

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2009-10

Version 7 issued in September 2009 by
Middlesbrough Adoption Service
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre
Cargo Fleet Lane
Middlesbrough TS3 8PE


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

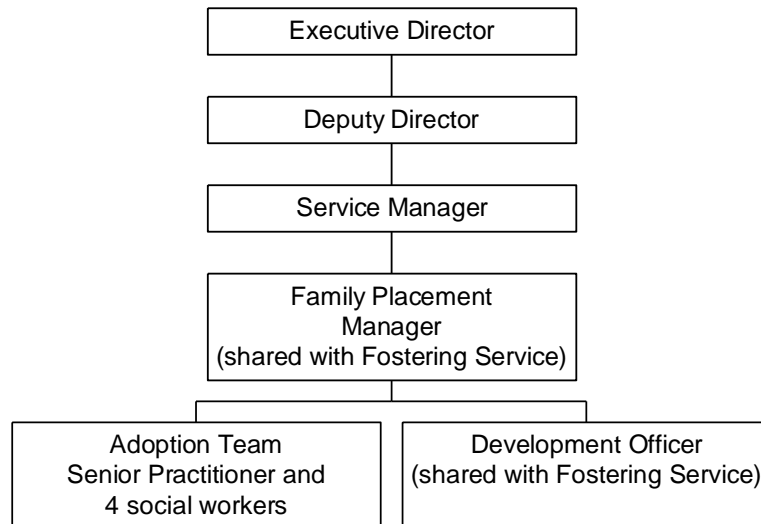
The Functions of the Adoption Service

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 September 2009 is shown in the diagram below.



Details of the Manager of the Adoption Service

The manager of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service is:

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Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre
Cargo Fleet Lane
Middlesbrough
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Details of staff of the Adoption Service (as at 1st September 2009)

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
Jane Wilson	Family Placement Manager	CSS – 1987 CMS – 2001 North-East Excellent Managers - 2008	With Social Services since 1984. With Adoption/Fostering Service since 1996.
Tony Kerr	Senior Practitioner, Adoption Team	CSS – 1990 Practice Teacher Award – 2002	With Social Services since 1983. With the Adoption/Fostering Service since 1997.
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	DipSW - 2004 BA SW Hons - 2006, PQ Child Care Award - 2009	With Social Services since 2004. With the Adoption Service since 2007.
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 Adoption 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 Manager or Senior Practitioner 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 5 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 Prospective Adopters Report and makes a recommendation regarding the application. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Deputy 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 quarter by the Family Placement Development Officer containing information on recruitment levels, applications and approvals of adopters, plans and placements of children approved by Panel and adoption orders made. 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 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 workings 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.

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