



ROCHDALE
METROPOLITAN BOROUGH
COUNCIL

Rochdale Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2013 / 2014



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Introduction

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to providing a high quality adoption service.

The statement of purpose details the aims and objectives of the service: the mechanisms that are in place for assuring the quality of the adoption service, and the range of services provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth families.

The Statement of Purpose describes how the adoption ensures best outcomes for children in need of adoption and their families. It includes details of the staffing and organisational structure of the service, management arrangements, monitoring and evaluation of services and complaint procedures and the details of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Agency functions within the within the requirements of the following primary legislation, regulations and guidance;

1. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 First Revision 2011
2. Adoption Agency Regulations 2005: First Revision 2011
3. Statutory Adoption Guidance 2005: Revised Feb 2011
4. Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
5. Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2011
6. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
7. The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determination (Amendment) Regulations 2011
8. The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- 8 The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
9. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
10. Statutory Adoption Guidance (New Chapter 3) from 01/07/2013
11. Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2011

Aims

The main aims of Rochdale Adoption Services are to: -

- Provide a range of quality services which promote and achieve best outcomes for children who need a permanent placement outside of the families they were born into.
- Meet National Minimum Standards for Adoption and comply with all relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks.

Objectives

Our overall objective is to provide permanent and legally secured family placements for children which meet their needs and promote their development.

We achieve that objective by recruiting, assessing and supporting adopters who are in order that they can provide children with opportunities to: -

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well Being

Values

The values of the Rochdale Adoption Agency are aligned with those embedded in the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and include;

- Adoption is primarily a service for children. The child's welfare, safety and needs are at its centre.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- A genuine partnership, based upon openness and respect between all those involved in adoption is essential for the Agency to deliver the best outcomes for children.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, however that family is made, that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- We acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and work within policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved – adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may therefore resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.

- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from good parenting and education. They should also have access to and enjoy a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult lives
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Promote a child's positive sense of identity through recognising and valuing a child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality
- Recognise that adoption affects people from all walks of life. Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Rochdale Adoption Service will meet our duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved and we will consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- Rochdale Adoption Service will meet its stated aims and objectives,
- Meeting national minimum standards and ensuring compliance with the appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks.

This statement of purpose is laid out against the National Minimum Standards, Adoption 2011.

STANDARD 1 – The child’s wishes and feelings

OUTCOME:

Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.

- 1.1 The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child or young person are at the centre of Rochdale’s Adoption Service.
- 1.2 Whilst the decisions relating to children in care are made by adults, they are made with regard paid to the wishes and feelings and understanding of the child or young person in care. The adoption service engages with children’s wishes and feelings in a meaningful way via work of the Independent Reviewing Officers and Children’s Guardians.
- 1.3 Every child will have their wishes and feelings regarding the plans for their future, actively canvassed and listened to in an age appropriate manner, recorded and taken into account in decision making and planning. Where their wishes and feelings are not acted upon, reasons for this will be explained to the child and recorded on the file.
- 1.4 The Agency recognises the impact upon children’s resilience and their future development of their being excluded from decision making and planning and its practice of engaging children in these processes is rooted in its commitment to ensuring optimal outcomes for all children in its care.
- 1.5 The views and wishes of the child are sought by a range of age appropriate means: -
 - The Children’s Rights Service will continue to play a key role in promoting the wishes and views of children in care and enabling their voice to be heard. The Independent Reviewing Officers will also ensure that a child’s wishes have been sought and are included in the care planning process as appropriate. If adoption is agreed as the plan children will have his or her wishes and feelings recorded and taken into account.
 - The Children’s Guide to Adoption and Young Person’s Guide is available to children and their carers when adoption is being considered as the plan. Children will also be given details of other appropriate adoption support services such as the national telephone helpline Talk Adoption via the Young Person’s Guide to adoption support. Both are available in leaflet form and can be accessed via the Rochdale Adoption Website.
 - Social Workers working with children with a plan for adoption continue to receive training core training via the Rochdale central training program. Children’s social workers are also offered consultation via the adoption service and/or CAHMS to assist them in adoption planning for children.

STANDARD 2 – Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing Diversity

OUTCOME:

Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

- 2.1 Adoption will be considered as a positive option for children in care that are unable to return to live with their birth parents or be placed with family or friends carers.
- 2.2 Children in need of adoption are a diverse population who bring with them a wide range of ethnicities, cultures, languages and faiths. We purposefully seek to recruit prospective adopters who can reflect such diversity.
- 2.3 The Adoption Service will aim to provide a diverse and wide range of adoptive placements to meet the needs of children who are being placed for adoption. The service will maintain a clear, inclusive and pro-active recruitment strategy to encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds and walks of life.
- 2.4 Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption and careful consideration will be given to recruiting carers that can meet the range of needs of all our children in care needing adoptive families.
- 2.5 All children moving on to adoptive or permanent families will have a life story book and a later life letter, written by the Social Worker who managed their Care Proceedings, and they will be supported to retain key items and mementos from their past. Children and their adoptive parents have access to specialist skilled help via post adoption support services as appropriate to enable them to express their feelings about their past and plans for the future and be better placed to develop new attachments to permanent/adoptive families once placed for adoption and beyond.

STANDARD 3 – Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

OUTCOME:

Children enjoy sound relationships with their prospective adopters, interact positively with others and behave appropriately

- 3.1 Assessments of children's needs will address their developmental experiences and their behavioural and emotional responses to those
- 3.2 Children's early life experiences will inform plans and decision making about matching children with prospective adopters.
- 3.3 Adoptive parents are recruited, trained, assessed and supported with clear and full attention paid to the additional needs of and challenges of parenting adopted children whose behaviour and relationships have been affected by early life adversity. This offer is made prior to any adoption being made and beyond.
- 3.4 The Adoption Service will maintain its commitment to its "open files" policy for prospective adoptive parents considering a possible placement with a child. All information held by the Agency will be shared with the prospective adopters in order that they are best prepared as possible to raise their children.

- 3.5 The Adoption Service will continue to support children's social workers and prospective adopters throughout the process of family finding and matching to ensure that all parties are aware of and understand the implications of the child's experiences for the child and for the prospective adopters.

STANDARD 4 – Safeguarding Children

OUTCOME:

Children feel safe and are safe; children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm including neglect, abuse, and accident.

