

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Families and Homes Services

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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Introduction

The Statement of Purpose is a requirement of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and subsequent legislation. Waltham Forest Adoption Agency's policies, procedures and written guidelines fully reflect the *Adoption Statement of Purpose*.

All adoption enquirers and members of staff can access a copy of the Statement from the Council's website. A children's guide is provided to all children and young people whose care plan is adoption.

1. The aims and objectives of the local authority in relation to the adoption service.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest is committed to providing excellent standards of care to Looked After Children, to maximising their life chances and to helping them enjoy stable and permanent relationships with significant adults. The Adoption Service will work in partnership with all colleagues involved in the planning and care of Looked After Children, including Health and Education. Waltham Forest also collaborates closely with other adoption agencies formally through Regional and Sub Regional consortium arrangements and informally through Adoption Exchange days. It makes Inter-Agency arrangements where appropriate to achieve the best match, in reasonable timescales. Our objective is to fully develop the corporate parenting role and to realise our commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children in public care.

Equality

- Every effort will be made to place children within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, wherever that is possible without delay for them. Where this is not possible, plans must be put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them. This will always be in the context of avoiding delay.
- Children who are looked after by Waltham Forest must be given the opportunity to develop a positive identity and high self-esteem. Children will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision.
- Children with disabilities will be placed in an environment that recognises and caters for their disability, and at the same time promotes their social inclusion.
- The disadvantages experienced by Looked After Children are recognised and appropriate Care Plans created for them, which address their needs – for example, education support, mental health provision and leisure opportunities. This is fully explored with adopters, addressed at the matching stage and reflected in Adoption Support Plans.
- Waltham Forest is a widely diverse community. The differences in child rearing practices, family values and attitudes, across the different spectrums of racial, cultural, religious and social classes living in the borough, will be respected and understood.

Core Values

- The Child's Welfare will always be at the centre of planning.
- Children will be encouraged and supported to participate in decisions that affect their life, insofar as this is consistent with their age and understanding.
- Partnership with Parents and Family; Parents and others with parental responsibility and significant adults in the child's life must be assisted to properly participate in the planning and decision-making processes concerned with their child's future. They must be properly

informed and consulted and their wishes ascertained and respected. Access to independent support is facilitated through the Post Order Support Team.

- Maintaining Contact with Birth Families; Insofar as it is consistent with their welfare, every effort must be made to ensure that the child maintains an appropriate level and type of contact with their birth family and community.

Responsibilities Towards Looked After Children

- Where children cannot return to their family of origin, permanent alternative care must be identified. In the first instance, every effort should be made to maintain the child in its own birth family and or community network. All reasonable alternatives will be considered before a plan for adoption is pursued.
- Looked After Children should not be disadvantaged by that status and the local authority must act as a good parent by ensuring that the child has a high standard of care, opportunities and life chances.

Adoption Service Objectives

- To provide a comprehensive, high quality adoption service to Waltham Forest's residents that is sensitive to the needs of all and recognises differences reflected in ethnic origin, culture, faith, gender, disability, economic position and sexual orientation.
- To promote a secure, permanent family life and to consider adoption as an option for all children looked after by Waltham Forest Children and Families' Services.
- To provide information, advice and guidance to residents seeking to adopt, as well as those affected by adoption.
- To actively recruit, train and support adoptive families
 - for children in Waltham Forest needing adoption
 - for children in other Local Authorities, serving the wider adoption community
- To identify matching criteria for children for whom adoption is the plan and further, identifying appropriately matched approved adopters, through other adoption agencies where appropriate.
- To provide support to all those involved in adoption. This includes children and families who need support after an Adoption Order is made as well as adults affected by adoption, including birth family members. Waltham Forest Post Order team extends their support service to families where Special Guardianship Orders have been granted.
- To provide transparent and clear services which encourage and enable consultation with our service users.
- To be accessible and accountable for all our work and leading ambition on behalf of children.

Legal Framework

Services are provided within the legal framework provided by

Children Act 1989

Adoption Act 2005

Children Act 2008

Children and Families Act 2014

National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011 & 2014, and Statutory Guidance in Adoption 2013, 2014 & 2015

2. The name and address of the manager.

Overall responsibility for the Adoption Service rests with the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting who reports to the Divisional Director for Children and Families' Services. There is a designated Team Manager responsible for the adoption team who reports directly to the Deputy Head of Service for Corporate Parenting Placements Services.

