



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

FOR

THE ADOPTION SERVICE

OF

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

INDEX

	Page Number
1. Introduction	3
2. Strategic Aims	3
3. Aims of the Adoption Service	5
4. Objectives of the Adoption Service	6
5. Principles	7
6. Organisational Structure	9
7. Management and Staffing	10
8. System for Monitoring and Evaluating Service Provision	13
9. Services Provided	14
10. The Service to Prospective Adopters	18
11. The Complaints Procedure	21
12. The Registration Authority	22
Appendix – Members of the Adoption Panel	23

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Statement of Purpose reflects the overall aims, objectives and principles of the Adoption Agency and is available to staff in the Agency and anyone seeking a copy. A copy of the Statement can be accessed on the Council's website. The adoption service is registered with, and inspected by, Ofsted.

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulations 2 and 4 and Schedules 1 and 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005. It will be reviewed annually.

2. **STRATEGIC AIMS**

North Somerset Council acts as an Adoption Agency to provide those adoption services required of it under the Adoption Act 1976, Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

The Adoption Service operates within the Corporate Vision, shared with partner agencies, of North Somerset Council's single plan for Children and Young People, which is:

North Somerset's children and young people will be happy, healthy and safe and achieve their full potential regardless of where they live. This is the keystone to their future personal success and the contribution they make to their communities.

The Adoption Service is fully supported by Council Services and our partner agencies who, as the above statement reflects, are working towards the national agenda of 'Every Child Matters' to achieve the following five outcomes for every child:

- Be healthy;
- Stay safe;
- Enjoy and achieve;
- Make a positive contribution;
- Achieve economic well-being.

The Children Act 1989 placed a greater emphasis on working to maintain children in their own families. Supporting families with children through a multi-agency strategy is linked to the provision of locality services and new ways of working associated with the delivery of a Common Assessment Framework. Therefore, those children who cannot be supported at home and come into public care are likely to be some of the most vulnerable and needy. These children will have experienced trauma and disruption in their early years and are likely to have complex needs and behaviours.

Where children are unable to live with birth families, alternative permanent arrangements, for example, adoption, will be considered. Adoption involves the complete transfer of parental responsibility to adoptive parents. An adoptive

placement aims to safeguard and promote each child's welfare through childhood into adult life by providing a positive secure, stable, caring and anti-discriminatory environment. This will ensure his/her unique needs are met, enabling him/her to:

- gain self esteem, confidence, self awareness and to fulfil their potential;
- form and maintain appropriate and effective relationships supported by a positive environment.

3. **AIMS OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

The service aims to:

- ensure that all children living in North Somerset have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent, safe, loving home and where this cannot be provided by the birth family, adoption will be considered.
- ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process;
- provide placements which meet these individual needs, including those of ethnicity, religion, sibling groups, disabled children, children with complex emotional and behavioural needs and children with special needs;
- ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents (including those wishing to adopt a child from overseas) are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services;
- ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process and have access to adoption support services.
- ensure that adopted adults are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the process of searching for their records.
- work in partnership with other agencies, using an holistic and multi-disciplinary approach, to meet the needs of adoptive families.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- To ensure that our childcare planning processes provide the opportunity for adoption to be considered for every child who might benefit from it.
- To find good quality permanent families for children for whom adoption is the plan.
- To recruit, prepare, assess and support a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children needing adoptive families.
- To develop a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies.
- To ensure that the adoption agency employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver a high standard of adoption services.
- To ensure that applicants for inter-country adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.
- To ensure that step-parent adopters are provided with an appropriate service in line with the Court's expectations.
- To ensure that adopted adults are given the appropriate support and information to progress their search.
- To ensure 'Best Value' in the services provided.
- To manage the Agency's Adoption Panel so that it is organised efficiently and is effective.
- To provide an independent counselling service to birth parents, adopters and adopted adults and children.

