



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose 2015/16

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Statement of Purpose - Bedford Borough Council's Adoption Agency

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1. Introduction

The statement of Purpose sets out the aims, values and objectives of Bedford Borough Council Adoption Service. It outlines the range of service provided to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth families. It also includes details of the organisational/managerial structure, key procedural/monitoring processes and current staffing arrangements.

The Statement of Purpose describes how the service ensures best outcomes for children via permanency planning and through securing placement stability for looked after children.

Bedford Borough Council is committed to meeting the Adoption National Minimum Standards and compliance with all relevant regulatory and legislative requirements. This includes a commitment to ensuring that children are able to remain in the care of parents, their birth families, friends or extended families wherever possible. Where the preferred plan is "Adoption", Bedford Adoption Service will seek to ensure children can reach their full potential by identifying the best families and the most effective support to enable children to enjoy and achieve, grow, develop healthy attachment and stay safe.

2. Aims and Objectives

During January 2014 Bedford Borough Council Adoption Service and Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Service transitioned from a shared service delivery arrangement to a single agency provider resulting in the establishment of Bedford Borough Adoption Service. Bedford Borough Adoption Service relocated from Technology House, Ampthill Road, Bedford and is currently based at Bedford Borough Council, Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AP. The service aims and objectives are:-

- To provide a high quality adoption and permanency service for Bedford Borough residents.
- To provide high quality placement options for every child where the plan is adoption or permanency.
- To support the provision of other permanent placements such as Special Guardianship.

- To ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is targeted to meet complex and diverse needs of children with a plan for adoption.
- To undertake high quality marketing, recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed for adoption or permanence including Special Guardianship.
- To provide support services that secure placement stability and successful outcomes for children through Adoption or Special Guardianship orders.
- To ensure that adoptive families are supported to meet the health and educational needs of children placed with them.
- To provide a range of support services for adopted adults.
- To offer timely information, advice and counselling to members of the public enquiring about adoption.
- To ensure support is provided for the birth relatives of children placed for adoption.
- To ensure that at all times the Adoption Service complies with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and legislation relating to adoption.

3. Values and Vision

Bedford Borough Children' Services have a vision that Bedford Borough is a place where people of all ages, particularly the most vulnerable are able to lead happy, independent lives and fulfil their potential. With this in mind the Adoption Agency aims to provide services that meet the individual needs of looked after children as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing process. This will include the identification and provision of wrap around support, educational/health provision and additional therapeutic interventions in order to enable children to reach their full potential. Therefore Bedford Borough Council is committed to promoting core values that:

- Promotes a positive culture which celebrates success and recognises achievement. Where people feel valued, respected and able to share ideas, think innovatively and learn from mistakes.

- Recognises that all children and young people are unique individuals and to offer them the individual support and care they need. To provide information about the services we deliver and promote informed choice wherever possible.
- Develop a professional and highly skilled “workforce” that are effectively trained and supported so that all staff and prospective adopters are clear about their role and are working together to promote positive outcomes for children.
- Ensure children can reach their potential by finding the best families and the most effective supports.
- Enables participation and engagement with adopters, children, their families and other professionals, to hear their views and use them to inform and influence the services we provide.
- Ensure resources are maximised and used creatively, effectively and efficiently to achieve best value and to continuously improve the service we deliver.

4. Management and Organisational Structure

Governance responsibility for Bedford Borough Council Adoption Agency rests with the elected members. The Adoption Service forms part of Bedford Council’s Children’s and Adults Services. The Directorate is headed by the Director of Children’s and Adults’ Services who fulfils the statutory duties of Director for Adult Social Services (DASS) and Director of Children’s Services (DCS). The Director is supported by 4 Assistant Directors who lead and manage the principle arms of the Directorate.

