



Cornwall Council and The Council of the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency



Statement of Purpose & Policy Service Statement June 2018

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This document is only valid on the day that it is printed.

The Adoption Policy and Statement of Purpose is a statutory requirement and should be shared with all staff, prospective and approved adopters and children (although in the case of children this must be in an age appropriate format), other Adoption Agencies and Adoption Panel Members.

This document will be available on the Cornwall Council website.

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Introduction

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Service, the services provided and how the aims and objectives are to be met. The information contained in the Statement of Purpose is prescribed in Schedule I of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Standard 1).

The Statement of Purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated as required by the National Minimum Standards. This document has been informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014
- Children Act 2004
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999
- Related Regulations, Local Authority Circulars and statutory Practice Guidance
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- The Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Special Guardianship Support Services Regulations 2005
- Independent Review of Post Adoption Support 2016
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013
- The Education and Adoption Act 2016

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Service is fully committed to meeting the National Adoption Standards for England and ensuring that children in care, birth families, potential and prospective adopters, adopted children, adopted adults and children and adults affected by Special Guardianship Orders understand what they can expect from the adoption service. This includes services in relation to those looked after children where the preferred plan for their permanence is adoption or a Special Guardianship Order and in relation to Intercountry and Non-Agency adoptions.

1. Value and Aims

Values

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency is committed to ensuring that children are able to remain in the care of their parents, their birth families, friends or extended families wherever possible. However, where this will not be possible, Cornwall Council will work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting.

Adoption will always be considered as a permanence option for children in care in order to determine whether or not it is in their best interests. This decision is then reviewed at every Child in Care review, taking into consideration any impact, positive or negative that the in care placement or adoptive placement is having on the child and to consider any changes in the birth family and friends' current circumstances.

Evidence shows the importance of finding the right permanent placement for children in care as swiftly as possible. Delay in decision making considerably reduces the life chances of children and recent changes in legislation require local authorities to consider Early Permanence as an option for all children where adoption is being considered, therefore Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency is committed to recruiting and assessing carers who will be dually approved as both foster carers and adopters in order to meet this requirement.

The Government's commitment to this principle is set out in the Action Plan for Adoption, published in March 2012. It set out a range of measures to reduce delay throughout the adoption system, encouraging practices such as concurrent planning and fostering to adopt, aimed at the early placement of children with their permanent carers.

This is at the heart of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency values and principles set out within this document.

A copy of this will be provided to Ofsted inspectors and be available on Cornwall Council's Adoption webpages to: -

- All staff working for the adoption agency
- Adopters
- Any child placed for adoption
- Any parent of a child placed in an adoptive placement
- Children subject to a Special Guardianship Order and their special guardians
- Other adoption agencies
- Adoption panel members

The Adoption Regulations and Adoption National Minimum Standards form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. They can be used by children, birth families, prospective adopters, adoptive parents and adopted adults as a guide to what they can expect from an adoption agency and an adoption support agency.

Children

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption and Special Guardianship Order process.
- Adopted children and children subject to a Special Guardianship Order should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Every unnecessary delay should be avoided when care planning for children, as this can have a severe impact on the health and development of children waiting to be adopted.
- The appropriateness of Early Permanence will be explored for all children where adoption is being considered.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, all aspects of their identity need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption and in the Special Guardianship Order process is essential for delivering the best outcomes for children; this includes the government, local government, other statutory agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.
- The adoption agency will work in partnership with other teams within Cornwall Council and with service providers to provide an efficient and seamless service to children, adopters, birth families and special guardians.

Adopted adults and birth relatives

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved including adopted adults, birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- All adoption agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- All adoption agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.
- All adoption agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults should have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

- The Adoption Service adheres to the principle of providing an efficient adoption service that works within current legislation, the budget set by Cornwall Council, One Vision and Cornwall Council Corporate Placement Strategy Outcomes Framework which puts the people of Cornwall at the heart of its services.

Adopters and Special Guardians

- All potential and prospective adopters and special guardians should be treated fairly and with courtesy and respect throughout the process of applying to adopt a child and registrations of interest will be accepted irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, health or religious beliefs.
- The Adoption Service should provide clear and transparent information to potential adopters, which is impartial and accurate in relation to children who are waiting for adoption and the types of skills that will be required by prospective adoptive parents.
- The Adoption Service will use the two-stage adoption process to ensure that all prospective adopters have received suitable advice, preparation, training and assessment and a decision on their suitability to adopt within the legislative timescales.
- Prospective adopters will be given a copy of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency Customer Care Standards which sets out the standards which we will be observed when dealing with prospective adopters.
- Prospective adopters will be offered the opportunity to consider offering Early Permanence placements and potentially being dually approved as both adopters and foster carers.
- All adopters and special guardians who have a child placed with them will be assessed for their support needs in maintaining the placement and will be supported to meet the needs of the child(ren) placed with them.
- All adopters and special guardians will be invited to participate in peer support groups and on-going training and workshops.
- Adopters and special guardians will be empowered to take responsibility for their own training and development and for participating in all stages of the process. Furthermore, adopters will be encouraged to support the development of new prospective adopters by attendance at the information events and various training events.

