

Leicester
City Council

ADOPTION TEAM 2005-2006

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND ANNUAL REPORT

The Adoption Agencies of:-

Leicester City Social Care and Health Department

**Leicestershire County Council Social Services
Department**

Rutland Children & Young People's Services

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Interim Statement of Purpose and Function

Adoption Service

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Purpose and Function explains the aims, objectives and services provided by the Adoption Team for Leicester City Social Care and Health Department, Leicestershire Social Services and Rutland Children's Services Department. It is part of the responsibility in fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2000).
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose and Function is available to staff of the organisation, prospective adopters, children and young people, parents and other professionals.
- 1.3 The addresses of the three Local Authorities who have approved the statement of purpose and function are as follows:-

Leicester City Council
Social Care and Health Department
New Walk Centre
Welford Place
Leicester, LE1 6ZG

Leicestershire County Council
Social Services Department
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester, LE3 8RL

Rutland County Council
Children's and Young People's Services
Catmose
Oakham
Rutland, LE15 6HP

2. Aim of the Adoption Service

Primary Aim

- 2.1 The primary aim of the Adoption Service is to ensure that children, who are referred for an adoptive placement, are placed as a matter of priority, within a loving and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- 2.2 Additionally, it is the aim of the service to:-
- Place children at the centre of the adoption process and act in their best interests at all times, ensuring the process is timely and avoids delay.
 - Recruit high quality adoptive families to meet the needs of children referred for adoption.
 - Provide advice and training for Child Care Social Workers on the matters related to applying for an adoptive placement.

- Provide a range of support services and information to adoptive families, birth families and adoptive children.
- Provide a range of support services for families and children to ensure adoptive placements are successful.

3. Objectives of the Service

- 3.1 To ensure children's needs have been fully assessed and that it is considered to be in the child's best interests to be adopted before a matching process starts.
- 3.2 To ensure that the views of children and young people have been listened to and given due consideration in any decisions taken about their future.
- 3.3 To regularly publicise adoption services to enable members of the community to consider adoption as a positive option and recruit carers from a wide variety of backgrounds to meet children's specific racial, cultural and linguistic needs and who will respect their birth and family origins.
- 3.4 To recruit, train and retain highly skilled and appropriately qualified staff that have experience in the making and supporting of family placements, and in understanding the effects the adoption process can have on all parties. To ensure all staff of the service are committed to ensuring children and families receive the support and advice required to maintain stable family life.

4. Principles

- 4.1 The Adoption Service believes that:-
 - Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
 - It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
 - The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
 - The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
 - Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
 - Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language should be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
 - The particular needs of disabled children should be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
 - The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family should be valued and respected.

- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.
- Children have the right to grow up knowing they are adopted and should have access to information about their family of birth.
- Where appropriate children should continue to have contact with family members who are significant to them.

5. Management of the Adoption Service

5.1 The Adoption Service is provided through a joint arrangement between Leicestershire, Rutland and Leicester City Local Authorities. Leicestershire and Leicester City provide managers who are responsible for the Adoption Team. Leicestershire County Council is the lead agency.

5.1.1 Leicester City Council

Name of Manager: - Mark Tingley

Address: - Eagle House
11 Friar Lane
Leicester, LE1 5RB

Experience and qualifications of the Manager are:-

Mark Tingley has a CQSW and BA (Hons) Social Science. He has over twenty years experience as a social worker and social work manager, having worked both in London and Leicester.

The registered provider is Leicester City Council Social Care and Health Department.

The agency decision maker on behalf of the Local Authority is Penny Hajek, Service Director.

5.1.2 Leicestershire County Council

Name of Manager: - Cath Sartoris

Address: - Social Services Department
Bassett Street
South Wigston
Leicester, LE18 4PE

Experience and qualifications of the manager are:-

Cath Sartoris has a degree in Social Studies and a CQSW from the University of Leicester obtained in 1974. Cath Sartoris also has a Diploma in Management from the University of Leicester obtained in 1996. She has worked extensively in Children's Services.

The registered provider is Leicestershire County Council Social Services Department.

The agency decision maker on behalf of the Local Authority is Flick Schofield, Assistant Director.

5.1.3 **Rutland Council**

Name of Manager:- Janet Marriott

Address:- Rutland and Young People's Services
Catmose
Oakham, Rutland, LE15 6HP

Janet Marriott has a degree in Applied Social Studies and a CQSW obtained in 1985. Janet Marriott also has a Post Graduate Certificate in Supervision and Mentorship in Child-Care and an Advanced Award in Social Work obtained in 2001 at Leicester University. Janet has worked extensively in Children's Services.

The registered provider is Rutland County Council Department.

The agency decision-maker on behalf of the Local Authority is Stephen Attwood.

5.2 The Adoption Service employs a number of qualified and experienced staff as follows:-

- Two Team Manager posts (Faye Andrews works full-time for the Leicester City Council and Mary Lowles and Bridget Puddepha are the managers for the Leicestershire County Council, both working 18.5 hours). They manage the day to day arrangements of the Adoption Team. All managers have social work qualifications and extensive experience of child care and adoption services over many years.
- Four full-time and seven part-time experienced workers, who are all qualified social workers and experienced in adoption work.
- Four adoption support workers - two qualified in social work and two support workers who have relevant experience.
- Two administrative assistants and three clerks who provide administrative support to the team.
- A full-time Receptionist for the Fostering and Adoption Information Centre where the Adoption Team is based.

6. **The Work of the Adoption Team**

6.1 The Adoption Team is based at:-
Eagle House
11 Friar Lane
Leicester, LE1 5RB

6.2 This team provides the following services:-

- Recruitment of adoptive families; including publicity, information giving and regular information evenings.

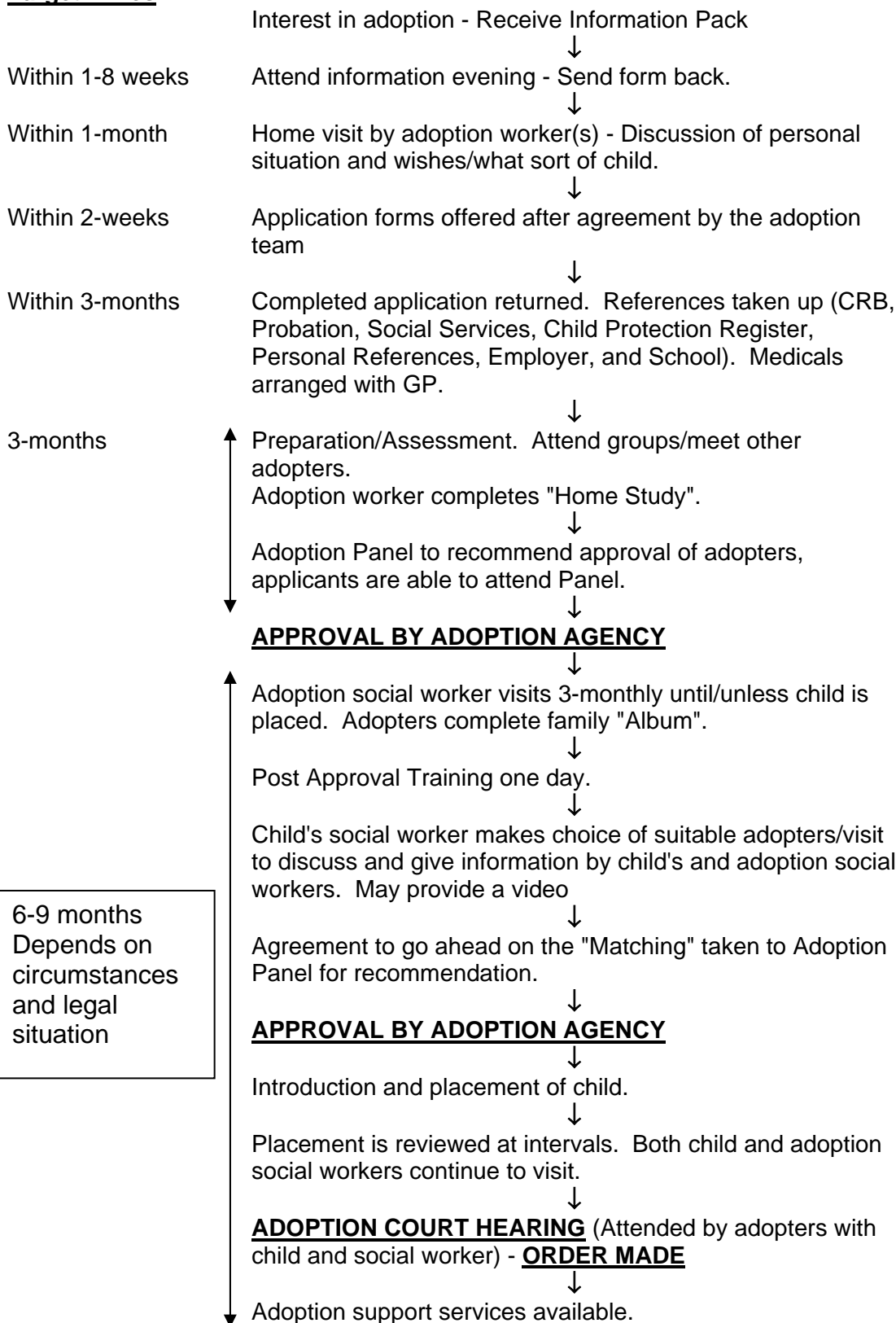
- Assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive families, which includes visiting the home, undertaking a home study, references, checks, and preparation groups.
- Support for approved families awaiting placement.
- Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and post placement, this includes workshops and events for adoptive families.
- Running training and educational events and providing guidance for departmental staff who are preparing children, their parents and carers.
- Provision of adoption support services to adoptive families and birth relatives.
- The facilitation of direct and indirect contact arrangements.
- The provision of a specialist consultation and advice service.
- Counselling, information, and advice in relation to the following individual situations:-
 - Birth parents whose children might be adopted.
 - Prospective adopters.
 - Adults who have been adopted, including support with tracing relatives. This includes access to birth records counselling.
 - Birth relatives of an adopted person, who want support with tracing relatives.
 - People who wish to adopt children from another country.
 - Non-agency adoptions including step-parents who wish to adopt their partner's children.
 - From 30th December 2005, when the Adoption and Children Act comes into force, it is intended that intermediary services will continue to be offered, as specified in the Act.

7. Enquiries about Adopting a Child : (Recruitment of Prospective Adoptive Families)

- 7.1 A range of leaflets is available to explain to people what adopting children is all about and the processes that prospective adopters will need to go through. The Adoption Service welcomes enquiries from people from all backgrounds, whether single, in a relationship, or married, and regardless of sexuality, race or religion. There is no upper age limit for a prospective adopter(s) but adopters need to be in good general health with lots of energy and love to give to a child(ren).
- 7.2 The Adoption Service has a well-defined recruitment strategy whose aim is to prioritise the recruitment of adopters who can best meet the needs of local children requiring adoption.

7.3 **Process for Assessment and Approval of Adopters**

Target Times



6-9 months
Depends on
circumstances
and legal
situation

8. Local Authority Adoption Panel and Decision-Making Responsibilities

8.1 Each of the three Local Authorities has an Adoption Panel to consider cases arising from their area. The Panel has the responsibility to:-

- Consider the assessment of prospective adoptive parent(s) and recommend whether they are approved as adoptive parents.
- Decide whether adoption is in the best interests of the child.
- Agree the matching of children to a particular family.

8.2 The Adoption Panel is governed by guidance and regulations. Panel members include qualified social work managers, a medical adviser, elected Members of the Council, lay people (who are not employed by the Service/Council and may have personal experience of adoption). A legal adviser also attends the panel. From 30th December 2005 panels will also have a panel adviser. All the panels have an independent chair.

Following the recommendation of the Adoption Panel, the papers are passed to the "Agency decision maker" who has responsibility for the final approval. The decision is put in writing to the prospective adopter(s).

9. Monitoring the Quality of the Adoption Service

9.1 The quality of the Adoption Service's work and standards are regularly monitored:-

- The managers of the Service ensure the staff are appropriately skilled, trained and supervised on a regular basis to ensure they can undertake the functions of their work.
- The work of the adoption team is governed by Adoption Standards, Guidance and Legislation. The work of the team is subject to regular inspection. The local authorities submit information on achievements against performance indicators.
- A service plan is produced by the three Local Authorities on the activity, achievements and areas of development within the Adoption Service on an annual basis.
- The Adoption Panel independently scrutinises all assessments and judgements made about children being considered for adoption and those of prospective adoptive parents. The Adoption Panel has a critical role to play in the provision of independent expert oversight.
- Elected members of the Council have a duty to be accountable for the Adoption Service.
- The Adoption Service is subject to a three yearly inspection by The Commission for Social Care Inspection.
- Feedback is gathered from a variety of service users through evaluation pro-formas.

10. Complaints Procedure

10.1 Each of the three Local Authorities has a complaints procedure. If a complaint is made it will be considered by the relevant Authority and the complainant will be informed of the relevant Authority dealing with the complaint.

10.2 Copies of the procedure and complaints forms can be requested from the Adoption Team at Eagle House, 11 Friar Lane, Leicester, ☎Tel: 299 5899.

10.3 Generally, there are three stages to the procedure:-

Stage 1

Will involve the manager responding to the complaint by attempting to resolve the matter informally.

Stage 2

Will involve an investigation by an independent person.

Stage 3

An independent panel considers the complaint. There are clear timescales for the complaint to be considered, investigated and responded to.

10.4 All complaints and matters of concern will be treated with respect and confidentiality, and will be recorded as part of the responsibilities of the Council. These records are open to Inspectors of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

10.5 Children who are already placed in adoptive placements (i.e. children in care of the Local Authority) also have access to the Council's Children's Rights Officer in Leicestershire and Leicester City, who will assist any child in making a complaint if they wish, and support them throughout.

11. National Care Standards Commission

The local office is:-

Commission for Social Care Inspection
The Pavilions
5 Smith Way
Grove Park
Enderby,
Leicester, LE19 1SX
Tel: ☎ 0116 281 5900
Fax: 0116 281 5910

12 Summary of Key Achievements 2004 - 2005

- 12.1 Adoption Team has dealt with a very high number of enquiries from people interested in adopting a child in 2004-2005. There has been an increase in enquiries of almost 100 over the previous year. Eight Information evenings have been held, run by social workers from the team, with the help of adoptive parents.
- 12.2 Seven Preparation Groups for adoption applicants have been held in the last year, varying in length from 3-4 days. These groups have involved the input of birth parents, adopters and adult adopters as well as the CAMHS Service.
- 12.3 The Team has continued to recruit a high number of appropriate adoptive families. The number for 2004-2005 for the three authorities is 55, which is a significant increase on 2003-2004.
- 12.4 There has also been an increase in the number of children referred for adoption. 64 children have been placed for adoption in 2004-2005.
- 12.5 There are now 4 adoption support workers within the team, 2 workers having been successfully recruited by Leicester City in the last year.
- 12.6 The adoption support workers have continued to run Post Approval Preparation Days for adopters and to organise seminars on attachment issues for adopters and professionals run by a clinical psychologist.
- 12.7 A leaflet for schools on adoption issues has been produced and distributed. There has been a very positive response from the Education Department to this leaflet.
- 12.8 The Team commissioned Adoption UK to run a 10-week course 'It's a Piece of Cake' for adoptive parents. Feedback from the participants has been extremely positive.
- 12.9 The Team has continued to implement the National Standards for adoption.
- 12.10 The Team has continued its involvement with the development of the East Midlands Consortium.
- 12.11 Liaison with the local CAMHS Service has produced an agreement to expand their vulnerable children's team to take referrals on children and young people who have been adopted.
- 12.12 After a gap because of vacancies the therapeutic social work team is again able to take referrals on adopted children.

