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1.0 INTRODUCTION.

This Statement of Purpose gives details of Sheffield City Council's Adoption Service, what it is and how it works. It describes the agency's aims and objectives and outlines services that are provided in order to ensure good outcomes for children for whom the plan is adoption.

It is a requirement under standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011, updated 2014 that each adoption agency must provide a statement of purpose.

It is available to all those involved in the adoption process, including children, birth family members, adopters, staff and partner agencies. It can be used by these people as a guide to what they should expect the service to provide.

It includes how the service is managed and delivered. It is reviewed annually.

2.0 The Principles and Values of Sheffield City Council’s Adoption Service

The Adoption Service is an integral part of the services that are provided to children and families by Sheffield City Council. Our principles and values are underpinned by the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and are outlined below.

1. We believe that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving, safe and secure family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

2. We affirm that wherever possible it is best that children are brought up by their own birth family. Full consideration will be given to family and friends as possible carers prior to a plan of adoption being agreed.

3. We will place the child’s welfare, safety and needs at the heart of the care planning and adoption process.

4. We will consider the child’s own wishes and feelings and take them into account at all stages. We will consult and listen to children and explain to them what is happening in a way they may best understand.
5. When children have a plan of adoption we will seek to avoid delays in placing them in order to minimise the impact on their health, education and development.

6. A sense of identity is an important part of a child’s wellbeing. As such we will take account of, and value, children and adopters’ ethnic origin, race, culture, religious belief, sexuality and language when decisions are made.

7. We will ensure the particular needs of disabled users of our services are fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.

8. We will work sensitively with birth parents whose children are to be adopted.

9. We will value and respect the role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family. They will be treated as important stakeholders in our service and in turn they will respect the principles and values that guide our service.

10. Sheffield City Council’s Adoption Service recognises that successful outcomes for children can be found in adoptive families from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicity, age, sexuality and marital status.

11. We understand that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires a lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals.

12. We will work in partnership with others, including health; education; local authorities and external adoption agencies to meet the needs for services of all those affected by adoption.
3.0  **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aims and objectives of the Adoption Service focus on how we will achieve good outcomes for all children with an adoption plan throughout their childhood and beyond.

**Our Aims:**

1. The service we offer is based on and compliant with all statutory and policy requirements, sound principles and good practice.

2. That the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process as presented in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption and Children Act 2002: Section 1).

3. We aim to ensure that we provide a high quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards for the care, safety and protection of children and young people who cannot live with their birth family and who need an adoptive family.

4. The agency aims to provide adoptive placements that will meet the child’s needs for safety, stability, security and attachment until adulthood and beyond.

5. We aim to provide an integrated adoption support service which is timely, proactive and has skilled, appropriately trained staff.

6. We aim to provide a comprehensive adoption service that is welcoming, accessible and non-discriminatory to all persons resident in Sheffield, or to whom we have a responsibility because of their previous residence within the Sheffield boundary. This includes children, adoptive families, adult adoptees and birth families.

**Our objectives:**

1. To provide information on the range of services available to all those affected by adoption, recognising that adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved and that their needs will change over time.
2. To recruit, train, prepare, assess, and support a wide range of adoptive families who are able to meet the placement needs of infants, children and young people, without delay.

3. For there to be sufficient adoptive families available for our children with an adoption plan, including those requiring early permanence through fostering to adopt placements.

4. For those children whose needs cannot be met within our own resources we will seek suitable adoptive families outside the agency without delay.

5. To provide a range of adoption support services to children; birth parents and relatives; adopters and adult adoptees directly and in partnership with other agencies.

6. To provide information on the service that is available to people who wish to adopt a child from overseas.

7. To provide advice to colleagues who are working with children and families where adoption is the plan.

8. To prepare reports for the Adoption Panel and the Courts on adoption work, including non-agency adoptions, as required.

9. To assist in the arranging of direct and indirect contact, and support children, young people, adoptive and birth families with arrangements, including accessing the letter box contact scheme.