Aims

- To place children with prospective adopters who best meet their assessed needs within the timescales laid down by the National Minimum Standards.
- To recruit, assess and provide suitable families, within the timescales laid down by the National Minimum Standards.
- To provide information, within the timescale laid down by the National Minimum Standards, on the process of adoption and the children available for adoption to enquirers wishing to adopt.
- To provide adoption and Special Guardianship Order support services to enable a children to remain with adoptive/special guardian families and fulfil their potential.
- To sign post to Intercountry Adoption so that they may provide information on the process of adoption for enquirers wishing to adopt a child from overseas, or a related child from within their family.
- To provide information, help and support to those people wishing to obtain information about, and from, their birth records.
- To provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption or Special Guardianship Order whether prior to, or after, the making of an order.
- To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by the Adoption Service.
- To provide opportunities for adoption workers to increase their skills and knowledge of new research and practice developments.
- The annual Adoption Service Plan sets out the objectives for the service in pursuit of the above aims.

Adoption Service Policy Statement

- Cornwall Council and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency is committed to adoption and Special Guardianship Orders as legal and emotional permanence options which should be considered for all children irrespective of age, ethnicity and disability.
- The process of placing a child for adoption or make the child subject to a Special Guardianship Order is set out in legislation and Cornwall Council's policies and procedures will meet legislative requirements.
- Delays in adoption planning and implementation can have a severe impact on outcomes and development of children. Monitoring systems will be established to identify and address delays for individual children.
- Cornwall Council acknowledges that adoption and the Special Guardianship Orders have lifelong implications for all involved and is committed to working collaboratively with different organisations, professionals and individuals to provide support services for those affected by adoption/Special Guardianship Orders.
- The importance of children having suitable contact with their birth families and other significant important people is recognised. Contact plans will be drawn up taking account of the specific needs of the child and acknowledging the role and legal status of the adoptive parents and special guardians.
- A range of support services will be available for adopters, adopted children and children and adults affected by Special Guardianship Orders including financial support, therapeutic support, access to training and support groups.
- The Adoption Service will work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies in order to provide the best possible range of services within the resources available.
- The Adoption Service will treat people fairly, openly and with respect throughout their involvement with the service.
- The Adoption Service will maintain strict confidentiality and ensure the security of all adoption records.
- The Adoption Service will provide a range of leaflets and web based information for people interested in or affected by adoption or Special Guardianship Orders.
- The Adoption Service will ensure that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Panels comply with relevant regulations and guidance.
- To avoid any potential conflict of interest, any Children's Social Care employee wishing to apply to adopt could be signposted to a neighbouring authority if they so wish. Cornwall Councillors wishing to adopt may also be sign posted to a neighbouring authority.
- Applications to adopt from other council employees, or close relatives of Children's Social Care staff will be considered as individual cases, for potential conflicts. If an application from a Council employee or close relative is considered to present a significant potential conflict of interest, then the applicant will be signposted elsewhere.

2. Named manager

The Registered Manager of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency including the Family Plus Team (Adoption Support) is Alison Waters, Adoption and Family Placement Service Manager, The Par Building, Old County Hall, Truro, TR1 3AY. Telephone number 01872 322200.

In the event that the Adoption Service Manager is absent Service Manager Julie Goodwin can be contacted at the same address and number above. Or the Head of Service of Children In Care and Care Leavers is David Roose who can also be contacted.

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is Jack Cordery, Cornwall Council Head of Children, Schools and Families Directorate; however this role can be devolved to three Heads of Service: Jane Hampton, Head of Service East, Bernie Doyle, Head of Service Mid, and Ben Davies, Head of Service West.

3. Qualifications and experience

Alison Waters, Registered Manager

Diploma in Social Work June 2001; Post Qualifying June 2006; Post Graduate Cert in Management Health and Social Care Nov 2007; Project Management for Business 2012.

Child Protection Social Worker & Senior Practitioner 2001 to 2008.

Child Protection Manager September 2008 to July 2012.

Service Manager Children in Care and Specialist Contact Service August 2012 to June 2013.

Service Manager Adoption June 2013 to October 2016.

Service Manager Adoption and Family Placements November 2016 to present.

4. Remit of teams

The **Recruitment Team** consists of a full time recruitment manager and three recruitment officers. They oversee all Registration of Interests, initial home visit and Stage 1 of the adoption process.

The recruitment team is responsible for setting up information events, recruitment drives, preparation groups and all advertising.

The **Adoption Assessment & Family Finding Team** supervise Independent Social Workers who undertake stage 2 assessment of the adoption process with prospective

adopters. The team consists of 3 Principal Social Workers (PSW) and a Senior Social Worker with a lead for Birth Parent Support and Birth Record Enquiries.