The Team Manager is: Jane Anderson
Permanence Team Manager
Corporate Parenting Placement Services
Sycamore House
Waltham Forest Town Hall Complex
Forest Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 4SU
Tel. 020 8496 3437

3. The relevant qualifications and experience of the manager

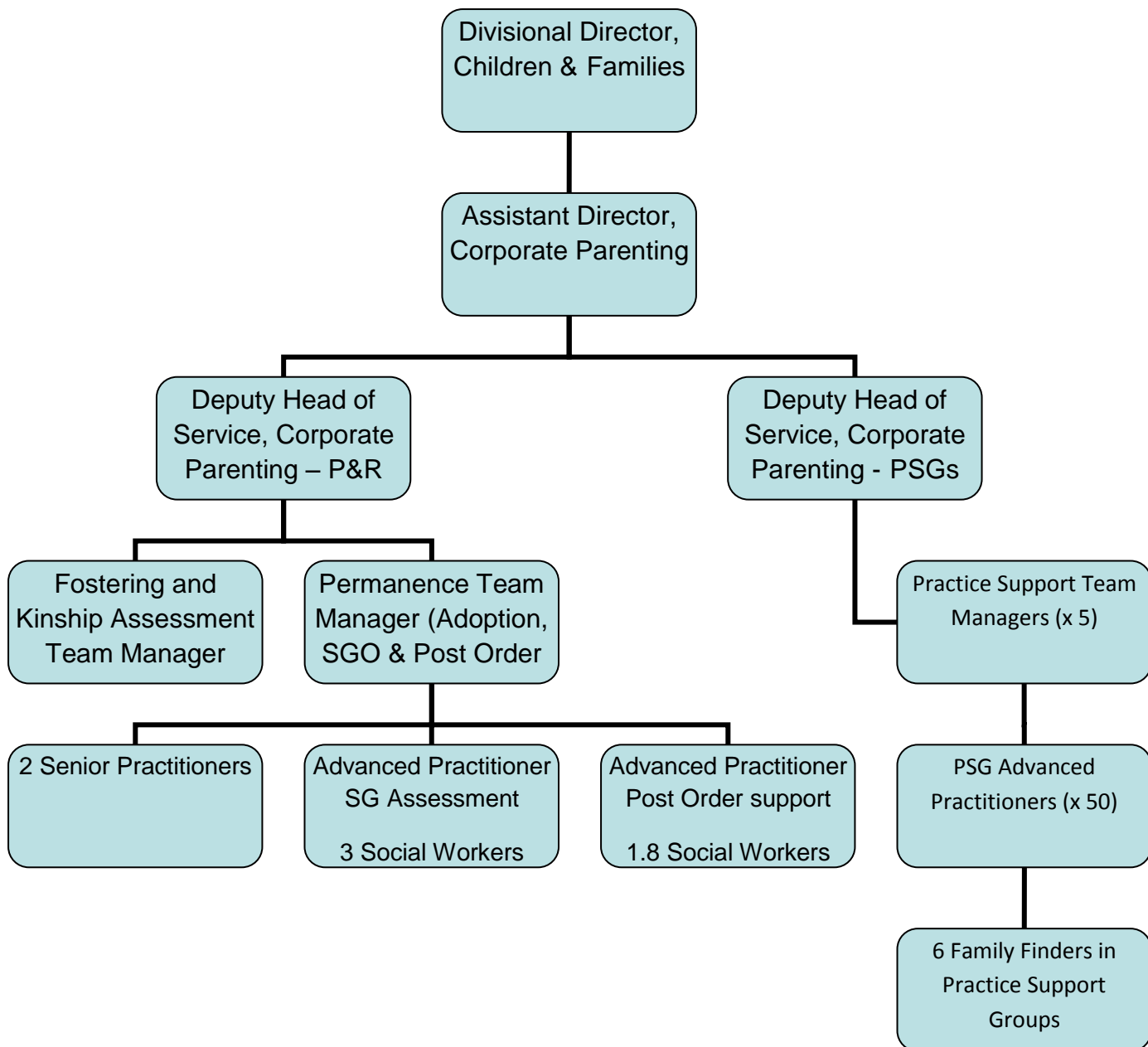
Jane Anderson, Team Manager has the following qualifications: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), MA in Advanced Social Work and Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Social Studies

4. The number, relevant qualifications and experience of the staff employed by the authority for the purposes of the adoption service.

- The Permanence Team consists of the team manager and two Senior Practitioners that are specifically dedicated to assessing potential adoptive parents.
- Six Family Finding Social Workers (5 FTE posts) sit within the Corporate Parenting Looked After Children's Team. They undertake Family Finding for Children needing all forms of Permanence, and support the child with transitions from one family to another. They also complete assessments of adults identified to offer permanence to specific children.
- The Post Order Team, which is a sub team of the Permanence Team, consists of an Advanced Practitioner and two qualified social workers who occupy 1.8 FTE posts.
- Both teams are supported by the Business Support Unit.

For a full breakdown of staff qualifications, *please see Appendix A.*

5. The organisational structure of the adoption service



6. The system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by the adoption service are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Service

- Children and carers are provided with information as to how to make a complaint and this is clarified and reinforced at each review.
- All complaints are responded to by the team manager of the Permanence Team and monitored by the Deputy Head of Service and Assistant Director to ensure learning.
- Permanence plans for children are monitored through a Permanency Tracking Panel and more individualised Permanency Planning Meetings and at children’s statutory reviews. The latter are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers.

- Data and performance (including timescales) on children referred, children placed for adoption, disruptions and adoption orders, and approvals of adopters are collated and reported in Performance Dashboards which are reported through several Governance structures within the Council and to Corporate Parenting Board.
- Annual reports, on both service and panel activity, are completed and presented to the Scrutiny Panel.
- A user evaluation form for social workers and applicants who attend Panel has been in place since January 2008 and are evaluated and used to inform improvement in service delivery.
- The Deputy Head of Service for Corporate Parenting Placement Services and the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting is responsible for reviewing adoption policy and practice in the department, and for ensuring the Divisional Director is provided with regular progress reports on the work of the adoption service.
- There are monthly portfolio meetings with the Lead Member for Children & Families by the Duty Chief Executive of Families and Divisional Director to ensure the Cabinet is kept informed on current issues, and provided with the relevant information in order to monitor the progress and quality of the service.
- Participation in the Adoption Leadership Board, the London Adoption Board and local consortium meetings to compare adoption performance and practice.
- The Independent Panel Chair and the Agency Adviser meet quarterly with the Divisional Director (also the Agency Decision Maker) and the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting to feedback any practice and service improvement issues. They also meet with the Adoption Team Manager annually for the same purpose.

7. The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters.

Full procedures for the Adoption Service in Waltham forest can be found on the council website through the following link:

<http://walthamforestchildcare.proceduresonline.com/>

The brief notes that follow illustrate the activities of the Adoption Service.

Duty Service

- A Recruitment line service is provided Monday - Friday 9am-5.15pm. This provides the first response to general advertisements to recruit prospective adopters, and the follow up of enquiries. On Tuesday's and Friday's the adoption team operate a duty service to give general advice to the public and workers in the department about adoption and permanency.
- There is a general emergency duty service outside these hours.

As a consequence of the continued reduction of children granted Placement Orders in Care Proceedings in Waltham Forest, the number of children awaiting adoption remains low. In response, the LB Waltham Forest continues to operate a recruitment policy which targets adopters who can meet the needs of children who still wait longest. These would include children with additional health or emotional needs, children who are older or part of sibling groups and children from some ethnic groups. Those who enquire who do not present interest in the most in need groups are offered the opportunity to approach Voluntary Adoption Agencies who may be more inclined to take their enquiry forward.

