

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
2nd August 2007

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION
SERVICE – ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2007**

**BRENDA THOMPSON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN
FAMILIES & LEARNING**

**JAN DOUGLAS – ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with
 - (a) information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service during the year 2006/7 and plans for the year 2007/8.
 - (b) the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2007/8
 - (c) the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2007/8

BACKGROUND

2. The Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services were brought into force on 30th April 2003. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is that each adoption service should produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Adoption Service. There are clear guidelines about what should be included in these documents. The Regulations also require that, in the case of a local authority, the Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and that it is reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.
3. In previous years, the Adoption Service has produced an annual report which was a separate document. However there were always several areas where the Statement of Purpose and the Annual Report contained the same material and in order to avoid

unnecessary duplication, it has been agreed that in future the annual report will take the form of a Committee Report rather than a stand-alone document.

ACTIVITY OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE DURING 2006/7

4. Levels of activity during the year have been high, reflecting the increased use of adoption as an option for children looked after. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	109
Number of requests for initial visits	33
Number of applications	10
Number of adopters approved	10
Number of children whose adoption plans were approved	20
Number of children matched with adoptive families	9
Number of adoption orders made	15

5. The Adoption Service has been affected by staff shortages for the whole of this year. Due to sickness absence of the Permanence Team Manager, the Fostering Team Manager managed both the Fostering and the Permanence Teams until 1st June 2006 when a social worker from the Permanence Team was appointed as Team Manager on a temporary basis. Later in the same month, a part-time social worker from the team retired due to ill-health. As a result, the team had 2 social work vacancies – 1 full-time and 1 part-time – for the rest of the year.
6. The recruitment strategy was reviewed during the year and this was considered in conjunction with the results of a study of children whose plans for adoption were approved in a 3 year period. This provided a clear profile of the children who need adoptive placements in a 'typical' year. This profile was then used to inform the recruitment strategy and has resulted in a targeted recruitment drive to find adoptive parents for children over the age of two. An advertisement and Open Evening held in November 2006, shortly after National Adoption Week, produced a good response and as a result 6 potential adoptive families who will consider children up to the age of 5 years attended a preparation group held in March 2007.
7. A combination of targeted recruitment and forward planning regarding children's needs for placement has resulted in positive outcomes for children during the year. For example, placements have been found for 2 sibling groups of three children which will enable them to stay together.
8. Middlesbrough Adoption Service was inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in October 2006 and the findings of the Inspection were positive. Some areas for improvement were identified, in particular the need for more adoption support. An action plan has been devised to address these issues.

9. In October 2006, a support group for adopters who are waiting for a placement was established. This group is organised in partnership with Stockton, Redcar&Cleveland and Hartlepool Council Adoption Services. Meetings are held 4 times a year and offer a mixture of information and support.

PLANS AND ISSUES FOR 2007/8

10. After experiencing staff shortages since October 2005, it is expected that the Adoption Service will become fully staffed in the year ahead. The Team Manager was appointed permanently in May 2007 which means that the full-time social work vacancy can be filled and a new member of staff is due to start in August. The remaining part-time vacancy will be filled during the year and the remit of this post will be to focus on adoption support. There is a need to support continued contact between the adoptive family and birth family and to promote and support links for the future.
11. Following the successful launch of a jointly run Adopters Waiting Group, further partnership working with neighbouring authorities is planned. This may take include the use of jointly run Adoption Information Sessions.
12. Middlesbrough Adoption Service participated in a regional Adoption Register event in May 2007, which was aimed at making regional links between children waiting for adoptive placements and approved adopters who are waiting for families. This was successful in identifying a placement for one of the three Middlesbrough children who were featured at the event. There is also a potential placement for a second child. A similar event is planned for October 2007. Middlesbrough Adoption Service will attend and hopes to repeat the successful outcome of the first event.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR 2007/8

13. The Statement of Purpose for 2007/8 for Middlesbrough Adoption Service is attached as Appendix 1. This document is a requirement of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and is updated at least once a year. It contains information about the principles, aims and objectives and functions of the Adoption Service, organisational structure, management and staffing details, the services and facilities provided, a summary of the procedures and processes used by the Service in relation to recruitment, assessment, approval, and of prospective adopters, details of monitoring systems, a summary of the complaints procedure and contact details for Ofsted.
14. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2007/8 is attached as Appendix 2. This document is also a requirement of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and is updated at least once a year.
15. The two documents are now being presented to Corporate Parenting Board for the 4th annual review.

