



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2020 - 2021



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1. INTRODUCTION

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that it provides. It can be used by children and young people and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

This document is the Statement of Purpose for Adoption Partnership south east, a Regional Adoption Agency, which was established on 1st November 2020. It is a shared adoption service working on behalf of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council.

The regional agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the three local authorities.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000.

Adoption Agencies are inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service:

Principles & Core Values:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued, and promoted when decisions are made
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

Equal Opportunities:

The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of each Partner. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability considering the need to avoid undue delay.

3. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families & other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements & good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

Objectives of the agency

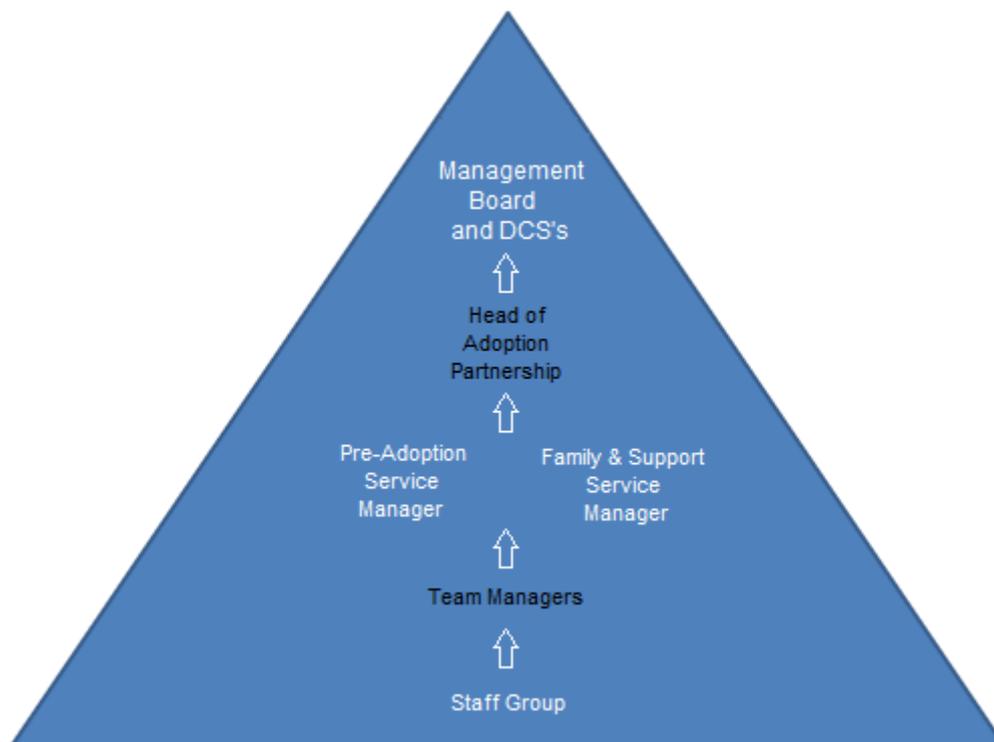
1. To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards
2. To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption
3. To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support, and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care
4. To minimise delay in family finding, paying attention to the needs of the child at all times
5. To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, their needs will change over time
6. To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters, and their children in partnership with other agencies
7. To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad
8. To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair
9. That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaints procedure is made available

10. That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments, and complaints.

4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Governance

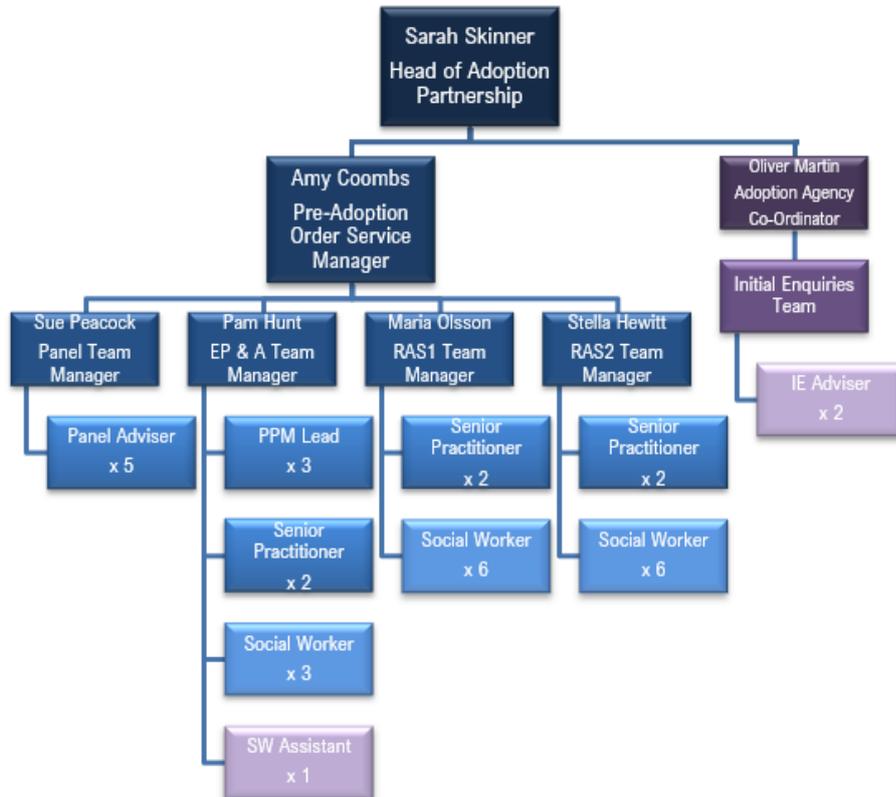
The Head of Service reports to a Partnership Management Board, which is comprised of Senior Officers from each Partner with representation drawn from the wider professional network. The Chair is rotated on an annual basis and for the period 1st November 2020- 31st October 2021, the Chair of the Partnership Board is Sarah Hammond, Director, Integrated Children's Services (Social Work) | Children, Young People and Education Services, Kent County Council.



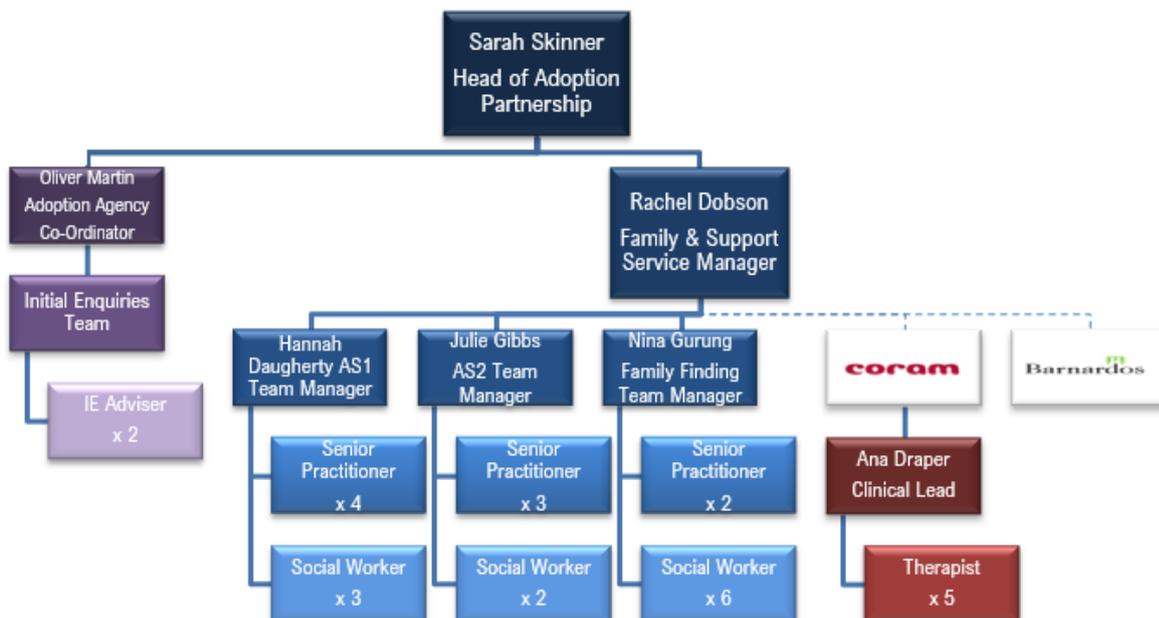
Adoption Partnership south east is managed by a Head of Service, two Service Managers, one of whom is responsible for the pre-adoption order work streams and one who is responsible for overseeing family finding and adoption support. There are seven Team Managers working within the Service and a Clinical Lead who line manages the clinical therapists who are a commissioned service from Coram. The agency has a total of 79 members of staff working within it.

The service is structured as follows:

Pre-Adoption Service



Family & Support Service



Business Support



5. THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption Partnership south east provides an adoption service directly and indirectly to:

- Children in need of an adoptive family
- Birth families directly and indirectly
- People wishing to become parents of a non-related child through adoption.
- Reconstituted families wishing to adopt a related child
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Adults who have been adopted seeking their records

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families
- Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a home study, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation training
- Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption; the family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible
- Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them
- Advice, guidance, and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement. This includes facilitating workshops, training, and support groups
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to another agency that provide a service under commissioning contracts
- Relative/stepparent adoption assessments
- The adoption letterbox and contact service and access to adoption archives for families living in Kent is delivered through a voluntary adoption agency and provided by Adoption Partnership south east for families living in Bexley and Medway. This enables adopted children to maintain contact with their birth families
- Support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults wishing to find out about their birth families and an Intermediary service are provided by a voluntary agency for families living in Kent and by Adoption Partnership for families living in Bexley and Medway. The expectation is that during the transitional phase of moving in to a Regional Adoption Agency, there are some differences in the way services are delivered, over a period of time, differences in service delivery will be replaced with a consistent approach across the region.
- Adoption support assessments for adoptive families
- The commissioning and delivery of therapeutic support, using the Adoption Support Fund.

Information about all aspects of the adoption service can be accessed via the Adoption Partnership Initial Enquiries Team:

- <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/>
- Adoption.Partnership@Kent.gov.uk
- 03000 422373

All enquirers are followed through by an adoption advisor.

Office addresses:

- Bexley Council, Civic Offices, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7AT
- Kent County Council, Stable Block, Oakwood House, Oakwood Park, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8AE
- Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR

5. THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Enquiries and first contact

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Partnership via the Adoption Agency website: www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk or make contact through the dedicated advice line. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and invited to an information session.

Information events

Enquirers are invited to attend or access an information event. During the pandemic all such events were moved online and held virtually. During the event, a presentation about adoption is delivered and there are opportunities to meet adopters and experienced adoption social workers to discuss the different routes to adoption. Should enquirers wish to progress their interest, following the information event, they request a home visit, the details of which are provided at the event. Details of these events are available on the Adoption Partnership south east website.

Initial home visit

The home visit request can be submitted at any point during the twelve-month period following the information event being attended. The home visit is undertaken by an adoption social worker who will provide more information about adoption. The personal circumstances of adopters will be discussed in detail to help them consider if adoption is the right choice for them. The social worker will also start discussions about practical considerations.

A detailed summary of the home visit will be completed and passed to an adoption manager before the registration of interest form is provided. The adoption manager will make a decision within 5 days of receipt of the completed registration of interest form about whether it should be accepted.

At this stage, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s). A letter will be sent to the prospective adopter(s) confirming that their application is proceeding or detailing the reasons why their registration of interest cannot be accepted.

Stage 1 - Pre-assessment process

Stage One begins on the day that Adoption Partnership accepts the registration of interest from the prospective adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete.

The stage one process will include the following:

- All the statutory references/checks will be completed including the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible. This will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues
- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training /preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have
- An adoption social worker will be provided to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.

Preparation sessions

Prospective adopters will be invited to attend preparation sessions in Stage One and Stage Two. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption website and the PACT Adopter hub.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 10 times per year based on need. Repeat adopter training is provided at regular intervals across the region, as is early permanence carer preparation group training.

Stage 2 – The assessment process

The stage two assessment process cannot begin until stage one has successfully been completed (apart from repeat adopters and foster carer adoptions, see next page).

Stage two begins when prospective adopters notify the agency of their wish to continue with the process. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long period during which a home study assessment is undertaken. This leads to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage Two plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional panel date.

The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, ex-partner, employers, and personal referees will also be visited.

Based on the information in the assessment the adoption social worker will write a Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will reach a conclusion about the prospective adopters(s) suitability to adopt and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is presented to the adoption panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the stage 2 process that they cannot recommend approval and /or if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinize the decisions of adoption agencies.

Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/ children's plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

A fast track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. Stage one and two of the adoption process will take place concurrently in order to avoid delay. They will be offered training.

Repeat adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and a 2 year age gap between their child and a potential new child. In this case, they would express an interest in adopting again and be offered a home visit to discuss their circumstances. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start the process. Depending on the circumstances of the family stage one and two of the process may run sequentially or concurrently. They would be offered training.

If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the home visit would involve the child's social worker too. In these cases, stage one and two would run concurrently.

Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. The Inter Country Adoption Agency, a specialist Regional

Adoption Agency is commissioned to provide a service for families living within the Adoption Partnership region. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Adoption panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- Approval of the match between children and adopters and
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan.

Adoption Partnership south east holds weekly adoption panels; four adoption per month. The panels have an Independent Chair with significant experience of adoption.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the district.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within 7 working days of the recommendation of the panel. They may make a different decision to that recommended by the panel.

Adoption Partnership south east has an Agency Decision Maker to consider the approval of prospective adopters; decision making for children to be placed for adoption is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's home local authority.

Decisions are notified to a child's parent(s), guardian(s) and prospective adopter(s). Social workers will be informed of the agency decision within 2 working days

The decision will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

6. BEYOND APPROVAL

Matching and support

Adoption Social Workers ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations such as Coram BAAF, Adopter hub and Adoption UK.

The adopter(s) social worker will help to identify suitable matches with an individual child or a sibling group and will provide support and guidance throughout the whole process. All prospective adopters are referred to Link Maker at three months, with their agreement, if no match has been identified locally.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team.

The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the letterbox system with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will also be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

Process for the matching of a child

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their social worker will attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

If a match is agreed an 'introductions planning meeting' is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the 'Early Permanency' route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering. These differences will be carefully explained to prospective adoptive parents from the beginning of their adoption process with us.

Annual reviews of prospective adopters

In the event that it is not possible to move to a match within 12 months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review and checks and references may need to be updated. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, an updated report will go to adoption panel for consideration.

Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information.

After placement

Visits will be made by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and prospective adopter(s).

The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six weekly. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker for the prospective adopters. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers.

A Life story book is prepared by the family finding social worker and adoption social worker in conjunction with the adopters. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

Adopters are provided with a peer mentor who is an adoptive parent, who can offer informal support and advice.

The letterbox and contact service

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families are provided by the agency. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact may include letterbox contact or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members.

A letterbox service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent or any other relative or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of direct contact may be arranged where necessary and agreed.

7. ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

Adoption Partnership south east has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption.

The adopters' social worker will ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations and are on the mailing list for any events organised through the adoption service.

The agency has 2 specialist adoption support teams, covering the region who offer a range of adoption support services. One of the Partners has a commissioning contract with Coram, a children's charity, and independent adoption agency to provide a clinical team, which provides direct interventions and group work to children and families. The agency will also 'spot purchase' external provisions when the internal clinical team are not able to provide the service needed.

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the "Adoption Passport" according to individual circumstances.

For adoptive families

- The adoption support team will undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.
- Access to a support and advice line
- Access to support groups including stay and play groups
- Access to a learning and development programme and workshops
- Access to therapeutic support groups
- Access to Theraplay trained workers
- Access to support with education via Virtual Schools in each local authority
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- Twice yearly social event for adoptive families

Adopted children & young people

- Social groups and activities
- Offering training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories
- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children

Birth relatives

- Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service
- Support regarding letterbox and contact arrangements
- Enabling parents to record on their child's file whether they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18.

For adopted adults

- Access to their birth records
- Discussion and advice regarding potentially wishing to contact birth relatives.

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via our Adoption Partnership Advice Line:

- 03000 422373
- <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/>
- adoption.partnership@kent.gov.uk

8 QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

Sarah Skinner, Head of Service, has overall responsibility for Adoption Partnership south east. Sarah was awarded a BA (Hons) Social Science from Bristol Polytechnic in 1985. She then went on to study at Warwick University in 1987 where she graduated with a MA Applied Social Studies & CQSW. This was followed by completion of the Advanced Social Work Diploma, Goldsmith University 1991. Sarah has over 33 years post qualification experience in children's social care including adoption, but also experience in a variety of different teams including policy & performance, Independent Reviewing Service, and Virtual Schools.

All Managers and Social Workers have a social work qualification and are registered with Social Work England and have relevant experience in children and families' service. The Clinical Therapists working within the Service are also suitably qualified and experienced practitioners. All staff have the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check completed.

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training or through externally commissioned trainers.

A management information system and government score card is in place which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption.

Adoption Agencies are monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted.

There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals.

Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice-yearly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chairs and Agency Decision Maker.

The Head of Service submits a quarterly report to the Partnership Board and provides an annual review and Business Plan which can be presented to individual local authority scrutiny boards or Executives.

A robust quality assurance framework is in place with regular auditing of files, plus evaluation feedback from adoptive parents and other service users. This is held centrally and is undertaken at key points in the adoption process.

10. CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of child for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer. All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the Complaints Procedures and informed of the role of the Children's Rights Service.

We aim to resolve any concerns you may have as quickly as possible. However, if we have not been able to provide a solution within the service, you can follow the formal complaints procedure. The Partnership has agreed that Kent County Council will be the lead partner on all complaints which relate either wholly or in part to the Adoption Partnership South East.

You can give us a compliment or make a complaint via the [Kent County Council website](#).

Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED CONTACT DETAILS

Ofsted National Business Unit Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester,
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231 Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk