

Lancashire County Council
Statement of Purpose
2019/20

Adoption



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1. Introduction

This is the Statement of Purpose for Lancashire County Council's Adoption Service. It complies with the Adoption Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and complies with all statutory guidance. This Statement of Purpose is approved by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

The Statement of Purpose and Children and Parent's Guides are available on the internet (www.lancashire.gov.uk/adoption) and can be made available in a range of languages and formats.

Parents are offered an abridged version of the Statement of Purpose and a copy of the full text is available on request. Copies of all documents pertaining to the Adoption Service will be issued to all prospective adopters and other approved adopters on request and also 'posted' on the internet.

A Parent's Guide is available describing the work of the Adoption Service. There are 2 guides available for children; 1 for younger children and a separate guide for older children.

For more information contact:

Karen Barker or Heidi Fliegauß
Senior Manager Fostering and Adoption
Children's Services
Lancashire County Council
County Hall, Preston PR18RJ
01772 553491

2. Welcome by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools

As the Cabinet Member for Children and young people, it is my privilege to provide a welcome to the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service.

This coming year, the Adoption service's aim and commitment is to offer a consistent approach to meeting the needs of children who have a plan of adoption and to ensure that appropriate adoptive families are recruited and approved. Statistical information for the AdoptionService indicates improved performance in terms of the adoption scorecard and the length of time children are in care before they are placed with their adoptive families and the length of time children are waiting before being adopted following the making of an adoption order. We are committed to ensuring prospective adopters are assessed to a high standard and an appropriate number of adopters are approved to meet the demands of the number of children needing adoptive families.

For children who cannot live with their birth parents both adoption and fostering are critical services. Research indicates that for children who cannot live with their family of origin the best outcomes are achieved by them living in substitute families. The

decisions taken by staff in the Adoption Service will influence the child for the rest of their lives and so it is important to get it right.

It is imperative that staff within the adoption service work closely with colleagues both in the locality based social work teams and with staff within the wider Fostering and Adoption Service to ensure that the right children have a plan of adoption and that adoptive families are being identified within a timely manner. It is also important to continue to promote early permanence and the concurrency and Fostering for adoption schemes to reduce the number of placement moves for children wherever possible and to reduce the length of time they are in foster care.

At the time of writing we are aware that the Government are supporting adoption services in relation to regional adoption agencies and this will be an exciting year for Lancashire with the development of their regional adoption agency which is due to go live in August 2019

I and other colleagues in the council wish the Adoption Service every success. We will be watching the development of the service with great interest during the forthcoming year.

County Councillor Philippa Williamson

Cabinet member for children and young people

3. Legislative and National Policy

Lancashire County Council's Adoption Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- Adoption Services National Minimum Standards 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010

4. The Vision for the Directorate for Children and Young People

Our shared vision for Children's Services is that '**Children, young people and families in need of help and support are safe, healthy and supported to achieve**'. We will deliver this in partnership through understanding the lived experience of the child or young person by:

- Delivering the right service at the right time by the right people through effective wellbeing and **preventative** strategies.
- **Purposeful** and effective social work and care intervention, engaging children, young people and families by building on their strengths.
- Focussing on **permanence** by delivering lasting and sustainable outcomes for children, young people and their families.

5. The Values of Lancashire's Adoption Service:

The Adoption Service embraces and supports the priorities and values of the Children and Young People's Plan and the sufficiency Strategy. As part of Children's Services, the Adoption Service is committed to working with families to ensure only those children who need to be looked after are looked after. The service supports those young people who need to be looked after to have security and stability through permanent adoption placements wherever possible.

We know there are sometimes risks in adoption and we have to manage these risks. Adoption really does work though and for hundreds of children every year their lives are improved by being adopted. It is important to make sure that we place children with adopters who are able to meet their needs, make them happy and help them to achieve.

Childhood is short and really precious. Most children being placed for adoption have already had challenging experiences in their life. We know how important it is for children to have settled placements that last and for this be achieved at the earliest possible opportunity. In Lancashire the Adoption Service, in partnership with other stakeholders is already engaged in many of the initiatives which the Government are

promoting within the Adoption Reform Agenda. We know the Adoption Service in Lancashire has more to learn and we can do better. Children deserve no less.

The National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Adoption together with the Adoption Regulations form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. Lancashire County Council's Adoption Service is committed to working in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and as such shares and embraces the important principles which underpin these Standards;

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

Values - adopted adults and birth relatives

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.

- Agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

6. Principle aims and objectives

Aims

Children who enter care deserve the very best. Children who cannot be re-united with their families should have the benefit of a long term stable childhood where they are loved and accepted as a unique individual, are assisted to achieve to their full potential, prepared for independence and can be supported into adult life. Adoption is a means by which this can be achieved for children where it is in their best interests. Adoption offers vulnerable children much needed stability, security, legal permanence and the support they need to achieve their potential. Where a child's care plan is no longer for adoption, the local authority is committed to securing the most appropriate permanent placement for the child.

Underpinning the mission statement, the Adoption Service has a series of core values which include:

- Every individual is unique and should be treated with respect
- Working in partnership with others is more effective than working in isolation
- We are committed to anti-discriminatory practice and providing a culturally sensitive service
- We will work to safeguard children from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect
- We will promote and facilitate the involvement of people who use our service in decisions about their lives
- We strive to ensure continuous improvements within the Adoption Service and actively seek and utilize feedback to inform service development

The Adoption Service has set out its priorities with the interests of children/young people, their adopters and birth families in mind.

Objectives

The key priority areas for the Service in accordance with the Children and Young People's priorities in 2019/20 are:

- To recruit a minimum of 50 mainstream adopters and 30 concurrent and/or Fostering for Adoption adopter households.

