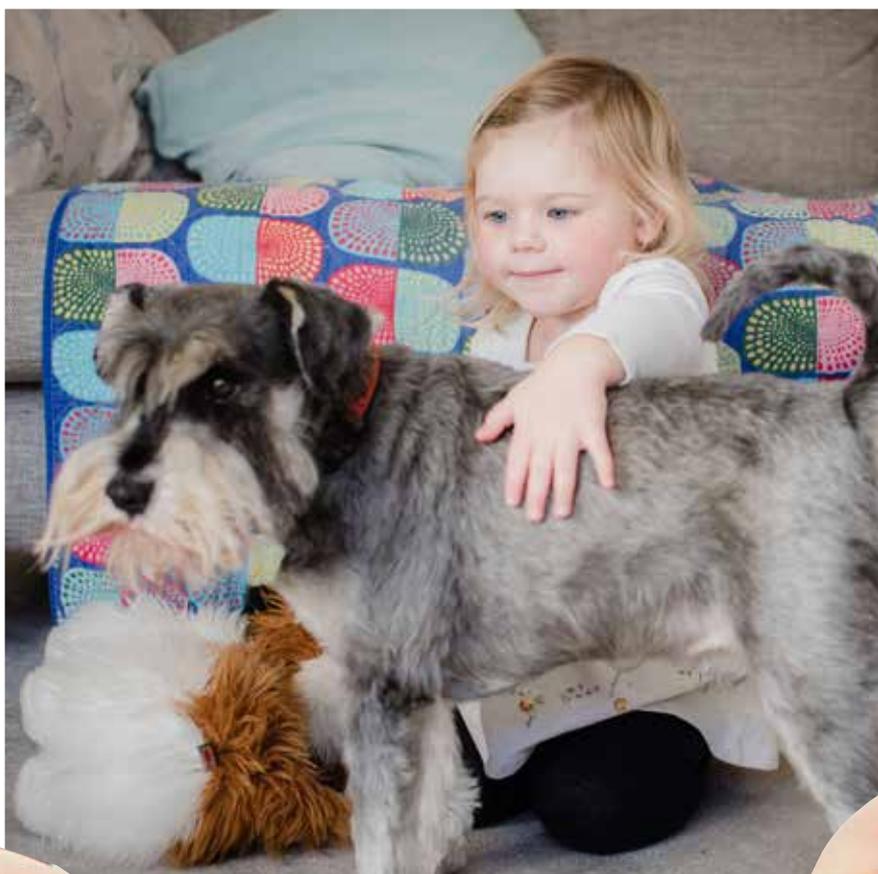


ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2019-2020



1. Introduction

This statement of purpose has been produced by Leicestershire County Council's Adoption and Permanence Service under the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2013 (amendments Adoption Support 2014), the Special Guardianship (Amendments) Regulations 2016 and the National Adoption Standards.

The statement aims to give all stakeholders and service users a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Adoption and Permanence Service in Leicestershire, as well as to detail the services that the Adoption and Permanence Team provides.

This is a key document against which the Adoption and Permanence Service is inspected by Ofsted. It has been endorsed by the senior management group for children services and is reviewed and updated on at least an annual basis to reflect local targets as well as national priorities for adoption as set by the government.

2. Role of Adoption and Permanence Service

The main role of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to provide high quality adoptive placements, a range of adoption and special guardianship support, and other permanency options, including profiling for long term placements for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and are unable to live with their birth families. Children will be placed with families and carers who can offer them safe, stable care and promote their individual needs, consistent with statutory obligations and regulations regarding adoption and placement of children.

The Adoption and Permanence Service has identified the following strategic goals for the forthcoming year which are aligned to Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2018-2021:

- Recruit, assess, prepare and support a range of adopters to ensure a diverse and confident mix of adoptive families is available to meet the needs of those children who are waiting for permanent homes. Leicestershire County Council is particularly looking for prospective adopters who are able to take on a level of uncertainty and complexity such as sibling groups, older children, children with disabilities or health needs and young children with complex background factors such as alcohol or drug misuse, mental health, etc.
- Assess and prepare carers to ensure that placements of children within their families are enduring.
- To provide a high-quality adoption support service to those affected by adoption and special guardianship.
- Ensure continuity and stability for each looked after child by planning for their future needs in a timely manner, exploring all permanency options available and planning effectively for these.
- Demonstrate a high commitment to the Regionalisation of Adoption Agenda by working alongside Lincolnshire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Coram BAAF Midlands and Faith Families), collectively known as L3R, to share resources, focus on innovative practice and develop wider adoption strategies.
- Meet the requirements of adoption and special guardianship legislation, government regulations and standards, and corporate policy through continuous monitoring of service standards and practice



