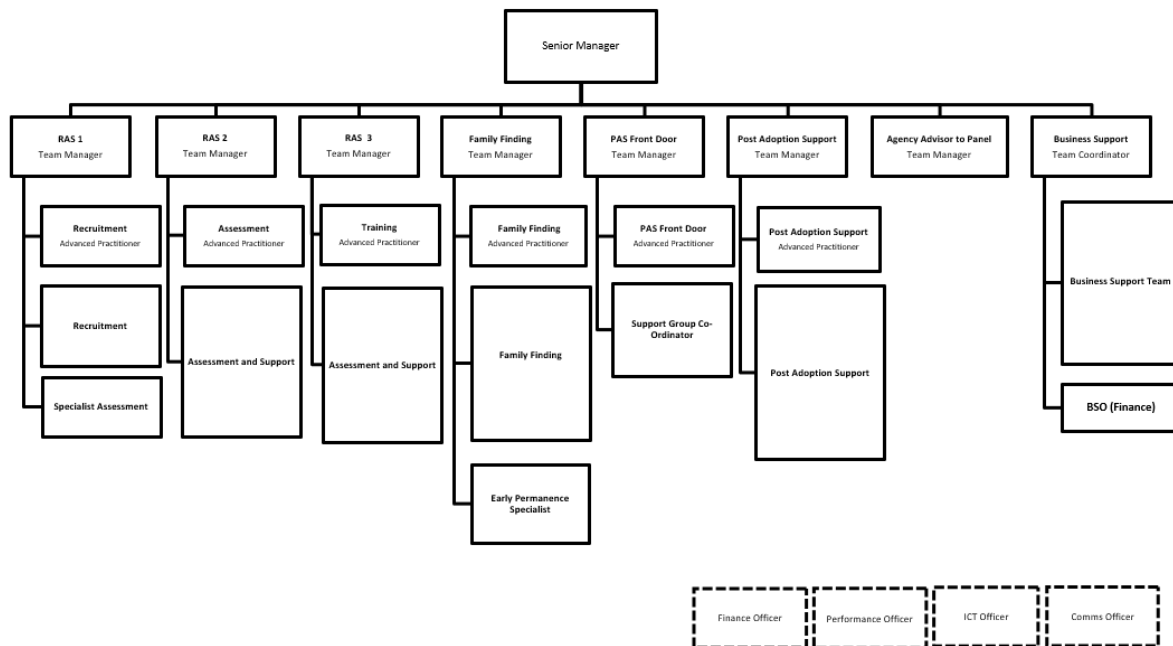
All staff are employed directly by North Tyneside Council.

Biographical information about members of the Management Team is publicly available on the Adopt North East website <https://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk/about>

Further information about the professional qualifications and experiences of any member of staff is available upon request.

8.1 Organisational Chart

Adopt North East Regional Adoption Agency 2024



The work of the staff team in Adopt North East is **supported by specialists** from North Tyneside Council, including ICT support for its Liquidlogic Case Management System, support with its financial management and support around Performance Management Information and Human Resources. Adopt North East also benefits from regular support from media and social media experts from North Tyneside Council to enable production of effective communications about Adopt North East, including regular targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns.

9. What services does Adopt North East provide?

9.1 Services to Prospective Adopters

9.1.1 Responding to Initial Contacts

Enquirers about adoption can access information about adopting with Adopt North East by email, web page form, social media or telephone contact.

All Initial Contacts are dealt with by Qualified Social Work staff – where appropriate, enquirers are given relevant information verbally and directed to the online information

available on the Adopt North East website. They will also be invited to attend one of the regularly held Information Events or signposted to other relevant services to support them in the very beginning of their adoption journey.

9.1.2 Responding to applications to adopt children from Overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work. Because of the expertise required for inter-country adoptions, Adopt North East is **proud to partner with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC)**. IAC are commissioned by Adopt North East to undertake the work on its behalf. This is to ensure that prospective adopters receive the highest quality service relating to issues outside of the normal practice of Adopt North East, including knowledge of UK immigration laws and the legal framework of the child's host country.

9.1.3 Information Events

Information Events are **regularly held** by the Agency to enable enquirers about adoption to hear from Qualified Social Workers about the adopter assessment process and the journey for children requiring forever families. There is also an opportunity to meet with and listen to the experiences of adopters.

Details of these scheduled events are available on the Adopt North East website and can be booked online via the website.

9.1.4 Initial Meetings

If enquirers have attended an Information Event or indicate their interest in starting their adoption journey with Adopt North East, the Agency will arrange an **Initial Meeting**, normally a home visit by a Qualified Social Worker. **This is not an assessment.** The purpose of an Initial Meeting is for the Agency to provide more detailed information to potential applicant adopters and answer any questions about the adoption process that the applicants may have. The potential applicants will be offered the opportunity to share information about their circumstances with the Social Worker in relation to factors that could be significant to consideration by the Agency

about their suitability should they decide to apply to adopt. Potential applicants will be encouraged to be honest and realistic about their circumstances and to highlight any issues they consider might be relevant.

Based upon the information shared, the potential applicants will be given advice by the Social Worker about their suitability. **This is not a decision by the Agency. It is advice** given by the Agency to support potential applicants in their decision making. The Social Worker will provide advice to the potential applicants about their strengths and any vulnerabilities, including whether the current time is the best time for them to apply and/or whether there are any areas that they may wish to address with a view to strengthening their application. As well as advice about the strengths and vulnerabilities of potential applicants, the Agency will make it clear that the potential applicants have a right to submit a **Registration of Interest** to the Agency in order that a formal decision can be made by a Team Manager about their suitability to progress to Stage 1 of the adoption process (usually within five days of receipt).

If an enquirer considers that they wish to commence their adoption journey with Adopt North East, they will need to formally **Register their Interest** and provide their written consent to a range of checks being undertaken, including consent for medical information to be disclosed to the Agency.

9.1.5 Registrations of Interest

All Registrations of Interest will be considered by an experienced Team Manager **within 5 working days of receipt**.

A letter will be sent to the Prospective Adopters by the Team Manager on behalf of the Agency which will either confirm that their application has been accepted by the Agency and the Agency will commence Stage 1 or, more rarely, that their application has not been accepted. Where an application has not been accepted, the Agency will always detail the reasons why. The Agency will also provide details of the complaints process should an applicant wish to complain about the decision.

9.1.6 The Pre-Assessment Process (Stage One)

Stage One begins on the day that Adopt North East accepts the Registration of Interest and should normally take **2 months** to complete.

The Stage One process will include the following:

- The Agency will undertake all the checks required by law, including DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks on the prospective adopters and all adult members of the proposed adopter's household;
- The Agency will obtain all the references required by law;
- The Agency will ask the prospective adopter(s) to participate in an Adoption Medical undertaken by their General Practitioner, the findings of which will then be considered by the Adopt North East Agency Medical Advisor;
- The Agency will provide the prospective adopter(s) with the opportunity to attend training and preparation sessions with the expectation that prospective adopters attend.
- The Agency will provide prospective adopter(s) with access to the CATCH on-line platform to support self-directed learning.

Throughout Stage 1, the prospective adopters will be supported by an **allocated Qualified Social Worker**.

At the conclusion of Stage 1, a Team Manager will consider all of the information obtained by the Agency and decide on behalf of the Agency whether the prospective adopters can progress to Stage 2 or whether, more rarely, based on the information obtained at Stage 1, the prospective adopters are not likely to be suitable to adopt. If this conclusion is reached, the Agency will inform the prospective adopter of the decision and provide them with a clear written explanation of the reasons why they are not deemed suitable to be able to proceed to Stage Two. Prospective adopters who wish to complain about this decision may make a complaint using the **Agency's complaints procedure**. The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is not available for challenging Agency decisions made at Stage One.

Finally, the Agency will allow a prospective adopter to take a break between Stage One and Stage Two upon request, or indeed recommend such a break, up to a maximum period of six months.

9.1.6.1 Adoption by foster carers

The Agency will **fast track** approved Foster Carers (not Connected Person Foster Carers who are temporarily approved) who Register an Interest with the Agency to be assessed as adoptive parents for a child in their care. Stage One and Stage Two of the adoption process will progress concurrently to avoid delay. The training requirement will be dependent upon the needs of the Foster Carers as determined by the Agency on a case-by-case basis. The Agency will aim to complete the assessment process **within 4 months** of Registration of Interest.

9.1.6.2 Adopting for a Second or Subsequent Time

The Agency will **fast track** previously approved adopters who have adopted who Register an Interest with the Agency to be re-assessed. Stage One and Stage Two of the adoption process will progress concurrently. The training requirement will be dependent upon the needs of the adopters, as determined by the Agency on a case-by-case basis. The Agency will aim to complete the assessment process **within 4 months** of Registration of Interest.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is the policy of Adopt North East that there must be a **minimum period of two years** from the date of placement of the previous child/ren with the prospective adopters to the date of the approval decision as to their suitability following reassessment. This policy enables re-assessment by Adopt North East to fully consider the impact of the adopted child/ren on the adopters' suitability to adopt a further child/ren and, critically, the impact of further adoption upon the child/ren already in their care.