- 4.1 Rochdale Adoption Service recognises that children who have already experienced significant harm within their birth family environments are likely to remain vulnerable. They are likely to have a reduced capacity for decision making. They may also have limited or distorted expectations of care by and adult. Children and young people who are, or will be adopted in the future are also likely to have a greater vulnerability to manage the impact of life stresses.
- 4.2 Rochdale Adoption Service will train and support parents to make sense of such limitations in their children and to in turn to enhance the resilience of those children in need of adoption.
- 4.4 The Service recognises the additional harm caused to children inherent in the process of removal from birth families, placement in foster care and during the time of court proceedings and care planning when all of the outcomes are uncertain for children.
- 4.5 Children and young people in care will be kept informed of the processes which affect their lives, and their views will be actively sought and where appropriate, acted upon. Where their views can not be acted upon, the explanation for this will be shared with the child or young person.
- 4.6 Rochdale Children's Services work in partnership with other agencies and community groups, will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children.
- 4.7 Where children or young people are not able to live safely with their birth parents then active consideration will always be given to that child being cared for within the wider family or friendship network. Family Group Conferences will be held whenever possible to enable the family to consider the best placement plan for a child. Family members will be assessed and where appropriate, supported to raise children who are not able to be raised by their parents.
- 4.8 Where children or young people are not able to remain with their birth family or be placed within the wider family network a family placement with foster carers or adoptive parents will be sought. Good childcare planning is essential to prevent children drifting in the care system. It is acknowledged that delays in progressing permanence plans can have a severe impact on the health and development of children.
- 4.9 All decisions for children will be based on a rigorous assessment and care planning process. Achieving permanence for children within the child's timescales is a key objective. A careful balance has to be achieved between allowing the birth family sufficient time with access to all appropriate support

services to make the changes necessary to resume the care of their children safely and the need for children to have the opportunity to live in a stable and permanent family.

- 4.10 All children in care will have a care plan. The wishes of the child will be taken into account as appropriate in drawing up the care plan. The birth family should be involved in the care planning process wherever this is possible and their views represented.
- 4.11 The care plan will be reviewed at every child in care review and at the 4 month review the plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan will be based on the needs of the individual child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved ideally by return to birth family or if that is not possible through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up to expedite the permanence planning, which will be appropriately monitored and considered at every subsequent review.
- 4.12 Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a LAC Review, plans will be made to present the plan for adoption to the Agency Decision Maker within 2 months.
- 4.13 All children will have a named social worker responsible for them throughout the adoption process. The social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the child is well prepared before joining a new family. Age appropriate information will be given and foster carers will be trained and supported to enable them to help children prepare to move to a new adoptive family
- 4.14 The Service will recruit prospective adopters who can demonstrate that they are safe adults and to train and prepare those prospective adopters for parenting children who will not necessarily expect family life to be a safe and secure place.
- 4.15 Assessment of adopters will continue to be robust both in terms of the evidence gathered through formal agency checks, personal and professional references, and through analysis of the prospective adopter's capacity to parent a child throughout their development, and build and sustain close and supportive relationships.
- 4.16 Supervision of children and prospective adopters will at least comply with minimum standards and the regulatory framework and will reflect the individual circumstances and needs of the child. The Service will **not** consider approval as an adopter prior to parenting as a guarantee in and of itself of safe parenting once a child is placed.
- 4.17 Specific safeguarding training is provided by Rochdale Post Adoption Services around E safety.
- 4.18 The adoption service has a health and safety guidance in place. This is made available via the Rochdale Adoption website. It is also available in information packs for adopters.
- 4.19 Policies are maintained in relation to child protection issues arising in adoptive placement and disclosure of past abuse by adopted adults.

STANDARD 5 - Promoting good health and wellbeing

OUTCOME:

Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services they need to meet their health needs.

- 5.1 The Agency is committed to minimising delay for children.
- 5.2 The Agency is committed to placing siblings together where it is in their longer term interests to do so. Decisions regarding placing siblings together or apart will consider the complementary and the competing needs of each child in the sibling group. The process of assessment and decision making is clearly recorded on the child's file. Any decision to separate siblings is explained appropriately to the children and their contact needs are fully considered and supported.
- 5.3 All decisions for children will be based on a rigorous assessment and care planning process.
- 5.4 Achieving permanence for children within the child's timescales is a key objective.
- 5.5 A careful balance has to be achieved between allowing the birth family sufficient time with access to all appropriate support services to make the changes necessary to resume the care of their children safely and the need for children to have the opportunity to live in a stable and permanent family.
- 5.6 All children in care will have a care plan to which they and their birth families will have been invited to contribute. The care plan will be reviewed at every child in care review and adoption placement review. The plan will be based on the needs of the individual child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved ideally by return to birth family or if that is not possible through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up between the IRO and the Social Work team to expedite the permanence planning, which will be appropriately monitored, and considered at every subsequent review.
- 5.7 All children with a plan for adoption will undergo an adoption medical with the Agency Medical Advisor. This will draw together all health information from records prior to and subsequent to a child becoming a child in care. It will include the information gathered by all health assessments and the Foster Carer's Report.
- 5.8 National Minimum Standards for adoption in respect of planning for the child will be followed and any delay in achieving those timescales will be monitored by field work managers, the adoption panel and the agency decision maker and reported in the annual and half annual Adoption Agency Report.
- 5.9 Compliance with NMS also informs quality assurance meetings between the Independent Panel Chair. The Adoption Panel Advisor and the Agency Decision Maker.

(i) **Matching**

- 5.9(i) Were adoption is identified as a potential plan for a child, a referral will be made by the child's social worker to the Team Manager for Adoption
- 5.10(i) A profiling meeting with the child's social worker and foster carers will then take place to consider the plans for the child, look at the matching considerations. A family finding strategy will then be devised with the adoption team manager.
- 5.11(i) A Social Worker from the Adoption Service will take responsibility for family finding and will work closely with the social worker for the child and other key parties to the process. Clear and detailed matching criteria will be used to ensure that children will be placed with families that are best able to meet their needs.
- 5.12(i) Children will not be left waiting for a "perfect family." Children will be placed with adoptive parents who are able to support a child in developing an identity which integrates all aspects of themselves. Whilst this may be most straightforwardly achieved by the adults having a shared ethnic or cultural heritage with the child, it is not the only way by which children can develop a strong and integrated sense of self and family finding social work will take into account the full range of the child's needs when considering appropriate potential matches.
- 5.13(i) The option of the child remaining on a permanent basis and achieving a permanent family ideally through adoption with their foster carers is always considered at an early stage and explored where this is considered appropriate. Assessment will include the full range of a child's matching considerations, the lifelong impact and implications of adoption for a child and the foster carers and any other children in the household, relationships with birth family members and future security of the placement.
- 5.14(i) The family finding social worker will take the lead in identifying appropriate families, liaising with the adopter's social worker and accompanying the child's social worker on meetings with the prospective adoptive family. The family finding social worker will remain involved until the child is placed in their adoptive family.
- 5.15(i) In addition to the open files policy which ensures full disclosure of information to adopters, the Medical Advisor meets with adopters who are considered as appropriate to match with a child where this will be of clear benefit to them. The Medical Advisor offers prospective adopters the opportunity to explore the implications her and other medical professionals' assessments of the child for their immediate and longer term futures.

(ii) **Adoption support provision**

- 5.17(ii) Rochdale recognises that children with attachment difficulties and histories of a traumatic and disrupted past and the parents who raise them may need continued access to multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption.
- 5.18(ii) Adoption support needs for the child, their adoptive parents and adoptive siblings, will be assessed at the point of matching with

adopters, and at any point subsequent to that for the child's minority and their or their parents' request.

5.19(ii) Adoption support assessments of need will be drawn up into an adoption support plan which is presented to Panel at the time of the match. This will also inform the legal process which leads to the making of an adoption order.