13 Key Objectives and Developments : 2005-2006

- 13.1 To recruit at least 40 adoptive families across the three authorities, who are able to meet the diverse needs of children referred for adoption.
- 13.2 To continue to review and update the Recruitment Strategy in order to meet the short and longer-term needs for placements.
- 13.3 To implement the Adoption and Children Act due to come into force on 30th December 2005.
- 13.4 To help to meet the training needs of child care social workers on adoption issues in general and specifically on the new legislation.
- 13.5 To continue to ensure that all aspects of work of the Adoption Team meet the National Standards.
- 13.6 To contribute to the on-going development of the work of the East Midlands Consortium.
- 13.7 To continue to progress adoption support services with the development of a Buddying Scheme (adopters supporting each other), a support group for adopted children and a mother and toddler group.
- 13.8 To maintain and develop proactive work with the CAMHS Service, to ensure that intensive local therapeutic support is targeted at those with the greatest need, as quickly as possible.
- 13.9 To reduce the waiting time for Birth Records Counselling by the appointment of additional staff on a short term basis.
- 13.10 To continue to monitor and review the effectiveness of the joint arrangement between the three authorities via Joint Arrangement Liaison Meetings.

14. Adoption Team Statistics : 2004-2005

1. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY

	2004/2005	2003/2004
1. New Referrals	1005	900
• City	290	275
• County	531	460
• Rutland	31	21
• Out of Area	153	144
2. Adoption Support Referrals	312	357
• Adoptees	173	202
• Birth Relatives	82	99
• Adoptive parents/family	57	56
3. Enquiries from people interested in adopting a child	354	260
4. Referrals of children for adoption or residence (by case)	94	84
5. Adoption Pack issued (individual children)	99	94
• City	54	60
• County	44	34
• Rutland	1	0
6. Number of individual children placed for Adoption	64	65
• City	42	27
• County	22	35
• Rutland	0	3
7. Number or Individual Children placed for residence order	8	12
• City	4	6
• County	4	6
8. Disrupted Placements (pre-adoption hearing)		
• City	0	2
• County	2	0

9.	Number of Information Evenings held	8	6
	Applicants given	50	50
	Applicants not given	4	8
10.	Home Studies begun	39	38
11.	Preparation Groups	7	7
	• Pre Approval	4	5
	• Post Approval	3	2
12.	Approved adoptive families	55	38
	• Mainstream	41	33
	• Foster Carers	7	3
	• Inter-County	7	2
13.	Non-Agency Adoption Referrals	127	104

COMMENTS:-

1. For the third year running the number of our referrals has risen, largely in the category of enquiries from people interested in adopting a child. There was an increase in the number of children referred for adoption.
2. The “through-put” of prospective adopters has largely remained unchanged but a larger total number of adoptive families were approved as suitable, compared to previous years. There has been a small but significant increase in Inter-County adoptions.
3. The numbers of City/County children placed for adoption has reversed from last year. Traditionally there have been more children in the City (demographically, a younger population than Leicestershire or Rutland) but last year showed a much lower than average number. Taken over a time period longer than one year, therefore, the numbers of children in the City relative to the County areas remain fairly consistent.

2. CHILDREN

		YEAR	2004/2005	2003/2004
1.	Number of individual children where adoption became the plan (adoption pack issued)	Total	99	94
		City	54	60
		County	44	34
		Rutland	1	0
2.	Number of individual children presented to Adoption Panel for the first time	Total	63	60
		City	37	49
		County	25	42
		Rutland	1	2
3.	Number of children placed for adoption (including foster carer adoptions)	Total	64	65
		City	42	27
		County	22	35
		Rutland	0	3
4.	Number of children placed for residence (with foster carers)	Total	8	12
		City	4	6
		County	4	6
		Rutland	0	0
5.	Number of children placed with adoptive families out-of-area (approved by other agencies) * 3 placements of 4 children	Total	4*	7
		City	3	2
		County	1	5
6.	Number of disrupted placements (i.e. a breakdown before the Adoption Order)	Total	2	2
		City	0	2
		County	2	0
7.	Number of Adoption Orders made	Total		60
		City		33
		County		26
		Rutland		1

a) **Placement of babies where birth parents requested adoption at or before birth (hospital babies)**

Total Number	3
City	2
County	1
Rutland	0

Of the City babies, one was of Asian Muslim heritage, one of Asian Hindu heritage. The County baby was of White British heritage. All were placed with culturally appropriate families.

b) Placement of children referred from child care teams, including foster carer adoptions

