

**Adoption Service**

**Statement of Purpose**

**2004-2005**



## Introduction

The London Borough of Brent believes that every child has the right to a stable, loving and permanent family to care for them, to promote their physical, intellectual and emotional development, and to enable them to achieve their full potential. When children cannot be cared for by their own family Brent enable them to move to alternative families who will care for them throughout childhood through to adulthood, providing love, care and warmth, and who are able to respond to their individual needs.

The overarching aim of the adoption team is to provide a high quality adoption and permanency service for these children finding them permanent families that best meet their needs.

This Statement of Purpose relates to Brent's adoption service under the requirements of the Adoption National Minimum Standards. Local Authority Adoption Service 2003 (England) Regulations, Care Standards Act 2000. It will be kept under review and revised to reflect any changes as and when they occur.

Brent Council has set local targets to achieve the targets for adoption set by the Government as well as objectives in providing alternative permanent families for children where adoption is not appropriate. These include permanent placements within the family or with a member of the child's community with whom the child may have a special relationship.

## **Overall Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of the adoption service fit with a number of local and national aims and objectives. These include objectives found in Brent's corporate strategy 2002-06, Corporate improvement plan 2004-06, Social services improvement plan 2004-2005 and the national objectives of the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Department of Health National Minimum Standards, and Regulations, and the Care Standards Act 2000.

The council corporate values underpin the aims and objectives of the adoption service. Supporting children and young people to improve their outcomes and life chances is one of the main aims.

### **The aims and objectives of Brent's adoption service are;**

- To work in partnership with prospective adopters, children and their families, and with colleagues, other professionals and agencies. Written information will be provided to adopters, birth parents and children on the adoption process.
- To offer training to and service Brent's Adoption & Permanency Panel.
- To comply with the Adoption Act 1976 and the Regulations made there under, the Care Standards Act 2000, and National Care Standards, and to work towards the implementation of the new Adoption and Children Act 2002.

### **For children**

- To take a child centred approach to adoption and permanency ensuring their welfare and safety is at the centre. This includes actively seeking and taking into account the child's wishes and feelings in age appropriate ways.
- Adoption will be considered as a positive option for all looked after children who are unable to return to live permanently with their birth family.
- Delays will be minimised as far as possible and time scales for decisions and action will take account of the child's age and needs.
- We will prioritise recruiting and assessing families who are most likely to meet the needs of local children who need permanent families.
- Where a child with a disability requires a permanent placement they will receive equal service to meet their individual needs.
- Adoption and other permanency allowances are paid where a child needs and circumstances require it in order to secure an alternative home. This will occur in certain circumstances where specific criteria are met. This decision is made at Brent's Adoption and Permanency Panel.
- To value a child's cultural, ethnic religious and linguistic background and not discriminate against any aspect of their identity. Usually it is in the child's best interests to be placed with a family which shares this

background, but we will not deny a child the chance of a permanent home, including adoption if it proves impossible to find a family with similar characteristics within a reasonable time.

- Where brothers and sisters need to be found alternative permanent homes, it is normally best for them to be placed together. If this is inappropriate or impossible, we will carefully consider possibilities for maintaining contact between siblings.
- To ensure that each child and family is prepared for adoption and that a suitable period of introductions occurs and that the settling in period is fully supported.

### **For the birth family**

- To promote and facilitate post adoption contact between children and their birth parents where it is assessed as being in their best interests.
- To offer independent counselling to birth parents during the adoption proceedings.
- To hold Family Group Conferences to involve the family in the planning for a child. We will appoint an independent chair to organise the conference.

### **For prospective permanent carers**

- Applications from people wishing to be assessed as prospective adopters will be welcomed regardless of marital status, race, disability, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- Prospective carers will be welcomed and responded to quickly and politely. They will be treated with respect and without discrimination throughout the adoption/permanency process. There will be clearly defined time scales for assessments.
- Prospective carers will be thoroughly assessed according to fair, clear and open criteria.
- The key criterion is that permanent carers can offer a safe, stable and loving home throughout childhood and beyond and demonstrate an understanding of a child's needs. Brent will aim to prioritise applicants who are able to meet the needs of the children who require permanent homes.
- We will communicate openly with applicants about our priorities, procedures and assessments.
- Assessing an applicant as a permanent carer rightly means going into a lot of depth, and exploring personal and often difficult areas. However, assessments will always be approached with sensitivity and on the basis of strict confidentiality.
- To provide an assessment and support service to inter country adopters. In particular, to be aware of the issues pertaining to inter-country adoptions, and to offer appropriate training in preparation groups to prospective inter-country adopters.