The policy means that re-assessment by Adopt North East is likely to start around **20 months after the placement of a child/ren**. The approval as suitable decision will not be made until a date **at least two years after placement**.

A decision that the specific circumstances are such that this policy should not be followed can only be made by the Senior Manager for Adopt North East.

If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap will not necessarily apply, and the Agency will give their re-assessment high priority.

9.1.6.3 Adopters transferring from another Adoption Agency

Sometimes prospective adopters begin the adoption process with one adoption agency but for a range of reasons may decide that they would wish to transfer to Adopt North East.

In these circumstances, Adopt North East will undertake an **Initial Meeting** prior to any decision being made about accepting the transfer to understand the rationale behind the request. In all cases, Adopt North East will contact the previous Adoption Agency to understand the circumstances from the perspective of the Agency. A Team Manager will decide if the transfer will be accepted. Should a transfer be accepted, all documentation held by the previous Agency will be requested and should be transferred to Adopt North East **within 10 working days**.

If adopters are approved by another Adoption Agency and request that they transfer to Adopt North East, they are required to resign from their approving agency in writing. Adopt North East will commence the process at Stage One again. Stage One and Stage Two of the adoption process will progress concurrently. The process will therefore normally be completed within **4 months**. In all cases, Adopt North East will contact the previous Adoption Agency to understand the circumstances from the perspective of the Agency and relevant documentation, including the PAR held by the previous Agency will be requested and should be transferred to Adopt North East **within 10 working days**.

9.1.6.4 Preparatory Training

Applicants are required to participate in training. Training is delivered by Qualified Social Workers and supplemented by experienced adopters who share their first-hand experiences of adoption. Adopt North East also represents the voices of children and birth families within the presentation. Feedback from adopters is that they really value the opportunity, with others, to think in detail about the skills they will need and the children needing adoption:

Module 1 Training (2 Days)

This mandatory training takes place during Stage 1 of the prospective adopter process, alongside the process of statutory checks. The focus of this training, delivered over two consecutive days, is to explore the journey children go on to reach the point of a plan of permanence by way of adoption, including the implications of the lived experience of children requiring adoption.

Module 2 Training (2 Days)

Stage 2 training is mandatory and usually takes place during stage 2 of the prospective adopter process concurrent to the assessment work. It normally takes place a couple of months after the Module 1 training (and as far as possible with the same group of people they did their Module 1 and EPP training with). The training picks up from the end of Module 1 training and considers adoption in more detail, including the process of approval, family finding, matching and placement. The training also explores the issues of compassion fatigue, post placement depression and asking for help. Learning from Disruptions inform this training. The training engages the participants in therapeutic play techniques and how to build relationships with children. Colleagues from the Family Finding Team join the training to explain about the children the Agency is currently family finding for and a Post Adoption Support Social Worker attends to talk about the lifelong support that is available to adoptive families.

Early Permanence Training (2 Days)

This training is mandatory for all those interested in understanding and considering Early Permanence. The training aims to give prospective adopters information about what Early Permanence is so that prospective adopters can make an informed and

considered choice during their assessment as to whether this it is something they would wish to consider. As Early Permanence Placements are a priority for the Agency, prospective adopters are very much encouraged to consider this pathway to adoption.

Growing Families Training (1 Day)

This training is mandatory for those prospective adopters who already have children either by birth, adoption, stepchildren or other arrangement. This training offer has been developed because of the learning derived from research around Disruptions relating to the impact of an adopted child on an established family. The training seeks to equip prospective adopters to think through the potential issues in advance and improve practical and emotional resilience.

Family and Friends Training (1 day)

This training is not mandatory, but participation is strongly encouraged. This training acknowledges that adoption impacts the wider network of friends and family and seeks to provide the wider support network of a prospective adopter with information and advice about adoption to equip them to better support adopters in their adoption journey. The training is in addition to the Network Meeting undertaken as part of the assessment of adopters and is more practical in focus.

9.1.7 The Assessment process (Stage Two)

The Stage Two assessment process will not begin by the Agency until Stage One has successfully been completed (apart from second time and foster carer adopters). At the conclusion of Stage 1 the prospective adopters will be written to by a Team Manager to formally advise them that Stage One is completed and **invite them to indicate** whether they wish to proceed. The prospective adopter(s) have **6 months** from the completion of Stage One to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the Stage Two process will ordinarily take no more than **4 months** including assessment, Panel and the Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated a Qualified Adoption Social Worker to complete their assessment. A Stage Two Assessment Plan will be drawn up between the Social Worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional panel date.