5.19(ii) Adoption Support plans are reviewed within the appropriate regulatory framework.

STANDARD 6 - Leisure Activities

OUTCOME:

Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities.

6.1 The Agency recognises that children in need of adoption will largely have come from adverse family circumstances where they are likely to have been neglected, under stimulated, mis-socialised and had limited opportunity for play and development. The impact upon creativity and learning of developmental trauma is well evidenced and the Agency therefore seeks to build children's capacities and resilience through broadening their life experiences within high quality foster placements whilst children are in care.

6.2 The Agency educates trains and supports adopters to understand the impact of early adverse life experiences on their Children's development and capacities throughout its process of recruitment, assessment, approval and matching with children.

6.3 Assessment of adopters considers their social networks; inter personal capacities, life experience and understanding of child development and their children's need to develop confidence through experiencing challenge and success. Assessments also include direct observations of prospective adopters with children, learning logs for adopters to chart their own development as prospective parents, and the expectation that applicants seek to build their experience with children over the course of their preparation and assessment where they are not already parents.

6.4 Adopters are prepared and supported in their understanding of the needs of children in need of adoption and the additional challenges they can face in learning and group environments. They are supported before and after placement to promote their child's sense of security of attachment in order that they can develop their capacity and ability for creative and satisfying play, access the school curriculum, participate in extra curricular activity and take part in group and individual leisure activities and hobbies.

6.5 Post adoption social workers support schools, parents and adopted children to get the most out of their school and learning experiences. They will offer direct support to schools wherever this is necessary. Rochdale's Virtual Headteacher also offers a consultancy service where this is necessary.

STANDARD 7 – Promoting educational attainment

OUTCOME:

The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

- 7.1 The Agency recognises that once a child is adopted, it is the adoptive parents who are responsible for promoting the educational engagement, enjoyment and attainment of their child. The Agency has its own policy in relation to promoting the education of an adopted child and this is shared with all adopters at the point of an adoption match.
- 7.2 The expectations of adopters are therefore clearly set out. They are also assessed in order to establish their capability to advocate for their child in and out of school.
- 7.3 Adopters are prepared and supported to understand the additional learning needs of children with disrupted attachment histories and early trauma and the additional requirements for them as parents to promote and maintain positive working relationships with their children's schools.
- 7.4 Adoption Support Assessments consider the educational needs of adopted children.
- 7.5 Adoption Support Social Work support includes liaison and advocacy with schools where this is requested by the Adoptive parent.
- 7.6 The Adoption Service will continue its commitment to attachment focussed training and support for teaching and non-teaching staff through its ongoing provision of consultancy to schools.
- 7.7 The Agency maintains its written education policy with regard to the needs of adopted children.

STANDARD 8 – Contact

OUTCOME:

Contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others in arranged and maintained when it is beneficial to the child.

- 8.1 Rochdale Adoption Service recognises the potential benefits for adopted children and their families of ongoing contact post adoption with birth families.
- 8.2 The Agency also recognises, and supports adopters and birth families to recognise the harm caused by unmediated contact either in person or through social networking.
- 8.3 The Agency addresses the issue of contact, its purpose, its potential benefits and possible risks throughout the process of recruitment, training and assessment of prospective adopters. Adopters will be given the opportunity to meet other adopters, and will be supported to consider the contact requirements of any child who may be matched with them.
- 8.4 The agency also addressed the issue of contact and social networking through post adoption training and support groups.

- 8.5 The views of the prospective adopters and the birth family will be taken into account when assessing the need for contact for a child. Attention is also given when planning and reviewing contact with all parties, to the harm associated with unplanned or unauthorised contact and the risks from online social networking sites.
- 8.6 Contact both direct and indirect remains under review over the course of the child's minority. Adoptive parents will be supported to consider their child's needs in the context of their child's development, age and understanding via post adoption service.
- 8.8 Appropriate contact for children with their birth family will always be considered in the final care plan and welfare checklist for the child within the court proceedings. These plans will also be considered by the Agency Decision Maker when the plan for the child is presented to Panel. When direct contact arrangements are planned to continue post adoption the aim will be to promote a positive sense of identity for the child, not rehabilitation to the birth family.
- 8.9 Indirect contact arrangements for all children with a plan for adoption with his or her birth family are arranged via the Adoption Service's 'letterbox scheme'. Letterbox arrangements will be put in place for all children where direct contact is not being maintained. It is recognised that the child's needs for contact and information about their birth family develop and change throughout their childhood. Post adoption support services will facilitate this or organise access to specialist services to review contact and promote the setting up of appropriate direct or indirect contact arrangements.

STANDARD 9 - Providing a suitable physical environment for the child

OUTCOME:

Children live with prospective adopters whose home provides adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote their development.

- 9.1 Rochdale Adoption Service ensures that children are placed in adoptive families who are able to provide homes adequate to the child's needs. In assessing prospective adopters, the Agency considers with families the suitability of their accommodation for family life and their financial security and responsibility.
- 9.2 The assessment of prospective adopters will consider their lifestyle, suitability to life with children, the impact of change of lifestyle on the adults, and their capacity to form and sustain support and social networks which will offer the family the opportunity for social integration and individual development.
- 9.3 The Service will assess and monitor the quality, security, safety and appropriateness of the homes of prospective adopters and throughout the period of placement for adoption.

STANDARD 10 - Recruiting and assessing prospective adopters

OUTCOME:

The adoption agency approves prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of looked after children who are to be placed for adoption and who can provide them with a home where the child will feel loved, safe and secure.

- 10.1 The Adoption Service aims to provide a diverse and wide range of adoptive placements to meet the needs of children who are being placed for adoption. The service will maintain a clear, inclusive and pro-active recruitment strategy to encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds and walks of life. Applications from prospective adopters will be welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation.
- 10.2 The Service will monitor and review changes in the nature of the needs of the children with a plan for adoption and will adapt its recruitment strategy accordingly in order to maximise to potential for families to be found for those children.
- 10.3 Prospective adoptive parents will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. The Service will make prospective adopters aware of their entitlement to seek independent review of the Agency's assessment of them. It is recognised that a wide range of adopters are needed to meet the needs of our looked after children and that these needs will determine the priority given to progressing applications from prospective adopters.
- 10.4 Enquiries will be responded to promptly and prospective adopters given full information about the eligibility criteria, recruitment processes, the nature of the process of assessment and the reasons for its requirements; training and approval procedures. They will be made aware of the range and number of children requiring adoption locally and of the support services available to adoptive families.
- 10.5 If a prospective adoptive family is offering a particular resource that may result in them not being linked with a local child or the agency is not able to process them, they will be directed to other Agencies with minimum delay to maximise the opportunity for them to be linked with an appropriate child.
- 10.6 The Adoption Service values the role that experienced adopters, adopted adults and birth parents play in the training and preparation and support of new adoptive families and will continue to work to facilitate this in the future wherever this is possible.
- 10.7 The Adoption Services will provide a duty social work service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Initial details will be taken and general information will be given about eligibility criteria. Information packs will be sent out to potential adopters within 5 working days. These information packs will contain information about the adopter process, training and assessment, the types of children needing adoptive placements and adoption support services. All of this information for prospective adopters is also made available on the Adoption website, www.rochdale.gov.uk.
- 10.8 Applicants must be over 21 years and legally domiciled in the UK and within a reasonable travelling distance of Rochdale. Couples will normally have to have been in a stable and enduring relationship. Applicants that have infertility issues will normally be expected to have concluded any medical

intervention and made a positive choice about adoption as a route to parenting.

