



London Borough of Hillingdon

**Children's Services
Adoption Statement of Purpose
2018**

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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose (SOP) explains the vision, objectives and services provided by Hillingdon Adoption Service. The Adoption Service is delivered through the Assessment Team who manage adopter recruitment and assessment and the Permanence Team who manage and support approved adopters, family finding permanent placements for children, including adoptive placements, services for adopted adults, adoption and Special Guardianship post order support.

This SOP will be kept under review on an annual basis and revised to reflect any changes as and when they occur. It is available to staff, adopters, children and young people, families, other professionals and the general public via the Hillingdon website.

Adoption Services are part of Children's Services.

The services operate within the legislative requirements of:

- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption & Children Act 2002 (2011)
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards (2014)
- Adoption Statutory Guidance: Adoption & Children Act 2002 (2005)
- The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Children Act 1989
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2003 and 2005
- Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- Fostering Services Regulations Data Protection Act 1989

The Hillingdon Adoption Service is also an active member of:

- The London Councils Adoption & Fostering Groups, with regard to the development of adoption services across the London area
- The Coram / BAAF specialist group
- South East Post Adoption Network

The Statement of Values

The Adoption Service supports the upbringing of children within their birth or extended family in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. Where this is not possible Hillingdon are committed to ensuring looked after children are placed with adoptive parents that will make them feel safe, loved and able to fulfil their potential.

The Adoption Service recognises the lifelong impact of adoption on adoptees, birth relatives and adopters and seeks to offer a service which is responsive and sensitive to these needs. The key principle underpinning the Adoption Service is that children should be at the centre of the adoption process and their welfare, safety, needs and wishes will be fully taken into account at all stages.

Our Aims and Objectives

The London Borough of Hillingdon's Adoption Service aims to provide a comprehensive range of adoption services to:

- Children in need of adoption
- Birth families
- Adopters applicants and approved adopters
- Those affected by adoption
- Special Guardians

Aims:

- To ensure that all children in Hillingdon who require permanency by adoption are provided with an adoptive family who can meet all their identified needs and offer a secure, stable and loving environment throughout their childhood, into adolescence and beyond.
- To recruit, assess and train prospective and approved adopters so they can provide a wide range of placements, which meet the diverse needs of children.
- To ensure the Adoption Service completes Stage One of the adopter approval process within two months and Stage Two within four months unless there is good reason for not doing so or on request of the prospective adopter.
- To seek placements from our partners and contacts when no in-house placements can be found. These include the Adoption Consortia, the National Adoption Match, Link Maker, Adoption Exchange events and through the use of dedicated publications and private or voluntary agencies, within the financial resources available to the Service.
- To ensure that a high standard of post placement support is provided for all Hillingdon children and adopters to ensure the maximum success of the placement.
- To provide a high standard of support to approved adopters to help them find children whose needs they can meet.
- To be committed to working in partnership with children, their birth families, adopters and other agencies to ensure that the services offered are based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice.

- To ensure that there are effective and reliable systems in place for recording, managing and storing information about children placed for adoption and all those affected by the adoption process.

Hillingdon Adoption Service will strive to not just meet but exceed the National Minimum Standards 2014. We are committed to continuous improvement and want to maximise our achievements in the areas that make the most difference to children, young people and families.

Service Objectives:

Our primary objectives in support of these aims are:

- To provide clear and useful information on the adoption process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption to help raise awareness and the profile of adoption amongst the general public.
- To prepare and assess adoptive applicants who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally in a transparent and timely way.
- To prepare adoptive parents for the challenges as well as the joys that adoption brings and instils prospective adopters with a realistic understanding of the needs of children awaiting adoption.
- To help adoptive applicants to consider that with support they may be able to adopt a child with a different profile to the child they originally envisaged adopting.
- To ensure that children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- To ensure children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- To provide a service for children and their families that truly values diversity and promotes equality. Ensuring that each child and their family have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability, sexuality and class background.
- To place children with adopters who provide an environment that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self-worth.