The overall management structure of the directorate is designed to comply with the Council’s Workforce Development Model (June 2013). This requires that the management structure has 4 levels:

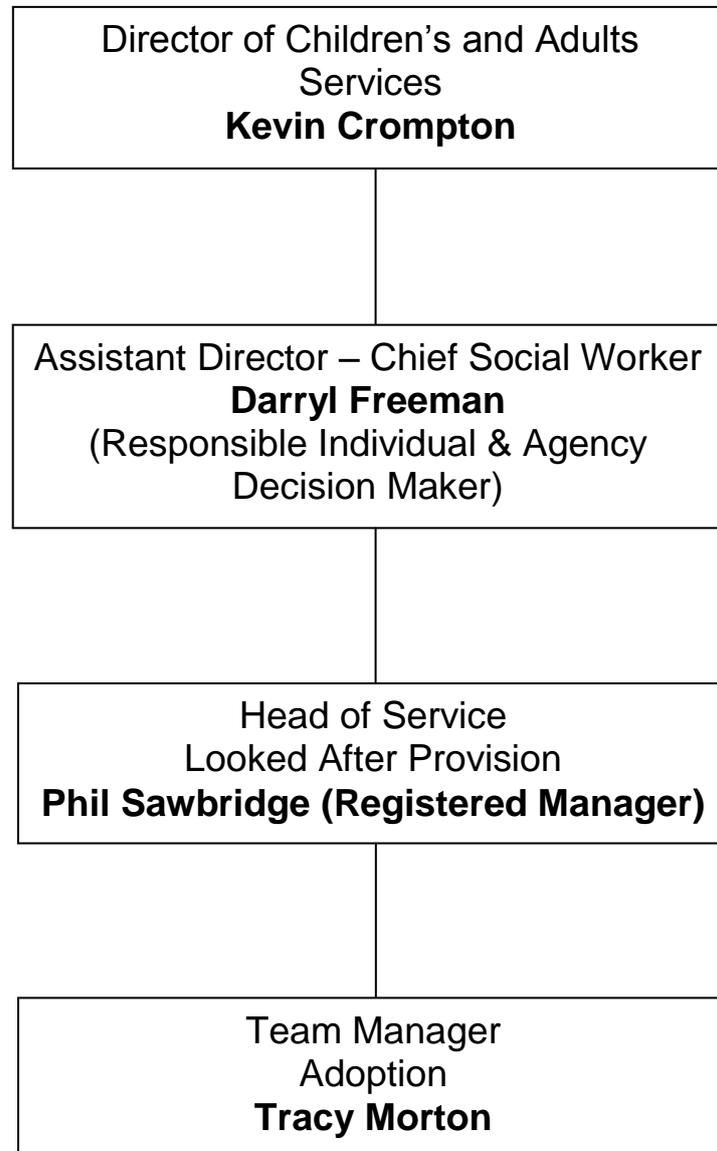
- Director
- Assistant Director

- Head of Service
- Manager
- Team

The Assistant Director (Chief Social Worker) is the Responsible Individual and Agency Decision Maker for the Adoption Agency. The Head of Service (Looked After Children) has operational responsibility for the Adoption Service and is presently the Registered Manager for the Adoption Agency.

