

# Statement of Purpose

## 1 April 2020



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## 1. Introduction

This is the Statement of Purpose for Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. It complies with the Adoption Services National Minimum Standards that an adoption service provides a Statement of Purpose which includes its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that it provides. This Statement of Purpose is approved by County Councillor Philippa Williamson Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools Lancashire County Council and Councillor Lynn Williams, Deputy Leader Children's Services Blackpool Council. This Statement of purpose is for Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool which is a new integrated adoption service for Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council which came into operation on the 1 April 2020. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is a Regional Adoption Agency hosted by Lancashire County Council.

Services are provided in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, as a local authority adoption service is inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

## 2. Welcome from County Councillor Philippa Williamson Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools Lancashire County Council and Councillor Lynn Williams, Deputy Leader Children's Services Blackpool Council.

Over the last two years, Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council have been working together to design and deliver a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), 'Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool'.

This new and exciting service sees two local authorities coming together to more effectively meet the needs of children waiting for a safe and secure adoptive family environment.

This new service will ensure children are matched with the best adopters as quickly as possible. This region-wide coordinated approach will allow us to increase the number of children who find forever families and reduce the length of time they wait for this to happen.

We will improve support for families and children who require this Post adoption and for those people considering adoption, whether now or in the future, a team of dedicated adoption specialists putting the interests of children first will be there to support them.

We are committed to making the adoption process as simple and effective as possible for both adopters and the children we care for.

We will be watching the development of the service with great interest and enthusiasm during the forthcoming year and wish it every success for the future.

### **3. Principles**

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to working in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and as such shares and embraces the important principles which underpin these Standards.

#### **Children;**

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as 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 National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

#### **Adopters;**

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, 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 consider 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.

#### 4. **Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool Vision and Values**

A piece of work was undertaken with adopters from the area as part of the work to form Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool regarding what adopters and their families want to achieve from a Regional Adoption Agency. These are the agreed aims and values agreed with our adopters.

**Our aim:** To support you and your family through your adoption journey

**Our values:**

- Friendly – we are welcoming, positive, understanding and helpful
- Open and honest – we are clear about what you can expect from us
- Inclusive – we are non-judgemental, consistent, fair and supportive
- Professional – we have knowledgeable and experienced staff who are passionate about what they do

#### 5. **The Work of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool**

Children who cannot live with their families deserve the very best. Children who cannot be re-united with their families should have the benefit of a long term stable childhood where they are loved and accepted as a unique individual, are assisted to achieve to their full potential, prepared for independence and can be supported into adult life.

Adoption is a means by which this can be achieved for children where it is in their best interests. Adoption offers vulnerable children much needed stability, security, legal permanence and the support they need to achieve their potential.