- 10.9 The information material provided to prospective applicants gives details of issues relating to past criminal convictions, health and age considerations. The age of applicants is considered in relation to their energy and activity levels and the age of the child they wish to be considered for. Children under the age of 5 years and children with specific relevant health issues will not be placed in smoking household because of the well-recognised risks of passive smoking.
- 10.10 The Adoption Service maintains a conflict of interest policy that details the fact that certain staff groups in children services and certain elected members of the authority are not eligible for assessment by the authority because of the potential conflict of interest. They will be assisted to access services from neighbouring adoption agencies, or from member agencies of the Adoption 22 Consortium.
- 10.11 Prospective adopters are informed about the fact that Rochdale is part of the Adoption 22 Consortium. Once approved if they are not linked with a Rochdale child their details will be circulated to Consortium members for consideration for their children. Information will also be given about the National Adoption Register.
- 10.12 Prospective adopters who decide to proceed following the provision of the general information will receive a follow up pre- arranged telephone call within 10 days of their initial enquiry where more detailed information is shared. This includes further discussion about the needs of children waiting for adoption and information about what adoptive parenting requires. The service provides a dedicated duty service for prospective adoptive applicants which is overseen by the Team Manager. The team endeavours to respond speedily to all enquiries and offers a full opportunity for prospective applicants to discuss issues and ask questions about the adoption process at an early stage. If the applicants wish to proceed they will then be offered an initial home assessment visit. Following this they will be invited to submit their registration of interest to progress to Stage 1 of the adoption process. Applicants who have successfully completed stage 1 (2 month duration) will then progress to assessment in stage 2 (4 months) If the Adoption Service feels it cannot prioritise or progress an enquiry or application, a full explanation will be given and recorded on the file. Applicants will be given details about the complaints procedures. The agency will also advise applicants of their right to approach the National Adoption Gateway, first4adoption or another local adoption agency
- 10.13 Under certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the social worker to consult with the Agency Advisor or the Adoption Panel about an issue concerning an application.
- 10.14 The Service will also provide a duty service to give information, respond to enquiries and undertake the work required to progress step parent adoptions.
- 10.15 In situations where foster carers are being assessed as prospective adopters for the children in their care they will be entitled to access training and support services. Assessments will be conducted within timescales compliant with the National Adoption Standards.
- 10.16 A mixture of independent learning and formal learning will be offered. Regular preparation training groups are generally shared by Bury, Oldham and Rochdale will be run for prospective adopters. On occasion access to

adopter training in other Local Authorities will be sought. The training groups will always include input from experienced adopters and birth parents and adopted adults where possible. Details of the scope and focus of these groups will be provided to applicants in advance. The preparation groups provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to consider in detail issues relating to adoption and meet other prospective adopters.

- 10.17 Views of prospective adopters about the training offered are canvassed at the end of the preparation group.
- 10.18 The assessment and approval process is comprehensive, thorough, fair and fully explained to applicants. The Adoption service will endeavour to work in partnership with applicants, however it is necessary for both parties to be clear that a risk assessment is being carried out when a home study assessment is being completed. Assessment will distinguish clearly between self-reported and independently evidenced information with verification of key aspects of the applicant's accounts.
- 10.19 The supervising social worker will meet the prospective applicants during Stage 1 and Stage 2 to agree a work plan. An agreement will also be reached about timetabling of the assessment. The manager may also meet the applicants again at any point when this is required.
- 10.20 Applicants will receive a copy of the Prospective Adopter Report and have the opportunity to comment on it. Applicants are given full information about the Adoption Panel and provided with a booklet about the Panel process. Applicants are encouraged and supported to attend. Panel will comment on the strengths and areas of potential difficulty in relation to the application and applicants are informed of Panel's recommendation immediately whenever possible. The decision of the Agency Decision Maker is made within seven working days of the Panel minutes being passed on to the Agency Decision Maker. The decision is share verbally within 24 hours of when it is made and followed up in writing within five working days of the Agency Decision being made.
- 10.21 A matching agreement will be drawn up with adopters once adopters are approved.
- 10.22 Prospective adopters will be fully advised about the adoption support services provided by the local authority, Adoption UK, newfamilysocial and other appropriate services.
- 10.23 The Adoption Service will also involve adopted adults, adoptive parents and birth parents in the preparation training groups run for prospective adopters, recognising the significance of adopters understanding the lifelong impact of adoption for any child that is adopted.

STANDARD 11 - Intercountry - assessing prospective adopters

OUTCOME:

The adoption agency approves prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of children who live outside the British Islands and who can provide them with a home where the child will feel loved, safe and secure.

- 11.1 The Agency maintains a contract with Nugent Care, a voluntary adoption agency, to undertake the preparation, assessment and approval of inter-country adopters on behalf of Rochdale. The agency has considerable experience in this specialist area of work and will provide a timely and dedicated response to enquiries from people wishing to adopt from abroad.
- 11.2 The contract with Nugent Care is reviewed on an annual arrangement by partners within Adoption 22.

STANDARD 12 - Birth parents and birth families involved in the adoption Plan

OUTCOME:

Children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families and life before their adoption.

Birth parents and birth families take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption.

- 12.1 Birth parents and birth families are provided with a service that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated in an open, fair and respectful manner throughout the adoption process
- 12.2 Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications and their rights. The Agency provides a booklet detailing the range of permanence options for parents. This booklet is given to all birth parents by their children's social workers when adoption as one permanence plan is being considered for their child/children.
- 12.3 Once adoption has been agreed as the plan by the Agency Decision Maker Child, the Agency will refer birth parents or significant adult birth relatives to Caritas Care for independent support and counselling regarding the implications of adoption for children and their birth families. The service works with the parents of children being relinquished and removed due to concerns of significant harm.
- 12.6 Birth parents and other relatives are provided with information on how to obtain legal advice, to understand the longer term impact of adoption in terms of legal identify, contact and parental responsibility, and how to support their child's future needs by engaging in the process of information gathering even though they contest the Agency's application to the Courts. They will also be given information on the services they could access from other organisations such as the Natural Parents Network.
- 12.7 The views of birth families about the adoption and contact plans will be clearly recorded on the case file and within the Child's Permanence Report. Birth parents will be given sight of the relevant sections of this report to enable

them to comment on its content prior to it being presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