5. PRINCIPLES

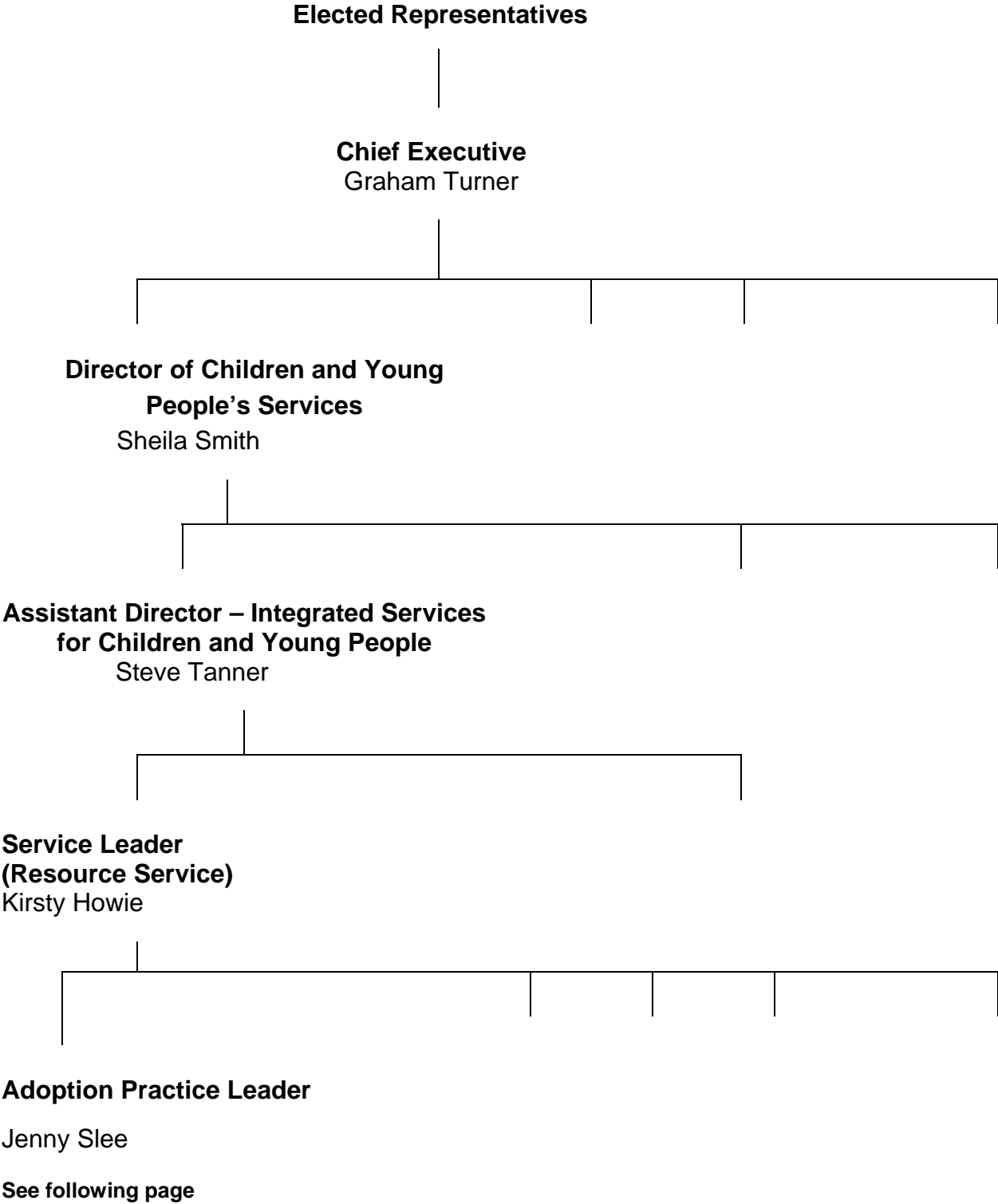
The adoption service aims to comply with the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2003 (revised February 2011) and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The Values Statement within the National Minimum Standards reflects the following principles which underpin these standards.