The assessment will comply with the legal requirements for the matters to be considered by the Agency in determining suitability to adopt.

During the assessment process, a **Network Meeting** will be held. This is to inform a Social Work judgment that an applicant has sufficient immediate support, for a child or children to be placed, and demonstrates a capacity to continue developing the support available to them.

Prospective adopters should make efforts to strengthen their network from the point of registering their interest in adoption. It is important that the Social Worker c

Where the Agency considers that more time is needed, or a prospective adopter wants more than four months to complete Stage Two (e.g. because the prospective adopter is struggling with the process or there has been a significant event in their life such as a family bereavement), the Agency may delay making their decision on the suitability of the prospective adopter. When the Agency decides to extend the timescale for Stage 2 beyond 4 months, it should be planned and purposeful. The Agency will not agree to an open-ended delay to the assessment. Where the applicants insist on an open-ended delay, the Agency will request that they withdraw from the Stage 2 assessment process at this time.

9.1.8 The Approval Process (Adoption Panel)

The **Adopt North East Adoption Panel** considers the information presented to them, including the adopters' Adoption Assessment Report (AAR) and makes **recommendations** about whether applicants are **suitable to be adoptive parents**.

Adopt North East currently holds a **weekly** Panel.

Membership of Panel meets the statutory requirements for the operation of panels, including the operation of a **Central List of Members**. The Agency is committed to a

membership which best represents the diversity of the community it serves and a membership which is ambitious for children.

All applicant adopters are invited to attend the Adoption Panel at which they are being considered.

The Panel makes recommendations to the **Agency Decision Maker** who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all the information presented at Panel. The Agency Decision Maker for Adopt North East is the Senior Manager for the Agency. The Decision Maker will decide within **7 working days** of receipt of the Minutes and Recommendation of the Panel. Decisions will be confirmed in writing within **5 working days** of the decision.

Where the Agency decides that applicant adopters are unsuitable to adopt during Stage Two of the approval process, this is initially known as a **qualifying determination**. This is a **40 working days** period of time in which the applicant adopter has the right to appeal the decision, either by making representations to the Agency or to apply for an independent review from an Independent Adoption Panel. The Agency will give the applicants a full explanation of why they are not considered suitable to adopt and give them information on what action they can take if they do not agree with the determination.

Where the Agency receives written representations from the prospective adopter within **40 working days**, the Agency Decision Maker will ordinarily refer the case back to the Adoption Panel for further consideration. Where the case is referred to the Panel, the Panel will consider the case again and make a **fresh recommendation** as to the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child.

Where the prospective adopters choose to appeal to the **Independent Review Mechanism** (IRM), an independent Adoption Panel will consider the application and make an **independent** recommendation about the suitability of the prospective adopters to adopt to the Adopt North East Agency Decision Maker. The IRM does not however have the authority to overturn the decision originally made.

Whether following written representations and consideration by Adopt North East Adoption Panel or recommendations from the Independent Review Mechanism, the Agency Decision Maker will then come to a **final decision**. The Agency will then notify

the prospective adopter in writing of its final decision, including the reasons for the decision.

9.2 Services to Approved Adopters

9.2.1 Family Finding

Approved adopters will be asked to be available for children referred to Adopt North East in need of adoption. The Agency **prioritises matching** of Adopt North East approved adopters with children referred to it from its five partner Local Authorities (Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside and South Tyneside). Should a match not be identified within six months of approval, adopters are permitted to seek a match with an external child or children needing adoption.

Adopt North East are committed to seeking suitable adoptive families for children who have a plan of adoption in a timely way. **Each week**, the Family Finding Team meet to consider the children who have been referred to the Agency and consider links to adopters. The Team also consider any expressions of interest made by adopters and whether a link should be explored.

The Family Finding Team Manager also meets on a **monthly basis** with each Local Authority to track all the children who have a plan of adoption. This also gives the opportunity for the Local Authority to highlight children with a potential plan of adoption so that early advice can be offered about Early Permanence and the realistic prospect of achieving a match for the child.

In addition to this, there is a Social Worker from the Family Finding Team allocated to each Local Authority as a **Link Worker**. Each Link Worker spends one day per month in the Local Authority so that they are readily available and accessible to offer additional advice and support. Link Workers also deliver focused training sessions to upskill Social Workers in relevant adoption related topics.

Adopt North East use the **Link Maker** software package as a tool to assist in making internal matches between children and approved adopters.

Adopters are also given the opportunity to hear more about particular children at regular **Profiling Events** (ordinarily run at least twice a year) and potentially meet the children at **Activity Days** run by the Agency (ordinarily run at least twice a year).