- To promote partnership working in determining a child's future by engaging the child, partner agencies, colleagues, those with parental responsibility, prospective adopters and adoptive families in the adoption process.
- To arrange and promote contact with birth parents, siblings, other members of the birth family and significant others when it is beneficial to the child and the stability of the adoptive placement.
- To provide a range of adoption and special guardian support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters, special guardians and their children in partnership with other agencies.
- To provide a high standard of post placement support to the children placed for adoption, or with a special guardian by Hillingdon for the first three years post adoption/granting of an SGO, when the adoptive/SGO holders family live outside of Hillingdon.
- To ensure children are given a copy of the Children's Guide to Adoption and this is explained to them according to their age and understanding.
- To provide adopters and children with clear and appropriate information about the child/ themselves, their birth parents and families in the form of a life-story book and later life letter no later than 10 days after the granting of the adoption order. The adoptive parent/s will safeguard, share and promote these with their child according to their age and understanding.
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed with the relevant party and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all in the adoption process
- To certify that the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with and learns from, those in receipt of their services through consultation, feedback, compliments and complaints.
- To ensure the service is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service. That staff providing services will be trained and will continue to update their knowledge and skills to ensure a consistent and high standard of service delivery.
- To use effective and efficient systems for recording and storing information about Hillingdon children placed for adoption, their birth families and others affected by the adoption process. The service maintains administrative records and financial management systems necessary for the effective and efficient running of the service.
- To ensure that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise the available resources.

In meeting the aims and objectives the Adoption Service will work to the relevant legislation and regulation, BAAF/Coram best practice guidance and the relevant policies of London Borough of Hillingdon.

Services Provided

Hillingdon Council offer their Adoption Services to adults and children through two teams.

- i. Recruitment and Assessment Team who manage adopter applicants
- ii. The Permanence Team who manage all other aspects of the adoption and permanency service for children and adults

Recruitment and Preparation of prospective adopters

The Recruitment and assessment team work to a Recruitment Strategy with an annual operational marketing plan which is reviewed and updated at the beginning of the financial year. The strategy recognises the need to recruit adopters from within Hillingdon and surrounding areas in order to meet the varied needs of the children requiring adoptive placements. A yearly analysis of placement needs and recruitment activity will inform the operational plan which sets out the process by which adopters will be recruited, trained, assessed and supported and families will be found for children in need of adoption. It will include details of the various marketing methods that will be employed by the service in partnership with Hillingdon's communications department to realise the aims of the strategy.

There may be periods the recruitment of adopters will be closed to new enquiries. People approaching Hillingdon will be sign posted to where they can explore alternatives.

Enquiries/ supporting people interested in adopting a child through Hillingdon

There are various ways that people who are interested in adoption can contact the service to find out more about adoption. These are publicised on the Council's website, on recruitment posters and leaflets and through other forms of advertising ensuring that adoption is publicised and awareness of the need for adoptive families from a range of backgrounds and ethnic communities is made apparent.

There are two types of enquiry, the first being a general enquiry for people at the initial point of exploring adoption. The service can give general information and advice and also signpost enquirers to further information and reading. All enquirers will be invited to attend a monthly adoption information session. The general information that people can expect to receive will include the following areas:

- Eligibility for adoption;
- Who are the children who need adoptive families;

- Assessment process and the legal implications of adoption;
- Useful sources of information;
- Answering any questions the enquirer has about any aspect of adoption.

The second type of enquiry is a specific enquiry for those people who already have some knowledge of adoption and have decided that they wish to begin their 'adoption journey'. For these enquirers Hillingdon's Adoption Service will strive to gather and share information within 10 working days of their telephone/email enquiry.

The adoption social worker will seek to gather information by telephone and a face-to-face initial interview. Where a couple are seeking to adopt, both enquirers need to be present for the initial interview. The social worker will consider eligibility for adoption in relation to:

- Practical situation - Adopters need to be over 21 years of age, domiciled in the UK, not have a conviction in relation to harm to a child and be able to consider the children who need adoptive families.
- Whether the enquirers are prepared to proceed within the timescales. The enquirer may be considered not ready to proceed if they have recently experienced any significant loss such as a bereavement, separation, job loss, or where they are about to experience a significant upheaval e.g. moving home, changing jobs.
- The enquirers need to have ceased fertility treatment.
- If the enquirers are a couple, they need to have lived together for at least 2 years.
- Accommodation needs to be suitable, which will usually include a spare bedroom for a child.
- Ideally the enquirers will have some contact and experience with children, or be willing to gain this with our support.
- They will need to give agreement to checks and references being carried out, including if applicable, a reference from a previous partner.