Total Number	61
City	40
County	21
Rutland	0

• CHILDREN ADOPTED BY THEIR FOSTER CARERS

Total Number	9
City	7
County	2
Rutland	0

• ETHNIC ORIGIN

White/British	58
White/African-Caribbean	3

• SIBLING GROUPS

Single	36
Groups of 2	11
Groups of 3	1

• AGE AT PLACEMENT

0-1 years	13
1-5 years	39
5-10 years	11
10+	1 (This was a foster carer adoption of an 11-year old)

• INTER-AGENCY PLACEMENTS (Children placed out of area)

Total placements	3
City	2
County	1

Total number of children	
City	3
County	1

• HOW LONG ALL CHILDREN WAIT FOR PLACEMENT (excludes children being adopted by their foster carers and is calculated from date the child was presented to an adoption panel for a 'best interest' decision)

0-3 months	10
3-6 months	22
6-12 months	14
12-18 months	5
20-months	3
24-months	1

COMMENTS:-

Children wait for a variety of reasons. There can be delays in the legal process, e.g. granting of care or freeing orders (this is an increasingly common reason), and also suitable families are very scarce for some groups of children, so that national advertising is then required. There may be a need for further health, medical or other information before family-finding can begin or a placement made. The children featured in the above figures who waited longest were either held up in legal proceedings or there were disability/medical issues. Very few children wait longer simply because of their ethnic origin.

Children whose plan was adoption but family finding was not successful (does not include children where plan changed, e.g. placement with relative).

Figures are given for year 2003-2004, as more recent children may still be the subject of family finding. Normally a time period of six to nine months is allowed following the start of active family finding and the situation is reviewed at regular intervals with the child care team. If there is no local approved adoptive family, then referral is made to:-

- National Adoption Register
- Regional Consortium

and advertising arranged via

- Be My Parent magazine (run by BAAF)
- Adoption UK magazine or
- Individual flyer to selected adoption agencies

COUNTY YEAR 2003-2004

	Ages	Ethnic Origin	Panel Date	Outcome
Single Female	7	White	June 2003	Court hearing June 2005 to decide between grandparent application and foster carer application
2 siblings – Male & Female	7½ 10	White White	January 2004	Likely to remain in long term foster care
2 siblings – Male Male	9½ 8	Brazilian Brazilian	February 2004	Long term fostering with current carer

City

Single Female	4½	White	September 2003	To remain with 2 siblings in long term foster care
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Rutland

NONE

3. ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Prospective applicants are recruited and assessed according to the National Standards. Information Evenings are held regularly and all prospective applicants are visited at home prior to applications being agreed. National Standards criteria are applied and priority is given to applicants who appear to offer themselves as potential families for children in our care, for example, sibling groups.

First time preparation groups run for three or four days and we have recently started to run "post approval" groups for approved adopters waiting for placement.

a) TOTAL NUMBER OF APPROVED FAMILIES	55
• Mainstream	41
• Foster Carers	7
• Inter Country	7
MARITAL STATUS	
• Couples (all male/female)	49
• Single	6
c) ETHNIC ORIGIN	
• White	38
• Asian Hindu	8
• African Caribbean	2
• Asian/Muslim	4
• White/African Caribbean	1
• Chinese	1
• Greek/Sri Lankan	1
d) AGE RANGE OF CHILDREN FOR WHOM APPROVED	
• 0-3 years	33
(7 of these were for specific children, often siblings of children already adopted)	
• 0-5 years	12
• 5+ years	10
e) INTER AGENCY PLACEMENTS	
(Approved adopters placed with children from other local authorities).	
Total Number	5 (6 children, 2 were sibling groups)
City	4
County	1

COMMENTS:-

One adopter was a single white female placed with a 7-year old girl; two adopters were African/Caribbean/White placed with children of similar heritage; one Muslim child, to be followed 10-months later by the child's sibling.

15 Adoption Support

New regulations and guidance were introduced for adoption support services on 31st October 2003. This was one of the first sections of the Adoption and Children Act to be implemented, but they are transitional until the 2005 regulations come into force on 30th December 2005.

The Adoption Team has four adoption support workers – 2 qualified social workers and 2 support workers. They deal with all referrals for adoption support including the majority of birth records counselling for adopters and birth relatives. They also take part in duty work.

