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**Purpose and Objectives of West Sussex Adoption Service**

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for West Sussex County Council’s Adoption Service as required under the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

The West Sussex Adoption Service places the child’s needs at the centre of its work and service provision. We are committed to ensuring that children can remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where this is not possible, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting, including adoption.

The purpose of the adoption service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of children who have been or may become adopted, their families of origin, and adoptive parents. This will include services in relation to children looked after with an adoption plan, children in an adoptive family pre and post adoption order and in relation to the non-agency adoption service.

Information about the West Sussex Adoption Service can be found here:


**Aims**

To achieve its aims the adoption service will:

- Ensure that the child’s wishes, needs, welfare and safety are at the heart of its work.
- Track children through the adoption process to ensure they are placed with a family as soon as possible.
- Treat people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents fairly, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear and accessible information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support.
- Assess and prepare prospective adopters who can meet the diverse needs of West Sussex children throughout their childhood and beyond.
- Provide help, support and guidance to ensure that adoptive families are successful.
- Provide services to everyone affected by adoption, recognising the lifelong implications of adoption.
- Treat everyone involved in adoption fairly, respectfully and openly throughout.

**Core Values**

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- The child’s wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages. The preferred communication methods of each child should be promoted and supported.
- The child’s welfare and needs are central to the adoption process.
There are unique advantages in children experiencing childhood within their own birth family and every effort should be made to preserve the child’s home and family links.

If children cannot remain at home, placement with relatives or friends must be explored before other alternatives are considered.

Adoption is considered as a permanent alternative for all children unable to return to their families.

Timely decisions should be made for children so that they can receive reparative care from their adoptive family as soon as possible; this includes the opportunity for children to live with foster to adopt families: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/adoption-and-fostering/adopt-a-child/fostering-for-adoption/

Children’s emotional, social, educational and developmental needs will be met through the promotion of secure attachments to their primary care givers.

Children’s ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.

The needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made.

We will work with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that National Adoption Standards are met.

Recruitment processes ensure that the West Sussex adopter pool is able to accommodate sibling groups, older children, children from ethnic minorities and children with complex needs.

Recruitment, preparation, prompt assessment, training and support of adopters enable adopters to meet the needs of children and young people and to keep them safe.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who must work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.

Practice and policies within West Sussex reflect the belief that adoption is a positive outcome for children.

**Services provided by West Sussex Adoption Service**

The Adoption and Special Guardianship & Adoption Service are currently managed with the same service group, Adoption and Permanent Placement Support. Please see Appendix 1 for service structure chart.

The Adoption Team has 2 FTE dedicated Practice Managers, one of whom is responsible for Recruitment; the other is responsible for Assessment and Family Finding.

There is 0.8 FTE Advanced Practitioner who is part of the management team, as is the 0.8 FTE Adoption Panel Advisor. Adoption Panel is based in Bognor Regis and offers 3 Panels a month. Please see Appendix 2 for Adoption Panel membership.

The Special Guardianship & Adoption Support Team has 3 dedicated Practice Managers (2.2 FTE) to manage the service, which offers, support, advice and guidance to special guardianship and adoptive families. Link to Adoption and Special Guardianship Passport: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/11459/adoptionsgosupport_2018.pdf

The Business Support Manager (0.4 FTE) for the Adoption Support Fund is part of this team.
All of the above staff report to the Group Manager for Adoption and Permanent Placement Support.

The Group Manager (1.0 FTE) reports to the Service Leader (1.0 FTE) for Fostering and Adoption who is responsible for the management of the Adoption Service and Adoption Agency functions in addition to other management responsibilities.

The teams benefit from being co-located on 4th floor of County Hall North, Horsham. The SG & Adoption Support team is also located in Worthing.

