



Slough Children's Services Trust as a Voluntary Adoption Agency

Statement of Purpose 2019-20

Summary

This Statement of Purpose explains the services Slough Children's Services Trust as a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency provides, the governing principles and details of the service.

Owner: Jackie Pape, Head of Family Placement Services

Version: V1

Date: March, 2019

Review Date: March, 2020

©Slough Children's Services Trust
St Martins Place, 51 Bath Road Slough SL1 3UF

Registered Company: England and Wales:
9487106



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be
..... Safe, Secure and Successful

Table of Contents

Slough Children’s Services Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency.....	3
Context.....	3
The Aims and Objectives of the Voluntary Adoption Agency.....	3
National Context	4
Staffing	5
Policies and Procedures	5
Services provided by Slough Children’s Services Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency.....	5
Adoption Support Services	7
Links to Other Agencies.....	8
Panel and LetterBox Service.....	8
Inter-country Adoptions.....	9
Non-agency Adoptions	9
Adoption Panel and Decision Making.....	9
Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare	10
Evaluating and Responding to Feedback.....	11
Management of the Service	11
The Complaints Procedure	12
Details of the Registration Authority.....	12

Slough Children's Services Trust as a Voluntary Adoption Agency

Context

Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) is a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency, and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2012). The Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011 sets out the requirement for adoption agencies to compile a statement of purpose explaining what services are provided, the governing principles and details of the management of the Service.

The statement of purpose is for:

- Children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Social workers internal and external to the agency
- Adoption panel members
- Elected members
- Slough Children's Services Trust Board Members
- Ofsted
- Members of the public

The Aims and Objectives of the Voluntary Adoption Agency

The Voluntary Adoption Agency is part of a range of services delivered by SCST which primarily seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family, a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. We aim to treat everyone with respect and fairness.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for the Service. Slough Children's Services Trust supports the basic principles that:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children, whenever possible, to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe, secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process
- Children's views should be listened to, recorded and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs
- In addressing the process of matching, the Voluntary Adoption Agency will look at each child's needs holistically. No one aspect of their needs will take precedence over another where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all

- The Voluntary Adoption Agency is proactive in seeking to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of each child's ethnic origins, culture, language and religion. However, no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be identified
- The Voluntary Adoption Agency works in close partnership with children's teams across the Trust and meets regularly with an independent reviewing officer to ensure that any delay in achieving permanence is avoided. We have in place monthly tracking meetings along with performance surgeries to ensure that we are aware of children at the earliest opportunity and have additional scrutiny for the progression of the plans. Additionally a member of the adoption team attends all permanency planning meeting that are held for every child that requires one
- Appropriate support is provided to the prospective adopters recruited by the Voluntary Adoption Agency following the placement of children, including linking them with experienced adopters who could offer them additional support, guidance and advice. The Voluntary Adoption Agency works effectively with placing authorities to maximise the long-term success of each child's placement.

National Context

In 2012, the Government published 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay', which outlined proposals to accelerate the adoption process with the aim of more children being adopted and more rapidly. Slough Children's Services Trust has a strong track record of successfully placing children and performed well in the adoption scorecards. We continually strive to improve our services and to deliver improved outcomes for our children and young people.

Our key areas for development are:

- To focus on our more difficult to place children – we work with our colleagues within neighbouring local authorities and VAAs as well as agencies further afield to prioritise and place those children. Additionally, from the earliest opportunity we place children's names on Linkmaker. Up until 31 March 2019, we have placed children on the adoption register, which closes after that date. We also have regularly attended the national profiling events up until this date, again these will not continue after 31 March 2019. We attend adoption activity days where appropriate.
- To consider fostering for adoption for children where this may be appropriate
- To continuously review practice and systems in order to ensure that the recruitment and approval of prospective adopters takes place within six months from the time of the acceptance of their register of interest in line with government guidelines.