All completed initial assessments are discussed by the team to decide if the enquirer is suitable to proceed. If the adoption team or manager deems an application as being unlikely to succeed, this is acknowledged to the applicants at an early stage and the reasons for this explained verbally and in writing. Where the enquirer/s wish to proceed and the service makes a decision that the enquiry is suitable, the applicants will be invited to register their interest by completing a 'Registration of Interest' form. There may be times when the service is not able to accept a Registration of Interest – details will be provided to person/s enquiring if this is the case, for example insufficient capacity to assess the applicants or there is an excess of approved families waiting.

Registration of Interest (ROI)

Once the Adoption Service has informed the enquirers in writing of the acceptance of their ROI, they can then proceed to the **two-stage assessment process**. The aim of the process is for adopters to be prepared for approval and adoptive parenting, so that more children can be placed in families and the service is also responsive to adopters.

Stage 1 commences when prospective adopters authorise the London Borough of Hillingdon to complete the necessary statutory checks. These include medical checks, Disclosure and Barring Services check (regarding any criminal convictions), Local Authority residency checks, personal references and overseas checks. This stage should be completed within 2 months, but may take longer if checks are delayed or the adoptive applicants and the Adoption Service agree that more time is needed.

The Adoption Service will ensure that all first time adopters are offered and made aware that they are expected to attend a 4 day Adoption Preparation Training. The first day of the Preparation Training will be offered to new and first time applicants in Stage One and the next three days will be offered in Stage Two. Adopters are asked to complete a workbook during Stage One. If support is required to complete this is available from staff in the Adoption Service.

Assessment of adopter applicants

The Adoption Service seeks to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, timely and fair.

Stage 2 commences when the adoptive applicants begin their regular meetings with their Social Worker to collect the information which will be needed to assess their suitability to be approved as Hillingdon adopters. At the onset of the home study the assessing social worker will meet with the applicants and propose and agree a framework for the assessment, setting the target panel and all dates for assessment meetings and details of the areas that will be covered at appointments. The Stage Two agreement is completed at this stage. The assessment work is prepared for the Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) to be presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for a recommendation, hopefully of approval as suitable to adopt. This stage should be completed within four months but may take longer if the adoptive applicants and the Adoption Service agree that it needs to. The 'home study' assessment is undertaken by an Adoption Social Worker and a 'second opinion' home visit may be undertaken by the manager of the team. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity and suitability to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs (physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs). Adoptive applicants are assisted through both the preparation groups and the home study process to provide evidence to support their application. This helps to identify the competencies and strengths that they have, and those that they will need to develop, if they are to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.

A copy of the social worker's PAR report is given to the adoptive applicants to check for accuracy and generate further discussion. They are given the opportunity to write any additional comments they wish the Fostering and Adoption Panel to take into account and they are asked to countersign the report if they accept the contents as true and accurate.

There can be a gap (at the adopter's request) between adopter applicants completing Stage One and commencing Stage Two, of up to six months. This break can be used for a number of reasons i.e. when adoptive applicants have some plans which may prevent them from completing stage 2 within the timescales, such as a house move, being unable to take the time away from work at that point, or where it is identified that they need to do more research/learning and preparation for adoption.

Applicants are invited to the Fostering and Adoption Panel hearing their application, and although attendance is not compulsory, applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. The assessing social worker presents the comprehensive assessment report to the Fostering and Adoption Panel, which makes a recommendation on whether the applicants should be approved.

The applicants are informed by the Chair of the Panel's recommendations. The Deputy Director (acting as the agency decision-maker) considers all the papers and makes a formal decision. Once this formal decision has been made a written notification is sent out to confirm the decision within 10 days of the panel recommendation. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of their right to make representations to the agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Foster Carers and second time adopters

Foster Carers and second time Adopters will be invited and encouraged to attend Adoption Preparation Training. Where possible this will be tailored and delivered to meet their specific needs, but it is not a requirement that they do attend as part of the approval process. Both groups are able to move straight into the Stage Two, the full assessment.