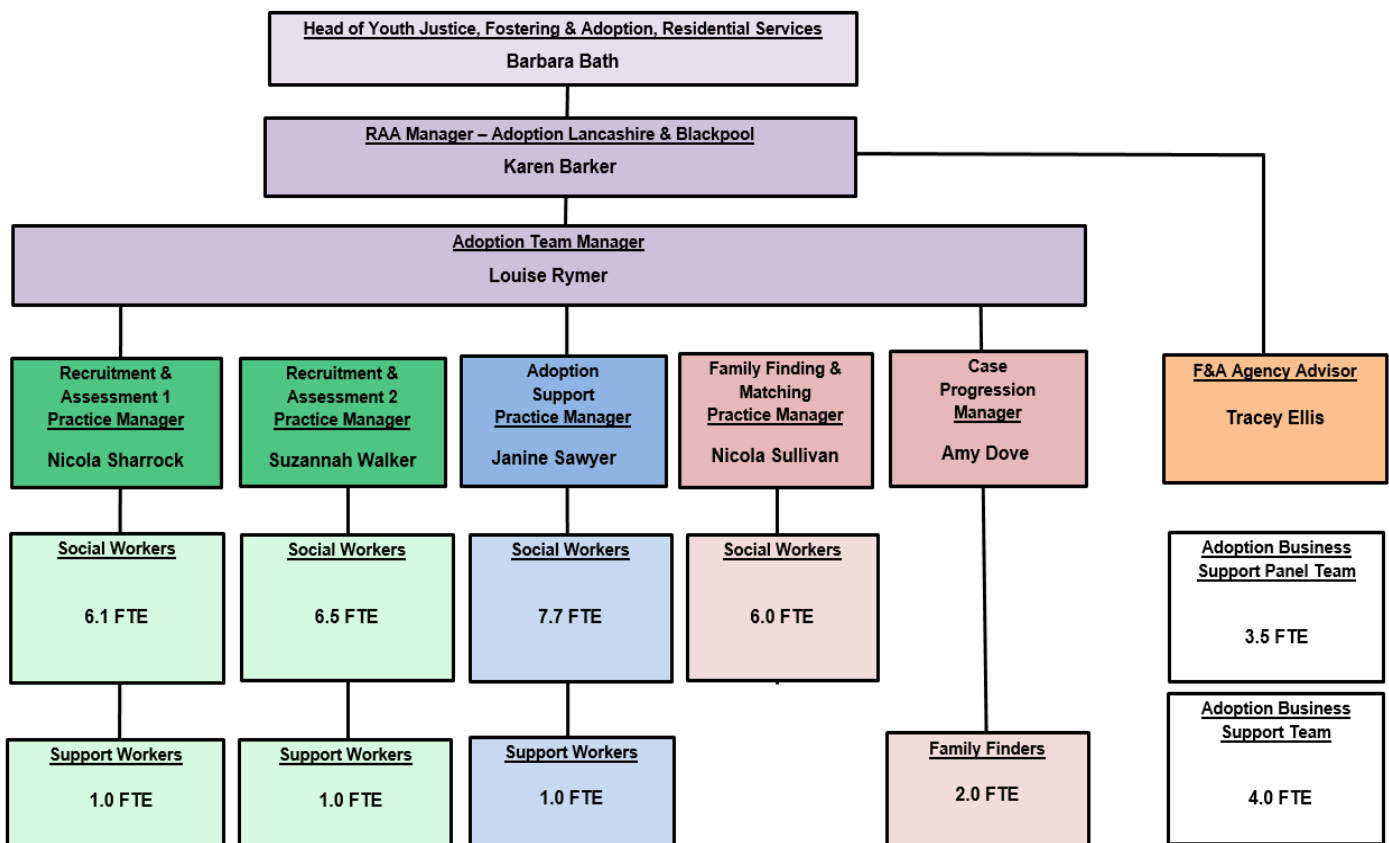
Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to trying to find adoptive homes for the children of Lancashire and Blackpool. Where this is not possible Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool will provide information to the local authorities regarding why this cannot be achieved.

The service will undertake the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families
- Assess, prepare and support sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds to provide permanent family care for children where their individual needs and history will be understood, valued and respected.
- Support early permanence of children by recruiting Concurrent and Fostering for Adoption adopters to enable children with a plan of adoption or a likely plan of adoption to be placed with their adopters at the earliest opportunity.
- Support adopters who are waiting for a child

- Family find for children who need a permanent home through adoption
- Support adopters through matching and bridging.
- Provide training and advice to adopters to support them in caring for their child.
- Provide appropriate choice of adoptive placements for children who are waiting
- Support adopted children to maintain contact with their birth families
- Provide access to information, counselling and support as appropriate to adults, whose lives have been affected by adoption, including adopted adults and birth families
- Provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad

## 6. Organisational Structure



The Adoption Support Services Advisor for Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is Janine Sawyer Practice Manager Adoption Support.

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool staff are based at County Hall, Preston, PR1 8XN, however they work across the whole of Lancashire and Blackpool.

## **7. Qualifications and Experience of Staff**

Karen Barker is the Manager of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. She has a BA in Applied Social Studies and a CQSW. A qualified social worker since 1989 and has worked in a number of statutory child care settings. She has been a manager for over 20 years, with over 15 year's management experience in permanency, fostering and adoption.

