

# **CROYDON COUNCIL**

## **Adoption Service Statement of Purpose**

**2017-2018**

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Croydon Council Adoption Agency. The information in this Statement of Purpose is prescribed in the Adoption Services National Minimum Standards. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed regularly and formally updated every twelve months.

The statement is informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended)
- Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- The Children and Adoption Act 2006 and associated regulations
- The Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2011 (as amended)
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010

### **1 Values, Aims and Objectives**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency provides a service that is underpinned by the following values statements as described in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS):

#### **Values- Children**

The child's welfare, safety and needs are kept at the centre of the adoption process.

Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.

Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.

Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.

A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.

The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.

Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.

Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

### **Values - adopted adults and birth relatives**

Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, 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 Aims of Croydon Council Adoption Agency**

To ensure a permanency plan is agreed for all Croydon's Looked After Children five and over, no later than by the second Looked After Review (four months) except if they are part of a sibling group aged zero to four+.

For children aged under five, a permanency plan should be agreed by the tenth day of becoming Looked After.

To ensure that as early as possible, clear action plans are agreed to achieve legal permanence, and where appropriate adoption is the permanence plan.

To ensure that when adoption is the plan, appropriate actions to implement the plan is progressed without delay and effective tracking and monitoring ensures that any obstacle or potential drift is identified and addressed in a timely manner.

To recruit sufficient adopters, who can meet most, if not all, of the needs of child referred to the adoption agency.

To assess and approve applicants within the statutory prescribed timescale of six months.

To provide prospective applicants with information of the adoption process, as well as information of the number and demographics of children available for adoption.

To provide an adoption support service that assists and enables children remain with their adoptive family and to enable children reach their full potential.

To provide prospective applicant's wishing to adopt a child from overseas, with information on inter-country adoption.

To provide information on the process of adoption for those people who wish to adopt a related child, e.g. step-parent and relative adoptions.

To provide support and access to case records to those people wishing to obtain information from their adoption files.

To provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption whether prior to, or after, the making of an adoption order.

To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by Croydon Adoption Agency.

To provide the agency's adoption social workers with positive learning opportunities to increase their skills, knowledge and experience, especially in the areas of new research, training and professional development.

## **2 Named manager**

The **Registered Person** and the **Adoption Support Service Adviser** is Henrietta Delalu, Service Delivery Manager, Adoption and Permanence.

In the event that the Registered Person is absent, Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service for Looked After Children, will act as the Registered Person.

The **Adoption Agency Decision Maker** is Ian Lewis, Director for, Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone E Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

In the event that Ian Lewis is absent, or when delegated, Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service for Looked After Children, will act as Agency Decision Maker.

## **3 Qualifications and Experience**

The Named Manager: **Henrietta Delalu** Service Delivery Manager Adoption Special Guardianship and Looked After Children. Henrietta Delalu qualified as a social worker in 2002 with a Master's Degree and Diploma in Social Work. She also gained a BSc in Social Policy and Management in 2000. Her experience includes, Social Worker in various Children's Specialist Social Care teams, direct line and operational management of Adoption and LAC services. Independent member Fostering Panel. Professional Adviser to Croydon's Adoption Panel. Henrietta is registered with HCPC.

Agency Decision Maker: **Ian Lewis**, Director of Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care. Ian Lewis qualified as a social worker in 1988. He worked as a social worker, primarily in child protection up to 1996. At that time, he started employment as a Team Manager in a Looked After Children Team in Tower Hamlets before transferring to become Team Manager of the Adoption and Permanence Team. During this time, he was the Agency Adviser to the Adoption and Permanence Panel. In 2002, Ian took up a position as Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering in the London Borough of Sutton. He continued in that position until 2009, when he moved to London Borough of Lambeth as Assistant Director for Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting. He sat on the Adoption Panels in both Sutton and Lambeth. In March 2014, Ian took up his current position at London Borough of Croydon. From 2004 until 2009, Ian represented London on BAAF's Social Work Practice Advisory Group. Ian currently Chair's the London Adoption Board. Ian is registered with the HCPC.

## 4 Organisation and Structure of Croydon Adoption Agency

**The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is:** Ian Lewis, Director of Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care. He is based on 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone E, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

**The Responsible Individual is:** Barbara Peacock, Executive Director, Children Families and Learning is responsible for the overall Management of Croydon's Adoption Agency. She is based on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone B Bernard Weatherill House 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

**The Appointed Manager:** The day-to-day management responsibility for the delivery of Adoption Services rests with the Delivery Manager, Henrietta Delalu. She is based in the Annex 4<sup>TH</sup> floor, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

The Adoption Team structure is designed to provide a seamless service within the People's Department combining specialist knowledge and skills in permanency work and ensuring timely and effective provision of services to service users. The Adoption Delivery Manager works closely with the Fostering Delivery Manager and the Delivery Managers in the Children's Social Care teams to ensure that services are provided in a coherent and flexible way, and consistent with keeping the child at the centre of the adoption process.

### **Organisation and structure**

The Adoption Service is part of Croydon's People Department Children's Social Care. The Head of Service, Looked After Children, has overall strategic responsibility for the Fostering Service, the Adoption Service, the Business Relations Team (placements) the Looked After Children Permanence Teams and the Leaving Care Team.

The Adoption Service is responsible for securing families for Looked After Children with an adoption plan. It is also responsible for the assessment, recruitment and support of prospective and approved adopters. The Service also have primary responsibility for the provision of adoption support services.

**The current structure of the Adoption Service** is designed to meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of adoption services. The Croydon Adoption Team consists of 12 full time equivalents staffing establishment of:

1 Delivery Manager  
2x Unit Managers  
10x Social Workers  
1X Letterbox Co-ordinator  
1X Unit Co-ordinator

**5 Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff.**

The structure and personal details, relevant qualifications and experience of current staff can be made available to Ofsted upon request.

**6 The Adoption Services provides as advised in the NMS:**

**6.1 Effective publication of adoption services, accessibility and including information about services provided by other agencies:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has a dedicated Freephone number for recruitment. This is widely publicised through literatures and on the Croydon website.

Initial enquirers can be provided with information over the telephone and they have access to a comprehensive adopter's information pack on the Agency's web page. The recruitment of prospective adopters is based on the needs of children being referred to the team. A tracking and monitoring system is in place to ensure that the number and needs of children referred informs the recruitment strategy.

Information is available on the Croydon Council website.

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt>

There are hyperlinks on the website to other adoption organisations. The adoption service information leaflets also include details of useful organisations.

The South London Adoption Consortium, of which Croydon is a member, also has a consortium website with information for prospective applicants and approved adopters.

<http://www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk>

**6.2 The recruitment process, including effective arrangements to advise, assess, counsel and support those who become approved adopters and those who do not:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has implemented the new Adopter recruitment process as stipulated by legislation and Adoption Statutory Guidance with effective from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. The details of this process are described in our Information Pack for prospective adopters; this is also available in PDF on the Councils website. Prospective Adopters are provided with information for access to the national gateway website 'first4adoption'. <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

Enquiry Stage – Prospective applicants complete an online expression of interest form via the Agency webpage

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt>

Once the form has been completed and submitted by the prospective applicant, an acknowledgement email with date the next information meeting is sent to the enquirer within 48 hours.

Croydon holds information meetings monthly to which prospective applicants are invited. These meetings provide an overall picture of adopting in Croydon and nationally, and will include information about children needing adoptive homes. This also provides an opportunity to talk to experienced adoption workers and adoptive parents.

If a prospective applicant attends the information meeting, they will be provided with a blank Registration of Interest (ROI) form at the end of the session to complete and return to the Agency.

If the Agency receives a completed ROI form from a prospective applicant, a duty social worker will contact the prospective applicant within 2 working days of receiving the completed ROI to clarify any required information.

Within 2-3 working days of receiving the ROI form, the agency will allocate the case to a social worker and write to the prospective applicant informing them that the Agency has accepted their ROI form.

If the decision is not to accept the prospective applicants ROI, the Agency will write to them giving clear reasons for this decision. This letter will also have details of other agencies they can approach or sign post to the National Gateway for Adoption. It will contain details of who they can write to, to make a formal complaint. Formal complaints should be made to:

The Service Delivery Manager  
Adoption & Permanence  
Children's Social Care  
People Department,  
London Borough of Croydon  
4<sup>TH</sup> Floor, Bernard Weatherill House  
8 Mint Walk  
Croydon  
CR0 1EA

The allocated social worker begins the stage 1 process by meeting the applicant within two working days of being allocated the case to draw up a Stage 1 plan and agreement form. This sets out expectations of the Agency and the applicant as well as timescales for completing Stage 1, details of how the applicant will manage any disagreements or complaints should also be detailed in the plan and agreement form.