They also provide support, advice and guidance to birth families up to and beyond the Adoption Order, and provide support to adopted adults wishing to trace their birth records. The adoption social workers link with the relevant childcare social worker to help them provide the information and requisite paperwork for the panel, ensure the birth family has all the required information and that any work that needs to be undertaken with the child, in relation to adoption, is completed. Adoption social workers will also assist in preparing adopters alongside the recruitment team.

The 3 PSW's will be the lead to family find with a county-wide remit. PSW's will also supervise Independent Social Workers in respect of their reports in step-parent and non-agency adoptions. Where a previous adopter wishes to adopt once again, or a foster carer wishes to be considered to become an adopter, the team will automatically take these cases.

The **Family Plus Team** is responsible for the provision of post adoption services which include special guardianship Orders, a team which has a clear understanding of trauma and attachment theory. Their work assists adoptive parents and special guardians to develop a nurturing bond and safe environment for their child to assist them to have a secure attachment and promote emotional wellbeing. The Family Plus team will undertake wellbeing assessments and put in place, where appropriate, support including therapeutic support. Therapeutic support is accessed via both internal resource or via the Adoption/Special Guardian Support Fund. Therapeutic work can be accessed using Independent providers or by using a therapeutic outreach worker from within the team. The team also works with birth parents and birth families in relation to both direct and indirect letterbox contact. The team have a dedicated Life Story co-ordinator. The Family Plus team is also responsible for supporting special guardians and carers subject of a Child Arrangements Order to a named child.

Meeting structure

The Adoption Service has a comprehensive meeting structure, which is designed to provide information for all staff working with the Adoption Service and ensure the effective management of the service.

The Adoption Service Manager and the Principal Social Workers, Consultant Social Worker who is the Agency Advisor and the Recruitment Manager meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of policy and practice arising from the operation of the service and plan service developments.

The Adoption Service Manager, Cornwall Council and The Council of the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency Panel Chair, Legal Advisor, Head of Service with responsibility for the Adoption Service, Head of Service with responsibility for Children and Family Services meet every 6 months to maintain standards and to discuss practice issues which may have arisen.

The Agency Advisor to the adoption panel meets regularly with adoption panel administrators to ensure and maintain consistent standards.

5. Staffing

A list of the staffs relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to the Ofsted Inspection Service on request.

Head of Service – David Roose
Service Manager – Alison Waters
Service Manager – Julie Goodwin
Principle Social Worker – Maggi Appleby
Principle Social Worker – Heather Averall
Principle Social Worker – Louise Richards
Senior Social Worker – Nigel Birch
Consultant Social Worker – Panel Advisor – Vacant Post

Recruitment Team

Recruitment Team Manager – Colette Pearce
Recruitment Officer – Suzanna Ellis
Recruitment Officer – Chiquita Helleur-Tanner
Recruitment Officer – Shannan Hobart

Family Plus Team

Team Manager – Sarah Coleman
Principle Social Worker – Sam Adlam
Therapeutic Family Support Worker - Esther Cannon
Therapeutic Family Support Worker – Linda Huggan
Therapeutic Family Support Worker – Debbie Isles
Therapeutic Family Support Worker - Bridgette Lewis
Therapeutic Family Support Worker – Philippa Thomas
Life Story Book Co-ordinator – Nicola Davies
Special Guardianship Reviewing Officer – Cathy Collins
Special Guardianship Reviewing Officer – Julie Pickerill
Psychologist – Dr Alex Clark
Psychologist – Dr Lucy Wilson

6. Services provided

The Adoption Service has a dedicated telephone (01872 322200), website (www.adoptincornwall.gov.uk) and Facebook page Adopt or Foster in Cornwall, for recruitment, which is widely publicised through Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Initial enquirers are given information on the website, over the telephone and sent a comprehensive information pack within five working days. The information pack includes information on eligibility criteria, preparation, assessment and approval procedures, children who need adoptive families, matching and introductions, adoption support and the agency's expectations of prospective adopters.

The Adoption Service ensures that recruitment of prospective adopters is based on the needs of children being referred to the service. Adoption information is available on Cornwall Council's website on www.cornwall.gov.uk.

Adopted Children

Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

All children being placed for adoption will be helped to understand, in an age appropriate way, why they are unable to live with their birth family and are being placed for adoption.

The Adoption Service will nominate a link worker to work in partnership with the child's social worker to co-ordinate the work in order to successfully place the child for adoption with the minimum of delay.

All children being placed for adoption will have a health assessment undertaken by a paediatrician using the Initial Health Assessment (IHA) Form.

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration all aspects of their identity. However no child's placement will be delayed while waiting for an 'ideal' or 'perfect' match.

The Adoption Service will aim to recruit a wide range of families able to meet the differing needs of children requiring adoptive homes.

Where there is little likelihood of recruiting a suitable adoptive family in Cornwall, the Adoption Service will seek a placement through the South West Consortium of Adoption Agencies, Link Maker (Adoption Register for England and Wales) and other agencies including Adoption Link. Children will also be featured in relevant publications to enhance their chances of finding a suitable adoptive family to meet their needs.

