

THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE

Statement of Purpose 2019 - 2020

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 17 and 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2005.

1. POSITION STATEMENT

- 1.1** Thurrock Council believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their emotional physical and developmental needs throughout their life. When children cannot live with their own birth families, Thurrock Council is committed to finding them such a family.
- 1.2** Thurrock Council is part of Adopt East, an alliance of Adoption Services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Southend, Luton, Norfolk, Bedford Borough, AdoptionPlus and Barnados). The priorities of the Alliance are as follows:
- Decisions about placements are always made in the child's best interests
 - Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence
 - Social Workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care
 - Matches for children and adoptive parents are timely
 - Early Permanence (fostering to adopt) is considered at initial stages of proceedings to ensure there consideration of the early permanent offer for children.
 - Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a high-quality specialist assessment of need
 - The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy making and delivery of services
 - The Adopt East website can be found here:
<https://www.adopteast.org.uk/>
 - Adopt East supports Thurrock through Regional matching arrangements and shared best practice policies and training.
 - Adopt East provides a central hub known as the 'Front Door' for initial enquiries about how to become an adopter.
 - Adopt East is a unified resource so there is a strategy and pathway for the recruitment of adopters, the good offer of training, and adoption support services

- 1.3** Thurrock Council will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Children, birth parents and relatives, adoptive parents and adopted people are entitled to a comprehensive service which promotes the welfare of children, supports families and treats all parties fairly, openly and with respect. This service will be planned and provided in collaboration with other relevant agencies and service user organisations.
- 1.4** The Statement of Purpose is provided upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the service, to children who may be adopted and their parents, to anyone wishing to adopt, to adopted persons and their families and to those granted or who are seeking a Special Guardianship Order.
- 1.5** The Statement of Purpose for a Local Authority is subject to formal approval by Elected Members and is reviewed on an annual basis.
- 1.6** Legislative Framework
- The Adoption Service complies with all relevant legislation:
 - The Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
 - The Adoption and Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
 - National Minimum Standards (Adoption Services)
 - The Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
 - The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
 - The Statutory Adoption Guidance amended 2011, 2013 and 2014
 - The Care Planning, Placement and Case review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
 - The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
 - The Children and Families Act 2014
 - Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 amended by Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016
 - The Children Act 1989

The framework is designed to ensure the service is accountable and defines practice and actions undertaken within the service.

2. AIMS OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 2.1** To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child is at the centre of the permanency process.
- 2.2** To ensure that where it is not possible for looked after children to be reunited with their birth families they are provided with a permanent, stable alternative family.

- 2.3 To ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about the assessment, approval process and support services.
- 2.4 To ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the permanency process and have access to support services.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 3.1 To ensure that children adopted from the care system are within the agreed timescales set by the government.
- 3.2 To recruit a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children needing adoptive families.
- 3.3 To provide a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies.
- 3.4 To ensure that Thurrock Council employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver the permanency service.
- 3.5 To ensure that all applicants for adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.
- 3.6 To provide counselling, advice and support to adopted adults and their families that recognise the lifelong impact of adoption.
- 3.7 To provide a service for inter-country adoptions – This is usually via “IAC The Centre for Adoption” <https://www.icacentre.org.uk/> .This is a paid for service.
- 3.8 To recruit adopters irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We encourage adopters from many different backgrounds to suit the diverse needs of children requiring adoption.
- 3.9 To provide, post Special Guardian Order, support services, including, practical and financial (where there is assessed need and in line with policy).
- 3.10 To apply, where there is assessed need and within government criteria, to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services for children.

4. PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Thurrock Council believes that:

- 4.1** Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all the needs of the child in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, physical, social and emotional development and that promotes a supportive, life long relationship.
- 4.2** It is best where possible for children to be brought up by their own birth family.
- 4.3** Children and young people should not be in public care throughout their childhood, therefore, where it is not possible for looked after children to be reunited with their birth families they will be provided with a permanent, stable, alternative family and consideration whether adoption is the best way to provide a permanent placement.
- 4.4** The child's welfare is paramount in all decisions about his/her future.
- 4.5** The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account according to their age and understanding.
- 4.6** A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are all significant factors for consideration when matching a child to their new family. The adoptive family should reflect this, if this can be found without unnecessary delay. No child should be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and parents do not share the same racial or cultural background.
- 4.7** Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the life-long implications of adoption. Thurrock Council will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for their child. Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications of adoption and their rights.
- 4.8** The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family should be valued and respected. The service will maintain an open and inclusive adoption recruitment strategy which will welcome all applicants regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, class or marital status and will encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds.
- 4.9** Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption. Careful consideration will be given to recruiting people who can meet the full range of needs of children requiring adoptive families.
- 4.10** Every effort should be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- 4.11** We work to ensure that plans for adoption are expedited in a timely way to avoid delays where ever possible recognising the detrimental impact that delay can have.

- 4.12 Every child is entitled to information about her/his birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- 4.13 We recognise the importance of continuing contact for children with their birth families and will make arrangements for ongoing contact - direct or indirect - between the child and his/ her birth family unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this.
- 4.14 A range of adoption support services should be provided to all parties in the adoption process including children, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families.
- 4.15 Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. Thurrock Council will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the needs of all parties in the adoption process are met.
- 4.16 We continually review and improve our services within the limits of available resources.
- 4.17 All parties to the adoption process should have access to Thurrock Council Complaints Procedure.

5. THE ADOPTION SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Thurrock Council's Adoption Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship support. The adoption office base is Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL. During the period 2020 to 2021 the service has been operating remotely as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Corporate Director for Children's Services is Sheila Murphy

- 5.1 Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director – Children's Social Care and Early Help, has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service and is Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

Email: jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk

Janet is a qualified social worker and she is registered with Social Work England. Janet has worked in a number of management roles.

- 5.2 The Strategic Lead responsible for adoption services is Naintara Khosla. The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After is Naintara Khosla. Naintara is also the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231
Email: nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk

Naintara qualified social worker in 1993 and is registered with Social Work England. Naintara has been a senior manager in Cafcass and Childrens Social Care since 2003, prior to this she held various positions as a Team Manager and Social Worker. Naintara has extensive experience as a senior leader across Fostering, Adoption and Placement Services for a range of local authorities

5.3 The Service Manager responsible for the Adoption Service is Dan Jones

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763
Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a B.Sc. Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has previously worked for the NSPCC, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council. He has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services

5.4 The Adoption Team comprises:

- 1 Team Manager
- 6 FTE Social Workers
- 3 FTE Life Story & Letterbox Worker

Supported by:

- 1 FTE Business Support

5.5 Team Manager – Sally Medbury

Sally Medbury is the Manager for the Adoption Team in Thurrock. She qualified as a social worker in 2001 and holds the DIPSW, BSc in Social Work and the Post Qualifying Child Care Award. She has extensive experience as a social worker and has worked across Children's Services within Local Authority's across London and Essex. Sally was the adoption family finding senior practitioner in Thurrock from 2014 and was appointed as Adoption Team Manager in 2018.

5.6 Staff members are social work qualified with access to appropriate training, supervision and support. The social workers specialise in either family finding, adopter recruitment and assessment or adoption support work. They are able

to work across the 3 teams where necessary. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

- 5.7** Staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW/DipSW or equivalent and nearly all staff possess a university degree.
- 5.8** All SW qualified staff are registered with the Social Work England.
- 5.9** The Adoption Team is an established and experienced team with the majority at senior practitioner level who are committed to providing a high quality service.
- 5.10** The culture of the team is of continual learning and all staff are encouraged to extend their qualifications by attending relevant training.

