

**LB REDBRIDGE
ADOPTION SERVICE**

**STATEMENT OF
PURPOSE**

February 2016

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose explains the vision, objectives and services provided by Redbridge's Adoption Service. In doing so it sets out how the service meets the requirements of the following legislation and statutory guidance:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- The Children Act 1989;
- Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003;
- Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005;
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011;
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011;
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013; and
- Children and Families Act 2014.

This Statement of Purpose is updated regularly and reviewed. It is available to staff, adopters, children and young people, families, other professionals and the general public via [Redbridge i](#).

As part of a development plan, the Adoption Service has had a contract with Coram since 2013, and is now negotiating a closer partnership which is expected to come into operation in October 2015.

The new Coram partnership known as Coram Capital Adoption, will work closely with Redbridge to plan and deliver adoption services in Redbridge. The Team Manager and two Senior Social Work Practitioners within the Adoption Team are employed by Coram and located in Redbridge. The supervision of the Team Manager is jointly undertaken by the Redbridge Head of Service and the Head of Adoption Services at Coram, with day to day decisions made locally.

Coram is an innovative children's charity which has been judged Outstanding by Ofsted. By partnering with Coram, Redbridge is benefitting from accessing approved adopters from a wide pool of adopters from diverse backgrounds (Coram places 80+ children pa). Redbridge also benefits from training and developmental opportunities for staff and from having access to concurrent planning placements for its children via Coram.

2. The Name and Address of the Registered Provider

Adoption Team
Fostering & Adoption Service
Station Road Centre
Station Road
Barkingside
ILFORD
Essex
IG6 1NB

3. The Responsible Individual

The Responsible Individual is John Anthony, Head of Adoption, Fostering, Placements, Contact and Leaving Care services. He is based at the Station Road Centre, Station Road, Barkingside, ILFORD, Essex, IG6 1NB

4. The Adoption Agency Decision Maker

The Adoption Agency decision maker is Caroline Cutts, Chief Children and Families Officer. She is based at Lynton House, 255-259 High Road, ILFORD, Essex, IG1 1NY.

5. Registration and Inspection

The service is registered with and inspected by Ofsted and published inspection reports can be viewed on the Ofsted website. The Adoption Agency is inspected against National Minimum Standards for Adoption, 2011. Any enquiries should be addressed to:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

6. Our Vision for Children and Young People

LB Redbridge seeks to promote the upbringing of children within their birth family or extended family in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. Where this is not possible the Adoption Service undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and adult life. All looked after children will have a Plan for Permanence considered at their second statutory review. Adoption is one of a range of available permanency options and should be considered as an option in cases where a child cannot return to the care of their birth family members and is considered generally for children under the age of eight years.

The Adoption Service recognises the lifelong impact of adoption on adoptees, birth relatives, including birth siblings, and adopters and seeks to offer a service which is responsive and sensitive to these needs.

The Adoption Service operates in accordance with the principles and vision published in the Children's Services Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP), 2015-2018.

7. Our Aims and Values

- To ensure that all children in Redbridge who require permanency by adoption are provided with an adoptive family as soon as possible who can meet their identified needs and offer a secure, stable and loving environment throughout their childhood, into adolescence and adulthood. Delays in adoption can have a negative impact on the health and development of children and will be avoided wherever possible.
- We aim to find and ensure that the best possible match is made for every child and family based on the child's identified needs which will enable those children to thrive and reach their full potential and become resilient adults.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process and their wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages according to their age and understanding.
- Delay in achieving a permanent placement is known to cause further damage to children and therefore avoiding drift and delay throughout the child's journey in care is a priority. When selecting suitable adopters for a child the need to avoid delay will be balanced with the child's holistic needs including:
 - Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
 - The particular needs of children with disabilities will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
 - Consideration is always given to placing siblings together.
 - The education and health care needs, including any needs arising from a child's disability or special educational need must be met by the adoptive placement.
- Contact, either direct or indirect, with birth family and kinship network is facilitated if it is in the child's best interest
- To ensure that there are sufficient numbers of adoptive families approved by Redbridge to meet the needs of the children requiring adoption.
- To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care waiting for families both locally and nationally.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adopters are recognised as valuable partners and will be viewed and treated as key stakeholders in our service for children.

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- If a Redbridge family is not available the Adoption Service will seek a placement from Coram as our partner VAA, as well as other Adoption Consortia, the National Adoption Register, Adoption Exchange events, through the use of dedicated publications and private or voluntary agencies, within the financial resources available to the Service.
- To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children in partnership with other agencies and to provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption by the agency and to their adopters during the pre-adoption order period and thereafter for the first three years post the granting on an Adoption Order when the adoptive family live outside of Redbridge and on-going until the child's 18th birthday, when they are resident in Redbridge.
- We are committed to working in partnership with children, their birth families, adopters and other agencies and to ensure that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice.
- To ensure that there are effective and reliable systems in place for recording, managing and storing information about children placed for adoption and all those affected by the adoption process.

8. Our Service Objectives

Our primary objectives in support of these aims are

- To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption and to raise awareness and the profile of adoption amongst the general public.
- That all the necessary checks on prospective adopters are completed and reviewed to establish they are satisfactory.
- Safe caring guidelines will be an integral part of adopter's preparation, assessment and subsequent placement.
- To support approved and waiting adopters in achieving the placement of appropriately matched children.
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed with the relevant party and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all in the adoption process.
- That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through consultation, feedback, compliments and complaints.
- The service 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. That staff providing services will be trained and will continue to update their knowledge and skills to ensure a consistent and high standard of service delivery.