The Family Finding Social Workers will work closely with assessing Social Workers to identify potential early matches and where appropriate this can lead to **targeted assessment of adopters** for a particular child.

Should Adopt North East not be successful in securing an internal match with adopters, the Agency will seek **inter-agency** funding to explore adopters within the North East and Cumbria so that the Agency can, wherever possible, find families within the Region. If this is not possible, the Agency will begin to search nationwide.

The Agency uses a **diversity of approaches in Family Finding** for children, including:

- Activity Days
- Child Specific Social Media Advertising
- National Profiling Events
- Other Profiling approaches such as Coram Connections
- Professionally produced DVDs
- Specialist Print Media
- Profiles on the Adopt North East website

9.2.2 Waiting Adopter Group

For some approved adopters, being linked and matched with a child or children takes time. This can depend upon the particular needs of the children requiring adoption and the matching considerations of adopters. The Agency understands that this period of waiting can be emotionally challenging. As a consequence, there is a monthly Waiting Adopters Group (WAG) which is intended to:

- Continue to prepare adopters through relevant on-going training;
- Enable adopters to meet with other adopters for peer support;

- Enable adopters to consider their matching considerations by hearing about some of the children the Agency is currently family finding for;
- Helping adopters to strengthen their profile as a prospective adopter.

The group is open to all those within a month of their approval Panel date, those who are approved and waiting and those with a link but who have not been formally matched at Panel.

9.2.3 Progressing a potential link

Adopt North East will provide the child's Local Authority Social Worker with up to three **Adoption Assessment Reports** (AARs) where it is the professional judgment of the Family Finding Social Worker that the adopters' might be a suitable match for the child. The Agency expects the Local Authority to respond within **seven working days** to ensure that this work is timely.

Once the child's Local Authority Social Worker has identified adopters' that they judge are the best likely match, the Local Authority and the Agency will **share the Child Permanence Report** (CPR) and other relevant written information with the linked adopters for their consideration. They will be supported by their Social Worker in this important stage to consider the information and decide if they are interested in progressing. If they are, the next stage in the process will usually be a **meeting** between adopters, the child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker, the adopter's Social Worker and the Family Finding Social Worker.

Following the visit to prospective adopters, the children's Local Authority Social Worker and the Family Finding Social Worker will reflect in discussion on the strengths and vulnerabilities of a match. A **decision** may be made to proceed at this stage with a match. If this is the case, the prospective adopters will be informed of the decision. However, where there are uncertainties, additional discussions and meetings may be required before a decision is made. This can be a challenging time for the prospective adopters and support will be provided. The Agency will however, always ensure that the **needs of the child are at the very centre** of the matching process.

If a decision is taken not to proceed to a match, the adopters' Social Worker will feedback sensitively to the adopters and the Agency will ensure that appropriate support and guidance offered.

When a decision is made to progress a link to a match, the prospective adopters will meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; the 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 **life appreciation event** will be facilitated 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. Any agreement around financial support will be reflected in the **Adoption Support Plan (ASP)**. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the **Adoption Placement Report (APR)**. Both the Adoption Support Plan and Adoption Placement Report will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

9.2.4 Matching Panel

The Child's Local Authority Social Worker, the prospective adopters and their Social Worker will attend the **Adopt North East Adoption Panel**. If the child is being placed with externally approved prospective adopters, the Adopt North East Family Finding Social Worker will also attend. The process for Panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made. However, the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child is the Agency Decision Maker for the Local Authority.

9.2.4 Placement

If a match is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, then a **Placement Planning Meeting** is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. If the match is with Adopt North East approved adopters, the Social Worker for the adopters will take the lead in this process with support from their manager. If the match is with externally approved adopters, the Family Finding Social Worker will take the lead.

There are some variations in the process if prospective adoptive parents are taking the Early Permanency route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering.

The Agency will always place the child's emotional needs at the centre of planned introductions. A child's move to adoption can involve the loss of key relationships with birth family members and foster family members as well as their social and cultural identities as part of those families. Accordingly, Adopt North East and its partner Local Authorities use the Moving to Adoption model from the University of East Anglia as a framework to inform the process of a child from foster care to an adoptive family.

- Stage 1 – Getting to know each other

Contacts between foster carers and prospective adopters, without the child present, followed by play dates between foster carers, prospective adopters and the child

This a gradual process of familiarisation in which the foster carers and the adopters, and the adopters and the child, can get to know each other and begin to build trust, without the adopters taking on caregiving tasks for the child.