- Recruit, prepare and support sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds to provide permanent family care for Lancashire's children where their individual needs and history will be understood, valued and respected.
- Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need permanent placements.
- Meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.
- Adhere to permanency planning timescales as set out in adoption legislation, in order to avoid delay and maximise each child's opportunity to experience a stable and secure family life.
- Provide appropriate choice of adoptive placements for children.
- Provide effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children, prospective adopters' assessments and linkings with children to be progressed without delay.
- Ensure all staff are appropriately recruited, supervised and trained to fulfill their agency functions.
- Ensure that where possible and appropriate, siblings will be placed together and that decisions to place siblings separately are made following a robust sibling assessment.
- Ensure that children's plans for adoption are agreed by the Agency Decision Maker to meet court timetables
- Provide time limited advice and support to birth parents at the point that adoption becomes the plan for the child.
- To maintain effective partnership with other adoption agencies.
- Ensure service users are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.
- Treat all service users with respect and without prejudice or discrimination.
- To ensure that children are linked with their adoptive families within 121 days after the making of the placement order.
- To work in partnership with Children's Social Care to ensure that children are adopted within 425 days of them becoming looked after.
- To continue to develop and monitor the family finding process to minimise delay for the child, maximise the potential for linking with Lancashire approved adopters and respond to the government adoption reform agenda.
- To ensure as per case law other care planning options have been considered prior to a SHOPA decision. To maximise family finding to avoid revocation of placement orders wherever possible.
- To provide a comprehensive post adoption service which meets the needs of residents in Lancashire who have been affected by adoption.
- To continuously develop the service in keeping with the Ofsted inspection framework and adoption scorecards to ensure we retain and improve our Ofsted rating of Good with some outstanding features.
- To become fully integrated within a regional adoption agency.

In order to meet these key objectives:

- We will implement a "targeted" approach to recruitment in order to ensure that approved adopters are suitable to meet the specific needs of children looked after, particularly, the hard to place children in Lancashire with a care plan for adoption.

- We will rigorously scrutinise the efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide and commission in order to achieve good value for money; we will endeavour to maximise the total resources available for the improvement of outcomes for children.
- We will be proactive in anticipating developments associated with the Government's Adoption Action Plan and be prepared for any consequent threats and opportunities.
- We will work closely with colleagues in North West Adoption Services including Voluntary Adoption Agencies to promote regional marketing strategies, address the national shortage of adopters and improve the adoption care planning process.
- We will work as one Recruitment & Assessment Team (both Fostering and Adoption) to provide the best permanent placement for our children until the regional adoption agency is implemented.
- We will be pro-active in ensuring that there are local advertising campaigns to ensure that prospective adopters in Lancashire are recruited to adopt children for the local authority.
- We will ensure that the adoption website (www.lancashire.gov.uk/adoption) is up to date and engaging.
- We will ensure the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Team work with all prospective carers, whether their main interest is adoption or fostering, efficiently and effectively.
- We will recruit a number of concurrent and Fostering for adoption carers to enable children with a plan of adoption or a likely plan of adoption to be placed with their adopters at the earliest opportunity.
- We will ensure that information sent to prospective adopters is accurate, informative and provided in a timely manner.
- We will ensure that there are sufficient preparation sessions across the county to meet the needs of prospective adopters.
- We will monitor the time scales for each stage of the approval process both at an individual and team level and openly report the outcomes to senior managers in the service.
- We will continue to develop the role of the Adoption Panel so that individuals with direct experience of the adoption process can comment on prospective adopters and proposed adoption placements.
- We will maximise the flexibility of adopters and avoid artificial barriers to the linking and matching process.
- In partnership with colleagues in Children's Social Care we will ensure that robust care planning for adoption is facilitated in a timely manner. This will be further facilitated by the integration of the newly formed Central Care Proceedings Team within the Children Awaiting Adoption Service.
- We have developed and recruited to the role of the Case Progression Manager within Lancashire who will track and analyse any delays within care proceedings under the new Public Law Outline and ensure that the Family Justice Board's priorities and the priorities of the government's Adoption agenda are congruent within Lancashire. The Case Progression Manager will identify any delays within the court and adoption process and track our adoption performance. An informed and analytical position on timescales will be formed which can be disseminated and discussed within the judiciary, Cafcass and

Children's Services. This will help to inform future resource and service development to improve outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption.

- The case progression manager will work closely with children's social care to focus on the quality of the child permanence reports being presented for SHOPA.
- We will facilitate a proactive and organised approach to family finding in order to maximise use of approved adopters, ensure timely placement of children with adopters and take into account the requirements of children with additional needs. This will be further strengthened through the development of Permanence and Placement Co-ordinators, who in conjunction with family finders will work with the district fieldwork teams to ensure early and targeted family finding strategies and support them in their twin tracking and adoption care plans.
- We will continue to provide training and support to approved adopters and members of their family via a comprehensive Post Adoption Support Service.
- We will continue to facilitate the Post Adoption Mailbox Scheme.
- We will work sensitively with birth relatives whose children have been or are in the process of being placed for adoption.
- We will provide access to a service for adopters who wish to adopt a child from another country

We will prepare adopters for the task ahead of them, promote and develop their skills and personal resilience by:

- Working with colleagues in training and development to ensure high quality training for an adopter's pre and post approval.
- Ensuring that training available to staff in Children's Services is also made available to adopters where relevant.
- Implementing an Adoption Allowance Scheme where appropriate and necessary in order to ensure that financial constraints do not prevent adoption or cause undue hardship.
- Providing a Post Adoption Support Service for adopters and children placed with them.
- Ensure that recruitment and preparation materials are fit for purpose and informative.
- Ensure that adopters are approved within the required timescales and kept fully informed of the progress of their application and family finding activity post approval
- Refer approved adopters to other organisations in the event that it is not possible to place a child from Lancashire with them for the purpose of adoption.

We will meet the needs of children awaiting adoption by:

- Ensuring that children are prepared for adoption and have the essentials such as Life Story Books and Later In Life Letters.
- Ensure that therapeutic input is provided both pre and post placement for those children who require it.
- Exercise a responsible, timely and robust approach to linking, introducing and placing children with adopters.

- Simultaneously identifying suitable adopters for a child from Lancashire approved adopters and from other agencies that are able to meet the children needs through existing links with National Adoption Agencies and Profiling Events.
- Implement an Adoption Allowance Scheme in order to ensure that financial constraints do not prevent adoption.
- Promote and facilitate post adoption contact arrangements where it is considered to be in the child's best interest.

We will work with adults who have been affected by adoption by:

- a) Working sensitively with birth relatives whose children have been/are being placed for adoption at all stages of the process.
- b) Providing access to counselling for adults who have been adopted and who are seeking information about their birth family.
- c) To provide a Post Adoption Mailbox Scheme to facilitate indirect contact where it has been agreed and supports birth parents to participate effectively.

The Adoption Service has been structured to achieve a number of functions including:

- The recruitment, assessment, and support of adopters and thus promote stability and reduce the number of unplanned moves for children.
- To find suitable families for those children who are awaiting adoption, prepare them for placement and support them for as long as required.
- To provide a comprehensive Post Adoption Support Service to all parties involved in the adoption process

We will ensure that the service is compliant with National Minimum Standards together with associated Guidance and Regulations. The service will work with colleagues in the Safeguarding, Inspection and Audit Team to routinely quality assure our practice.

Managers in the service will continue to work closely with colleagues in all of children's services teams to identify changing priorities and develop policies and procedures that support the adoption process and to minimise the need to accommodate children who have been adopted and to facilitate a return to their birth family if it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Managers in the Adoption Service will implement a comprehensive programme of customer feedback and meet with representative stakeholders on a regular basis in order to improve the quality of service and inform Adoption Service development.

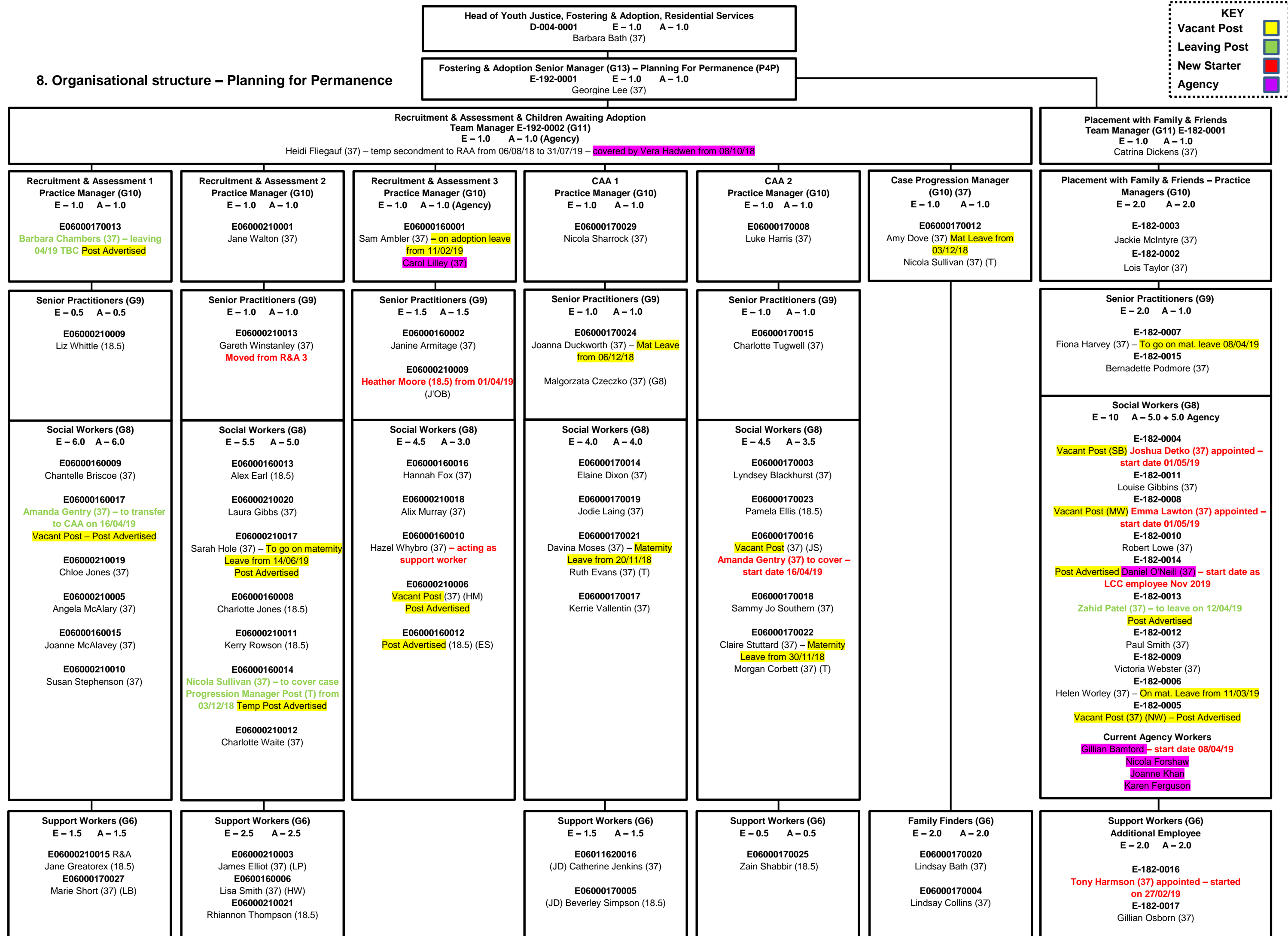
We will continue to facilitate support groups for adopters, a calendar of events throughout the year and a regular newsletter.

7. Adoption Service Activity 2018/19

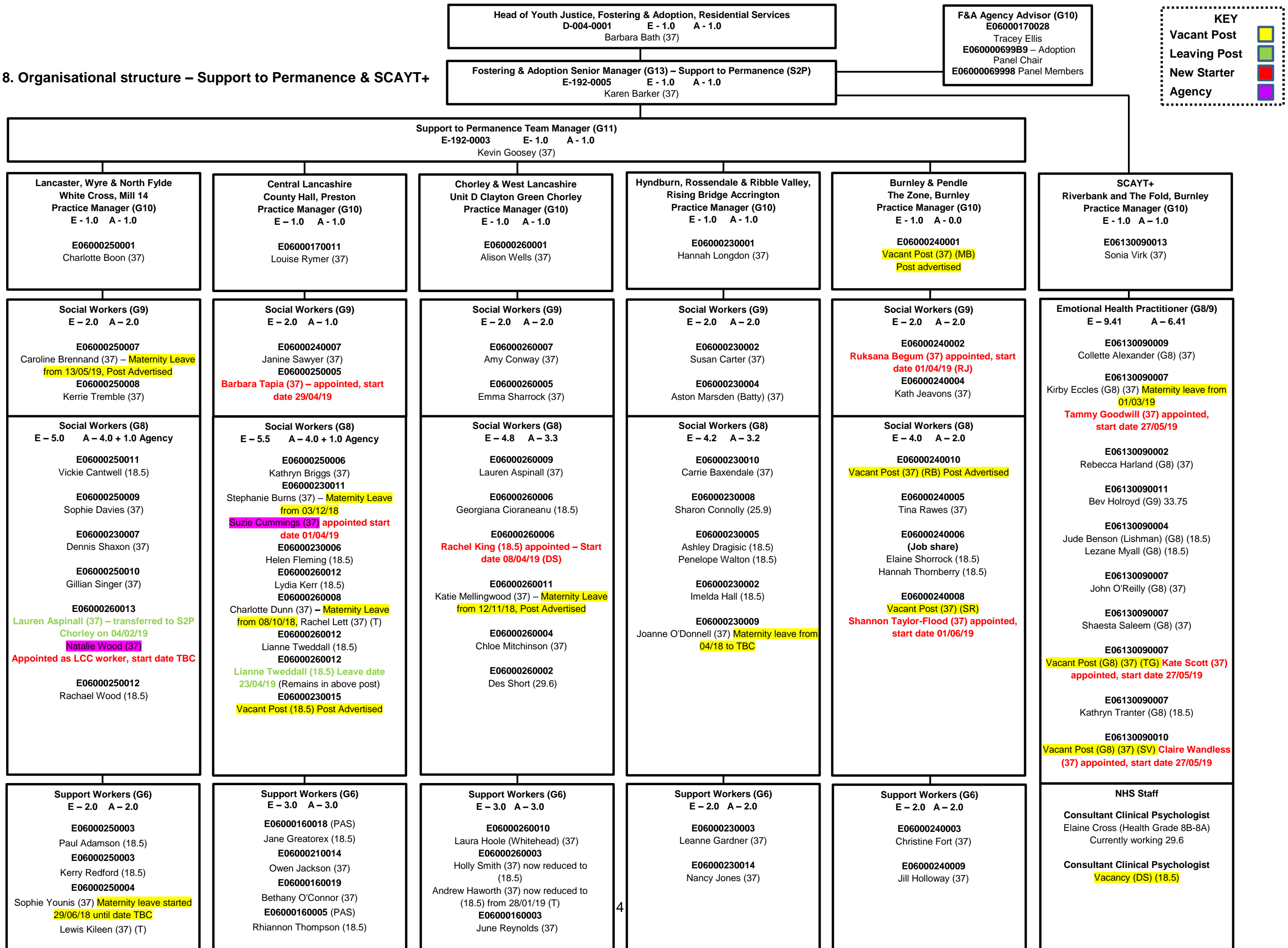
Lancashire's Adoption Service has a robust performance monitoring and reporting framework in place and is committed to continuous improvement. The Adoption Service Improvement Plan identifies its priorities in line with the Adoption Scorecard.

- Clear targets have been identified and our performance is reported against the targets monthly.
- 481 initial enquiries were received and responded to within the Adoption Service during 2018/19. This has been a similar number of enquiries to the last three previous years.
- A total of 56 mainstream adopters and 19 early permanence adopters were approved during 2018/19; the mainstream approvals are similar to the previous two years but we have seen an increase of 4 early permanence approvals each year for the last two years.
- Over the course of 2018/19 a total of 68 children were placed for adoption, a decrease of 18 on the previous year. Of the 68 children, 57 were placed with Lancashire adopters.

8. Organisational structure – Planning for Permanence



8. Organisational structure – Support to Permanence & SCAYT+



9. Team functions

The Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Recruitment and Assessment Team's priorities are:

- To recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of Lancashire Children Looked After with a care plan of adoption.
- To provide training for prospective adopters and assist them to understand the needs of the children being placed with them.
- To support adopters prior to children being placed with them.
- In conjunction with the Children Awaiting Adoption Team provide support to adopters once a child is in placement.
- To support adopters to make an adoption to the Court in conjunction with the Children awaiting Adoption Team.
- To provide advice, information and support to prospective adopters/adopters via a duty system.
- To work with other adoption agencies to ensure that appropriate children can be placed with Lancashire adopters if they are not matched with a Lancashire child.

The Children Awaiting Adoption Team

The Children Awaiting Adoption Team is responsible for:

- Advising and liaising with social workers in Children's Social Care regarding permanency planning and care planning for adoption.
- Assuming social work case responsibility for children who are subject to a SHOPA decision/Placement Order.
- Taking on social work case responsibility for relinquished children once adoption has been identified as the care plan.
- Preparing children to be placed within adoptive families.
- To identify in conjunction with the Recruitment and Assessment Team suitable adopters for Lancashire children who require to be adopted.
- To support adopters once a child is in placement in partnership with the Recruitment and Assessment Team.
- To undertake all statutory duties for those children for whom they have case responsibility.
- To provide reports to the Court as necessary to enable completion of the adoption process.
- To assist and support district fieldwork teams in developing care plans for adoption and early family finding strategies through the creation of permanence and placement co-ordinators and family finders.

The Post Adoption Support Team

The Post Adoption Support Team's responsibilities are:

- To undertake post adoption assessments as required.
- To organise and facilitate support groups for adopters.

- To provide counselling for adult adopters seeking access to their birth records.
- To administer the Adoption Mailbox Contact Scheme
- To supervise direct contacts post granting of an adoption order where appropriate to do so.
- To administer the Adoption Allowance Scheme
- To commission direct work/therapeutic input for children and their adopters where it is appropriate to do so through close working links to our SCAYT + service.
- To offer support to birth parents in understanding the adoption process and managing loss.

There is administrative support to all of the adoption teams.

Family Finding / Placement/Matching

We provide matching and placement information to commissioning social workers within both duty and consultation systems. Wherever possible, matching information is followed by introductory visits and pre-placement meetings. We also consider certain children to be taken to 'activity days', an initiative that was created to support an Adopter led approach to linking and matching.

Concurrent and fostering for adoption placements

For children whose likely care plan is one of adoption, we provide approved adopters who are also approved foster carers (concurrency) or are who are granted temporary approval as a foster carer (FFA) to enable children to move to their potential adoptive placement without delay.

This has been achieved through reducing delays in care planning, helping the children achieve permanence within a family who can meet their holistic needs and improve their life chances, and where they will have the opportunity to form secure attachments to their permanent carers at the earliest opportunity.

In summary the Concurrent Placement scheme aims to:

- Minimise the number of moves for young children entering the care system, thus preventing unnecessary broken attachments, by placing children early with carers who can if necessary become their adoptive family, whilst Children's Social Care and the Court make decisions about their future.
- Reduce the length of time a young child spends in foster care before being placed with a permanent family, either birth or adoptive family. The emphasis is on the importance of decision making being within a child's timescale – often set at the beginning of a concurrent placement with a written agreement and usually working towards a nine month timeframe
- Ensure the birth parents are actively supported in undertaking work to help them make appropriate changes that might lead to their child being returned to their care. This is done within tight timeframes set for work to be undertaken focusing on parents' behaviours and actions not promises made
- It demands tighter planning and thinking with clear decision making earlier on in the process

Carer support

We offer regular and good quality support to carers, tailored to their needs. This support increases when children are placed with them.

Allowances

A means tested adoption allowance can be considered for some children.

10. Referral process

We offer a recruitment and assessment service for new applicants (and repeat adopters). This is a systematic process, which is standardised across the county. Prospective adopters are recruited across Lancashire. Applications from neighbouring authorities may be considered in exceptional circumstances; this increases the pool of adopters in terms of geographical location and the characteristics of the prospective adopters, enabling better matches to be made.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team responds to a very high number of enquiries from people interested in adopting a child. The team is proactive in informing adopters when a sibling to a child already adopted may be required.

The Adoption Service Recruitment Strategy is based upon the expectation that it will be possible to recruit a significant proportion of adopters for Lancashire Children Looked After from within Lancashire. Recruitment and marketing activity is planned for the year and tailored to reflect the cohort of children awaiting adoption. Recruitment and marketing activity is monitored and reviewed in order to inform future activity and ensure the material is attracting appropriate enquiries.

Regular Information events are held throughout the year; these are facilitated by social workers from the team, with assistance from fieldwork support officers and support workers. The events allow for prospective applicants to make informal enquiries about the adoption process and access information about the process. Information is provided about the Concurrent Placement Project and prospective applicants are provided with the opportunity to express an interest in being assessed for dual approval.

Ten Preparation Groups are scheduled throughout the year. Additional events will be arranged if required and/or arrangements made for prospective adopters to access preparation and training from other adoption agencies within the Adoption 22 consortium in order to avoid delay. These groups involve the input of adopters and adult adopters as well as other services. Positive feedback regarding the content, quality of delivery and relevance of the training is consistently received from participants.

Prospective adopters may contact the service either through a dedicated duty system or online via the Lancashire Adoption Website which is regularly updated. The duty system provides an evening call back facility.

Many adopters approved by the Adoption Service in Lancashire are matched with Lancashire children. The 'Family Finding Protocol' developed by the Adoption Service

allows early identification of potential links. Many adopters are approached with details of a potential link very swiftly either whilst in assessment or following their approval. In the event approved adopters are not linked swiftly with a Lancashire child their profiles are usually uploaded to linkmaker.

Foster carers who wish to adopt a child for whom they are caring are advised to make their wishes known to the child's social worker. Following a professionals meeting, the adoption services in conjunction with the child's social worker will then undertake a viability assessment to determine if that application should proceed. This decision is made by the Adoption Services Manager. If the decision is made that the application is viable a social worker will be appointed to complete the assessment of the prospective adopter. The foster carer will be invited to attend the relevant training.

If the viability assessment recommends that the full assessment should not be undertaken foster carers will be advised of their right to submit an application to court in certain instances.

11. Support provided to adults

Adoption Support

Once a child is placed with adopters they are invited to attend support groups. The support groups are organised by the Post Adoption Service. The groups which include meetings and events are held in three separate localities to minimise the need for adopters travelling a long distance. Feedback obtained by the Adoption Service indicates that participants value the support that is available to them via the groups.

The production and distribution of a regular newsletter ensures that adopters are kept in touch with post adoption events, activities and the services available to them. The newsletter also provides information about Service developments and the wider context of adoption including changes to legislation and policy.