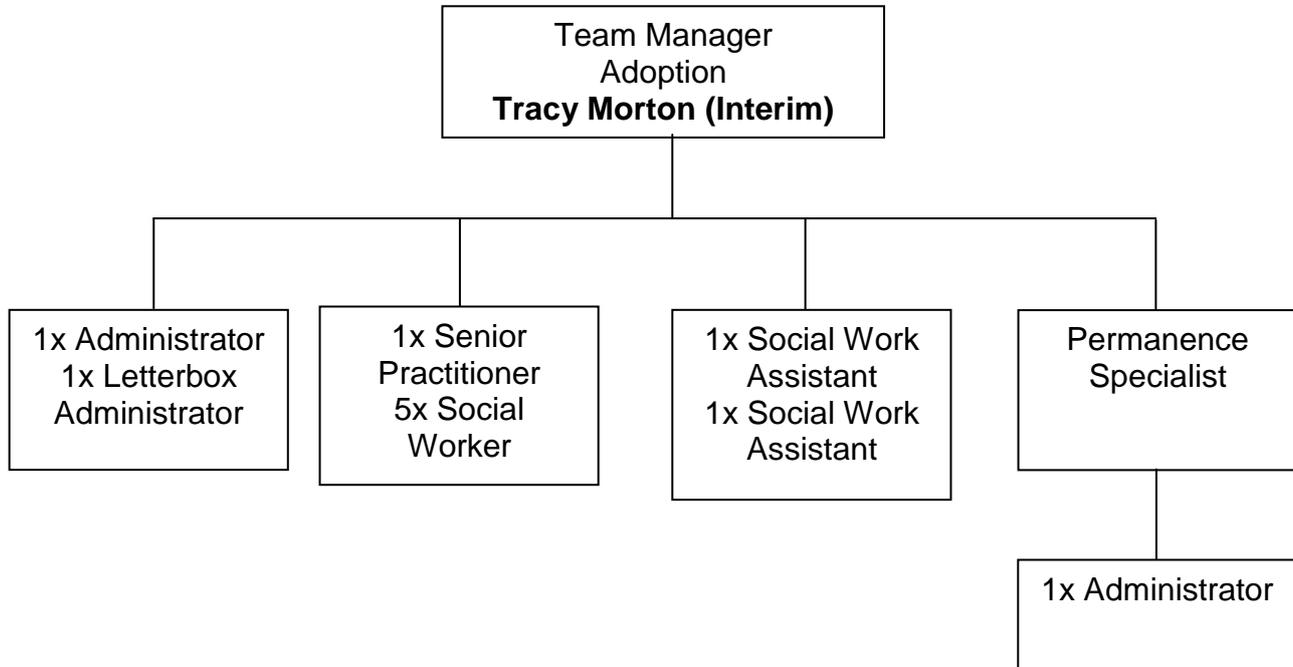
The Adoption Team Manager supervises the Adoption Social Workers; Assistant Social Workers; Marketing and Publicity Worker and Administrators within the Adoption Team.

Management Structure



5. Staffing

The Adoption Team staffing structure is as follows:



The Team Manager and Social Work Staff are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. Staff practice is supported via monthly supervision and training needs are discussed via Personal Development Reviews to identify training needs which inform the councils Learning and Development Programme.

The Team are assisted by administrative staff providing dedicated support in the following areas:

- Letterbox Contact.
- Tracking Stage 1 and Stage 2, Adoption enquiry and assessment processes.
- Telephone Customer Service.
- Management Information and Tracking
- Finance

There is a Marketing and Recruitment Worker responsible for marketing and recruitment of prospective adopters in line with Bedford Borough Council's Marketing Action Plan.

6. Services Provided by Bedford Adoption Service

- Recruitment, assessment, preparation and support to prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- Family finding service for children where adoption is the plan.
- Counselling, information and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption.
- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary services to track birth relatives are signposted elsewhere.
- Preparation of reports and attendance at other Local Authority Panels when a match has been recommended for a Bedford Borough Council family.
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an adoption order has been made. This will include adoptive families unknown to the Agency who reside in the County and request adoption support assessments 3 years after post adoption order.
- Support for Special Guardians and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders through assessment of SGO needs and provision of services to meet assessed needs.
- Access to services provided by Adoption UK and New Family Social.
- Support groups for adopters including twice yearly events for adopted children and their families.

7. Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters

In July 2013 as part of the Governments, Adoption Reform Agenda the Two Stage Adopters Assessment Process was introduced. Bedford Borough Council has detailed policies and procedures for the recruitment, counselling, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters. The following is a summary of the recruitment, assessment and approval process.

The Adoption Service aims to provide a diverse and wide range of adoptive placements to meet the needs of children for whom Adoption is the plan. The service will maintain a clear, inclusive and pro-active recruitment strategy to encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds. Applications from prospective adopters are welcomed regardless of marital status, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation.

The service will monitor and review changes in the nature of the needs of looked after children with a plan for adoption or permanency and will adapt its recruitment strategy accordingly in order to increase placement options for children.

Prospective adoptive parents will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. The service will make prospective adopters aware of their entitlements and rights in Stage One and Stage Two of the assessment process and following approval as adoptive parents.

Enquiries from those interested in Adoption will be responded to promptly and prospective adopters given full information about the eligibility criteria, the assessment and approval process and requirements linked to information days; training and support sessions; taking up of references and statutory checks.

They will also be made aware of the range of children requiring adoption locally and regionally and the support services available for prospective and approved adopters.

The Adoption Service provides a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Prospective adopters contacting the service are provided with written information about adoption within one working day. Full information packs will

be sent out within 5 working days. Information is also available on the Borough website, www.bedfordboroughcouncil.org.uk about Adoption.

If prospective adopters wish to find out more, they are invited to an Adoption Information Evening. These are held monthly. Following attendance of the Information Evening, prospective adopters wish to pursue their enquiry will be offered an initial visit with a worker from the Adoption Service. The initial visit provides an opportunity for us to meet prospective adopters and to address more personal questions as well as gaining more information about their circumstances.

A written report is completed following this visit which is shared with the adopters. The report will recommend if it is appropriate for the enquirer to progress to Stage One of the assessment process and will be invited to complete a Registration of Interest (ROI) form which upon completion will trigger the beginning of Stage One of the assessment process. We aim to complete the Stage One Assessment within 2 months from the date the Adoption Services receives the completed Registration of Interest form. Where this is not possible, the prospective adopter(s) will be kept informed of the reasons for this.

Main responsibilities of the adopter during Stage One:

- To complete a workbook and undertake Preparation Training.
- To engage in additional learning through the National Gateway for adoption and further reading and research. This offers adopters the opportunity to self-assess aspects of their parenting capacity and allows them to identify their own training needs.
- To undertake an Adoption Medical.

Main responsibilities of the agency during Stage One:

- Completion of statutory checks and references including;
- Disclosure and Barring Service.
- We will want to take up four written references, two from family members and two non-family and also employers' references.

Stage 2

Applicants may take up to 6 months to decide that they wish to proceed to Stage 2, which is Social Worker led but guided by the prospective adopters. A further agreement will be completed and the dates of training, assessment visits and presentation of the Prospective Adopters Report to the Adoption Panel. It is expected that Stage 2 will be completed within 4 months, but longer may be needed in some cases. The focus of the assessment will be the analysis of the strengths and capacities of the prospective adopters to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma and loss, and areas that may need development/further training.

Where any significant concerns arise during the Stage 2 assessment the Social Worker will advise the applicants of this and present a Brief Report to the Adoption Panel. The applicant/s will be encouraged to attend and make their own representation to the Panel.

The applicant/s will receive a copy of the completed Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) and be asked to sign it to confirm they have read its contents and provide feedback about its contents and the process of assessment.

Applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel in order to address any questions themselves. Not all applicants may wish to attend and they are entitled to waive their right to do so without this affecting the Panel's ability to make a recommendation to the Agency by the Panel Chair.

The Agency's decision will be made within 7 working days of receipt of the Panel's recommendation and final Panel minutes and applicants will be informed orally within 2 working days and in writing within 5 working days of this decision.

8. Adoption Panel

Adoption Panel Arrangements

The Adoption Agency Regulations require that all Adoption Agencies must establish a Panel to consider the circumstances of children who may require adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the placement of approved children with specific adopters. The Panel makes recommendations to Bedford Borough Council's

Agency Decision Maker. The role of the Agency Decision Maker is undertaken by Darryl Freeman.

The Adoption Panel Manager, in consultation with the Independent Chair, will ensure that the training needs of Panel Members are regularly considered and that opportunities for training are provided.

The Adoption Panel Manager ensures that there is a balanced representation on the Panel. In line with the requirements of the Adoption Minimum Standards a “Central List” of Adoption Panel Members has been established.

All Panel members, including the Independent Chairperson, will be subject to annual appraisals.

9. Monitoring of Children’s Adoption Plans

Bedford Borough Council undertake close tracking of cases, through the Gateway stage (PLO) and care proceedings, to ensure assessments and decision making is timely, so that where a child’s plan is Adoption, Placement Order applications are made within timescales.

Parallel/Permanency Planning begins at the PLO stage and is coordinated and tracking by the Permanency Specialist, enabling tighter accountability and to ensure that any Care Plans of Adoption are compliant with ReBS.

A monthly Adoption Tracking Meeting is chaired by Head of Service; this enables us to identify those children that are hard to place and to consider best options available for securing Adoptive Placements.

In reaching a decision about Adoption, Bedford Borough Council will consider the views and wishes of the child, his or her family and current carers in conjunction with assessments completed of birth family or potential connected-person carers.

When considering a particular adoptive placement for a child the Adoption Service will look carefully at the assessed needs of that child and the parenting capacity of the adoptive family to ensure that it is the best available match and that it will meet the assessed needs of the child. Arrangements for introducing children to adoptive carers will be undertaken through a planned process that takes account of the individual circumstances and needs of the child and adopters.

When seeking placement for black and dual heritage children, a placement with a family whose ethnic backgrounds reflects that of the child will usually be preferred but time limits, based on the needs of the child, will be imposed and trans-racial placements with adopters who have proven links, knowledge and skills in meeting the needs of black and dual heritage children will be actively considered.

Wherever possible sibling groups of children requiring Adoption will be placed together. Before a decision is made that this is not possible or is not in the children's best interests, a thorough assessment will be undertaken of the siblings' relationships and presented to the Agency Decision Maker who will advise on the appropriateness or not of the plan. When children are placed separately, the Adoption Service will seek to ensure that contact between the children will be retained in an appropriate form based on an assessment of the needs of the individual children.

The Adoption Service will ensure that the needs of children are understood prior to placement and take steps to ensure that the child is prepared for the move to an adoptive home and adopters understand and have the skills and resources to meet their needs.

The child will be supported in placement by their allocated Social Worker. An Adoption Social Worker will provide advice and support to the adoptive parents. In certain circumstances children and adoptive families will be supported by the Adoption Support Team. Statutory Reviews chaired by the Independent Reviewing Officer will continue until an Adoption Order is granted in respect of the child.

All children who are to be adopted will undergo a full medical assessment before presentation to the Agency Decision Maker to consider Adoption as their care plan. Information from the assessment will be available to the adoptive parents prior to placement being agreed. Arrangements will be made by the Medical Advisor to ensure that the appropriate medical practitioners follow up health issues that require ongoing treatment or monitoring. All this information will be shared with adopters prior to placement.

The Local Authority recognises the importance of providing adoptive homes which promote and celebrate learning and achievement and consideration of the educational needs of children will also form an important part of the process of

planning an adoption placement. Bedford Borough Council will seek to ensure that where children move from one area to another as a result of being placed for Adoption, their assessed education needs will be appropriately met in the new location and information exchanged as appropriate.

Where a particular religion or faith is specified for a child by his or her parents, the Adoption Service will seek a placement that is committed to enabling the child to be brought up with an awareness of his or her religious background and given opportunities to follow that persuasion if he or she wishes to do so.

The majority of children for whom Adoption is the plan will need contact with members of their birth family either directly or indirectly. As part of the planning for the child, Social Workers will assess whether contact with members of the child's birth family will be in his or her best interests and, if so, the form that contact should take. A clear plan will be drawn up in respect of ongoing contact before placement so that prospective adopters understand their commitment in this respect before a final decision is reached on the suitability of the placement.

10. Preparation of Children for Adoption

Every child placed for Adoption should have a Life Story Book and a Later Life Letter within 10 days of an Adoption Celebration Hearing being granted in line with Bedford Borough Council's policy and procedure and statutory guidance.

Life Story Work is usually undertaken by the child's social worker with support and advice from the adoption worker if required. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history in order to help the child make sense of their family heritage including use of photographs and art work/drawings.

The Later Life Letter gives the child an explanation of why he/she was adopted and the reasons and actions that led up to this decision being made. This should include, whenever possible, the people involved in the decision making, and the facts at that time. The letter is in addition to the child's Life Story Book and not a substitute for the book.

11. Support to Placements

All adopters will have an allocated Adoption Social Worker. Once a placement has taken place the Child's Social Worker will also be involved in supervising and supporting the child in placement.

