

North Lincolnshire Council Statement of Purpose for Adoption 2021 – 2022



North Lincolnshire



**North
Lincolnshire
Council**

www.northlincs.gov.uk

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Appendix 1 – Adoption Team Structure – North Lincolnshire

This information can be made available in other languages, in large print, Braille or on audiotape. Please phone 01724 297024 if you need any of these or any other help to access North Lincolnshire’s services.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption. It explains the aims, objectives and services provided by North Lincolnshire Council's Adoption Service. It is made available to staff, adoptive carers and the general public.

The main responsibilities the service has, which the Statement of Purpose, sets out are to: -

- Recruit, assess, support and supervise adopters to meet the needs of children who require permanency by way of adoption.
- Constitute an adoption panel to make recommendations in respect of approval, reviews and terminations of approval of adopters.
- To family find and facilitate appropriate matches between adopters and children that meet the child's assessed individual needs.
- Provision of post adoption support services where required to all those connected to adoption, as identified within the core offer. Taking a 'One Family' approach, support is provided by the right service for the right family and where it is felt there are more holistic needs then support can also be provided by our Family Support Services alongside the identification of other universal services.
- The organisation and running of North Lincolnshire Council's Post Adoption Letterbox Contact Service. Currently, we are managing over 200 arrangements for children who are in either adoptive or special guardianship arrangements.
- Offer and provide Intermediary Services.
- The provision of support services in respect to Special Guardianship Orders, as identified within the core offer. Taking a 'One Family' approach, support is provided by the right service for the right family and where it is felt there are more holistic needs then support can also be provided by our Family Support Services alongside the identification of other universal services.

The Young Person's Statement of Purpose has also been updated. This is a document that originates from the adopted young person's group, 'Superkidz's' and which was completed in partnership with adopted young people.

All information is correct as of 14th April 2021.

This document will be revised annually. Significant in year changes will be put in writing to the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

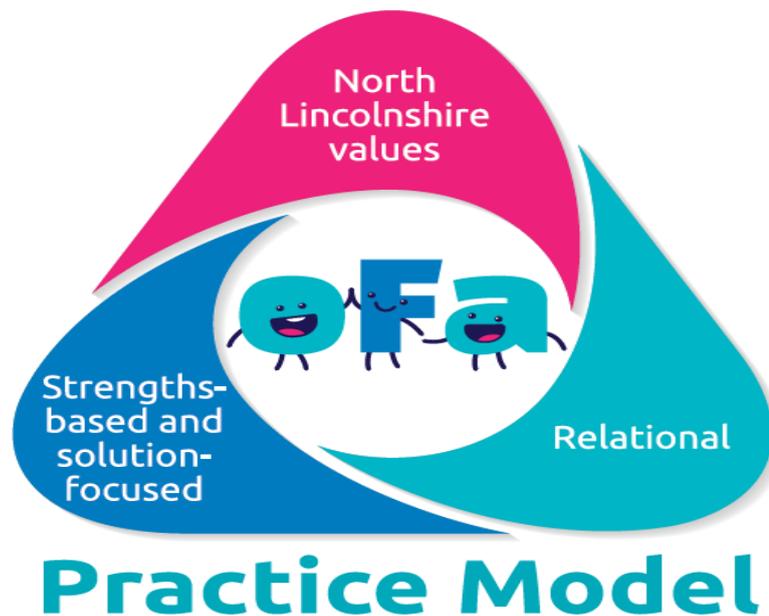
The Adoption Service is registered with;

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Telephone 0300 123 1231
Email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Our One Family Approach aims to create a system that works for all children, young people and families, where we work together to provide and commission integrated services for children and young people.

Our ambition is for children to be in their family, in their school and in their communities.

Within this, the **One Family Approach - Helping Children and Families in North Lincolnshire 2020/24** document sets out how services support children, young people and families to participate, find help online and in their networks and communities, be resilient and stay independent.



We want all children, young people and families to be able to build upon their strengths and develop their resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions when things are not going so well. They should be able to access available information, advice, guidance and be enabled to maximise their life chances.

Central to this is a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This commitment is inherent in our council values of equality of opportunity, excellence, self-responsibility, and integrity, and underpins our focus on prioritising the most vulnerable. Additionally, North Lincolnshire Council believes that it is our role, and indeed our responsibility alongside our partners, to challenge racism and prejudice in all its forms by upholding our values and the highest standards of behaviour, and by committing to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices to reduce inequalities.

2. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE ADOPTION

North Lincolnshire Council's Adoption Service shares the values and principles that underpin the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014; the values that are contained within the Adoption Charter and the values that are reflected within the adoption reform agenda. They can be summarised as follows;

Values – Children and adoptive families

- 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 a means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents / guardians, adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the Adoption National Minimum Standards 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 lifelong process for all those involved – including adopted adults and 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 considers 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.

The Adoption Service is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This commitment is inherent in the council values of equality of opportunity, excellence, self-responsibility, and integrity, and underpins our focus on prioritising the most vulnerable. Additionally, the Adoption Service believes that it is our role, and indeed our responsibility alongside our partners, to challenge racism and prejudice in all its forms by upholding our values and the highest standards of behaviour, and by committing to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices to reduce inequalities.

We also continue to work to the values within the Adoption Charter, which was published in 2011. The Charter was one of the first developments, which preceded a period in which there has been significant adoption reform. This Charter outlines what we will do to support children and young people going through adoption as well as what our expectations are from adoptive parents. It is as follows;

Children Come First

- Adoption is first and foremost a service for children and young people who cannot live with their birth family. Children and young people will be helped to understand what adoption means and will be supported throughout the adoption journey and beyond by experienced professionals.
- Adoption is a life-changing decision that affects the child, and his or her birth and adoptive families. It must be made with the child's best interests, wishes, feelings and needs at its heart and on the basis of sound evidence and high-quality assessments.

North Lincolnshire Adoption will:

- Ensure that the children and young people are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- Treat prospective adopters and adopters with openness, fairness and respect.
- Make prospective adopters first points of contact informative and welcoming.
- Approach adopter recruitment in the spirit of inclusiveness with a view to identifying potential and opportunity – no one will be automatically excluded.

- Recruit prospective adopters who can meet all or most of the needs of children and young people waiting for, or likely to need, adoption and signpost prospective adopters to other agencies if there is insufficient local demand.
- Explain to prospective adopters the needs and profiles of the children and young people waiting to be adopted.
- Ensure preparation and training, the assessment and approval processes are explained and proceed efficiently.
- Regularly review progress on matching with prospective adopters.
- Provide adopters and prospective adopters with information, counselling and support, as and when needed, throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Provide prospective adopters with information about the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Work in partnership, and with other agencies and the Courts, to ensure that all decisions are timely and joined up.

Adoptive Parents must:

- Be aware that adoption often brings challenges as well as joy, be realistic about the needs of children and young people awaiting adoption and accept that with support they may be able to consider adopting a child with a different profile to the child they originally envisaged adopting.
- Make the most of opportunities to develop their parenting skills and seek support when needed at the earliest stage.
- Do all they can to enable their adopted child to feel loved and secure and to reach their full potential.



3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- North Lincolnshire Council aims to deliver a high-quality adoption service and adoption support service each of which meets the needs of its service users. This includes children in its area who may be or are placed for adoption; children and adults who have been adopted and their birth parents and relatives. It also includes people who may wish to adopt a child or have applied to become adoptive parents or have adopted a child.
- The welfare of any child who has been, or may become, adopted is the paramount consideration of all adoption services provided by the Council and the safeguarding of every child's welfare, safety and security is at the heart of the work of the adoption service. We will ensure that children feel safe and are safe and that they understand how to protect themselves. The safety and protection of children will be promoted and addressed through the functions of the North Lincolnshire Children's Multi Agency Resilience and Safeguarding arrangements, effective multi-agency working and clear procedures in line with 'Working Together' guidance 2018. Safer Recruitment practices and regular child protection training for staff, volunteers and adoption panel members will all be integral to safeguarding.
- Where it is not possible or safe for children to be brought up within their own family, we will work with everyone concerned to help the child to move on to a permanent and stable family. Adoption is seen as a positive means of providing stability and permanence for children who cannot live within their birth family. Where adoption is identified as the appropriate care plan for a child, we will work together with all others involved in the child's life to ensure that this happens without delay. This is achieved through early intervention, timely decision-making, and effective planning with regard to relevant timescales. Children with a plan of adoption are referred to the adoption service early to enable initial family finding which includes the consideration of early permanence.
- Our approach is underpinned by all working closely together, performance reporting and monitoring processes that review family finding activity; the assessed needs of children and identified specific additional steps to be taken in order to secure a suitable adoptive or permanent placement. Throughout we will remain mindful of each child's stage of development and 'time in the life of the child'.
- We recognise the lifelong impact of adoption and we aim to deliver support to all parties at all stages in the process. Adoption support services will be both universal and particular to the needs of individual service users. Provision of services will reflect the assessed needs of each service user. The overall aim being to ensure that each child who receives a service from the Adoption Service is provided with the opportunity, through the care offered by their adoptive family and through the support of North Lincolnshire Children's Services and partner agencies, to develop to their full potential and achieve positive outcomes in terms of their safety, education, health, leisure activities, and self-esteem and identity.