Stage 1 is a two months process. This is an '**adopter led**' period of information gathering. An allocated social worker will complete a Stage

1 Plan & Agreement with the Adopters. Group sessions will be provided to support the adopters with this process.

Stage 1 is completed when the applicant and social worker can provide physical evidence of the applicants learning through the production of a portfolio which contains details of all the work and research the applicant has undertaken in the two months. The portfolio should contain a list of readings undertaken by the applicant, any training undertaken with certificates. Checks and references undertaken (social workers responsible for these) A written reflection of the applicants learning and meetings with the social worker. Evidence of attending the Stage 1 learning group. Copy of the applicants completed eco map, chronology, and genogram. Any other relevant information such as written commentary of child care observation or experience as well as notes from network support meetings.

A Unit Manager will review the portfolio in order to enable them make a decision whether the applicant has sufficiently done enough learning to enable the applicant move on to Stage 2. Thereafter, a manager will write to the applicant advising them they have successfully completed Stage 1 and accepted into Stage 2.

Stage 2 takes four months. It is social work led assessment. A manager will allocate the case to a social worker preferably to the same social worker who completed Stage 1. The allocated social worker will complete a Stage 2 Plan & Agreement with the applicant. The social worker will also ensure that the applicant is booked to attend a preparatory training. A proposed panel date will be booked at this stage to avoid drift and delay. However, if there are unforeseen issues that could potentially have implications for the Adoption panel making an informed decision, a purposeful delay will be agreed by the Service Delivery Manager.

Where the Agency does not agree that an applicant should move into Stage 2, the prospective adopters will be provided with clear written reasons for this decision. They will also be sign posted to Croydon's on line complaints procedure if they wish to utilise this.

Second time adopters and foster carers who wish to adopt children in their care, will not be required to complete Stage 1. They will be allocated to proceed to Stage 2. Specialist preparation groups are run for second time adopters by our partner agencies within South London Adoption Consortium.

### **The assessment of prospective adopters using objective, thorough, fair and transparent criteria**

In Stage 2, prospective adopters are assessed by a qualified social worker. Information about the applicant will be collated using the

Prospective Adoption Report (PAR) produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. Applicants will be visited in their own home as well as asked to attend meeting in the Council Offices. In the case of a couple, they will be seen together as well as separately. Applicants will be invited to make their own written and verbal contributions to their assessment. The applicant's children who are part of their household will be seen alone if deemed appropriate by the social worker. Any other adult member of the household apart from the applicants will be interviewed. Children who do not live in the household will be contacted and interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are seen at this stage. At the end of the assessment, the assessing adoption social worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters.

The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicant's 10 working days prior to Panel, and offer them the opportunity to discuss or make comments on the report. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the adoption panel when their application is being considered.

Adopters are assessed on their capacity to provide a home and to meet, most if not all, of the lifelong needs of children they then go on to adopt. They are matched on the basis that they may reflect and/or promote the child's race, culture, language and religion.

#### **6.4 Inter-country adopters:**

Applicants for inter-country adoption are assessed by the Inter-country Adoption Centre (IAC) which is commissioned to provide a service to all Croydon's prospective and approved inter-country adopters. IAC is a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency which is registered with and reports separately to Ofsted. IAC provides a full and comprehensive service to prospective adopters, from initial enquiry through to support on return to the UK with a child.

A summary by IAC of their service to inter-country adopters is as follows:

*"Information and initial counselling, which includes written information and an interview with the Assessment Team Manager. Prior to the interview we always suggest that you attend an IAC Information Day, as this ensures that you have access to full information at an early stage about both the process and the potential challenges of inter-country adoption.*

*If you satisfy the overseas country requirements and the Agency eligibility criteria you would then be invited to make a formal application to be assessed as prospective adopter(s).*

*Preparation – all IAC applicants are asked to attend either a three day general preparation course or a two day kinship preparation course at Barnet. These courses are run in small groups, led by two experienced social workers one of whom is generally an adoptive parent. In very exceptional circumstances, bespoke preparation is arranged.*

