

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Introduction

St. Francis' Children's Society (The Society) began as a children's home in 1869. It then became an adoption service post WWI, due to the surge of relinquished babies during that time. which has over the years continued to grow in the provision of professional and comprehensive adoption services. The Society operates within current adoption legislation and regulations and is registered with and inspected by Ofsted (SC049107). St Francis' Children's Society is a Registered Charity (No: 211670) and Voluntary Adoption Agency operating in England, governed by a Board of Trustees.

Employees are based in our office in Milton Keynes and the agency covers an area of approximately 50 miles radius from Milton Keynes.

The Statement of Purpose is a requirement under the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 regulation 3 and schedule 1. It covers the following areas:

- Mission statement.
- Values, Aims and Objectives.
- Data Protection.
- Services provided.
- Information about the Registered Provider.
- Organisational structure including qualifications and the experience of the responsible individual and manager.
- Information about the staffing of the agency.
- Systems for monitoring and evaluation of service.
- Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving, and supporting adopters.
- Information about complaints procedure.
- OFSTED address and contact number.

MISSION STATEMENT

As a Registered Voluntary Adoption Agency, the Society delivers a comprehensive range of high-quality professional services, both pre and post adoption to families and children. The Society's main focus is on providing secure and sustainable adoptive placements for vulnerable children who are hard to place through the Adoption Connections service.

The Society provides counselling and support as appropriate through the Birth Connections and Building Connections services to those whose lives have been affected by adoption or other permanent placements.

VALUES, VISION AND AIMS OF ST. FRANCIS' CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Our values

- Integrity: to be professional in our approach and deliver high quality services, treating each case on its individual merits
- Respect: to treat all individuals with respect given the variety of life experiences
- Knowledge: to be a learning organisation, valuing expertise of staff to deliver quality services
- Enabling: to enable all service users to contribute to and influence the development of services and to reach their full potential.
- Resilience: to support service users in developing skills to enable them to manage life's challenges
- Inclusive: to ensure equality of opportunity for all service users, staff, and volunteers
- Collaborative: to work with service users and organisations to develop services that are innovative and responsive to need
- Hope and Optimism: for the future, that change is possible.

Our Vision and Aims

1. We believe all children have the right to grow up as part of a loving family and we will deliver services to support this.
2. We believe that the child's welfare, safety, and needs are at the centre of the adoption process and therefore the focus is on permanency and creating a stable family life. Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is core to our work.
3. We acknowledge that adoption is a lifelong evolving process for all those involved and therefore adopted people should have access to information and services to help them deal with adoption-related matters.
4. We will provide a personal, effective, and flexible service to everyone affected by adoption - before, during and after placement.

5. We believe in a holistic approach and in working in partnership with other agencies and Local Authorities to achieve the best outcomes for children and their families and everyone affected by adoption.
6. Our services aim to be non-judgmental, diverse, and inclusive. We strive for equity and are open to compliments and feedback on how we can improve our services through continuous learning and engagement with our key stakeholders. We embrace difficult conversations for the learning opportunities they provide, to be the best we can be individually and collectively.
7. As an employer we support workforce development and are committed to providing staff members with suitable opportunities for personal and professional development of skills and responsibilities. We strive to create a sense of belonging and embrace equity, diversity and inclusion in our workforce and supplier network.

DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY POLICY

St Francis' Children's Society is registered with the Information Commission's Office, reference: Z8591724.

General Statement

The Society is required to process relevant information regarding service users, staff, trustees, volunteers, donors, and suppliers as part of its operation. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 was replaced by the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018 and provides the legal framework for the holding, processing, and accessing of data. Please see separate privacy statement.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Statement about the impact of Covid-19

The Society is following Government and Ofsted guidance regarding the delivery of services during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is to ensure as far as is practical the safety of service users, employees, trustees, panel members, independent contractors, suppliers, and customers.

Employees are working from home and the office is closed to visitors and used as required by employees if work needs to be undertaken that cannot be completed at home. Social distancing rules are adhered to and there is a supply of hand sanitiser and cleaning materials in the office. PPE is being sourced for use when face to face meetings are unavoidable and have been risk assessed.

Management meetings, staff meetings and supervision are all taking place remotely, and we are increasingly adapting to a hybrid way of working and seeking to use technology to enhance productivity. We are in the process of upgrading our technology hardware and software with aim to using cloud-based services to enable agile working.

Regulations were relaxed under The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 until September 2020. The Society had taken the decision to continue to hold Adoption Panels, reducing the quoracy to 3, and holding them remotely via video conferencing. The progress of adopters from stage 1 to stage 2 is being reviewed on an individual basis regarding the completion of health checks and references including DBS checks. Following the update of The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, from October 2020 the Adoption Panel and the Society took the decision to revert back to full quoracy. We continue to follow the updated amendments from 23rd April 2021 until September 2021.

Services are being delivered remotely using video conferencing, email and telephone. Enquirers are being either invited to an information event via video conferencing or are sent a link to a film of the event and initial visits are taking place remotely. Training is being delivered via video conferencing, as are adoption support events. Some events have now been held face to face outside. Some Children in Need funding is being used to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families

Adoption Service (Adoption Connections)

The aim of this service is to recruit, prepare and assess prospective adopters to provide secure and sustainable adoptive placements and to offer tailored support throughout the different stages of the adoption process.