When undertaking the assessment of a Foster Carer who is wishing to adopt or a second time adopter, the Service will aim to conduct a fast track assessment which uses all existing and historical information about the applicants to inform the current assessment. These assessments will be completed within the same four month timescale which is applied to first time adopters, unless there are good reasons to extend this period.

Fostering for Adoption (FfA)

Hillingdon Adoption Service will discuss with adopter applicants whether they may be interested in fostering a child for whom the borough is considering adoption and provide them with/direct them to more detailed information. If the applicants are interested, this will be indicated in their PAR. This will allow any local authority to note that interest and to match the prospective adopter with a child requiring a FfA placement subject to assessing and approving the prospective adopter as a foster carer. If it becomes apparent that it would be in the best interests of a particular child to be placed with prospective adopters in the first instance as foster carers, the London Borough of Hillingdon will strive to do so. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) 2010, amended 2013, Regulation 25A provides for a person who has been approved as an adoptive parent by a local authority to be temporarily approved as a Foster Carer for a named child. The local authority acting for the child needs to seek and approve the carers as Foster to adopt carers for the named child. In Hillingdon this is done by the Agency Decision Maker. Following placement the FfA carers are supported, financed and monitored along similar lines to foster care placements.

Family finding adoptive placements for Hillingdon's children

Finding and securing children in their adoptive placement in a timely way is the primary objective of the service. ***The Family Finding Standards*** set out the details of the work with timescales that should be adhered to secure the best adoptive family for every child with an adoption care plan. Following the first Child Care Review or before, when it is agreed that reunification with the birth family or friends may not take place, the child's social worker will contact the Fostering and Adoption Service to arrange a Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM). The aim of the PPM is to discuss and devise a plan for permanency including a parallel plan for the child/ren and sets the framework to ensure that drift is minimised. It is imperative that a parallel plan for permanence is established at the latest by the time of the child's second LAC review. All relevant stakeholders including the child's foster carers and birth family members (where appropriate) will be invited to attend the PPM subject to the individual circumstances of the case. If adoption is the plan, a family finding social worker from the Adoption Service will be allocated to work alongside the child's social worker in order to find a suitable, permanent placement for the child in a timely manner. The adoption care plan is presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to decide whether the child should be placed for adoption. Where a baby is relinquished by its birth parent/s for adoption, in which case the matter is placed before the Fostering and Adoption Panel for a recommendation and then passed to the ADM for a decision.

Family finding social workers will consider in-house approved families and those currently undergoing an assessment. Should there be no suitable in-house adoptive parents a referral is made to the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium (WLAPC) Adoption Match and Family Link. Thereafter, consideration will be given to the best way to recruit a suitable family. Decisions about assessing whether siblings should stay together, especially when larger sibling groups have an

adoption plan, should be completed at the first stage of the permanency planning process so a clear direction is established from the start. The Adoption Service will always seek to find creative and additional ways to family find for children. During the family finding process direct work will be undertaken by the child's social worker and foster carer to introduce and explain the children's guide to adoption.

Adoption Allowances

If an adoption allowance is applicable this will be agreed and arranged in accordance with Hillingdon's adoption allowance policy.

All calculations will be included in the adoption support plan, included in paperwork presented to the Fostering and Adoption panel as part of the child's adoption match.

Matching children with adopters

Once a match or several potential matches have been identified a selections meeting is held. The family finding social worker and child's social worker will visit the potential adopters. All potential adoptive placements will have two visits undertaken and the second visit will include the child's current foster carer, unless there are clear reasons why this is not in the best interests of the child.

A final PPM/family finding meeting will be held and the matching matrix regarding the child's needs is completed. In circumstances when there is more than one possible match, it is the family who are best able to meet the child's hierarchy of needs who will be matched.

Hillingdon's Adoption Services will provide approved adopters with full written information about the child's history prior to the match. Adopters can have access to the child's file once a match is agreed, if this is deemed appropriate.