*Statutory checks – as part of our duties we are asked to undertake checks upon any applicant, including Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau Checks and Health checks.*

*Assessment report – you will be allocated a social worker who will interview you in depth in order to prepare a report about yourself and your adoption plans, including recommendations as to your suitability as a prospective adoptive parent.*

*Adoption Panel – IAC's Adoption Panel meets regularly to hear adoption applications and to make recommendations as to applicants; suitability to adopt.*

*Collating and forwarding of paperwork to the Department of Children, Schools and Families is undertaken by IAC's Assessment Team Manager and Assessment Team Administrator.*

*Annual review of suitability to ensure that your approval remain valid.*

*Opportunity to attend a workshop for inter-country adopters whose application documents are in the overseas country and who are awaiting a child match.*

*Support at the time you are matched with a child, including a counselling meeting with a social worker and a medical opinion from the Agency Medical Advisor on the health of the child (as indicated in the medical reports from the overseas country).*

*One post placement visit from a social worker following the child's arrival.*

*An opportunity to attend an IAC Adoption Support workshop within the first two years of placement. “*

The Inter-country Adoption Centre has established good links with Friends Linked by Inter-country Adoption (FLICA) as well as other Inter-country organisations.

After approval, Croydon Adoption Agency is responsible for post placement monitoring once the approved adopter have been matched with a child. IAC will send Croydon Adoption Agency copies of all paper work relating to the adopter and the child. Croydon Adoption Agency is also responsible for post placement reviews of the child until an adoption order is made. A social

worker will be allocated to monitor the placement and this worker will also be responsible for supporting the family through the application and granting of the adoption order.

## **6.5 Non-agency adoptions**

Enquirers approaching the team for a service are provided with verbal information and sent written information about non-agency adoption within 5 working days.

Prospective applicants are offered an initial visit by a social worker to further discuss their application and the process of non-agency adoption.

Prospective applicants are asked to confirm in writing their 'Notification of intention to apply to adopt' and send to the Delivery Manager.

Prospective applicants are asked to complete an application form that will also enable the Agency complete statutory prescribes checks.

A social worker is allocated to complete the assessment through home visits.

After 3 months of submitting a notification of intention to adopt the applicants can submit their application to court.

The social worker completes an "Annex A" report for court, and attends any court hearings they are required to until the adoption order is granted.

## **6.6 Birth parents - Support, information and counselling:**

Many birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that adoption is decided by the court to be the best outcome for their child. Others will accept that this decision and very few will relinquish a child for adoption.

Croydon Adoption Agency fully accepts and supports the principle in the National Adoption Standards that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognise the lifelong implications of adoption.

The child's social worker and adoption social worker have discreet but complementary roles in providing services to birth families affected by adoption.

Adoption and childcare social workers work together with birth parents to enable the implementation of effective plans for children. They also ensure that birth parents views about the adoption plan and contact are sought, recorded and that birth parents are supported throughout the adoption process.

Where necessary and appropriate, a parent will be provided with information and supported to access support from other agencies and organisations.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to explain the adoption process, and obtain written information from the child's birth parents' their views about adoption. This should include wishes and feelings about the type of family, religion and contact. The child's social worker will explain the importance for the child, of obtaining a full medical history not only of the birth parents but also of the wider related family. The child's social worker, with support from an adoption social worker, is responsible for providing the birth family with information about local and national support groups and helping them to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Birth parents are entitled to see information written about them before the child's permanence report is presented to the Adoption Panel for a matching recommendation and to make representation to the ADM and Adoption Panel if they choose to.

All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information, and contribute to their child's Life Story Book and Letter for Later Life.

The adoption team will provide birth parents, via the childcare social worker, with an information leaflets explaining the adoption process and where appropriate counsels the parent's, or refer to another agency to complete this work.

Following the making of an Adoption Order birth parents can access services directly from the adoption team.

## **6.7 Adoption Panel**

Croydon's Adoption Panel is chaired by an independent chair. The panel is constituted from a Central List in line with Adoption Agencies Regulations and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The panel meets twice a month or as and when required and is supported by a panel administrator.

Panel members have annual training, which updates Panel members on changes in legislation, practice and research. In addition every panel members role is reviewed annually.