Louise Rymer, Team Manager has a BA (Hons) Hons in Education and Deaf Studies 2001. Louise qualified as a social worker in 2005 and has worked in adoption since then.

The structure of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is set out above. All social workers are qualified with a social work qualification and registered with Social Care England, the governing body for social workers. They have relevant experience in children and families work and all have undertaken an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

The teams in Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool work closely together with colleagues in the Local Authorities to identify the children who require adoptive families and within the service to ensure that adopters and children are supported through their adoption journey.

## **8. Services for Prospective Adopters**

### **How to make an Enquiry**

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool via the agency website - [enquiries@adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk) or by making contact through the dedicated enquiry line 0300 123 6727. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process and an information pack link is sent out. We welcome enquiries from those who live in Lancashire and Blackpool as well as those who live beyond Lancashire and Blackpool. Enquirers are invited to an information session.

### **Information Events**

Information events are held throughout the year; these are facilitated by workers from Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. The events allow for prospective applicants to make informal enquiries about the adoption process, meet adopters and access information about the process. Information is also provided about Early Permanency via Concurrent Placements and Foster for Adoption. Prospective applicants are provided with the opportunity to express an interest in being assessed for dual approval as adopters and early permanency adopters. If enquirers wish to progress their interest, they can request a home visit.

### **Initial Home Visit**

An adoption social worker will provide further details on the adoption process including early permanency on the home visit. The personal situation of the applicant(s) will be discussed in detail to see if adoption is the right choice for them. The social worker will start discussions about practical considerations.

A detailed summary of the home visit will be completed and passed to an adoption manager before the registration of interest form is accepted. On most occasions, enquirer(s) will be given a registration of interest form. The adoption manager will make

a decision within 5 days about whether it should be accepted. At this stage, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s). A letter will be sent to the prospective adopter (s) confirming that their application is proceeding or detailing the reasons why their registration of interest cannot be accepted.

### **Stage 1 Pre-assessment process**

Stage 1 begins on the day that Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool accepts the registration of interest from adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete.

The stage 1 process will include the following:

- A social worker will be allocated to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.
- All of the statutory references/checks will be completed including the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible which will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues
- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training /preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have.

### **Preparation Training**

Prospective adopter(s) will be invited to attend preparation training in Stage 1. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on our website.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 12 times per year based on need. Second or subsequent adopter training is provided at regular intervals as required.

### **Statutory Checks**

All statutory checks, including DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as the ROI is received. Applicants are aware that negative police/statutory checks may affect their application and in some case may result in rejection. References are taken up with Local Authorities where the applicants have lived over the past 10 years.

Applicants are advised to inform us of any adverse history or medical condition which any of these checks may reveal. If applicants work with children or vulnerable adults, employers are asked whether there are any concerns of a safeguarding nature. This includes voluntary work. In most cases other checks include employer's checks, contacting adult children of the applicant/s and former significant partners will be done in Stage 2.



## **Medical Advisor**

Applicants will be asked to have their adoption medical as soon as their ROI is received. The Medical Advisor may follow up any concerns with the GP/hospital consultant. The Medical Advisor's opinion is taken into account in assessing the applicants' suitability to progress to Stage 2 alongside other information.

## **Stage 2 - The Assessment Process**

The stage 2-assessment process cannot begin until the stage one assessment has successfully been completed (apart from fast tracked applications, which comply with the specific criteria set out by regulation.) In some instances, applicants can proceed to stage two with outstanding checks subject to a management decision if it is deemed that not to do so would cause unnecessary delay.

We will at all times endeavour to ensure that the same worker undertakes stage 1 and stage two.

The applicants complete a stage 2 application form. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long process during which a home study assessment is undertaken leading to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage 2 plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and provisional panel dates. The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, ex-partner, employers and references. Personal referees will also be visited.

Based on the information in the assessment the adoption social worker will put together a detailed Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will reach a conclusion about the prospective adopters(s) suitability to adopt and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is presented to the adoption panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the stage 2 process that they cannot recommend approval, we may present a "brief report" to panel which sets out the concerns. Applicants can make representation in person or in writing to panel.

If panel recommend that the application should not continue, or that they cannot recommend approval of a completed assessment, and if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by panel or by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinise the decisions of adoption agencies.

The recommendation of the subsequent adoption panel or IRM is then referred back to the ADM who will consider all the information and reach a decision that will be final. They may seek legal advice to assist.

### **Interviewing members of Extended Family/Adult children**

If members of the extended family are expected to play a particular role in an adopted child's life (e.g. by providing day care for a working parent) they will be interviewed. Where possible adult children of the applicant(s), including those who live away from home, are interviewed. Where an interview is not possible, adult children receive a letter seeking their comments on their parent's plans. The comments of adult children are taken seriously. They do not have an automatic veto but their views are considered and followed up. If we can obtain their permission, their comments are shared with the applicants.

Where applicants have had previously significant relationship -where they have cohabited for a lengthy period, or have parented a child with a former partner, that partner will generally be contacted to ascertain their view or identify any concerns they may have about the applicant's ability to keep a child safe. If this is not appropriate (e.g. because of possible violence from an ex-partner towards an applicant), the reason will be explained in the assessment report and the Panel will take a view of all the circumstances. A decision not to approach an ex- partner must be agreed by the Manager of the Regional Adoption Agency.

### **Referees**

At least three personal referees need to be interviewed and to complete a written reference. One of these should be a family member who may be different from the family member referred to above.

In the case of applicants who are couples, it is our policy to interview a representative from each side of the family. Additional referees may be needed if there are issues about a particular stage in the applicant's life about which we need to obtain another view. A written summary of each interview is made. Interviews with referees are confidential and referees should be assured that we will treat them as such unless they agree to share. Referees are asked to sign the summary of the interview, which is provided to Panel.

### **Adoption by existing foster carers**

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child ( or the children's) plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

The service in conjunction with the child's social worker will then undertake a viability assessment to determine if that application should proceed. This decision is made by the Manager of the RAA. If the decision is made that the application is viable a social worker will be appointed to complete the assessment of the prospective adopter. If the viability assessment recommends that the full assessment should not be undertaken foster carers will be advised of their right to submit an application to court in certain instances.

A fast track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. The process will bypass the stage one process and start at the beginning of stage two (as above). They will be offered training.

## **Second or subsequent adopters**

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and there is a 2-year average age gap between that child and a potential new child. These timescales will not apply if the child to be placed is a sibling of the child already in placement. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start in stage 2. They would be offered training.

## **9. Adoption Panel**

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- Approval of the match between children and adopters
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the district.

There are three Adoption Panels per month, two are held in County Hall Preston and one is held at Bickerstaffe House Blackpool.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within 7 working days of the recommendation of the panel. They may make a decision different to that recommended by the panel. The agency decision maker for approvals of prospective adopters is the Manager of the Regional Adoption Agency.

Where prospective adopters or existing adopters disagree with a decision following consideration by the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker, they have the right to make representation in certain circumstances in accordance with the Regulations. The prospective/adopter should make their representation within 28 days of receiving the written decision of the Agency Decision Maker. This is done by making representations either to the Adoption Service or the Independent Review Mechanism, [www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

## **10. Matching**

Many adopters approved by the Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool are matched with Lancashire and Blackpool children. The tracking of children in Lancashire and Blackpool allows early identification of children suitable for early permanence and identification of potential links with early permanency adopters. Those children where

early permanence is not suitable are still considered for links at the earliest opportunity. Adopters can be approached with details of a potential link very swiftly either whilst in assessment or following their approval. In the event approved adopters are not linked swiftly with a Lancashire or Blackpool child their profiles are usually uploaded to Linkmaker.

When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report (CPR) and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and their assessed needs. The CPR will contain details of proposed contact with the birth family including mailbox arrangements which are to be maintained by all parties once a child is adopted.