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account according to their age and understanding and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family throughout their childhood, which should meet all the needs of the child in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, physical, social and emotional development and that promotes a supportive lifelong relationship.
- Children, birth parents, families and adoptive applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.
- Adopted adults will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the searching process.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Practice in relation to the recruitment, training, assessment and support of adopters will underpin the maintenance of high standards of care for children.
- 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 promoted and valued.
- A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic background are all important factors to consider in finding a new family. The adoptive family should reflect this, if this can be found without unnecessary delay. No child should be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and parents do not share the same racial or cultural background.
- The local authority will work in partnership with birth families and those with parental responsibility, to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for their child. This will involve birth families in planning for the future of their children, to recognise their feelings and needs and to take account of their wishes.

- Every effort will be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- 'Drift' in planning for children is not acceptable, as it can have a severe impact on the health and development of children. Delay may be unavoidable but should be accounted for.
- Every child is entitled to information about her/his birth family in order to promote her/his sense of identity.
- There will be arrangements for ongoing contact, direct or indirect, between the child and birth family unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Adopted adults have their identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether or not to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.
- The local authority will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure the best outcomes for children are delivered; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved. Children and young people who have been adopted, their adoptive families and birth families will have access to a range of professional services and supports appropriate to their assessed needs.
- All the parties to the adoption process will have access to the Department's complaints procedure.
- Commitment to involve users in the ongoing review and development of the service.
- The policies and procedures guidance in the form of the Adoption Manual will reflect current practice and be regularly updated.
- Confidentiality is a priority and therefore policies, procedures and practices reflect this.
- Arrangements can be made through appropriate interpreters for those who are unable to understand a document to have it read, translated or explained to them.

6. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

North Somerset Council Management Structure



7. MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING

Adoption Practice Group

Practice Leader
Jenny Slee 18.5 hours
Social Workers
Jean Cartmell Debbie Havill Anita Huggins Tim Maddison Sue Newton Georgina Shuckburgh 4.2 fte
Administrative Staff
Eileen Cockburn Tracey Walters 1.2 fte (including 1 day Letterbox administration)

The Adoption Letterbox Contact Scheme is managed by the Adoption Practice Leader. Debbie Havill is responsible for co-ordinating the Scheme and Eileen Cockburn provides administrative support. Both are allocated one specific day a week for this work.

The Assistant Director - Integrated Services for Children and Young People is the manager with overall responsibility for the adoption service and is the Agency Decision-maker. The Adoption Support Services Adviser is the Adoption Practice Leader, Jenny Slee. Jenny Slee is a qualified Social Worker, registered with the General Social Care Council, with extensive experience in childcare social work and has managed adoption services for more than 20 years. Jenny Slee holds a Certificate in Managing Care from the Open University, completed in June 2005.

All social work staff are professionally qualified, registered with the General Social Care Council and have substantial experience in the childcare and adoption fields.

Eileen Cockburn, Administrative Assistant, is qualified to NVQ Level 3 and has extensive experience in the adoption field. Tracey Walters, Administrative Assistant, also has experience in the adoption field and is a qualified AAT Accounting Technician.

All social workers receive monthly supervision, and the administrative worker three-monthly supervision, from the Adoption Practice Leader. There is an annual appraisal system in operation for all staff.

The Adoption Practice Leader receives monthly supervision from her line manager, Kirsty Howie.

Other relevant staff:

- Independent Reviewing Officers, who work in the Quality Assurance Team, have a responsibility for monitoring the implementation of adoption plans and ensuring that time-scales are adhered to. The Independent Reviewing Officers also review children when they are placed for adoption.
- North Somerset is a member of the South West Adoption Consortium, which is used to increase the range of placement possibilities for children and adopters and for the sharing of good practice. The terms of reference of the Consortium are available if requested. Matches are also sought via “Be My Parent”, “Adoption Today”, the National Register, specific advertising and a variety of Adoption Exchange Days.
- Childcare social workers and their managers involved in the social work of adoption cases work in line with the Adoption Agency Regulations.
- Full time Business Development Officer in Adoption and Fostering to assist in increasing the number of adopters in line with the Teams’ Recruitment Strategy.
- Independent qualified and registered social worker with substantial experience of intercountry work to undertake the intercountry adoption assessments.
- Clinical Psychologist who offers a session a week to the Adoption Consultation and Assessment Service, to advise on emotional and psychological issues within the adoption process.

Other points:

- All children and adopters are referred to the National Adoption Register and the South West Adoption Consortium.
- An Adoption Manual maintaining a comprehensive policy and procedures guide to assist staff in their adoption work is available on the Council’s Intranet.
- Independent support and guidance for anybody affected by adoption is provided by the South West Adoption Network (SWAN). This service can be accessed directly and offers a helpline, counselling and consultation sessions. Regular statistics are provided and service users are encouraged to fill in evaluation forms.
- The “CONSULT” service, which is a multi-disciplinary team, provides a psychological support service to adoptive families through consultation and direct work.

The Adoption Panel

North Somerset Council has one Adoption Panel constituted in accordance with current regulations (National Minimum Standard 17) which states that “the adoption panels and decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations / decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children throughout their lives”.

The Adoption Panel plays a central role both in the placement of children and in determining whether people are suitable to be approved as adopters. The present composition of the Adoption Panel is attached as an Appendix (Page 23). Panel members are required to undertake an annual appraisal.

The Adoption Panel has an important role in assisting the Agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:

- whether a child should be placed for adoption;
- the suitability of prospective adopters; and
- whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter.

The Adoption Panel can give advice to the Agency on:

- contact arrangements;
- whether an application for a Placement Order should be made;
- the number of children the prospective adopter(s) may be suitable to adopt, as well as the age range, sex, likely needs and background; and
- the provision of adoption support.

The Adoption Panel will make its recommendations based on detailed written reports. In considering the approval and matching of prospective adopters, the applicants are invited to attend the Panel in person.

If the Agency Decision-maker does not approve the prospective adopter as suitable, the prospective adopter may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism by way of independently reviewing the proposed Agency decision and the prospective adopter's case.

8. SYSTEM FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING SERVICE PROVISION

- An annual Adoption Agency report is written, including statistical data, on the work of the Adoption Panel.
- The Adoption Panel receives regular reports on the progress of children and prospective adopters awaiting placement and/or adoption.
- The Adoption Panel adviser has a quality assurance role so issues of poor practice can be taken up through the line management system.
- The Adoption Panel is fully aware of the Independent Reviewing Mechanism.
- The Area and Resource Service Leaders meet regularly to 'track' adoption cases to ensure adoption cases are not drifting.
- The Agency's performance, including numbers of adopters approved, numbers of children approved and time-scales for children's progress through the adoption system is reported to senior managers.
- A file audit system is in place for managers to regularly check on the quality of record keeping and to ensure procedures are being followed.
- Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance.
- Training on adoption issues is provided for staff and adopters by the Training Department, which co-ordinates internal and external courses. All internal training is evaluated.
- There is an annual training day for the Adoption Panel members, which helps to ensure that Panel members are kept up to date with current adoption issues.
- The South West Adoption Consortium provides quarterly reports of its activity, which are circulated to each member agency and includes information on the number of children and adopters from each agency for whom a placement is achieved.
- The South West Adoption Network produces regular statistics, which indicate the uptake of the service from the North Somerset area.
- The Adoption Support Steering Group, chaired by the Resource Service Leader, meets regularly to implement, maintain and review the Adoption Service.
- The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed by members of the agency and elected members.

9. **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Adoption Section

- Publicity and targeted recruitment for prospective adoptive parents;
- Provision of information about adoption to prospective adopters, including intercountry adoption;
- Initial selection of applicants who are likely to offer placements required by children needing adoption;
- Preparation and assessment of applicants who wish to adopt, including intercountry adoption;
- Presentation of applicants to Adoption Panel;
- Ongoing support to adopters through the matching and placement process;
- Family Finding;
- Pre-placement assessment of support needs;
- Providing assessments as required under the Adoption Support Regulations;
- Development of support services to meet identified needs;
- Maintaining records of all approved adopters and proposing matches for children needing adoption;
- Participation in the South West Adoption Consortium and National Register to facilitate matches between adopters and children;
- Independent Counselling;
- Provision of initial counselling for adults seeking their birth records;
- Provision of a comprehensive service for parents wishing to relinquish babies for adoption;
- Facilitating support groups for adoptive families which includes both social and educative events;
- Accessing and funding therapeutic services for adopted children where appropriate;
- Range of adoption support services (and contribution to Adoption Support Plans).

- Adoption Consultation and Assessment Service (provided in conjunction with a Clinical Psychologist).
- Provision of a Letterbox service for indirect contact between birth families and adopted children;
- Supervision and provision of court reports for step-parent, intercountry and other non-agency adoption placements;
- Provision of consultation to child care commissioning social workers and other agencies on all adoption matters;
- Service level agreement with South West Adoption Network, who provide counselling services for all parties to adoption, including independent support to birth families whose children are to be placed for adoption.

Adoption services provided by other teams

Child care commissioning teams are responsible for direct work with children and families. This will include assessment and planning, legal processes, preparation for adoption, support to birth families, presentation to the Adoption Panel and the matching and placement process.

Support to Adoptive Families

The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 place a duty on North Somerset Council to assess the need for adoption support.

Parenting an adopted child who may have complex needs can be challenging and adoptive families are likely to need professional advice and help. North Somerset aims to work with families in order to better meet these challenges.

North Somerset's support services, along with its training programme, is aimed to enable adopters to work with children to address attachment issues, to support children with disabilities to counter discrimination and disadvantage and to promote and safeguard children's welfare and to encourage them to achieve their potential.

Services Provided

- Direct contact with a social worker from the Adoption Practice Group. The social workers are all suitably qualified, competent and experienced people who are committed to improving the welfare of adoptive families.
- An assessment of support needs can be carried out by the Adoption Practice Group, with a social worker from the Referral and Assessment Practice Group, if appropriate.

- Advice and information about other services, if appropriate.
- Direct contact with the Adoption Support Services Adviser, who can give advice and information to people affected by adoption.
- **SAFINS** (Supporting Adoptive Families In North Somerset), an active Support Group for adoptive families, has been running for ten years in North Somerset. The meetings are both formal (speakers, discussion topics) and informal events (for instance, summer picnic, Christmas Party).
- A Summer Scheme for adopted children for a week during the summer holiday.
- A Youth Summer Scheme for adopted young people for a week during the summer holiday and Youth Activity Days held during other school holidays.
- 'CONSULT', a professional group offering adopters a multi-agency response, comprising a Clinical Psychologist and a specialist social worker from North Somerset Council.
- A Clinical Psychologist, who is commissioned as part of the Adoption Consultation and Assessment Service.
- ABCs (Attachment, Behaviour, Consultation and Support) is a North Somerset provision which offers a monthly drop-in group with a clinical psychologist and social worker on hand to offer support and advice.
- SWAN (South West Adoption Network) – an independent adoption service supported by North Somerset Council, providing a range of services for all those involved in adoption, including adoptive parents.
- Training - There are a number of opportunities for adopters, through North Somerset Council's training department. For instance, adopters are encouraged to attend a six-week training course on attachment.
- Sitting Service - North Somerset has a service for adopters whose children require babysitting because the families are unable to access support from within their own social network because of a child's special needs.
- Parent and Child Relationship Support Service - This new service was created in December 2009 with social workers and a clinical psychologist trained in using 'Theraplay' techniques. Specifically for adoptive families requiring work on attachment.

Other resources, separate from North Somerset Council funding, that can be accessed independently, are:

- Our Place in Bristol is 'A Centre for Foster and Adoptive Families' independently run as a service to support adopters, with access to professional help if required.

- CATCHPOINT is an independent service in Bristol for adoptive parents and children with a focus on attachment. It provides therapeutic work including music therapy and assessment. An initial consultation is free of charge, but subsequent services will be charged.

10. **THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS**

The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters are set out in detail in the Adoption Manual.