We are currently working with other agencies in the formation of a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), working title: 'Ambitious for Adoption' to support our work, and we will join this RAA during 2019. It has the following objectives:

- Accelerate the placement/reduce the waiting time for children in particular for harder-to-place children

- Further develop and increase early permanence arrangements
- Retain and build confidence of adopters as they move through the assessment and matching process by supporting and encouraging them on their journey
- Increase early placement stability
- Remove peripheral activity from social workers in order to increase their capacity to focus on the tasks that only social workers can do i.e. child protection, adoption assessment and family finding tasks. An example of this is a dedicated family support worker employed to be the consistent point of call for potential adopters contacting the agency with their enquiries.
- We hold a nationally recognized accredited award in 'working towards early permanence' , which was awarded based on the evidence that we provided on our work in this area.

Staffing

The Voluntary Adoption Agency work within Slough Children's Services Trust and is undertaken by staff from the Family Placement Service. There is a specific, specialist post within the team responsible for providing adoption support services, and there is also a life story worker within the service. There are dedicated workers that undertake adoption work (including the processing of non-agency adoptions), alongside their colleagues within the Family Placement Service who provide the following services: Fostering, including, 'The Mockingbird Family Model', supported lodgings and Home from Home (short breaks respite).

All social work staff within Slough Children's Services Trust share the same job descriptions commensurate to their posts. All staff are provided with a thorough induction and are supported by experienced staff to ensure that the principles and values of the agency are intrinsic in the way that the service works. Staff work in accordance with the agency's policies and procedures.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency actively promotes opportunities for the professional development of adoption social workers and all other social care social workers and business support staff, in order to increase their knowledge of good practice and personal development and to strive for service improvement (for improved service delivery) at all times.

Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures cover all of the Voluntary Adoption Agency's activities for children, adopters, birth families, step-parent adopters and their children and are regularly updated to ensure that they reflect any developments in practice and legislation. Agency policies are available online internally and externally.

Services provided by Slough Children's Services Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency

All services provided are within the legal framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Children Act 1989, and associated guidance and regulations.

There is a free phone line for enquiries relating to adoption which is 0800 073 0291. There is specific information relating to adoption on the Slough Children's Services Trust website:

<http://www.scstrust.co.uk/>

Prospective adopters receive a prompt and professional response. The initial enquiry is responded to within 48 hours of the initial contact and there is a dedicated worker in this role. An information pack will be sent out within two working days of the telephone call, and if the enquiry is received by post or online, an information pack will be sent out within two working days of the contact. We offer monthly information sessions as well as one to one meetings. We also run regular preparation groups. SCST facilitates joint adoption and fostering information sessions. Prospective adopters will be assessed by a two stage process that will take six months in total.

Eligibility criteria:

- Applicants must be at least 21 years old (there is no upper age limit)
- At least one of the couple or the single applicant must be domiciled in the British Isles or both of the couple or the single applicant have been habitually resident for at least one year
- Neither applicant nor any adult member of their household can have been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence.

All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an information meeting and an adopters' preparation group if they have not previously adopted a child through the Voluntary Adoption Agency. Previous adopters and approved foster carers may be able to proceed straight to stage two and receive a tailored assessment to take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of the child they have previously adopted/fostered.

The preparation training includes a two day course in stage one and a one day course in stage two. We have a dedicated family support worker working with stage one applicants to support them through the first stage of the assessment process. Should they require additional support we will endeavour to offer them a mentor.

The material used in the two day course is designed to provide prospective adopters with information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children, both locally and nationally, who need adoptive parents.

The one day course in stage two is focused on attachment (using Dan Hughes material), brain development, fostering for adoption, the legal process, linking and matching and adoption support. The training material used is kept under regular review.

Following approval, all adopters have access to our detailed learning and development programme, which includes the opportunity to attend our annual adopter and foster carer conference. All approved adopters also have the opportunity to attend social events, which include picnics twice a year and coffee mornings three times a year.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency is committed to seeking feedback from service users in order to inform future service provision and a fairly robust system is in place to seek feedback from prospective and legal adopters at key points in the adoption process.

Prospective adopters are assisted through both the preparation groups and the home study process, to consider/ identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs. All prospective adopters who have previously stayed abroad for sometime will be required to obtain an overseas Police check.