All children placed for adoption will have an adoption support plan and may have a Recovery plan undertaken by Cornwall Council Psychology Team. In some circumstances, a child may be eligible for adoption financial support, either as a single payment or in exceptional circumstances as regular payments over an agreed period. Regular payments of financial support are subject to a wellbeing assessment and an annual financial assessment.

All children who are of an age to understand will be encouraged to contribute to their child permanence report and adoption reviews in an age appropriate way.

The Adoption Service acknowledges the importance of the relationships between brothers and sisters and will always consider placing brothers and sisters in the same adoptive family. Where brothers and sisters are not living together, the Adoption Service will promote the need for appropriate contact between them.

The Adoption Service recognises and supports the importance of children having suitable contact with their birth families and other important people. Such contact should be entirely governed by the best interests of the children. Contact can vary

from an annual exchange of written information through to face to face contact with members of the birth family.

The Adoption Service operates a letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. The Family Plus Team will assist in reviewing the contact arrangements where requested.

The Adoption Service will make arrangements for at least one meeting between a child's birth parents and prospective adopters around the time of placement providing this is in the child's best interests; other significant birth relatives may also be involved. A settling in letter will also be available to birth parents from the prospective adopters.

The Adoption Service believes in the importance of children retaining the forename chosen by their birth parents as this is an integral part of their identity. However in exceptional circumstances where a child has been given a very unusual name which could easily identify them, or a name that could cause them embarrassment, the Adoption Service will seek a direction from the court to change the name.

The progress of children awaiting placement will be monitored regularly by the Adoption Service Manager.

Children who are placed for adoption will continue to be regularly reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer and have periodic health assessments until the Adoption Order is made.

In the event of an agency placement breaking down before an Adoption Order is made, a disruption meeting will be held no earlier than 28 days following the disruption and no later than 42 days following the disruption. The purpose of the meeting is to share information improve practice and learn lessons for the future. The adoption panel and the adoption management team will receive a summary of the main learning points.

All children who are of an age to understand will have access to written information about the adoption process e.g.:

- Children's Guide ("Understanding Adoption");
- Guide to Adoption Support Services ("Adoption Support"); and
- CoramBaaf Children's Guide ("Adoption – What it is and what it means").

All children placed for adoption will be provided with a life story book and a letter for later life within ten working days of the adoption ceremony to celebrate the making of the Adoption Order.

Cornwall Council Safeguarding Procedures will be followed where an allegation of abuse is made in the case of a child placed for adoption in Cornwall. Where there are child protection issues relating to Cornish children who are placed outside the county, investigations will be carried out in line with local safeguarding procedures.

Cornwall Council and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency does not sanction any form of physical punishment of children who are looked after by a carer, whether foster carers or adopters.

Birth Families of Adopted Children

The wishes and views of birth families are important and will be considered. All alternatives to adoption will be explored. They will be offered support both before and after the making of an Adoption Order.

The Adoption Service will provide counselling and written information to birth parents about adoption, in order that they understand the process and know their rights. Birth parents should be consulted about possible adoptive families. The adoption service may if required sign post to and also fund independent counselling.

Cornwall Council will work closely with the birth family to ensure the child is provided with all necessary information about their background and will at all times promote a positive but balanced image of the birth family. Birth parents will be encouraged to share information about themselves and their family, including making a contribution to the child's permanence report, to help give their child, now and in the future, the fullest understanding possible of their birth family.

The Adoption Service will take into account birth parents' wishes with regard to the religious upbringing of their child. In the case of older children their own views will also be taken into account.

The Adoption Service will provide the birth parents with an agreement outlining how parental responsibility is to be shared between prospective adopters, the Adoption Service and themselves once the child has been placed for adoption.

The Adoption Service will make arrangements for at least one meeting between a child's birth parents and prospective adopters around the time of placement providing this is in the child's best interests; other significant birth relatives may also be involved.

The Adoption Service recognises and supports the importance of children and young people who are adopted having suitable contact with their birth families and other important people. Such contact should be entirely governed by the best interests of the children involved. Contact can vary from an annual exchange of written information through to face to face contact with members of the birth family.

The Adoption Service operates a letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between birth families and adoptive families. The Family Plus Team will assist in reviewing the contact arrangements where requested.

The Adoption Service can hold information from birth families and people who have been adopted, which can be exchanged on request.

The Adoption Service will provide advice, guidance and counselling to birth relatives wishing to trace adult adopted relatives. With the consent of the person who has been adopted and their birth family the adoption service will exchange relevant information and can act as an intermediary.

The adoption service actively encourages feedback from birth parents about the service they have received.

Adopters

Adoption is a service for children and their best interests are paramount in all planning and decision making. Adoptive families must be well prepared and supported for looking after a child in need of adoption.

Agency Adoption

Agency adopters are approved by an adoption agency to adopt children in England and Wales.

The Adoption Service does not discriminate against applicants on the grounds of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, disability or marital status providing the Adoption Service believes they can meet the needs of a child into independence.