10. To provide birth records counselling for adopted adults either directly or via an approved adoption support agency.

11. To ensure that any decisions are fair and transparent, that concerns are addressed and that information about the complaints procedure is made available to all.
12. To ensure the service regularly consults with and learns from those who are in receipt of services through service user feedback, comments, compliments and complaints.

13. To continue to work with our regional ‘Adopter Development Co-ordinator’ to facilitate Adopter Voice meetings and the contribution of national, regional and local adopter voice to our service development.
4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFFING.
Sheffield City Council Adoption Agency reports to the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council's Chief Executive.
The Cabinet Member for the Children and Young Peoples Service is Councillor Jackie Drayton.

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**Agency Adviser:** There is one agency adviser in Sheffield’s Adoption Service. She works 3 days per week. She has considerable experience and knowledge, as both a manager and practitioner, regarding a wide range of children’s services.

The agency adviser provides robust quality assurance of reports and plans presented to Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker. She is also available for advice and acts as a link between the agency and the independent panel.

**Agency Decision Maker** The service has one Agency Decision Maker, Becky Towle. She is responsible for decisions regarding whether children in care proceedings should be placed for adoption as well as those relating to adoption panel recommendations. The Agency Decision Maker is an Assistant Director in Children and Families, with no direct line management responsibility for the Adoption or Fieldwork Services.

They Agency Decision Maker assists with the overall quality of care planning and decision making for children and young people in the care of the authority. Oversight also includes adopter approvals, fostering to adopt, matches and disruptions. They may also comment on plans relating to siblings being placed together, contact with birth family members and adoption support needs.

**Business Support:** The business support team provides administrative support to both the fostering and adoption services. There is a dedicated adoption panel minute taker. Other duties are shared across the service.

All our adoption service staff are subject to the Council’s policies on recruitment, equal opportunities, performance, disciplinary and managing attendance procedures.

**Qualifications and Training:** All adoption social workers are professionally qualified (Diploma in Social Work/CQSW) are registered with the HCPC and have a minimum of three years post qualification experience. Some also have post qualifying awards.

The service manager has a relevant management qualification as does one of the team managers. The others are about to undertake management training or will be offered it when they take up their appointment with the agency.

Support workers have undertaken an appropriate NVQ qualification. Some have undertaken additional training in theraplay and sleep hygiene.

All workers are encouraged to attend training in relevant areas, and advantage is taken of external courses addressing issues around adoption. Social Workers actively pursue training to maintain their registration with the HCPC and are supported in doing so by the organisation.

All staff have current enhanced DBS disclosures and are registered with the HCPC.

**Location and Contact Details:**
The Adoption Team
The Moorfoot Building
Floor 7, East Wing
Young Street
Sheffield
S1 4PL
Telephone: 01142735010
E-mail: adoption@sheffield.gov.uk
Website: https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/campaigns/adoption.html

Duty hours: 9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday. 9am to 4.30pm Friday
There is an out of hour’s service available for emergencies.

The service is based close to Sheffield City Centre. The building has good access from train, car, and bus as well as tram links. The premises has a number of meeting rooms that are available for training events and for the two Adoption panels that take place each month. There is disabled access. There are a number of public car parks within walking distance.
5.0 SERVICES PROVIDED

1. Recruitment and Assessment

The Assessment and Recruitment Team’s role includes the recruitment, training and assessment (using the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Prospective Adopter Report), support and supervision of prospective adopters. The social workers are involved from initial enquiry through to adoption order.

The recruitment team have primary responsibility for family finding for approved adopters which involves matching the needs of potential children with the skills, abilities and preferences of the approved adopters.

Adopters are asked to commit themselves to Sheffield City Council Adoption Service for 3 months after approval. Where a suitable local match cannot be identified, the team initiate a wider search, with use of regional and national resources such as the One Adoption Consortium, Link Maker, Adoption Activity or Exchange days.

The Adoption Team ensure approved adopters are informed about children needing placement and support them in finding suitable matches.

‘Life Appreciation Days’ are held for all children who are adopted, where all professionals and carers of the children to be adopted can meet with the adopters and share their knowledge of the children. This helps ensure adopters have more direct information about the child’s early life and enriches the information available for both them and the child.

Prospective adopters participate fully in the placement planning process for each child;

Where there are any placement disruptions a disruption meeting is held to consider all contributing factors and to plan for the future needs of children, adoptive families and birth families.

PROCESS FOR RECRUITING, PREPARING, ASSESSING AND APPROVING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

The following is a summary of the procedure for recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters. All timescales comply with the relevant regulations:

Strategy

- Sheffield’s recruitment strategy seeks to recruit a range of adopters from a variety of backgrounds who can address the needs of children requiring placement, including those arising from race, culture, ethnic origin, language, disability, gender and sexuality;

- We aim to target recruitment on those prospective adopters most likely to meet the needs of the children waiting for families. Applications may be
prioritised if it is thought applicants could provide a home for a child already waiting to be placed.

**Marketing/Publicity**

- The team works closely with the Communications Department within the local authority. They produce a communications strategy in line with the recruitment strategy. This helps us to use our advertising approach to best effect.
- Publicity is through a range of methods including advertising on buses and trams; clear channel sites on key routes into the city or via newspaper, social media or radio advertising. It also includes use of banners in key locations and attendance at community events such as Sheffield Pride. Information about adoption can also be downloaded from the council's website. This is a key point of contact and needs to be kept up to date and relevant. Publicity is further organised and planned to coincide with National Adoption Week and LGBT fostering week.

**Application process**

- Applicants contact the Adoption Team by telephone or via the website to express an interest in adoption.
- The Information Officer or duty Social Worker completes an initial referral and potential adopters are encouraged to attend an information evening.
- The information events are an opportunity for potential adopters to access information, talk to members of the Adoption Team and meet approved adopters.
- If prospective adopters wish to continue with their interest then an initial home visit will be carried out by a member of the Adoption Team.
- The visit will discuss adopting a child and to answer any questions which they prospective adopter may have.
- Where a couple live in the household both partners should be present. At some point any other children or other adults living in the family home will be seen.
- Where the worker considers that the prospective adopter/s has potential they will recommend to the Team Manager that they proceed.
- At this stage prospective adopters are asked to complete a registration of interest form.
- A social worker from the Adoption Team is then allocated to complete Stage 1 of the assessment process where all necessary statutory checks are undertaken and the applicants have a medical. This stage of the process should be completed within 2 months.
• If all checks are returned satisfactorily then applicants are invited to complete an application to adopt and they move into Stage 2 of the assessment process. This stage should be completed within 4 months.

• We aim to keep the same social worker throughout stage 1 and stage 2, right up to adoption order.

Training

• Applicants undertake an initial preparation course and each applicant is required to attend all sessions. The sessions are held during the day, over 3 days.

The training sessions aim to:

✓ Help applicants to make appropriate decisions about their application
✓ Help applicants to begin preparing evidence in a workbook of their competencies as potential adopters
✓ Provide the Adoption Team with information about the applicants’ understanding and ability to function within a group

The course content is constantly evaluated, improved and updated. Core input as a minimum standard will always include:

✓ The Adoption and Children Act and legal framework for adoption
✓ Roles and responsibilities of adopters
✓ The developmental needs of children, the effects of interrupted development and loss and trauma
✓ The importance of birth families and their life long importance in the adoption process, including appropriate contact
✓ Understanding the effects of child abuse
✓ Safe caring
✓ Behaviour management and positive parenting
✓ Disability and equal opportunity issues

• Applicants’ participation is assessed and reported to the assessing social worker. It is also included on the applicants prospective adopter report (PAR) and any concerns are addressed with them.

Assessment

• Each assessment will cover a range of areas including:

✓ Parenting capacity, awareness and competencies
✓ Applicants’ family, life history, lifestyle and background
✓ Full statutory checks are completed and obtained, together with financial checks, medical reports and personal references
✓ A Health and Safety checklist is completed, including transport
✓ Adult children are contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire about their upbringing and make comments about an applicant’s suitability to become an adoptive parent.
Ex partners are contacted (where appropriate) and asked for their views about the proposed application.

Each applicant works closely with the assessing social worker to complete the assessment. The applicant is able to read (excluding references), comment on and address any issues within the report, and to then sign it.

The report is then forwarded to the Adoption Team Manager for checking and agreement before being circulated to members of the Adoption Panel.

**Adoption Panel – Approval of Adopters**

- The completed assessment is presented to the Adoption Panel by the adoption social worker.
- Applicants are invited, and encouraged to attend the Panel meeting.
- The Panel discusses the content of the assessment and asks any questions it has before reaching a recommendation.
- The Independent Panel Chair will inform the applicant/s of the recommendation/s about suitability to adopt.
- The recommendation/s are then considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who makes a final decision on behalf of the agency.
- All applicants are notified verbally, and in writing, of the Panel’s recommendation/s and of the ADM’s decisions.
- **Appeal:** Where the decision is that applicants are not considered suitable to adopt a child (a qualifying determination), applicants are informed in writing, giving reasons for the decision.

Applicants have 28 working days to decide whether to:

- Accept the decision and withdraw OR
- Make representations to the Agency Decision Maker OR
- Apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

- Where applicants make representations to the ADM or the IRM, the final decision will be made by the ADM.
- If applicants are still dissatisfied they may use the Council’s complaints system.

**2. Family Finding for Children:**

**Tracking:**

- Family finders track children from legal gateway onwards. Each fieldwork service and the children with additional needs team have an allocated family
finder to monitor progress of care plans and to advise on the adoption component of the planning.

- Family finders will advise in relation to medicals, child permanence reports, support plans, life story work, later life letters or any other element where the child’s social worker may require support.
- One of the Family Finding Team is an early permanence champion and can give advice on Early Permanence Placements.
- Additionally Permanence Tracking meetings are held across all of the fieldwork teams, including children with additional needs, for all children who enter care.

**Should be placed for Adoption: ADM**

- Most decisions regarding whether a child should be adopted are referred direct to the agency decision maker.
- Only those children who accommodated by the local authority or relinquished for adoption or on a care order but the birth parents have indicated they will consent to adoption (no court scrutiny) will be referred to the Adoption Panel.
- The adoption panel and the decision-maker will be sent the same reports and information as each other.
- Once a plan of adoption is agreed birth relatives will be informed and offered independent advice and support.
- Family finding work will commence prior to a placement order being granted to avoid unnecessary delay for the child.

**Timeliness:**

- The family finding team aim to find suitable matches for children at the earliest opportunity.
- Wherever possible sibling groups of children requiring adoption will be placed together. Sibling assessments should be completed early in the planning process for children, in order to avoid delay.
- Inter-agency searches will be agreed promptly where no in-house adopters are available.
- We aim to identify suitable families as close as possible to a plan of adoption being agreed for a child, so that once a placement order is granted the child can be matched quickly.
- Family finders take advantage of a range of methods to find families. They meet regularly with the Recruitment team to identify suitable links as soon as possible. They also use activity and exchange days as well as using Link Maker, the local consortium and networks with external agencies.
- Family finders will meet regularly with the child’s social worker and foster carer to ensure they understand the needs and plans for the child so this can be accurately communicated to adopters’ link workers.
- They provide profiles of children at the earliest opportunity to provide information to potential adopters.
Potential matches:
- Where a potential match is outside the Council, Family Finders will visit potential adopters with the child’s worker to support them in providing and receiving full information about the potential link.
- They will assist the child’s social worker in writing the support plan and making claims to the ASF.
- All children have life appreciation days.
- The family finders will also attend panel along with the child’s social worker when the match is being considered.

Introductions and Placement:
- Where it is an inter-agency placement, the family finder will be part of the planning process around the transition of the child to the adoptive family.
- Where the match is with Sheffield adopters it is the adopters’ link worker who supports the child’s social worker with the plans for transition. They also support the adopters.
- Foster carers will be supported by their link worker when moving children on to adoptive families.
- Once the child is placed the family finder (external match) or the adopters link worker (internal match) will attend the LAC review along with the child’s social worker and independent reviewing officer. They will monitor and support placement, up to the making of the Adoption Order.
- If post adoption support is required the family finder or adopters support worker will assist the child’s worker in referring to the Adoption Support Team.

3. Adoption Support Services.

We understand that placing children in adoptive families is only the beginning. Supporting the placement and recognising the ongoing needs of the adopted person alongside those of their birth and adoptive families is equally important.

Support Plans at Match:

There is a statutory responsibility to provide an Adoption Support plan for every child placed for adoption. The plan must cover the support needs of the child and the adoptive family. The child’s agency and the adopter’s agency must contribute to and agree this plan.

The support plan covers the following key areas
- Health
- Education
- Emotional and Behavioural Development
- Identity
- Social Presentation
The Adoption Team will play a pivotal role in liaising with the child’s Social Worker to ensure that any additional services required, i.e. therapeutic support, is identified, assessed and an appropriately qualified provider is identified to deliver the service.

**Services Provided – Adoption Support:**

The Adoption Service offers a range of post-approval and post adoption support for people who have been adopted, birth families and adopters. We prioritise resources focused on maintaining the relationship between an adoptive child and their adoptive family.

Adoption is a life time relationship and adoptive families may request an assessment of adoption support needs at any time while their child/children is/are growing up.

Where a child is placed outside the city, Sheffield City Council will be responsible for assessing and providing for adoption support needs for three years post adoption order. After this time it will become the responsibility of the local authority in whose area they reside.

The authority similarly recognises the need to give financial support to some families. To meet this need, the Agency has a scheme for the payment of adoption allowances in specified circumstances.

Financial support is offered to all adopters to facilitate introductions.

Financial support to provide necessary equipment for children being placed may also be payable.

All prospective adopters have an allocated social worker. This is usually the worker who completed the assessment. This worker will support the adoptive family until the finalising of an Adoption Order. When a child is placed for adoption, the child’s social worker will also be involved in supporting the child in placement as required by adoption legislation.

Children placed for adoption will be subject to statutory adoption reviews under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. This will involve an Independent Reviewing Officer who will ensure that all aspects of the child’s welfare and plans for the future are progressing satisfactorily.

Prospective adoptive parents and children placed with them are entitled to support from services for Looked After children, whilst the child is placed, prior to an Adoption Order being granted

Sheffield Multi Agency Psychological Support Service operates a helpline which is available for adopters every Friday from 10-12pm. The telephone number is 2260876
Newly approved adopters are actively encouraged to take up membership of Adoption UK which provides a comprehensive range of adoption services both locally and nationally.

Sheffield is part of a contract with Yorkshire and Humberside for adoption support services. These are supplied by Pac-UK, Family Action and Adoption UK. This includes the following:

1. An advice line for those affected by adoption: birth families; adopted adults.
2. Support for adopted adults, schedule 2 counselling sessions and intermediary services:
3. Pro-active birth parent support and counselling: Core offer is up to 6 sessions and review for further sessions beyond this. Group work may be provided where appropriate;
4. Independent support for adoptive parents: Core offer up to 3 sessions and review for further sessions beyond this. Group work may be provided where appropriate; and
5. Support for adopted teenagers including a website, online chat forum where support can be provided
6. A Youth Council across Yorkshire and Humber with social events with the aim of using views and experiences to help improve and develop policy and practice
7. Assistance in improving the participation of adopters’ views in service development and delivery of services across the region.
8. Improving the participation of birth parents in service development across the region.

These are in addition to services offered locally. Leaflets advising of the range of services offered are freely available.