- We will actively promote the educational achievement of children in partnership with prospective adopters / adopters.
- We aim to help children to develop a positive self-esteem, emotional resilience and knowledge of their background as a means of supporting and valuing their diversity and identity needs. We recognise that achieving these outcomes demand a clear focus on the specific individual needs of children coupled with an awareness of the life-long nature of adoption and being an adopted person. Some of the main elements of this are:
 1. *High quality assessments and child permanence reports, which are quality assured at a senior level.*
 2. *A commitment to the careful preparation of children through direct work and keeping children informed throughout the adoption process.*
 3. *Children with a plan of adoption will be carefully prepared for adoption, using direct work techniques and the appropriate Children's Guide. They will have a personalised record of their family and personal history to keep.*
 4. *Utilisation of the following guides;*
 - a. *A Younger Child's guide to Adoption (boy version and girl version)*
 - b. *A Child's Guide to Adoption (boy version and girl version)*
 - c. *Young People's Guide to Adoption Support Services in North Lincolnshire*
 - d. *North Lincolnshire Adoption Service After 18 Guide*
 5. *Prospective adopters will be assessed on their capacity to safely meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.*
 6. *Contact plans that are based on the assessed needs of the child and which are reviewed where required, taking into account the wishes and views of all involved.*
- The voice of children in care and/or adopted is critical to achieving the best possible outcomes for them. We are therefore committed to listening to children and to taking their views, wishes and feelings into account when making decisions on their behalf. We have developed a range of consultation and participation processes to ensure that all children are consulted, unless by virtue of their age – for example a baby or infant - and level of understanding makes ascertaining their views, wishes and feelings not possible.
- A variety of methods or approaches are used to establish children's views including play or direct work, questionnaires, and interviews. Where children are disabled and are unable to express their views and feelings verbally or in writing we ensure that they have access to other means of communication such as IT or through a specialist professional who possesses the requisite communication skills.
- Children can also access advocacy and be given advice with regard to contacting the Children's Commissioner and Ofsted.

- The Adoption Service has a sound understanding of the sufficiency needs with regards to children in North Lincolnshire who may require an adoptive placement. Ongoing targeted recruitment activity aims to meet the needs of children requiring adoptive placements by ensuring that we have sufficiently skilled and approved adopters able to meet the needs of children who require an adoptive placement both locally and nationally.
- Where in-house adopters are not available, we utilise all available avenues of family finding without delay, for example, working with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies; Regional Adoption Agencies; other Local Authorities; Adoption Link; attending exchange days and activity days.
- The needs of individual children are considered as paramount and each case is considered on the basis of how individual children's needs can best be met. No child will be left waiting indefinitely for a 'perfect match'. Children's needs will be accurately assessed and they will be matched with adopters who are able to provide a safe, loving and permanent home. Support will be provided to help achieve a successful and lasting placement.
- The preparation and assessment of prospective adopters covers both children's generic or basic health needs and particular needs resulting from children's experiences of past trauma, abuse and neglect. Implications for re-parenting children with developmental delay and attachment problems are fully explored.
- Where a family has been identified for a child, the prospective adopters are provided with full and detailed information regarding the child's health. They will also have the opportunity to meet with medical professionals. Thereafter, the child's health needs are addressed as a key part of the adoption support plan or where there is an assessment for adoption support services post adoption. In certain cases, referrals are made to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service who, subject to their criteria and assessments, will undertake work with adoptive children and/or their families in partnership with Children's Services. The Adoption Support Fund is also utilised when we meet their criteria in respect to a request for funding of a therapeutic service.
- To work in partnership with education professionals, health professionals and other organisations to develop and deliver informed, responsive and effective support services to all parties affected by adoption. These services should reflect the lifelong implications of adoption. Within North Lincolnshire, we have an excellent partnership with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- Enquiries from all prospective adopters will be responded to promptly and without prejudice, we are committed to ensuring no one experiences discrimination in terms of personal differences such as age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, colour, religion, racial, ethnic or social origin, marital or partnership status or employment status. Each enquirer will be given clear information about recruitment processes and the preparation, assessment and approval process.

- People wishing to adopt children from overseas will be provided with relevant information and initial counselling from the Adoption Service. If enquirers wish to take their interest further, this can be obtained by receiving more detailed preparation from Yorkshire Adoption a regional Voluntary Agency as per a service agreement. However, should applicants wish to have a full assessment carried out, this is a private arrangement and they will become responsible for the payment of a fee to the Yorkshire Adoption Agency.
- Adopted adults will be enabled to gain access to their birth records and will be given assistance in making choices about search and reunion. Services may be provided through a service level agreement between the council and a registered Adoption Support Agency or the council's own Adoption Service staff.
- The service aims to involve birth families as much as possible, treating them with openness and respect and encouraging full participation wherever possible. To help birth families maximise the contribution they can make to promoting and preserving their child's heritage and sense of identity. We recognise the specific needs of birth families in the adoption process and provide or help access services, which take account of their feelings of loss and grief. Free access to independent support services will be available in all cases.
- Assistance to birth relatives regarding intermediary services will take account of the likely impact of disclosure on all parties involved and wherever possible will obtain consent before progressing to contact.
- Appropriately, qualified and experienced practitioners will deliver all services.



4. OUR FOCUS ON OUTCOMES 2021 - 2022

As a service we have continuously shown improvement in our performance.

In June 2017 we were inspected by Ofsted with the report of this inspection being published in September 2017. Adoption was judged as **outstanding**. The following comments were made within the Ofsted Report;

'The Adoption team offers a service that is highly effective, forward thinking, sensitive, increasingly timely and child focused, and the support offered to children and adopters throughout their adoption journey is valued and a real strength'.

'Achieving permanence through adoption for children is a high priority in North Lincolnshire. Comprehensive permanence planning and consideration of adoption being at the earliest possible stage, and concurrent and twin tracking planning ensures that children do not experience drift and delay. Decision-making and progress are effectively monitored, further supporting timely permanence'.

'North Lincolnshire has shown continuous improvement in the average timescales for children entering care and moving in with their adoptive families. Current published data indicates that North Lincolnshire is performing better than national and statistical neighbour averages, ensuring that children are placed with their permanent family as soon as possible.'

'Arrangements for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters are highly effective and timely'.

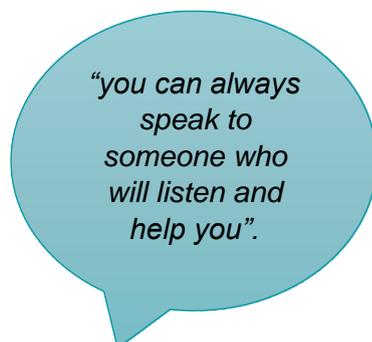
'There are effective and timely assessments of adopters in line with national requirements and the service is responsive and sensitive to the needs of adopters within the process'.

'Well attended and highly valued child appreciation events are held for all children prior to children being introduced to prospective adopters. These draw together a range of professionals, carers and significant people in children's lives to give information, tell stories and to give a real sense of the children who may be placed with them'.

'Preparation and planning for the child's transition to the adoptive family are thorough, sensitive and effective. Adopters reported that children are prepared well for adoption by their foster carers and their worker'.

'Impressively effective and responsive adoption support is offered in a variety of creative ways, dependent upon need'.

'Adopters and children spoken to by the inspectors stated, for example:



Adopters spoke of the invaluable support that they receive from 'buddying' arrangements that put them in touch with adopters who have experienced similar circumstances'.

Our performance information does tell us that for many children we are achieving timely

permanence. This in turn impacts positively upon the life outcomes for those children. This sums up the overall aim of our service and this value is embedded in all staff within the service.

We will continue to use the performance information to identify performance priorities and to ensure monitoring processes are in place to ensure optimum performance and attainment of targets set. This includes the use of a monthly performance tracker.