6. ADOPTION SERVICES

- 6.1** The Adoption Team has responsibility to provide adoption services for the council including:
 - Information related to adoption for the general public.
 - Assessment and preparation of adopters.
 - Permanence planning and family finding for adoption.
 - Adoption support to all parties involved in adoption including adopters, children and adopted adults, birth parents and relatives.
 - Counselling and access to records for adopted adults.
 - Support to maintain contact where appropriate and planned between adopted children and their birth relatives and foster carers.
 - Inter-Country Adoption services (via a commissioned service).
- 6.2** The Adoption Team provides a central point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an adopter, including those who make enquiries about inter-country adoption, step-parent and relative adoption. The team along with the recruitment team actively recruits adoptive families who can meet the needs of our children needing permanence through adoption. We engage in preparation of prospective adopters, which includes pre-approval training consisting of a four day of preparation group in either stage one or early stages of stage 2. Input on Dual Approval and Foster for Adoption is included in the preparation. In addition to the four days there is a family and friends training day.
- 6.3** Thurrock Council provides a range of information for prospective adopters and service users including families requiring adoption support. The information provided includes: recruitment brochures for adopters, booklets for our adoption support services for birth parents, adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families. The service also produces a guide to adoption for children looked after and information about attending the adoption panel.

- 6.4** The service has a website where prospective adopters or those requiring adoption support information can browse <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/adoption>. The service benefits from a bespoke email address to encourage enquires: PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk
- 6.5** Various campaign activities include use of social media, advertising in local newspapers, billboards, leaflet drops, information days and adoption match exchange days. The teams are encouraged to attend events to promote adoption services for Thurrock Council.
- 6.6** The Adoption Team undertake family finding for all children in Thurrock who require an adoptive family. Family finding social workers present the adoption match to panel in partnership with the child's social worker. The family finding social worker, in partnership with the child's social worker ensures that an adoption support plan is in place for every adoptive family. They also coordinate and support introductions and placements of the child/ren once the match has been made.
- 6.7** The children's teams undertake the tasks of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption, in conjunction with the Adoption Service. Each child has a named social worker and an agreed care plan.
- 6.8** The children's teams work with the child's family during the decision making process for adoption. During this period the birth parents are offered the opportunity to speak to a member of the adoption team who is independent of their case for independent counselling.
- 6.9** The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is responsible for making decisions in relation to whether a child should be placed for adoption. The Child's Permanence Report is submitted to the ADM, who then has 7 working days to make a decision. Legal, Medical and Expert reports are provided to assist in the decision making process.
- 6.10** The children's team and adoption social workers collaborate in family finding, matching, supporting adoptive placements and in the facilitation of contact arrangements, until the adoption order is made. When the adoption order is made the adoption team offer support as specified in the support plan.
- 6.11** The adoption service aims to work closely and in partnership with the teams within the department where adoption is a plan. They offer advice and consultation where this is appropriate. It aims to provide a holistic approach to planning for adoption to incorporate support to families throughout the placement of the child and beyond. All staff have access to training courses and are updated on developments in practice and legislative changes. All staff are suitably qualified to undertake adoption work, with appropriate supervision and oversight to those new to adoption processes.
- 6.12** The aim of the permanency planning process is to reduce delay in achieving permanence for children from the point they become looked after. The Family

Finders role is to assist social workers in the decision making process regarding permanence issues particularly in more complex cases and where adoption or SGO may be the outcome.