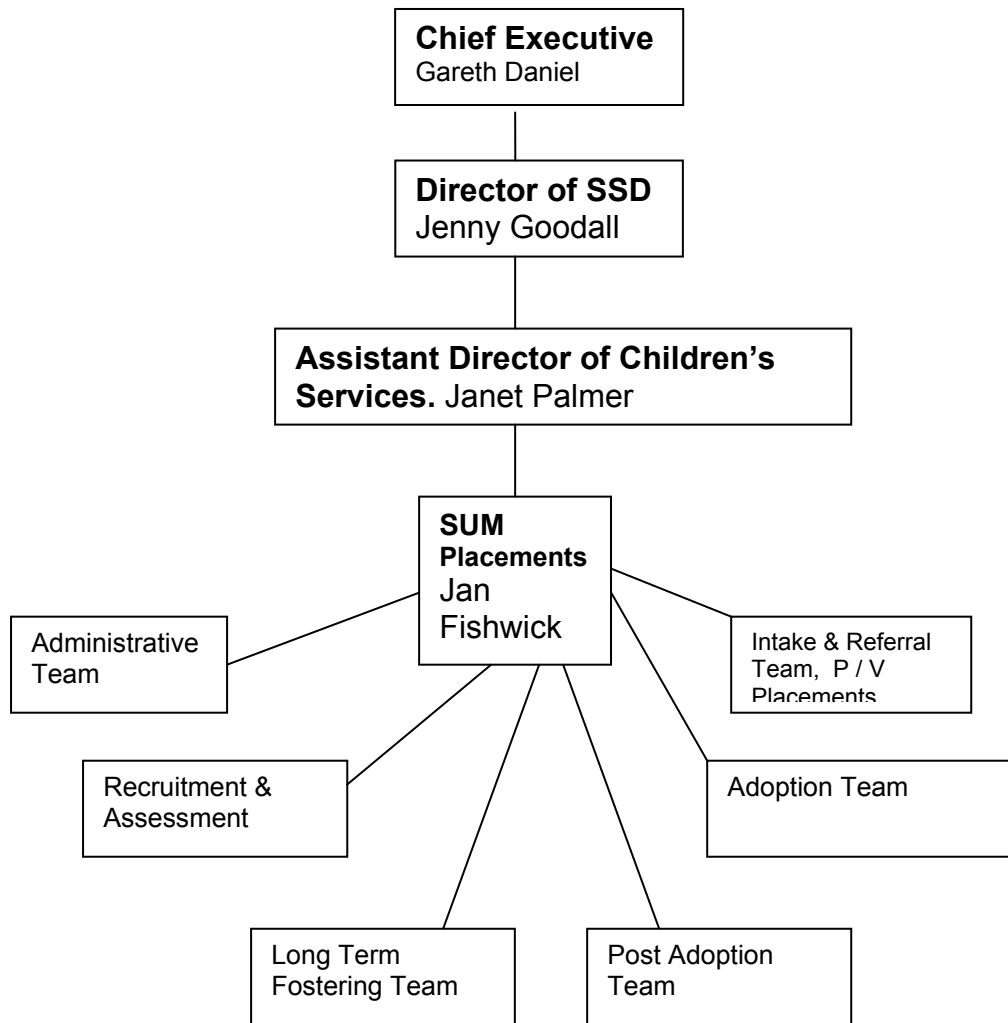
## **After Adoption**

- We will ensure that a high quality adoption support service is available to adoptive parents and children. Brent Council has a post adoption team, which provides support services to adopted families as well as birth families. In addition, the adoption social workers will continue to support the adoptive families for one year following the making of an adoption order.
- The above service will provide a social work service for adoptive families requesting advice on parenting and behaviour to include home visits when necessary. Where necessary work with children will also be provided.
- An independent telephone helpline for both parents and children is available from the Post Adoption Centre to which Brent Council is a subscriber.
- Brent's Post Adoption service will provide newsletters, training events and up to date information on adoption issues and arrange group events for families.
- Birth record counselling, information and advice will be provided for adopted adults and their birth families who want to know more about their family history.
- Adopted people will also receive assistance in tracing their birth families, if that is what they wish, and a post adoption social worker will act as an intermediary once the adopted person has found their birth family member. Support will be provided for adoptive parents where adult children are contacting birth families.
- The post adoption service will attempt to contact adopted people on behalf of the birth families where that is requested. All identifying information in regard to the adopted person will be kept confidential.
- Where the birth record counsellor is unable to trace the adopted person, a referral will be made to NORCAP who will endeavour to trace the adopted person. All information supplied to NORCAP is held on a strictly confidential basis. For each case Brent Council will set up a non-disclosure agreement with NORCAP.
- In addition to the above, the post adoption team will facilitate post adoption contact where this has been agreed. This may be letter box contact once or twice a year, when mail is re-directed in accordance with agreements made at the time of adoption, or face to face contact with birth families at agreed times.

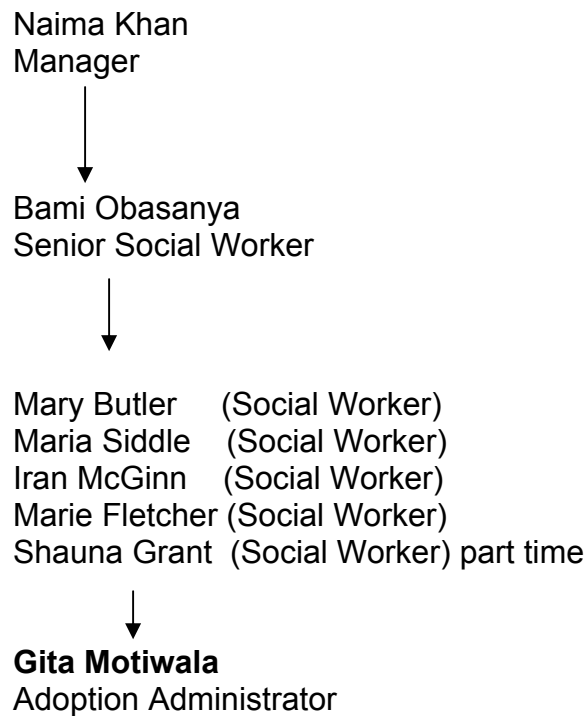
## **The Organisational Structure Of The Service**

The adoption service is part of Brent's Children and Families service within the social services business group. The structure of the service and how it relates to the business group is shown below.

## Management structure



## **Adoption Team structure**



## **Staffing and Qualifications**

The service unit manager of Children's placement services Ms Jan Fishwick is responsible for the adoption service. The service consists of two teams; the adoption and post adoption teams. These are managed by two different managers.

The manager of the Adoption Team is:

Naima Khan  
Adoption Team  
Triangle House  
328-330 High Road,  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA9 6AZ  
Tel: 0208 937 4565

The manager of the Post Adoption Team is:

Monash Kessler  
Post Adoption Team  
Triangle House  
328-330 High Road  
Wembley

The qualifications of the managers and their experience are shown in detail below:

<b>Position in the Unit</b>	<b>Hours per week</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Year of appointment</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>
Service Manager	36	Jan Fishwick	2001	CQSW Currently completing MPA
Team Manager	36	Naima Khan	2002	M.A. CQSW, DMS
Team Manager	18	Monash Kessler	2000	M.SOC.SCI. CQW

The adoption service works in collaboration with the area children's social work teams to ultimately ensure welfare of children placed. We aim to work together with other professionals within and outside the council to achieve the best outcomes for looked after children in Brent. We work within a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory framework.

All referrals for adoption are received by the Permanency Duty worker, from the Child's allocated social worker. The adoption team, under the umbrella of the Placements Recruitment Strategy, undertakes all publicity and marketing to recruit prospective adopters and takes responsibility for joint information sessions with Consortium members.

The Adoption team is responsible for the assessment and preparation of all potential adopters and for providing a comprehensive support service for them and for children who are adopted, including facilitating any post adoption contact between them and their birth family. After 12 months post adoption order support, the Post Adoption team will become involved for providing support and an access to records service

The Adoption team is also responsible for facilitating effective and timely permanency planning and family finding for looked after children, and commissioning the assessments of inter- country adopters and providing them with support.

Brent's Adoption Service is part of the Westminster and West London Consortium. This is made up of eight west London boroughs and two voluntary agencies. The consortium matches children with families waiting for them amongst the eight west London boroughs.