The Department for Education Adoption Leadership Board published the 2019 Adoption Scorecard on the 24th August 2020. The scorecard reflects that as a service we are performing well, which the below indicators evidence;

Average time between a child moving in with its adoptive family. Where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)

Our 2016-19 3-year average was 318 days, up from 291 days in the previous period. The England average for this period was 376 days, the SN (statistical neighbour) average 362 days and the Y & H (Yorkshire and Humber) average 360 days. This has improved to 274 days in 2017-20.

Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days)

Our 2016 – 19 3-year average was 122 days, up from 111 days in the previous period. The England Average for this period was 178 days, the SN average 198 days and the Y & H average 167 days. This has improved to 90 days in 2017 – 20.

Average time between entering care and placement order (days)

Our 2016 – 19 3 year average was 254 days, up from 225 days in the previous period. The England Average for the period was 257 days , the SN average 239 days and the Y & H average is not provided. This has improved to 223 days in 2017-20.

The 2020 Adoption Scorecard has not yet been published and publication of this is anticipated sometime in 2021.

We continue to promote early permanence placements with the aim being to place children much earlier with those who could offer permanency, should it be the case that the child cannot live with their birth family.

To continue to achieve good outcomes for children the adoption service works closely with Social Work Services and it is this that makes a significant difference in many aspects of adoption work. The differences it makes includes for example; knowing what children are likely to require an adoptive family and being able to target recruitment accordingly; timely planning; child focused planning; having adoption experience readily available and good sense of local performance in respect to the adoption scorecard.

As a Service we are ready for any challenges and we have worked hard to be a cohesive staff group who will support each other through challenge and change. Our ultimate focus is ensuring that children remain at the heart of adoption work and at the heart of adoption decisions made. As an authority we have always worked hard to ensure that we have the right care plan for a child. As a smaller authority we have a history of working with other agencies, as it is not always the case that we can match in-house and so this stands us in good stead.

Moving forward into 2021 – 2022 adoption continues to remain high on the agenda in North

Lincolnshire and our key outcomes remain;

- **To encourage more people to adopt and in particular to consider early permanence placements and also providing placements for harder to place children.**
- **To reduce the time it takes for children to be placed with a loving family.**
- **To make sure adoptive families get the support they need.**

We will do the above by ensuring;

- For those adopters who want very young children we do discuss with them early permanence whilst also being mindful that for some adopters the risks associated with this is not something they feel able to consider, which we respect. It is increasingly likely that if approved adopters want to experience parenting a young child then this will be via an early permanence arrangement.
- We work closely with prospective adopters and approved adopters to help them understand the profiles of those children who are waiting for an adoptive family. We offer further training / activity sessions in thinking about caring for siblings and harder to place children via the Regional Hub and via their one-to-one sessions with their Adoption Social Worker. We work hard to connect our adopters with children who are waiting and a valuable resource in doing this is Adoption Link and Activity Days. By using these methods adopters waiting can visibly see and understand the needs of the children waiting and connections can be made. It also enables adopters waiting to feel more proactive in their own family finding.
- We continue to monitor the plans of children closely by way of the Adoption Cohorts and the Pre-Birth Cohorts so that we can ensure that we are tracking assessments to ensure no delay and where appropriate early permanence is considered and we can seek an early permanence placement.
- The provision of universal adoption support and also timely adoption support assessments where requested / required, with referrals to the Adoption Support Fund where appropriate and where the Fund Criteria is met.
- We will continue to work closely within our partner authorities within our developing Regional Adoption Agency, alongside other Regional Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.



Regionalisation of Adoption Services

Background

The government's adoption reform agenda was set out in the paper 'Regionalising Adoption', which was published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015. Within this there was an expectation that Local Authority Adoption Services would merge with other Local Authorities to form a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by 2020.

As a Local Authority, we have taken the time that we have needed to ensure that in moving forward, any decisions that are made, are taken in line with what would be the best thing for children and families in North Lincolnshire.

Following careful consideration, in October 2020 we formally joined Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. We were warmly welcomed into this partnership.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement. The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

The vision of the RAA is that:

- Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters
- Its shared aim is to deliver the benefits of a regional agency without disrupting arrangements that are already working well in each Local Authority. There is no plan to move staff away from existing bases.

It remains the case that;

- North Lincolnshire Council will retain responsibility for all aspects of care proceedings for children with a plan for adoption, counselling for birth parents as well as adoption allowances. Non-Agency adoptions and matters relating to special guardians will also be managed from within the local authority.
- Arrangements for Adoption Panels will continue to be managed locally at present. As part of the regional arrangement, we will continue to explore opportunities to share panel capacity, but we are not considering changing current arrangements at this time.

Governance and Management

The RAA will be accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is aligned to the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for Looked After Children. The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops. The Board includes representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency.

The FAL Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority. The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each LA. Each partner LA retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager.

The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

As part of the new regional adoption agency, there is a new logo that we will be using which identifies us as being part of FAL.



5. WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE ADOPTION

The feedback we have received as a service indicates a high level of satisfaction. Examples of feedback received are;

Our worker was 'brilliant and kept in touch with lots of support' [adopters of 2 siblings in receipt of post order support]

The service received from North Lincolnshire Adoption 'has always been excellent' [adopter whose child was receiving support from an adoption worker]

'Just wanted to say thank you to everyone involved on Saturday. The boys had a wonderful time!! Even in that heat. You do some great things for the children. It's much appreciated.' [a family who attended an Adoption Team hosted event]

'We were never in doubt about where we were in the process and how long it might take. [Our worker] has been efficient' [prospective adopters]

We had a 'Clear, straight forward instructions (plan) of what would happen, regular social worker contact and all forms given and explained.'
[prospective adopters]

'The team got back to us quickly with a booklet regarding the process, we have received lots of clear written forms and feedback.'
[prospective adopters]

'We can't begin to thank you enough for all you've done for us, putting up with us and eventually bringing us so much happiness. You are a true credit to your team and all the people you help in such a profound way. We will forever be grateful...and all the time you spent with us' [adopters who had a child placed and went on to adopt their child]

The assessment process and training 'It gave us more insight into the process and helped us get to know more regarding the role of our social worker and also enabled us to get to know her a little more, hence feel more comfortable in the following months. It gave us knowledge of different issues such as attachment.'
[prospective adopters]

'I feel the service are doing the best they can to support birth families and keeping them up to date with what is happening' [birth parent]

Birth grandparents valued 'the help with writing my letter to my grandchildren

who are adopted'

'I would say it is a brilliant service. My worker has been there since day one and it is helpful that I can ring one person. If my worker is on leave however, I know that I can ring the team' [birth parent]

My worker has 'helped me make sense of what has happened. I am being given the chance to explain to my children about the mistakes I have made...I hope that by writing to my children they can make sense of

things more and it will also help me make sense of my own past' [birth parent being supported to contribute to letterbox contact and a child's life story book]

COVID 19 Feedback

Everyone during 2020/21 has experienced an unprecedented event with COVID 19. This has meant that we have had to adapt as a service and find different ways in which to carry out adoption business safely for those we are working with and ourselves. It is with pride that we can say that throughout COVID 19 we have continued to provide an adoption service and that it has been a service that has been valued by those we are working with. Alongside, a testament to the commitment of the staff team.

We have sought the views of those we have worked with, in particular, as we plan for the future, to help inform us of what has worked and what we can continue to develop.

Overall, the questionnaires evidenced a satisfaction with the virtual way that we were working and direct quotes are as follows;

'We value the level of support we are receiving'

'I know that you are always there if I need help or advice. You are doing a good job'

'It has been fantastic to have support at the end of the phone. To be able to speak to someone who understands the challenges we are facing'

'The contact [with their worker] had increased during lockdown' and they were appreciative of this

'Agreeing a contact plan via telephone which has been maintained over time has been helpful'

'Agreeing when that contact will occur via text so I can plan around home schooling has also been useful'

'It has been both invaluable and provided a fresh perspective on managing my child's behaviour'

'Support to get our children a place in school has been beneficial for the whole family'

'Having the collaborative support with Family Support Service and Adoption has enabled change and the workers are a credit to the service'

"Support to ensure my child had a place in school over the holiday periods was essential' and was provided"

'Telephone contact which is co-ordinated with the Barnardos Therapist has meant that support is spaced out in the week and collaborative in nature'

'Agreeing when that contact will occur via text so I can plan around commitments to relatives has been helpful'

6. SERVICE AND STAFF PROFILE

There is a strong culture within adoption and amongst all staff of continuously looking at ways in which we can improve and develop the services we provide. This is reflected in our performance.