- 6.13** The permanency planning process, through a proactive dialogue between the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Children social work teams through the review process, the Adoption Team Manager monitors the timescales in those cases where adoption has been identified as the most appropriate plan for a child in order to ensure that any delays are minimised and that drift does not occur.
- 6.14** IROs have a responsibility for monitoring the implementation of adoption plans and ensuring timescales are adhered to.
- 6.15** Children and prospective adopters are actively referred to Linkmaker. Approved adopters are referred following approval. Adopters are also informed that they can self-refer to Linkmaker once they are approved at panel should they wish.
- 6.16** Thurrock Council's adoption service is engaged in the development of the proposed Regional Alliance including the promotion of good practice.
- 6.17** The adopters social workers offer adoption support prior to, and post, the adoption order. and the adoption team social workers provide adoption support following the adoption order. These social workers have responsibility for reviewing all the adoption support plans annually and this includes managing and reviewing the financial support offered to families.
- 6.18** Adoption support services to families are provided by the children's and adopters social workers until the adoption order is granted. This includes weekly visits in the first month of placement and support with accessing services like education and health.
- 6.19** Financial support is provided only in exceptional circumstances and following financial assessment. Financial assessment includes an annual review of the adoptive families continuing need for an allowance. Financial support may also be available for therapeutic services via the Adoption Support Fund.
- 6.20** Adopters are refunded their expenses for accommodation and travel during introductions.
- 6.21** The adoption support social workers process new requests for adoption support assessments from adoptive families who live in the Borough. Families living outside the Borough with whom Thurrock Council has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the adoption order. Financial support is subject to a means test and an annual financial review.
- 6.22** An adoption letterbox service is managed within the team to enable adopted children to maintain indirect contact with their birth families.

- 6.23** The adoption support social workers provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out about their birth parents and adoption details.
- 6.24** The adoption service works within the requirements of all relevant Council policies e.g. complaints policy, recording policy, and access to records policy.
- 6.25** Applicants to become adoptive parents, who are dissatisfied with the Adoption Panel outcome, are advised of their right to make representation to the Independent Review Mechanism in order for their case to be considered by an independent review panel.
- 6.26** Thurrock Council's Adoption Panel provides a thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. Its overall function and purpose is to:
- Consider and make recommendations regarding whether children should be placed for adoption only in cases where the birth parents are consenting to adoption or relinquishing babies.
 - Consider and make recommendations about placements requiring permanency through adoption.
 - Consider and make recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters, Consider and make recommendations about the proposed matches between children and prospective adopters.
 - Consider any adoption support plans submitted as part of the proposed placement.
- 6.27** The membership of the Adoption Panel aims to reflect the diversity of the local community and complies with regulations (adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011).
- Regulation 4 requires that the agency appoints from the central list: a person to chair the panel who is independent of the agency.
 - One or two people as vice chairs, who may act as Chair if necessary.
 - A medical advisor who makes a full contribution to the wider aspects of the panel as well as providing advice and comment on medical issues.
 - Thurrock Council includes on its central list, independent members who have personal experience of adoption.
 - In addition, the Panel has:
 - A Legal Adviser - non attending
 - A Professional Advisor
 - A Panel Administrator
- 6.28** The panel's business can only be conducted if there are at least five members present. This includes the chair or vice chair, and the adoption social worker. Where the vice chair has to chair the meeting, and is not an independent member, at least one independent member will need to be present for the panel to be quorate.

- 6.29 Inter-country adoption services.** Thurrock Council aims to provide the highest quality Inter-country adoption services for those residents wishing to adopt from overseas. It is recognised that this is a highly specialised area of work and as such we have contracted the IAC: the Centre for Adoption to provide this service on our behalf. IAC: the Centre for Adoption are nationally recognised experts in inter-country adoption and can be contacted on: <http://www.icacentre.org.uk/>
- It is usual for adoption agencies to charge for inter-country adoption services and IAC will make a charge for this service. Thurrock does not receive any income from IAC for their provision of services to local residents.

7. THE RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR ADOPTERS

- 7.1** It is the task of the Recruitment and Adoption Service to find innovative ways of encouraging people to consider adoption. All applications from prospective adopters are welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- 7.2** All enquirers can access on Thurrock Council website information about adopting with Thurrock Council along with details of information events which can be booked online. Enquiries by phone are dealt with within 5 working days. Adopt East are developing a marketing and recruitment strategy for the Alliance which includes a website. This will be accessible alongside the Thurrock Website so that enquiries can be managed at a local level but also through Adopt East.
- 7.3** The Adoption Service offers an initial telephone discussion or appointment to discuss further the enquirer's personal circumstances and their motivation to become an adoptive parent. A Registration of Interest form is provided to the applicants following this meeting at their request.
- 7.4** The social worker will discuss potential adopters and their application with the Team Manager.
- 7.5** All applicants are expected to attend preparation training groups. The aim of these sessions is to inform and prepare people to deal with issues that are common to adoption placements. Observations through the group process and the learning of the applicants from it provide evidence for the assessment.
- 7.6** Once applicants have submitted their Registration of Interest forms and been invited to a preparation group, an assessing social worker is allocated to them to undertake a home study in order to prepare an in-depth report to support their application. The assessment is completed using the CoramBAAF prospective adopters report (PAR).