Flowchart of adoption enquiry to assessment and approval



Recruitment

- Advertising campaigns are conducted for both general recruitment and for specific children needing families. A recruitment strategy is agreed each year based on the identified needs of the department and lessons learnt from the past.
- The criteria for recruitment are kept under review depending on the needs of the children on referral.
- Systems are in place to respond promptly to enquiries and since April 2014 we have been benchmarking our practice standards against timescales, as identified in the Adoption Scorecard.
- Initial appointments (usually home visits) are offered to all applicants meeting the criteria. Social workers discuss the outcome of these appointments with their Team Manager and more widely in the regular Practice Support Groups if required. A decision is made whether to invite the applicant to make a *Registration of Interest*.

Preparation and Training

- On acceptance of the *Registration of Interest* applicants participate in Stage 1 of the adoption process. During this period they have work books to complete over a two month period. Applicants are then invited to a preparation course, which uses the BAAF model, materials and workbooks. This is provided by Barnardos as a consortium partner of Waltham Forest.
- Following an evaluation of their attendance and participation at the end of the course, and completion of Stage 1, a decision is made about continuing the assessment to Stage 2 of the adoption process.
- Waltham Forest has a service level agreement with our East London Adoption Consortium colleagues which commissions places on preparation courses from Barnardos. This enables Barnardos to provide regular preparation groups for the five consortium boroughs and their own prospective adopters, ensuring the prospective adopters are not waiting to attend a preparation group.
- Prospective adopters are also required to attend a 'loss day' which is provided by an independent provider for consortium boroughs.
- First time adopters are required to have completed a preparation course before they are presented to panel. Second and subsequent adopters may be offered a specific preparation course for those who have adopted before.
- Following Stage 1, the Local Authority provides further training sessions for prospective adopters and members of their support network including relatives and friends. Further modules regarding particular aspects of adoption are also offered throughout the year.

Assessment

- Adopters' assessments are completed using the BAAF Form PAR (Prospective Adopters Report) document. The assessment process aims to be completed within six months from receipt of the formal application, and taken to panel for consideration for approval.
- We encourage applicants to think about what they have to offer in terms of their personal experience, faith, culture, ethnic origin, knowledge and skills gained throughout their lives. If there are areas that need development, we work with them to explore ways of adding to their competencies. We have an open inclusive approach, evaluating applicants for what they have to offer.
- We require that applicants have sufficient time and space to meet the demands of adoption. All applicants are encouraged to think carefully about their support networks, including family and others who can support their individual circumstances.
- Applicants are given their report to read and comment on and asked to sign it. They are encouraged to add to it if they wish. They are invited to attend the Adoption Panel when the approval is being considered.
- All adopters have an allocated Social Worker in the Corporate Parenting Service. Once approved, this worker helps them consider children for a match and works jointly with the child's social worker when they are linked.
- At the point of linking, these two workers carry out a needs assessment to consider support to the placement immediately and in the future. A variety of issues must be considered: - medical and therapeutic needs, educational needs, identity issues, life story work and contact issues are always included.

Foster Carers' adopting Children Looked After

Where there is an agreed plan for the foster carers to adopt child/children they are looking after, the local authority will undertake an assessment within four months. The report for foster carers, as adopters, is compiled using the Rule 14 Court report format. They are encouraged to attend an adoption preparation course.

Foster to Adopt

Waltham Forest has an active consideration of whether adoption applicants are available to consider joint approval as adopters and foster carers. Where we agree that they have the additional resilience required, assessment and approval as adopters is followed by approval as foster carers. This is in accordance with best practice, with a view to placing children under fostering regulations and transferring the status to an adoptive placement on confirmation of adoption as the agreed outcome. This has the potential for avoiding additional moves for the child.

Inter Country Adopters

Waltham Forest has a service level agreement with the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, (IAC) which offers a specialist service, to undertake Inter Country Adoption assessments on behalf of the Local Authority. Any initial enquiry is made through the Adoption Service duty system. If appropriate, the enquirer is referred to IAC, which provides prospective adopters with advice concerning the preparation and assessment process, the requirements of their country of choice, and that of the Department of Education. If the applicants wish to proceed, IAC will complete the assessment on payment of the required fees, and take the application to their Adoption Panel for consideration. IAC will then forward the appropriate documentation to DfE.