## **Procedure for Monitoring and Controlling the Activities of the adoption service and Ensuring Quality of Performance**

The following systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the service:

- A regular departmental Children and Families activity report giving details of children placed for adoption and adopted.
- A regular report is presented to the Service Unit Manager and to the Adoption Panel (which includes a member of the Council) detailing the numbers of children waiting for a permanent placement, matching and placement dates, Adoption Order dates, any breakdowns in placements, and timescales achieved.
- Management information is correlated and there are monthly reports on the numbers of children placed for adoption, numbers adopted, ethnicity, and timescales to be obtained and compared with DoH standards.
- A database is maintained of adoption applicants, ethnicity, responses, outcomes and timescales.
- Systems are in place to monitor the department's needs in placement. This information is used to inform recruitment and contracting with providers (see below).

### **Ensuring accountability of staff**

- There are clear lines of accountability and management of the service.
- There are annual performance reviews for all staff, setting and reviewing targets, which are in line with departmental and service targets and objectives. These reviews aim to ensure that staff are well trained and competent in delivering a quality adoption service.
- Each member of staff is given supervision by their line manager on a three- four weekly basis, with a review of tasks and monitoring of targets.
- The adoption service ensures that there are comprehensive and up to date records on all children placed, prospective and approved adopters with whom Brent has worked. This information is accessible in line with data protection regulation.

- There are clear written policies and procedures for staff within the adoption service including the adoption panel. These are available on request to service users.
- Written information is given to birth parents about adoption and contact with their birth children; all children receive a leaflet which explains adoption to them and adopters given written information both before and after approval.
- All staff and adopters have a valid CRB checks, which are satisfactory.
- Allegations against adopters/staff are investigated under departmental procedures. (Under the umbrella of the London Child Protection Procedures)
- The Customer Care and Complaints Section maintain records of complaints, their outcomes, and praise.

### **Planning for looked after children**

- The adoption social worker / family finder is responsible for setting up and participating in the permanency planning meeting, matching and selection, introduction and progress meetings.
- In line with the National Standards on Adoption, a child's need for a permanent home will be considered no later than at the child's four month Statutory Child Care Review. If the decision is made that adoption is in the best interests of the child a referral will be made to the Permanency Duty Team within 48 hours of the child's review.
- All referrals for permanency are booked into the Initial Permanency Planning Meetings, which are held fortnightly, and the case is discussed. Various options are discussed and the case is then taken up by the appropriate team and either allocated or held on duty.
- Once a case is allocated Permanency Planning Meeting will be booked six- weekly or earlier if required.
- The Adoption & Permanency Panel will make its recommendation as to whether adoption is in the child's best interests within two months of the decision being made at the child's Statutory Child Care Review (best interests' decision). The Adoption & Permanency Panel will approve the proposed match within:
  - Six months of the best interest decision
  - Six months of a Court's decision in Care proceedings OR
  - Three months for voluntarily relinquished children aged less than six months.

This will be monitored, manually at present and then by Framework i next year.

### **Adopters**

- All placements up until the adoption order is made are monitored and supported.
- The adoption agency has access to specialist advisors, for example, a play therapist, child and family consultation service, (clinical psychologist) a medical advisor, a legal advisor, teenage pregnancy advisor and a specialist education team.
- The adoption service has a clear strategy for the support of adopters ensuring each adopter is allocated a social worker up until the adoption order is made and beyond when appropriate and in line with any adoption support plan.

### **In addition, the following financial procedures are in place:**

- Regular budget monitoring information itemises amounts paid for a variety of services and totals paid in adoption allowances. Monthly expenditure and budget allocation information is updated monthly in the Finance Section.
- Weekly Adoption allowances are fortnightly using an electronic payment system, and amounts and any changes are checked and signed for by managers. Adoptive families are informed by letter of any changes in payments.
- Annual financial review forms are completed by all families receiving an adoption allowance to ascertain whether they still qualify for this.
- Inter-country charges are always clarified on first contact and attached to the information sheet given to prospective adopters. Charges are reviewed and agreed with the West London Partnership.
- Inter-agency financial agreement meetings are held, and charges and expectations of timescales for payment are recorded on BAAF Form H1.