Retention of staff is excellent within the Adoption Service. It is worthy of note that most staff within the service have extensive experience in respect to adoption work. The longest serving staff member within the service has been in the team for twenty one years. This is closely followed by two other staff members. The experience within the team is extremely well regarded and this knowledge and experience within the team is shared across and benefits the whole service.

Currently the adoption element of the Adoption and Fostering Service comprises of: -

- 1 x Service Manager with a lead responsibility for adoption
- 1 x Practice Supervisor
- 3 x part time Social Workers
- 6 x full time Social Workers
- 1 x 30 hours per week
- 1 x part time Panel Coordinator post

All appointments working directly with children are subject to safer recruitment procedures and all staff receives regular supervision, appraisal and development opportunities including training and shadowing. Frequent team meetings are held and regular team days. The staff have a strong value base of providing our children in care with high quality, safe and nurturing family-based care which best meets their needs and achieves optimal outcomes.

It is the responsibility of the social workers within the Adoption to undertake the below adoption tasks;

- Family finding for children
- Recruiting and assessing prospective adopters
- Stepparent adoption
- Facilitating training
- Family finding for adopters
- Supporting adoptive placements
- Post Adoption Support assessments
- Support Groups
- Birth Record Counselling

We do not have separate post adoption workers / team. Our rationale for this is due to us being a smaller Local Authority. We have not wanted to limit any workers skill set in any particular area i.e. to have only one support worker and be reliant upon that person to provide post adoption support, which could also then impact upon capacity of the support services we can provide. Instead, we have workers who are skilled in all areas of work and who also have the opportunity to take lead roles based upon their areas of interest.

We have found that this approach works well for us as a smaller authority and the benefit (also evidenced via the feedback we receive) is that we know our families in North Lincolnshire and that our families feel confident in approaching the team to request support. Our adoptive families have the opportunity to meet all of the team at the various social events we hold.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) for North Lincolnshire is Di Rees. She is a Service Manager who fulfils the requirement of the Adoption Support Services Advisor role by having many years of experience across Children’s Services and this also includes experience in adoption work. Should you need to do so, please contact the Adoption Service 01724 297024 for her contact details.

Please see appendix 1 for the Structure Chart.

Agency Decision Makers

Name	Post	Decision to be made
Tom Hewis Di Rees	Head of Early Help and Protection Service Manager, FaSST	A child should be placed for adoption
Nikki Alcock Annmarie Brierley Tom Hewis	Lead Officer, Children's Multi Agency Resilience & Safeguarding (MARS) Head of Children’s Social Care, Deputy Director Head of Early Help and Protection	Prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child or continues to be suitable to adopt a child A child should be placed for adoption with particular prospective adopters To disclose protected information about adults under section 61 of the Act and regulation 15 of the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 when determining an application

Name and address of the Registered Provider and Registered Manager

The Registered Provider	Relevant qualifications;
<p>Paul Cowling Service Lead, Resources North Lincolnshire Council Church Square Scunthorpe North Lincolnshire DN15 6NL paul.cowling@northlincs.gov.uk</p> <p>01724 297024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BA Hons Social Science July 1986 • Diploma in Social Work June 1995 • Diploma in Social services Management July 1998 <p>Experience;</p> <p>Paul has been a qualified social worker since June 1995 and since then has always worked within Statutory Children Service's</p>

The Registered Manager	Relevant qualifications;
<p>Karen Everatt Service Manager (Adoption) North Lincolnshire Council Church Square Scunthorpe North Lincolnshire DN15 6NL karen.everatt@northlincs.gov.uk</p> <p>01724 297024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BA Hons (Social Policy & Criminology) • Diploma in Social Work • Masters in Social Work • Post Qualifying Award in Childcare • Diploma in Counselling • ILM Level 3 Management <p>Experience;</p> <p>Karen has been a qualified Social Worker since 1999 and she has always worked within Statutory Children's Services.</p>

Staffing Qualifications and Experience

Post Title	Gender	Qualifications of current post holder	Experience of current post holder
Practice Supervisor – Adoption	Female	Diploma in Social Work	Qualified Social Worker since 1996.
Social Worker	Female	BSc (Hons) Social Work	Qualified Social Worker since 2018
Social Worker	Female	Bachelors Degree, Sociology Masters Degree, Social Work	Qualified Social Worker since 2019
Social Worker	Female	BSc (Hons) Social Work	Qualified Social Worker since 2009.
Social Worker	Female	BA (Hons) Social Work Post Qualifying Award Children and Families	Qualified Social Worker in 2007.
Social Worker	Female	Diploma in Social Work Diploma in Counselling Consolidation – Learning and Professional Development Children and Families (Masters level)	Qualified Social Worker since 1997.
Social Worker	Female	BA (Hons) Social Work Bsc (Hons) Psychology	Qualified Social Worker since 2007.
Social Worker	Female	MA Social Worker Degree LLB Law and Criminology	Qualified Social Worker since 2010
Social Worker	Female	Diploma and Masters in Social Work	Qualified Social Worker since 2010.
Social Worker	Female	Diploma in Social Work Child Care Award	Qualified Social Worker since 1997.
Social Worker	Female	BA (hons) Social Work PQ Consolidating Practice EPD	Qualified Social Worker since 2010.

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The methods we use are as follows;

Adoption Panel

- Regular statistical and performance reports are available to the panel and timescales for children for whom adoption is the plan are monitored.
- An annual summary report is presented to the panel with managerial comments on performance.
- Quality issues raised at panel are fed back via the Agency Advisor to the relevant social work team and follow-up is reported to subsequent panel meetings where required.
- Recommendations about policy, procedures and the quality of reports are discussed at an annual feedback meeting involving the Director of Children and Community Resilience, the Agency Advisor and the Adoption Panel Chair.
- Reports to the Adoption Service are completed by the Adoption Panel Chair incorporating Panel Members feedback. The feedback given includes comments on the quality of reports; the meeting of standard timescales and the meeting of the requirements of the Regulations on the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005. This information is used to identify service quality issues and to inform the annual review of the Panel Chair and business meeting with the Agency Decision Maker to plan for any required improvements.

All panel members receive an induction and ongoing training which consists of;

Induction;

- Information about Statutory Regulations, policies and procedures
- Contact details of Panel Chair and Panel Advisor
- Meeting with Panel Chair and Panel Advisor to discuss roles and responsibility
- An opportunity to observe Panel

Then as a panel member they have the following;

- Receive panel papers 7 days before the Adoption Panel is held and should they wish they have the opportunity to discuss any issues with the Agency Advisor
- Opportunity to feedback to Agency Advisor any issues
- Monthly performance reports
- Any updates to policies and procedures
- Training
- All Panel Members also have an annual appraisal where their performance is considered by the Panel Chair and Agency Advisor. Members are asked to complete a self-assessment form prior to this meeting and at the review each panel members personal training needs are discussed.

Ongoing training;

We facilitate Adoption Panel Workshops which Panel Members, Adoption Social Workers and Team Leaders are invited to. Decision makers are also invited to attend.

Service user consultation

The feedback we receive as a service is important and we use this feedback to develop our services. Seeking, listening to and responding to the feedback are key ways in which the Adoption Service works with service users.

We collect feedback and consult via the following methods;

- We have established an Adopted Young Person's Group called 'Superkidz's and the young people who attend are always eager to give their views verbally and to help us think about how best to support them / what they would like us to do.
- Collecting verbal feedback that is given to us via support groups and social events that we hold.
- All approved adoptive parents give written comments about their assessment and preparation and the quality of their prospective adopter's report, which then is presented to the Adoption Panel within their prospective adopter's report.
- Adoptive parents and their social workers who attend the Adoption Panel are invited to complete a questionnaire about their experience of attending the panel.
- Service users accessing PAC-UK are asked to complete a service user form by PAC-UK.
- Service users are invited to complete a questionnaire about the service they have received.
- We ascertain birth families views via the work we undertake with them.
- We also hold an annual consultation event 'Celebrating Adoption'. This is a way for us to capture the views of those adoptive families who do not have active involvement with us. We use this feedback to develop our post adoption support.
- We ensure that we have a presence at the Council Marketplace Events and Children's Service Events and actively encourage those we work with to give feedback about our service.
- We also ensure that those who are working with us are aware of who the Adoption Services Advisor is for North Lincolnshire Council and that they are aware that they can make contact with the ASSA should they want to seek advice about an adoption support matter.
- North Lincolnshire Council also has a robust formal complaints procedure and it is available to those who may wish to complain about any aspect of the service.