Non-Agency Adoptions

The Adoption Service also provides a service to other types of non-agency adopters, including step-parents and birth relatives who wish to adopt a child in their care. In these cases, formal notification to the agency must be made by the prospective adopter(s) of their intention to apply for an Adoption Order. Applicants must give their agreement to complete checks in line with all adopters. On receipt of the prospective adopter's application, the court will set timescales, and notify all parties involved. At this stage an adoption social worker will be allocated to complete the assessment, if this has not already commenced, and report to the court.

Adoption Support Services

Identifying support needs to sustain lifelong placements is an integral part of the adoption service and assessment process. Coming together under the Permanence Team, the Post Order Support Service works closely with the Adoption Assessment Service. It provides its own duty service each weekday morning.

The post order support service offers a range of services to support adoptive families and their children including counselling, advice and information, workshops/training, support groups, an annual family day, a newsletter, financial support, links with CAMHS and the virtual school.

Other services include:

Adopters are given details of Adoption UK and encouraged to join local groups. Newly approved adopters from Waltham Forest are provided with a two-year subscription to Adoption UK. Access to therapeutic support for adoptive families and adopted children throughout their childhood to majority is available through the Adoption Support Fund. The Post Order Support Service staff have been trained to carry out assessments to make applications to the fund for such support. Waltham Forest also works with the Post Adoption Centre (PAC) to provide support to adoptive families.

Various resources are available to Children Looked After by Waltham Forest including the Agency Medical Adviser, the CAMHS therapy services and the virtual school.

Approved adopters are supported during introductions and their support needs will be reviewed every six months until the making of the Adoption Order.

Financial support is considered for each match, in line with the Borough's scheme. The adoption support fund, implemented in May 2015, enables Waltham Forest to submit applications for therapeutic services and support that cannot be provided by Waltham Forest's internal resources. There is an eligibility criteria and support will be considered on the basis of suitability to achieve positive outcomes for the child and family.

There is a mechanism for assessing financial support, which is organised jointly between the Permanence and Finance Team and uses a nationally applied means-test. All regular payments and financial support packages are reviewed annually through the Post Order Support Service and the Post Order Support Panel.

The child's social worker also visits between placement and the Adoption Order.

Adopters who live in Waltham Forest can be provided with a service until a child is 18 years of age or continues in education beyond that time. Where a child is placed with adopters who live outside the borough, support by the placing local authority may continue for a period of 3 years after the Adoption Order is granted. After that time any further support is provided by the borough in which they reside.

The Post Order Service manages all post adoption contact arrangements, including face-to-face contact and letterbox agreements. An allocated worker provides support to birth relatives and adopters to promote contact as a positive experience for the child. The Deputy Head of Service is the Adoption Support Services Adviser for Waltham Forest.

Birth Families

Independent counselling is provided to birth families whose child is to be placed for adoption or is already adopted. This service is available to both parents and other members of the extended family and is provided by PAC as part of the service level agreement that LBWF has with them.

Adopted Adults

Waltham Forest provides an intermediary service for birth relatives and adopted adults. Some group work is organised through Voluntary Agencies, such as group work for birth mothers with mental health problems as well as for adopted adults.

The local authority has service level agreements with the Post-Adoption Centre, Barnardo's and Adoption UK. These organisations can provide a range of support to anyone affected by adoption.

8. A summary of the complaints procedure established in accordance with section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989(1) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990(2).

Making a Formal Complaint

We always endeavour to supply good quality services and to be customer focused, but we know that sometimes we may get things wrong. If people are unhappy with the service they have the right to complain.

The complaints procedure has three stages –

1. At Stage One, the staff or agency providing the service will seek to resolve the complaint informally. We can sort out many complaints this way.
2. If the response you have received does not bring satisfaction, this can be taken to Stage Two. An investigation officer will be appointed; they will be from another part of the service, so that an independent view can be gained.
3. If this still does not bring resolution, Stage Three can be started. We will refer your complaint, our informal response from Stage one and any reports from Stage 2, to a review panel made up of two of our officers (not involved in the complaint) and an independent person who will chair the panel.

All formal complaints should be sent to:

The Complaints Manager
Social Care Complaints Team
Residents First
Waltham Forest Town Hall
Forest Road
London
E17 4JF

Telephone 020 8496 3000

The Local Government Ombudsman

If complainants are not satisfied with the response they receive from the Council they may contact the Local Government Ombudsman by calling 0300 061 0614 or via their website at www.lgo.org.uk.