## **Procedures for recruiting, preparing and assessing adopters and supporting adoptive parents**

### **Recruitment and Retention Strategy.**

- The Unit has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit and retain sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

### **Assessment**

- The recruitment and assessment policy details the procedures for the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters. By way of brief summary: written information is sent in response to all initial enquiries and regular discussions take place at team meetings as to which applicants would be suitable for children waiting. An initial visit is then undertaken and the recommendation discussed at team meetings and a decision made as to whether the applicants should be offered a formal assessment. The assessment is then allocated and prospective applicants are invited to attend a preparation training group.
- A Home Study assessment will be completed within 5-6 months and presented to the Adoption & Permanency Panel to make a recommendation to the agency (London Borough of Brent) whether or not to approve the prospective adopters.
- Once approved, the social worker will seek to identify a suitable child, starting with local children, and then extending the search through the West London Partnership and the National Adoption Register. Once a family has been selected, details of this match will be presented to the Panel who will make a recommendation and within 7 days the Agency will decide whether or not to approve the match.
- If the match is approved there is a planning meeting and a period of introductions. The child will then be placed according to the Adoption Regulations and any Care Order that may be in force.

### **Support**

- The supervising social worker will continue to support the prospective adopters until an Adoption Order has been made.
- An assessment of the need for adoption support will be completed for all children for whom adoption is the plan and will be presented with the proposed match to the Adoption & Permanency Panel. The Adoption & Support plan will be reviewed at the child's initial statutory child -care review and at every subsequent review until the Adoption Order is made or

if there is a significant change in circumstances. The review of adoption support plans once the Adoption Order has been made will be negotiated and agreed with the adoptive parents.

- Brent's Adoption Allowance Scheme provides a financial allowance to facilitate the adoption of children whose needs may involve additional costs. It is not applicable to all children. There are eligibility criteria based on the child's needs. If an allowance is applicable to the child, then the adopters' financial circumstances are assessed. Adoption allowances are means tested, and a financial assessment is carried out each year.
- A full assessment of the child's need for post adoption contact will be undertaken. Decisions about contact will always be based on the best interests of the child, in consultation with and with the agreement of the adoptive family. This is normally a voluntary agreement.
- The birth family and adoptive family may exchange letters and photographs by mutual agreement, via a service called "letterbox". The Post Adoption Team will act as the post box and forward correspondence to the families. If direct contact is to be maintained between the child and his or her birth parents or family, if assessed as necessary the Post Adoption team will help facilitate this by providing support and/or supervision, support and counselling service for birth parents

### **Access to Records**

- A comprehensive service is available to adopted adults requesting access to their records.

### **The Adoption & Permanency Panel**

- Brent Council's Adoption & Permanency Panel meet every fortnight to make recommendations to the Assistant Director, Children's Services, who is the Agency Decision Maker, in respect of all matters concerning adoption.
- The composition of the panel is in line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and 1997 and includes independent members as well as council officers. The chair of the panel is an independent person with significant experience of adoption work and the necessary skills to ensure that the panel's work is carried out efficiently and sensitively.
- The Adoption & Permanency Panel will receive all necessary information on prospective adopters within 6 weeks of the completion of the assessment report.
- Panel recommendations will be conveyed orally to all those involved within 24 hours. The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision within 7

working days of the Adoption Panel recommendations. Decisions will be conveyed orally to all those involved within 24 hours and confirmed in writing within 7 working days.

- Applicants or birth parents will have 28 days to raise any objections to the Agency's Decision Maker. All correspondence will be acknowledged within 3 working days and answered formally within 14 working days.
- When a child has been approved for adoption, quarterly progress reports will be presented back to the Adoption Panel until an adoption order is made.
- Approved adopters who have not had a child placed within 2 years will be required to be re-assessed and presented back to the panel.
- A separate adoption file will be created for every child once adoption has been approved by the Agency. Once an adoption order is made the file will be placed in the Records Archive for 75 years.

### **Complaints**

- All local authorities are required to have Complaints Procedures under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and also, where children are involved, under the Children Act 1989. The Complaints Procedure is listed in Part III.
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection, North West Regional Office West Point 501 Chester Road, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 9HU  
Direct Line - 0161 876 2410
- All complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets Departmental and National requirements. Children, their birth family and adopters will all be given a copy of Brent Council's complaint leaflet.
- Children will be made aware of the national telephone help line, 'Talk Adoption', the complaints procedure, children's rights services and of their right to make representations and complaints. Birth families and adopters will be advised of the complaints procedure and their right to make representations and complaints.

Jan Fishwick  
Registered Manager  
Date: November 2004