An adoption support plan based on the child's identified and possible future needs will be completed as part of the matching process. The family finding social worker and the child's social worker jointly prepare the Adoption Placement Report, Adoption Placement Plan and Adoption Support Plan for presentation to the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

The Fostering and Adoption Panel must consider whether to recommend that a particular child should be placed with a particular approved adopter. The social workers, the adopters and their agency, if it is an inter-agency placement, are expected and encouraged to attend the panel but it is not a requirement that the adopters attend. Following the Panel's recommendation and the Agency Decision Makers' agreement to the match, a Placement Planning Meeting will be arranged to agree the child's Adoption Placement Plan. This meeting covers the areas that need to be agreed and put into action before the child can be placed with the prospective adopters and will focus on the introductions between the child/ren and the adoptive family and plan a date to formally review these. All adopters will produce suitable information about themselves to be shared with the child as part of the introduction process.

Training opportunities for approved adoptive parents

Approved adopters are encouraged to access a range of training. The annual foster carer training schedule is open to both approved adopters and foster carers and covers topics such as safeguarding children, first aid and managing challenging behaviour. Development training opportunities are also available via the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium.

Annual Review of Approved Adopters

In the event that no placement has been made within 12 months from approval, the Adoption Service will conduct a review of their approval status with the adopter which is then presented with a recommendation to the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Fostering and Adoption Panel

The Panel has a quality assurance role in respect of the Adoption Service and monitors aspects of practice determined by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determination (Amendment) Regulations 2011. The National Minimum Standards 2014 also provide relevant timescales in considering approvals for prospective families, reviews of approved adopters and matching of children with approved families.

The composition of the Hillingdon Panel is in line with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations and includes an Independent Chair and Vice Chair.

The Panel is additionally supported by:

- A panel Adviser
- A legal Adviser (Legal Services)
- A medical Adviser
- A Minute taker

A central list operates to ensure that the panel meets the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005.

The panel meets twice monthly and additional panel meetings will be arranged if there is a need for more. Panel members and the Agency's Decision Maker are supplied with copies of the reports to panel seven working days before the Panel meeting.

There are feedback mechanisms in place for attendees to provide user feedback to the panel and service. In addition, Panel provide written feedback to the service and ADM on the quality of the work presented.

The management team ensures the effective administration and functioning of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, including the recruitment and annual appraisal of Panel members. The Hillingdon Adoption Service report to Panel its performance in business meetings which are held twice a year between the service and the Panel

Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Services

The Adoption Service has specific policies and procedures for Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Services. Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Services are available to all Hillingdon children, adopters, special guardians and birth families both prior to and after the making of an order.

Support services include:

- Adoption Support Assessments
- Special Guardianship Support Assessments
- Birth Parent Counselling
- Schedule 2 Counselling
- BRICS (Birth Relative Initiated Contact Service)
- Letterbox System
- Contact arrangements
- Adoption Support Groups; pre and post placements
- Special Guardian support groups through the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium

Support prior to the Adoption Order once a child has been placed under the Adoption Regulations 2002

Hillingdon may, subject to assessment of need, provide a settling in grant to facilitate the introduction of children to their new family. Once the child has been placed for adoption visits from the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker will take place. The child will be visited during the first week of placement by his/her social worker followed by at least one of the workers visiting weekly up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement where the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed at that Review but will not be less than every six weeks. Placements are supervised and supported along the same lines as foster care placements to ensure that the carers are supported to care for children, meet their needs and help them to reach their potential. The status of the child as a 'looked after' child will continue until such time as an adoption order is granted to the adoptive parents.

The timing of the Adoption Order application will be kept under review with the Service advising families when they are eligible to make the application (after 10 weeks from the date of the adoptive placement). The application will be discussed at the child's review. The Adoption Service will provide support and advice to the adoptive applicants on preparing their application for the court, if this is in the best interests of the child.

Once the adopters have submitted their application to the court the Annexe A report will be prepared by both the family's and child's social worker.

Support for adopted children and families who have adopted a Hillingdon child, following the granting of an adoption order and services for children and families who hold a special guardianship order (SGO)

Anyone who adopted a child through Hillingdon's Adoption Service or had a Hillingdon child placed with them and holds a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or lives in the borough and is affected by adoption/SGO can request a support assessment by contacting the Adoption and Permanence Service. The services run a daily duty service; the contact details are located at the end of this document.

For families who have adopted through Hillingdon or who hold a SGO, this is an on-going service. For those families who live in the borough and adopted or had a child placed from another area, Hillingdon are responsible for assessing their needs when three years have passed since the granting of the adoption order. Depending on the nature of the referral and the outcome of an assessment, the type and level of support will be determined. In many cases this is about signposting families to other services, whereas some situations require a more in depth and thorough assessment of the support needs. Applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) will be made based the finding and recommendations of a adoption support or special guardianship support assessment.

There are two exceptions to the 3 year rule:

- The provision of any regular on-going financial support agreed before the Adoption Order, such as an on-going allowance, always remains the responsibility of the placing authority regardless of where the family live.
- The responsibility for the management and support of any contact arrangements remains with the placing agency. Regardless of where the family chooses to live, the placing authority should continue to be responsible for managing and supporting contact arrangements, such as letterbox arrangements agreed prior to the Adoption/SG Order, and any changes to those arrangements over time.

Support for birth families

Birth parents will be provided with information about specific support services provided by the Post Adoption Centre UK (PAC-UK) on behalf of Hillingdon. Children's social workers will provide birth families with their information when adoption becomes their child's care plan.

The children's social work service will provide information to birth family members about current adoption practice and its implications and will encourage birth parents to be involved in planning for their child's adoption through contributing to the Child Permanence Report, commenting on what is written about them and recording their wishes for their child's upbringing.

Birth parents will be informed of the progress of plans for their children and decisions are conveyed to them in a timely and sensitive way, verbally and in writing.

The Adoption and Permanence Service will promote and support the contact arrangements that have been agreed and endeavour to help resolve any issues relating to contact if they arise.

The Adoption and Permanence Service will give information to birth families about the Adoption Contact Register and will provide intermediary services in accordance with appropriate legislation, regulations and guidance.

Birth parents and families have the right to make representations and complaints about the adoption service. Birth parents and families will have access to the Council's complaints procedures

Support for Adopted Adults

The Adoption Service provides Schedule 2 Counselling for adopted adults and intermediary services for birth relatives and adopted adults.

The Adoption Service also receives requests from adopted adults who are trying to trace birth family and from birth parents or relatives who are trying to trace an adopted adult. The service will provide counselling to the individual wishing to trace a relative and access information from a variety of sources to help individuals begin the tracing process.

People who were adopted before 12th November 1975 are required to see a counsellor before they can be given access to their birth records. People, who were adopted after 11th November 1975, may choose whether or not they would like to see a counsellor before they are given the information that will lead them to their birth record.

Persons adopted before 30th December 2005

In the case of persons adopted before 30 December 2005, Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act preserves the legal right of an adopted person, on reaching the age of 18, to apply to the Registrar General for information they need to obtain a certified copy of their birth record.

The agency will continue to have the discretion under the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 to disclose identifying information to adopted adults who are seeking to find out about their family history and origins. This information may help inform any decision by the adopted person as to whether he or she wishes to apply for an intermediary service. If, however, a birth sibling has also been adopted then the agency will not be able to give out the sibling's adoptive identity without that person's consent.

Persons adopted after on or 30th December 2005

On reaching the age of 18, adults whose adoptions took place on or after 30th December 2005 have the right to receive from the adoption agency:

- A copy of their birth certificate
- The information originally contained in the permanence report prepared for the adoption Panel
- Copy of court documents relating to the adoption which do not contain protected information.

Written information will be provided to the adopted person about the availability of counselling but there is no legal requirement to receive it before being given the requested information.

If the agency decides that such information should be withheld from an adopted person, it must apply to the High Court for an order denying access to this information.

Contact support

The importance of the child maintaining some form of contact with birth family members, in particular siblings who are placed elsewhere, will be supported as appropriate in letterbox or direct contact arrangements and detailed in the Adoption/SG Support Plan. Details of any support birth relatives may need to enable them to meet the contact plans will also be included in this plan. Hillingdon facilitate a contact service between birth families and the SG/adoptive family. Contact can either be direct or indirect (letterbox) contact. Contact of any kind is often agreed in principle during the care proceedings and is only set up when it is believed to be in the child's best interests.

Contact and social networking

Social networking sites have impacted on many adoptive families and have the potential to affect many more. Increasingly, young people are using the internet to trace and contact their birth parents and other birth relatives. Birth relatives are also using the internet to trace their children. Hillingdon are taking this issue seriously and are working on strategies to help adoptive families appreciate the way in which social networking is changing adoption. This includes educating adopters during their training about the potential implications of social networking and aiding adopters to assist their children in understanding their life stories from an early age and to

promote positive contact with birth family members in a safe and secure way. Then by the time that adopted children are eligible to sign up to social networking sites they should be sufficiently aware of the risks associated with unsupported contact with birth family members.