It is recognised there are sometimes periods during a placement when more intensive one to one support may be required. Adopters may seek a post adoption assessment at any time during a child's minority. This will be undertaken by a social worker from the Post Adoption Team. The assessment determines what services are required to support the family. This may be individual support to the child and his or her adopters and can be accessed from a variety of sources Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), SCAYT+ or in exceptional circumstances specific therapeutic input may be commissioned.

Services to Adult Adoptees

Adults who have been adopted can approach the Registrar General's Office when they are 18 to request details from their original birth certificate. Once they have obtained this information a request can be made to the Post Adoption Support Team for access to birth records. This involves obtaining a file from either the Adoption Archive or from another Adoption Agency. The amount of information available in the file can vary considerably but has to be carefully considered in terms of sharing the contents with an adopted person. This aspect of post adoption work is provided on a statutory basis.

Once this basic information has been obtained many people then request assistance with tracing their birth relatives and with achieving a reunion (Intermediary work).

The Post Adoption Service is unable to provide assistance in tracing birth relatives or providing an intermediary service. Advice will be provided and individuals signposted to obtain these services. Most agencies providing Intermediary work charge a fee.

Services to Birth Relatives

Information and counselling are provided to birth parents of children who are being adopted are provided by the Post Adoption Support Team. Additional provision is also commissioned via After Adoption, a voluntary organisation, with whom Lancashire has a contract for providing services to birth relatives through their "Birth Ties" service. The support is provided for up to the duration of the care proceedings in helping them understand the adoption process and the reasons why adoption is being considered.

12. Services to children

The Agency Decision Maker with support for the Agency Adviser considers proposals that children should be placed for adoption by Children's Social Care. If the Agency Decision Maker decides that the child should be placed for adoption (SHOPA) a member of the Children Awaiting Adoption Team is allocated to co-work alongside the allocated social worker until the Placement Order is made. This arrangement allows for a seamless transfer of case accountability once the Placement Order is made. Once the child becomes subject to a Placement Order the Children Awaiting Adoption Team will assume full case accountability.

Wherever possible, children are matched to an appropriate family including considerations of ethnic origin and religion. However no child will wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. Siblings will be placed together unless there are particular circumstances why this should not happen.

Support is provided from their allocated social worker and, when required, support workers to prepare a child when moving to their adoptive family and to enhance a child's understanding of the process. Life story books are prepared for the child to help them understand their journey and a late life letter is also written for them to read when they are older.

Therapeutic support is provided from our in house SCAYT (supporting carers and young people together) service and the adoption support fund is also access at the point of placement or post adoption where necessary.

Post Adoption Contact

Indirect post adoption contact is facilitated via the 'Post Adoption Mailbox Scheme'.

The Post Adoption Mailbox Box Scheme and all associated documentation has been reviewed and updated. A public information leaflet on the Post Box Scheme has been updated and reprinted. Information regarding the Post Adoption Mailbox Scheme can also be accessed on the Adoption website.

Business Support is available to assist with implementation of the scheme and a social worker for the Post Adoption Support Team has lead responsibility for ensuring the

service is effective and responsive. There are over 200 active cases and this number is increasing all the time.

There are a number of direct post adoption contact arrangements which have also been established, some of which involve supervision by the Post Adoption Support Team.

13. Adoption Panels

There are 3 adoption panels held each month. These panels are chaired by an independent chairperson and the panel is made up of panel members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The membership of the panel must be drawn from a Central List of persons with the appropriate qualifications and/or experiences, including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. Lancashire also has a panel advisor whose, primary role is to provide professional advice to the panels, ensures that arrangements for panel are coordinated in advance, run smoothly on the day, and that follow-up actions and reports happen as required. The panel advisor is also responsible for ensuring that appropriately experienced and qualified panel members are recruited, inducted and receive training and annual appraisals.

Membership and process of the Adoption Panel meet National Minimum Standards. Lancashire employs an independent panel chair, who also chairs the Fostering Panels. This has resulted in more robust monitoring, an enhanced quality assurance role and a greater level of consistency in relation to the Adoption Panel function.

The medical advisor provides reports that are made available to all panel members and sits on Panel.

The panel has clear policies and procedures to meet the Adoption Service National Minimum Standards and statutory Adoption Guidance.

All panel members attend training and have an appraisal on an annual basis. There is an induction programme, information pack and peer mentoring available for new members joining the central list. Additional training for new panel members, Vice Chairs and the Independent Panel Chair is also commissioned as required and appropriate.

The Adoption Panel provides recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision following a recommendation by the Adoption Panel.

The Adoption panel has two key functions:

- Recommendations on the approval of adopters/prospective adopters including the terminations of approval of adopters
- Recommendations on whether a child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter

Where prospective adopters or existing adopters disagree with a decision following consideration by the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker, they have the right to make representation in certain circumstances in accordance with the Regulations. The prospective/adopter should make their representation within 28 days of receiving the written decision of the Agency Decision Maker. This is done by making representations either to the Adoption Service or the Independent Review Mechanism, www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

The Service has produced information about the Adoption Panel for prospective /adopters which is available in a public information leaflet 'Lancashire County Council Adoption Panel'.

In response to the Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 & revised statutory adoption guidance the Adoption Service has developed an Agency Decision Making process to consider whether a child should be placed for adoption.

The Central Adoption Panel membership is as follows:

CHAIR - Sean white

VICE CHAIR – Maureen Heferran

SOCIAL WORKERS

Louise Jefferson (YOT practice manager, can also sit as vice chair and can chair in emergency)

Liz Pickering (IRO, also vice chair and can chair in an emergency)

Janine sawyer (social worker in support to permanence team)

Debbie Thompson (independent social worker with experience in R & A team)

Marie Carroll (independent with many years' experience in the fostering and adoption service at Wigan)

Maureen Heferran (independent, is also vice chair and is an adoptive mum, also worked in fostering and adoption services for many years)

Martyn Sharples

CLLRS

CLLR Rear

CLLR Townley

YOUNG PEOPLE

Saima Ali

HEALTH

Louise Savill (independent, worked as a nurse for many years)

EDUCATION

Eileen Bleasdale (independent, was a head teacher)

Jackie Nicholls (independent, worked as a teacher for many years)

Alf Yates (independent, sits on schools appeals panel)

Pat Taylor

OTHER

Jane Pickersgill (independent, is an adoptive parent)

Rosaline martin (independent is an adoptive parent)

Barbara Everitt (independent, experience as a support worker, was a foster carer, delivers skills to foster training)

Graham Dobkin (independent is a magistrate, experience of youth work)

Georgie Howitt (family fostered she studies SW)

Chris McIvor (Head of service Bolton and adopter)

Cath Coffey (adopter)

Susan Harris (magistrate and adopter)

Rhianna Richardson (was minute taker adoption in family)

Medical Advisor Jane Burnett

Dr Mathur

Panel Advisor Tracey Ellis Kelly

Panel Administrator Jenny Wall and Barbara Smith

Agency Decision Makers Sally Allen, Acting Director

Brendan Lee, Head of Service, Children's Social Care North

Rose Howley, Acting Head of Service, Children's Social Care Central

14. Learning and Development

The Adoption Service is a learning organisation and is committed to continuing learning and development of both staff and adopters.

Staff

- Staff development is seen as essential to effective professional practice within the Directorate.
- All social workers and managers employed within the Adoption Service hold the Certificate in Social Service, the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, the Diploma in Social Work or equivalent.
- All new staff employed within the Service undertake a comprehensive programme of induction.

- There is a programme of mandatory courses which staff must undertake. This includes a programme of E learning
- Training for staff is identified through the Personal Development Planning process and is subject to ongoing evaluation and review.
- The Children's Social Care County Training Group commissions a programme of appropriate courses for Adoption Service staff. The training plan is reviewed, evaluated and updated annually in partnership with the training unit.

External National and Regional Training Events are also available on a wide range of topics.

- A number of training events are held jointly between the Adoption Service and Fostering Service. Other training events are undertaken jointly with the district based teams.
- Regular supervision is provided for all staff in keeping with the Directorate's Supervision Strategy. Supervision is within the Directorate's personal development appraisal framework.
- Flexible work patterns are accommodated where it is possible and meet with Service requirements to promote retention of staff.
- A career grade system has been introduced which allows suitably qualified and experienced staff to remain practising operationally but being financially rewarded for the expertise that they have developed.
- All social workers within Lancashire County Council register with the HCPC. The Directorate is a member of 'Research in Practice' and is able to access and circulate appropriate research information to staff.
- Staff within the Adoption Service, provide training on related subject areas for other professionals.

Adoption Panel Training

- Panel members are included in the Learning and Development Strategy and are offered opportunities to attend events alongside social workers, adopters and others in addition to dedicated twice annual panel training.

Learning and Development Strategy for Adopters

- The Directorate is committed to training adopters in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of each child or young person placed in their care.
- The Adoption Service learning and development programme was devised in response to ongoing consultation with the Adoption and Fostering Teams as well as adopters themselves. The programme aims to build on the initial training programme which is delivered to all new adopters as part of the Adoption Service recruitment strategy.
- Varied, interesting courses are provided flexibly including e-learning (online learning) opportunities, which are proving successful.
- Adoptive applicants are required to participate in learning and development as a mandatory element of the assessment and preparation process.

- Some of our experienced adopters will offer informal "mentoring" and support to less experienced adopters or those encountering specific scenarios where it is of benefit.
- Evaluation and quality assurance processes are incorporated into each stage of the commissioning and delivery of training. Attendance on courses has improved overall. Adopters and supervising social workers regularly provide positive feedback about their training experiences. Feedback indicates that courses are useful and assist social workers and adopters to carry out their responsibilities more effectively and with good outcomes.
- The Employee Development Department has been responsive to requests from both adopters and operational managers that specific courses be facilitated in their locality.

The current training programme for Adopters includes:

- ❖ Keeping Children safe On-Line
- ❖ Recognising and Respecting Differences
- ❖ Child Development, Attachment and Resilience

15. Monitoring and evaluation

The service monitors and evaluates the provision of its service through:

- Feedback from training, assessment, panel, development days and the support is measured through feedback forms. The details of such are included and shared in the six monthly activity reports.
- The wishes and feelings of the child are recorded in the relevant documentations and actively sought.
- Monitoring of timescales and processes are reviewed and evaluated through: items being returned to panel for reconsideration, Regulation 36 reviews, Placement order review meetings, CLA reviews, statutory visits, family finding strategy, early matching protocol, reflective supervision and through compliments and complaints.

17. Complaints, Comments, Compliments and Allegations:

The Adoption Service is committed to the process of continuous improvement. Compliments, comments, complaints and allegations provide opportunities to review services and promote service developments.

Complaints:

- The Adoption Service has a policy in place to manage complaints from both children and adults, including adopters/prospective adopters. There is a Children Act Complaints Procedure and a Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- There are a number of ways children and young people who are looked after are able to make complaints and/or comments about the service they receive which include text messaging, email facility and a customer feedback website.
- The Complaints Procedure requires staff to seek resolution to complaints at a local level whenever possible and appropriate. The Directorate Customer

Feedback Service facilitates a Mediation Service to enable complaints to be resolved swiftly and avoid the necessity to escalate within the formal complaints procedures. Mediation is a confidential process; the mediators are impartial and independent of the service which is the subject of complaint. The Mediators are qualified and experienced at assisting people who are in dispute to identify and agree a resolution.

- On those occasions when complaints are required to be investigated and responded to formally there is a clear policy, procedural guidance and information available.
- Complaints by children, young people and carers are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly and lessons learned from any recommendations.
- The Directorate produces two leaflets 'Let Us Know What You Think Of Us' and 'Your Choice, Your Voice'. These documents are made available to adopters in the Introduction Pack which each adoptive applicant receives.
- Stage 1: We endeavour to resolve problems by front line staff and their managers being proactive, listening carefully to the complainant and using a customer focused approach to achieve the desired outcome.
- We aim to resolve complaints at this stage in 10 working days (although this can be extended to 20 working days where the issues are complex and in the interest of conducting a proper investigation).
- Stage 2: If it is not possible to resolve a complaint by means of local resolution (stage 1 or mediation) then complainants may request their complaint is progressed for independent investigation at stage 2 of the complaints procedure. The Stage 2 investigation process is commissioned by the Customer Feedback Manager and undertaken by an independent investigating officer accompanied by an Independent Person. An advocate can be made available to assist the complainant if requested. Any child or young person making a complaint is offered the services of an advocate to assist them with the process.
- Stage 3: If the complainant still remains dissatisfied the complainant may request their complaint is considered by an Independent Review Panel.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied following consideration by the Independent Review Panel the complainant or in some instances the Directorate may refer the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- The full version of the Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others policy and procedure is available from supervising social workers. For more information about complaints please see Lancashire's Adoption website at www.lancashire.gov.uk/adoption.
- Service users can access the 'Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others Policy and Procedure'. The policy is not just about complaints but also provides opportunity for compliments and comments to be recorded.
- Depending upon the individual circumstances and the specific nature of the representation it may not be appropriate for the service user to access the Children Act complaints procedure (if the complaint does not relate to a specific child). In these circumstances service users may be advised to access to the Corporate Complaints Procedure (www.lancashire.gov.uk/complaints).
- All Children Looked After are entitled to contact the Children's Rights Commissioner, Dr Maggie Atkinson. Contact details for the Children's Rights

Commissioner are included in the Your Choice Your Voice public information leaflet.

- In certain circumstances adopters/prospective adopters may be entitled to access the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Further details regarding the IRM can be found at www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

Comments and Compliments:

- The Adoption Service values its staff, service users and other stakeholders and seeks feedback in relation to all aspect of the service. The feedback is recorded, reported and utilized to inform service improvement and developments.
- A record is maintained of compliments regarding the services or individuals within the Adoption Service.
- Staff and carers are acknowledged for their contribution to the service and acknowledgments are sent when an individual has been complimented.
- The service shares good practice in order to learn and develop.

Allegations:

- Through high quality, training and support we minimise the risk of complaints or allegations against prospective adopters.
- Allegations include scenarios when an individual, it may be a child, parent, young person or another person makes an allegation that the prospective adopter has harmed a child.
- If such an allegation is made then the allegation will be thoroughly and fairly investigated. The relevant government department will be made aware of the allegation where appropriate and required.
- Whilst the allegation is being investigated the prospective adopter will be supported by their support worker from within the Adoption Service.
- Prospective adopters may wish to have independent support and advice whilst an allegation is investigated. In such an event the Adoption Service will commission support from an independent organisation.
- The Adoption Service is a member of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) a national organisation, and this organisation is able to provide advice and information.

18. Equality, Cohesion and Integration

LCC Corporate Vision

Lancashire County Council is committed to understanding our communities and their needs. As a community leader, employer and service provider, we want our services to reflect what matters to local people, irrespective of their background. We aim to promote a sense of personal and social responsibility across neighbourhoods, to advance equality of opportunity and inspire our communities and citizens to realise their potential. We celebrate the diversity of our communities whilst fostering a sense of common ground and good relations. Lancashire does not tolerate unlawful

discrimination, harassment, threats and extremism that affect individuals or divide our communities and we will work in partnership to respond to these issues.

The County Council has responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The general duties stipulate that we should;

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation because of protected characteristics.
- Advance equality of opportunity of people with protected characteristics.
- Foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do not share them.

The PSED's Specific Duty means that we must publish information about equality performance and objectives.

To ensure that our Service can effectively deliver against the Public Sector Equality Duties and improve service delivery; the Equality Impact Analysis process will be utilised. The Equality Analysis process provides a robust framework for incorporating consultation findings, engagement and survey results with statistical information relevant to our service. This process will inform all aspects of decision making, business planning and monitoring and evaluation against service targets.

Priority Areas

1. Knowing our communities: Collecting, sharing and analysing information between partners.
2. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment:
 - i) Driving a clear and consistent organisational approach to equalities that is communicated effectively throughout the service.
 - ii) Ensure that the service encourages participation in public life by all sections of the community and fosters good relations between them.
3. Community engagement and satisfaction: Ensure robust structures are in place for community engagement and to assess customer satisfaction.
4. Responsive services and customer care: Ensuring equality analysis is integrated into service reviews, service planning and delivery and that access to services are reflective of the communities it serves.
5. A skilled and committed workforce: Ensuring workforce strategy, monitoring, staff engagement, policies and procedures are consistently and fairly applied. This is also applicable to bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- 6.

Lancashire Adoption Service will:

1. Undertake an Equality Impact Analysis (when appropriate) to ensure that all aspects of equality and cohesion are considered during service planning, decision making and action planning on specific issues.
2. Monitor and record data in line with the protected characteristics. (CYP and adopters)
3. Ensure that all information is accessible to the people we serve.
4. Ensure that all recruitment literature and materials promote equality, diversity and cohesion.
5. Ensure that all staff have undertaken equality, diversity and cohesion training.

6. Ensure that prospective adopters undertake appropriate equality training.

Lancashire Adoption Service is committed to anti-discriminatory practice and providing a service that is sensitive to the needs of an individual.

- We recognise the cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds of children for whom we are responsible and celebrate their diversity.
- We ensure a child's ethnic needs are met through our matching process.
- We value and respect the children we look after for their individuality and unique personality.
- We have high aspirations for all the children we look after.
- We welcome enquiries from prospective adopters irrespective of their ethnic background, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or faith.