Any lessons are picked up throughout the year on receipt of responses. Points for improvement are noted and shared with relevant professionals, in adoption team meetings and raised at panel training days.

Overall, the feedback we receive tells us that service users in the main are happy with the services that we provide and that they feel supported.

Supervision and Management

- Staff supervision takes place on a monthly basis as well as informally; quality checks on the work produced take place at regular points in the process including before presentation to Panel of all cases.
- Staff training and professional development has a high focus in the service and is monitored on an annual basis by the appraisal process.
- Monthly audits are undertaken. Actions arising are followed up and lessons for improvement are shared with the social work teams.

Performance Management

- Time scales for children and prospective adopters' assessments being presented to panel are monitored by the Service Manager and the Adoption Panel and also via the Adoption Cohorts Meetings.
- Progress of children who are waiting to be placed with adoptive parents is monitored regularly within the Adoption Cohorts Meetings.
- Monthly performance reports are circulated to Senior Management, Staff and Adoption Panel.
- Team days are used to track progress and development and also include feedback on quality assurance issues which have arisen.
- An annual adoption business report is presented to Senior Managers and the Council Executive. These reports highlight the range of relevant statistics and comments on performance measures. In the year-end report, there is also a narrative report on the service across the year.



8. RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

A key area of focus will continue to be **the recruitment and assessment** of adopters and the adoption recruitment strategy outlines our position. Our **local recruitment** will be underpinned by both the **Regional Recruitment Strategy** and the **National Adoption Recruitment Strategy** for adoption.

National Adoption Recruitment Strategy January 2021 – December 2023

This strategy sets out what the **National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG)** will do over the next three years to make a difference to the lives of children. The strategy is built upon a commitment from all those involved in the adoption system across England, bringing together all the major stakeholders in the delivery of adoption services across England. The **NARSG** works closely with the **Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board** and the **Department of Education** to ensure a consistent approach to policy and practice.

Regional Recruitment Strategy – Family Adoption Links

Alongside the National Strategy, the **Family Adoption Links Marketing Plan** sets out the regional steps we will be taking with regards to adopter recruitment.

The **Regional Strategy** identifies that by working closely together we can achieve the overarching aims as defined in the '**Regionalising Adoption**' document. Those aims being;

- A **larger adopter pool** – created by sharing resources and better targeted recruitment activities.
- **Speedier and more effective matching** of children with adoptive families.
- Opportunities to **reassess approaches to adoption support**, address gaps and to develop a more comprehensive training package for adoptive parents.
- **Improved collaboration** between RAA's, LA's and other agencies in some RAA's.

North Lincolnshire Council's Placement Sufficiency Strategy

The Placement Sufficiency Strategy sets out the strategic intentions of North Lincolnshire Council in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (Children Act 1989 s22G) towards children in care.

Our local recruitment strategy also works within the scope of this and we play a key role in the ambition of securing permanence at the earliest point for those children who enter care. Our role being to ensure we have adoptive families available to offer placement choice and permanency to children.

Aims and Objectives of our Local Recruitment Strategy

All of the above strategies will underpin our own local strategy with shared values and vision in securing the right adoptive family for every child in a timely way and encouraging a wider diversity of adopters to come forward.

First and foremost, the key value we work to is that all efforts should be made to ensure that children are supported to remain within their birth families and communities. However, where this is not possible, and permanency is required by way of adoption, that this is then achieved in a timely way.

Therefore, the key aim of the recruitment strategy is to set out how we will recruit the adopters needed to meet the needs of children who require permanence by way of adoption.

Our recruitment is underpinned by the above and recruitment remains high on the agenda.

We continue to identify earlier matches where we can and the recruitment strategy is based around understanding the profile of those children who are likely to require an adoptive placement and targeting recruitment. By targeting our recruitment accordingly, we can look to recruit and assess adopters that we can place North Lincolnshire children with. However, we are also aware of the children that are waiting nationally and so our recruitment is also focused upon seeking adopters who can consider early permanence and harder to place children.

We use the Adoption Cohorts and Pre-Birth Meetings to monitor the children where assessments are ongoing and children who have twin track and adoption plans. The information from these meetings is very helpful in us being able to predict what adoptive placements may be needed.

We have a recruitment timetable in place which we adapt as needed and it includes using a variety of different methods including digital recruitment. We hold monthly information events where those interested in adoption can come along and find out more. We currently have outdoor banners and have made use of the various council wide communications methods.

Our recruitment focuses on the message **'Time to Adopt?'** and we also encourage people to **'spread the word'** that North Lincolnshire are looking for adopters. We are looking for people with a range of experiences and from a wide range of backgrounds, with varied personal circumstances, taking into account the differing needs of children waiting for adoption.

In our recruitment, we aim to use our adopter networks, as we know that **'word of mouth'** is one of the most powerful things there is when it comes to potential adopters choosing which agency they would like to work with. We welcome interest from any adoptive parents who would like to support in our recruitment.

North Lincolnshire Adoption has a strong record in being able to meet their sufficiency needs as the annual business report evidences.

Adoption and Fostering Ambassadors

This initiative is to encourage employees of the council to become ambassadors and to promote fostering and adoption within their workplaces. They will be required to complete an e learning package about fostering and adoption, which then culminates in a short test. They will then be issued with their badges proclaiming them as ambassadors and will be able to signpost those interested in fostering and adoption to us. This is another way in which we are using those we work with to **'spread the word'**.



9. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Preparation for Adoption

North Lincolnshire Council recognises the importance of sensitive and age-appropriate preparation for children to enable them to successfully move on to their adoptive placement. The primary responsibility for preparing a child for adoption rests with the child's social worker. However, foster carers, health service professionals, fostering social workers, adoption social workers and birth family members can assist the social worker in this task.

Family Finding and Matching

Children referred for adoption are allocated an adoption social worker to act as a family finder. The family finder has a number of key responsibilities in respect of the child;

- To consider the specific needs of the child, so that an appropriate family can be sought which most closely matches those needs.
- To offer support, advice and assistance to the social worker, and significant others, including foster carers and birth family members, in preparing the child and supporting them throughout the adoption process.
- To speedily identify a suitable adoptive family through a range of family finding activities which are carried out concurrently.
- To work alongside the child's social worker in carrying out thoroughly all the preparatory tasks prior to presenting any proposed match to the North Lincolnshire's Adoption Panel.
- To take a lead role in the planning of introductions of the child to prospective adopters to ensure a successful transition.
- To review, with others, the placement.
- To work with the child's social worker to prepare a report for Court in relation to the Adoption hearing.
- To consider the support needs of any adoptive placement made and in particular, the support that a child placed for adoption may require. This can include completion of adoption support assessments and support plans and the chairing of support meetings.

North Lincolnshire Council will seek, where appropriate to place children with adoptive families approved by the Council, family finding activity will be vigorous and designed to minimise delay in placement.

Information and Support

North Lincolnshire Council is committed to ensuring that children are provided with information and support throughout the adoption process.

All children, taking into account age and understanding, are provided with a copy of the Children's Guide, once a decision has been taken that adoption is the plan or when appropriate.

Children will also be given information about prospective adopters who have been identified for them. This information will take the form of photograph albums, or DVD recordings.

After the placement has been made, if appropriate, the child may receive indirect information from their birth family, via the council's Adoption Contact Letterbox Service. All letterbox arrangements are child focused and must be in the child's best interests. The system, which is administered by the Adoption Service, passes information between birth family members and children (or adopters acting on behalf of children). The type of information passed on, together with the frequency of exchange, are set out in a written agreement which all parties sign and are expected to adhere to.

The child's needs for adoption support services are assessed at different stages of the adoption process. These are as follows;

- Where North Lincolnshire Council is considering adoption for the child.
- Where it is proposed that a child be placed with particular prospective adopters.
- When a child is matched with an adoptive family support plans are put in place.
- Where a child's placement for adoption is being reviewed.

Examples of adoption support services provided for children include;

- Information, advice and counselling.
- Therapeutic services.
- Support for contact arrangements between adoptive children and birth relatives
- Financial support.
- Social Events for Adoptive families.
- Group meetings for adopted children.

Where children are being provided with adoption support, they are provided with a copy of the 'Children's Guide to Adoption Support' appropriate to their age. This guide is also available to other adopted children who may wish to seek adoption support at any time.

The support needs of any child placed for adoption by North Lincolnshire Council will also be assessed following a request from the child or the adoptive parent(s) for up to three years after the making of an Adoption Order. For adopted children who live within North Lincolnshire, adoption support assessments will be made upon request at any point unless their placing authority continues to be responsible for three years after the making of an Adoption Order.