Cornwall looks for in adopters which are:

- Ability to see the child as they are – not how you would like them to be
- Acceptance, commitment, flexibility, stick-ability, sensitivity, openness
- Ability to cope with a bit of a mess and disruption – not perfectionists
- Ability to ask for and accept help
- A sense of humour
- Family and Friends support network

Applicants attend centrally organised preparation courses aimed at preparing prospective adopters to become adoptive parents, and to start giving them the skills and knowledge to prepare them for the task. Topics covered include:

- The impact of neglect and abuse on children's development, now and in the future.
- Caring for children who have experienced neglect and abuse using an attachment based PACE model.
- Promoting a child's identity.

Applicants are visited within their own home and seen together, and separately, if there is more than one applicant. An Attachment Style Interview (ASI) will also be undertaken. The ASI is used for assessing potential adopter's characteristics and likely support needs and will be used to inform the Prospective Adopters Report. Work with the adopter's own children is undertaken if appropriate and any other members of the household are interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are also seen at this stage. Applicants are invited to make their own written as well as verbal contributions to their assessment and are given the opportunity to read and comment on the completed Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). The assessing adoption social worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicant to be an adopter. The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicant who will have ten working days to give their views to the agency.

Prospective adopters are invited to attend the Adoption Panel when their application is being considered.

Enquirers currently undergoing infertility treatment will not normally commence the adoption process until treatment has been completed and they have come to terms with the reality of not having their own birth children.

The Adoption Service will provide initial written information within 5 days of the initial expression of interest and within 10 days will send an invitation to attend an information event or to speak with a social worker.

Stage One assessments will be completed within 2 months from the time the Adoption Service receives the completed registration of interest form. Where this is not possible, the prospective adopter(s) will be kept informed of the reasons for this.

Stage Two assessments will be completed within 4 months of the receipt of the application for assessment (after stage one). Again, where this is not possible, the prospective adopter(s) will be kept informed of the reasons for this.

The Adoption Service would normally expect the youngest existing child in a family to be at least 2 years old before the start of another application.

Adoption Orders should have been made on children already placed for adoption before the start of another application.

Each application will be considered individually. Any medical condition will not necessarily be a bar to adoption. Prospective adopters make a commitment to care for a child into adulthood and should therefore be reasonably confident that they will remain in good health.

It has been shown that children's health is adversely affected by passive smoking. The Cornwall Council Fostering and Adoption Smoking Policy states that any potential prospective adopter should have stopped smoking for a minimum of 12 months and that any foster carer, children under 5 or children with disabilities should not be placed with carers who smoke tobacco or e-cigarettes. In all kinship adoptive placements the additional health risks to the child of being placed in a smoking household need to be carefully balanced against the benefits of the placement for the child.

The Adoption Service will contact all previous partners where there were children involved, and all significant previous partners, during stage one of the process.

All first time adoptive applicants will be required to attend a preparation course, complete a feedback form and meet with the trainers following completion of the course.

Where people are adopting for a second or subsequent time, attendance at preparation groups may not be required if the Adoption Service is satisfied the applicants are up-to-date with current adoption requirements and philosophy.

Foster carers applying to adopt a foster child who is living with them will be required to attend a preparation course.

Applicants will be financially responsible for their initial medical examination. The Adoption Service will pay for any subsequent updates or supplementary medical reports.

All prospective adopters' reports will be considered by Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Panel who will make a recommendation to the agency decision maker regarding their suitability.

Once an application has commenced and the Adoption Service is of the view that the applicants are not suitable, the Adoption Service will give the applicants the opportunity to have their case considered by the adoption panel.

Applicants are invited to attend the adoption panel when their application is being considered and the adoption panel considering any subsequent match with a child.

If the agency decision maker proposes not to approve an applicant, the applicant can ask for the decision to be reviewed by an independent panel through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision on the suitability of the prospective adopters to adopt within the statutory timescales, unless there is a suitable reason for delaying the decision which is fully documented on the case file.

Adoption social workers will maintain contact with prospective adopters in addition to undertaking a formal review of their approval every 12 months. There is also pre-adopt training which prospective adopters can undertake.

Prospective adopters can have their details included on the Link Maker (Adoption Register for England and Wales) also Adoption Link and circulated to the South West Consortium of Adoption Agencies three months after approval, and earlier if they are offering a scarce resource and no suitable child is waiting in Cornwall.

Prospective adopters will be given comprehensive written information about children for whom they are being considered. This information must be returned to the Adoption Service if no placement is made, or the placement disrupts.

Prospective adopters will be made aware that they can only change a child's forenames prior to an Adoption Order by order of a court or with the consent of all those with parental responsibility.

The Adoption Service will make arrangements for at least one meeting between the prospective adopters and a child's birth parents around the time of placement providing this is in the child's best interests; other significant birth relatives may also be involved.

The Adoption Service will support prospective adopters to maintain contact with birth parents and other significant important people, where it has been determined as being in the child's best interest. This can range from an annual exchange of written information to face to face contact with members of the birth family.

The Adoption Service operates a letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families.

All children placed for adoption will have an adoption support plan which will also reflect the prospective adopters' needs. In some circumstances adoption financial support may be payable, either as a single payment or in exceptional circumstances as regular payments over an agreed period. Regular payments of financial support are subject to an assessment and an annual financial review.