The Society's adoption recruitment policy is to recruit adopters from diverse backgrounds who can offer children a stable and permanent home. Potential adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, given clear information about agency policy and procedures, while being treated fairly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

The criteria for the recruitment of adopters is related to the needs of children waiting and the likelihood of adoptive applicants providing an appropriate placement for a child /children. This is within the framework of legislation and government guidance. The Society ensures that the recruitment and preparation programme for adopters accurately reflects the needs of children currently awaiting adoption. The Society will continue to support specific initiatives to facilitate the recruitment of families specifically for priority (those who wait the longest) children who are older, in sibling groups, of ethnic minority backgrounds and children with special needs/physical disability. Adopters are also encouraged to consider whether they could consider a placement of a child on a fostering basis with a plan for adoption, having been approved as foster carers by a local authority (regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010).

The Society liaises with Local Authorities, Regional Adoption Agencies, regional and national networks and Link Maker to maintain information regarding the needs of children awaiting adoption placements throughout the UK. Children will be matched with approved adopters who can offer them a stable and permanent home. Full consideration will be given to the ability of the adopters to meet the child's cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic needs.

Adoption Support

The Society is registered to provide adoption support to adopted children and their families and to adopted adults. Service users will be made aware that they are entitled to request an assessment of need for adoption support services from the Society and from their local authority. The outcome of any such request will be considered by the agency when deciding whether to provide a service to a particular individual. The Society provides a comprehensive support service pre and post placement. This includes standard support services from supervising social workers, individual direct work, consultation appointments offered by an adoption support social worker and a therapist, Theraplay® techniques, parenting workshops and social events. We will support adopters to access other specialist support as may be required through the placing local authority's resources and the Adoption Support Fund.

The Society will provide every support and encouragement to the adoptive family to enable them to provide a secure and emotionally satisfying experience for their children, so that the children are enabled to develop healthy attachments, experience permanency, and develop an integrated sense of identity.

Birth parent service (*Birth Connections*)

The aim of this service is to offer support and ongoing assistance to birth parents affected by adoption.

Birth relatives who have lost a child to adoption are able to access the Society's service of support, advice, and counselling through commissioned services via their local authority. The Society will work in partnership with local authorities and birth relatives will be treated fairly, openly and with respect as the lifelong implications for all involved in adoption is acknowledged. Any counselling and support offered aims to enable the birth family members to understand the emotional and legal implications of adoption and to be familiar with their rights. Any birth parent or relevant family member wishing to discuss the placement of a child for adoption will be given initial advice and guidance regarding accessing appropriate services.

The Society provides appropriate ongoing services to birth parents, post-adoption, to enable a constructive partnership in contact arrangements. Where it is in a child's best interest for direct or indirect contact to be maintained with birth parents, siblings or other family members, the agency will seek to facilitate this. The Society will ensure that birth parents continue to be informed of services such as those offered by the Contact Register and other support organisations, in addition to the Society's resources.

Services for adopted adults (*Building Connections*)

The Society holds the records for those people historically adopted through the adoption service. A service is provided to help adopted adults and birth families to access their records

and where appropriate, to trace their family members, whilst offering the vital support and counselling this often-difficult journey requires.

Qualified social workers will assist and advise in tracing procedures as appropriate and, within the Society's Policy and Procedures, act as an intermediary in reunions where requested and where appropriate.

The Society also holds the records for the St Francis' Boys Home in Shefford which closed in 1974. A service is provided for ex-residents to access their records.

Additional services offered to Local Authorities.

The Society works in partnership with Local Authorities and provides commissioned services such as:

- Notified (step parent) adoption assessments.
- Theraplay techniques intervention.
- Birth record counselling and intermediary services for adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- Ongoing support to birth parents affected by adoption.
- Life story work

REGISTERED PROVIDER

Name and address:

ST FRANCIS' CHILDREN'S SOCIETY
Collis House
48 Newport Road
Woolstone
Milton Keynes MK15 0AA
Tel: 01908 572700

Name and address of Responsible Individual

The Responsible Individual is:

Safia Boot

Chair of Trustees

St Francis' Children's Society
Collis House
48 Newport Road
Woolstone
Milton Keynes MK15 0AA
Tel. 01908 572700

Name and address of the Interim Chief Executive Officer

Angela J.A. Dakin – CEO

St Francis' Children's Society
Collis House
48 Newport Road
Woolstone
Milton Keynes MK15 0AA
Tel: 01908 572700

Agency Decision Maker (independent registered Social Worker)

Anna Sharkey – CEO of 'Adoption Focus'/Family Society Ltd

TS3 Pinewood Business Park
Coleshill Road
Marston Green
Birmingham B37 7HG
Tel. 0121 779 0891

Name and address of the Registered Manager

Suzanne Strachan

Adoption Team Manager

St Francis' Children's Society
Collis House
48 Newport Road
Woolstone
Milton Keynes MK15 0AA
Tel: 01908 572700

Ofsted Registration

St Francis' Children's Society is a Registered Adoption Agency for domestic adoption and is also registered to provide post-adoption services. The Society has operated as a registered voluntary adoption agency continuously since 1944.

Ofsted number: SC049107

Contact details:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 1231231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Status and Constitution

The Adoption Agency is an operation of St Francis' Children's Society.

The Society is a registered charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Society is governed by its Articles of Memorandum and Association. A copy is available on request.

Registered Charity number: 211670

Registered Company number: 00392550

RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE – KEY PERSONNEL

Safia Boot is the Responsible Individual and Chair of Trustees. She has a MSc in Personnel Management from Portsmouth University and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), holder of an Advanced Certificate in employment Law and an anti-racism practitioner. She is a serving Employment Tribunal Panel Member of 20 years, Independent Investigator into workplace misconduct and discrimination in the grounds of all protected characteristics and their intersectionality. She is an experienced Mediator and Founder of Respect at Work Ltd. She holds various portfolio roles including Board Director for Milton Keynes Business Leaders Partnership (MKBLP Ltd) – with the lead for CSR/Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. MKBLP seeks to support local business and community enterprises and recognise business achievements. Safia is also the Chair of the Milton Keynes CIPD leading the HR community to promote improved working lives. She has 30 years+ background as a HR Executive in the public (NHS) and private sector (IT). On a personal front, Safia is an adoptive parent of two children and an active Aunt and Great, Great Aunt to 50+ nieces and nephews.

Angela Dakin is the SFCS Chief Executive with extensive experience in strategic planning, performance, transformation, and management of stakeholder relationships at times of organisational change. She has a distinguished record across local government, health and the charity sector including previously working as the Business Manager for Barnardo's and as a Local Authority Assistant Director in Children's Services. She is deeply committed to the care, support and safeguarding of children and young people, and to empowering individuals and communities to change their stories and life outcomes through a commitment to diversity and inclusion and embedding people values. She has particular expertise to drive transformational change, to ensure sustainable performance and financial improvements with an extensive network to engage with multi-interest groups harmoniously. She has extensive expertise in project management, governance, financial and grant funding through her ongoing work with BBC Children in Need in her role as the National Impact Committee Member (and formally serving on the Grant Committee).

She has a further portfolio role as Vice Chair of Trustees for St Christopher's Fellowship (national children's charity delivering residential, fostering and outreach services) and serves on the Board Nominations Committee, Safeguarding Committee and is Trustee representative on Foster Panel, as well as providing strategic input to supporting service provision for children with complex needs. This and her other Trustee roles means she has a welcome understanding of governance and the essential role played by volunteer board of trustees to provide strategic direction and governance through partnership working with the executive leadership to achieve shared goals and values. Angela is joining us after SFCS has successfully emerged from a challenging period of change over the last 18 months which finally resulted in a record number of adoption placements and improved financial reserves. She will now support SFCS through the next stage of its journey to build for long term sustainability and benefits to our service users, especially children who wait the longest to be placed.

Anna Sharkey is the Independent and experienced CEO who is also a Qualified Social Worker (CQSW since 1984) with expertise to approve the Adoption Panel recommendations on behalf of SFCS under a management services agreement. She has been the CEO for Family Society – trading as 'Adoption Focus' for nearly 12 years (and 15 years with Father Hudson's Society as a Family Placement Manager). She has worked extensively within adoption with various local councils as a Case worker and Team Leader as well as working collaboratively across the adoption sector and St Francis Children's Society on early permanence from fostering to adoption.

Suzanne Strachan is the Adoption Manager of St Francis Children's Society and acts as the Registered Manager for our registration with Ofsted. She has a B.A Honours Degree in Applied Social and Community studies, Diploma in Social Work, Child Care Award, a BA in Child and Adolescent Studies, and a Professional Certificate in Management. She is trained in safer recruitment. She has worked in the statutory childcare sector for over 20 years, mostly in the adoption field, including 3 years' experience in the commissioning of social care provision. Suzanne is supported by an independent Social Worker Consultant to provide monthly supervision

NUMBER, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF OTHER KEY STAFF WORKING FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE AGENCY

Sarah McGrory is the Adoption Support Manager; she also acts as the Adoption Panel Adviser. She has a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, Child Care Award, Post Graduate Certificate in Social Work studies, Post Graduate Certificate in Education-Early Years, and National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership. She is trained in safer recruitment. She has worked in the statutory and voluntary childcare sector for over 25

years and has a range of experience including safeguarding, fostering, adoption and children's centre management. She is a qualified safeguarding trainer.

The Finance function is outsourced to Macintyre Hudson, an independent organisation and works in a complementary way with the in-house Interim Finance and Operations Manager – **David Waterson** who is a CIMA qualified Management Accountant with extensive experience as a Financial Controller in local government and private sector organisations including Bedford Borough Council, Noah Enterprises and Bedford College. He is a practical problem-solver with a calm disposition that lends itself to developing effective systems and processes to meet statutory and commercial objectives.

Business Support Function comprises a full-time Finance & Operations Manager (David Waterson as above), Two full-time Senior Business Support Assistants (one supporting the Social Workers with the adoption panel and another who supports the finance function and acts as PA to the CEO), a Business Support Assistant (Adoption) and a part-time Fundraiser (0.6). All have the relevant qualifications and experience to deliver the Business Support Function and work effectively with a range of complementary outsourced suppliers.

Marketing

A part time Marketing Officer (0.7) works with external marketing and digital service providers, has a range of experience across a variety of organisations and is qualified to degree level.

Social Work staff

All Social workers have a common job description and undertake a range of adoption and adoption support tasks as required by the workload of the Society and to meet demand for services.

Adoption Team

The Adoption Team consists of 2 Consultant Social Workers, 3 Senior Social Workers, and 3 Social Workers (80% of FTE hours). All have the relevant qualifications and experience to deliver adoption services and are Social Work England registered. Some have additional qualifications such as Theraplay® level 1, Child Care Award and Practice Teacher Award. The Society regularly provides placements for student social workers. The Society also uses independent social workers to undertake specific pieces of work, and all have the relevant experience and qualifications and are Social Work England registered.

Adoption Support Team

1 Consultant Social Workers and 3 Senior Social Workers (75% of FTE hours) deliver adoption support services, supported by a range of independent therapists who have expertise in parenting training, counselling, play therapy and Theraplay® techniques. Adoption Support contracts are delivered by social workers. The Adoption Support social workers also undertake adoption recruitment and assessment work as required. The team provides secondment opportunities for Student Social Workers from Northampton College.

Volunteers

The Society uses several volunteers on an as required basis, for example as adoption preparation group co-facilitators and adoption panel members. All volunteers undergo a recruitment process and are subject to DBS and reference checks.