3. Principles and values of the Adoption and Permanence Service

Leicestershire County Council believes that all children and young people who cannot live within their birth families and communities should have an opportunity to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their individual needs during childhood and beyond. The Adoption and Permanence Service is therefore based on the following principles:-

- The child's welfare and safety should be the focus throughout the adoption and permanence planning process. Children's rights should always be respected .
- Children have the right to family life, stability and continuity throughout their lives so that they can maintain their identity and develop their potential fully.
- Decisions taken about placing children should consider all aspects of the child's needs and use research and experience to inform what the future needs may be.
- Relationships that are important to the child should be sustained and developed where possible and where this is assessed as appropriate.
- Children, birth parents and adoptive parents should have access to all relevant information and be encouraged to participate in any discussions and decision-making processes.
- All decisions should be taken in a manner that is fair and transparent, and individuals should be given an opportunity to challenge decisions. Services should be administered in a fair manner and in keeping with the Council's equality and valuing diversity policies.
- Decisions about the child's future should be taken in a timely manner that minimises delay.
- Leicestershire County Council fully embraces Foster for Adoption, so that for children who require adoption, they can be placed with their permanent family as early as possible.
- Adoption is a life-long commitment that has far-reaching consequences for those who are affected; this is reflected in the structure of the service, is recognised by staff involved in delivering adoption services, and services are delivered in a sensitive way.
- The confidentiality of all those involved in the adoption and permanence process is always respected .

4. Aims and Objectives of the Service

Leicestershire's Adoption and Permanence service aims to provide an efficient service that meets the needs of those children in the authority who require permanent substitute care by identifying their individual needs and finding families to match their needs within agreed timescales as set by the government or family courts. The service aims to continue to improve and increase timely adoption. The service will comply with the following legislation and government regulations and standards:

- Children Act 1989
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and 2014
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and accompanying statutory guidance
- Friends and Family Care statutory guidance for Local Authorities 2011
- The National Minimum Standards for Adoption and Fostering Services 2011 (updated 2014) and related statutory guidance.

Early involvement of the Adoption and Permanence Team in child care planning is crucial to minimise disruption and avoid delay:

Regular Child Decision Meetings are held fortnightly to provide consultation to children's social workers to enable them to discuss individual cases, explore permanence options and plan effectively to achieve these. This process ensures that all permanency options are considered for every looked after child as well as that parallel planning is taking place.

Assessments of the family and friends network will be completed before planning for adoption and the service uses quality assurance mechanisms to track progress these assessments.

Providing support services to children, adopters and permanent carers as well as birth families is another key aim of the service. These include social work support, training, support groups, special events, accessing Adoption Support Fund, counselling and/or signposting to independent advice.

The service also aims to provide a sensitive service for adoptive parents, birth parents and adopted adults who wish to contact family members from whom they were separated following adoption. Support will be offered via access to adoption files, provision of advice, counselling and information on how to access birth and adoption records, or by signposting to an intermediary agency for adopted adults and birth relatives of the adopted adults.



5. Service Users

Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to:

- Children who are to be adopted
- Birth parents
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services
- Children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice, where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire
- Adopted adults.

6. Multi-Agency and Joint Working

Leicestershire County Council aims to work with our partner agencies and organisations to improve the range and quality of adoption and permanence services. Leicestershire County Council is part of Adoption East Midlands whose aim is to develop joint initiatives and improve practice to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of process for adoption for children.

Member authorities are:

- Derby City Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Leicester City Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Rutland County Council

Leicestershire's Adoption and Permanence Service benefits from partnership arrangements with Adoption East Midlands. Specifically, Leicestershire has a partnership agreement with Lincolnshire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and voluntary agencies Coram Baff Midlands and Faith in Families. These arrangements include early sharing of information about children and families waiting for placements, participation in joint advertising and recruitment initiatives, shared training opportunities as well as developing and sharing good practice in relation to initiatives in adoption and achieving permanence for children.