Children placed for Adoption by Bedford Borough Council will be subject to statutory reviews under the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This will involve an Independent Reviewing Officer from the Local Authority to ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for his or her future are progressing satisfactorily.

Based on assessments carried out under the Adoption Support Regulations there may be a need to give financial support to some Adoption situations. To fulfil this, the Local Authority has a scheme for the payment of financial support in specified circumstances. The payment of financial support is the responsibility of the placing agency if agreed at the time of placement or within three years of the Adoption Order being made. If financial support is agreed post three years of an Order being made it is the responsibility of the agency within which the child currently lives.

Where a placement for Adoption ends in an unplanned way, or there is an imminent risk of it doing so, the Adoption Service will convene a meeting to consider what has happened and to help with planning for the future. Reports of placements that end in this way and the outcome of subsequent meetings will be shared with the Adoption Panel in order to support learning and practice development.

12. Adoption Support – Birth Parents

It is acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that an adoption placement represents the best outcome for the child. As an Adoption Agency, Bedford Borough Council fully supports the principle that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognise the lifelong implication of adoption.

The child's social worker and adoption worker has a key role in supporting birth families. Birth parents are offered counselling and support, the purpose of the support is to ensure that the alternatives to adoption have been explored and the

implications of adoption are fully discussed. It also offers birth parents the opportunity to express their views in relation to the plans for the child, and to be involved in planning for the child's future wherever possible. Where the offer of support is accepted, the social worker makes the necessary arrangements for a referral for independent support to be made.

Counselling and Support to birth parents includes the following areas:

- Explaining the key stages of the adoption process and likely timescales.
- Explaining, where appropriate, the procedure for seeking a Placement Order.
- Explaining the parents' legal rights, including the right of the unmarried father to seek a Parental Responsibility Order or a Child Arrangements Order in relation to the child.
- Explaining the role of the Adoption Panel/Agency Decision Maker.
- Explaining the role of CAFCASS in witnessing consent or acting as the Children's Guardian.
- Explaining the way the Adoption Contact Register works and how an adopted adult may seek information about the birth family in the future or register a wish not to be contacted.
- Explaining how prospective adoptive parents are assessed.
- Ascertaining the parents' views on the adoption plan, including the selection of the adoptive family, any specific ethnic, cultural or religious needs of the child, and any plan to separate a sibling group. Their views on these issues should be recorded.
- Dealing with grief and loss.
- Where there is parental consent to the adoption, explaining the process for giving their written consent to an adoptive placement or advance consent to the adoption (including the role of CAFCASS), their right to state that they do not wish to be informed of an adoption application, and that they have the right to withdraw their consent to an adoptive placement at any time up to the making of an adoption application, but the restriction of their rights to do so after an adoption application has been made.
- Ascertaining the parents' views on post-placement and post-adoption contact including whether they would wish to meet the adoptive family and if so, how they might prepare for this.

- Providing information to the parents on national and local support groups, and other possible sources of help.
- Where birth parents refuse or decline to accept counselling and/or support; the child's social worker records the attempts made to persuade the parents and the reasons for their refusal in the child's file and Adoption Case Record.

13. Adoption Support – Adopters and Adopted Children

Adoption support is defined as including:

- Financial support to adopters. This can include paid adoption leave at similar rates to maternity and paternity leave.
- Priority access to social housing, and access to additional support to cover a spare room whilst adopters wait for their child to arrive in their new home.
- Priority admission for school places, including academies and free schools.
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and birth parents to discuss matters relating to adoption.
- Assistance, including mediation, with contact agreements between adopted children and their birth parents or others with whom they share a significant relationship.
- Therapeutic services for adopted children.
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children to support the adoptive placement and enable it to continue, including respite care.
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children where a placement disrupts or is at risk of disruption.
- A range of support services, including access to counselling, information and advice for both adoptive parents and their children, who may have complex needs.
- Assistance with cross boundary matters.
- Intermediary Services.
- Adoption Support Fund.

Bedford Borough Council's Adoption Service recognises the importance of supporting adopters and their families access a wide range of support provision to ensure placement stability and help secure positive lifelong outcomes for the child.

At the point of matching all children must have an adoption support plan which sets out both the prospective adopters and child support needs including one off expenses or ongoing financial support. Where on-going financial support is provided the adopters will undergo a financial assessment and annual review once finance is agreed.

Following the grant of an Adoption Order the adoptive family can approach the Local Authority for an assessment of their adoption support needs until their children are 18 (or 25 with a statement of educational need).

14. Adoption Support Fund

On the 1st May 2015 the Government launched the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund has been established to help to pay for therapeutic services for children up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 with a SEN statement). Who have been adopted from Local Authority Care in England or adopted from Wales but living in England. In order to access the fund families will need to have an assessment of their adoption support needs completed by the Local Authority. If the Social Worker undertaking the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial, they can then make an application to the fund on behalf of the family and if successful the fund will released the money to the Local Authority.

The Bedford Borough Council Adoption Team are responsible for undertaking assessments of adoption support needs and families and other professionals are able to refer to the service to request such an assessment by contacting the Adoption Duty Social Worker on 01234 718718.

15. Special Guardianship Support Service

Every child needs to feel secure and settled in a family that loves and values them. That means strong attachments to adults who are committed to them long-term, who support their development and who guide them through childhood to adulthood. A Special Guardianship Order is a way of providing a legally secure foundation for those carers who are caring for a child who is unable to live with their parents. When making a decision regarding an order, the welfare of the child is of paramount consideration.

Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 financial support and other services may be available for the special guardian, the child and the birth parents. However, if a child is not (or was not) looked after by a Local Authority, then there is no entitlement to an assessment for Special Guardianship Support Services, although it is possible to make a request for this assessment.

Bedford Borough Council may be able to make arrangements for the provision of Special Guardianship Support Services which may include:

- Mediation to assist with new or existing contact arrangements.
- Counselling and advice and information.
- Access to support groups.
- Therapy services.
- Training for the special guardian to meet the needs of the child.
- Respite care.
- Financial assistance, financial assistance is less straight forward.

The Adoption Service is responsible for the provision of support services for Special Guardians for duration of up to 3 years following granting of the order. They will also undertake a review assessment of support needs should this be requested in the future.

It is possible for special guardians to apply to the Local Authority for a Special Guardianship Allowance. The allowance is means tested but guidance is given in Section 7 of the Local Authorities Social Services Act 1970; this directs Local Authorities to have regard to how much fostering allowance would have been paid had the child been fostered rather than cared for under a Special Guardianship Order.

16. Complaints

The Adoption Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Policy and Procedure, for dealing with and monitoring complaints by prospective adopters, adopters, birth relatives, staff and other parties with a relevant interest in the Adoption Service.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of Central Bedfordshire Council, but a central record is also kept within the Adoption Service. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Service to respond and learn from complaints made. The Council is developing a database which will in future enable customers to make and track a complaint via the Council's website. Complaints Procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants. The Complaints Procedure has several stages; Stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Adoption Service or from Central Bedfordshire's Customer Relations Department.

17. Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption

Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with LSCB procedures and Central Bedfordshire procedures for managing allegations regarding such children.

18. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Head of Service for Looked after Children and the Team Manager for Adoption. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member for Children's Services and will be notified to the Registration Authority within 28 days.

This Statement of Purpose will next be reviewed in April 2016.

19. The Registration Authority

The Registrations Authority is:

Ofsted Royal Exchange Buildings

St Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

20. Contacts

For more information about Bedford Adoption Service please contact:

The Adoption Service

Bedford Borough Council

Borough Hall

Cauldwell Street

Bedford

MK42 9AP

Tel: 01234 718718

Web Address: www.bedfordboroughcouncil.org.uk

For copies of the Complaints Procedure or further copies of this Statement of Purpose, please contact the Adoption Service on the contact details above. If you wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, or the Adoption Service or make a complaint, please contact:

Head of Service, Adoption Service, Bedford Borough Council, Borough Hall,
Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AP.