- 12.8 The wishes and views of the birth parents will be taken into account in the planning of placements particularly in regard to religion.
- 12.9 Social workers for the child will make efforts to obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth family about themselves and their history and encourage them to contribute to the child's life story material.
- 12.10 Birth Parents whether voluntary or involuntary, will be kept informed of their child's situation and well being according to the duties (either to imposed upon the Local Authority under the terms of the legal orders to which their children are subject.
- 12.11 Staff within the Adoption Service will explain to adoptive parents the importance of keeping safe any information provided by birth families and to provide this to the adopted child as appropriate.
- 12.12 Birth parents and appropriate relatives will be given the opportunity to meet the adoptive parents, usually prior to placement, unless there are exceptional circumstances that would make such a plan unsafe and against the best interest of the child.
- 12.13 The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with extended birth family members is recognised and will be supported as appropriate via letterbox or direct contact arrangements.
- 12.14 The Adoption Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and advice about agencies that can provide an intermediary service.
- 12.15 Birth parents and families will be advised of the complaints procedures and their right to make representation and complaints.
- 12.16 The Agency recognises and meets its duty to children with a plan for adoption to ensure that they have appropriate life story material, including photographs and mementoes and a narrative detailing the reasons for their no longer living with their birth family in age appropriate language together with a later life letter written to them by their social worker.
- 12.17 The Agency ensures that adopters are aware of the importance for a birth family to know if their child dies during childhood or shortly after. Adopters are trained, assessed and supported to recognise the need for children to be able to manage their dual identity as an adopted person.

STANDARD 13 – Matching and placing the child with prospective adopters who can meet most of their assessed needs

OUTCOME:

Children benefit from stable placement and are matched and placed with prospective adopters who can meet most, if not all, of their assessed needs.

- 13.1 Children feel loved, safe and secure with their prospective adoptive parents with whom they were originally placed; and these children were placed within 12 months of the decision of the agency's decision that they should be placed for adoption wherever this is possible.

- 13.2 The Adoption Service operates with a policy of full disclosure and will ensure that adoptive parents are given access to all information held on file about the child prior to placement. This includes a meeting with the child's current carer.
- 13.3 Where adoption is identified as a potential plan for a child a referral should be made by the child's social worker to the Team Manager of the Rochdale Adoption Service. The team manager will oversee the referral and family finding process.
- 13.4 The allocated social worker will organise a Permanence Planning meeting as appropriate with the child's social worker and foster carers to consider the profile of the child, the plans for the child, look at the matching considerations and devise a family finding strategy.
- 13.5 A social worker from the Adoption Team will take responsibility for family finding and will work closely with the social worker for the child and other key parties to the process. Clear and detailed matching criteria will be drawn up and children will be placed with families that are best able to meet their needs.
- 13.6 Children will not be left waiting for a 'perfect family'. Children should be placed with adoptive parents who are able to support them in their development and who are able to help them integrate all aspects of their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Most often, this will be best achieved in family placements which reflect the background of the child however each aspect of the child's needs must be considered when considering appropriate placements, including the need for timely placement.
- 13.7 Where children are placed with families less able to reflect their cultural or ethnic heritage, support is given to those families to meet the child's needs in these respects. This forms part of the adoption support assessment, provision and reviews of the adoption support plan.
- 13.8 The family finding social worker will consider adoptive resources within the local pool of Rochdale adopters, approved adopters within the Adoption 22 Consortium as well as any resources identified by the National Adoption Register. If no local placements are available, specific family finding activities will be undertaken by advertising for adopters within appropriate journals, contacting a wide range of adoption agencies. Consideration will also be given to commissioning other services e.g. Child Specific Recruitment.
- 13.9 The option of the child remaining on a permanent basis and achieving a permanent family ideally through adoption with their foster carers will always be considered and explored at an early stage if appropriate. However other matching considerations such as the age and ethnicity of the child, the need to place siblings together if possible and the particular needs of the child and circumstances and family structure of the foster carers' family will also be taken into account.
- 13.10 The family finding social worker will take the lead in identifying appropriate families, liaising with the adopter's social worker and accompanying the child's social worker on meetings with the prospective adoptive family. The family finding social worker will remain involved until the child is placed in an adoptive family.
- 13.11 The Service will make it clear to potential adopters that it is a requirement that the child's name should be retained unless there is a very good reason not to. Any such reason needs to be discussed and agreed with the Adoption

Service as it is a very clear expectation that the child retain and be known by the name given to him or her by their birth family.

- 13.12 Siblings should be placed together where at all possible and the needs of the different children taken into account. Assessments of sibling relationships will take place where take place to inform decision making about their future placements. A decision to separate siblings should be fully recorded on the file and explained to the child as appropriate. A clear contact plan for maintaining the link between siblings must be presented as part of the plan for adoption to the Adoption Panel.
- 13.13 Approved adopters will be given full information about the matching, introduction and placement process including information on the Consortium and National Adoption Register. Key documents will be made available to all newly approved adopters in the Post Approval Pack issued immediately following approval. A matching agreement between the agency and adopters will be agreed.
- 13.14 Rochdale MBC has detailed procedures for staff about the matching, placement and introduction procedures
- 13.15 An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration and then to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision. The reports made available will include matching meeting minutes and an Adoption Placement Report which details the positive factors about the match, any potential areas of risk/difficulty, information on any other possible matches that have been considered and the adoption support services that will need to be made available to the family. The prospective adopters will have an adoption placement plan, which will include the adoption support plan, provided for them prior to the introduction process commencing.
- 13.16 As well as having full information about the child's history prior to the match the prospective adopters will also have the opportunity to meet the child's foster carers, seek information from the Medical Advisor and meet any other key professionals.

STANDARD 14 – Intercountry - matching prospective adopters to child's assessed needs 31

OUTCOME:

Children feel loved, safe and secure with their adoptive parents or prospective adoptive parents.

- 14.1 Rochdale maintain a contract with Nugent Care through which they delegate their duties to discuss potential matches with approved inter country adopters. The role includes welfare visiting and periodic reports to the originating country where these are required. It also includes reporting to the Court in the Adoption Application Process.

STANDARD 15 - Adoption support

OUTCOME:

Children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs.

Service users confirm that the adoption support service provided met or are meeting their assessed needs.