OPTION APPRAISAL

16. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

17. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- (a) note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
 - (b) formally approve the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2007-8
 - (c) agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2008 or as soon as possible thereafter.

REASONS

19. The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to the Adoption Service are documents that are required under Regulations 2 and 3 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The review and updating of these documents is required under Regulation 4 of the same regulations. Formal approval of these documents is required under standard 1.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- (a) the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- (b) National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England

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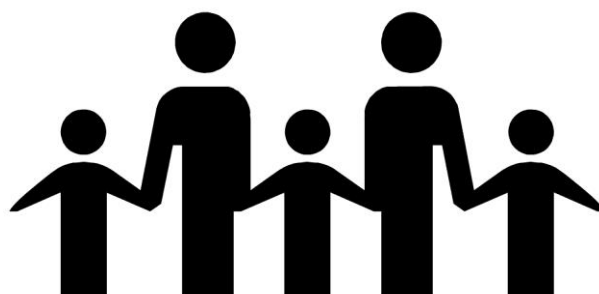
Karen Curran, Adoption Team Manager

TEL NO: 01642 - 201961

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Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2007-8

Issued in July 2007 by
Middlesbrough Adoption Service
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning
Centre
Tranmere Avenue


Middlesbrough
moving forward

The Principles of the Adoption Service

The work of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is based on the following principles:

- (1) **Child focussed**
The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- (2) **Partnership**
The Adoption Service will work in partnership with birth parents and children, adoptive parents and their families, foster carers, social work staff, other professionals and other agencies when delivering the service.
- (3) **Anti-discriminatory practice**
The Adoption Service will respect Human Rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism.

The Aims and Objectives of the Adoption Service

The main aim of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is:

- ◆ to provide suitable adoptive placements for children who are looked after by Middlesbrough Council and whose assessed need is for an adoption placement

The secondary aims of the Adoption Service are to provide services to meet the needs of:

- ◆ adults who wish to adopt children
- ◆ children whose birth parents are requesting adoption for their child
- ◆ children who have been adopted, and their adoptive families
- ◆ the parents, guardians and other birth relatives of adopted children
- ◆ adults who were adopted as children

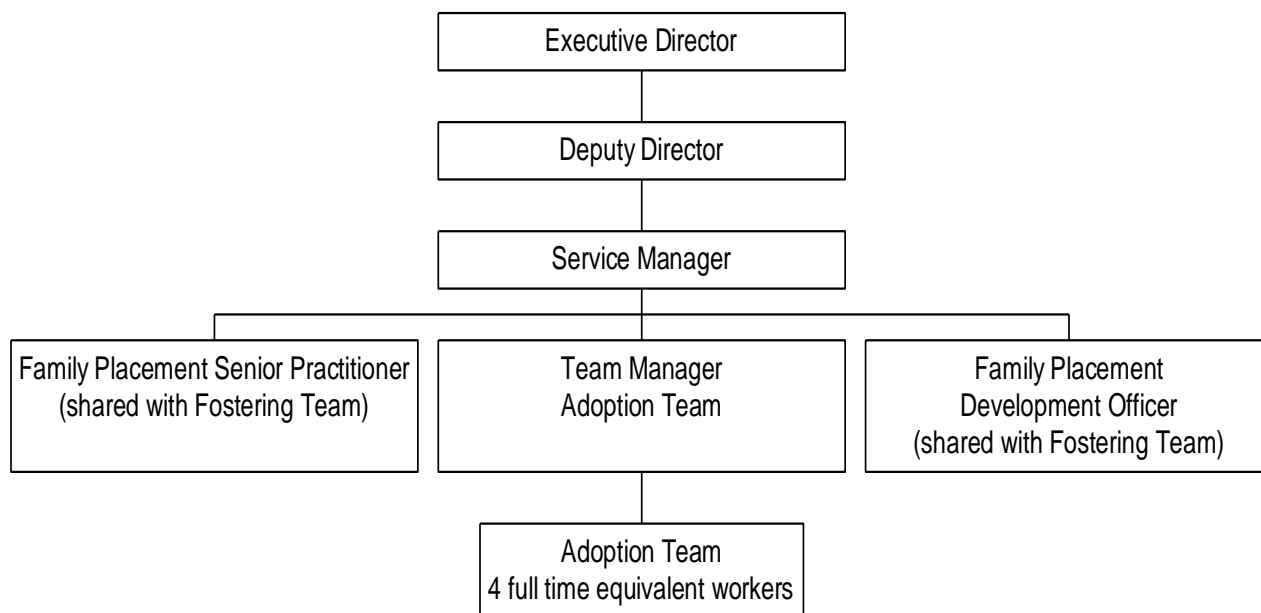
The Functions of the Adoption Service

The main functions of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service are:

- ◆ to recruit, prepare, assess and approve adopters
- ◆ to work in partnership with the child's social worker in order to identify suitable adoptive placements for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council
- ◆ to provide counselling for birth parents who are considering relinquishing a child for adoption and to make all the arrangements for the placement if their decision is to place their child for adoption
- ◆ to undertake assessments of the need for adoption support
- ◆ to provide post-adoption support for adoptees, adopters and birth relatives, in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- ◆ to provide court reports for non-agency adoption applications

The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service of Middlesbrough Council is provided mainly by workers from the Adoption Team which is based within the Children, Families & Learning Department of Middlesbrough Council, with additional input from 2 other members of staff from within the Family Placement Service. The organisational structure as at 1st July 2007 is shown in the diagram below.



Details of the Manager of the Adoption Service

The manager of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is:

Karen Curran
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre
Tranmere Avenue
Middlesbrough
TS3 7PB
Phone 01642 - 201961
Fax 01642 - 201973
Email Karen_Curran@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Details of staff of the Adoption Service (as at 1st July 2007)

There are 7 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Adoption Service. In addition, there are 2 staff employed by Hyder Business Services who provide administrative support to the Adoption Service. Details of the staff, their relevant qualifications and experience are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Karen Curran	Adoption Team Manager	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With the Adoption Service since 2003.
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Adoption Team	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1990. With the Adoption Service since 2002.
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Adoption Team	CQSW – 1984 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With the Adoption Service since 2004.
Joyce Virth	Social Worker, Adoption Team	DipSW – 1999	With Social Services since 1993. With the Adoption Service since 2005.
Jane Clarke	Social Worker, Adoption Team	BA SW Hons, PQ1	Due to start with the Adoption Team in August 2007
Tony Kerr	Family Placement Senior Practitioner (shared with Fostering Team)	CSS – 1990 Practice Teacher Award – 2002	With Social Services since 1983. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 1997.
Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer (shared with Fostering Team)	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992 B.T.E.C. Management Studies 2005	With Social Services since 1976. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 1999.
Gill Bisp	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (shared with Fostering Team)	NVQ Business Admin. Level 2 – 1995 Level 3 – 1997 Level 3 Key Skills – 1997	With Social Services since 1981. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 1996.
Sue Atkinson	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (part-time, shared with Fostering Team)	B.T.E.C. Business Admin – 1996	With Social Services since 1998. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 2000.

The Services and Facilities provided by the Adoption Service

The services and facilities provided by Middlesbrough Adoption Service fall into 10 main areas:

(a) Those provided to prospective adoptive parents:

- Information and advice about adoption
- Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming adoptive parents
- Preparation training for applicants
- Assessment of applicants
- The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented

The above services are provided to people who live within reasonable travelling distance of Middlesbrough and who wish to adopt a child from within the UK. They are also provided to people who wish to adopt a child from outside of the UK but in these instances, the applicants must be resident within the area of Middlesbrough Council.

(b) Those provided to adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service

- Support from a named member of the Permanence Team throughout the various stages of the adoption placement process
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service
- The opportunity to have a year's free membership of Adoption UK (a national voluntary organisation which supports adoptive families before, during and after adoption).
- Financial support with expenses related to the introduction and placement of a child, if the child is looked after by Middlesbrough Council.
- Financial support with expenses related to direct contact with birth relatives, if this is part of the plan for the child
- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with their adopted child's birth family

(c) Those provided to children looked after by Middlesbrough Council for whom adoption is the plan

In this situation, the main responsibility for work with the child normally rests with the child's social worker and the Adoption Service works in partnership with the social worker to:

- identify whether there are any adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service who are a suitable match for the child
- make a referral to regional consortia and the National Adoption Register if no appropriate local matches are available
- make a referral to family-finding publications such as Be My Parent and Adoption UK, if no appropriate local or regional matches are available
- receive the initial enquires from people responding to any publicity