The Adoption Service will meet reasonable settling-in costs, particularly in relation to health and safety equipment.

The Adoption Service will, subject to specific criteria, meet prospective adopters' legal expenses incurred in their Adoption Order application in respect of a child placed with them by Cornwall.

Prospective adopters are expected to meet the costs of their court application fees unless they are on Income Support (or Universal Credit) in which case the Adoption Service will meet the cost. Prospective adopters receiving other benefits or on low incomes may be able to apply to the courts for a waiver or reduction of this fee.

The adoption service actively encourages feedback from adopters about the service they have received.

Adoption panels

Cornwall Council and the Isles of Scilly adoption panel chaired by an independent chair and attended by an agency advisor to the adoption panel meets centrally in Truro. The panel is constituted in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and amendments, and follows the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The panel meets twice a month and is supported by dedicated panel business support.

The Adoption Service offers regular training to its panel members, which updates panel members on changes in legislation, practice and research. In addition panel has a separate business/training meeting to review the previous year's work.

Adoption panels assist the agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:

- Whether a child should be placed for adoption, where there is parental consent i.e. in the case of relinquished babies.
- The suitability of prospective adopters or the termination of approval of a prospective adopter, and
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a specific prospective adopter.
- The panel can give advice to the agency (but it is not required to do so) on:
 - contact arrangements;
 - The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background; and
 - The provision of adoption support.

Whilst it is now a requirement that prospective adopters be invited to attend the panel when their application is being considered, Cornwall Council has followed this practice for many years and positively encourages applicants to attend.

Prospective adopters are also invited to attend panel when they are being considered for a match with a specific child or children. Prospective adopters are given a leaflet explaining the panel process and asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting which is fed back to the panel.

Agency Decision Maker

The agency's decision-maker has the authority to make decisions on the agency's behalf as to whether:

- A child should be placed for adoption (AAR 19);
- Prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child or continue to be suitable to adopt a child (AAR 30B and 30D);
- A child should be placed for adoption with a specific prospective adopter (AAR 33); and
- To disclose protected information about adults under section 61 of the Act and regulation 15 of the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 (AIR) when determining an application.

The agency decision makers make a considered and professional decision as to the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child. As well as making the decision, the decision-maker may express a view on any advice given by the adoption panel(s) about the children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt. The decision, including any decisions on advice given by panel must be recorded on the child's files.

"2.72. Some children's cases will continue to be referred to the adoption panel for consideration and recommendation on whether they should be placed for adoption, but from 1 September 2012 the majority of cases are now referred directly to the decision-maker. Where a case has been referred to the decision-maker following the consideration and recommendation of the adoption panel, the decision-maker may express a view on any advice given by the panel with regard to contact or the application for a placement order, with any views expressed recorded on the child's case record."

(Adoption Statutory Guidance, Department of Education 2013)

Inter-Country adopters

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's Adoption Agency contracts out a service for people interested in adoption from another country to an organisation called ICA – The centre for Adoption. ICA provides specialist advice and information about the process of Inter-Country adoption, undertake the assessment and training of prospective adopters, presents them to their own Adoption Panel and liaises accordingly with Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency and the Department for Education who oversee the process and link with the country of origin of the child. There are financial costs involved within Inter-Country adoption and ICA will charge a fee to carry out an assessment, as well as there being further costs post approval.

ICA's contact details are:

ICA – The Centre for Adoption,
22 Union Street,
Barnet,
Herts, EN5 4HZ.
0208 4492562
Email: info@icacentre.org.uk
www.icacentre.org.uk

Whilst there are no statutory timescales associated with intercountry adoption, Cornwall Council will endeavour to ensure that the assessment is undertaken by the provider in a timely manner notwithstanding any delays that occur on the part of the prospective intercountry adopters.

Applicants must satisfy the requirements and procedures of their country of choice. All local authorities are now required to provide a comprehensive adoption support service. Intercountry adopters and intercountry adoptive children are entitled to an assessment of their needs for adoption support. Services which may be provided include counselling, advice, information, therapeutic services, services to ensure the continuation of a relationship, and services to assist in case of disruption of adoption placements. Most countries require progress reports (known as 'post-placement reports') to be sent to them at regular intervals. The progress reports are usually required to be completed by the local authority or voluntary adoption agency registered to work on intercountry adoption. It is therefore important that intercountry adopters maintain in contact with the local authority or voluntary adoption agency in order to comply with this requirement. The frequency of these reports varies. Further detail is available from the Department for Education.

Non-agency adoptions

These are adoptions which have not been arranged by an adoption agency and include step-children, adoption by other relatives and children conceived with the involvement of a donor or surrogate.

- Enquirers approaching the Service are sent written information about non agency adoptions within five working days.
- Once the applicant is satisfied they meet the criteria, they make an application to court.
- Court will notify Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency. A timescale of 12 weeks is given.
- Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Adoption Agency will then allocate a worker to undertake the assessment called an Annex A, and forward to the Court with a recommendation.