**Commissioned Services**

The Agency has a service agreement with the **Post Adoption Centre**, a registered voluntary adoption agency organisation specialising in advice and support to all members of the ‘adoption triangle’ – child and adopted person, adoptive family and birth family. Details of their services are provided to all those involved in adoption in West Sussex and can also be viewed on the Post Adoption Centre website: [https://www.pac-uk.org/](https://www.pac-uk.org/)

West Sussex Adoption Agency provides counselling through **Kaleidoscope Therapies** to adults affected by Adoption: [http://www.kaleidoscopetherapies.co.uk/](http://www.kaleidoscopetherapies.co.uk/)

The **Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC)** is commissioned to provide a full service to those wishing to adopt a child from overseas: [http://www.icacentre.org.uk/](http://www.icacentre.org.uk/)

**Adoption South East (ASE)**

West Sussex County Council collaborates with East Sussex, Surrey and Brighton & Hove Adoption Agencies, who will become a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adoption South East (ASE) from April 2020. A full time Project Lead is developing the RAA with support from the Assistant Directors of Children’s Services from each member authority (Executive Board) and operational managers from each authority (Project Board). The Department for Education has provided a coach to support RAA development.

**Adopter Recruitment**

The focus of the Adoption Service is to recruit adopters for all West Sussex children with an adoption care plan. The emphasis in the recruitment strategy is to identify families able to adopt sibling groups, children with disabilities, children from minority ethnic backgrounds and foster to adopt carers.

West Sussex’s procedures for staff are set out in the West Sussex Adoption handbook.

We provide comprehensive information about the adoption process online:


We host information events on a monthly basis at various venues in the county. Those wishing to attend are asked to make a booking. Enquirers are able to attend Information Events hosted by our Adoption South East partner agencies in the event they are unable to attend a West Sussex event. Information about events is on the Adoption website:


Initial enquiry is made either by completing and returning the online enquiry form: adoption.team@westsussex.gov.uk or by calling our duty line 033 022 27777.

All initial enquiries are responded to within 5 working days and each enquirer is sent an information pack within 72 hours of their initial enquiry.
An initial visit is arranged following the initial call, which is undertaken by a social worker, to discuss the process in more detail and to enable the exchange of information.

Following the initial visit, a registration of interest form is sent for completion by the prospective adopter household, and its receipt and acceptance mark that start of Stage 1. The Adoption Practice Managers track adopter progress through each stage to approval, in accordance with the National Minimum Standards 8 month timeframe.

If the social worker does not recommend progression of the prospective adopter’s application to stage one the applicants are advised of the reasons for this decision and possible action they may wish to take. They are also advised how to access the complaints procedure.

**Stage 1 Adoption Process**

The government stipulated timeframe for Stage 1 is 2 months.

The social worker who undertook the home visit is allocated to continue with the prospective adopter household wherever possible throughout Stages 1 and 2.

West Sussex Adoption Agency is required to complete the following statutory checks and references in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. These include:

- Barring and Disclosure Service (DBS)
- Three personal references for single applicants and four for couples
- Employment references (usually during Stage 2)
- Local Authority checks
- Health visits or school checks if appropriate (or during Stage 2)
- Medical assessment
- Housing (mortgage/rental status)

The Adoption social worker will make a decision with their Practice Manager whether the applicant meets the requirements to proceed to Stage 2 of the process. Should the applicants be deemed unsuitable to proceed, a written and verbal explanation will be provided. Potential adopters can take a break of up to 6 months between Stages 1 and 2.

**Stage 2 Assessment process**

The government stipulated timeframe for this process is 4 months.

Prospective adopters should usually be able to progress to Stage 2 with their Stage 1 social worker whose role it is to undertake a full Prospective Adopter report (PAR). Further checks are undertaken as appropriate, including ex-partner/s, health visitor, school, adult children. Prospective adopters are required to attend a three day preparation course during Stage 2. Adopters are invited to attend Adoption South East partner agency preparation in the event they cannot attend the West Sussex provision.

Approved foster carers and second time adopters (approved after 2006) can proceed straight to Stage 2 of the assessment process.

The report is then presented to Adoption Panel for their recommendation to the agency decision maker (ADM) for a final decision, which should be made by week 16 of Stage 2.
Non-Agency Adoptions

Non-agency adoption is a service to families applying to adopt a child who was not placed by an adoption agency. This service is mainly accessed by step parents and relatives wishing to adopt a child of their family following a private arrangement. The Agency will undertake this work after legal advice has been sought by the enquirers, who have to give 3 months’ notice of their intention to make an application for an adoption order.