Any support plan may make reference to other services such as those provided by education or health professionals. These services will, therefore, be consulted in the preparation of the plan.

The primary goal of the provision of adoption support services is to ensure the continuance or success of adoptive placements.



10. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Prospective adopters in North Lincolnshire will receive a service that responds to their interest in adoption promptly, fairly, openly and with respect.

The framework for assessing prospective adopters is as follows;

Pre-Assessment Information Stage

- The Adoption Service receives enquiries by telephone, email or by web enquiries.
- A Duty Officer is available during normal office hours (Monday to Friday) to respond to any enquiries.
- Enquiries will be followed up within 24 hours via telephone contact and with the information booklet being sent the same day either by email or post.
- Follow up contact will be made within 5 working days and where enquirers request further information this will progress to a referral and an initial visit. A Registration of Interest form will be completed and submitted to the Adoption Service. Within 5 working days of receipt of the registration of interest form the decision will be made by the Adoption Service as to whether it proceeds or not. A letter will be sent notifying of the decision.
- Upon decision being made to proceed then an Adoption Social Worker will be allocated and prospective adopter begins Stage One.
- Where the Adoption Service declines registration, a written explanation is provided and will give contact information for other agencies where appropriate.

Stage One – Initial Preparation / Training Prospective Adopter-led

- Stage One begins when the agency accepts a prospective adopter's registration of interest. This stage should take no longer than 2 months and where longer than 2 months is required an explanation for this will be clearly recorded within case records. At Stage One the Adoption Service and prospective adopter will produce a written agreement which will set out the responsibilities of them both.
- Within Stage One, police and health checks will be undertaken. The prospective adopters will need to give names of three referees, two of whom cannot be related to them. The Adoption Service will telephone interview each referee and make a written report of the interviews with them. There will then be a face-to-face meeting with the referees within Stage 2 and a written report will be completed following this.
- During Stage One 'Self-Learning Packs' will be given to support the adopter-led learning. Workshops are held and the allocated worker will book the prospective adopters onto the workshops. There will also be the opportunity to learn from experienced adopters and adoptees. More information will be given about the children waiting for adoptive placements.
- Within the above the allocated worker will explore with the prospective adopter the preparation and learning style most suited to them and support / adaptations can be made.

- The Adoption Service will inform the prospective adopter of their decision at the end of Stage One and explain that they must tell the Agency if they wish to proceed to Stage Two within 6 months of the decision. A prospective adopter is able to take a break of up to 6 months between Stage One and Two.

Stage Two – Agency-led Intensive Training / preparation and assessment

- Stage Two of the Adoption Process will not begin until a prospective adopter has completed Stage One and have notified the Adoption Service that they want to proceed to Stage Two.
- Stage Two should take 4 months and is about intensive training and assessment. Should more than 4 months be required then an explanation for this will be clearly recorded within case records. The Adoption Service and prospective adopter need to create an assessment plan; this will detail for example, the assessment process, dates of meetings / visits and agreed training. The allocated worker will guide prospective adopters through this process.
- The Adoption Service will provide the prospective adopter with a copy of the report and invite them to send observations on the report within 5 working days. The report then goes before the Adoption Panel. Once the Panel have met the Agency Decision Maker will make the decision.

Agency Decision

Suitable to adopt: Where the prospective adopter is approved the agency should inform them in writing

Unsuitable to adopt: The prospective adopter has the right to request an independent review. The agency must provide a letter detailing their full reasons. The prospective adopter has 40 days to make representation to the agency.

Stage Two ends when the decision is made about whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt.

Information about North Lincolnshire Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panel has three key functions in relation to children and families, it must consider:

- The case of the prospective adopter referred to it by North Lincolnshire and make a recommendation as to whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt.
- The proposed placement referred to it by North Lincolnshire and make a recommendation as to whether the child should be placed for adoption with particular prospective adopter(s).

The recommendation of the panel is then passed to the identified Agency Decision Maker for a final decision to be made.

The panel is made up of professional and lay people, who have knowledge or experience of adoption through their work or their personal lives. The Panel is chaired by an independent chair who has extensive experience of chairing both adoption and fostering panels.

Inter Country Adoption

A regional inter country Adoption Service has been established. The Yorkshire Adoption Agency undertakes inter country adoption work on our behalf and the service includes post adoption support and reporting work where required as well as the preparation of adopters who want to adopt by way of inter country. There will be financial costs to prospective adopters who chose this route and The Yorkshire Adoption Agency will discuss this directly with those interested.

Foster Carers Who Wish to Adopt their Fostered Child

Foster carers who make a formal application to adopt children that are in their care are entitled to the same information and preparation as other prospective adopters.

Where foster carers are accepted as potentially suitable to adopt a child in their care, they can be expected to be assessed in the same way as other prospective adopters. The assessment can be fast tracked. The assessment will focus on the specific long-term needs of the child in question and will consider the following;

- The quality of the attachment between the child and the foster carers.
- The wishes and feelings of the child.
- The assessed ability of the foster carers to provide permanent care for the child through adoption.
- The impact on the child now, and for the rest of their lives, of being adopted by these particular carers.



11. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES FOR APPROVED ADOPTERS

Following approval, prospective adopters will receive clear information about how a child will be matched with them and how family finding will be undertaken.

Regular contact will be made to ensure that adopters' circumstances remain updated and that discussions on potential children for placement are held regularly. We encourage our approved adopters to consider membership to Adoption UK.

Approved adopters are reviewed annually if a match has not occurred.

When a potential match is identified, prospective adopters are given full written information about the child, which includes their emotional, developmental and health needs. The prospective adopters will also be provided with clear and detailed information about any areas of uncertainty regarding the child's future development and the possible implications of these for the child and themselves.

Prospective adopters will have the opportunity to attend a Child Appreciation Day. This will enable them to meet and hear from different professionals who have been involved with the child. At the same time, the meeting serves to convey a sense of the child's journey.

Preparation work prior to placement focuses on not only the prospective adopters and also other members of the household. North Lincolnshire Council makes every effort to prepare and protect all those involved.

Prospective adopters are given ten days to consider the placement report which will cover areas such as contact plans, and support plans as well as the reasons for believing the family will meet the child's assessed needs over time.

Adopters are invited to the placing authority's (the area in which the child resides) Adoption Panel when the placement is considered. Once a decision has been made, the adopters will be invited to a Planning Meeting to arrange their introductions to their child and plan for the administrative and formal information sharing.

Adopters may be supported financially to meet basic safety needs at the point of placement and any costs associated with the introductions. This will be a consideration during the matching process.

Approved adopters are supported by regular contact, advice and visits by the adoption social worker and the child's social worker from the point that the child is introduced to them through to the making of the Adoption Order.



12. ADOPTION SUPPORT - GENERAL

After the making of the Adoption Order, support may also be provided if a support plan is in operation or it is decided to provide services as a result of an assessment of needs. North Lincolnshire retains responsibility for any North Lincolnshire Child for three years following the making of the Adoption Order. A child placed in North Lincolnshire from another area remains the placing authority's responsibility for three years following the making of the Adoption Order.

Adoptive parents, adopted children or any member of the household including any other children of the adopters, are entitled at any time to request an assessment of their needs for Adoption Support Services under the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005.

Adoption support services are accessed via a formal assessment of need where the request will involve ongoing provision of services. Where one-off support is the likely outcome, this will be provided without a formal assessment.

Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was launched nationally on the 1st May 2015. The aim of the fund is to reduce the gap between adoptive children needing therapeutic services and receiving them (ultimately to improve outcomes for young people and families).

On the 14th January 2016 the government confirmed that the funding for the Adoption Support Fund would continue, increasing year-on-year, for the next four years. The Fund remains in place for 2021/22.

The Adoption Support Fund can be used to provide therapeutic support for children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families. The DfE is keen that adoptive families have early access to therapeutic parenting training and attachment-based therapy, both of which will help to establish relationships and create a stable family environment.

As a service we will remain responsible for core support and assessments of need, and we will be able to apply to the fund when therapeutic services are needed; subject to meeting the fund criteria.

Currently, a broad range of adoption support is provided within the framework set out within the Adoption Agency regulations. A significant amount of support to adoptive families is provided in house. However, where it is assessed to be required referrals are made to our local CAMHS or to other therapeutic providers.

We have a good working relationship with our local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. The lead Clinical Psychologist is an Adoption Panel Member and there are also monthly meetings to consider service provision.

Support Services

The support services that North Lincolnshire provide are wide and varied. The support includes the following;

- Social Events
- Training
- Fun Days

- Adopted Young Person's Group
- Birth parent support group

There is a booklet that is updated annually that summaries the support services available. This booklet is called the 'Adoption Core Offer of Support' and is made available to adoptive families.

All of the above events are very important as they allow families to keep in touch and provide a wonderful opportunity to enjoy family time and also to keep in touch with staff. This helps us identify early on if there are any support needs and to provide services prior to issues becoming more serious.

- **Support to Social Workers and other professionals** - The service is happy to provide workshops on a variety of topics for example;
 - Early Permanence
 - Life Story Work
 - Overview of the Adoption Process
 - Lifelong Implications of Adoption on all involved
 - Life Appreciation Days
 - Supporting Adoptive Families – Messages from Disruption Research and how to get support right from point of initial contact.

We run these workshops on request and where need has been identified.

- **Education and the Adopted Child** - We are available to offer support and guidance. Where appropriate we can offer bespoke training to schools in respect to understanding adoption and how best to support the adopted child.

We provide written information in respect to the Pupil Premium, which details how this is accessed.

- **Training** - As a service we continuously review and develop the training we provide to our adoptive families based upon need and feedback received.

Our adoptive families are able to access the Local Authority Training Plans and we are continuously reviewing and revising this to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our adoptive families.

- **PAC-UK** - We commission PAC-UK (formerly After Adoption) to provide some services for us in respect to birth families and adopted adults, for example, birth records counselling, or independent counselling.
- **Bespoke Training Packages** - We welcome being approached from all those working with adopted children / young people and their families, in respect to discussing any bespoke training they would like the Adoption Service to provide. For example, we are happy to go into schools to provide training around attachment and understanding the needs of the adopted child. There may be some occasions where there has to be a

charge for this training. This depends upon the costs incurred by the Adoption Service, and this is something that would be discussed alongside any conversation regarding a bespoke package of training.

- **Family Adoption Links (FAL)** - As part of FAL we are developing access to a range of events and training, for example; preparing for children to move in courses and second time adopters' courses. As these different events are advertised, we will ensure that North Lincolnshire Adopters are given the information and are encouraged to attend.
- **Post Adoption Contact** - North Lincolnshire manages the post adoption contact arrangements for every North Lincolnshire child, placed in their adoptive placement and following the making of the Adoption Order.

It is our belief that any contact arrangements (indirect or direct) must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.

It may serve on or all of the following functions;

- To maintain a child's identity. Consolidating the new with the old.
- Provide reassurance for the child.
- Provide on-going source of information for the child.
- To give the child continuing permission to live with an adoptive family.
- To minimise sense of loss.
- To assist with the process of tracing.
- To give adopters a secure sense of the right to parent.

The letterbox facilitates the indirect contact between children, adoptive families and birth families throughout the adopted child's childhood. Arrangements are reviewed on an annual basis but can be reviewed at any time in accordance with the child's needs.

Birth relatives may request an assessment in relation to support for contact arrangements with their birth children.

The adoption social worker's role is to act as intermediary between all parties. Acknowledgment is given that all children's needs may change, and it is the adoption social worker's role to mediate between everyone involved.

Birth relatives may need assistance in writing letters and responding to news received through the letter box and this is provided by the adoption social workers.

- **Financial Support** - Adopters can be assessed for a means tested allowance based on the needs of the children placed. This allowance is discretionary and is reviewed annually in respect of the needs of each placement and the child.

Additional financial support to adoptive parents or special guardians will be considered only in the circumstances prescribed in the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 and the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

In order to comply with principles of a base rate applying to all types of substitute parenting which involve council funding, the base rate is the same whichever route is chosen so that there is no financial incentive or disincentive for an adopter or special guardian to opt for one route rather than another.

The base rate for an adoption or SGO means tested allowance is set and maintained to be in line with the Level 1 base rate received by foster carers in North Lincolnshire. For 2021 – 2022 this is:

0 – 4:	£138:00
5-10:	£154:00
11-15:	£176:00
16+:	£204:00

A means test is used to determine the amount of finance to be received by each family.

Discretionary additional financial support may be given due to the needs of the children placed with adoptive parents or under special guardianship. All child related benefits are deducted from any allowance paid, as we are not able to replicate these payments.

- **Adoption Support Services Advisor** - Adoptive families or others affected by adoption may choose to seek advice and assistance through North Lincolnshire's Adoption Support Services Advisor. The role of the Adoption Support Services Advisor is to act as a single point of contact and respond quickly to provide advice, resolve problems, or to help to arrange, where appropriate, for services to be provided. They also work closely with other departments such as health and education to help develop and improve services.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor may be contacted by writing to:

The Adoption Support Services Advisor
North Lincolnshire Council
30-40 Church Square House
Scunthorpe
North Lincolnshire
DN16 6NL
Telephone: 01724 297024
Email: adoption@northlincs.gov.uk

Further information regarding Adoption Support including the legal framework can be obtained on request.



13. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES FOR BIRTH FAMILIES

North Lincolnshire Council will value and respect the wishes and feelings of birth families and will take account of their views when planning for their child's adoption.

North Lincolnshire Council will work with birth families to help them maximise the contribution they can make to promoting and preserving their child's heritage and sense of identity.

North Lincolnshire Council recognises that adoption is an evolving, life-long process for all those involved and will provide support to birth families at all stages of the process, both during adoption, and throughout life.

Those birth families working with the Adoption Service will be invited to give feedback in respect to the Service they feel they have received and this will also influence service development. Birth families are able to obtain independent support through After Adoption Yorkshire, a specialist service for people involved in adoption. North Lincolnshire has a Service Level Agreement with **PAC-UK (formerly After Adoption)** which includes the provision of intermediary services.

Counselling

It is the role of the child's family finder to offer and provide adoption counselling to birth family members. This can be accessed at any time during the adoption process, including after the child has been adopted. This service may also be provided by PAC-UK should the birth family wish. This is a delicate and sensitive role and there is an acknowledgement for the birth families experience of grief and loss. Birth family members often access this support, which is seen as independent from the childcare team. The Adoption Service can support birth families by helping them to produce materials which give an account of their circumstances and feelings surrounding the loss of their children and which may contribute to Life Story books. We also carry out work with birth parents enabling them to create their own memory books. These books can have benefits not only for the birth parents themselves and also their adopted children as they grow up.

Other Intermediary Activities

Birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for them. North Lincolnshire Council provides services to respond to this need. This may include;

- Information about other resources or adoption support agencies.
- Assistance to write letters to place on an adopted child's file.

- Information about the Adoption Contact Register.

The provision of intermediary services in relation to birth family members who wish to seek information about adopted children who have reached adulthood, with or without a view to establishing direct contact. In these circumstances the formal consent of the subject is required before information can be disclosed.

14. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES FOR ADOPTED ADULTS

Birth Records Counselling and Information

This service is provided to adults who were adopted before 30 December 2005 to enable them to access their original birth record details and to consider the likely implications and meaning for them of exploring their birth family of origin.

The purpose of counselling is to ensure that the adopted person has considered the possible emotional impact of any enquiries, both on himself/herself and on others as well as uncertainties surrounding any searching or possible reunions.

Adopted adults will be supported and may pursue their enquiry via obtaining an original birth certificate, requesting access to information in their adoption file or requesting help to locate birth relatives with a view to meeting.

File access and information sharing is provided in line with government guidance. It is imperative that the information sought, is provided in a sensitive and appropriate manner.

A Service Level Agreement is in place with PAC-UK to provide birth record counselling when required.

Intermediary Services and Vetoes

Adopted adults who were adopted before 30 December 2005 are also able to request that there is an absolute or qualified veto placed on their records and on the Adoption Contact Register should they wish for no contact or no contact with specified people.

Adopted adults can request Intermediary services to provide for mediated contact with birth relatives. This service can be provided by the Adoption Service or through a registered adoption support agency.



15. DESCRIPTION OF PERMANENCY OPTIONS

The following list provides options when considering the most appropriate permanent care for a child. Permanence with family should be sought as the first choice for a child if it is in their best interests, only when this cannot be achieved should other care be sought. The list should not be seen as a ladder of options. Good assessment and planning should help determine which of the priorities is the most appropriate for the individual:

- Staying at Home
- Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons
- Adoption
- Early Permanence which includes consideration of Fostering for Adoption / Concurrency placement
- Child Arrangement Order/Special Guardianship Order
- Long Term Fostering
- Residential Care

Staying at Home

The first stage in permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together.