Services available to all those affected by Adoption and Special Guardianship Support

Placing children in adoptive families or with special guardians is only the beginning. Supporting the placement and recognising the on-going needs of the children and

adopted adults alongside those of their birth relatives, adoptive families and special guardians is equally important.

The Adoption Service will offer a range of post adoption and Special Guardianship Order support for people who have been adopted, birth families, adopters and children and adults affected by Special Guardianship Orders.

The Adoption Service will prioritise resources focused on maintaining the relationship between a child and their adoptive family/special guardians.

Newly approved adopters are actively encouraged to take up one year's free membership of Adoption UK which provides a comprehensive range of adoption services both locally and nationally. The Adoption Service also refer to Adoption UK during the training, as well as give the adopters printed articles from them that may be of interest feel for example articles about FASD and post placement depression.

The Adoption Service will stimulate the development of a broad range of adoption and Special Guardianship support services in partnership with the voluntary sector in the region, and encourage adoptive families to seek information or assistance when required. Full use will be made of the Adoption Support/Special Guardianship Fund.

The Adoption Service will facilitate post-order contact where required in those cases where there is either an informal agreement or a Contact Order and will provide support to those involved.

The Adoption Service operates a confidential letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive/Special guardian families and birth families.

The Adoption Service can hold information from birth families and people who have been adopted which can be exchanged on request.

Where adopted people and children subject to a Special Guardianship Order under the age of 18 seek further information and possible contact with their birth family, the Adoption Service will offer counselling and other appropriate services. This will usually be in conjunction with the adoptive/Special Guardian family.

Where adopted people over the age of 18 request further information and possible contact with their birth family, the Adoption Service will offer counselling and act as an intermediary.

The Adoption Service strongly supports use of the National Contact Register so that all parties to an adoption can record their mutual willingness to be approached. An intermediary service will be available when a link has been made on the register.

Where birth families contact the Adoption Service seeking further information and possible contact, the Adoption Service will act as an intermediary if the whereabouts of the adult who has been adopted are known. Adults who were adopted prior to 1975 must speak to the senior adoption social worker before they can obtain their original birth certificate.

The Adoption Service encourages all parties to adoption to use the services provided by the Family Plus team, which offers an information and advice service.

The Adoption Service actively encourages feedback from people about the service they received.

Special Guardianship Support

A Special Guardianship Order is an order appointing a person or persons to be a child's special guardian. Applications may be made by an individual or jointly by two or more people to become special guardians. Joint applicants do not need to be married. A special guardian must be 18 or over. The parents of a child may not become that child's special guardian. A court may make a special guardianship order in respect of the child on the application of:

- Any guardian of the child.
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application.
- Anyone who holds a residence order with respect to the child, or who has the consent of all those in whose favour a residence order is in force.
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
- Where the child is in the care of a local authority, any person who has the consent of the local authority.
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child.
- Any person, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply.

The Childcare and the Kinship Teams are responsible for undertaking assessments relating to Special Guardianship. The Family Plus Team will action the support plans after the order has been made and allocate a worker for the first 12 months of the Order or will undertake new wellbeing assessments to look at support needs should they be requested in future. The Family Plus team can also sign post to other services such as Friends of Special Guardians who work in collaboration with Cornwall Council.

The Family Plus Team will support or sign post for support, children and adults (including birth families) who may be affected by special guardianship Orders who may need specialist support on issues they may face whilst their child is growing up once the special guardianship Order has been granted.

A child under a special guardianship Order, a special guardian or a birth parent of a child under a special guardianship Order may request an assessment of their support needs if:

- The child lives in Cornwall and was previously a looked after child in Cornwall.
- The SGO was made over 3 years ago in another local authority but now the child lives in Cornwall.
- The child does not live in Cornwall but was a looked after child in Cornwall and the SGO was made less than three years ago.
- The child lives in Cornwall but has never been a child looked after in Cornwall. In this case the team will consider undertaking an assessment of support needs where this is requested, although it is not obliged to do so.

- Following an assessment in respect of a child in the care of Cornwall Council the team will agree one of the following options:
 - Advice and information
 - Signposting to another agency or department who may be able to support their needs
 - Undertake an assessment of support needs.

All support plans will be developed with the child / special guardian / birth parent and will be shared with them and agreed by them.

Financial Support may also be available subject to the above eligibility and subject to a formal financial assessment as per Cornwall Councils Special Guardianship financial policy 2017.

Anyone applying for Special Guardianship Order Support will be given information relating to the support available.

The assessed needs will be reviewed when necessary and if circumstances change.

Allowances will be reviewed annually; such reviews may take place by correspondence.

Clear criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, the arrangements for review and making these available to adopters

At the point of matching, all children must have an Adoption Support Plan which sets out both the prospective adopters' and child's support needs, with any financial implications, and how the Adoption Service intends to meet these. The Adoption Support Plan must be agreed with the adoptive family before being presented to the adoption panel.

Where on-going financial support is provided the Adoption Service will undertake an annual financial review. If an allowance is provided, this will be for a twelve month period. If after this time further financial support is required an assessment will need to be undertaken to determine need and ensure that all benefits are being claimed appropriately.