Inter-Country Adoption

The Adoption Service is approached by individuals and couples who wish to adopt a child from overseas. These enquiries are signposted to the charity; Intercountry Adoption Services (IAC) who specialise in adoptions from overseas. A service level agreement exists with IAC to undertake all stages of the assessment process including providing information, carrying out the viability assessments, adoption preparation, prospective adopters report and approval at the ICA's panel. The current service level agreement started in June 2014 and is reviewed annually. Once a child is placed with adopters, IAC will notify Hillingdon and the welfare visits, support and supervision is handed back to Hillingdon's Adoption Service who appoint a social worker for the child and an adoption social worker to link with the adopters. Applicants can access information about this service through the website.

Storage and Security of Adoption Records

The London Borough of Hillingdon's Adoption Service adheres to the requirements of the Adoption Regulations and Standards in the way it manages adoption case records.

The London Borough of Hillingdon Children & Young People's Service has an electronic system for recording and storage of case records. Paper files have been archived with a specialist company in a secure storage facility when adoption orders have been made. Only the Adoption Service can access and request these files to be removed from the archive.

Adoption case records where there has been an Adoption Order are kept for 100 years. A policy is in place which determines the retention of case records in other circumstances. The same approach is taken with both agency and non-agency adoption.

Quality assurance, evaluation and monitoring of the work of the service

A number of mechanisms exist to monitor the work of the Agency and to ensure that service delivery is consistently of a high quality and meeting the performance targets (both national and local), and business outcomes identified in the service plan.

All children with an adoption plan are monitored on a weekly basis by the Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption until an adoption order is granted.

Bi-annual reports on the performance of the Adoption Service are presented to the Lead member for Children and Learning.

The Adoption Service is monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted. The last adoption inspection took place in July 2010 and the outcome was satisfactory. The report is available at the Ofsted website or by writing to Ofsted. A bi-annual report on adoption services enable the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel to monitor and evaluate the provision of services and ensure services are effective and of good quality.

Adoption and Performance Service Staff Qualifications

The Adoption and Permanence Service is part of the Children Resources Service. Experienced social work staff with relevant qualifications, who are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and have current enhanced DBS checks. Are employed to deliver these services. They are appointed by interview in accordance with the adoption standards, equal opportunities, good practice and the borough's human resources recruitment policies. Copies of staff qualifications, registration, references and checks are kept on personnel files for inspection and oversight by appropriate inspectors and managers. All staff receive a monthly supervision and permanent staff are subject to an annual appraisal.

All allegations and complaints against Hillingdon adopters are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel to ensure scrutiny and for recommendations as to the carer's suitability to continue caring. In all cases the needs of the children remain paramount.

Complaints and Compliments

Allegations, Complaints, Disruptions and Outcomes

All adopters are given a copy of the 'How to Complain about Council Services' leaflet plus information on the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Allegations relating to child protection matters are dealt with under the London Child Protection Procedures and Hillingdon's Safeguarding policy & procedures.

Complaints regarding the Adoption Service can be made to:

London Borough of Hillingdon
3S/03A Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 1UW
Tel: 01895 277801 - E-mail: complaintsmailbox@hillingdon.gov.uk

All allegations and complaints against Hillingdon adopters are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel to ensure scrutiny and for recommendations as to the carer's suitability to continue caring. In all cases the needs of the children remain paramount.

The outcome of adoption disruptions are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for scrutiny of decision making processes.

Registration and Inspection

Ofsted is responsible for having an overview of the Adoption Service. They undertake regular inspections of the Adoption Service as part of the new Ofsted inspection reforms. During the inspection Ofsted seek confidential feedback from service users, carers, and placing social workers.

Ofsted are alerted to any significant incidents, if they receive an allegation which meets a safeguarding threshold.

The service is registered with and inspected by Ofsted. Enquiries should be addressed to:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA 08456 404045
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231 (about children services)

Tel: 0300 123 4666 (complaints about agencies)

Tel: 0161 618 8524 (minicom / text phone enquiries)