- 7.7** During Stage one of the Assessment Process, Thurrock Council also starts the process to undertake references, health and statutory checks including a Disclosure and Barring Records check.
- 7.8** A second opinion visit may be undertaken by another SW or Team Manager to prospective adopters. A written report of this visit is also presented to the Adoption Panel.
- 7.9** The Adoption Service endeavours to complete the PAR and present it to panel within 4 months of the start of Stage Two.
- 7.10** The information gathered in the home study, along with statutory checks and references form the PAR, which is presented to the Adoption Panel.
- 7.11** All applicants receive a copy of their assessment report and have opportunity to comment on it at least 10 days prior to it being presented to the Panel.
- 7.12** All applicants are invited and supported to attend the Adoption Panel when their approval is being discussed.
- 7.13** The Adoption Panel comments on the strengths and provide insight into areas the adopters may find more of a challenge. The panel recommends to the Agency Decision Maker whether to approve or not to approve the application. The panel can also defer making a recommendation and request additional information. The required time scales are adhered to concerning informing the applicants of the decision.
- 7.14** The decision of the Agency Decision Maker is conveyed to applicants verbally within 2 days that it is made and followed up in writing within 5 working days.
- 7.15** Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.
- 7.16** Before a match is agreed, adopters are given full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and an opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family. They will be involved in discussions on how they can best maintain any links, including contact, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.
- 7.17** All adopters are referred to 'Linkmaker' at the start of stage two to link up with the Adopt East agencies.
- 7.18** An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration. A full matching report is completed which details the positive factors about the match, any risk areas together with an adoption support plan that details the adoption support services that will be made available to the adoptive family, the child and the birth family.

- 7.19** The assessing social worker continues to support the prospective adopter throughout the process of matching and placing a child, until an adoption order is made. This includes preparing them in advance of the child coming to live with them.
- 7.20** Adoption support services are provided by the Adoption Team who are available to provide support and advice to families and individuals who need or request assistance before, during and after adoption.
- 7.21** Where there are difficulties with the placement or the adoption breaks down, all the agencies involved co-operate to provide support and information to adoptive parents and the child.
- 7.22** Adoptive parents are informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES

- 8.1** The Adoption team offers advice to the permanency planning process where Special Guardianship is being considered and to the compilation of the support plan. It is responsible for the assessment and delivery of Special Guardianship Support Services
- 8.2** The adoption support social workers also process new requests for assessments of need from Special Guardians who live in Thurrock. Families living outside of Thurrock with whom Thurrock Council has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the SGO. The team ensures that any recommendations in the support plan are fulfilled which includes monitoring and reviewing support plans, finance, counselling and advice. There are also support groups, training and social events available. Financial support is subject to a means test and an annual financial review.

9. SYSTEMS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING SERVICE PROVISION

- 9.1** The Adoption Service is reviewed on a yearly basis. The aims and performance of the Adoption Service are part of the overall sufficiency strategy for looked after children and service has a development plan
- 9.2** The Chairperson of the Adoption Panel produces an annual report that includes an evaluation of feedback received from those attending panel. This is in line with the financial year and produced by the end of the first quarter
- 9.3** Forms have been devised to monitor the achievement of government set timescales with regard to adopted children and prospective adopters.