- 15.1 The preservation of adoptive families and the reduction of the risk of placements disrupting is a key aim of the service. The needs and background circumstances of children and their birth families must be fully assessed so that important matching considerations can be identified and children placed with adopters that are best able to meet their needs.
- 15.2 Adoption support services are provided as required by the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 to all parties in the adoption process including adoptive adults, birth families as well as adoptive families.
- 15.3 The Agency maintains a Post Adoption Support Strategy which is coordinated by the Adoption Service Team Manager.
- 15.4 The Adoption Support Services Advisor will oversee the provision of adoption support services. The service will also be responsible for undertaking adoption support assessments, advising and supporting adopters and their children, contributing to training and workshops for adoptive families and professionals, offering advice and consultation on adoption related matters, undertaking specialist pieces of work for court and managing direct and indirect post adoption contact.
- 15.5 The Post Adoption Support service will also provide a specific service to adoptive families to support and advice on schooling and education issues.
- 15.6 Adoptive parents will be supported to enable the child to maintain any appropriate contact arrangements, either direct or indirect, with birth family members or significant others such as previous foster carers. It is recognised that contact arrangements need to be carefully and sensitively managed and kept under review and will need to adapt over time to meet the child's needs.
- 15.7 Children with attachment difficulties and histories of a traumatic and disrupted past may need continued access to multi-disciplinary services beyond placement and adoption. Adoption support needs for the child will be identified following an adoption support assessment and a plan will be drawn up in conjunction with the prospective adopters and key agencies. The Adoption Support Plan will be presented to Panel alongside the Adoption Placement Report. It is a requirement that the Adoption Placement Plan and the Adoption Support Plan are agreed with the prospective adopters before the commencement of introductions to the child. This adoption support plan will be kept under review.
- 15.8 The Post Adoption Service will provide access to ongoing training on a shared basis with Oldham and Bury adoption services. The role of the Adoption Support Services will be explained to all adoptive families in specific leaflets and on the website.
- 15.9 The Adoption Service will work with other agencies and key stake holder groups, including Adoption UK and Newfamilysocial to continue to review and develop adoption support services.

- 15.10 The Adoption Service currently provides adoption support groups, a newsletter and occasional social opportunities for adopters and their families to meet together along with Oldham and Bury adoption services.
- 15.11 A range of adoption support services will be made available for children adoptive families and birth families. This includes groups for birth parents and young people where they can engage in activity and share time with others whose circumstances are similar.
- 15.12 If placements do disrupt in spite of intensive placement support, disruption meetings will be convened that are chaired by an Independent Chair within Adoption 22 who has not been involved in the care planning process to date. All parties involved in the placement will be invited to attend and express their views and the views of the child will be sought. The disruption meeting will address the future needs of the child and the chair will ensure that a full record of the meeting takes place. Any lessons for future practice will be fully disseminated to all relevant parties.

STANDARD 16 - Intermediary services

OUTCOME:

Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to the adoption, where appropriate, and contact is facilitated between an adopted adult and their birth relative if that is what both parties want.

- 16.1 The Service does not currently offer an intermediary service as defined within the Adoption & Children Act 2002 but will provide details of other agencies that are approved to provide such a service.
- 16.2 The Adoption service will provide a service to adopted adults that are seeking to find out information about their past history from case records held by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

STANDARD 17 - Adoption panels and agency's decision-maker

OUTCOME:

The adoption panel and decision-maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives.

- 17.1 Rochdale Adoption Service will ensure that the adoption panel and decision-maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions which meet the Regulatory requirements in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives.
- 17.2 The Adoption Panel has three main functions: -
- To consider whether an adoptive applicant should be approved to care for children.
 - To consider prospective matches between children and adoptive parents.
 - To consider plans for adoption of children where no application for a Placement Order is made.

- 17.3 The recommendations made by the Panels in relation to the above are then considered by the Assistant Director, who is the Agency Decision Maker.
- 17.4 The Agency maintains clear terms of reference and a constitution for the operation of the adoption panel and associated processes, together with the management of the central list.
- 17.5 The Panel are advised by the Council's legal advisor and the adoption agency advisors who are the Adoption Team Manager and the Deputy Team Manager.
- 17.6 The Adoption Team manager Wendy Blanchard acts in the role of Agency Adviser for Adoption and has a key quality assurance role and reads all the reports that are going before Panel. The Adviser has a broader role in policy development and ensuring practice issues are disseminated within the Adoption service and fieldwork team.
- 17.7 The Chair of Panel Helen Humphries is an independent and experienced panel chair who also Panel regularly raises issues with the Agency Decision Maker about aspects of practice and the Chair of Panel
- 17.8 Helen qualified as a social worker in 1977. Her experience includes specialist child protection work. Helen has also worked as a Children's Guardian ad litem, Principal Manager in Fostering and Adoption and Assistant Director for Children's Services. Helen has also previously undertaken roles within Inter-country Adoption and been a member of DHSS/D of E working groups in adoption reforms 1987-9; 1993-1998 and 2000-2006. Helen has been a Board member of a Voluntary Adoption Agency from 1992-2000 and has chaired Local Authority Adoption Panels from 1989- 1991.
- 17.9 The Agency will ensure robust quality assurance, monitoring performance against national minimum standards and recording and reporting that performance every six months to the officers and elected members of the Council. Rochdale has key quality assurance mechanisms in place in relation to adoption work.
- 17.10 The Agency Advisor will read all the paperwork for Panel and take up quality assurance issues regarding practice, reporting and planning with staff and managers and withdraw assessments from Panel if further work is needed.
- 17.11 The Agency Advisor will ensure policy and practice issues are picked up and disseminated to staff in fieldwork and family placement teams. The Agency Advisor will also act as a consultant to all staff and managers in the department on issues relating to adoption and permanence policy and practice.
- 17.12 The Agency Advisor will recruit members of the central list in line with Adoption regulations and will provide training and induction as necessary and organise for all Panel members to have the opportunity for regular training input on key areas of adoption practice to ensure that they are kept updated on changes in legislation and regulations. One of the training sessions during the year for Panel members will be held jointly with the social workers and managers within the Agency.
- 17.13 Rochdale employs a suitably qualified and experienced person to act as independent chair of the Adoption Panel. The chair also has a clear quality assurance role and will take up issues directly with the Agency Advisor or Agency Decision Maker as necessary. The chair provides written feedback on each case to the Agency Decision Maker in addition to meetings with the

Agency Decision Maker; the Chair will also provide a separate report on the activities of Panel as part of the Annual and half annual Adoption Agency reports.

- 17.14 Rochdale's Adoption Panel will continue to review the frequency of adoption panels to ensure that there is no delay in considering children for adoption, approval of adopters and matching. Additional panels will also be considered to ensure that delay is not caused to children and their family.
- 17.15 Staff and prospective or approved adopters attending Panel are asked to complete evaluation forms and their views are taken into account when reviewing the functioning of Panel and the role of the chair.
- 17.16 The Panel will receive progress reports on a six monthly basis on children who have been, or are to be, placed for adoption up until the adoption order is granted. Panel will also monitor compliance with the timescales set for progressing permanence plans for children where the care plan is adoption. Individual issues will be addressed with appropriate staff and managers and the overall performance will be reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency report.
- 17.17 Panel will also monitor compliance with the standards in relation to the assessment of adopters. An annual review will be organised if adopters do not have a child placed within their first year of approval.
- 17.18 Panel members will receive all the documentation for Panel in good time to allow time to read and fully consider the issues.
- 17.19 Panel will make a recommendation and convey that to the staff member or adoptive applicant at Panel. The decision will be reported back to applicants, and staff verbally within 24 hours and followed up in writing.
- 17.20 The Agency Administrator will ensure that the decision maker has the details of the Panel discussion and recommendation to inform the decision making. A copy of the panel minutes will be provided to the Agency Decision Maker.

STANDARD 18 - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides

OUTCOME:

Children, service users and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the adoption agency/adoption support agency, and what services and facilities it provides.

