



<b>Briefing for:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Briefing Note: Adoption Agencies</b>
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## **1. Introduction**

Adoption is based on the premise that the importance of family life cannot be overstated and that it is the fundamental right of every child to belong to a family. Where children cannot live with birth parents for whatever reason, society has a duty to provide them with a stable, safe and loving alternative.

## **2. Functions of an Adoption Agency**

Local authorities have a duty to maintain an adoption service in their area, they is not obliged to provide all the facilities of an adoption service itself, but may make use of the services provided by voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

The services provided are:

- Deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption
- Preparing, assessing and approving prospective adaptors
- Matching and proposing a placement
- Adoption Support Services
- Post Adoption Services

An effective specialist service in relation to inter-country adoption is provided for Haringey applicants by Norwood, voluntary adoption agency. Norwood assesses prospective adopters and undertakes welfare supervision on our behalf. The statutory reviews are chaired by our IRO.

### **3. Making the adoption process work well**

We know how successful adoptions can be. Experience and research has made clear the factors that make the adoption process work well for the child, birth parents and adoptive parents. The local authorities that are most successful in finding adoptive families for looked after children will generally be those with a very clear care planning process that always considers adoption as a possible permanence option.

Avoiding delay in the adoption process, includes starting the family finding process as soon as adoption becomes the plan following a statutory review. Any delay which prevents the needs of the child from being met is unacceptable. Legislation makes clear that delays in coming to a decision and in the subsequent stages of the adoption process, are likely to prejudice the child's welfare.

Key elements:

- Actively promote adoption
- Taking the fullest account of the views and wishes of the child
- Placing a child with a prospective adopter who can meet most or all of the child's identified needs. Any practice that effectively stops a child from being adopted because the child and prospective adopter do not share the same racial or cultural background is not child-centred and is unacceptable.
- Providing an effective adoption support service
- Effective collaboration with the local authority's other social services and with voluntary adoption agencies so that services may be given in a coordinated manner. This avoids delay and duplication
- Developing and sustaining constructive links between adoption and looked after children's teams and the courts in order to minimise delays in court proceedings
- A practical and balanced understanding of the circumstances in which special guardianship may be more appropriate than adoption and how to manage the different processes and legal requirements.

### **The Legislative Framework**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (the Act) is the principle piece of legislation governing adoption in England and Wales. It has been in force since 30 December 2005, and has been amended by other legislation since 2002. While the Children Act 1989 sets the general framework for the support of children in need and planning for their future if they become looked after, the Act provides the framework for implementing plans for adoption. Much of the detail of the adoption system is set out in regulations.

#### **4. Adoption Panels**

Adoption Panels need at least five members present including the chair/vice chair, adoption social worker and one independent member.

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency-decision maker who is a senior officer as described in the National Minimum Standards.

The panel has an adviser who is experienced in adoption, a medical adviser and a legal adviser.

When a looked after child's review recommends that adoption would be in the best interests of a child an adoption plan is developed. The process for a child to be placed with adoptive parents involves rigorous scrutiny by the agency and the court.

Guidance recommends that a child should be placed with a suitable prospective adopter within 6 months of the agency decision. Prospective adopters should expect to be considered by the panel within 8 months of their application, following a full assessment.

Haringey Adoption Service belongs to the North London Adoption Consortium (NLAC). The consortium consists of seven adoption agencies, five local authority agencies and two from the voluntary sector. The local authorities are Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington, while Norwood and PAC (Post Adoption Centre) are our voluntary agency partners.

Particular areas of co-operation include exchange of information of approved adopters and systems to more effectively achieve placements for children waiting for adoptive families. The consortium arranges preparation programmes for applicants and training for adoptive families and for staff.