- 9.4 The Adoption Service staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance.
- 9.5 A file audit system is in place for managers to regularly check on the quality of record keeping and ensure that procedures are being followed.
- 9.6 Training on adoption issues is part of the learning and development plan for staff in Children's services and those involved in adoption work. Staff complete post- training evaluation forms, which feed into reports produced by the Children's Services Learning and Development Team.
- 9.7 We are developing 2 annual training days for the Adoption social workers from these teams which helps to ensure that panel members and social workers are kept up-to-date with current issues in adoption.
- 9.8 The Chairperson of the Adoption Panel reports back to the Agency Decision Maker on any practice issues so that these can be taken up through the line management system.
- 9.9 The Agency Decision Maker meets with the Chairperson of the Adoption Panel twice yearly to discuss any issues of concern.
- 9.10 The Assistant Director for Children's Services signs off the Statement of Purpose annually or when there are any changes made to the document.

10. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 10.1 Thurrock Council is continuing to ensure as that children who require adoption have suitable placements at the time they need them. This is enhanced via the regional Adopt East offer
- 10.2 Thurrock Council is continuing to work towards increasing the numbers early permanent placements as well as ensuring timeliness of adoption, so that children are placed within 3 months of the court authority to place.

The adoption service has experienced delay as a result of Covid 19 and the court backlog. This will impact the service through 2021-2022 and the timeliness will improve as restrictions are lifted and there is increased court time available.

- 10.3 Thurrock Council is planning and delivering services in accordance with the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its associated regulations and guidance.

- 10.4** There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for the adoption and special guardianship services. These documents are reviewed to ensure that the service is provided in line with new legislation, guidance and regulations.
- 10.5** Our aim is to ensure that life story work is undertaken for all children needing permanence in Thurrock Council. The Adoption Team has 3 full time family workers who provide life story work post order where this is the outcome of an Assessment of Need.
- 10.6** All social workers in the team have received training on legislative changes and new practice developments.
- 10.7** The resource library for adopters and staff is continually updated to reflect current changes in legislation and practice.
- 10.8** The use of CoramBAAF forms, which reflect the changes to the regulations, are used by social workers, these include
- Child Permanence Report
 - Prospective Adopters Report
 - Adoption Placement Report Adoption Placement Plan
 - Adoption Support Plan
- 10.9** The Adoption Panel has the following responsibilities:
- To consider whether adoption should be the permanence plan for a child where the child is relinquished.
 - To ensure that the adoption plan has met the welfare checklist.
 - To advise adopters about the appropriate sharing of parental responsibility.
 - To monitor and ensure that adoption support plans are in place for all the adoptive families matched at the panel.
 - To recommend domestic adopters approval.
 - To recommend the match for a child within an adoptive placement
- 10.10** Monitoring takes place of children who are in the care system and where the care plan may be adoption. This ensures plans for children are being expedited in a timely and appropriate way.

11. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 11.1** In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

- 11.2** Thurrock Council recognises that children, their birth parents, adoptive parents, prospective adopters and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.
- 11.3** The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the statutory guidance “Getting the Best from Complaints”.
- 11.4** There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council’s complaints procedure
- 11.5** In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the adoption social worker, as appropriate.
- 11.6** Any of the parties in the adoption process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:
- Any child who has been placed for adoption or placed under a special guardianship by the council - including adults who were formally adopted.
 - A birth parent of a child who has been or is being adopted or is or will be subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
 - Adoptive parents.
 - Prospective adoptive parents during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
 - One person on behalf of another e.g. an adoptive parent on behalf an adopted child.
 - Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.
- 11.7** Applicants to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the adoption panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel’s decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The adoption agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.

- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager
Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road
Leeds, LS12 6AJ
Tel: 0845 450 3956
Email: irm@irm.org.uk
www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

11.8 Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Complaints,
Thurrock Council,
Civic Offices,
New Road,
Grays,
RM17 6SL
Tel: 0800 021 3016
Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

12. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

12.1 OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

12.2 Thurrock Council's Adoption Service is regulated and inspected by:

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk
Telephone: 0300 123 1231