- Stage 2 – Making the move

All the steps to be taken for the child to move from their Foster Family to their Adoptive Family

This is a structured process to allow a series of adopters' visits to the foster home with planned opportunities for the adopters to observe, share and then take the lead in care tasks and activities. A **Midway Review Meeting** will be held, prior to introducing the child to the adopters' home, to review the child's readiness to make the move to the adopters. In some cases, it may be felt that one or more additional Review Meetings will be needed during the Introduction period depending this will depend on the needs of the child. A Review Meeting will confirm the planned placement date.

- Stage 3 – Supporting relationships after the move

Developing a child's trust and sense of security and belonging in the adoptive family and the gradual reduction in the role of the Foster Carers

The placement day marks the formal beginning of the adoptive placement. However, the day is not to be seen as the ending of the child's relationship with the foster carer but rather a step in the gradual process of the child building trust in the adopters, a process that should be supported by a series of visits from the foster carer after the placement day.

9.2.5 Meeting birthparents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents prior to placement, however this does not exclude opportunities following placement. Adopters will be supported by their Social Workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information. It is also helpful and important for adoptive and birth family to know who they are writing too as part of indirect Post Box contact arrangements.

9.2.7 After placement

Visits will be made by **both** the child's Local Authority Social Worker and the adopters' Social Worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and adopters. The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The law requires that the child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by **weekly visits** up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than **every six weeks** by the allocated Adopt North East Social Worker.

The law also requires that there are regular reviews. These reviews will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice about this process will be given to the adopters by their Social Worker.

9.2.8 Applying and Obtaining an Adoption Order

An application for an **Adoption Order** is made by the adopters. The Court fee is paid for by Adopt North East. The Court require a report known as an **Annex A** – this is prepared by both the child’s Local Authority Social Worker and the adopters’ Social Worker. For matches with Adopt North East approved adopters, it is the adopter’s Social Worker who is responsible for filing the Adoption Order Application once all paperwork is completed. For external matches, it is the Adopt North East Family Finding Social Worker who is responsible for this. Of note, Newcastle Family Court require DBS checks on adopters to have taken place **no more than 12 months** from the date of application being submitted (or the application will be rejected). As a consequence, Adopt North East requires all adopters to **register with the DBS Update Service** so that timely online checks can be undertaken at the time of adoption applications being submitted to avoid delay.

The child’s Local Authority Social Worker is responsible for ensuring that a **Later Life Letter** and a **Life Story Book** are completed and provided to the adopters **within 10 working days** of an Adoption Order being made. This work gives the adopters for the child the story of their circumstances of the child’s life and the reasons for adoption. It is given to the adopters for safe keeping for the child in the future.

9.2.9 Reviews of Adopters

Prospective adopters are approved as ‘suitable to adopt’ by Adopt North East at a particular point in time, based on the information available to the Agency Decision Maker that has been gathered during the preceding assessment process. Following approval, as part of the Agency’s duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, **approved prospective adopters will be subject to regular** review until the making of an Adoption Order or, where no placement occurs, the termination of their approval.

As well as review at fixed points from the date of approval, the Agency will also exercise ‘**continuous vigilance**’ of prospective adopters’ suitability to adopt and will, where it deems it necessary to do so, undertake a review at any point in time.

If adopters have not been matched with a child within **6 months from the date of approval**, the Agency will undertake a review of the adopters' continued Suitability to Adopt. This will be Chaired by a Team Manager. The adopters' Social Worker will prepare a report for the review, and this will be sent to the adopters so that they are able to consider and contribute their views prior to the review meeting taking place. Checks and references will also be updated as required.

A Review will be held by the Agency six months from the date of the Agency Decision that the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt and then **every six months** thereafter until a child is placed, they withdraw in writing, or their approval is ended.

Whilst approved adopters will not necessarily be subject to 'reassessment', a Review will consider, in light of any updated information not available to the Agency Decision Maker at the point of approval, whether approved adopters are 'still suitable to adopt'. The Team Manager will also decide whether to refer the adopters to the Adoption Panel for consideration of continued suitability.

9.3 Adoption Support Services

Adopt North East is committed to **providing effective help and care to adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption**. Adopt North East provides a range of adoption support services. As well as services provided by Adopt North East, it also does so in partnership with a range of providers, including those from both the voluntary and independent sector.

9.3.1 Services supporting indirect Contact

Adopt North East manages the exchange of written contact between birth families and adoptive families in compliance with the Adoption Contact Plan for a child. This is known as **Letter Box**.

There are many benefits of letter exchange, including:

- The child knows that their birth family has not forgotten about them and that they still care about their welfare and the progress they are making.
- The link with the birth family is maintained.
- Adopters receive regular information from birth families including any major changes in their lives or circumstances which the child should know about.
- Birth families receive regular information from adopters about any changes in the child's circumstances.
- Birth families are reassured that the child is safe and well.

Adopt North East offers **practical support** such as letter writing skills and provides advice on the type of information that can and can't be shared. Adopters are usually asked to send letters to the birth family, on an annual basis. The letters will typically include milestones a child has achieved during the year, their physical health and progress at school. Adopt North East also encourages birth families to reply to adopters to keep them informed of birth family news.

9.3.2 Services supporting direct Contact

Adopt North East will **support adoptive parents** if they decide to establish direct contact arrangements. Direct Contact should always only ever take place if it is in the best interests of a child.

9.3.3 Services for Adoptive Families

Adoption is a lifelong process that is both rewarding but at times challenging. Adopt North East has a dedicated **Post Adoption Support Front Door Team** and a **Post Adoption Support Team** to support adoptive families with their adoption journey.

Both teams are staffed with experienced Qualified Social Workers. They are available to provide **advice and support** about any adoption issues and, when necessary, will undertake either a Short or Full **Assessment of Adoption Support Need** with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs. This will include consideration of making an application to the **Adoption and Special**

Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for more **specialist assessment** or a package of **therapeutic support**.

Adopt North East uses a Framework of over fifty **specialist therapeutic providers** with expertise in supporting adoptive families and their children. Adopt North East works with adopters to identify the best service to meet the assessed needs.

The support Adopt North East provides intentionally changes and develops as we strengthen as an Agency. However, at the time of writing services for adoptive families include:

- A specialist Front Door Team for Adoption Support
- Social Worker visits to the home for advice and support
- Social Worker assessment of need
- Applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for targeted and specialist therapeutic support within scope of the fund.
- Thematic Support Groups providing opportunity for adopters to meet to discuss adoption issues and listen to guest speakers
- Peer Support groups providing opportunity for adopters to meet and build their friendships and support networks
- Group-based Support including Attachment Matters, Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) and Therapeutic Life Story Work
- Letter Box exchange of indirect contact between birth families, adopted children and siblings
- Website and Facebook links to resources and research
- CATCH Online resources
- Links and signposting to other services, including mental health services and voluntary services supporting adoptive families
- Links to the Virtual School Head Teachers and wider educational services
- Links to Local Authority Early Help and Social Care

9.3.4 Services for adopted children and young people

The support Adopt North East provides intentionally changes and develops as we strengthen as an Agency. However, at the time of writing services for adopted children and young people include:

- Social Work Advice and Guidance
- Social Worker visits to the home for advice and support
- Social Worker assessment of need
- Applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for a variety of therapeutic interventions, including but not limited to:
 - Clinical psychology
 - Play therapy
 - Creative therapies
 - Life Story therapy
 - Therapy related to sensory needs
- Links and signposting to other services, including mental health services and voluntary services supporting adopted children
- Links to the Virtual School Head Teachers and wider educational services
- Links to Local Authority Early Help and Social Care

9.3.5 Services for Birth Parents and Family Network affected by adoption

Adopt North East **commissions specialist services** for birth parents and relatives within the family network affected by adoption where they have been affected by an adoption arranged by one of the five Local Authority partners (Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside).

Services commissioned include:

- Face-to-face and telephone counselling
- Various Support groups
- Support around letter writing and receiving post adoption contact

Services are intended to provide:

- Support and counselling to understand and take part in Adoption Proceedings
- Support and counselling through feelings of grief, loss and anger
- Support and information on the adoption process
- Support and Information about post adoption contact
- Signposting to **Intermediary and tracing services** for birth relatives wanting to explore direct and indirect contact with adopted adult relatives. Please note that there may be a charge for this service.

9.3.6 Services for Adopted Adults

Adopt North East provides a service to adopted persons seeking access to their Adoption Case Records of they were adopted from the care of Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside or South Tyneside. Adopt North East commissions services to provide adoption summaries and redacted adoption records to adopted adults over the age of 18 years old.

Any request by an adopted person for access to their Adoption Case Record must be in writing and accompanied by a photocopy of identifying information, such as passport or driving licence. Evidence of the adopted person's address will also be required.

10 How is the work of Adopt North East monitored?

10.1 Governance arrangements

The five partner Local Authorities have joint responsibility for Adopt North East. The Agency benefits from robust governance arrangements provided by a tiered approach to scrutiny and challenge and the active participation of all five partners.