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

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

Applicants wishing to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the adoption panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from panel decision to decide to contact the IRM.
- The adoption agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism
Contract Manager
Unit 4
Pavilion Business Park
Wortley
Leeds
LS12 6AJ
Tel: 0113 202 2080 or 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate)
Fax: 0113 263 7414 or 0845 450 3957 (charged at local rate)
Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

Ofsted

Waltham Forest Adoption Service is inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Concerns or queries about the service can be raised by contacting Ofsted at:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231 (Children's Services)
Prefix for Tynetalk: 18001
For Textphone/Minicom users: 0161 618 8524
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

9. The address and telephone number of the Commission.

Children must be made aware of their rights as Looked After Children and have information that allows them to make representations and complaints where necessary. This includes them being provided with a simple guide of how to contact the *Children's Commissioner*.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk
(See below for further contact options).
Website: <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/>

Extracts from their website:

"I want all children to have the brightest future possible. I will advocate for positive change for all children and particularly those who are most disadvantaged." – Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England.

The Children and Families Act 2014 further strengthened the remit, powers and independence of the Commissioner, and gave her special responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social care services. She also speaks for wider groups of children on non-devolved issues including immigration (for the whole of the UK) and youth justice (for England and Wales).

Help at Hand is their national advice line for children and young people who are **in care, leaving care, living away from home or working with children's services**.

The advice line is independent of the Government and exists to make sure that young people's rights and entitlements are upheld and that their views are taken seriously.

If you are a child or young person who lives away from home or who receives social care, who needs advice or assistance, you can call us on the free phone number 0800 528 0731 or email to advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Adults representing children or young people who need advice or assistance and who live away from home or who receive social care services can also get in touch using these contact details.

We would like to recommend that you try and get your questions answered by adults who work directly with you or your local advocacy service for children in care before contacting us but if you can't do this or you they have not been properly answered do contact us.

If your enquiry involves an urgent concern about a child protection issue, you should contact your local police or social services. Adults can also call the **NSPCC child protection helpline on 0808 800 5000**. Children can call **Childline on 0800 1111**."

Appendix A: Staff details and qualifications

Position	Qualifications
David Fry Assistant director, Corporate Parenting	Postgraduate Certificate in Commissioning for Children DMS CSS
Karen Stoodley Deputy Head, Corporate Parenting – Placements Services	Post Graduate Diploma and Higher Specialist Award in Social Work Leadership and Management. Practice Teaching Award BA (Hons) in Social Work Diploma in Social Work Theraplay Level 1 & 2 Story Stem Assessments
Tina Mitchell Advisor to Adoption and Fostering panel	Diploma in Social Work
Jane Anderson Team Manager, Permanence Team	CQSW Post Grad Diploma in Applied Social Studies MA in Advanced Social Work
Smeera Lauder Senior Practitioner, Adoption Assessment	MSc in Social Work Studies Diploma in Social Work
Kirstan McConkey Senior Practitioner, Adoption Assessment	B.Social Science SW University of Cape Town B. Social Science Hons Clinical Social Work Certificate in Psychological therapies with children, young people and families (Tavistock)
Alin Badica Family Finding Social Worker	Diploma in Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania PQ (Consolidation Module)
Michelle Jones Family Finding Social Worker	Dip Social Work
Rebecca Beazley Family Finding Social Worker	Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work BA in Sociology and Criminology
Kara Spence Family Finding Social Worker	Diploma in Social Work
Christine El Issa Family Finding Social Worker	Bachelor's degree in Social work (USA)
Barbara Shirley Family Finding Social Worker	CQSW
Gloria Akrobettoe Advanced Practitioner, Post Order Support	BA Hons Social Science Diploma in Social Work.
Carolette Caines Social Worker, Post Order Support	BSC Social Science Diploma in Social Work Advanced Systemic Family Therapy
Karen Dwyer Social Worker, Post Order Support	BA (Hons) History and Sociology MA/CQSW Applied Social Studies Diploma in Counselling Diploma in Family Therapy

The team is committed to offering placements to student social workers.