Adoption East Midlands has its own website and social media accounts through which prospective adopters can make enquiries about adoption which are then passed on to the relevant local authority for further assessment. The Adoption and Permanence team manager acts as Leicestershire's link with the partnership members. Other groups, such as family finding, preparation group coordinators, recruitment officers and adoption and special guardianship support, meet regularly to exchange and enhance practice development and ways of working together to deliver a robust and ground-breaking practice.

Leicestershire County Council has a Service Level Agreement with Yorkshire Adoption Agency, who provide consultation services and support for those adopters seeking an Inter Country Adoption.

In providing services, the Adoption and Permanence Team will work closely with all staff involved in the process across different service areas within Children's Safeguarding and Social Work as well as outside partners such as health and education partners or national organisations.

7. Services for prospective adopters

7.1. Recruitment

Leicestershire has developed a comprehensive recruitment strategy, jointly with partner members, based on the changing needs of children requiring adoptive placements. Recruitment campaigns are carefully targeted to achieve the provision of adoptive placements that match the needs of the children waiting for adoption.

The benefit of having a joint recruitment strategy with Adoption East Midlands means that Leicestershire can be part of campaigns that reach a wider audience. Monthly open evenings run across partnership members to enable prospective adopters to find out more about adoption and to answer any queries they may have. All publicity materials are designed in a way that is sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of the prospective adopters.

Leicestershire has a dedicated Recruitment team who are available daily to respond swiftly and positively to enquiries from anyone who has an interest in adoption. The teams provide clear, written information for prospective adopters about the assessment and approval process and all prospective adopters are invited to an Open Evening where they are provided with a full information pack and can talk to staff and other adopters.

Enquiries and applications are welcomed from all sections of society, including single people, same sex couples and unmarried couples and people from a wide variety of races, religions and cultures.

7.2. Assessment

Applicants have the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances with a social worker either via telephone or during an office appointment. This ensures that adopters have a clear understanding of the types of children that are currently awaiting adoption. If adopters can consider the profiles of children waiting both locally and nationally, they will be encouraged and supported to begin the assessment



The adoption assessment is structured as follows:

Stage 1

Prospective adopters complete a Registration of Interest form, which marks the beginning of Stage 1. This stage should last two months. Applicants are allocated a social worker to support their learning and a Stage 1 Agreement plan is made.

During this stage, the following must be completed:

- Applicants attend three-day preparation training (this may be completed prior to Stage 1 commencing).
- All statutory checks including DBS, medicals, background checks and references.
- Workbook: this is an assessment tool which applicants are supported to complete prior to moving on to Stage 2.

Stage 1 can be extended for up to six months for legitimate reasons, without having to restart the process.

At the end of Stage 1, a review meeting is held with the adopters to review the outcome of Stage 1 with a view to progress to Stage 2.

Stage 2

All the applicants' learning and information gained in Stage 1 (including the Workbook) form the basis of the Home Study and support completion of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). At the beginning of Stage 2, applicants are invited to sign a Stage 2 Agreement.

Stage 2 should be completed within 4 months, including being presented to Panel and the recommendation being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

As part of the assessment process, the social worker will also interview family members, friends and others in the prospective adopter's support network, and any person with whom someone has had a significant relationship, particularly if there were children as part of that relationship.

All prospective adopters have the opportunity to read the assessment report prepared by the assessing social worker and make their own comments for the panel. A midway meeting is often held during the assessment. It's general practice that adopters are involved in these meetings. Once the report has been agreed it is formally submitted to the panel for a recommendation for approval.

7.3. Approval

Recommendations about whether prospective adopters should be approved to adopt are made by the Leicestershire Adoption Panel, which meets once a fortnight

Panel recommendations are passed to the designated Agency Decision Maker (ADM). She will consider the recommendation made by the panel and make a Qualifying Determination whether or not to approve the prospective adopters.

The ADM makes a decision on all panel recommendations as soon as receiving the final set of minutes and recommendations but not later than 7 working days.

Applicants whose approval is not agreed by the panel or the ADM can ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process together with timescales are made available to the applicants during the adoption process.

The IRM works to the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the decision to decide to contact the IRM
- Leicestershire will be required to produce relevant documentation within 10 working days
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

The IRM is currently operated by Coram BAAF Academy for Adoption & Fostering.

7.4. Matching

Approved adopters are given clear information about the matching, introduction and placement process. Regular visits with the allocated social worker are completed in order to clarify and agree how the adopters will be supported in identifying a suitable match for them.

The matching process is designed to ensure that children are placed with adoptive families who are most likely to be able to meet the child's needs. All aspects of the child's history and development will be considered as well as how adopters may meet their needs.

Matches will be considered from a number of sources, which include Leicestershire's children, the L3R partnership and organisations like the Adoption Register and Link Maker. Adopters are also invited to attend Adoption Exchange Days, where children from several local authorities are profiled. Activity Days are also periodically held nationally.

After an adopter has expressed an interest in a child, a shortlisting process takes place to ensure that only adopters who are most likely to be able to meet the needs of the child are considered. Once shortlisted for a match with an identified child, adopters are given a copy of the Child's Permanence Report which contains full information about the background and needs of the child, including health, educational and therapeutic needs and other unique characteristics such as cultural or religious background. The shortlisted adopters are then requested to write a statement detailing how they believe that they will be able to meet the needs of the child not only now but in the future and all shortlisted adopters are presented to a matching meeting where a decision is made on a preferred match. Once an adopter has been identified as a preferred match the adopter will be able to meet with the child's family finding social worker and the match discussed in more detail. If both the family finding social worker and the adopters are satisfied that the match is appropriate the match will be validated and the adopters will progress on to meet any other professionals who are working with the child, such as the medical advisor or the child's foster carer.

Once it has been agreed to proceed with the match, the social worker will prepare an Adoption Placement Report which the adopters will have an opportunity to both contribute to and consider before agreeing the final report with the social worker.

Once agreed, this is sent to the Adoption Panel along with a comprehensive Adoption Support Plan, in order to make a recommendation to the ADM as to whether the child should be placed for adoption with the proposed adopter(s).

The Panel may also give advice on arrangements regarding contact, adoption support services and the extent to which prospective adopters will be able to exercise parental responsibility once a child has been placed with them.

7.5. Placement

Once a child has been placed for adoption, the child's social worker and the adopter's social worker will visit the placement regularly to monitor the child's progress and support the placement. Review meetings will be held and chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer, as part of the requirement to review Looked After Children's care and adoption plans. Adoption Support Plans and services are reviewed at this meeting. Once the adoption order is granted, such services continue to be reviewed 6 monthly for the first three years.

Adopters who live in Leicestershire and adopt a Leicestershire child will also receive a visit from a post adoption support worker. The worker will provide emotional and practical advice and will review the adoption support plan. The worker will offer more visits if needed but will continue to maintain contact every 6 months for the first three years post granting of an Adoption Order.

7.6. Support

During the assessment and matching process, the support needs of the adopters and child are fully explored and considered. Within Leicestershire there is a range of adoption support services available for adoptive families.

These could include:

Information, advice and counselling -

The team can offer advice, information and counselling to adoptive parents, or can refer them on to more appropriate resources. Leicestershire has access to a range of therapeutic services for children, including in-house therapeutic workers and advice from CAMHS.

Financial Support

- Financial support can be provided to help adoptive parents with any additional costs in caring for the child, in particular where the child has specific on-going needs. There is no automatic entitlement to financial support and support will be subject to a means test and reviewed at least annually.
- The team runs a letter-box contact scheme that enables birth families and adopted children to exchange letters. The service is confidential and is normally agreed and set up as part of the adoption planning for the child.
- Post placement, Leicestershire organise training and/or events for adoptive families that give them an opportunity to meet other adoptive families and can also help them in accessing support groups.
- Adoptive families have the right to request an assessment for adoption support services. Where they consider they need to have support services, they can contact the adoption support services advisor based in the Adoption and Permanence team for information and advice on the types of services available.

The Adoption Support team will respond to any new requests for adoption support from adoptive families who live in the authority.

Leicestershire is responsible for supporting families with whom they have placed children for a period of three years, following the granting of an Adoption Order.

Leicestershire offers adoption support services to any adopters and children/young people who reside in the authority.

7.7. Overseas Adoption

Applicants wishing to adopt from another country are referred to Yorkshire Adoption Agency, a contracted agency who undertakes this work on behalf of Leicestershire.

7.8. Non-Agency adoptions

People who are resident in Leicestershire wishing to adopt a child they are caring for must notify the department of their intention to adopt. These notifications are managed by the Assessment Team who are responsible for the preparation of the Annex A report required by the Court in all adoption applications



8. The Adoption Panel

Leicestershire has its own independent Adoption Panel that sits fortnightly to oversee Leicestershire's Adoption Service as set out in the Children Act 1989, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

The panel's overall functions and purpose are:

- To consider and make recommendations about whether a child should be placed for adoption in those cases where there is no court involvement.
- To consider and make recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters
- To review prospective adopters' approval on an annual basis.
- The termination of approval of adopters.
- To consider and make recommendations about the proposed matches between children and prospective adopters and make recommendations on support plans.
- To consider any adoption support plans submitted as part of the proposed placement.
- To provide a thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it in order to make sound and appropriate recommendations to the agency decision maker who makes the final decision.
- To consider and provide advice on any other issues affecting Leicestershire's Adoption Service.

The panel consists of a central list of panel members who have been recruited because they have the necessary experience and expertise to contribute effectively to the discharge of the panel functions. Leicestershire's panel aims to ensure that the panel reflects the diversity of the authority and includes representation from as wide a field as possible in terms of professional knowledge and experience of adoption and fostering. The panel also works to ensure that panel membership is gender-balanced and reflects the ethnic and cultural composition of Leicestershire as much as possible. The ADM makes the final decision.

Should any adopters disagree with the panel recommendation and the agency decision maker's decision, they are able to make representation to appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The composition of the Panel is made up as follows:

- An independent chairperson who has appropriate skills and experience in adoption and permanence work
- Two independent vice chairs who can, if required, chair the Panel
- A councillor who serves on a full and equal basis as other panel members
- A medical adviser who makes a full contribution to the wider aspects of the panel as well as providing advice and comment on medical issues
- At least 3 other independent persons who include, where reasonably practical, two people with personal experience of adoption.
- Two social workers, each with at least 3 years' relevant post-qualifying experience.
- Education specialist

In addition, the Panel has:

- An Agency Adviser
- A Panel Administrator

All children's plans for adoption are considered by Leicestershire County Council's Agency Decision Maker.

9. Services for Special Guardians

- Advice through the Adoption and Permanence Duty line
- Access to social work support following completion of an assessment
- Letterbox
- Review of support needs
- SGO allowance which is means tested and reviewed annually
- Quarterly newsletter
- Activity days twice per year
- Access to training

10. Organisational structure and management of the Adoption and Permanence Service

The Adoption and Permanence Team is located within the Children and Families Service, the Director of which has overall responsibility for the Adoption and Permanence Service.

The Adoption and Permanence Service is structured into three distinct areas:

- Family Finding for children with a care plan of adoption
- Assessment and support for prospect and approved adopters,
- Adoption & Special Guardianship Support.

This ensures the team is able to maintain specialisms and much needed expertise in adoption and permanence. The current structure also allows for work to be completed in a flexible, creative manner across the sub-teams to ensure good and timely service is provided in all areas according to service need.

The Adoption and Permanence team undertakes family finding for all children in Leicestershire who require an adoptive family. The family finding social worker presents matches to the Adoption Panel in partnership with the child's social worker and the adopter's social worker. The family finding social worker has a role to co-ordinate and support introductions and placements.

The Adoption and Permanence Team offers adoption support services, and the team manager acts as Leicestershire's Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA). This team is responsible for Adoption Support Assessments and applications to the ASF.

The Adoption and Permanence team is responsible for reviewing all the adoption support plans as appropriate. A review of the financial support offered to families is carried out annually.

Staff within the Adoption and Permanence team work closely and in partnership with other teams across the department, offering social workers advice and consultation.

All staff have access to training courses and are kept updated on developments in practice and legislative changes.



11. Responsible individuals are:

Name	Designation
Jane Moore	Director, Children and Families Service
Sharon Cooke	Assistant Director, Children's Safeguarding and Social Work
Nicci Collins	Head of Service
Michelle Robinson	Service Manager
Helen Gronhaug	Agency Decision Maker
Gemma Barber	Manager, Adoption & Permanence Team
Emma Bulgin	Manager, Adoption & Permanence Team
Vacant	Manager, Adoption & Permanence Team
Katie Bancroft	Senior Practitioner, Post Adoption and SGO Support
Vacant	Senior Practitioner, Adoption
Lauren Nichols, Angela Saduera, 4 Vacant posts	Family Finding Social Workers
Lisa Deakin	Special Guardianship Support Social Worker
Mandy Mason, Harriet Person-Cole, Rachel Knox-Barrett, Debbie Bevan	Adoption Social workers
Sameerah Makda, Cam Supra, Charlotte Waggle	Post Adoption Support Social Workers
Sarah Greaves, Anne Barton	Birth Records Counsellors
Sheryl Perberdy	Special Guardianship Support Worker
Lianne Graham-Halford	Post Adoption Support Worker
Michelle Smith	Life Story Worker
Leesha Irwin	Art Therapist
Lorraine Daniels	Panel Advisor

12. Quality Assurance

The Adoption and Permanence Service is monitored regularly to ensure that performance adheres to the standards set out by legislation and council policies. The service's aims and objectives are also reviewed as part of the Children and Young People's Plan by both Service and Divisional managers.

An annual report on the work of the Adoption Panel and the Adoption and Permanence Service is produced for the senior management group.

The mechanisms for quality assurance are:

- All staff in the Adoption and Permanence Team receive regular supervision and training, as well as an annual appraisal. The team managers are supervised by the Service Manager.
- Children's cases are regularly reviewed, with statutory child care reviews chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who are attached to the Quality Assurance Unit.
- Management information is collected regularly to ensure performance indicators are met, to deliver efficient provision of the service and to set targets for the service.
- The Adoption and Permanence team operates in accordance to written policies and procedures, legal and regulatory framework and is subject to corporate policy that sets out clearly its role and responsibilities and provides a reference for good practice.
- Prospective adopters are effectively recruited, prepared, trained and supported so that the adoptive placements available are of a high quality and able to meet the needs of the children.
- Prospective special guardians are effectively assessed, trained and supported to promote placement stability and longevity.
- All adopters approved for over a year and who have not been matched with a child are reviewed annually by the Adoption and Permanence team manager and the recommendation is presented to the Adoption Panel.
- The Adoption and Panel is independent of the Council's management structure and is responsible for scrutinising applications from prospective adopters and adoption plans for children.
- Senior managers hold a tracking meeting regularly to monitor the progress of all children who are to be placed for adoption or waiting permanency.
- Where an adoptive placement breaks down, a disruption meeting is held, chaired by a senior manager or independent person, and the findings are fed back to the Adoption Panel.



13. Complaints

At Leicestershire County Council we aim to provide the best possible service. If a service user, or someone planning to use our service, is unhappy with any aspect of our service or a decision we make, they can make a complaint. This is important as it helps us to improve our services.

It is the responsibility of the staff and their managers based in the Adoption and Permanence Team to try address any concerns raised by service users when a problem first arises. This local resolution is the first stage of the complaints process.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at the first stage, it may be necessary for it to progress to stage two, where it is formally investigated. Service users have a right to go straight to this stage of the process, if they wish.

If the complaint is still unresolved after the formal investigation at stage two, a Review Panel may be requested, which is chaired by an independent person. This is stage three of the process.

If a child or young person makes a complaint about services provided for them, then the complaints procedure must be followed. In this event, a child or young person involved in the complaint will be entitled to an advocate to support and represent them in the process.

Advice on making a complaint can be sought from the complaints team

Complaints Unit

Simon Parsons

County Hall, Glenfield, LE3 8RA

Email complaints@leics.gov.uk

14. The Registration Authority

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The address of the registration office is:

Ofsted

National Business Unit, Royal Exchange Building, At Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045

Children's Rights Officer

Roger Morgan

Ofsted, Alexander House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE

15. Other useful Organisations and Links

CORAMBAAF Academy for Adoption and Fostering

Coram Campus, 41 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ

Tel: 020 7520 0300

Department of Education Adoption Web Pages

Adoption - The Department for Education

Adoption UK

46 The Green, South Bar Street, Banbury OX16 9AB

Tel: 01295 752240

Fax: 01295 752241

Website: www.adoptionuk.org

Adoption East Midlands

Website: www.adoptioneastmidlands.org.uk

adoptionLeicestershire.com



Leicestershire
**Fostering
& Adoption**