- To ensure that children are given a copy of the Children's Guide to Adoption and this is explained to them by their Social Worker according to their age and understanding and that this is made available according to the child's needs.
- Children have clear and appropriate information about themselves, their birth parents and families and life before their adoption order which is given to the adoptive parent/s to safeguard, share and promote with their child according to their age and understanding.
- There will be a period of introduction before the placement commences, appropriate to the age and circumstances of the child. This will be child rather than adult led.
- LSBS and Later in life letter to be provided within ten days of Adoption order.

9. Organisational Structure

See **Appendix 1** for the organisational structure chart and **Appendix 2** for Adoption Service staff summary of qualifications and experience

The Adoption Team is part of the Adoption, Fostering, Placements, Contact and Leaving Care services. The Head of Service is John Anthony. This service sits within the wider Children and Families Service, which also incorporates the Child Protection and Assessment Service, the Community Social Worker and Looked after Children Service and the Early Intervention and Parenting Support Service. The Head of Service reports to the Chief Children and Families Officer, Caroline Cutts.

The Adoption Team consists of three Coram posts (funded by the Redbridge contract), i.e. one Team Manager and two Senior Practitioners. The other two social work posts are Redbridge employees including one dedicated to adoption support work.

10. Administrative Support to the Adoption Service

Dedicated administrative support to the Adoption Service is by staff based within the Children and Families Service, serving Adoption, Fostering, Placements, Community Social Work and Looked After Children.

Administrative Support Officers are also responsible for administering Adoption Panel meetings, coordinating and taking minutes of Adoption Permanency Planning Meetings, providing a contact service (also known as "letterbox") to enable children placed for adoption to maintain links with members of their birth families as appropriate, administering adoption allowances, collecting statistics and arranging for non-active files to be archived.

11. Services Offered by the Agency

The Adoption Service provides the following:

11a. Recruitment and Preparation of Adopters

The Adoption Team works to a Service Delivery Plan which is reviewed and updated at the beginning of the financial year. The strategy recognises the need to recruit adopters from within Redbridge and surrounding areas in order to meet the varied needs of the children requiring adoptive placements.

A quarterly analysis of placement needs and recruitment activity will inform the Service Plan which sets out the process by which adopters will be recruited. There a general information pack is sent out/given to all enquirers.

Redbridge benefits from families recruited through their partnership with Coram and can have a choice of up to eighty families should they be identified as appropriate matches for children.

Information sessions are held jointly with East London Consortia and Coram for people interested in adoption are run (whenever possible in partnership with an approved adopter) every two months. These are advertised in advance. Enquirers are asked to book onto a session. It is not a requirement to attend an information session to register an interest in adoption. In the future enquirers will have the option of attending information meetings at Coram.

Since July 2103, the Adoption Service has managed all enquiries in accordance with the Two Stage Adopter Assessment process.

There are two types of enquiry, the first being a *general* enquiry for people at the initial point of exploring adoption. The team can give general information and advice and also signpost enquiries to further information and reading. They will also invite people to an information evening in order for them to gather further information. The general information that people can expect to receive will include the following areas:

- Eligibility for adoption;
- Who are the children who need adoptive families;
- Assessment process and the legal implications of adoption;
- Useful sources of information; and
- Answering any questions the enquirer has about any aspect of adoption.

The second being a *specific* enquiry for those people who already have some knowledge of adoption and have decided that they wish to begin their 'adoption journey'. The Adoption Social Worker will seek to gather information by telephone and a face-to-face initial interview. Where a couple are seeking to adopt, both enquirers need to be present for the initial interview. The social worker will consider eligibility for adoption in relation to the following:

- Statutory requirements: Adopters need to be over 21 years of age, domiciled in the UK, not have a conviction in relation to harm to a child and be able to consider the children who need adoptive families.

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- Whether the enquirers are prepared to proceed within the timescales which are detailed below.
- The enquirer may be considered not ready to proceed if recently having experienced any significant loss such as a bereavement, separation, job loss, or where they are about to experience a significant upheaval, e.g. moving, changing jobs.
- The enquirers need to have ceased fertility treatment.
- If the enquirers are a couple, they need to have lived together for at least two years.
- Accommodation needs to be suitable, which will usually include a spare bedroom for a child.
- Ideally the enquirers will have some experience of children, or be willing to gain this with our support.
- They will need to give agreement to statutory checks and references being carried out, including if applicable, a reference from a previous partner with whom they have jointly parented a child.

For these enquiries Redbridge strives to gather and share information, verbally and in writing within 10 working days of the initial *specific* telephone/email enquiry and will accept applicants from day 10 who want to register their Interest in Adoption, unless they have not met the necessary criteria. Where the enquirer(s) wishes to proceed and meets the eligibility criteria for adoption, the Redbridge Adoption Service will make a decision that the enquiry is suitable; the applicants will be invited to register their interest by completing a 'Registration of Interest' form (ROI). This asks for all the information that Redbridge need to start the process including the checks and references. Based on the information gathered in the initial interview with regards to eligibility and the information within the ROI form, Redbridge endeavours to make a decision to accept the enquirers within five working days. This decision is also based on the capacity of the Service to prepare applicants for adoption within the required time frame. There will be circumstances where this decision is delayed, maybe due to needing further information or due to availability of the enquirers to attend a meeting.

Once applicants have been informed in writing of the acceptance of their ROI they can then proceed to the **two-stage assessment process**. The aim of the process is for adopters to be prepared for approval and adoptive parenting more quickly, so that more children can be placed in families without experiencing any unwarranted delay.

The Adoption Service are committed to and will ensure that all first time adopters are offered and made aware that they are expected to attend Preparation Training. This will be offered to new and first time applicants to complete in Stage One.

11b. Assessment of Adopters

Stage One

This stage commences when the initial visit has been completed and the ROI accepted. Adoptive applicants complete the statutory checks that are necessary; these include medicals, Disclosure and Barring Services check (regarding any criminal convictions), Local Authority residency checks, personal references and overseas checks. This stage should be completed within 2 months, but may take longer if checks are delayed or the adoptive applicants and Redbridge agree that it needs to. During Stage One some preparation training will be offered which applicants are required to attend. In addition, they will need to undertake some home study exercises which are guided by the Adoption Service.

If the Adoption Team Manager deems an application as being unlikely to succeed, this is explained to the applicants at an early stage and the reasons for this explained verbally and in writing. If an application to proceed to stage 2 is not accepted, the enquirer may make a formal complaint.

Stage Two

At the outset of the home study the assessing social worker will meet with the applicants and propose and agree a framework for the assessment, setting the target panel date and all dates for assessment meetings and the details of the areas that will be covered at appointments. Applicants will be given a copy of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) template to understand the framework that guides the social work assessment and to enable them to contribute fully to the process.

During the home study adoptive applicants have regular meetings with their assessing Social Worker to collect the information which will be needed to assess their suitability to adopt and for their report to be compiled and presented to the Adoption Panel for approval as prospective adopters. This stage should be completed within four months but may take longer if the prospective adopters and Redbridge agree that it needs to.

Applicants can request a gap of up to six months between completing stage one and commencing stage two. Such arrangements will be discussed and agreed with the applicants. A longer gap will require a re-entry interview involving the applicant.

Both the assessing social worker and applicants will agree the expectations and arrangements for completing the assessment. Applicants may request additional time for a range of different reasons. A copy of the social worker's PAR report is given to the adoptive applicants to check for accuracy and generate further discussion and sign for presentation to the Fostering and Adoption Panel. Applicants are invited to the Fostering and Adoption Panel hearing their application, and although attendance is not compulsory, applicants are encouraged to attend.

The assessing social worker presents the PAR to the Fostering and Adoption Panel, who make a recommendation on whether the applicants should be approved to adopt a child.

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The applicants are informed verbally by the chair of the Panel's recommendation and in writing. The Chief Officer, Children and Families Service (acting as the agency decision-maker) will receive a final set of minutes of the Panel hearing and make a formal decision. Once this formal decision has been made, written notification is sent out to confirm the decision within five days of the decision. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of their right to make representations to the agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The Independent Review Mechanism was established by the government to allow an independent review of an adoption application by a body (the IRM) constituted in a similar way to an adoption panel. The IRM will consider all the reports submitted by the applicants and the adoption agency before making a recommendation. The IRM's recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision.

Foster Carers and 'Second' time Adopters

Foster Carers and Second time Adopters will be invited to attend Preparation Training and when possible this will be tailored and delivered to meet those specific needs, but it is not a requirement that they do attend preparation training as part of the approval process and decision re this are made on an individual basis. Both groups are able to move immediately into the Stage Two; the full assessment.

When undertaking an assessment of a Foster Carer who is wishing to adopt or a second time adopter, references from the Fostering Service or Adoption Agency will be sought. The Service will aim to undertake a fast track assessment which uses all existing and historical information about the applicants to inform the current assessment. These assessments will be completed within the same four month timescale which is applied to first time adopters, unless there are good reasons to extend this period.

Foster to Adopt

The London Borough of Redbridge Adoption Service will inform adopters about Fostering for Adoption during the approval and assessment process. If it becomes apparent that it would be in the best interests of a particular child in Redbridge to be placed with prospective adopters in the first instance, as Foster Carers, the London Borough of Redbridge will discuss this option with the applicants and if there is agreement, undertake an assessment of the applicants with the view to approving them as temporary Foster Carers under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations 2010, to enable the placement of a child with the family if this is deemed appropriate and in accordance with the child's care plan.

The Redbridge Adoption Service is a child focussed service whose first priority is to identify adoptive families for children with an adoption plan. There may be times when it is necessary to prioritise which prospective adopters to assess to meet the needs of children in Redbridge to ensure that permanency arrangements are secured in the shortest time frame possible. If we are not able to accept an adoption application because of the pressure of work, enquirers will be invited to contact Redbridge again, and will be directed to First for Adoption and other adoption agencies that may be able to offer a service. It is not permitted for Adoption Agencies to operate a waiting list of prospective adopters.

11c. Family Finding

Concurrent planning – the Coram Concurrent planning Programme operates in partnership with Redbridge. The CCPP offers a specialist advice service to children aged 0-2 years who are subject to care proceedings and where in the view of the courts, on the basis of the past history, it is likely that the children will need a permanent placement outside of the birth family. In all cases there is still a prospect of the birth parents or other relatives being able to provide appropriate care within the child's timescales. The overall aim is to prevent drift and delay in achieving permanence for these children and to prevent placement moves by placing them with carers who are dually approved as foster carers and as adopters (i.e. concurrent planning carers or foster for adopt carers).