The adopters where possible will meet with the child's social worker, child's foster carer and other relevant professional who are involved with the child such as medical advisor, teacher etc. This allows the adopter(s) to be able to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the child(rens) needs. A life appreciation day may be undertaken this is dependent on the child's circumstances.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen and contributed to by the prospective adopters before panel.

The proposed match is taken to the Adoption Panel, with all the relevant paperwork. The child's social worker, adopter's social worker, family finding social worker and adopter(s) will attend panel. The process for panel is the same as approval with the Adoption Panel making a recommendation on the suitability of a match. Decision making for children to be matched for adoption is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's statutory local authority. If the adopter is being matched with a child from an agency outside Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, they will attend that agency's panel.

If a match is agreed there will be an introductions planning meeting to plan for the introduction, and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the Early Permanency route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering.

#### Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or more usually, once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information.

## 11. Post Placement

The child remains a Child Looked After until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six weekly. Statutory visits are the responsibility of the placing local authority. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and the worker for the prospective adopters will give advice, however this is normally at 10 weeks of placement. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family and child's social workers.

Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safekeeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a Later Life Letter is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

## 12. Adoption Support

The adoption support team will undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.

- Newsletter
- Duty telephone line
- Support groups including stay and play groups
- Peer Mentoring Service
- Links with mental health and educational services
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- Annual social events for adoptive families
- Advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories
- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children
- Information about registering a veto

### **Contact and the Letterbox Service**

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child, and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact may include letterbox contact, or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, brothers and sisters or extended family members.

A letterbox service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent, or any other relative, or with any other person, the agency considers relevant.



### **13. Annual Reviews of Prospective Adopters**

We aim to match approved adopters and children at the earliest opportunity working proactively with adopters to enable placements to be made. The clear focus is on placing children in loving homes but there may be occasions where there is an interval between an adopter being approved and a child being placed.

Where approved adopters have not achieved a match with a child within a year of approval they will be reviewed. If required it can be presented to the Adoption Panel for their consideration and advice. Adopters for whom there has been a significant change of circumstance will also be presented at the Adoption Panel for review. This process will be repeated annually if the adopters remain without a match.

If as a result of the review there is a recommendation for deregistration of a prospective adopter due to specific concerns which have arisen during the period, the social worker will write a report for Panel, detailing:

- Placements that have been considered and/ or made (in the case of adoption disruptions).
- Why no placement resulted
- Any safeguarding issues relating to the adopters
- Significant changes in circumstances
- Changes in the kind of child sought
- The applicant's views and wishes
- Information from updated statutory checks – DBS updates; and
- Making a recommendation as to whether to continue the approved status of the applicant/s or not

As with the original approval, prospective adopters have the right to view the report, comment on it and to attend Panel. The representations procedure or referral to the Independent Review Mechanism is available at this stage as at the initial approval stage.

### **15. Complaints, Comments, Compliments:**

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to the process of continuous improvement. Compliments, comments and complaints provide opportunities to review services and promote service developments.

Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue. In certain cases the Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool managers will be the most appropriate person to talk to. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, you have the right to progress to a formal complaint.

#### **Complaints:**

If you are a child, or your complaint is on behalf of a child, then you should contact the local authority, which has responsibility for that child. The local authority will be responsible for handling your complaint as it retains responsibility for the welfare of each adopted child. Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal

discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue.

However, if you are not satisfied with their response you can contact the Complaints section of the relevant local authority by clicking on one of the links below;

**Lancashire County Council**

[www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/)

**Blackpool Council**

[www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Social-services-complaints.aspx](http://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Social-services-complaints.aspx)

If you are an adopter, prospective adopter or birth parent, and you wish, to complain about a service provided by Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, you should make the complaint to Lancashire County Council which is the host agency for Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool and which will investigate all complaints about Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool.

**Lancashire County Council**

[www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/)

**Compliments and Comments**

If you want to make a comment or compliment about a service provided by Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, you should make the compliment/comment to Lancashire County Council

**Lancashire County Council**

[www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/)