All staff

All Society staff are subject to the Society's Safer Recruitment and Selection Procedures, Employment Procedures, Safeguarding, Training and Appraisal Procedures. All staff are subject to relevant DBS clearance on a three yearly basis and are encouraged to register for the single certificate DBS scheme. Similar requirements apply to those who work with the Society on a Sessional/Temporary/Voluntary basis. All staff are supervised appropriately.

Adoption Panel

Graham Pellew is the Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel. He holds a certificate of Qualification in Social Work, a Post Graduate Certificate in Public Services Management, and has also been awarded an OBE for his work for services to adoption. He has been employed as an Adoption Manager since 1987 in a variety of Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agency settings. Having recently retired as Deputy Chief Executive of a VAA Graham is now undertaking a variety of adoption related work.

The Adoption Panel Central List is made of a pool of internal and independent stakeholders with experience of adoption and birth family support. The adoption panel is managed by the Adoption Panel Adviser in consultation with the Agency Decision Maker, Chief Executive and Adoption Team Manager. The Central List includes panel members who have a broad range of experience and professional qualifications including adoption, education, and health, and seeks to reflect the diversity of society. Adoption panel members are provided with induction, regular training, and annual appraisal. All panel members are subject to a DBS check and reference checks.

NUMBER AND EXPERIENCE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Society is governed by a Board of Trustees, chaired by Safia Boot who has also occupied the role of Acting CEO/FC from mid-December to August 2021 to help stabilise the organisation. Safia is currently supported by three Trustees (more are in the process of being recruited) who take the lead on key strategic initiatives. The Board of Trustees meet on a regular basis and receive reports from the Chief Executive Officer and the Finance & Operations Manager (and external advisors).

The Finance & Audit Committee (FAC) has been absorbed into the main Trustee Board meetings to reflect the current size of the Board. The Board of Trustees can ultimately

comprise of up to 10 members. All must be committed to children and the adoption process and have a range of experiences including financial expertise, experience of adoption, safeguarding, inspections, commissioning, transformation, fundraising, marketing, equality, HR and leadership and performance management. These skills contribute to the effective management and operation of the Society.

Roy Bean, Trustee provides the lead for Commercial and Property Management, he is a MCIPS accredited as a Procurement and Project Manager for Sodexo with a MSc in Construction Project Management and a BA (Hons) degree in Construction. He has over a decade of experience in Facilities Management, Construction and Professional Services at private sector companies, public sector housing associations and government bodies. He is passionate about continuous business improvement and committed to equity, diversity and inclusion and founded a social enterprise network providing mentoring, networking and career guidance via the 'Equality Partnership' to promote access to elite professions and leadership roles to aspiring individuals facing socially constructed barriers.

Dawn Jarvis is a former NHS Director of Nursing and a registered adult and children's nurse with Board level experience in change management, service development, operational and strategic leadership development. She has led on workforce capacity building, staff and patient engagement. She provides SFCS with a lead on transformation and change. She brings extensive expertise in promoting equality and supporting effective practices to support CQC, Ofsted inspections and safeguarding requirements. She has expertise in quality risk management, Equality Impact Assessments and commissioning and redesigning services. Dawn has been a leading advocate on equality within the NHS and has actively supported the Nursing Leadership programme to ensure access to BAME staff a route to fulfil their potential. Dawn left the NHS after 30 years to found her Healthcare and Diversity Consultancy Service to lead strategic change and is passionate about enabling access to leadership through coaching, mentoring and professional development for those with protected characteristics facing barriers to access.

Laura Weedon provides the lead on safeguarding and Trustee training and works as a Police Detective in Domestic Violence with Hertfordshire Constabulary, conducting complex investigations and risk assessments. She has extensive experience of multi-agency working and formally worked as a Legal Administrator in Wills and Probate with Tollers Solicitors and Shoosmiths in Debt recovery and conveyancing. She has held various volunteer roles to support charitable causes involving supporting young people. Having been exposed to the challenges of seeing children and vulnerable adults in difficult circumstances she is utterly committed to the benefits of adoption and enabling children to find forever families that can provide a nurturing environment to change their life outcomes for all parties in positive ways. Laura holds a BSC (Hons) in Sociology and Criminology

The Board of Trustees delegate the day-to-day management of the Society to the Senior Management Team and the Interim Chief Executive Officer, who delegates particular responsibility to the Adoption Team Manager and Adoption Support Manager. The

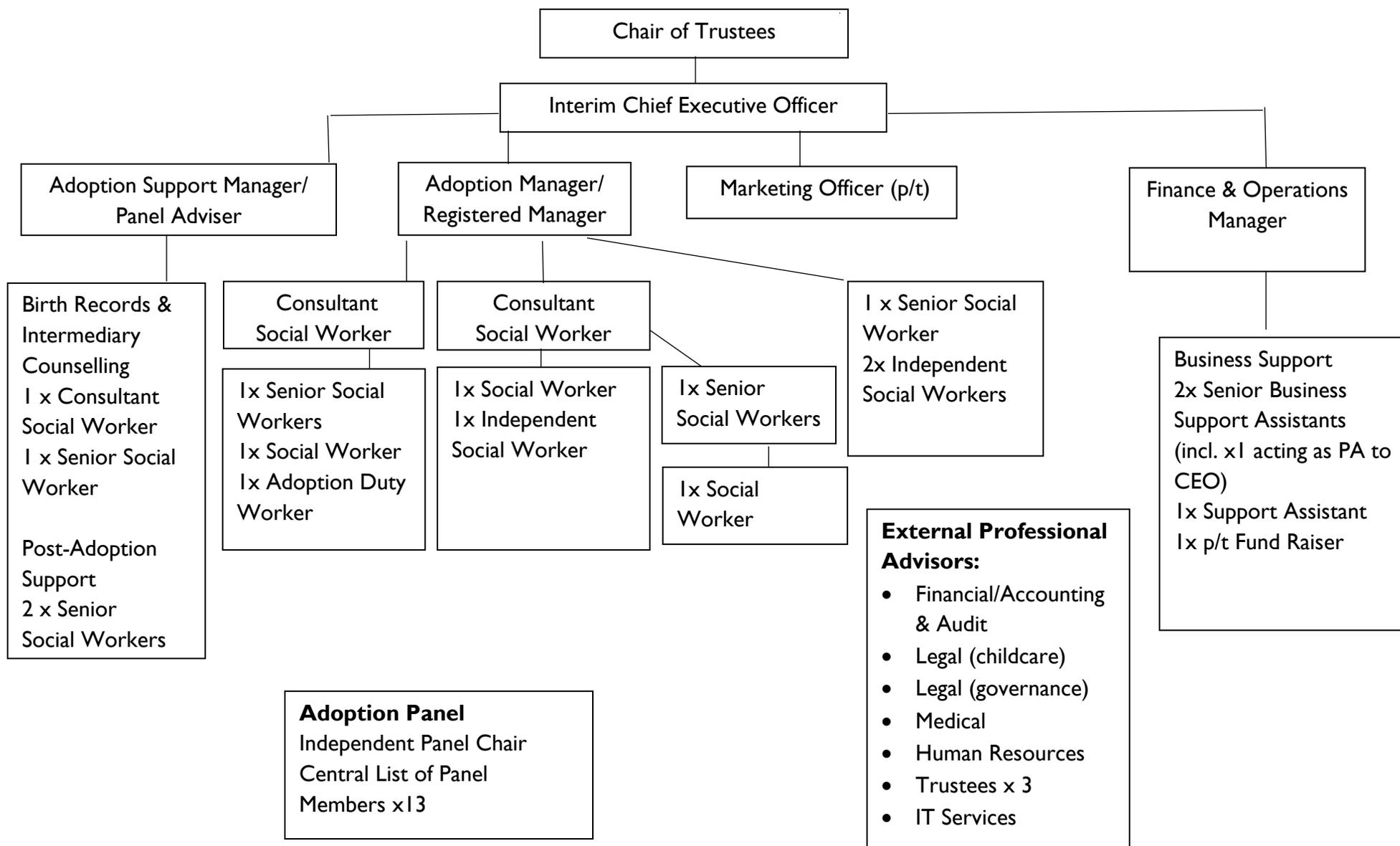
Management Team comprises of the (Chief Executive Officer), Adoption Team Manager, Adoption Support Manager and the three Consultant Social Workers. The Chair of Trustees meets regularly with the other trustees to discuss the day-to-day management of the Society and attends Management and Staff Meetings on a regular basis. Clear arrangements are made to ensure that an appropriate Manager is in charge when members of the team are absent.

The Interim Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the management and oversight of all the functions of the agency, including those that are adoption-related, finance, IT, business planning and the human resources function. An independent Registered Social Worker (Anna Sharkey – CEO of 'Adoption Focus'/Family Society Ltd) acts as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in relation approving the Adoption Panel recommendations and reviewing feedback from stakeholders for continuous organisational learning.

McIntyre Hudson are the Society's External Financial Contractor supporting the Interim Finance & Operations Manager with the financial management of the Agency. The Finance & Operations Manager also manages the external suppliers, IT (via external IT Services provider), business support staff and premises and HR (via external providers). The Adoption Team Manager is responsible for managing the day-to-day work of the Adoption Team, overseeing the Adoption Panel, and supervising the social work staff. The Adoption Support Manager, who also acts as the Panel Adviser, is responsible for the smooth functioning and quality control of the Adoption Panel and for managing the birth parent projects, adoption support services, Birth Counselling and intermediary counselling contracts, and other new initiatives.

Hewitsons LLP provide independent advice on governance to the Board and other specialist legal and professional advisors are appointed as required.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE SOCIETY



THE PROCEDURE FOR RECRUITING, PREPARING, ASSESSING, APPROVING AND SUPPORTING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Recruitment

The Society aims to provide stable and secure adoptive families for children where a decision has been made by a Local Authority that adoption is in their best interest. Recruitment activity aims to recruit adoptive families for children whom Local Authorities have difficulty placing through their own approved adoption resources. Details of these children are received through the Society social workers liaising with Local Authority social workers, RAA's, the circulation of children's profiles, and children featured via Link Maker and other regional and national resources such as Adoption Activity Days and Exchange events.

Recruitment activity is ongoing throughout the year and is co-ordinated by the CEO, Marketing Officer and Adoption Team Manager. The adopter recruitment strategy is regularly updated. There is a separate marketing and fundraising budget. A recruitment group meets as necessary to review general recruitment and plan future recruitment events. The Society is working with Home for Good to recruit adopters from churches across the region and has a dedicated project worker and will review extending access to other religions and non-religious groups in line with its equality agenda as it moves forward to audit its practices to identify further opportunities for equity and inclusion by role modelling effective allyship and engagement with the issue of intersectionality through its policies and practices. The Society is also a member of New Family Social and supports recruitment events for LGBTQ+ adopters.

The Society offers information about adoption through monthly Open Events on a Wednesday evening and a Saturday morning. These events have proved a popular starting point for individuals thinking about adopting. The Society's website is a major source of enquiries and is regularly updated. Other recruitment activities include advertising on social media, through Facebook, takeover of local newspaper online home pages, specific targeted online advertising, and the use of Google Ads. The Society is also included in other websites e.g. First4Adoption, CVAA, CoramBAAF; and through radio, TV programmes and newspaper interviews.

A Duty Worker is available every day between 9am and 2pm to take enquiries from prospective adoptive parents. They can provide information about the children the Society places for adoption and to share details of the adoption preparation, assessment, and approval process. A comprehensive information pack is sent to enquirers usually by return, and always within five working days, usually by email. The pack can also be downloaded from the Society's website. Where enquirers wish to pursue their interest in adoption, if appropriate, an appointment for a home visit is made and an initial assessment of suitability is completed. Prospective adopters are also encouraged to consider whether they would be able to offer a fostering for adoption placement.

Stage 1

If the prospective adopter(s) want to proceed and they meet the recruitment criteria, they will be invited to submit a Registration of Interest form to start their adoption assessment process at Stage 1. A social worker is allocated, and a stage 1 plan is completed. This enables the Society to undertake a range of standard checks (including DBS), to contact referees, for the adopters to attend training and arrange to undertake their medicals. Stage 1 also includes a Health and Safety risk assessment and pet-owning applicants will complete a pet questionnaire. Prospective adopters can be linked with an experienced adopter 'buddy' who can support them through the process.

Stage 1 should be completed in two months, however, can be extended at the prospective adopter(s) request or for good reason by the Society, however stage 1 cannot be completed until the statutory checks and references are returned. On completion of stage 1 prospective adopter(s) or the agency may, for a specific reason, delay stage 2 by up to 6 months. If the delay is longer than this there is a requirement to re-do stage 1.

Preparation Training

The Society provides an integrated adoption preparation and assessment programme for all prospective adoptive parents. The Preparation Groups, which contain four separate day-long modules, are run up to six times each year. These usually take place in stage 1. An additional training session is provided for those interested in Fostering for Adoption and being approved as foster carers for a specific child by a local authority. The preparation and assessment programme aims to equip applicants to meet the physical, emotional, intellectual, social and health needs of children placed for adoption from Local Authority care.

Stage 2

At the end of stage 1 the Society will advise the prospective adopters whether or not they may proceed to Stage 2. The prospective adopters must advise the Society in writing of their intention to proceed to Stage 2 and this stage officially starts when the Society accepts their notification that they wish to proceed. The timescale for Stage 2 is 4 months unless there is a good reason to extend the process.

The stage 2 social worker completes a stage 2 plan with the prospective adopters. The CoramBAAF Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR) (including concurrent planning and fostering for adoption carers) is used as the assessment format and a copy of this is provided for applicants at the start of the assessment process. This format is compliant with regulatory requirements. Applicants are provided with a Homestudy Workbook, which they use to record information about themselves and their family and which contributes towards the content of the PAR assessment report.

Where agreed it would enhance the assessment, an Attachment Style interview is undertaken with each applicant and the conclusions included in the report.

Once the final assessment report is prepared, a draft copy is shared with the applicants and any comments they make regarding the content are fully considered before the report is finalised. The applicants are asked to read and sign the final report.

A second opinion visit is undertaken by the line manager where it is the first PAR completed, or where the assessment is complex. The report forms part of the PAR.

If the Society has concerns about the prospective adopters and is not intending to recommend approval, the social worker and line manager will discuss their reasons with the prospective adopters during stage 2 and may present a brief report to panel.

Adoption Panel and Approval

The Society operates an Adoption Panel in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations. The Adoption Panel meets monthly at the Milton Keynes office (and digitally) and has an independent chair. The assessment report is presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration within 4 months of the prospective adopters commencing Stage Two, unless the specific needs of the assessment demand more time. The Adoption Panel will be provided with the reasons for any delay experienced. Applicants are encouraged to attend the Panel and participate in the discussion and are provided with written information to assist them in deciding whether they will attend and to prepare them for meeting the Panel. Adoption Panel makes a recommendation regarding the applicants, which can be approval, defer or not to approve. If the applicants also wish to be considered for a fostering for adoption placement, additional information is added to the PAR and discussed by the Adoption Panel. The Adoption Panel will give advice to the agency regarding suitability for a fostering to adopt placement.

All agency decisions are made following receipt of the Adoption Panel's recommendations and final minutes, within seven working days. The Agency Decision Maker is currently the independent CEO of a fellow adoption agency and a qualified Social Worker with experience of adoption. Applicants are notified in writing once an Agency Decision is made. Where the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to approve an application, a qualifying determination is issued, and the applicants are given the opportunity to make representations to the Agency Decision-maker or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review of their assessment by the IRM Panel.

Matching and Support

Following the Agency Decision, prospective adopters are supported by their social worker to find a suitable match with a child or children. They are also expected to attend further training modules including linking and matching, and a session for the support network of adopters.

Approved adoptive parents are encouraged to be proactive in the family finding process, including joining Link Maker to identify potential links. Their profiles are circulated to Local Authorities in the agency's 'Waiting Families Booklet'. Details are circulated regularly within

the local RAA. In addition, the adoptive family's allocated social worker will discuss with them details of children referred to the Society directly from several Local Authorities.

The allocated social worker will discuss all appropriate children with the adopters. If a link appears possible, they will contact the child's social worker to commence the process of exchanging information. Full, comprehensive, and up to date information about the child is requested (including health and educational assessments, the legal situation and contact).

The Society's document 'Expectations in Relation to Inter-agency Placement' is sent to all Local Authorities where a match is being considered. It describes the type of information that the Society requires to facilitate a link between children and families, why this is needed, the timescale in which it should be received, and the Society's general expectations relating to inter-agency adoption placements.

Detailed discussions take place with the adopters regarding the content of the reports during and following a meeting with the child's social worker. Advice on the content of reports is sought from the Society's Legal and Medical Advisers, whenever relevant, and this advice is discussed with the adopters. It is expected that the child will be fully prepared for placement and the child's social worker will work hard to ensure the adopters are provided with full and accurate reports and information about the child's history and current situation.

The Society holds an internal Matching Meeting chaired by a social work manager. Minutes of the meeting include identified positives in the proposed match and highlighting any areas of concern/gaps in information, are shared with the prospective adopters, and held on file. Meetings between the adopters and the child's foster carers, teachers, birth family and the Medical Adviser are actively encouraged.

Once a placement is agreed, the social worker provides intensive support to the adopters during the introductory period and the early weeks of placement. Home visits occur on a weekly basis for the first month, followed by fortnightly for the following three months and in accordance with assessed and agreed need. Copies of case records reflecting these visits are sent to the Placing Agency and a reciprocal arrangement of their own visits requested.

Support on the telephone is also provided and the adopters are invited to attend the Society's regular support groups and other ongoing training and social events. Additional support may be provided by the Society's links with a designated Therapist, or by the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or by an experienced adoptive family with whom the adopters will have been linked during the assessment process. Advice regarding education and school attendance is also provided including information about access to the pupil premium. The Local Authority social worker retains statutory responsibility for the child placed and is expected to visit on a regular basis.

Advice and support is provided to adopters to assist them to prepare their application to adopt to the Court, and to maintain any agreed contact arrangements.

Every effort is made to avoid a placement disruption but occasionally the needs of the child are so complex that the adopters' capacity to manage these are insufficient, even with an intensive package of support services. In such circumstances the welfare of the child remains paramount, and efforts will be made to avoid an unplanned ending of the placement. Whenever possible a Placement Support Meeting will be convened as a means of sharing information, pooling resources, and seeking to avoid any inappropriate placement breakdown. The adopters will be provided with support focussed on their needs during and following a placement disruption.

The Society provides adoption support services in recognition of the adoption journey and the challenges adoption may present at different life stages:

Universal Services

- Regular visits and support by qualified and experienced social workers until adoption order
- 3-month adoption support review post adoption order
- Regular E-newsletters
- Regular stay and play events
- Adopter Forum (suspended during Covid pandemic)
- A calendar of family events throughout the year
- Follow-on Groups/training
- Buddying scheme with other experienced adopters
- Annual Adopter conference with adoption expert speakers (suspended during Covid pandemic)

Targeted Services

- Adoption Support assessments
- Short term targeted interventions and support
- Regular consultation appointments with experienced social worker and therapist
- Theraplay® techniques to support placement in the early stages.
- Support to access the Adoption Support Fund
- Birth Records counselling and Intermediary services
- Adoption training post placement
- Therapeutic Parenting workshops

Specialist services

(Funded by the responsible Local Authority, Adoption Support Fund or by charitable funds and available following assessment of need and availability)

- Support in accessing specialist services as DDP, Play therapy and EMDR.
- Theraplay® Techniques Intervention, including MIM, 20 sessions, reports, and specialist clinical supervision.

- Life story work

MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE SOCIETY'S SERVICES

The Society strives to ensure that its services are effective and efficient, and as a means of achieving this, the Society continually monitors and evaluates its operations. The Society has a Monitoring and Evaluation policy. All services are designed and delivered to promote best outcomes for children including positive attachments, self-esteem, educational achievements, and good physical and mental health.

We encourage the involvement of service users in processes wherever possible, and service users are integral to the delivery of the preparation groups, represented on the Adoption Panel and on the Board of Trustees. This empowers service users, and their personal experience informs practice. All policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated, as necessary.

Safeguarding is monitored by the CEO in consultation with the Registered Manager (Adoption Manager) who is the designated safeguarding lead, supported by the Adoption Support Manager who deputises for this function. Safeguarding issues are discussed at management and trustee meetings and Ofsted is notified of serious concerns. Where a CEO provides the line management supervision but is not personally a qualified Social Worker, SFCS uses the services of an independent Social Worker Consultant to provide coaching support and supervision to both the Adoption Manager and the Adoption Support Manager who both lead their respective teams of social workers to ensure effective and independent supervision and professional development support.

The Society's Comments, Complaints and Compliments Procedure is readily accessible to service users in a range of media. Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any pattern of complaints against services or individuals as well as identify feedback to indicate our key strengths so we can maximise them.

The Adoption services are monitored and evaluated in the following ways:

Staff:

- All staff have an induction plan, regular supervision, and an annual appraisal
- All qualified staff are registered with Social Work England
- All staff, Panel members, Trustees and volunteers have Disclosure & Barring Service clearance; references are obtained and verified.
- All staff have access to relevant training opportunities to update and develop practice.
- All staff are involved in the annual evaluation day and development of the service
- All volunteers and independent workers receive induction and regular supervision and are invited to staff meetings and training events as appropriate.

- All staff and volunteers are made aware of the Society's safeguarding procedures during the induction process and regular training is provided.
- All allegations about current or previous staff or volunteers are dealt with in a timely way and recorded and referred to the appropriate agencies.
- Exit interviews are carried out with staff leaving the Society, where practicable and with their agreement. Their views are taken into consideration in all aspects of the Society's services and HR Policy and Procedures, as are the views of current staff as expressed in annual appraisals.