Following the completion of all assessments of family or connected persons, it is then agreed that a plan of adoption is appropriate. The child's social worker will contact the Adoption Team to arrange a Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM). Referrals to the Adoption Manager are usually made through the Permanency Tracking Panel process.

The aim of the PPM is to devise a plan to achieve a permanence placement for the child. It sets the framework to ensure that a plan is developed, reviewed and monitored to prevent drift and achieve permanence through adoption when this is the child's care plan. PPM meetings follow a clear and established framework to ensure that all looked after children in Redbridge for whom permanency is the plan receive an equal service which identifies their holistic needs. All relevant stakeholders, including the child's Foster Carers and when appropriate, birth family members will be invited to attend part of or all of the PPM subject to the individual circumstances of the case.

If adoption is the plan a family finding social worker from the Adoption Team will be allocated to work alongside the child's Social Worker in order to find suitable adopters for the child as soon as possible. When trying to find a family who can meet the identified needs of the child/ren, family finding social workers will consider Redbridge approved families, and those currently undergoing an assessment. If there are not any suitable Redbridge adoptive parents available, a referral is made to Coram and the North East London Adoption Consortium (NELAG) and the National Adoption Register. Thereafter, consideration will be given to the best way to recruit a suitable family assessing whether siblings should stay together, especially when larger sibling groups have an adoption plan, should be completed at the first stage of the permanency planning process so a clear direction is established at the start.

The Adoption Team will always seek to find creative ways to family find for children. PPM's are held regularly and routinely to review cases, assessing the progress and to look at any barriers that may be preventing a child or sibling group from being matched with adopters. Regular liaisons with the legal department will be maintained to ensure all necessary legal processes are pursued robustly. During this process direct work will be undertaken with the child for who adoption is the plan and at the appropriate time. The social worker in partnership with the Foster Carer will introduce and give the child the Children's Guide to Adoption/ children's pledge.

11d. Adoption Allowances.

Redbridge has an Adoption Allowance policy and allowances are considered within the terms of this. If an adoption allowance is applicable this will be agreed and arranged before the match is finalised and presented to the Panel as part of the Adoption Support Plan.

11e. Matching Children with Adopters

Approved adopters who are available will be considered against the needs profile of any child awaiting adopters. Up to two families will be shortlisted for a visit by the child's social worker, the family finding worker and the adopters' link worker. Visits to them will be prioritised to avoid delay. The family finding social worker and child's social worker will decide whether either of these families is likely to be able to meet the child's needs and will include the child's Foster Carer in a follow up/ second visit to share their knowledge about the child. The social workers will seek their views about the proposed possible match. If neither of the selected families is deemed suitable, further families will be sought.

A final PPM meeting, called a Matching Meeting will be held and the matching matrix will be completed. In circumstances when there is more than one possible match, it is the family who are best able to meet the child's holistic needs who will be matched with the child.

The Adoption Service will provide approved adopters with full written information about the child's history prior to the match. Potential adopters will be advised to meet with the agency medical adviser and any other relevant stakeholders prior to the finalising of the match. Adopters can have access to the child's file once a match is agreed, if this is deemed appropriate.

The adopters will be given a 'later life' letter for the child to be held by the adopters for the child to read as a young adult, which will explain details of the child's life leading up to the adoption, as well as the child's Life Story Book. These will be given to the Adopters no later than 10 days after the Adoption Order is granted.

The family finding social worker and the child's Social workers jointly prepare the Adoption Placement Report, Adoption Placement Plan and Adoption Support Plan for presentation to the Adoption Panel.

The Fostering and Adoption Panel must consider whether to recommend:

- That a particular child should be placed with a particular approved adopter

The social workers and the adopters, and their agency, (if it is an inter-agency placement) are expected and encouraged to attend the panel but it is not a requirement that the adopters attend. Following the Panel's recommendation and the Agency Decision Makers' consideration of the match, providing that this is then agreed, an Introductions Planning Meeting will be arranged to agree the child's Adoption Introduction Plan. This meeting covers the areas that need to be agreed and put into action before the child can be placed with the prospective adopters and will focus on the introductions between the child/ren and the adoptive family. A date to formally review these will be arranged. All adopters will be asked to produce information about them to be shared with the child in the form of a welcome book or a DVD. The adopters will be supported to do this in an appropriate manner.

11f. Training Opportunities for Approved Adoptive Parents

Approved adopters are encouraged to access a range of training. The annual training schedule is open to both approved adopters and foster carers and covers subjects such as Safeguarding children, First Aid, Managing Challenging Behaviour. Development Training opportunities are also available via the East London Adoption Consortium (ELAC). Redbridge will also fund places for adopters on external training where relevant to their needs. Redbridge adopters will also be invited to training events arranged by Coram – for example a study day on talking to adopted children about their life story as they grow up.

11g. Annual Review of Approved Adopters

In the event that no placement has been made within 12 months from approval, the Adoption Service will conduct a Review with the adopters including any matches considered and the children for whom they may be suitable. A report is presented to Panel if there is a recommendation to deregister them.

11h. A Contact Support Service

The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with birth family members, in particular siblings who are placed elsewhere, will be supported as appropriate in letterbox or direct contact arrangements and detailed in the Adoption Support Plan. Details of any support birth relatives may need to enable them to meet the contact plans will also be included in this plan.

Redbridge facilitate a contact service between birth families and the adoptive family. Contact can either be direct or indirect ("letterbox") contact. Contact of any kind is often agreed in principle during the care proceedings and is set up with the belief that it is in the child's best interest. Adopters need to be consulted about the contact plans and the arrangements to be agreed and signed by the adopters and where appropriate by the birth Parent

11i. Inter-Country Adoptions

The Adoption Service may also be approached by individuals and couples who wish to adopt a child from overseas. These enquiries are signposted to PACT, an agency who specialises in adoptions from overseas. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) exists with PACT to undertake all stages of the assessment process including providing information, carrying out the viability assessments, adoption preparation, prospective adopters report and approval at the Inter Country Adoption Panel. The current service level agreement was reviewed in January 2015 and is reviewed annually. Once a child is placed with adopters the welfare visits, support and supervision is handed back to Redbridge who appoint a social worker for the child and an adoption social worker to link with the adopters.

11j. providing advice and Guidance to other Professionals, Partner Agencies and Organisations

The Adoption Service is available to other professional, partner agencies and organisations for advice and guidance on any aspect of adoption and can provide bespoke training as required to develop skills, knowledge and awareness. The Service can also provide opportunities for shadowing and learning opportunities for students on placement and contribute to service inductions for new staff.

12. The Fostering and Adoption Panel

The Panel has a quality assurance role in respect of the Adoption Service and monitors aspects of practice determined by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and National Minimum Standards; relevant timescales in considering approvals for prospective families, reviews of approved adopters and matching of children with approved families.

Unlike most other Local Authorities Redbridge has one panel that meets the statutory requirements of both the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and Adoption Agencies amended Regulations 2011 and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.

The joint panel has been a long standing arrangement in Redbridge who is a smaller than average Local Authority and have found that this serves the needs of both services well. The members on the Central List and the independent Chair are experienced, skilled and trained in both areas of work. The two vice chairs are individuals who both foster and adopt themselves.

The composition of the Redbridge Panel is in line with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations and includes:

| Designation |
|---|
| Independent Chair appointed by agreement with all the agencies and suitably qualified in accordance with AAR 3.2 and 3.7 |
| Vice Chair x 2 & Independent Panel Member |
| Medical Adviser & Panel Member |
| An Elected Member (Councilor) |
| Independent Panel Member |
| Independent Panel Member |
| Independent Panel Member |
| Young Person (IN PROCESS) |
| Social Worker (with at least 3 years' experience) |
| Social worker (with at least 3 years' experience) |

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The Panel is additionally supported by:

- The Panel Adviser
- Panel Administrator and Minute taker

The Central list of Panel members is held by the Service. Each person on the list should attend panel specific and joint training with adoption staff, to keep abreast of relevant changes to legislation. Each member signs a Panel agreement which sets out the expectations of the Adoption Agency. A human resources file is kept and maintained on all members on the Central List and includes references, confidentiality agreements, and DBS clearance which is renewed every three years, plus copies of the member's appraisals. All members are given a copy of BAAF's Effective Adoption Panels publication on loan whilst they are Panel members.

The frequency of Panel Meetings is twice monthly and additional panels will be convened if there is a need for more.

Panel members and the Agency's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of the reports to Panel at least seven working days before the Panel meeting.

In the case of prospective adopters the applicant's social worker will attend the Panel to answer any questions raised by the panel and assist them in reaching a recommendation. Applicants are given the opportunity and are encouraged to attend the panel.

In the case of matching a child and prospective adopters, the child's social worker, the adopters' social worker and the family finder will attend panel. The adopters will be invited to attend.

If following a review of approval there is a recommendation to deregister adopters, the report will be presented at Panel for consideration and the adopter will be invited to provide written comments and to attend that Panel.

13. Adoption Support Services

13a. Support prior to the Adoption Order once a child has been placed under the Adoption Regulations 2002.

Redbridge will consider a settling in grant when necessary depending on individual circumstances, and will pay the costs to facilitate the introduction of child to their new family.

Once the child has been placed for adoption, visits by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker will take place. The status of the child as a 'looked after' child will continue until such time as an Adoption Order is made, although the prospective adopters will share Parental Responsibility with Redbridge, and there will be an agreement as to what aspects of Parental Responsibility will be delegated to the prospective adopters.

The child must be visited during the first week of placement by his/her social worker followed by at least one of the workers visiting weekly up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, where the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed at that Review but will not be less than four weekly. Placements are supervised and supported to ensure that the adopters are supported to help children settle and feel secure in the new family, and to build secure attachments in order that they may flourish in their new family and develop their potential.

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The timing of the Adoption Order application will be kept under review within the statutory child care reviewing process and advice will be given by the worker to the adopters. The Adoption Team will provide support and advice to the prospective adopters on preparing their adoption application for the court. This will be discussed at the child's Review meeting and agreed with the adopters. The timing of the adoption application is the decision of the adopters.

The Annexe A which is the report for Court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social worker. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is completed and given to the adopters before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

The Adoption Service will discuss with adopters any arrangements for contact and obtain their views on the arrangements that were in place at the time of the adoptive placement. Once adopters have considered and agreed contact arrangements in the best interests of the child, they will be supported to fulfil them.

The Adoption Service recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid placement breakdowns and adoption support plans that are produced prior to the match will be followed and reviewed as needed.

Redbridge provides a clear statement of the adoption support services that they can provide to adopters at the point that they are enquiring about adoption, as well as compiling a specific adoption support plan at the time of placement.

13b. Support for adopted children and for families who have adopted a Redbridge child, following the granting of an Adoption Order

Anyone who adopted a child through Redbridge, or lives in the borough and is affected by adoption, can request an adoption support assessment by contacting the Adoption Team. The team run a daily duty service and this would be the first point of call for this service.

For families who have adopted through Redbridge this is an on-going service. For those families who live in the borough and adopted a child from another area, Redbridge are responsible to assess their needs if three years has passed since the granting of the adoption order. Depending on the nature of the referral and the outcome of an assessment, the type and level of adoption support will be determined. In many cases this is about signposting families to other services whereas some situations require a more in depth and thorough assessment of the adoption support needs.

There are two exceptions to this rule:

- The provision of any regular on-going financial support agreed before the Adoption Order, such as an adoption allowance, always remains the responsibility of the placing authority regardless of where the family live.
- The responsibility for the management and support of any contact arrangements remains with the placing agency. Regardless of where the adoptive family chooses to live, the placing authority should continue to be responsible for managing and supporting contact arrangements, such as letterbox arrangements agreed prior to the Adoption Order, and any changes to those arrangements over time.

13c. Support for birth families

- The Adoption Service will provide information to birth family members about current adoption practice and its implications and will encourage birth parents to be involved in planning for their child's adoption through contributing to the Child Permanence Report, commenting on what is written about them and recording their wishes for their child's upbringing.
- Birth parents will be informed of the progress of plans for their children and decisions are conveyed to them in a timely and sensitive way, verbally and in writing
- The Adoption Service will promote and support the contact arrangements that have been agreed and endeavour to assist in sorting out issues relating to contact if they arise
- The Adoption Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and will provide intermediary services in accordance with appropriate legislation, regulations and guidance.
- The Looked after Children's (LAC) Service signposts birth parents for assistance and specialist counselling and refer them to Barnardo's Link Adoption Support Service in line with its requirements under the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- Birth parents and families have the right to make representations and complaints about the adoption service. Birth parents and families will have access to the Council's complaints procedures

13d. Access to Counselling Services for Adults involved in the Adoption Process

The Adoption Service provides Schedule 2 Counselling for adopted adults and intermediary services for birth relatives and adopted adults. When counselling needs are identified, these may be arranged from a suitable agency or individual, as appropriate.

The Adoption Service also receives requests from adopted adults who are trying to trace birth family and to birth parents or relatives who are trying to trace an adopted adult.

We will provide counselling to the individual wishing to trace a relative and access information from a variety of sources to help individuals begin the tracing process.

People who were adopted before 12 November 1975 are required to see a counsellor before they can be given access to their birth records. People, who were adopted after 11 November 1975, may choose whether or not they would like to see a counsellor before they are given the information that will lead them to their birth record.

Persons adopted before 30 December 2005

In the case of persons adopted before 30 December 2005, Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act preserves the legal right of an adopted person, on reaching the age of 18, to apply to the Registrar General for information they need to obtain a certified copy of the record of their birth.

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The Adoption Service will continue to have the discretion under the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 to disclose identifying information to adopted adults who are seeking to find out about their family history and origins. This information may help inform any decision by the adopted person as to whether he or she wishes to apply for an intermediary service. If, however, a birth sibling has also been adopted then the agency will not be able to give out the sibling's adoptive identity without that person's consent.

Persons adopted after on or 30 December 2005

On reaching the age of 18, adults whose adoptions took place on or after 30 December 2005 have the right to receive from the adoption agency:

- a copy of their birth certificate;
- the information originally contained in the permanence report prepared for the Adoption Panel; and
- Copy of court documents relating to the adoption which do not contain protected information.

Written information will be provided to the adopted person about the availability of counselling but there is no legal requirement to receive it before being given the requested information. If the agency decides that such information should be withheld from an adopted person, it must apply to the High Court for an order denying access to this information.

13e. Intermediary Services

Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides adopted adults and their adult birth relatives with the right to apply for an intermediary Service.

In all circumstances adoptees will be helped to consider carefully what actions they might take in terms of obtaining information and/or tracing and the possible implications of their actions for others. The Agency will provide an intermediary service to adult adoptees who are wishing to make contact with a birth parent, sibling or grandparent and who are able to provide a name and address of the person who they wish to contact. The Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, but will provide adoptees with details of other agencies and organisations that may assist them, provide such a service, or offer additional support. All adoptees will be provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

In those cases where the original contact is from a resident of Redbridge then where a birth parent or sibling of an adopted adult is wishing to establish contact with her/his birth child/sibling, she/he will be offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted her/himself. Birth relatives will be encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar General (which provides a safe and confidential way for birth relatives to assure an adopted person that contact would be welcome).

If the adopted person is aged over 18 and the Department has a previous address for her/him, the Agency will, if the birth relative requests it, seek to make contact with the adopted person via the last known address and inform them of the birth relative's wish to initiate contact.

14. Quality assurance, evaluation and monitoring of the work of the service

A number of mechanisms exist to monitor the work of the Agency and to ensure that service delivery is consistently of a high quality and meeting the performance targets (both national and local), and business outcomes identified in the service plan.

The Head of the Community Social work and Looked after Children (CSWLAC) Service chairs a multi-agency permanency tracking panel to ensure that permanency plans, including adoption, are decided at the earliest opportunity and are then tracked through this mechanism to prevent delay in securing permanency for children. In addition, all children with an adoption plan are regularly monitored by the Head of Service and Adoption Team Manager until an Adoption Order is granted.

The Adoption Service is monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted. The last adoption inspection took place in July 2010 and the outcome was satisfactory. There has been no further cross cutting inspection carried out by Ofsted. The report is available at the Ofsted website or by writing to Ofsted. A six monthly report on adoption services enable the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel to monitor and evaluate the provision of services and ensure services are effective and of an appropriate quality.

Six monthly Panel business meetings are held, chaired by the Head of Service and are attended by all Panel members and the managers for the service. The Adoption Service provide reports about its performance to these meetings and the Panel are able to feedback their observations, a summary of panel evaluations and suggestions to the Service.

The management team, in partnership with the Panel Chair ensures the effective administration and functioning of the Adoption and Fostering Panel, including the recruitment and annual appraisal of Panel members.

Adopters and staff who attend Panel will be provided with evaluation forms for feedback purposes on their experience of the Panel. Their feedback will be evaluated and reported on through the six monthly panel reports.

Statistical data is kept about recruitment of adopters and provided to Senior Managers and Members and the Panel at the Panel Business Meetings.

The Service is committed to seeking feedback from service users. Processes, procedures and service development are informed by the feedback, for example feedback on recruitment information sessions, preparation training and attendance at the Panel.

In 2015 Coram undertook a service user survey of adopters who had a child placed by Redbridge between 2011 – 2014. This provided an anonymous opportunity to give feedback which has provided useful information about areas for future development.

The service provides weekly performance data to the Senior Leadership Team on the progress on those children in Redbridge with an adoption plan. Activity in the adoption service is measured against national targets on a regular basis and is now recorded on the adoption scorecard.

15. Adoption Scorecard

The Adoption Scorecard was introduced by the Department for Education in May 2012 and is updated annually. It measures the average time taken for a child who has been adopted from the time entering care to moving in with their adoptive family. The initial performance threshold for Local Authorities is 21 months, 639 days but this will be lowered within four years to the statutory threshold of 14 months. It also measures the proportion of children waiting longer for adoption than 21 months and the average time taken to match children with an adoptive family after a Placement Order has been granted. The initial performance threshold is seven months, 213 days, but this will be lowered within four years to four months. The Adoption Scorecard is currently published in September each year.

Redbridge's position is that the current 3 years Average time is 575 days (2011-14), compared to National Average of 628 (2011-14).

Redbridge has also been better than the National Average on time between Court order and child being placed with adoptive parents. Performance was 171 days in 2011-14, compared to the National Average of 217 days (2011-14).

16. Complaints

All children, their birth families, adopters and their children have the right to complain about the Adoption Service. Wherever possible, concerns or representations should be made to the adoption or child's social worker or the relevant manager, to allow an opportunity to resolve the complaint as quickly as possible in an informal way. However if this is not possible the complaint can be raised formally.

Prospective adopters, birth parents and children for whom the agency is planning adoption are provided with information about the complaints procedures including details for the Complaints Manager.

There is a complaints leaflet available that explains how to make a complaint and what happens next. Complaints leaflets are available from the Adoption Team or by phone to the Customer Contact Centre 020 8554 5000 or e-mail. They can also provide direct access to the complaints manager for children.

Information is also available on the Redbridge website www.redbridge.gov.uk. It has contact details of the complaints manager and how to make a complaint including access to the on-line complaints form.

A complaint can also be raised with Ofsted which is responsible for inspecting adoption services (contact details available under registration and inspection).

Ofsted National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Building
Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA
Tel no: 08456404045
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Children are given written information about how to make a complaint in the Children's Guide to Adoption which is given to all children with an adoption plan and explained to them by their social worker according to their age and understanding.

17. Independent Review Mechanism

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) was launched by the on 30 April 2004. It is currently operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department of Education (DfE). The IRM is a review process, conducted by a Panel, which prospective adopters can use when they have been told that their Adoption Agency does not propose to approve them as suitable to adopt a child. Adoption Agencies cannot refer matters to the IRM – it is only prospective adopters who can refer. The IRM does not have the authority to rescind the recommendations made by Adoption Agency– they can only offer an independent review from which they then make recommendations.

Prospective adopters who are not approved have the right to make representations once their assessment has started or to request an independent review; details of how to do this are provided during the course of the assessment process if requested or if the Team Manager agrees that the recommendation to Panel will be not to approve the applicant.

18. Children's Files

Children's adoption files will be carefully stored and archived and information from the agency's records can be made available to children when they are of a sufficient age and understanding. Redbridge has an access to files policy. Information about this will be provided to children and young people and their adoptive families.