15.1 Adoption Team Activity

Objectives as set out in the last annual report 2003-2004 were to:-

- Incorporate the city adoption support workers into the existing team whilst monitoring and reviewing its overall functions.
- Continue the existing liaison and co-working with the therapeutic social work team.
- Implement the Support Services regulations and participate in continuing government consultation on regulations and guidance.
- Press for closer involvement and communication with CAMHS and Education and to raise awareness of adoption issues.

15.2 Progress Made

- The adoption support section of the team is now fully and firmly established and meets regularly to review actions and progress with team managers.
- The Therapeutic Social work team post holder left and was not immediately replaced, pending review of their service.
- The new legislation is being implemented and the team has developed several new services; we now await implementation of the new regulations in December 2005.
- Progress has been made, with CAMHS and commitment has been made to include adoption in their looked after children service, and funding agreed for additional psychologist post with knowledge of adoption and attachment issues. There will also be another Community Psychiatric nurse post within the vulnerable children's team.

15.3 New Referral

Total number of referrals to the adoption support worker were 312. Of these, the majority continue to be from adopted adults (173) who were requesting a variety of services, but commonly access to their records and help in tracing their birth relatives. But relative enquiries (82) seek similar services, often requesting contact with their adopted relatives. Requests from adoptive families (57) are the lowest in number but are the most time consuming and complex. They are increasingly urgent and sometimes traumatic cries for help from adoptive families with extremely troubled adopted children and young people.

15.4 Service to Adopted Adults

Some cases involve straightforward information and counselling, but they frequently involve searches for relatives and support for mediation and reunions. Dilemmas can arise about the advisability of 'cold contact' between the adopted adult and the birth parent.

A difficulty regarding access to information is now common to all adoption agencies as the law is open to interpretation. Issues of conflicts over rights and privacy are impossible to cover in policy and procedure. In addition, the referrals from young adults who were adopted from care are now increasing. Some of these adults have painful, if not traumatic, histories and there may be a large number of case files to read. Some of these young adults are extremely vulnerable and need much support to embark on renewing contact with parents and relatives from whom they were removed through care proceedings. This is very different from the work previously done with adopted adults who are usually subject to an agreed adoption.

15.5 Services to Birth Families

Birth relatives who request information and tracing or contact with adoptees, present similar tasks and dilemmas to those mentioned in the section on services to adopted adults. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 makes considerable changes to existing law, giving the right to birth relatives to have intermediary services. When the regulations come into force in December 2005 there is likely to be an increase in referrals from this group. Our intention is to register as an Adoption Support Agency, a legal requirement, to facilitate such intermediary services.

A leaflet has been designed and produced by the adoption support workers describing the services that are available and describing how to access information.

Birth mothers are offered the opportunity to join an independent support group (see 'Groups'). These are usually mothers of children recently adopted, not mothers of "adult children". A future development, when staffing allows, would be to set up a similar group for fathers.

The new requirement (National Adoption Standards) is to offer independent counselling to birth parents during care proceedings. This means birth parents now have the opportunity to use this service and then be offered the existing support group once an adoption order has been made. The independent counselling is carried out by PICS (Parent Independent counselling Service) which is subject to a Service Level Agreement. Take-up of this new service has been fairly slow, but may increase once it becomes better known and established.

15.6 Services for Adoptive Families

The number of referrals of families struggling with the problems of their adopted children and young people continues to take up a lot of the team time and resources. The 2003 regulations (Adoption and Children Act 2002) has recognised the need for support services and also raised awareness for adoptive parents that their requests for help are legitimate.

A key aim is to try to build services, which, in the long-term, will be preventative, by building up adopters' knowledge of issues that affect their children. In addition, to increase adopters' awareness of the sources of help, in order to avoid the acute stage of crisis referrals and placement breakdown.

The Adoption team, particularly the adoption support workers are one of the first points of call for adoptive parents. When a family makes contact information and advice may be all that the family needs. For other more complex situations the worker may carry out an initial assessment, followed by individual or family casework. In some instances the family may be referred to an access DAT (City) or Childcare team, or to the Therapeutic social work team. There may be joint work with any of these teams. In the County a protocol has been developed to describe the roles and responsibilities of all those involved. This is to try to ensure that families receive a seamless service and are not passed from one to another.

The adoption support workers run several evening support groups for adoptive parents (currently in Wigston, Loughborough, Melton and Desford). Attendance is variable but feedback is positive. An additional support group has been established in the daytime for parents of children with attachment problems.

The team has also twice funded a ten-week course run by 'Adoption UK' called 'A Piece of Care' for adoptive parents. This has been extremely successful in supporting and assisting the success of placements and participants have given very positive feedback. In addition, two-day seminars were provided by the Adoption UK course tutor for the adoption team social work staff, which were well received.

The workers continue to organise day seminars by a well respected clinical psychologist on 'Attachment' issues and resolutions. These have been well attended by adoptive parents and have greatly enhanced their understanding of attachment issues as well as their skills to parent damaged children. Learning in the company of other adopters is experienced as supportive and sometimes useful ongoing contacts are established between them. Fortunately we have been able to invite a number of social workers and other professional workers to these events and hope they can be repeated.

Social events such as the annual adoption party for children and parents continue to provide opportunities for families to support each other. Summer events such as picnics have been organised by adopters.

Education issues are a central concern of many of the parents who ask for help. Currently there is only limited understanding of attachment issues and its effects on behaviour within schools. The P.L.A.C.E. (Promoting Looked After children's Education) Panel has now extended its remit within the County to consider the needs of children placed for adoption. There is no equivalent forum in the City or Rutland but most of the adoption support work current lies within the County area.

In 2004 we produced a details leaflet for schools, (distributed to all primary schools), following consultation with teachers and parents. This has proved to be a fruitful source of information, and well received by teachers.

Developmental working on buddying schemes (between adoptive families) has been considered and discussions have taken place with Adoption UK who run their own Buddying Scheme. It is hoped to set this up later in the year.

The City's LAC support team which intervenes directly to work with children and families has been of considerable benefit to some adoptive families, and has proved a very useful additional resource.

15.7 Contact Services

Improved management of the Post Box (indirect contact) Scheme has been assisted by excellent and necessary clerical support. The two support workers who are responsible for this service have really improved its quality and development. There are now approximately 520 active cases.

Separate files for direct contact arrangements have been established, as such arrangements have increased. A second review of direct contact cases will take place this year. Responses will be shared with the team to inform our practice. Yearly listing of direct contact arrangements assists information for court statements, which are commonly requested on contact issues.

An email facility has now been established.

A leaflet on the Post Box Scheme has been updated and reprinted.

15.8 Services to Children

Indirectly, we have supported children through services to their parents and through the Contact Scheme. We have access to a reasonable supply of books, and a few tapes and videos for direct work with children. Counselling is possible with older children. Children participate in social events such as the annual party and summer picnic.

We have debated the format of setting up children's groups and decided to run summer activities rather than formal groups – there were planned for summer 2005 and were very successful.

15.9 Groups

As described above, the following groups have been set up

- Prospective adopters preparation – section of final day
- Approved adopters one day sessions for those awaiting placement (and some adopters with new placements).
- Support groups for adoptive parents – varied venues.
- Support group for adopters encountering attachment problems.
- Birth mothers support group run at the Laura Centre by independent workers; referrals / liaison / support work from the adoption workers.
- Children's activities
- Teenage girls group.

15.10 Research

The Thomas Coram Research Unit is currently involved in testing out ways of enhancing adoptive parent skills and supporting families. We are now taking part in this national research project, and hope that it will add to our knowledge in this area.

The University of East Anglia is also very interested in us as a local authority adoption service and particularly that we do so much 'in-house' support services. They have asked if we will joint in their Adoption Support Research.

15.11 Objectives for 2005-2006

1. Implement the 2005 support services regulations and intermediary services for birth relatives regulations.
2. Continue current support services.
3. Review direct contact arrangements.
4. Review and evaluate children's and young person's group activities.
5. Continue meeting with CAMHS staff to promote improved support and therapeutic help to adoptive families.
6. Set up a referral form with CAMHS and the Therapeutic social work team to consider the best form of intervention for adoptive families who are in need of services.