- identify whether there are any suitable matches for the child resulting from consortium referrals or publicity
- accompany the child's social worker to visit any potential adoptive families for the child
- provide advice to the child's social worker about the placement and adoption process, especially in instances where the social worker has no previous experience of this area of work
- participate in life appreciation days for children when this is part of the placement plan

(d) Those provided to adopters approved by other agencies with whom a Middlesbrough child is being placed for adoption

- Financial support with expenses related to the introduction and placement of a child
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Financial support with expenses related to direct contact with birth relatives, if this is part of the plan for the child

(e) Those provided to birth parents who request adoption for their child or unborn child

- Counselling about the available options and their implications
- Information, advice and support if the birth parent decides to place their child for adoption
- Making all the arrangements for a suitable pre-adoptive placement if necessary
- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with the adopters of the child and support with the process if necessary
- Financial assistance with expenses related to direct contact with the child and the adoptive family, if this is part of the plan for the child
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service
- Information about other sources of support for birth parents

(f) Those provided to birth parents and other relatives of children looked after by Middlesbrough Council who have been placed for adoption

- Provision of a post-adoption post-box service for exchange of information with the adopters of the child and support with the process if necessary
- Financial assistance with expenses related to direct contact with the child and the adoptive family, if this is part of the plan for the child
- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service
- Information about other sources of support for birth parents

(g) Those provided to adopted adults

- Counselling in relation to access to birth records
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service
- Information about other sources of support for adopted adults, such as NORCAP

(h) Those provided to birth parents/relatives of children who have been adopted in the past

- Information and advice about access to information and the availability of intermediary services
- Information about other sources of support

(i) Those provided to adoptive families resident within the area of Middlesbrough Council

- An assessment of the need for adoption support and provision of appropriate services in partnership with other agencies when appropriate
- Access to all relevant services provided by After Adoption as part of their contract with Middlesbrough Adoption Service

(j) Those provided to other agencies

- Reports to the Court in relation to non-agency adoption applications
- Supervision of placements on request, where another authority has placed a child for adoption with adopters approved by Middlesbrough Adoption Service

Procedures used by Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

- (1) Recruitment activity is planned in accordance with the Family Placement Recruitment Strategy, which has been in place since January 2000. This uses a continuous, low-key, community development approach with a 'drip feed' of various types of publicity and information. Recruitment activity goes on at different levels - national (for example Adoption Week, inclusion of our details on various websites) and local (for example the use of 2 standard adverts placed in various publications, adverts in Yellow Pages and the local telephone directory, inclusion of adoption information on Middlesbrough's web-site and other specialist web-sites).
- (2) Another key element of the recruitment strategy is that of responding to enquiries in a positive but realistic way. Enquiries are taken by a member of the Adoption Service who takes basic details and answers any initial questions. An information pack is sent out within 5 days of receipt of the enquiry. If the enquirer wants to go on to the next stage, they send back a short form giving basic details of themselves and the type of child they are interested in adopting.

- (3) The Team Manager will then arrange for 2 Social Workers to visit and give information on the application process and its requirements, the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan, and the role of the adopter. They will also find out about the enquirer's circumstances and their motivation to adopt. Approximately 4 weeks after this initial visit, the same workers return for a follow-up visit. They ensure that all household members have been seen, and then, following further discussion, an agreement is reached about whether it is appropriate to proceed with an application.
- (4) An initial application form is given to prospective adopters if appropriate. This includes consent for statutory checks for all relevant people in the household. Once the application form has been completed and returned, references are taken up with Criminal Records Bureau and all relevant statutory agencies. This includes contact with the relevant embassy if the applicant has worked abroad and the records of the RAF/Navy/Army if the applicant has been a member of the Armed Forces. References from the applicant's current employer are sought if appropriate. Medical examinations are carried out by the applicant's doctor using the BAAF Medical Form and returned to Middlesbrough's Medical Adviser for comments and a recommendation.
- (5) The applicants are notified of the dates of the preparation group and given a clear message that the preparation group is an important part of the application process and they are expected to attend each session. The preparation group runs for 4 full days. There is evaluation and feedback at the end of the group, to see if applicants have met the competencies and if not, people are advised not to proceed any further. The application is confirmed at this point, after people have digested all the information and are able to make a positive informed choice. At this point some people decide for themselves not to proceed any further.
- (6) The next stage is the home study which consists of a minimum of 7 sessions with 2 workers, with individual sessions with each applicant in addition. The topics covered include personal background/history/experiences, parenting experiences, birth children's views, the home environment, including dog/pet safety and applicant's own work to show absorption of material from groups. In addition to these sessions with the applicants and their family members, 3 personal referees are interviewed. References are also sought from ex-partners, schools (if the applicants have school-aged children) and employers.
- (7) When all the necessary material is available, a report is completed by the social workers using contributions from the applicants themselves at appropriate points. This report is read and signed by the applicants and is presented to Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel which meets every 2 weeks. Applicants are able to attend the panel meeting when the application is discussed if they wish. The Family Placement Panel considers the Form F and makes a recommendation regarding the application. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Director of Children, Families and Learning.
- (8) If an application is not recommended by Panel and the applicants do not accept this, they can choose either to make further representations to the Family Placement Panel or to have their application referred to an independent body known as the Independent Review Mechanism. The IRM will review the recommendation made by Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel and make its own recommendation about

the applicants' suitability, which the agency must then take into account when making the decision about the application.

- (9) When adopters have been approved, they are notified of this in writing and sent written information about the matching process and about their right to adoption leave and maternity and paternity pay. They will receive ongoing support from a social worker who is a member of the Adoption Team. This social worker will visit regularly while they are waiting to be matched with a child. An annual review of approval will be held for all adopters who do not have a child placed with them, and if there are any doubts about their suitability as adopters, a report will be submitted to the Family Placement Panel.
- (10) When a possible match is identified, the social worker will discuss the child's situation with them and support them through the process of deciding whether to proceed. When there is a decision to proceed, their social worker will liaise with the child's social worker to carry out an assessment of the need for adoption support in respect of the proposed placement. If the match is with a Middlesbrough child, the adopters will be invited to attend Family Placement Panel when the proposed placement plan is discussed.
- (11) When a placement has been agreed, the adopters' social worker will support them through the introduction process and beyond, up to the point at which an adoption order is made, and will liaise closely with the child's social worker. Post-adoption support will be provided in accordance with the adoption support plan for the placement. All adopters will be provided with information about the services available from After Adoption and Adoption UK.

Systems used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the Adoption Service

- (1) There is monthly supervision for all staff, including managers. During the supervision of social workers, each case is discussed at least every 3 months.
- (2) Monitoring reports are compiled every 6 months by the Family Placement Development Officer containing information on recruitment levels, initial visit and assessment timescales, placements made and placement timescales. Managers meet to discuss the reports and their implications.
- (3) There is quality assurance by the Panel Adviser of all reports which are presented to the Family Placement Panel.
- (4) There is feedback from Family Placement Panel on the quality of reports and the work that has been carried out.
- (5) There are spot-checks of adoption files by a Service Manager followed by a visit to the adopters.
- (6) There are regular reports to Corporate Parenting Board on the work of the Adoption Service

A summary of the complaints procedure

Complaints about Middlesbrough Adoption Service are dealt with using the complaints procedure of Middlesbrough Council. This procedure sets out 3 stages to dealing with a complaint.

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

The Manager of the service will attempt to address the complaint as quickly as possible. Within 3 days of receiving the complaint, the Complaints Section will acknowledge the complaint telling them who will look into the complaint and provide them with information on the complaints procedure. The Manager will contact the complainant to discuss the complaint and try and resolve the issues within 10 working days. If the Manager cannot achieve resolution initially, the Manager may take a further 10 working days but the maximum amount of time that Stage 1 should take is 20 working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation

If the person making the complaint is not happy with the outcome at Stage 1 or the timescale has elapsed at Stage 1, the complainant has the right to move onto Stage 2. A Senior Manager who does not have direct line management of the service or person whom the complaint is being made, will investigate the complaint along with an Independent Person who is appointed from outside of the local authority, whose role is to ensure that the process of investigation is open, transparent and fair.

The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will meet with the complainant to agree the elements of complaint. Once the Investigating Officer and Independent Person have completed their investigation they will both prepare a written report, which will be sent to the Department and complainant.

The Investigation should be completed within 25 working days, if this is not possible the timescale may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days. The Children's Complaints Officer or the Investigating Officer will discuss any extensions to the timescale with the complainant.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

If the person making the complaint is not happy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, they can ask for the complaint to be considered by a Review Panel. The panel will consist of an Independent Chair and two other Independent People who do not work for the local authority.

The purpose of the Review Panel is to consider the adequacy of the Stage 2 investigation and focus on achieving resolution for the complainant by addressing their clearly defined complaints and desired outcomes.

The Review Panel should take place within 30 working days of receiving the request. The person making the complaint will be informed of the recommendations of the Review Panel within 5 working days and the Director of Children, Families & Learning will send the complainant a response to the Panel's recommendations within 15 working days of the panel meeting.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

The Adoption Service of Middlesbrough Council is inspected every 3 years by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

The Northern Regional Centre is at: Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Phone: 08456 – 404045

APPENDIX 2

Children's Guide to Adoption Services

Statement of Purpose

- The safety, welfare and needs of children come first.
- The adoption service works in partnership with young people, their birth parents, adoptive parents and their families. They also work with people from other adoption services that find people who want to adopt a child like you.
- The adoption service aims to treat everyone fairly.
- The adoption service aims to help children who need parents by finding people who want to adopt a child and matching them up.
- They also help people who ask for their child to be adopted; people who have been adopted; and other people in their families.
- Staff in the adoption service are all properly trained and experienced.
- The adoption service is very careful about making sure that those people who want to adopt a child are the right kind of people. This includes checking into their background, finding out what kind of a parent they would be and helping them to understand what is needed.
- The adoption service provides information and support for people who want to adopt a child. This includes having their own social worker to help them through the long process.
- The adoption service makes sure that people who adopt a child know where to get help and support after they have adopted someone.
- The Adoption Service has a complaints procedure if things go wrong.

Who's who in the adoption service?

These are the people who work for the Adoption Service.

Name	Job title
Karen Curran	Team Manager, Adoption Team
Jane Clark	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Joyce Virth	Social Worker, Adoption Team

Who are adoptive parents?

Adoptive parents come from all sorts of backgrounds and have all sorts of families.

People who want to adopt a child might be:-

- People who are not married and live by themselves.
- People who are not married, and live as partners.
- People who are married but don't have any children of their own.
- People who are married and have children of their own.
- People who already look after children as foster carers.
- People who would like to adopt certain kinds of children, such as children with disabilities, babies or groups of brothers and sisters.

Being adopted

- When a plan is made that you need to be adopted into a new family, a Judge in a Court of Law makes this decision. From this point, it is usually about 8 months until we find a new family for you.
- Your social worker will talk to you about what it means to be adopted, and the kind of family you would like to have.
- We try to match you and your new parents very carefully so that you will all be happy to become part of the same family forever. Your new family may live nearby or could live in another part of the country.
- Before you meet your new family your social worker will visit to discuss your situation with them. Together they may decide to meet your foster carer to get more information about what you are like to live with.
- When they meet, they will talk about your needs and what kind of things you like to do, and also the things you don't! They will talk about how you are doing at school and what your hobbies are.
- The new family can tell your carers and social worker where the local parks are, where the school is and what sort of things they do on a weekend. They might have a pet dog or cat.
- When you have lived with your new family for a few months your new parents make a decision to apply to the court to adopt you. The court makes this decision. Once you are legally adopted, it means that you are no longer part of your birth family - you belong to your new adoptive parents.

Contact between Adoptive Families and Birth Families

- Before you are legally adopted a plan is made about contact between your birth family and your new adoptive family. This includes contact with parents, grandparents and brothers and sisters.
- Contact will be encouraged so links can be kept up between your birth family and your new family. Contact can be face to face - so you meet back up with your birth family - or through the "post box" system.
- Face to face contact will only happen your new family and your social worker feel that it would be right for you. The adoption service can help this to happen. This only happens if it has been agreed before you go to live with your new family.
- You and your adoptive parents can send cards, letters, drawings or photographs to the post box. The adoption service will keep a copy in case they get lost.
- The adoption service will send things on to your birth family and they can write back to you, using the post box. Your adoptive parents decide whether it is ok to pass on to you the things that are sent by your birth family.
- The adoption service always check to make sure people haven't moved before they send things on. This means that important information doesn't get lost and isn't delivered to someone else by mistake.
- If contact wasn't agreed at the time of adoption, the service can ask if people are willing to have contact. The adoption service **cannot** make people accept contact.
- The priority is for you to have a permanent family.

Recruiting and Supporting Adoptive Parents

- The adoption service advertises for adoptive parents in the paper, on the internet (www.middlesbrough.gov.uk) and by using posters.
- An Information Pack is sent out to people who are interested.
- 2 Social Workers visit and talk about the application process, the needs of children like you who need a new family and the role of an adoptive parent. They also find out about their situation and the reasons why they want to adopt a child.
- The Social Workers visit again to make sure that they have met everyone in the household and to make sure the family has thought about adoption seriously.
- A check is made with the Criminal Records Bureau to see if they have been in any trouble with the police.
- The person has a medical check to make sure they are fit.
- Then they take part in an adoptive parent preparation group that lasts for 4 whole days. This gives them lots of information.
- Adoptive parents then do at least 6 sessions with 2 social workers to find out about their personal background, history, experience, their home and their thoughts about what type of a parent they will become.
- Each person in the household is talked to separately.

- 2 people who know them well are interviewed. Also 1 other family member, who could be your new grandma, uncle etc.
- The Family Placement Panel looks at all the information. The panel then makes a recommendation about whether they think the person should be approved as an adoptive parent.
- The Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning gives the final approval for the person to become an adoptive parent.
- Once adoptive parents have been approved they are given information about how a match is made between them and a child.
- Adoptive parents are given support by a social worker from the permanence team who visits them regularly. The social worker looks for a possible child and discusses the child's situation with them.
- The permanence team social worker works closely with the child's social worker to make sure that the adoption will work for everyone. This includes providing support when people are introduced to each other.
- Adoptive parents, approved by the adoption service, are regularly sent a newsletter about the service.
- Adoptive parents are given information about places to get help and support after they have adopted someone. This includes Adoption UK and After Adoption.
- They are also offered a chance to do further training as looking after a child can be a difficult but rewarding job.

What to do if you are unhappy about anything to do with the adoption service.

➤ Talk to someone

Many problems can be sorted out quite easily if you tell someone about them. *All our staff have a responsibility to help you to sort things out, if you ask them to.* Talk to your social worker (or any other member of staff), a relative, your teacher, your independent visitor (if you have one) or anyone else that you trust.

➤ Contact an Independent Advocate

You can also get help from an independent advocate who can speak up on your behalf. *The National Youth Advocacy Service will provide you with an adult (who does not work for the Council) to help you.* You can contact the National Youth Advocacy Service by using a freephone number: 0800 616101 or send a text message to 0777 333 4555 or e-mail to: help@nyas.net

➤ Contact the Children's Rights Director for England

The Children's Rights Director is responsible for listening to the views of children who live away from home. If you wish, you have the right to complain directly to him and he will make sure your complaint is passed to the right person and taken seriously. The Children's Rights Director for England is Roger Morgan. His address is Office of the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE. Contact Roger Morgan by **freephone: 0800 528 0731** or visit the web site: www.rights4me.org.uk

➤ **Make a complaint**

The law says that if you are unhappy about anything that we do or do not do, you have the right to complain about it. The Children's Complaints Officer is there to make sure that your complaint is dealt with properly. The Children's Complaints Officer is based in Vancouver House:

01642 728416 Mon to Thurs 8.30 - 5.00pm, Fri 8.30 - 4.30pm

Email - voicemyourviews@middlesbrough.gov.uk

This is what happens when you make a complaint.....

You will get a letter saying who will look into your complaint. You should get this letter within 3 working days of us hearing from you.

Stage 1 - Local Problem-solving

A manager who is responsible for the service will talk to you about your complaint. They will try to sort it out as quickly as possible. We will try to resolve your complaint within 10 working days if we can. If your complaint has not been resolved or you have not received a response within 20 working days, you can move to.....

Stage 2 - Investigation

A different manager will look into what has happened. An Independent Person - someone who does not work for the council - will be involved too. They will make sure your complaint is dealt with fairly. We will try to complete this stage in 25 working days. If you are not happy with how your complaint has been dealt with, you can move to.....

Stage 3 - Review Panel

Your complaint will be looked at by a 'Review Panel'. The panel is made up of three independent people, who do not work for the Council. You will be asked if you would like to go and talk to the panel. This panel will decide if your complaint has been dealt with properly and fairly. The panel will say what they think should happen. We will tell you what we are going to do.

If you are still not happy, you can talk to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is based at Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road, York YO30 5FZ. Tel: 01904 380200 Adviceline: 0845 602 1983