



Statement of Purpose

Family Placement Service

Adoption Agency



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1. Responsible Individual and Registered Manager

Responsible Individual:

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Executive Director Wellbeing and Community Health Services
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County Hall
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Phone: 01670 622682

Registered Manager:

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Family Placement Service Manager
3 Esther Court
Wansbeck Business Park
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NE63 8AP

Phone: 01670 626262

2. Aims & Objectives

Northumberland County Council's vision is for every child in Northumberland, with a special focus on those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, to grow up as healthy, safe, confident citizens who contribute positively to the lives of those around them. Northumberland Adoption Agency makes a contribution to achieving the overall Children and Young People's Plan 2015 – 18. The focus of what the CYPP will deliver is on:

- A Journey to Independence
- Bringing our communities together and tackling child poverty
- Developing ambition, enjoying life and doing well as well as possible
- Being there to help and support when it will have most impact
- Promoting safeguarding and how to live safely

When children cannot safely remain within their own family or extended family, adoption provides an opportunity for the child to be parented in a safe, secure loving family where their needs can be met throughout childhood and beyond.

Northumberland County Council aims to improve life chances for children through maximising the contribution adoption can make to providing permanent families for looked after children.

Successful adoptions depend on good planning and preparation.

Timely plans should be made for looked after children to achieve the security of permanence through a return home to birth family, kinship care, long term fostering, special guardianship or adoption.

We aim to:

- Identify quickly those children who cannot live with family members and formulate a timely child centred permanence plan.
- Prepare the child and the birth parents for adoption. This will include gathering and preserving family information for the child.
- Promote timely planning and placement through the court process.
- Identify a suitable adoptive family as soon as possible after a decision has been made that the child should be adopted.
- Achieve adoptive placements for older children and children with complex needs.
- Plan and manage introductions between the child and the adopters in a way that maximises a smooth transition and lays the foundation for a stable adoptive placement.
- Provide, with colleagues, accessible and meaningful ongoing support to birth parents and children up to and beyond the making of the adoption order.
- Recruit, prepare and approve sufficient numbers and range of adopters to meet the needs of both Northumberland children and children nationally waiting for adoptive placements.
- In partnership with colleagues from other disciplines, support adopters from initial enquiry through to post adoption support.
- Provide a post placement and post adoption contact service including a post box service.
- Provide advice and counselling for all those affected by adoption in Northumberland.
- Recruit adoptive families to meet the needs of children referred for adoption, within the context of recognizing that family life can be achieved in families headed by married couples, single people and couples in same sex relationships. Adults with and without birth children can provide suitable placements.
- Treat adoption enquirers with respect and dignity regardless of their ethnicity, marital status, gender, sexual orientation age, disability, income, accommodation or religion.

- Complete adoption assessments within the 6 month timescale from application to agency decision unless the prospective adopters request an extension or there are exceptional circumstances.
- Increase the numbers of children who benefit from permanence via adoption or special guardianship.
- Ensure continuity of support for children's education throughout the adoption process.

3. Range of Services

The core business of Northumberland County Council Adoption Agency is to provide a comprehensive adoption service to the residents of Northumberland and to recruit adopters to meet local and national need.

- **Children**

We assist the children's social workers in making permanence plans for those children who cannot live with their families of origin.

We ensure that those plans are carried out in a timely manner especially preparing reports for the Agency Decision Maker and the Adoption Panel.

We are involved in direct work with children, preparing them for adoption placement, undertaking life story work and ensuring that children understand what adoption will mean for them.

With the child's social worker, we select suitable approved adopters and match and place the child for adoption.

We provide support and guidance for children and prospective adopters ensuring that education progress continues and suitable education placements are arranged.

- **Prospective Adopters**

Information Evenings take place, at a minimum, 6 times a year. They are distributed between the north, the west, south east and central coast areas of Northumberland. People can attend either before or after they make an initial enquiry. Information and dates for both types of event are publicised on the Northumberland website <http://adoption.northumberland.gov.uk>

We welcome enquiries from prospective adopters. All enquirers will be treated equally, irrespective of their ethnicity, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, disability, income, accommodation, religion or political beliefs, throughout the adoption process. Adopters do need to be over 21 years of age and whilst there is no upper age limit adopters do need to be in good general health and able to parent the child through to adulthood. We do not place children under the age of 5 years, or with respiratory problems in households with smokers.

We need a wide range of adopters to meet the needs of children in Northumberland

All the initial enquiries come into the team who will then arrange for an information pack to be sent out within 5 working days. When the agency receives a completed Registration of Interest form it will arrange for a Family Placement Social Worker (FPSW) to undertake an initial visit and complete a report within 10 working days. They will provide additional information about the adoption process and discuss adopter led agency guided preparation. Meanwhile the agency will take up statutory references, arrange for medicals and Disclosure and Barring Checks (DBS). This is referred to as Stage One of the process. This will be completed within 2 months by which point the agency will reach a decision as to whether a prospective adopter can be invited to undertake Stage Two of the process. If a prospective adopter is not invited to apply for Stage Two, they will be informed of the reasons in writing.

A Prospective Adopter can choose to defer progressing to Stage Two for up to 6 months however beyond that time would need to submit another Registration of Interest Form and restart the process. Stage Two consists of an intensive 4 day adopter preparation group and the home study which is used to prepare the Prospective Adopters Report which is presented to the Adoption Panel.

Adopter Preparation groups are held at a minimum 4 times a year. These sessions further prepare prospective adopters for the task that lies ahead. A Family Placement Social Worker is allocated to each prospective adopter to complete the Stage 2 home study and where possible, applicants retain this worker throughout the assessment, approval, matching, placement and post placement phases, thus ensuring continuity and consistency.

Many adopters keep in touch with the other prospective adopters they met on their training course. We have often linked new adopters with established adopters at various stages of assessment and post placement.

Prospective adopters are encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel meeting which considers their Prospective Adopters Report. Attendance is not compulsory. The vast majority of adopters do choose to attend.

- **Approved Adopters**

We support approved adopters during the period when they are waiting for a child to be matched and ensure that what they are offering is continually checked against the identified needs of children on referral. Approved Adopters receive a year's subscription to Adoption UK, which is a national support group for adopters.

After 3 months adopters are entitled to be referred to the Regional Consortium and the National Adoption Register.

- **Post Placement and Post Adoption Support**

Intensive support is offered during the introduction of the child or children to their new adoptive family. This is by the child's social worker and the FPSW and continues at an appropriate level through to the making of the Adoption Order.

An adoption support plan covering a range of areas such as health and education is agreed and presented to the Adoption Panel at the time of match and this is reviewed at regular meetings until the making of the Adoption Order. Educational and health support is organised prior to the placement of the child.

Adoptive Families have entitlement to lifelong adoption support services. Northumberland county Council have a responsibility to provide an assessment for services for 3 years post adoption order and thereafter the responsibility lies with the home Local Authority. Northumberland has a dedicated email address for adoption support: AdoptionSupport@Northumberland.gov.uk

Northumberland has a full time Adoption Support Services Advisor and it also has a contract with PAC UK who can offer independent support services. There are currently 3 adopter support groups running in the county one of which is parent led and called Forever Families. Adopters have access to a range of training courses run by the Agency and by the Children and Young Peoples Service (Health). This includes training on Attachment. Northumberland also publicises Talk Adoption, which is a regional service for all adopted families, and who host events for adopted young people using Big Lottery Funding.

Many of our adopters keep in touch and help out with Adoption Preparation Groups, Information Evenings and other aspects of recruitment. A small number of adopters are independent members of the Adoption Panel.

- **Contact**

We offer advice and counselling regarding contact and are involved in discussion of this at the permanence planning stage and as the adoption plan progresses. Prospective adopters are helped to understand the purpose of contact through the Preparation Group. The vast majority of contact arrangements are indirect via the Northumberland Post Box system. On occasion children and birth family members is facilitated. The adoption support worker is assisted by the Letterbox Co-ordinator who administers the post box system.

- **Birth Records Counselling**

We offer counselling to adopted adults, birth relatives and other eligible parties who wish to obtain information about their birth family and/or initiate contact. We do not directly provide a tracing or intermediary service so for those who wish this, we would make a referral to After Adoption Yorkshire.

- **Inter-Country Adoption**

We do provide assessments for residents of Northumberland who wish to adopt from abroad. Inter Country Adoption has increasingly proved a complex and difficult area in which to work. Each country has different adoption rules that can change at very short notice and so Northumberland Adoption Agency subscribes to the Intercountry Adoption Centre who can provide up to date specialist advice to our staff.

- **Step Parent Adoptions and Other Non- Agency Placements**

We provide an advice and counselling service, carry out statutory checks, undertake assessments of suitability to adopt and prepare the report to the court.

- **Special Guardianship Orders and (SGO) and Family and Friends Fostering**

Family Placement staff work with the child's social worker to undertake SGO assessments which are predominantly of family members and they also undertake family and friends fostering assessments.

4. Quality Control

In addition to the normal supervisory arrangements for all County Council Children's Services staff and the review system for looked after children, there are a number of other ways in which the County adoption service is monitored and evaluated.

The work of the adoption team is governed by Adoption Standards, Guidance and Legislation.

Elected members, in their capacity as corporate parents, receive regular updates about the service.

Elected members review and approve the Statement of Purpose of the Adoption Agency once a year and after any significant changes.

The County Adoption Panel, with an Independent Chair and the presence of independent members, also serves to ensure impartial scrutiny of the quality of the adoption service. The Lead Member for Children's Services is a member and regular attender of the Adoption Panel. The Agency Decision Maker observes the adoption panel once a year.

Service users are consulted about the quality of the service, for example, the value of the information that we send to adoption enquirers. We invite feedback from participants in our adoption preparation course. We receive post adoption feedback from our own contact with adopters and via After Adoption Yorkshire.

Adopters and their social workers also have the opportunity to report on the Panel experience and this is reported back to the Panel.

Panel promotes continual improvement in report quality, for example, through the completion of feedback sheets.

The manager of the adoption service produces the annual report of the panel and the adoption agency, which is presented first to the panel then to elected members.

Similarly, the written policy and procedures of the agency and the panel constitution are updated every 3 years in consultation with agency staff and the Adoption Panel and the document is presented and approved by Elected Members.

The managers of the Service ensure that staff are appropriately skilled, trained and supervised on a regular basis to ensure they can undertake the functions of their work.