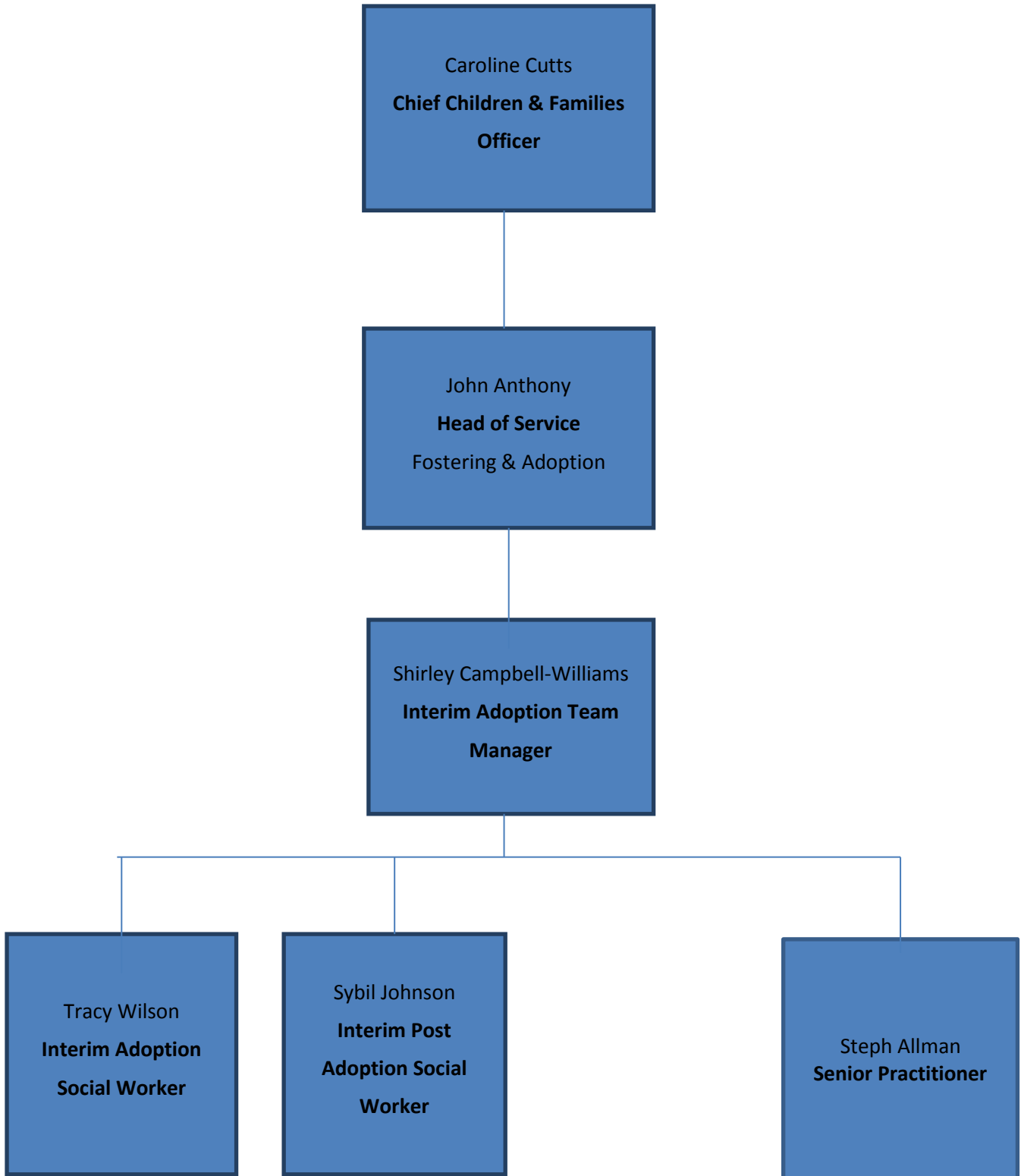
Adoption files will be retained for 100 years.

Other useful organisational links

Coram London Office
49 Mecklenburg Square
London WC1N 2QA
Email: adoption@coram.org.uk

First 4 Adoption
Dedicated information service for people interested in adopting
Tel: no. 0300 222 0012
www.first4adoption.org.uk

Appendix One - Organisational Structure Chart



Appendix 2

Adoption Service: Staff Summary- qualifications and experience

- The Agency Decision Maker is :

Caroline Cutts
Chief Children and Families Officer
London Borough of Redbridge
Lynton House
255-259
High Road
Ilford
Essex
IG1 1NY

- The Head of Service (Community Social Work and Looked After Children) is Harriet Jannetta. Harriet is a qualified social worker with 35 years of experience of working in children social care in field and residential work. She is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and is also a qualified Play Therapist.
- The Head of Service for Adoption, Fostering, Placements, Contact and Leaving Care is John Anthony. John is an HCPC registered qualified social worker, with over 15 years operational and senior management experience in a range of disciplines including local & central government. John holds a Social Science Degree/DIPSW, a Master's Degree in Social Policy and post graduate Diplomas in Law and Legal Practice. John has also received Public Sector Management Training from the Office of Public Management and is a qualified Prince 2 practitioner.
- The Manager of the Adoption Team is Shirley Campbell- Williams. Shirley is a qualified Social Worker Dip/SW with over 18 years of working in Children's Social Care. She qualified in 1996 and has experience in Child protection, Fostering and Adoption. She holds a Degree BSC (HONS) Psychology with Women's Studies 1993. Shirley holds a management qualification – Diploma in Management skills level 5 obtained from the institute of Leadership and Management in 2009. Shirley has ten years management experience in Adoption and Special Guardianship. Shirley is a trained experienced Practice Teacher and is registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC).
- There are two Adoption Social Workers, on interim contracts. One has the lead responsibility for post adoption support work. There are two permanent senior Social Work practitioners. All are qualified social workers, registered with the HCPC.