Whilst it is now a requirement that prospective adopters be invited to attend the panel when their application is being considered, Croydon has followed this practice for several years and positively encourages applicants to attend.

Prospective adopters are provided with a leaflet explaining the panel process and are also asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting. Their comments are fed back to the panel and the Adoption Panel Advisor retains a copy of all evaluation forms. This feedback informs service development.

## **7 Preparation of prospective adopters for the placement of a child, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Prospective adopters receive preparation for the placement of children through attendance at their Preparation Groups and during their assessments as adopters as well as in the Stage 1 information gathering regarding the realities of adoption.

When prospective adopters are identified as meeting a particular child or children's needs the adoption worker and child's social worker will provide the prospective adopters with verbal and written information about the child.

If the prospective adopters wishes to proceed, they will receive further detailed information which will include written information about a child and their background. In all cases the leave of the court will be sought to disclose relevant court papers to the adoption panel and to prospective adopters and will be visited by the child's social worker, and family finding social workers with the adopter's social worker in attendance to support them throughout the matching process. The Adopters will also meet with the child's Foster Carer. All adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet with the Medical Adviser prior to the adoption panel.

If following a period of reflection all parties wish to proceed, an Adoption Placement Report, and an Adoption Support Plan is prepared in consultation and partnership with the adopters. The Adoption Panel will recommend whether or not the match should proceed. As well as seeking the prospective adopters' views about the placement, children's views are sought where they old enough to express these.

In order to plan introductions and placement of a child, an adoption manager chairs a Placement Planning Meeting and an Adoption Placement Plan is agreed with the adopters.

Following placement, the child and prospective adopters will be visited within one week of the placement and thereafter at least once a week until the first review and thereafter at such frequency as the agency decided at each review until the Adoption Order is granted.

Once placed, the child's needs are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer who will continue to regularly review the placement up to the making of an Adoption Order.

Croydon provides Post Adoption Support Services. The services, that are available to prospective families before the granting of an Adoption Order, are also available to families post Order. However services provided are based on the assessed needs of the child and the assessed capacity of the adopters to meet this level of need.

Support can be accessed from independent, local and national organisations via application to the Adoption Support Fund. These include but not exhaustive, the Post Adoption Centre (PAC), CoramBAAF, Adoption UK and After adoption. Croydon Council subscribes to CoramBAAF, PAC, and Adoption UK. These organisations operate a telephone advice line, which Croydon adopters can access directly. Workshops and training can also accessed by the prospective and approved adopters at a reduced rate.

Croydon Council is a member of the South London Adoption Consortium with six neighbouring local authorities and four voluntary agencies. The aim of the consortium is to increase the choice of adoptive placements regionally by circulating details of children and approved adopters who have not been linked by their own agency. The consortium also strives to share resources and commission services and to achieve consistent high practice standards. Croydon aims to learn from best practice of other boroughs, primarily in the Consortium but not restricted to the Consortium.

## **8 Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the 'perfect placement' and Croydon seeks adopters who can meet all or most of the child's needs and can reflect or actively promote the child's identity race and culture.

For every child should have a Life Story Book, a Letter for Later Life and a written guide to adoption. This work in most cases is undertaken by the child's social worker with help and advice from the adoption worker. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history and help maintain their heritage. The Letter for Later Life includes information about the child's birth and early life, and provides up to date information about themselves and their situation. Croydon aims to provide adopted children with high quality Life Story work in a form and style which will be of most assistance to the child in relation to their journey towards adoption. The initial Life Story Book is provided by second adoption review and the final version with input from the adopters no later than a week after Adoption Order by when the Letter for Later Life must also have been provided.

Work is undertaken with children by their social worker to ascertain their wishes and feeling about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with, taking account of their age and understanding.

Once a family has been identified, children are given appropriate information, depending on their age. The Placement Planning Meeting co-ordinates an age appropriate introduction timetable. This is reviewed during introductions to assess progress and whether the timescale for

the child's move needs to be adjusted in accordance with their needs.

Post placement, the social worker continues to support the child in placement but where more in depth work is identified the child and prospective adopters can be referred to the Post Adoption Team or other appropriate post placement/adoption support services, e.g. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and services related to education, special needs and managing contact with birth families. See Section on Post Adoption Services below for more detail.

Clear criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, and the arrangements for review, are made available to adopters.

The Croydon Council Adoption Service will support adopters financially with introductory expenses, and settling in costs for essential equipment where matched with a Croydon child. Croydon will meet the cost of reasonable legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex.

At the point of matching all children must have an Adoption Support Plan, which details the child's needs and how these will be met. Adoption Support is a continuum of universal services available to all children, and those provided by the Adoption Agency. The Support Plan will confirm any financial support. The Plan and on-going financial support are to be reviewed annually. The Adoption Support Plan is agreed with the adoptive family before being presented to the Adoption Panel.

Where it is not possible to place a child with Croydon adopters, the Adoption Service has access to a dedicated inter-agency budget.

The process for establishing, maintaining, monitoring and reviewing contact arrangements for each adopted child is usually by voluntary agreement with all parties.

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of children and young people having suitable contact with their birth families and other significant people. Such contact is entirely governed by the best interests of the children. Contact can vary from the annual exchange of written information to face-to-face contact with members of the birth family, at intervals appropriate for the child and agreed by the adopters.

The Adoption Service operates a well established Letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for direct face-to-face contact.

The Adoption Service always considers at least one meeting between a child's birth parent and adoptive parents because of the long term benefits of this for the child. Other significant birth relatives may also be

involved.

Contact plans are first considered at the Looked After Children reviews, and included in the child's Care Plan. Croydon Adoption Panel reviews and comments on contact plans. Identified work to ensure that these plans are viable may take place at any time between the Adoption Agency Decision that a child should be placed with adopters and the placement of the child with prospective adopters. Children's needs change over time and contact plans should evolve to reflect the child's changing circumstances and needs.

Post placement, contact arrangements continue to be reviewed at each adoptive placement review. The Service does not formally review contact arrangements after the Adoption Order is made, but if issues arise these are addressed and supported through the Croydon Adoption Service.

## **9 The review of disrupted placements, ascertaining the causes for the breakdown to aid future planning for the child**

Following a disruption the Croydon Council Adoption Service convenes a Disruption Meeting in order to try learn lessons and to achieve a better understanding of the factors which has led to the breakdown of the placement. This helps in planning future placements. These meetings are chaired by an independent social worker with extensive experience of adoption work.

A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are presented to the adoption management team meeting and the relevant Adoption Panel in order that they can learn any lessons. The disruption rate for children placed by the Croydon Council Adoption Service has historically been below the national average.

## **10 Investigations into allegations that are made known to adoption service staff, adopters and children and young people**

The adoption service has a separate child protection procedure relating to allegations from or about a child in an adoptive placement who may or may not be receiving post adoption support services. This procedure requires consideration of child protection procedures and strategy meetings but in cases where this is not appropriate adheres to the Croydon Child Protection procedures published by the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board: these are in line with the London Child Protection Procedures.

The basic principle is that in safeguarding the child, it should also be recognised that an adopted child may have specific networks and specific life experiences which may impact on planning and decision making.

## **11 The range of post adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption**

The Croydon Adoption Units provides an intermediary service and counselling and advice to adult adoptees and birth relatives.

The team also provides a range of direct services to adoptive families if they are experiencing any difficulties. These include counselling and advice, an assessment of need for adoption support, including financial support where relevant, and is based on the assessed needs of the child.

All newly approved adoptive parents are offered free membership of Adoption UK for one year. Croydon Council Adoption Agency also facilitates the local support group for adopters.

All known adopters in Croydon are sent an annual copy of the Croydon Council Adoption & Fostering Service Training Booklet, with information regarding workshops and training for adopters and foster carers.

## **12 Assessing adoption support needs for previously adopted Children**

Any adopted child residing in Croydon may make representations for post adoption support, including those who have been placed by another agency and for whom the three year post adoption period has elapsed. In these situations, a Post Adoption Assessment will be carried out by an adoption social worker to determine the circumstances and needs of the child, the adopter/s and other family members and make recommendations regarding the level of support required.

Croydon's Adoption Service has a duty system which runs between 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm from Monday to Friday. A duty social worker is always available during these times to answer telephone enquiries, provide information and take referrals as appropriate. A duty manager is also available for guidance.

Queries and referrals are also taken via letter and E Mail. A duty worker will deal with such matters on a daily basis.

Once a referral has been completed, and if assessed as appropriate the case is allocated to a social worker. Allocations take place every two weeks at team meeting. However, if the matter is identified as urgent, the Delivery Manager can make a decision to allocate the case immediately.

A leaflet providing details of the types of services provided is available

contact details.

**13 An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption:**

Croydon Council Adoption Service works in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy, which is available to all staff via the Council's intranet service.

The adoption service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, and on the basis of being able to parent and to meet the lifelong needs of adopted children.

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability, without delay being placed with adopters who can meet most if not all of a child's needs.

**14 There is a system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by the Adoption Service are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has developed a system for monitoring service users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and reported in the annual Adoption Service Action Plan. Where necessary the information is used to improve the service. This monitoring includes:

- Adoptive applicants
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses
- Feedback on attending adoption panel
- Feedback on written information at time of placement
- Birth Parents are asked to include their views when the plan for adoption is presented to the Adoption Panel.
- The Letterbox Service is to set up an evaluation and review system for all parties to arrangements.
- Feedback from children who have been placed via the Looked After Children Review process
- Children are counselled and their wishes and feelings ascertained during family finding process taking account of their age and understanding.

**15 Monitoring of the Adoption Service**

The Service meets with senior managers who review performance in the previous year and sets targets for the forthcoming year, having regard to any serious shortfalls in the service and the standards and timescales set out in legislation.

There are review systems in place for the following:

- All approved adopters are formally reviewed annually by senior adoption social workers and team managers
- The Independent Reviewing Officer reviews the progress of all children placed for adoption.
- Staff within the Adoption and Children's Services supervise and monitor the placement.
- The Adoption Panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice.
- There is a well-established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff on the Croydon Council's Intranet, and an on-going performance review system for all members of the service.
- Additionally each Unit Manager monitors the work in progress.

An Adoption performance meeting, chaired by the Head of Service for Looked After Children, meets bi-monthly and includes all relevant managers from children social care and adoption. The purpose of the meeting is to review the progress of all LAC cases and to identify and address obstacles to permanence.

## **16 Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency acknowledges the need to ensure all records are maintained in accordance with Adoption Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption. The indexes to all adoption case records are kept for 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an adoption order being made, the related case papers are also kept for 100 years.

All other records are retained in line with Croydon Council Policy on Record Retention and Destruction Handbook. All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Delivery Manager and the Adoption Service maintains a log of all requests. All files are held in lockable, secure storage.

## **17 A summary of the complaints procedure established in accordance with section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989 (a) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990 (b)**

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories.

a) Complaints about the service received by any of the adoption teams are dealt with under the Croydon Customer Services Complaints

Procedure available on request. A service user or any one acting on their behalf can make a complaint.

b) Where the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to recommend the approval of adopters, the applicant will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the Agency Decision Maker or refer their case to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is managed by the: CoramBaaf on behalf of the Department for Education. The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a panel, which applicants can use when they have been informed that the Agency does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive parents or has terminated their approval.

The IRM welcome can be contacted directly from people who are considering the use of the IRM or who wish to discuss their options. They also welcome enquires from agency staff.

Their address is:

IRM Contract Manager  
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)  
Unit 4  
Pavilion Business Park  
Royds Hall Road  
Wortley  
LEEDS LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956  
Fax: 0845 450 3957  
(charged at local rates)  
E-Mail: [irm@baaf.org.uk](mailto:irm@baaf.org.uk)

[www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

## **18 The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose**

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually. The information contained in this Statement of Purpose can be made available in alternative formats: Large print, Braille, audio tape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages.

Please contact:  
Croydon Council  
Adoption & Permanence Team  
Children's Social Care  
People Department,  
London Borough of Croydon

4<sup>TH</sup> Floor, Bernard Wheatherill House  
8 Mint Walk  
Croydon  
CR0 1EA

By free phone: 0800 389 0129  
By telephone: 020 8726 6000  
By fax: 020 8760 5665

By email: [adoption.enquiries@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.enquiries@croydon.gov.uk)

**This Statement of Purpose has been approved by:**

**Councillor, Chair, Corporate Parenting Panel** (Original Signed copy held by the Adoption Service)

Signed:.....

Date: .....

**Ian Lewis, Director, Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care**

Signed:.....

Date: .....

Review date: .....