In brief:

- The Adoption Practice Group, along with the Business Development Officer, is responsible for the publicity and targeted recruitment of adoptive parents. The recruitment strategy highlights and reflects the needs of the children and therefore the need for applicants who have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:
 - children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties;
 - children from minority ethnic groups;
 - children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support;
 - children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health / medical care;
 - children who have an identified physical or learning disability;
 - single children aged five years or over;
 - sibling groups of two or more children;
 - children whose background histories may include a parent / parents suffering from a range of difficulties, for example, mental health problems, drug or alcohol addiction, physical or learning disabilities.
- All enquirers are sent an information pack about adoption within five working days, where appropriate.
- Enquirers are offered a home visit to learn more about adoption from an experienced practitioner, where appropriate.
- Those applicants wishing to proceed will be invited to attend a Preparation Course (there is a specific one for intercountry adopters) which provides more detailed information and helps people decide whether adoption is for them or not.
- For domestic adoptions, an Adoption Practice Group social worker is allocated to undertake the assessment report which involves a number of home visits, police and other checks, references and a medical.

For intercountry adoption, the assessor is an independent worker specialising in overseas adoption and the applicants are charged for this. Currently,

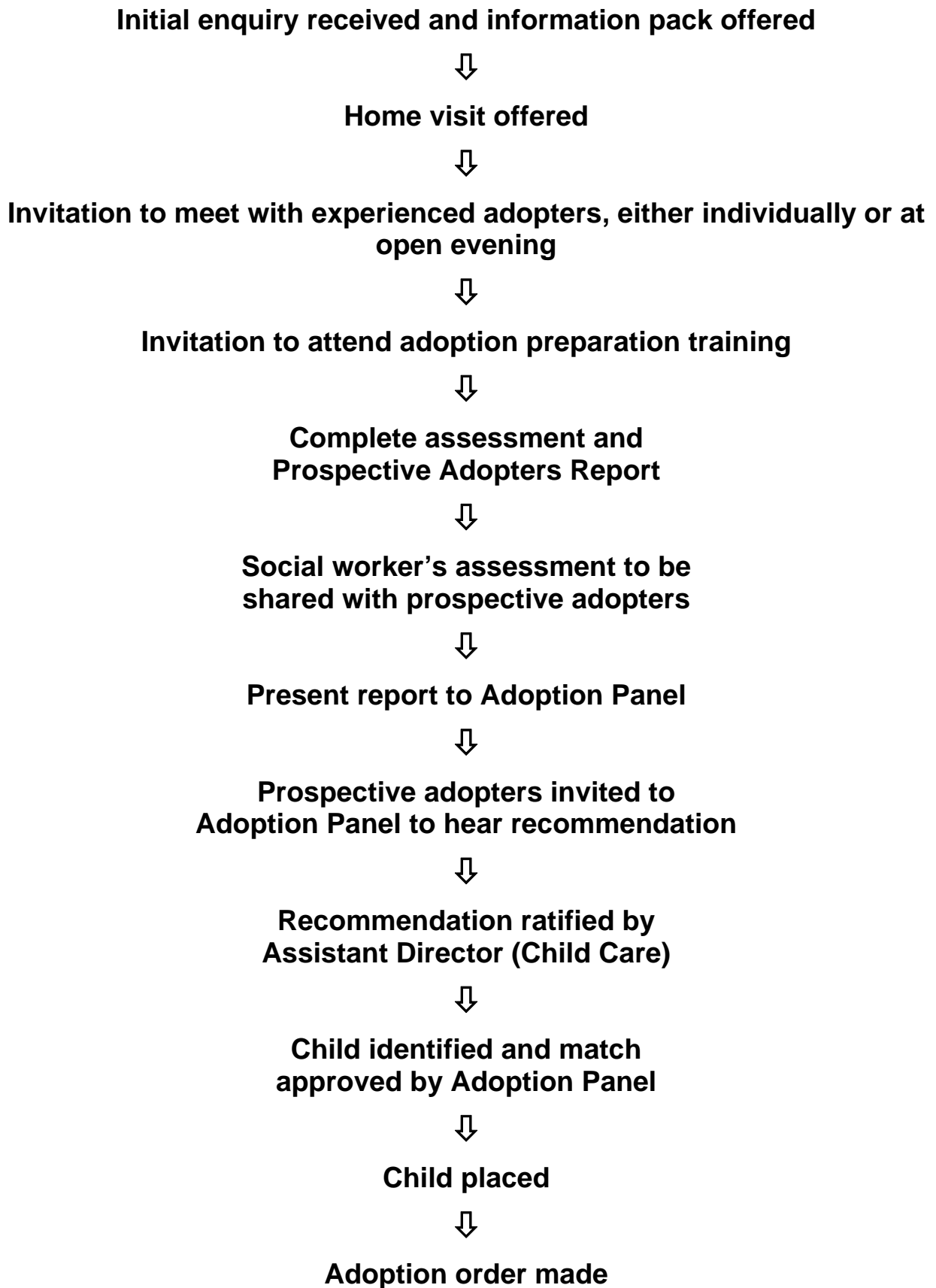
charges are £6,500 for an initial assessment and £5,700 for a subsequent assessment.