This involves the provision of to ensure that the child's placement with his or her family does not breakdown or, where it does, that the child is restored to his/her natural family as quickly as is safely possible.

Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons

If the assessment concludes that a child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with a family member or Friend/Connected Person as their carer. This will either be as part of a work plan to return the child home, or as a preferred option of permanency if a return home is not in the child's interests.

It is vitally important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, in order to comply with court proceedings and avoid delay for a child.

Permanence with Family or Friends/Connected Persons should be considered if:

- There are no significant risks to the child with the birth family/friends or connected person.
- There is a high likelihood of achieving permanence with birth family/friend or connected person.
- There is wider family support.
- Agencies are able to provide sufficient long-term help to support the family/friend/connected person to maintain the child's stability and wellbeing throughout their childhood.

- There is a low risk of further harm or disruption by the parents.
- It meets the wishes and feelings of the child.

Adoption

Adoption transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who have parental responsibility, including the Local Authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s).

The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if he or she had been born to them. The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK.

Research indicates adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor to contributing to the stability of children, especially for those under four years of age who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family.

Early Permanence including Fostering for Adoption

A child for whom adoption is thought to be a likely outcome may be placed with prospective adopters who have been given temporary approval as foster carers. This can be where the child's plan is likely to become adoption, and other options have not yet been ruled out for that child.

Approved prospective adopters can be given temporary approval as foster carers under Section 25A of the Care Planning and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This temporary foster carer approval planning process can be carried out at the same time as the adopter approval process.

The local authority should consider placing a child with dual approved foster carers whenever it is considering adoption; or where the decision has been made that the child ought to be placed for adoption, and where the agency does not yet have authority to place the child for adoption through either a placement order or parental consent.

Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a specific group of children, who need a sense of security, stability within a placement away from their parents, and without the absolute legal break, associated with adoption.

Child Arrangements Order

This is an order that dictates with whom the child concerned is to live; this person acquires Parental Responsibility via the order. The Order can also outline arrangements regarding contact with the child. It may be used to increase the degree of legal permanence in a placement with family or friends/connected persons, or a long-term foster placement where this would be in the child's best interests.

Long-term Fostering

Long-term foster care can be an option that is in the best interests of children who retain strong links with their birth family, and whose wishes and feelings indicate they do not want or need the formality of adoption. It is also used when the carers wish for continued involvement of the Local Authority, with shared parental responsibility.

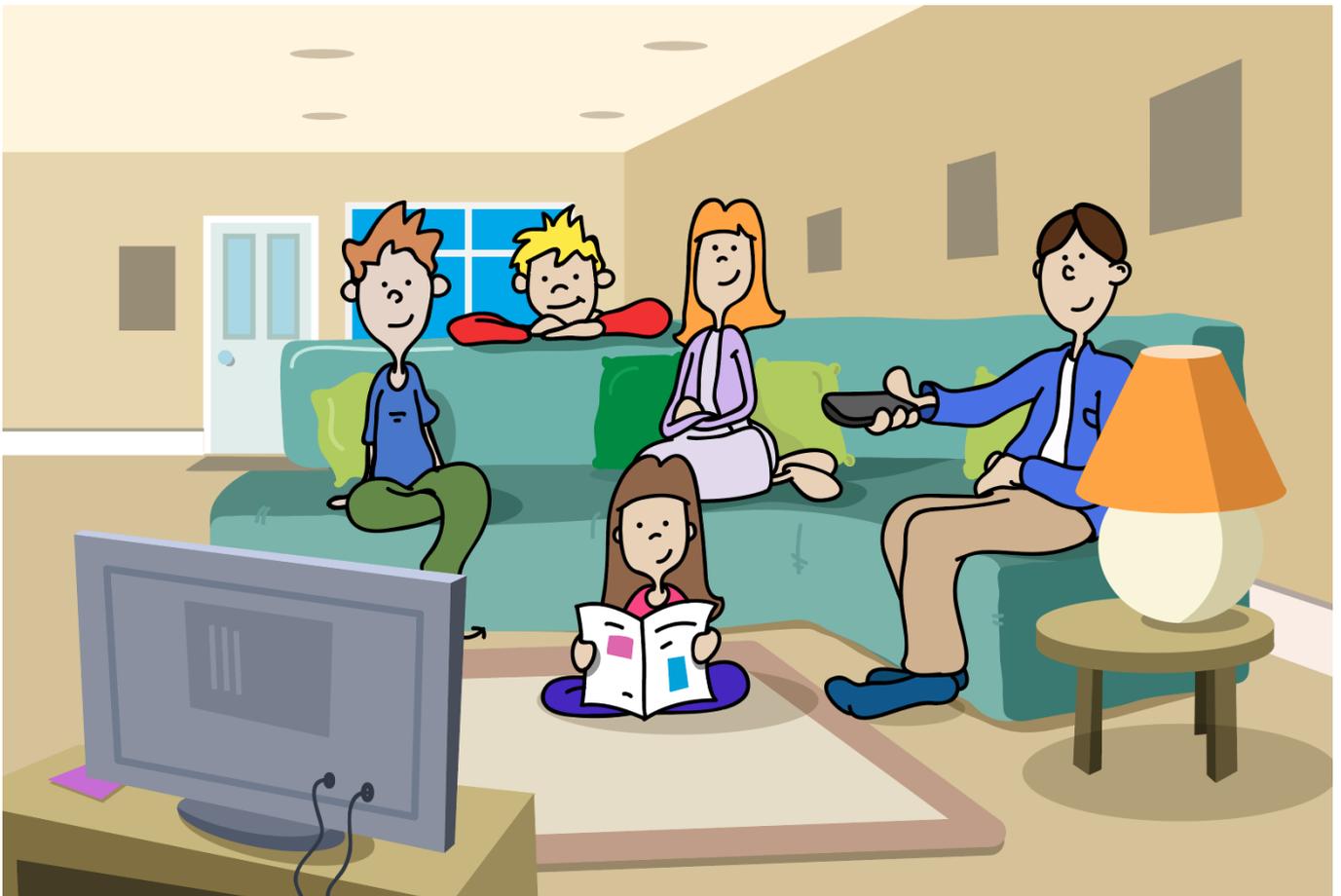
Residential Care

Residential living is only likely to be considered in very few cases when the criteria for permanence is met and it is not possible, or appropriate to provide a fostering placement.

The needs of the young person may be such that they cannot be met within a family placement or it may be the wishes and feelings of the young person not to live within a family.

Final Note;

For children whom adoption is not appropriate, each case will need to be considered on its merits. The decision between the options will depend on the individual needs of the child set alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each legal route.



16. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

At times, adopters, children, birth families and other people affected by adoption may feel unhappy about the services they receive. The Adoption Service works within North Lincolnshire Council's complaints procedures. If you have a complaint we encourage you to contact the service directly in the first instance. Staff there will do all they can to put things right and resolve the issue for you. If you feel the matter is still unresolved or you wish to complain formally, please report your complaint to;

Lesley Cooper
Contact and Relationship
Manager North Lincolnshire
Council Church Square House
30 – 40 High
Street
Scunthorpe
North
Lincolnshire
DN15 6NL

Telephone Number 01724 297069

Email Lesley.Cooper@northlincs.gov.uk

If you remain unsatisfied with our response you may wish to contact the **Local Government Ombudsman on 0300 061 0614**.

17. MANAGING ALLEGATIONS

Approved Adopters can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with North Lincolnshire's Children's Multi Agency Resilience and Safeguarding (MARS) arrangements. All allegations are managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer.

In addition to the role of the supervising social worker, adopters can have access to an independent social worker who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters listed in the Regulations are monitored by the manager who ensures that the appropriate notifications to Ofsted and other agencies are carried out.

Should there be a Safeguarding Concern following the making of a Adoption Order then the usual Safeguarding Procedures are followed as per policies and procedures.



18. FAMILY ADOPTION LINKS NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any questions about anything in this Statement of Purpose then please do not hesitate to contact;

Karen Everatt, Adoption Service Manager **01724 297024**

karen.everatt@northlincs.gov.uk

Address;

**Family Adoption Links North Lincolnshire
Church Square House
30 – 40 High Street
Scunthorpe
North Lincolnshire
DN15 6NL**

19. OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS:

The Children's Commissioner for England

The Children's Commissioner for England promotes and protects children's rights in England. The Commissioner does this by listening to what children and young people say about what matters to them and making sure adults in charge take their views and interests into account. Contact details are;

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Telephone: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk



Appendix 1

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE ADOPTION TEAM