When therapeutic or other adoption support services are identified as needed, and are not available from universal services or services for Looked after Children, spot-purchase funding can be available and funded through the Adoption Support Fund, which is Government funding available to support adoptive families, or funded direct from Sheffield City Council. Where appropriate your social worker will make the application for funding from the Adoption Support Fund. An example of where this might be used is for a specialist therapeutic intervention to assist adopters and children struggling with attachment or other difficulties.

Assistance is given to access mainstream education services and to ensure all appropriate arrangements have been made for the child’s education, prior to the granting of the Order

Assistance is also given to support prospective adopters to promote the child’s participation in leisure activities and trips;

Support with ongoing contact arrangements is considered and reviewed as part of the Adoption Support Plan.
Adopters attend support groups where they share their experiences and learn from each other. They are kept up to date with changes and developments within the service.

Sheffield provides an adoption allowance scheme, where required, to ensure the adopters can care for the child. The allowance is paid monthly and is means tested.

The Adoption Service operates a confidential Letterbox Service, providing safe and proactive contact arrangements for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. The adoption service can hold information from birth families and people who have been adopted which can be exchanged on request.

Where adopted people, under the age of 18, seek further information and possible contact with their birth family, the Adoption Service offers counselling and other appropriate services. This is usually in conjunction with the adoptive family.

Where adopted people over the age of 18 ask for further information and possible contact with their birth family, the Adoption Service offers counselling and acts as an intermediary or this service is provided by PAC-UK. The Adoption Service strongly supports the National Adoption Contact Register so that all parties to an adoption can record their mutual willingness to be approached. An intermediary service will be available when a link has been made on the register.

The Adoption Service encourages all parties to adoption to use the services provided by the Post Adoption Centre (London), which offers an information and advice service.

Sheffield City Council offers out of hours emergency social work support to all service user groups.
6. ADOPTION PANEL

All adoption service providers are legally required to have an Adoption Panel. Adoption Panels have an independent role separate from the adoption service provider.

Sheffield Adoption Service operates two adoption panels per month. Additional Panel meetings are arranged where required.

The Adoption Panel works within the same principles and standards of service as the adoption agency. Additionally:

- The Panel will take an active role in maintaining the quality of standards of adoption services;
- Involvement of children, families and applicants will be maximised.

The key role of the Adoption Panel is to provide independent scrutiny of the proposals presented and to determine whether:

- All the issues have been clarified
- The proposal is sound

The Panel can then make a recommendation about the following:

- Recommending whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child;
- Recommending the “match” between a child referred to Panel and a particular prospective adopter.
- To recommend whether a child should be placed for adoption in those cases where there is no court scrutiny and birth parents have consented to the making of an adoption order, for example relinquished children.

The Adoption Panel also provides advice regarding:

- The provision of adoption support for particular adoptive families;
- The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background;
- The arrangements for allowing any person contact with a particular child;
- Whether the parental responsibility of any parent, guardian or the prospective adopter should be restricted for a particular child, and if so, the extent of any such restriction.

Central list

Panel members are drawn from a list of people whom it is considered have the appropriate qualifications and/or experiences to consider cases submitted to the Adoption Panel.
There is no limit to the number of people who are on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every Panel.

Sheffield’s Adoption Service will decide how many Panel members should sit on each Panel meeting, subject to the Panel meeting being “quorate” (a certain number of people need to be present for the meeting to go ahead). Panel business can only be conducted if there are at least 5 members present, including the Chair or Vice Chair and the adoption social worker. Where the Vice Chair has to chair the meeting and is not an independent, at least one independent member must be present for the Panel to be quorate.

The Panel should not be so large so that it is difficult to chair and could be seen as rather overwhelming to prospective adopters attending the meeting.

The central list in Sheffield includes:

- A Chairperson – an independent person with the necessary skills and experience.
- Social workers, each with at least three years’ relevant post qualifying experience in child care social work, including direct experience in adoption work. The social workers do not need to be employed by the agency.
- The Medical Adviser – will have expertise in child health and health related issues.
- Other persons – “independent members”, including where practicable at least two persons with personal experience of adoption. This could include specialists in education, child and adolescent mental health, race and culture and those who have personal experience of adoption.
- Additionally, Sheffield City Council will appoint a Legal Adviser to the Panel. They do not attend Panel but can be called upon for advice. The Legal Adviser will be a qualified solicitor who is well experienced in child and family law and is also a member of the Law Society’s Children’s Panel.

The agency adviser and panel minute taker will also be in attendance.

**Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel**

The Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel is a senior member of staff with at least five years’ relevant post-qualifying experience and relevant management experience.

The Agency Adviser is not a Panel member but should attend Panel meetings. Where necessary another Agency Adviser will deputise.

**Vice Chair of the Panel**

Sheffield Adoption Panel has two Vice Chairs, with responsibility for acting as the Panel Chair if the Chairperson is absent or the appointment is vacant.
7. PERFORMANCE DATA.

Sheffield City Council’s Adoption Service presents performance management information every month to senior managers from across Children’s Services.

It is also part of the regular reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board which includes elected members.

Quarterly performance data is sent to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. This informs national scorecards for adoption services as well as providing information about trends in adoption and comparative data with other agencies and statistical neighbours.

Six monthly reports are provided by the adoption panel and annual agency reports go to the scrutiny committee.
8. QUALITY ASSURANCE and MONITORING.

Arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by Sheffield’s Adoption Service are effective and that the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard. These include the following:

1. Children’s permanency plans and adoption plans are scrutinized by Independent Reviewing Officers, Team Managers, Service Managers, Agency Adviser, Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.

2. The agency’s performance including number of children approved and timescales for children’s progress through the adoption system is reported to the Senior Leadership Team every month. It includes the number of adopter enquiries, assessments and approvals as well as the timeliness of assessments.

3. Performance is included in the Annual Agency report which goes to Scrutiny committee.

4. All staff members have regular supervision.

5. All prospective adopters complete an evaluation of the preparation course in order to monitor the effectiveness of the delivery of training.

6. All individuals receiving a service from the Adoption service are asked to complete an evaluation form about the service they have received.

7. All prospective adopters are advised of the department’s complaints procedure and given information about how to make a complaint.

8. After each panel a questionnaire will be sent to all attendees, seeking their views and feedback. The outcome of these is fed back to panel on a six monthly basis and incorporated into the panel annual report.

9. The Adoption Team regularly reviews the progress of family finding and possible matches for waiting adopters within the monthly family finding meetings.

10. The adoption panel provides commentary on all reports presented to panel. We have recently introduced grading of reports by panel. These are collated and fed back at monthly performance meetings, as well as being included in panel reports.

11. The agency adviser provides thorough feedback to workers and their managers on the quality of their reports and plans.

12. Audits of case records are carried out by team managers on a regular basis.
9. COMPLAINTS

Sheffield City Council welcomes complaints, comments and suggestions about services from service users, their families, carers or representatives. The complaints procedure recognises the vulnerability of complainants and the need to resolve complaints at the most informal level possible.

The adoption service actively encourages feedback from people (including children) about the service they received. This feedback is then used to inform future service planning and any “lessons learned” are communicated to relevant staff;

All Looked After children who make a complaint can be provided with the services of an advocate via the IRO service.

Adopters, prospective adopters and birth families are clearly entitled to use, and are made aware of the complaints procedure if they feel they cannot resolve a difficulty with the individuals concerned or their managers.