Intercountry adoption is commissioned to IAC.

Family Finding and Matching

The adoption service endeavours to place children with a family who can meet and promote all of their needs, including their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language, as quickly as possible. There are some children for whom identifying an adoptive family will take longer than hoped.

The adoption service works closely with prospective adopters and children’s social workers to ensure all relevant information is shared about the child’s needs. This enables prospective adopters to consider how they would meet the needs of the child. The adoption team collaborates to consider matches from within the adopter pool and families under assessment, prior to sharing PARs with children’s social workers. A Matching Matrix Meeting is held to agree the most appropriate match to pursue.

If it is not possible to place a child with West Sussex adopters, the child’s profile is put onto the Adoption South East Linkmaker page and shared with our regional ASE colleagues within 10 working days. Adoption South East share bi-monthly adoption exchanges and have undertaken Adoption Activity Days for harder to place children.

In the event that it has not been possible to identify an adoptive family from within ASE, the Advanced Practitioner will lead in searching for an interagency placement. Permission is sought from the Service Leader to undertake a search on the basis of evidencing the child’s needs and family finding efforts to date. The Advanced Practitioner will be involved with interagency placements until the Adoption order is made.

Transitions

The child’s social worker and foster carer carefully prepare the child to move onto their new family, using story books and a welcome book. A planning meeting agrees a plan for introductions of the child to their new family, each plan is bespoke to take account of the specific needs of the child, with a review midway to check progress and that everyone remains committed to the plan.

Regular visits are required under adoption regulations following an adoption placement, weekly for the first 4 weeks of a placement, with a looked after child review held within the first 28 days of placement. Visits to the family are usually shared between the adoption worker and the child’s own social worker during this period.

Relinquished babies

The adoption team provides advice, information and counselling for parents (usually expectant or new others) who are considering adoption for their new baby. For the small number of parents each year who decide adoption is the right decision for their child, the adoption service will undertake arrangements in consultation with the parents.
**Permanence planning**

The adoption team works with the Family Support and Protection and Children Looked After teams respectively to promote early permanency for children. The permanency planning co-ordinator invites an adoption worker or manager to all permanency planning meetings where adoption is being considered for a child. The permanency planning co-ordinator chairs a monthly managers’ meeting to track progress of all children with an adoption care plan.

**Foster to Adopt**

Our early permanence scheme, Foster to Adopt, is used for babies and children who are either in local authority care or who are due to be born, where they are likely to be adopted but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family. Early permanence is designed to provide children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care while detailed assessments of their birth family are completed and the court decides on the plan for the child. Consistent care for the child reduces possible future harm and helps them develop healthy attachments.

Initially, applicants are assessed and approved as dual or temporary foster carers for the child. They are required to provide the child’s day-to-day care and continue to work with their social worker to ensure that all the child’s needs are met. They are supported by a social worker from adoption and fostering during this period. At the same time, the child’s social worker will continue working with and assessing the child’s birth parents to see if they have made the changes required to have the child returned to their care.

The court will make the final decision on the plan for the child. If the court decides that the child should be adopted, the foster to adopt carers can then go to an adoption linking panel for a recommendation that the child should be placed with them for adoption. Alternatively, the court may decide that the child should be returned to their birth family.

**Adoption Panel and ADM**

3 adoption panels are scheduled for each month, and are held in Bognor Regis on a Tuesday. A Fostering Practice manager attends where dual foster to adopt approval is sought. Adoption Panel members offer a breadth of personal and professional experience. **Appendix 2** evidences Panel membership.

The Adoption Panel Advisor undertakes a significant role in quality assuring requests for ADM best Interests decisions and submission of assessments and links to Panel. The Advisor offers advice to social workers, ADMs and Panel to ensure compliance with statutory guidance legislation and good practice.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Adoption Service monitors progress of children, prospective and approved adopters through a central database, with the support of a performance analyst.

Monthly performance data provided by the Group Manager is scrutinised by the Family Operations Leadership Team on a monthly basis.

Quarterly reports are presented at the Agency Decision Makers’ Meeting by the Adoption Panel Advisor.

The Adoption Panel Chair provides a report to the ADM meeting on a bi-annual basis.

Overall Agency performance is monitored through collection of data by the Department for Education and is reported in the Adoption Scorecard.
Review of approval

All approved adopters who have not had a child placed with them within 12 months of their date of approval are required to have an annual review of their approval. This is completed internally within the adoption service, unless there has been a significant change of circumstance or the approval is of 3 years duration in which case a fuller review is required and must be presented to panel.

Following approval

The adoption worker remains in contact with the family following approval, and a matching plan is agreed to look how the prospective adopters and agency can work together to secure a match. There is a regular training programme provided, and adopters are expected to continue in their learning and development pending matching and following placement of children, in recognition of the additional challenges that adoptive parenting brings. As such, we try to ensure that adoption remains a ‘live’ issue following the end of the application process. Sessions typically run most monthly and are held in the evenings as part of a rolling programme.

Post Adoption Support

The Special Guardianship and Adoption Support Team is committed to providing an assessment of the support needs of adoptive families which inform a plan to address those needs.

Support offered can include:

- How a child’s needs relate to their history
- Impact of early trauma
- Understanding the adopted child’s life story
- Therapeutic parenting
- Support, guidance and mediation re contact (direct and indirect)
- Education
- Emotional support to adopters
- Workshops and training for adopters
- Activities for children throughout the year
- Newsletters 3 times a year
- Links to community and specialist resources
- Financial assessments and support
- Therapeutic playgroup
- Referrals to Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services

In addition the team is working in collaboration with the adopter community:

- Big Brunch events offering peer support between adopters and special guardians.
- Inaugural Adopter and SG Conference March 2019
- Parents of teens group
- Adoption Education Group with Virtual School
- Bright Futures Charity
- Local support groups

Independent Support to parents affected by adoption

Counselling is provided through PAC and Kaleidoscope Therapies. The Adoption Service is working with Pause West Sussex to develop a wraparound service, By Your Side, for parents whose children have been adopted. This includes a review of all literature and processes to ensure inclusivity throughout.

West Sussex offers a birth parent support group which is facilitated by a birth mother.
Access to birth records and intermediary service for adult adoptees

Adopted adults aged 18 or over who were either adopted through or reside in West Sussex, can request support in obtaining information relating to their adoption and in facilitation of contact between themselves and birth relatives as appropriate.

The Agency will provide access to non-identifying information regarding the adoption and advice and support to birth relatives aged 18 and over, who require intermediary services, when the adoptee has reached age 18 or over. Information on counselling for the applicant and the subject of the application should be made available. Priority is given to relatives of people adopted before 12th November 1975.

Complaints procedure

Complaints are dealt with according to the Complaints and Representation Procedure which can be accessed through the following link:
West Sussex County Council: Comments, compliments and complaints

Regulation and Inspection

Adults & Children’s Services are inspected by Ofsted. They can be contacted at the following address:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk

Paper copies of documents and translation services

All documents referred to above with Internet links to the West Sussex website can be provided in paper copies on request. Translations will be provided on request and wherever practical, contact details and information relating to the other organisations referred to in this Statement of Purpose can be obtained from either of the services below.

The Adoption Service can be contacted at the following address:

The County Adoption Team
4th Floor
County Hall North
Chartway
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 1XH

Phone: 033 022 27777
Email: adoption.team@westsussex.gov.uk
Qualifications and Experience of Senior Managers

Jackie Wood – Head of Children’s Social Care Placements

Jackie has a BA (Hons) Degree in Social Science (1986) and gained her CQSW and Postgraduate Certificate in Applied Social Studies from Hull University in 1987. Jackie went on to qualify as a Further and Adult Education Teacher in 1999 and also has an Executive Diploma in Management (Level 7). She completed Systemic Leadership Training in December 2018. Up to 1999 Jackie held social work and management posts within Humberside and E. Yorkshire children’s services, including posts within the Adoption Service. From 1999 to 2012 Jackie worked for Cambridgeshire County Council’s Children’s Directorate as a Service Manager in children’s fieldwork teams, which included time spent as the vice chair of the Adoption Panel and Agency Adviser to both Fostering and Adoption Panels; the last five years of her time with Cambridgeshire County Council was as the Head of Fostering and Adoption. Jackie has worked as an interim Head of Looked After Children Service; Head of Early Help; Lead Auditor; Assistant Director with a VAA and Head of Provider Services and joined WSCC mid- December 2018 as Head of Placements.

Sarah Foster- Service Leader, Fostering & Adoption

Sarah holds a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Management from Manchester Polytechnic (1991) a Post Graduate Certificate in Education from Leicester University (1992) and holds a Masters in Social Work from the University of Sussex (2001). Sarah has been in her current role within West Sussex since June 2017. Prior to this appointment she was the Group Manager for Fostering South and Placement Finding with West Sussex. Previous to this role she worked in a variety of management roles within Placement Finding, Independent Fostering Agency and Voluntary Agency Children’s Home.

Wendy Wood- Group Manager, Adoption and Permanent Placement Support

Wendy holds a BA (Hons) in Sociology from University of Lancaster (1992) and a Masters in Social Work from University of Sussex (1997). She also holds the PQSW and Child Care Award and a level 5 ILM Leadership and Management. Wendy completed the Family Futures Adoption and Attachment training between 2000 and 2002. Wendy has been in her current role within West Sussex since June 2016. Prior to this appointment she was a manager for Surrey Children’s Services in Family Finding and Recruitment, Child Protection and Care Proceedings and the Hope Service, a multi-agency provision for young people with complex emotional and social care needs.
Appendix 1

Adoption and Permanent Placement Support Service Structure Chart

HEAD OF CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE PLACEMENTS – JACKIE WOOD

SERVICE LEAD – SARAH FOSTER

Group Manager
Wendy Wood 1.0

Adoption 1
Practice Manager
Davinia Overton 1.0

SW – Julie Lloyd 1.0
SW – Emily Jones 0.5 (on maternity leave)
SW – Mallu Montino 0.75
SW – Christine Austin 1.0
CFW – Siobhan Ames 0.59 M-F

Admin Via Capita Office Services –
Embedded Role Coordinator –
Sandra Sargent 1.0

Adoption 2
Practice Manager
Melissa Paton 1.0

SW – Helena Polson 0.7
SW Rose McKinney 0.61 M-W
SW - Jenny Boddington 1.0
SW – Rachel Stewart 1.0 (on maternity leave)
SW – Nicola Sterlini 1.0
SW – Stefanie Barnett 0.39
CFW – Andie Cankalis 0.5

Adoption Panel Advisor
Sharon Lake
0.81 M-Th

Advanced Practitioner
Lisa Knight
0.81
### Appendix 2

**Adoption Panel membership - December 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helen Davies</td>
<td>Independent Panel Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shirley Hosgood</td>
<td>Vice chair, independent social work member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Pauline Shute</td>
<td>Consultant Community Paediatrician, Panel Medical Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Janetta Milea</td>
<td>Consultant Community Paediatrician, Panel Medical Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeleine Voice</td>
<td>Social worker member (West Sussex-maternity leave)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol Jenkins</td>
<td>Independent social worker member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Doyle</td>
<td>Independent member, adoptive parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian Harmer- Draper</td>
<td>Independent member, adoptive parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Harris</td>
<td>Vice chair, independent member, adoptive parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley Hurley</td>
<td>Independent member, foster carer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cllr Hilary Flynn</td>
<td>Independent member (County councillor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cllr Francis Oppler</td>
<td>Independent member (County councillor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trudy Davies</td>
<td>Independent member, adopted adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Molyneux</td>
<td>Independent member, birth mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian Okeze-Tirado</td>
<td>Social worker member (West Sussex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gill Cox</td>
<td>Social worker member- Fostering (for Foster to adopt assessments)</td>
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</tbody>
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**Panel Advisors and non-voting members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Lake</td>
<td>Adoption Panel Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Boothroyd</td>
<td>Legal advisor to Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Ellis</td>
<td>Legal advisor to Panel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>