The adoption agency meets the aims and objectives in the statement of purpose.

- 18.1 The Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Agency is maintained, reviewed annually by the registered manager of the Agency, and published on the Adoption Website where it can be accessed by service users, prospective service users, family members and professionals in the network around a child.
- 18.2 The statement of purpose clearly states the values, aims and objectives of the Agency, details its processes and demonstrates how it achieves positive outcomes for children and families against the requirements of National Minimum Standards Adoption.

- 18.3 All policies, practice guidance and procedures issued to staff are coherent with the values, aims and objectives, and adhere to the processes described in the Statement of Purpose.
- 18.4 The Agency has a two Children's Guides to Adoption: one for younger children, the other for older children. Both are provided to children by their Social Worker's and later passed on to the adoptive family to assist them in their understanding of the care planning for them and the meaning of adoption.
- 18.5 The Agency has a Children and Young Person's Guide to Adoption Support which is provided to the foster carers of children and young people to hand over to the adoptive family when a child moves on to adoption.

STANDARD 19 - Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency or an adoption support agency

Outcome: The Agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service.

- 19.1(i) The registered agency provider is: Rochdale MBC Children's Services.
- 19.1(ii) The Interim Director of Children's Service is Gladys Rhodes-White, Rochdale MBC.
- 19.1(iii) The responsible individual and decision maker is: -

Lana Shannon
Interim Assistant Director
Rochdale MBC
Crossfield Mill
Crawford Street
Rochdale
OL16 5RS
- 19.1(iv) The Service Manager for Cared For Children's Resources is Susanne Rayson. Susanne is also the designated Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA).
- 19.1(v) The Team Manager for the Adoption Service is Wendy Blanchard. She is the Registered Manager of the Agency. Wendy has substantial experience gained across a range of children's services settings. Wendy has worked as the manager of the Adoption Service since April 2012. Wendy has a DIPSW and MA in social work and NVQ level 4 in management.
- 19.1(vi) Wendy Blanchard can be contacted at the Adoption Services and Special Guardianship Support Team, Rochdale MBC, Crossfield Mill, Crawford Street, Rochdale. OL16 5RS. (Telephone: 01706 922300). Email: wendy.blanchard@rochdale.gov.uk.
- 19.2 Managers within the service are all qualified and social work practitioners have sufficient knowledge and experience of adoption law and practice and family law to deliver an effective Adoption service.
- 19.3 Managers also have access to a range of managerial training courses. They have clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the

service.

- 19.4 The Service has, in total 5½ full time equivalent qualified Social Worker posts which include 2 Senior Practitioners.
- 19.5 Recently an additional full time agency deputy manager and 2 full time social workers have been added to strengthen the service. This is an interim measure to a new service re-design.
- 19.6 All members of the adoption service are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council.
- 19.7 A structure chart for the Adoption Services and the detail of social work experience and qualifications is appended to this document.

STANDARD 20 - Financial viability and changes affecting business Continuity

OUTCOME:

The Adoption Agency is financially sound and maintains a business continuity plan as an Adoption Service and as part of broader council services.

- 20.1 The Adoption Agency is financially sound. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance (Section 151) Officer of a local authority to report on the robustness of the estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides. The Council's Officer Report confirms adequacy of budget and of reserves to meet the council's responsibilities for 2013/14.
- 20.2 The business continuity plan for the Adoption and Fostering service sits within the wider business continuity plan of the Council. It is reviewed annually

STANDARD 21 – Suitability to work with children and service users

OUTCOME:

There is careful selection of all staff, volunteers and persons on the central list and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to hard children and service users.

- 21.1 Rochdale employs sufficient staff to work within the Adoption Services. The staffing structure is kept under review. Recruitment and staff welfare and management is undertaken according to the policies and recruitment practices of the wider agency. All staff are subject to enhanced CRB checks and these are maintained as current. Appropriate records are maintained by the centralised council HR department.
- 21.2 All staff undertaking assessments of adoptive applicants are social work qualified and General Social Care Council registered with access to appropriate training, supervision and support.
- 21.3 The Agency does not make use of volunteers.
- 21.4 Staff within the team undertakes recruitment, training and assessment of carers, supervision and support of placements (pre and post adoption) adoption support assessments and specific adoption support interventions,

step parent adoption assessments, family finding and birth records counselling work.

- 21.5 Staff within the service work closely with colleagues within the Fostering Service and with fieldwork teams. Staff have access to training courses and are kept updated on developments in practice and legislative changes.
- 21.6 Staff are made aware at the point of employment of the whistle blowing policy and the anti bullying policy and of how to access this information through the Council website.

STANDARD 22 - Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

OUTCOME:

Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

- 22.1 Procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse are detailed in the Rochdale procedures and will be followed.
- 22.2 Procedures for managing allegations and suspicions of harm to children are applied within the frameworks of RMBC safeguarding procedures which are available on the Rochdale website and through the link on the Rochdale Adoption website.

STANDARD 23 - Learning, development and qualifications

OUTCOME:

Children and service users receive a service from staff, volunteers, panel member and decision – makers who have the competence to meet their needs.

- 23.1 All staff receives an induction to the Rochdale Adoption Service upon being appointed to their posts. They have access to the annual learning and training programme operated by the Council workforce development service.
- 23.2 All staff new to the council undertakes RMBC induction standards, commencing within 7 working days of starting their employment and completing them within six months.
- 23.4 Ongoing supervision, practice development workshops, reading and access to research provide opportunities are made available for staff to maintain their knowledge base and to develop their practice.
- 23.5 Learning and development needs are identified with staff in their annual Personal Development Review which leads to an agreed personal development plan.
- 23.6 Members of the Central List receive an induction covering the role of the Panel, child care legislation and the regulatory framework for care planning and decision making, issues in adoption contact and identity, and the processes involved in family finding for children and recruitment of adopters
- 23.7 Members of the Central List receive an annual appraisal with the Chair of the panel and the Agency Advisor which identifies any areas of learning and

support the member to meet those needs through group or individual learning.

- 23.8 In addition to formal training, members of the central list are offered learning on issues particular to specific cases through the agency advisor and the legal advisor to the Adoption Panel.

STANDARD 24 – Staff support and supervision

OUTCOME:

Staff and Volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children and service users.

- 24.1 Staff within the Service will receive supervision and access to a range of training opportunities to ensure they are well equipped to recruit, train, assess, and support adoptive families, family find and place children appropriately and provide support to adopted adults, birth families and others in the adoption process.

STANDARD 25 – Managing effectively and efficiently, and monitoring the adoption agency or adoption support agency

OUTCOME:

The agency is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently and delivering a good quality service which meets the needs of children and other service users.