On an annual basis, the **Lead Members for Children's Services** of the five constituent Local Authority partners are invited to attend Executive Board. This meeting is facilitated and hosted by the Lead Member for North Tyneside Council. This meeting enables political overview, scrutiny and challenge.

The five Directors of Children's Services sit as the **Executive Board** of the Agency. The Executive Board meets quarterly. The Board is currently Chaired by the Director of Newcastle City Council Children's Services. The Board meetings are aligned with outturns for quarterly performance reporting periods for the Agency.

The Assistant Directors of the five partner Local Authorities sit as the **Senior Leadership Group** of Adopt North East. The Group has met at varied frequencies to ensure the effective delivery of adoption services by the Agency.

Senior Managers from the five partner Local Authorities responsible for children with plans of permanency by way of adoption sit as the **Adoption Practice Leadership Group**. The Group meets monthly. This Group provides a regular forum for operational issues to be raised and shared across the partnership. There is a shared ownership of the agenda – this is reflected in the Chair being shared on a rota basis across all five partners.

10.2 North East Adopters' Voice

Adopt North East benefits from a **reference group of service users** who volunteer to meet on a bi-monthly basis and contribute their perspective on the design and delivery of services.

10.3 Adopt North East Annual Report

An annual report is provided to the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services in each of the five partner Local Authorities. It is the responsibility of the Board member for each respective authority to ensure that these are presented, discussed and noted. The Report includes quality of practice information and performance management information.

Copies of the Annual Report are made available to each member of staff and each Adoption Panel member.

Additionally, the Annual Report is made **publicly available** on the website of Adopt North East www.adoptnortheast.org.uk

10.4 Performance Score Card and Inspection

Adopt North East provides information about its performance to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, reporting by way of a 'Score Card'.

The performance of Adopt North East is also inspected when a Local Authority partner's Children's Social Work Services are subject to an **Inspection by Ofsted**. Inspections occur every three years in each Local Authority. Ofsted make their findings public.

11. How can I compliment or complain about Adopt North East?

We want to improve what we do and how we do it. We **welcome your feedback** on what it was like to receive a service from Adopt North East.

If we have done something well, please tell us. We want to learn what works so that we can do it again, even better.

We also know that we will not always do things as well as we could have done. If you feel we could have done better, then tell us. We will investigate what you tell us, think about what we did and when we find we got it wrong, we will say so, apologise and most importantly try to make things right. We will also learn from our mistakes and work out how we can make any changes we need, so we do it better next time.

The easiest way for you to feedback is to talk to, email or message the **member of staff who provides a service to you**. They may be able to sort out any worries you have quickly.

If you don't feel you can raise a worry with the member of staff directly then talk to, email or message the **Team Manager** who has responsibility for the work being done with you. Part of their job is to make sure that the work is as good as it can possibly be. They will want to agree with you what your worries are, what you want to happen

and then they will investigate it. They will try to respond as quickly as they can. They will try to do within 10 working days and no more than 20 if they need a little extra time.

If you have tried this but are still not satisfied with the response, or you would rather tell someone else, **someone independent**, you can talk to, email or message the North Tyneside Council Customer and Member Liaison Team. This is the Team that works to resolve complaints on behalf of Adopt North East. They will work with you to help you get a response to your worries.

Because we regularly work in partnership with our five partner Local Authorities, sometimes your worries may be better looked at and responded to by them. If that is the case, we will tell you so and make sure that you know how you can feedback to them.

11.1. Contact Details to Compliment or Complain

Adopt North East
Floor 3
Quadrant West
2 Quick Silver Way
Cobalt Business Park
North Tyneside
NE27 0BY
Tel: 0191 643 5000
feedback@adoptne.org.uk

North Tyneside Council
Customer and Member Liaison Office
Telephone: (0191) 643 2280
Email: CMLO@northtyneside.gov.uk

12. About this Statement of Purpose

12.1 Who wrote it?

This Statement of Purpose was written by the **Senior Manager of Adopt North East** in consultation with the staff group of Adopt North East and stakeholders.

12.2 Who approved it?

This Statement of Purpose was approved by the **Senior Leadership Group of Adopt North East on the 05 July 2024**. The Senior Leadership Group consists of the Assistant Directors of Children's Services for the five partner Local Authorities.

12.3 When will it be reviewed?

The Statement of Purpose will be **reviewed** by the Senior Manager of Adopt North East on an annual basis in consultation with the staff group of Adopt North East. It will next be reviewed in June 2025.

12.4 Who can get a copy?

Copies of the Statement of Purpose are made available to each member of staff and each Adoption Panel Member.

Additionally, this Statement of Purpose is **publicly available** on the website of Adopt North East www.adoptnortheast.org.uk