The complaints procedure:

- The Complaints procedure has two stages, formal and informal
- Informal complaints are usually dealt with by the Manager of the Service concerned, and as quickly as possible
- If the complaint is serious, or if someone is not satisfied by the action taken by the manager, the complaint can be registered as a formal complaint
- An Investigation Officer, who is not directly involved in providing the service, will be appointed. The complaint will be acknowledged within seven days and will normally be responded to within 28 days.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Investigation, they can ask for a review of their complaint through an Investigation Review.
- The Investigation Review is the end of the Council’s complaints procedure. There is no further right to appeal to the Council following completion of the Investigation Review.
- If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may take their complaint to the relevant Ombudsman or external body.
- All complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate and all staff members must ensure that anyone within the adoption process understands how to make a complaint, and to whom it should be directed. At any stage, they may contact their Councilor, MP or consult with a solicitor.
In the event that someone wishes to make a complaint they may contact:

Complaints Department,
1 Union Street
Howden Sheffield S1 2SH

Tel: 0114 2734567
Website: https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/your-city-council/make-complaint-council-service

**OFSTED**

OFSTED is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services, including Sheffield City Council, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act (2000). Should an adopter, child or birth family member need to contact the service, with any questions, queries or complaints, they can be reached on:

Telephone: 0300 123 1231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Or in writing to;

OFSTED,
Piccadilly Gate
26-32 Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

**Adoption Panel Complaints and Representations:**

Any complaint specifically about the Adoption panel should be directed to the Panel Adviser or Chair in the first instance, to assist resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved at stage one then the usual complaints procedure for Sheffield City Council will be used.

**Independent Review Mechanism**

If a prospective or approved adoptive parent is unhappy with a recommendation or decision made by the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker, the applicants have the right to appeal within 40 days of receiving notification. The appeal has to be made in writing to the Agency Decision Maker.

Alternatively, they may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 days from the agency decision to contact the IRM.
- The Adoption Agency will be contacted to produce relevant documents within 10 days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.
The IRM is managed by Coram Children’s Legal Centre (CCLC) with the service operating from its own base in Leeds. It covers the whole of England. Adoption Agencies cannot refer to the IRM – only prospective adopters. They do not have the authority to rescind decisions made by the Agency but can offer an independent review of decisions, from which they can make recommendations. Details of this process are made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM can be contacted at;

Independent Review Mechanism
The Contract Manager,
Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ
Telephone; 0845 450 3956 or 0113 2022080
Email; irm@baaf.org.uk
10. ALLEGATIONS:

Any complaint, allegation or concern about a child involving possible injury or harm to a child, including historical complaints, will be investigated within the existing Sheffield City Council Safeguarding Procedures.

Clear safeguarding procedures are in place including any concerns about professionals or carers. There is also a whistle blowing policy.

11. ADVOCACY and CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

In Sheffield City Council the ‘Children’s Involvement Team’ provide advocacy for children and young people in care. They can be contacted on:
Telephone: 0114 228 8553
Email: advocacy@sheffield.gcsx.gov.uk
Website: www.sheffkids.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/childrensinvolvementsheffield

Part of their role is to make sure that the authorities’ adoption service fulfils its obligations to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children and young people.

Advocates from the Children’s Involvement Team act independently upon behalf of children and young people who are looked after, ensuring that they are fully aware of the processes that affect their time in care, helping them plan for their future and above all, seeing that their voice is heard. There is a statutory obligation, under the Adoption Act 2002, that all children in care must be offered the services of an Advocate, if they are making or are intending to make a complaint.

Sheffield City Council is committed to giving children and young people in care, the best opportunities they can have in life by putting them at the centre of all our processes. By consulting with adoptive parents and their children, we are looking to constantly improve the service and provide the best possible outcomes.
Sheffield City Council is committed to challenging any form of discriminatory conduct. We will treat all candidates fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption enquiry and assessment process and applicants will be approved as adopters, irrespective of ethnicity, spirituality, faith, gender, sexual orientation or ability, providing the adoption service considers that they can safely meet the needs of children in care and will, in turn respect their needs. The minimum age for a candidate to apply to adopt in Sheffield is 21 years of age.

We will make every attempt to find a placement which meets the needs of the child or young person, taking into account their ethnicity, spirituality, faith, language, culture, gender and ability although we recognise that no child in care should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. Where it is not possible to place a child in a family that reflects their ethnic origin every effort will be made to assist the adoptive family to address their identity needs.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.