The Adoption Service will pay pre-placement costs (introductory expenses and settling in expenses) in certain circumstances. This will be discussed and agreed at the matching advisory meeting.

The Adoption Service will meet the cost of legal expenses for the prospective adopters when applying for the Adoption Order.

The Adoption Service has a dedicated inter-agency budget when it is not possible to place a child with Cornwall adopters.

The review of disrupted placements

Following a disruption between placement and the making of an Adoption Order the Adoption Service convenes a disruption meeting in order to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors which led to the breakdown of the placement and to inform future planning for the child. An independent person chairs these meetings. A summary of the conclusions are presented to the adoption management team and the adoption panel in order that any lessons can be learnt.

Investigations into allegations

All child protection investigations involving children placed for adoption are undertaken in accordance with Cornwall's Safeguarding Procedures.

An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption

The Adoption Service works to Cornwall Council's Corporate Equality & Diversity Policy, which is available to all staff via the Council's Intranet service.

The Adoption Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, providing the Adoption Service believes that they can safely meet the needs of children on placement and throughout their lives.

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However no child's placement will be delayed in pursuit of the 'perfect' match.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Adoption Service has developed a comprehensive system for monitoring services users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and reported in the Annual Report and where appropriate used to improve services.

This monitoring includes:

Adoptive applicants

- Whether the initial information pack was received within five working days of the enquiry, whether the information was helpful and suggestions for improvement.
- Feedback on the Information Meeting.
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses.
- Feedback on attending adoption panel.
- Evaluation on service received following the making of an Adoption Order.

Birth Parents

- Evaluation of the service received.

Children

- When of an age to express their wishes and feelings, children's views are recorded in the Child Permanence Report.
- The statutory review via the reviewing officer or via MoMo, an interactive tool for young people to put forward their views.
- Inter-Country adopters, Step-parents.
- Whether the initial information pack was received within five working days of enquiry, whether the information was helpful and suggestions for improvement.
- Inter-country adoption – evaluation of service received following the forwarding of papers to the Department for Education.

Post Adoption Services

- Evaluation of Birth Parent and Birth Record Enquiries, service when applicants have received the information they require.
- Evaluation via annual survey sent to all families accessing the Post Adoption Service.
- Evaluation via survey sent to all adults who have gone through the adoption stage 1 and stage 2 assessment processes and have been matched to a child and have been granted an Adoption Order.

Monitoring of the Adoption Service

There are review systems in place for the following:

- All approved adopters are formally reviewed at 12 monthly intervals by the adoption Social Worker and Service Manager.
- Monitoring the progress of children prior to placement by the Adoption Service Manager in regular monitoring meetings.
- A formal review of family finding activity takes place weekly for every child following the granting of the Placement Order, attended by the Principal Social Workers within the Assessment team and the Recruitment Manager.
- The Independent Reviewing Officers review the progress of all children under 8 years of age and who are placed for adoption on a three monthly basis.
- The Corporate Parenting Board receives reports on the Adoption Service's functioning on a quarterly basis, following the ALB data to the Department for Education.

The adoption panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice, in conjunction with the Agency Advisor to the Adoption Panel, and provides six monthly reports.

8. Security of adoption records

The Adoption Service acknowledges the need to ensure all records are maintained in accordance with the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and

GDPR (May 2018). The indexes to all adoption case records are kept for at least 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an Adoption Order being made, the related case papers are kept for 100 years from the date of the making of an Adoption Order. All other records are retained in line with Cornwall Council Policy on Record Retention and Destruction procedure.

All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Service Manager and recorded. All files are held in lockable, secure storage, Restore, which is managed by Cornwall Council, Records Management and ensures that the records are held under conditions that are fit for purpose.

9. Complaints procedure

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories.

1. Any service user, or a person acting on behalf of a service user with their informed consent, can make a complaint about the service received from the adoption team. The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with the Children Action 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the statutory guidance 'Getting the best from Complaints'. Where a person making a complaint does not qualify to access that procedure, the complaint will be dealt with in line with Cornwall Council Customer Care Procedure, Listening and Learning. Complaints may be made directly to any member of staff of the Adoption Service or to the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Team, New County Hall, Truro, TR1 3AY. Telephone 01872 323164 or email www.cornwall@gov.uk
2. Where the decision maker is minded to not recommend the approval of adopters, or to discontinue approval, they will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the Adoption Service or referred to the Independent Review Mechanism which is managed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

10. OFSTED - contact

Head Office functions operate from the following address:

Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

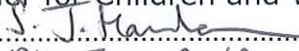
Following any inspection of Local Authority Children's Services a report becomes a public document and can be found on the Ofsted website.

11. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the Adoption Service Policy statement.

This Statement of Purpose has been approved by:
Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers – David Roose

Signed 
Date 13.06.18

Portfolio Holder for Children and Wellbeing – Sally Hawken
Signed 
Date 18th June 2018

Updated June 2018
Next up date required June 2019