- Applicants receive a copy of their assessment report (except for the confidential sections) and are invited to comment on it.
- Applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel when their approval is being considered. The Panel may provide advice on the number, age range and gender of the children for which they are considered suitable.
- Following approval, the Adoption Practice Group social worker will continue working with the prospective adopters to ensure that they have access to information about children needing placements.
- The social worker will support the family throughout the matching process, the placement of a child and the subsequent Court process. Support is provided post-Adoption Order as appropriate.
- For non-Agency placements (step-parent adoptions, foster carer or family adoptions) an assessment will be carried out and presented to the Court or Adoption Panel (where appropriate) and training offered (where appropriate).

Review of Approval

Where prospective adopters do not have a child placed, a written report is provided to the Adoption Panel on an annual basis. This review reflects their current circumstances, to ensure they wish to continue with the process of adopting and that their approval terms remain appropriate.

FLOWCHART - PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS



11. **THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

In order to improve the quality of the adoption service by building on its strengths and identifying its deficiencies, the Department encourages feedback from service users, providers and partners.

In most adoption situations, areas of potential tensions or conflict should be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion / negotiation involving all parties where appropriate. Adopters, children and families can use the North Somerset complaints procedure where they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. Adopters may complain on behalf of a child as well as on their own account.

The complaints procedure outlines the different levels and stages a complaint may reach and is available on the Council's website.

Complaints may be made either to the Practice Leader or the Complaints Officer (see below for contact details), but in either case will be initially investigated and responded to by the Practice Leader. If the complainant is not satisfied, then the second stage procedure is implemented by the Complaints Officer. In exceptional circumstances, a complainant may receive assistance, on request, from an independent supporter. In the case of a complaint by a child, they will be offered an independent advocate.

All adopted and looked after children receive a children's guide, which contains the details of the complaints procedure and the contact details of Ofsted.

All complainants may contact Ofsted (see below).

Adoptive applicants who are turned down by the Adoption Panel, and / or the decision of the Agency Decision Maker, will be able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism, details of which are provided to prospective adopters.

Allegations against adopters

Allegations about the abuse or neglect of a child by adopters are investigated according to the North Somerset Area Child Protection Safeguarding procedure.

Contact details for complaints

Jenny Slee
Practice Leader
Adoption Practice Group
CYPS
Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare BS23 1UJ
Tel: 01275 884757

Christopher Orlik
Complaints Manager
14 Fenswood Road
Long Ashton
BS41 9BS
Tel: 01275 882171

12. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is an independent, non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provision of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Ofsted aims to:

- promote service improvement
- ensure services focus on the interests of their users
- see that services are efficient, effective and promote value for money.

The address for Ofsted is:

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone enquiries to: 08456 404040

APPENDIX TO STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

MEMBERS OF THE ADOPTION PANEL (as held on the “Central List”)

Pat Richards	Chair
Jeannie Osmond	Vice Chair, Assistant Locality Leader
Nasreen Ahmed	Independent Member
Dr Sara Carter	Medical Adviser
Theo Clarke	Independent Member
Jane Cosnett	Lay Member, adopted as a baby
Debbie Havill	Social Worker, Adoption Practice Group
Kirsty Howie	Adviser to Adoption Panel, Service Leader, Resource Service
Maggie Pitts	Independent Member
Lorraine Sherman / Trish Wood / Bridget Nicholls	Legal Adviser
Alan Turkie	Independent Member
Lisa Czelecki	Panel Administrator