- 25.1 The National Minimum Adoption Standards in respect of planning for child will be followed and any delay in achieving those timescales will be monitored by fieldwork managers, Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker and reported on in the Annual Adoption Agency Report.
- 25.2 The Adoption Support Services Advisor within the service will meet with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care on a regular basis to update on key practice and operational issues and to ensure that any issues of a strategic nature are taken forward.
- 25.3 The Adoption Service produces an annual recruitment strategy and progress in relation to recruitment activity is reported on at the monthly Management Team Meeting. The Team Manager reviews all referrals and meets with the Service manager to discuss allocation issues and review workloads.
- 25.4 The Agency Advisor has a key quality assurance role and reads all the reports that are going before Panel. The advisor also has a broader role in policy development and ensuring practice issues are disseminated within the Adoption service and Area Teams. The Chair of Panel is an independent and experienced manager and therefore also plays a quality assurance role. Panel regularly raise issues with the Agency Decision Maker about aspects of practice and the Chair of Panel provides a report to accompany the Adoption Agency Report to the lead cabinet member.
- 25.5 There is a comprehensive audit programme in place to ensure that all files of carers and adopters are audited.

- 25.6 Regular meetings are held with lead elected members of the council and senior managers within the Department to ensure that members are kept up to date on key service developments. Issues related to the work of the Adoption Services are reported on at these meetings as appropriate.
- 25.7 The management team, including Service Managers, Team Managers and Agency Advisors meet regularly with the Head of Service to discuss operational and policy matters and ensure the continued integrated development of the service.
- 25.8 All staff have access to regular supervision and there is a performance and development process in place across the authority.
- 25.9 The Service is required to produce an annual business plan which form part of the business plan for Rochdale Children's Social Care.

STANDARD 26 - Individuals who are registered providers of adoption support agencies

N/A.

STANDARD 27 – Records

OUTCOME:

Records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of the child's life.

- 27.1 Rochdale continue to make use of the Child Permanence Report in order to ensure compliance with primary legislation, the regulatory framework, national minimum standards and best practice in recording and planning for children.
- 27.2 We maintain a clear retention policy which is centrally managed and staff and service users are clear about the reason for our maintaining a record relating to our involvement with them.
- 27.3 The Agency creates an Adoption file for all children when they become subject to a plan for adoption. This file contains the all information relating to the plan for adoption and is maintained until the adoption order is made in order that it is archived securely and provides a record for the child in the future.
- 27.4 The Agency maintains a written record of its involvement with prospective and approved adopters and there is a clear written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the file.
- 27.5 Regular file audits by managers ensure that files are compliant in structure and in content with the written policies and requirements. Written feedback is provided to case holding social workers with timescales for any issues to be rectified. Practice Managers then address any concerns regarding individual performance within supervision. Where concerns remain, performance management procedures will be considered and where appropriate implemented by the Team Manager and supervisor.
- 27.6 Records are maintained in secure conditions; hard copy files are maintained in lockable filing cabinets and electronic records are kept secure on the council's secure network.

- 27.7 Staff understands the agency's policy on dealing with requests for access to information and all requests are considered by the Team Manager and processed according to the written policies which are compliant with legislation and regulation.
- 27.8 Case records are maintained electronically which means they cannot be signed, but are entered as a complete record which cannot be edited at a later date. They are attributable to the author within the record of the entry.
- 27.9 Records of complaints and allegations are recorded in accordance with agency policy and procedure and this is managed by the Team Manager for the Service along with RMBC complaints department.

STANDARD 28 – Fitness of premises for use as an adoption agency or adoption support agency

OUTCOME:

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the agency to meet its Statement of Purpose.

- 28.1 Premises have facilities for the secure retention of records (including, for example, cards, letters; the child's life storybook; photographs and audio-visual film). For closed cases the service uses a secure archive provider whose own provisions meet industry standards. The contract for this service is managed through central council services.
- 28.2 While cases are active, the premises have secure facilities for the retention of records.
- 28.3 All records are catalogued and readily retrievable from the archive.
- 28.4 The arrangements to address disruptions to services are laid out within the business continuity plan which addresses the maintenance and recovery of records in the full range of formats.
- 28.5 Life story material is provided to adopters within the required timescales and copies kept on the child's archived file.

Rochdale Adoption Service Organisation Structure and Personnel

(See attached appendix)

For additional information please see section 17 for information relating to the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Making Processes.

The Adoption Service operates within the overall quality assurance framework for children and families operated by Rochdale which set out the range of general and specific service standards and methods by which these methods are monitored. Children for whom adoption is being considered or who have been placed for adoption are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Rochdale Adoption Services continually monitors, evaluates and develops its service at every stage of the process to ensure quality and effectiveness. Rochdale Council welcomes feedback from service users and actively seeks this out in order to provide a responsive service.

Feedback from service users is explicitly invited at 16 points through the adopter process, post approval, placement and post adoption processes.

As part of the Adoption 22 Consortium, Rochdale actively considers and shares good practice and policy development.

The Adoption Service is inspected on a three yearly basis by OFSTED, (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills).

Complaints procedure

Users of Adoption Service includes children, birth families, prospective and approved carers, are provided with copies of the complaints procedure, advised how to access the procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with services provided.

Prospective adopters are also advised about the circumstances in which they may have recourse to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) if they are in disagreement with a decision being proposed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Information about the complaints process can be found by going to the Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council website: www.rochdale.gov.uk

Most complaints are resolved informally and speedily by the local manager and records are kept of all complaints, compliments and representations made to the Service. There are clear procedures in place for responding to complaints. Formal Stage 1 complaints are acknowledged within 2 working days and should be responded to within 10 working days.

If someone is still unhappy after the complaint has been dealt with at Stage 1 they can ask for Stage 2 investigation. The Cooperate Complaints Team will aim to conclude all Stage 2 investigations within 20 working days.

Complaints may be made to the manager of the Adoption Service Wendy Blanchard at: -

Crossfield Mill
Crawford Street
Rochdale
OL16 5RS
TEL: 01706 922300

Caroline Phipps is the Cooperate Complaints Manager. Complaints can also be made to the Cooperate Complaints team on: -

Tel: 01706 923537 or via the website www.rochdale.gov.uk

The Service reports annually on complaints. Corporate records of complaints, compliments and representation are reported on regularly.

The Management team regularly discuss any issues arising from complaints, standards of care, or allegations against carers and adopters to ensure any lessons learnt can be disseminated and changes in practice made.

Members of the public can complain to the local Ombudsman at any time. However the Ombudsman will usually want the Council to have chance to investigate the complaint first.

The Department commissions a Children's Rights & Advocacy Service from

The Children's Society
94-96 Hill Top Drive
Kirkholt
Rochdale
OL11 2RL
Tel: 0800 072 6383

Email: rcrs@childrenssociety.org.uk

Children and Young People can also contact: -

The Office of The Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

Freephone 0800 528 0731

The Service reports annually on complaints. Corporate records of complaints, compliments and representation are reported on regularly.

The Management team regularly discuss any issues arising from complaints, standards of care, or allegations against carers and adopters to ensure any lessons learnt can be disseminated and changes in practice made.

The Adoption Service is inspected by OFSTED in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations and the National Minimum Standards.

Inspection reports are public documents and a copy of the current report is available via the OFSTED website at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The local OFSTED office responsible for inspecting adoption services provided by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council can be contacted at:

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed regularly and was last updated 04/07/2013.