Service Users:

- All service users are invited to comment on the services provided, both informally and formally.
- Children and Young People are encouraged to comment on the service provided and to suggest areas for development.
- Younger children are involved in a range of activities and their views accessed verbally at adoption support events, and individually within their families. Young people are involved in Activity Groups. Young adoptees are supported in expressing their views of services available to them.
- Service users are advised of the Society's Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure.
- All adoptive families are invited to return questionnaires regarding training. Specific issues arising are addressed with attendees on receipt of the comments. Preparation Training is continually reviewed and adjusted depending on feedback from attendees.
- All prospective adopters are encouraged to make a written contribution to their assessment report.
- All prospective adopters are informed of the role of the Independent Review Mechanism.
- All prospective adopters are asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their attendance at adoption panel.
- Post approval all prospective adopters are asked to complete a questionnaire covering their experience of the process which is returned to the CEO and reviewed. Any issues are discussed and responded to.
- All approved adoptive families are reviewed in accordance with adoption regulations. Adopter checks are updated every 2 years. Reviews are submitted to the Panel as required.

Adoption Panel

- Panel Members complete feedback forms in respect of the quality of reports submitted to the panel. These are collated by the Panel Advisor and Independent Panel Chair, who prepares a 6-monthly report to the Agency.
- There are quarterly meetings between the Agency Decision Maker, Panel Chair, Panel Adviser, Adoption Manager, Panel Administrator and CEO to discuss any issues that arise. These inform the practice of the agency and the supervision and training of

assessing social workers. The Board of Trustees are provided with copies of the Independent Panel Chair's reports.

- The Panel Central List includes people who have relevant experience and knowledge of adoption, fostering and other related matters.
- Members of the Panel Central List have induction into their role, including observing panel, and have access to training which supports their role.
- Members of the Panel Central List are formally appraised annually.
- The Panel receives regular reports from the Agency about the performance of the Adoption Service.
- The Panel receives regular reports of placements made, and children's progress.

Trustees

- The Chair of Trustees meets with the CEO monthly to provide supervision and set performance objectives in consultation with the Board and CEO; and receives monthly management accounts, reserves and cashflow forecasts and updates on the adoption pipeline to share with the full board.
- The trustees regularly assess risks to direct the executive to prepare operational plans to manage such risks.
- The Chair of Trustees attends senior management and staff meetings regularly.
- The Trustees receive a report 4-6 times per year regarding the activity of the Adoption service, which is discussed at Board meetings.
- The Trustees receive the Independent Chair of Adoption Panel's report to the Agency and the Agency report to the Adoption Panel and observe an adoption panel as part of their induction training.
- Where available on the board, a Social Worker qualified Trustee sits on the Adoption Panel and reports back on performance and issues to Trustees and the CEO.
- Exit Interviews with Trustees and key senior personnel are in the process of being established with the Chair of Trustees to ensure effective governance feedback.
- Trustees receive safeguarding and other training as relevant to their role using our external advisors and commission governance reviews in a timely way and set Key Performance Indicators in consultation with the Executive.
- Trustees actively take part in the annual audit and preparations for Ofsted Inspections to ensure systems and processes are in place and any recommendations arising are implemented.

General

- The Adoption Service is monitored through monthly Management and Adoption Team meetings and monthly staff meetings.
- There is a tracking system to monitor timescales and to ensure that they are met. A monthly Placement Projections report is completed which monitors the progress of all adoption cases from Registration of Interest to Adoption Order.
- The Adoption Manager and Adoption Support Manager use a caseload weighting system to track and monitor workload.

- Monthly statistical information is compiled for the adoption and adoption support services, shared at management meetings, and then becomes part of the quarterly statistical return to the ASGLB and Annex A report for Ofsted.
- The Adoption Panel is kept informed of and monitors the adoption service's performance in meeting timescales to panel.
- The Adoption Service uses the Charms database to record service user information. Case files are regularly audited, and decisions are recorded as progress points. Case supervision records are signed dated and timed and uploaded to Charms.
- The Adoption Service is benchmarked through meetings with other Voluntary Adoption Agencies at CVAA and Buckfast meetings.
- Contracts are monitored through quarterly meetings with commissioning Local Authorities, including an annual audit and safeguarding reporting.
- Practice has been audited against current children's and adoption legislation, regulations, guidance, and national minimum standards.
- All policies & procedures are regularly reviewed and updated, as necessary.
- The service provision is registered with and inspected by OFSTED.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Society positively encourages comments and criticism concerning its services. The Society has a formal Complaints Procedure (as well as a Whistleblowing Policy for staff and contractors), which is made available to all service-users at their first point of contact with the Society. A simple child-focused form is also available for children in placement and after adoption to encourage children and young people to share any worries or concerns they may have.

It is anticipated that minor complaints will be dealt with at the informal stage by the social worker and/or line manager, however if the complainant, the staff member involved and their managers are unable to resolve the dissatisfaction, then the formal Complaints Procedure will be implemented without delay.

The Representations Officer of the Society is the Chief Executive Officer, and the Society sources an Independent Person in relation to Level 3 complaints. Feedback and complaints can also be directed to the Chair of Trustees for a final internal resolution where earlier attempts have not been successful or it is appropriate for them to be dealt with at a higher level of leadership.

Complaints can also be directed to your local MP. Complaints about breaches in regulations can ultimately be directed to OFSTED.

Where a child or young person wishes to make a complaint, the Society will seek to support them and provide them with the appropriate information to facilitate the process of their complaint. If the matter cannot be resolved through the Society's informal or formal Complaints Procedure, a child or young person may contact:

The Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

The Voice of the Child in Care

Freephone: 0808 800 5792
www.voiceyp.org

National Youth Advocacy Service

Freephone: 0800 616 101
www.nyas.net

Childline

0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

**THE NAME, ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF THE
REGISTRATION AUTHORITY:**

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 1231231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.org.uk