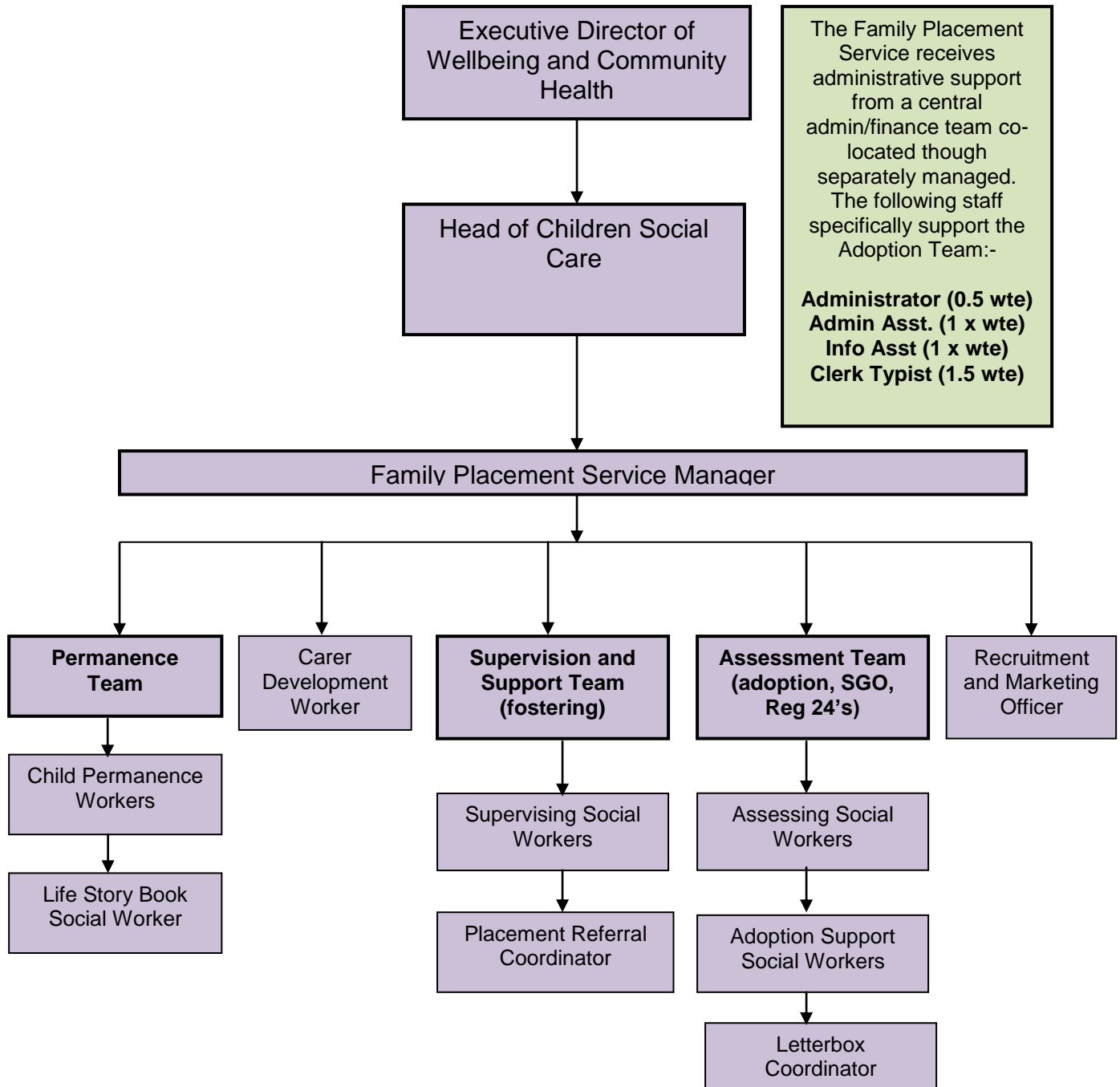
5. Organisational Structure

The Northumberland Adoption Service is provided by the Family Placement Service which is located within the Looked After Children's Services Group along with Residential Services. The Family Placement Service has responsibility for adoption, fostering, family and friends and special guardianship assessments.

The Council's function as an adoption agency has been exercised through the Policy Board with overview and scrutiny of the function by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

The Adoption Panel is constituted in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and is responsible for advising the adoption agency on all aspects of adoption.

Family Placement Service Structure



6. **Some Useful Links**

- NCC Corporate Plan
www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=11021
- NCC Adoption recruitment webpage
www.northumberland.gov.uk/adopt
NCC detailed service webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Looked-after/Adoption.aspx#adoptioninformationpack>
- Adoption National Minimum Standards and Regulations
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-national-minimum-standards>
- NCC Virtual School for Looked After Children webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=12414>
- Adoption UK
www.adoptionuk.org
- PAC UK
www.pac-uk.org
- First 4 Adoption
<http://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

The above list is not exhaustive.

7. **Complaints and Advocacy**

Northumberland County Council has an established complaints procedure.

Complaints can be directed to:

The Client Relations Officer
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF
Telephone: 0800373615
client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk

Children and Young People can contact the Complaints Officer at

Children's Services
Freepost NEA15580
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 1BR
client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk
Text: 07766631
Free phone: 0800373615

Children and Young people also have access to an advocacy service.
voicesmakingchoices@northumberland.gov.uk
NCC Participation and Advocacy Officer is Robin Craig who is available for looked after young people who need advice, support or information. Young people can also express their views about the services they receive.

- E-mail robin.craig@northumberland.gov.uk
- Address: Freepost RTRH-RREY-GSKE

Northumberland County Council
Participation & Positive Activities Team
Northumbria House
Manor Walks Shopping Centre
Cramlington
Northumberland
NE23 6UR

If young people would prefer to speak to an independent advocate Action for Children can be contacted by:

- Phone 0191 2619212
- Email necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk

8. **Contacting Ofsted**

Concerns or complaints about the Family Placement Service can also be directed to Ofsted.

03001231231 or email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted
Royal Exchange
Manchester
M2 7BR