A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all adoptive applicants in line with the requirements of the adoption regulations, guidance and national minimum standards.

From 1 July 2013 the introduction of regulation 25A in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 enables approved adopters to be temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child by the local authority without being referred to a fostering panel. Fostering for adoption protocols are in place.

There is an adopter recruitment marketing strategy, with certain activities geared to the recruitment of adoptive parents for Slough Children's Services Trust. We work closely with the head of communications to ensure maximum impact of recruitment efforts, which include a variety of advertising in publications, press and radio, editorial features in local press, and running information events at local venues. The Voluntary Adoption Agency seeks to maintain a level of public awareness of the wider national need for adopters, including specific recruitment events during National Adoption Week.

All adopters approved by the Voluntary Adoption Agency who are not linked or being actively considered for a potential match are referred up until 31 March 2019 to the Adoption Register (Adoption Match) and Linkmaker, so that they can be made available for consideration by other placing authorities (subject to the adopters' consent).

Adoption Support Services

Slough Children's Services Trust is committed to providing the full range of adoption support services required by regulations. These services are:

- Counselling, advice and information
- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and birth parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a birthparent, birth sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child
- Services in relation to therapeutic needs of an adoptive child
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, including making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions.

The Adoption Support Fund is part of a wider package of reforms introduced by the Government through the Children and Families Act 2014, and became available in May 2015. The Trust made 17 successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund during 2017.

While Slough Children's Services Trust seeks to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Trust may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others; either Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Local Authorities or independent providers of adoption services.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency is committed to providing adoption support services as part of an overall integrated service for all children and families who are engaged with children's services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted children and their families also have access to mainstream services available to children and families with particular needs.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency has a dedicated worker providing counselling and support services to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service.

The role of adoption support services advisor (ASSA) is vested in the practice manager for adoption support, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the post adoption worker within the Voluntary Adoption Agency. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level will be raised by the ASSA to the head of family placement services.

Links to Other Agencies

The Trust is currently working towards joining the Regionalised Adoption Agency, working title 'Ambitious for Adoption'. It is also a member of the CVAA as it is a Voluntary Adoption Agency. We have also worked closely with Coram BAAF in our adoption work, and the practice manager for adoption is a member of the Coram BAAF Early Permanence Network. We have established a good working relationship with Buckinghamshire County Council Adoption Service, and have shared post adoption services with them. Managers attend regular meetings organised by the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB), and also attend the Coram BAAF Practice Forum for adoption managers held on a quarterly basis.

Panel and LetterBox Service

The Trust has established an adoption and permanency panel, and there is a dedicated panel advisor, who also manages the letterbox service. The service includes:

- Management, training, recruitment and co-ordination of SCST adoption and permanency panel
- Management of the letterbox service, including relevant administrative and professional tasks as required

- Management of the birth relative project including relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption
- Management of post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement.

Inter-country Adoptions

The Voluntary Adoption Agency by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

Non-agency Adoptions

Slough Children's Services Trust provides a service to people applying for a non agency adoption (adoption not arranged through the Voluntary Adoption Agency). Initial meetings and subsequent assessments are undertaken by staff experienced in this area of work and reports are provided to the Court within timescales set. Adopters are made aware of their right to access adoption support services. The prospective adopters are also made aware of other alternatives available to them via written information and during the meeting with the social worker.

Adoption Panel and Decision Making

The Voluntary Adoption Agency holds its own adoption and permanency panel monthly. The composition of the panel is in line with regulations. Additional panels can be arranged if needed. The role of the panel is to consider adopter approvals, matches, and if adoption is the best plan for a child that has been relinquished for adoption.

The overall functioning of the adoption panel is managed by the adoption panel adviser, including maintaining the central list of panel members and ensuring that annual reviews of panel members and training requirements are maintained in accordance with regulations.

Panel members and the Voluntary Adoption Agency's decision maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the panel meeting.

The link worker for the applicants, or in her/ his absence, their manager will be present when an application is considered, to answer the panel's questions and assist them in reaching a decision. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend panel for their approval or when a specific match is being presented with a child/ren.

The recommendation of the panel is conveyed verbally to the applicants on the day of the panel. The draft panel minutes are forwarded to the panel chair within four working days. The chair approves and finalises the minutes before they are passed to the agency decision maker.

The agency decision maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven working days of receiving the recommendation and final panel minutes, and this is conveyed to the applicants verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days, in line with regulatory requirements.

A decision as to whether a child who is the subject of care proceedings should be placed for adoption is made by the agency decision maker (ADM) at Slough Children's Services Trust. The agency decision

maker (ADM) is able to consult with the agency legal, medical and adoption advisor and to request any further information which is deemed necessary.

Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

The Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board provides the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Slough and the Voluntary Adoption Agency ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance. Adoption panel members are also provided with safeguarding training as part of their programme and at least one training day per year with the Voluntary Adoption Agency. Additionally panel members are invited to attend adopter and carer conferences, and can access the SCST training programme that is available to all staff working for the Trust.

- Systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Voluntary Adoption Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard
- Performance is monitored nationally via adoption scorecards that assess the effectiveness of planning and permanency (including adoption) arrangements for children
- Annual data is sent to Ofsted
- Quarterly information sent to the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB)
- Reports are provided on a bi-annual basis to Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and SCST Board. Tracking meetings and performance surgeries are in place to capture key milestones in the child's journey in care, including adoption progress and to avoid any unnecessary delay
- Feedback from service users is pro-actively sought in order to inform future service provision from children, prospective and approved adopters, birth parents, adult adoptees, following birth records counselling and feedback from birth relatives, following enquiries about tracing adopted relatives. In addition, feedback is obtained and collated from adopters who attend the adoption support group meetings; adopters following life appreciation days; and from foster carers, after children have been moved on to adoption placements, regarding their views on this process
- Children's wishes and feelings are also captured at events specifically organised for adoptive families
- An Adopter Advisory Board chaired by the head of service for adoption, fostering and residential services has been established, for adopters to provide insight and challenge to the service and help us develop new processes
- The adoption panel provides independent oversight of cases
- Chairing of adoption disruption meetings is undertaken independently.

Evaluating and Responding to Feedback

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Voluntary Adoption Agency, this is referred to/considered by the relevant manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaising with external agencies/ organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Voluntary Adoption Agency to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be dealt with via Slough Children's Services Trust's complaints procedure.

We collate feedback and evidence how it has influenced service development.

Management of the Service

The Voluntary Adoption Agency decision maker is:

Lisa Humphreys, chief executive

Slough Children's Services Trust, St. Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 3UF

The responsible individual is:

Jackie Pape, head of family placement services

Slough Children's Services Trust, St. Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3UF

The day to day management of the work of the Voluntary Adoption Agency is undertaken by the adoption practice manager, family placement service (Voluntary Adoption Agency), in consultation with the head of service, placements and resources.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency employs qualified and experienced staff as follows:

- One practice manager, and one consultant practitioner.
- The manager is a registered social worker with significant experience of child care and family placement services
- Five full time social workers who are all qualified and experienced in adoption/family placement work
- One family support worker (part time)
- One dedicated business support officer (30 hours)
- One dedicated life story worker
- All social workers are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC)
- Slough Children's Services Trust is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve appropriate training. The head of service, who is the responsible individual, undertook a Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in Social Work 2007-2009. The practice manager responsible for adopters has a Practice Teaching Award. All staff in the Voluntary Adoption Agency has access to a comprehensive programme of training, internally and externally. There is a training officer in post across SCST, and a dedicated training officer for the Family Placement Service.

The Complaints Procedure

All prospective adopters engaging with the Voluntary Adoption Agency and all birth parents and where appropriate family members of children for whom the Voluntary Adoption Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about the Trust's complaints procedure.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services and other relevant organisations.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process as appropriate. The practice managers of the Family Placement Service, along with the head of service, placements and resources monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Family Placement Service.

Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED

National Business Unit

Royal Exchange Buildings

St. Ann's Square

Manchester, M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Details of the Children's Commissioner for England

Anne Longfield

Children's Commissioner for England

The Office of the Children's Commission

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London, SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk