

Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE, Assistant Director - Children's Safeguarding

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	08 September 2022
Subject:	Adoption Statement of Purpose 2021 - 2022

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Corporate Parenting Panel about the work of the Adoption Service in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards National Minimum Standards 2003, 2011, 2014 and the Adoption and Children Act 2022. The National Minimum Standards, together with the Adoption Regulations, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

The Statement of Purpose at Appendix A sets out the relevant performance information and identified the key developments with the service of the last twelve months.

To be presented for approval by Lincolnshire County Council Executive in September each year.

Actions Required:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel recommends the approval of the. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are invited to review and approve the contents of the Adoption Statement of Purpose 2021 – 2022.

1. Background

The aim of this report is to present the Adoption Statement of Purpose 2021-2022 to members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. Conclusion

Following consideration of the attached Statement of Purpose, the Panel is requested to consider and comment on the contents of this report and the work of the Fostering Service.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Adoption Statement of Purpose 2021 - 2022

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2022



Lincolnshire

Lincolnshire
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Working for a better future

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of standard 18 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2002, amended (2005,) (2011) and (2013) and the Children and Families Act 2014.

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AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Regional Adoption Agency

Lincolnshire County Council is part of the Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (which provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Northampton Children's trust, and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

The vision of the RAA is that:

- Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Family Adoption Links, Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters.

Governance and Management

The RAA is accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is aligned to the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for children in care.

The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops. The Board includes representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus.

The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency. The FAL

Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money, and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority.

The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each Local Authority. Each partner local authority retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager.

The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

THE MAIN AIMS OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ARE TO:

Provide a range of quality services which can promote best outcomes for children who need a permanent placement.

Meet and comply with the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services.

Ensure that all staff are appropriately recruited, supervised, and developed to fulfil their agency functions.

To identify children for whom the plan is adoption and to work with them and their carers to ensure children enjoy outstanding developmental outcomes, with quick progress to successful placements with their adoptive parents.

Adhere to best practice for permanency planning timescales as set out in adoption legislation and the Public Law Outline, to maximise each child's opportunity to experience a stable and secure family life.

Provide appropriate choice of adoption placements for children within Lincolnshire County Council and beyond where appropriate, making full and prompt use of the regional resources, voluntary adoption agencies and the Linkmaker database.

To recruit, prepare, assess, and fully support prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children requiring adoptive families, including those who take a direct/Foster for Adoption placement.

The focus of assessments will be the applicants' ability to meet the assessed needs of children, promote attachment, improve their understanding of the adoption task and their suitability to be an adoptive parent through on-going quality assurance, and sustain a high standard of assessments. Assessments will be completed within the timescales set out within Statutory Adoption Guidance (2014) wherever possible.

Applicants for inter-country adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.

Ensure that children are well prepared both practically and emotionally for a move to a new permanent family.

Provide links for children, for whom adoption is the plan, with families who can meet their ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic needs, whilst recognising that no child should wait indefinitely for the "ideal" match.

Provide a comprehensive support package, including financial support where appropriate to achieve stable and successful placements.

Provide effective and efficient adoption panels to enable adoption plans for relinquished children, prospective adopter assessments and links with children to be progressed without delay.

Ensure that children's plans for adoption are agreed by the Agency Decision Maker and Placement Order applications are made to meet court timescales.

Ensure that issues for contact with the birth family are carefully considered and meet the individual needs of the child.

Ensure that where possible and appropriate, siblings will be placed together and that decisions to separate siblings are made in a timely manner, following a sibling assessment.

In conjunction with other agencies provide a comprehensive range of support services, pre and post order, as detailed in the Adoption Passport, to children, birth parents, relatives, and adoptive parents and those involved in the process of special guardianship applications.

To access funding where appropriate on behalf of adoptive families, via the Adoption Support Fund.

To ensure that accurate and up to date records and management information is kept in relation to individual children, adoptive parents, and services and to maintain confidentiality and security.

Ensure that customers are fully involved and consulted on service delivery and service development.

Treat all customers with respect and without prejudice or discrimination.

Lincolnshire County Council delivers its adoption service through a dedicated Adoption Team managed by a Team Manager.

THE MAIN PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE SERVICE ARE:

Lincolnshire County Council and its adoption agency believe that, wherever possible, it is best for children to be brought up within their birth families. Only where this is not possible, and other appropriate options short of adoption have been considered, then adoption should be considered as a positive alternative for children to enable them to grow and reach maturity within a stable and loving family.

The Statement of Purpose links all sections in the document to the relevant Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 and shares its values with those Standards.

VALUES

Children

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully considered at all stages of the adoption process.
- Delays should always be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this; their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- The needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and considered.
- Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.
- Children, birth parents/guardians, families and adoptive parents will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes

the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

ADOPTED ADULTS AND BIRTH RELATIVES

- Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved including adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.
- Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.
- Agencies have a duty to provide services that consider the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.
- Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.
- Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.
- Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY

The Adoption Service aims to provide safe, secure, and high-quality care in family settings for children whom a plan for adoption has been agreed. This will be achieved to the standards set out in the Adoption Services Regulations 2002, 2011 and The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 (referred to as the "Regulations"), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010), The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, 2015 & 2021, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005), The National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2014) and The Statutory Guidance amended (2011) and July (2013 and 2014).

Working together with the Adoption Team, the Adoption Panel and the Panel Adviser, the service strive to continuously improve standards of care, informed by inspections, quality audits, service learning days as well as new legislation and guidance to evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery.

STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY

Lincolnshire County Council is an approved Adoption Service provider and will be inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Service is managed by the Head of Service – Regulated through a Team Manager for Adoption. The Team Manager acts as the Adoption Support Services Advisor. (Standard 15)

The Assistant Director for Children Services is the Agency Decision Maker. (Standard 17)

Lincolnshire Adoption Panel is constituted in accordance with regulations. (Standard 17)

During the period of the pandemic the DfE published 'flexibilities' to allow for the exceptional circumstances so adoption panels have been held virtually since April 2020 and this remains under review.

The adoption panel only considers whether:

- A child who is in care to Lincolnshire /Rutland County Council should be placed for adoption, where a parent relinquishes their child or consents that adoption is the best outcome for their child.
- Prospective adopters are suitable to adopt, and
- Adopters are suitable for a particular child or children.

There are sufficient appointed panel members including an Independent Chair. The Members of the Adoption Panel will be appraised annually against performance objectives.

From 1 April 2011, the Regulations regarding the make-up of panel changed and allowed the adoption agency to draw its members from a list of people known as “the central list”; these members the agency considers having the “ appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the adoption panel for its consideration.” There is no limit to the number of people on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every panel meeting.

The agency can decide how many panel members should sit at each panel meeting, subject to the panel meeting being quorate.

The members of the central list must include (in addition to the Independent Chair): an adoption social worker with at least three years’ relevant post qualifying experience in children’s social work, including direct experience in adoption work. The medical adviser

to the adoption agency is a panel member; also, the agency can appoint other people whom the agency considers suitable. Suitable members could include specialists in education, child and adolescent mental health, race, and culture; and those who have personal experience of adoption.

A Legal Adviser who provides advice in writing to the panel on any legal issue with implications for a child whose plan is being considered by panel. The Legal Adviser also gives advice to the Agency Decision Maker – the Assistant Director of Children's Services.

Lincolnshire Adoption Agency has medical adviser(s) who examines all children being considered for adoption and reports to panel members on the child's health needs. The adviser will also meet with prospective adopters to consider health requirements of individual children.

For the period of the pandemic the DFE agreed 'flexibilities' to allow for virtual /telephone medicals to be conducted where necessary, but practice is now reverting

The Agency Medical Advisers also advise panel members on health issues relating to prospective adoptive parents.

There is a Professional Adviser to the Adoption Panel who advises panel members on procedures, policies, and professional issues.

Government issued guidance and regulation which came into force on the 1st September 2012 which impact significantly on the work of the Adoption Panel.

The primary change made by the Regulations is that Adoption Panels must not be involved in deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the Court will be involved in the decision, where care proceedings are on-going or where the child has no parents; the case must be referred directly to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision.

Panel will however still consider cases and make recommendations where the child's parents will consent to the child being placed for adoption.

THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

The named manager of the Lincolnshire Adoption Service is:

Deborah Crawford– Head of Service, Regulated Services

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Lincoln
Lincs
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Email: Deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Qualifications:

DipSW

Diploma in Higher Education

BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies

PQ1 in Social Work

Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work.

Experience: 29 years' experience working in the field of social care, specialising in children and families since 1993. Since 2013 has held a Team Manager post with the local authority within the fostering service before progressing to a Head of Service post in early 2021.

The nominated manager to manage the Adoption Service in the absence of the named manager under Regulation 5 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 is Anne Johnson.

The adoption teams are locality based and deliver a comprehensive service. These teams manage the permanency planning and family finding role, the recruitment, assessment, approval, support, and placement processes which enable children in care in Lincolnshire County Council to be placed in a range of appropriate adoptive placements.

Dawn Oldroyd is the dedicated Professional Advisor for both the Adoption and Permanence panels.

The organisational structure of the Service is shown in Appendix 1. The list of current staff is set out in appendix 3. This information in its fullest form is only available to Ofsted.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

The Adoption Service works within the overall Quality Assurance Framework for Children and Families, which sets out a range of general and service specific standards and methods by which these standards are monitored. Children for whom adoption is being considered or who have been placed for adoption are reviewed by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Lincolnshire Adoption Service continually monitors and evaluates its service at every stage of the adoption process to ensure quality and effectiveness. Lincolnshire welcomes feedback from all involved in the adoption process

The activity and performance of the Adoption Service is scrutinised by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

As part of the Regional Adoption Leadership Board and Family Adoption Links, Lincolnshire Adoption Service actively considers and shares good practice and policy development.

The Adoption Service is inspected by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), under the single inspection framework for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children in Care and Care Leavers. All local authorities will be inspected under this framework within a three-year period.

Performance of the service is monitored through the National Adoption Scorecard and a range of performance indicators.

THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Lincolnshire County Council's vision is

*“Working for a better future by; -
Building our strengths
Protecting your lifestyle
Being ambitious”*

The principles that the Council adheres to are:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Safeguarding
- Aspiration and well being
- Learning and achievement
- Best use of Resources.

In addition to the principles, four strategic outcomes for children have been agreed by Children's Services.

- Children and young people are: Healthy & Safe
- Develop to their potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Learn and Achieve
- Children and young people are ready for Adult Life

The Adoption Agency has the expectation all children in its service is encapsulated into these principles and will work with children to champion the importance of these aspirations.

The service will work to develop self-esteem, self-belief and resilience in all children encouraging all children to be the best they can be.

We will use resources to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities.

The Adoption Agency strives to match, wherever possible, a child to an appropriate family, including considerations of ethnic origin and religion. However, no child will wait indefinitely for the ideal placement. (Standard 13) the Children and Families Act 2014

supports the adoption reforms set out in "An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay" by ensuring that a search for a perfect or partial ethnic match does not become a barrier to finding a child an adoptive family.

Unless there are clear and specific reasons why this should not happen our aim is to place siblings together. (Standard 13)

All children approved for adoption will receive a guide, which will give age-appropriate information about adoption. (Standard 18)

The Adoption Agency will provide support from an individual social worker and, when required, other professionals to enhance a child's understanding of and preparedness for placement. (Standard 15)

Life storybooks and other information which will help children understand their family and background will be provided by the Adoption Agency within the prescribed timescales. (Standard 3, 5, 12)

The Adoption Agency will undertake assessment of needs and placement considerations, which inform matching process to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities. (Standard 1 &10)

Where we anticipate local resources cannot meet their needs the opportunity to be matched with an adoptive family from the RAA, VAA, and the Linkmaker Database (Standard 13) shall be actively pursued.

Therapeutic support is provided directly, commissioned, or met by referral to other agencies if required as an outcome of assessment. (Standard 15)

For those seeking information, counselling, and advice in adulthood on tracing birth family members and reunion is available and provide individuals with counselling about the circumstances of their adoption. (Standard 16)

The Agency will offer supervision and support throughout the adoption process. (Standard 15)

To operate an adult-to-adult information exchange via the Lincolnshire letterbox system. (Standard 16)

To give an opportunity to talk with other young people who may be separated from members of their birth family. (Standard 16)

The Agency will offer information about how to contact the advocacy service provided by Voiceability Lincolnshire. (Standard 16)

Through collaborative working with other agencies, we will deliver and co-ordinate support for children, especially those with attachment difficulties, to facilitate the transition to new adoptive families). (Standard 1, 3, 10)

ASPIRATION AND WELL-BEING

All prospective adoptive carers are, as part of their assessment and training, required to inform the Agency of the plans that they will make to safeguard and maintain the child's welfare when they are adopted. The Agency will undertake to support carers to locate such services as GP, dentist and education services if required.

Before making the placement, the Agency must give the notifications required by regulation 35.6. These are important in ensuring as smooth a transition as possible in the child's health care and education, and in the safeguarding and support arrangements for the child.

Working collaboratively with adopters, local agencies, and the Statutory Authorities; a plan will be presented to panel outlining the resources that the child needs and how the adopters will be assisted in meeting these needs.

All adoptive families in Lincolnshire are offered therapeutic parenting training to empower them to make a positive and sustained change to their family relationships. Lincolnshire County Council Adoption Agency also offers its adopters therapeutic parenting advice including "Theraplay" which is presented through the initial training course and is designed to assist adopters in identifying areas that may present challenges to them, and were identified as a need, further support is available.

Prior to consideration of the child's plan, a health assessment under regulation 7.1 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 is carried out and a report of this assessment in accordance with those regulations is prepared. Once the agency is considering adoption for the child, it immediately consults its medical adviser to ascertain whether the health information already obtained is sufficient, and sufficiently up to date. This report is needed to fulfil the requirements of the regulations and the need for full information for the child, the adoption panel, and the prospective adopter.

This report is presented to Panel and the needs of the child are fully discussed to ensure that any future placement has both the information about the child and a plan as to how these needs are to be met.

SAFEGUARDING

Lincolnshire's Children's Service including its Adoption Service is part of Lincolnshire's Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

The assessment of adopters includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited.

All adopters have a safer caring assessment prior to approval which highlights key aspects of the safer caring process. Safe caring is an important part of the training offered.

This training is mandatory and covers specific areas such as safer caring, the implications of looking after children who may have been harmed and the implications of how a child's attachment may have been affected in their early years.

Allegations that are made against adopters prior to an order being made are investigated using an established procedure whereby all are considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process to ensure its timeliness. Where allegations are made following the granting of an adoption order these are managed using standard Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership procedures.

ASPIRATION, LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to maximising a child's potential in both academic attainment and personal achievement and will work collaboratively with prospective adopters, local agencies, and any party it considers as necessary to plan and maintain the child's education.

From 2013, adopted children were given priority school access and in 2014 all adopted children aged 2 years became entitled to free early education. Furthermore, the Pupil Premium was increased and now includes all adopted school children from reception class through to year 11 and includes children who were in care prior to becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order.

A record of the child's achievements prior to being placed will be available to the prospective carer and information sharing will consider the short medium and long term needs of the child in education. Research has shown that in most of the cases adoption works. Education and health outcomes are as good as for children growing up with their birth parents. To assist, it is essential that information about their birth families is available to adopters and that there is an Information Sharing Meeting before an application is made to the Adoption Panel to match a child with applicants. (Standard 1, 3, 10)

At the Information sharing meeting a well-presented family time (contact) plan for children with birth relatives and siblings will be available. However, Lincolnshire County Council considers that unless there are clear and specific reasons why this should not happen, it is our aim to place siblings together. (Standard 13)

Lincolnshire County Council will provide support from an individual social worker and, if required, other workers to enhance a child's understanding of and preparedness for placement (Standard 15). This is alongside life storybooks and other information which will help children understand their family and background. (Standard 3, 5, 12)

SUPPORTING THE ADOPTION SERVICE

All the work of the Service is delivered through the following relationships and support functions which are described below.

1. Prospective Adopter's Social Worker

The role of the prospective adopter's social worker is to give support to the adopter throughout the assessment process, through placement to order. They also assist and advise with practical difficulties and the provision of equipment. They are a crucial link between the adopter and the child's social worker and the two workers need to work closely to prepare the adopters and share with them information that they need to assist in planning for the placement of a child.

Through the period of the pandemic there were 'flexibilities ' which allowed for visits to be conducted virtually but practice has been updated and have resumed to face to face.

2. Child's Social Worker

The child's social worker is responsible for the overall management of the child's care plan. They have a statutory duty to visit the child in line with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010), the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2014); however, in some circumstances the visiting pattern will be more frequent particularly in the early stages of a placement or when there are difficulties, up to the time when the adoption order is made.

Through the period of the pandemic there were 'flexibilities ' which allowed for visits to be conducted virtually, by video call albeit face to face visiting has resumed.

3. Adoption Support Social Worker

The role of the adoption support social worker is to provide specialised therapeutic support to those families which require direct adoption support to the family with tailored plans of support. Support is underpinned by an assessment of need which is made in line with the Adoption Support Regulations 2005.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser is the Team Manager for Adoption who will deal with any enquiries regarding the eligibility for support services and the services provided.

The service is provided on a tiered basis dependent on assessed need:

Tier 1	Support to adopters includes family time (contact) co-ordination, helpline advice, information via the Lincolnshire adoption website. Birth records counselling for adults. Also included in this tier is counselling for birth relatives whose children have been adopted as well as seminars for grandparents of adopters.
Tier 2	All of tier 1 and in addition adoption support groups/activities for adopters and for children affected by adoption. These include a programme of activities which bring

	adoptive children together to share experiences of adoption as part of leisure activities.
Tier 3	Previous tier support plus specific adoption support includes assessment of need, individual adoption support packages, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Theraplay clinic sessions to promote attachment. This tier also includes access to primary mental health services and CAMHS. Since the launch of the Adoption Support Fund, therapeutic interventions can be claimed from the central fund to ensure that adoptive families have access to therapeutic support.

4. Adoption Support Groups

There are locally held support groups for adopters to attend; their social worker will assist them to join a local support group and discuss with the adopter's issues such as information sharing within the group. The Adoption Service will provide adopters with access to the Council's website which provides links to useful information relating to all aspects of adoption and signposting to services and resources. In addition, in 2014 the service introduced a quarterly newsletter for adopters, which is sent to all current and past adopters with children under 18.

TRAINING

The Adoption Service ensures that adopters are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of a child placed in their care.

Training is not an option but a clear expectation of all adopters and is evaluated prior to approval.

The training is delivered by qualified and experienced social workers in partnership with people who have experienced adoption. There is an adoptive carer and an adult who was placed for adoption in the past, and these people's experiences have been positively recognised by those attending the training.

During the pandemic, the preparation courses had been provided remotely using 'teams' however this has reverted to face to face and the groups have been smaller and held once a month to try to ensure that all attendees are able to participate as much as possible.

Each preparation course is run over a two-day period and covers:

Day One

- Introduction
- Short Icebreaker
- Exploration of the changes that becoming an adoptive parent will bring
- Awareness of separation and loss
- Life story work
- Resilience.

Day Two

- Attachment cycle
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Adopted person talking about tracing
- Adopted parent discussing experiences of contact
- Managing behaviour
- Managing contact.

In addition to the two-day experiential learning all prospective adopters are provided with a workbook during stage 1. Each subject in the workbook has an exercise for prospective adopters to complete. During the learning days, the course facilitators refer to the subjects in the workbook and later in the assessment stage the completed exercises are discussed with the assessing supervising social worker.

Each workbook covers:

- The adoption process
- Why children come into care: Background factors
- Child Care Law
- Abuse of children and the possible effects
- Effects of early trauma
- Effects of separation and loss in childhood
- Life story work and family books
- Child development
- Discrimination
- Resilience
- Contact
- Telling children about their adoption
- Task description of an adoptive parent
- Social networking/e.g., safety
- Reading list.

Pre-approval training is complemented by post approval learning and development opportunities, delivered through e-Learning and more traditional training seminars.

THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING AND APPROVING ADOPTERS

The recruitment of adopters is currently managed and effected jointly between the RAA Family Adoption Links and the local Fostering and Adoption recruitment activity. The referrals to the Family Adoption Links website are forwarded to the local offices depending upon geographical location. The Recruitment Co-ordinators aim to contact all enquirers within 24 hours of them registering their interest online.

The Recruitment Co-ordinator's role is to ensure that enquirers have all the information they need and following an initial discussion an initial expression of interest can be completed over the phone and/or a detailed information booklet is made available to all interested applicants about the adoption process which is sent within 5 working days.

The service is focusing on enhancing the overall customer experience and the Recruitment Co-ordinators represent the Local Authority in a professional manner, being respectful to all enquirers and acknowledging their individual journey to embark on this process.

Within 5 working days of applicants completing their initial expression of interest, the enquirers will receive a telephone call from the agency to arrange an individual interview. Initial enquiry forms can also be filled in on our interactive website. Following this visit, applicants will then submit their formal registration of interest to the agency. Adopters are recruited and assessed in line with Lincolnshire guidance based on the National Minimum Standards and Adoption Regulations.

Recruitment involves:

- Utilising social media to reach wide audiences. This is now being led by the regional marketing officer and all RAA marketing information has been rebranded.
- Holding Information events. Information events have been held online through the pandemic and are all being advertised on the Family Adoption Links website, so that they are available to all.
- Newspaper advertisements, using the local press across the region.
- Newspaper articles
- Distribution of posters
- Information distributed through displays and presentations
- Word of mouth through existing carers
- Lincolnshire County Council LCC Connects website/Family Adoption Links website
- Targeted activity within specific communities in county

The Regional Adoption Agency continues to focus on four specific areas for recruitment: recruiting adopters for sibling groups, children aged over 4, children with complex health needs and recruiting Foster to Adopt carers.

Foster to Adopt carers will be approved as both foster carers and adopters, but with the purpose of early placement stability for those children where rehabilitation home is unlikely, and adoption is a very likely outcome. This would mean that the children in these

placements would not have to move from a fostering placement into an adoption placement, thus minimising disruption for the child at a crucial stage in development.

The recruitment strategy has both a community focused approach, to reflect the specific needs of the communities within the region, coupled with digital marketing as it is recognised that we need to maximise our reach to prospective adopters and cannot rely on a single method to achieve this.

The service has continued to advertise through local media channels and parish magazines but also utilised social media and the Lincolnshire County Council/FAL website to advertise events throughout the region.

The recruitment activities arranged continue to facilitate informal information sessions where individuals have the opportunity to hear all about the adoption process. These events have continued virtually through the pandemic.

Staff are involved at the events who can outline the process to them and what this entails. Prospective adopters also can hear from an experienced adopter in these sessions, and the chance to ask questions.

The prospective adopters can be provided with information booklets about Adoption and Foster to Adopt following events or they can complete a form online that will trigger contact from a Recruitment Co-ordinator who can begin to obtain details with the hope of progressing to an initial home visit.

The process for the assessment and approval of adopters was reformed on the 1st July 2013 and a new two stage approval process was introduced, so that prospective adopters can be approved to adopt a child more quickly. Under the new two-part process, adoption agencies must assess and approve adopters within 6 months. The new process comprises a two-month initial training and preparation stage (Stage One).

Stage One commences when applicants have formally registered their interest and will end with the agency's decision on whether the prospective adopter can proceed to Stage Two. In Stage One, all required checks and references will be completed. This process is now fully embedded.

Stage Two consists of an in-depth assessment and will end with presentation of the prospective adopter report to the adoption panel and the agency decision maker's decision about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child.

The prospective adopter report is completed by a social worker who is compliant with the restriction on the preparation of adoption reports regulations 2005.

A person is within a prescribed description for the purposes of section 94(1) of the 2005

Act if: —

(a) She/he is a social worker who is employed by a local authority or registered adoption society and who satisfies at least one of the conditions set out in paragraph (2)(a) or (b).

(b) She/he is a person who: —

- is participating in a course approved by a Council under section 63 of the 2000 Act for persons wishing to become social workers
- is employed by, or placed with, a local authority or registered adoption society as part of that course; and
- satisfies the condition set out in paragraph (2)(b); or

(c) She/he is acting on behalf of a local authority or a registered adoption society and is a social worker who satisfies the conditions in paragraph (2) (a) and (b).

The conditions referred to in paragraph (1) are that the person: -

(a) has at least three years' post-qualifying experience in childcare social work, including direct experience of adoption work.

(b) is supervised by a social worker who: -

- is employed by the local authority or registered adoption society in question; and
- has at least three years' post-qualifying experience in childcare social work, including direct experience of adoption work.

The report is presented to the Adoption panel for consideration and a recommendation of their suitability is made. The organisation and composition of this panel is in accordance with Adoption Service Regulations 2011.

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations on the suitability of prospective adopters; this recommendation is passed, along with the prospective adopter report, panel's final minutes and any other supporting documentation, to the Agency Decision Maker. National Minimum Standards 23.17 sets out the qualifications, knowledge and experience the decision-maker must have.

The Agency Decision Maker does not have direct line management responsibility for the adoption panel but has the authority to make decisions on its behalf as to whether the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child. (AAR 27)

Prospective Adopters are invited to attend panel and participate in the panel discussions. All panels have been conducted remotely throughout the pandemic, but all applicants have still been invited, and have attended.

Feedback is received from those applicants who have commented on the process and have for the most part been satisfied with the experience of being at panel.

NUMBER OF ADOPTIVE CARERS

A total of 27 adoptive parents were approved to adopt during 2021/2022, with no adopters approved for inter-country adoption. 6 of these were also approved for Foster to Adopt. This is a small increase from last year's figures.

The service ended the year with adopters awaiting placements so were able to meet the needs of children with adoption plans coming through the system. The focus of the work during this year was to match the children waiting and place them into adoptive families at the earliest opportunity whilst ensuring that we remained Covid secure.

The trend continues to be that there are more adoptive parents than children waiting for a placement within the County. As there have been significant delays in children's court proceedings, the service has always had approved adopters waiting to ensure choice when making matches.

On 31st March 2022 there were 12 adopters approved and waiting; two of which were being considered for possible links. In addition, there were four adopters fostering children with a view to adoption.

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Total Adopters approved	27	25	28	43	22	32	24
Of which Foster-to-Adopt	6	8	7	15	14	12	0
Foster-to-Adopt New Applications	5	8	6	10	5	12	6
Foster-to-Adopt Subsequent Applications	1	0	1	4	9	5	0

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Approved for one child	16	19	18	37	13	20	14
Approved for two children	11	6	10	6	9	11	9
Approved for three children	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

NUMBER OF CHILDREN PLACED

With regard to placements made this year 36 children were placed: so, 1 more than in the previous year. Of these, 32 were singleton placements, and 4 children were placed in 2 sibling groups of 2. Of these sibling groups, one of the groups had one child over five. All the children placed were under five with 28 of them being placed before they were 2 years, with nine children placed between the age of 2 and five years. There were 18 boys placed and 18 girls, so a change from last year when there were more boys than girls.

Overall, there were fewer sibling groups than in the previous year and the cohort of children were generally younger than in previous years as approximately. There has been a significant increase in the number of cases which are delayed in court awaiting placement orders and were not placed within NMS 17.7 as they waited several months to be made subject to a Placement Order.

FINANCE

Adopters can be assessed for a means tested allowance based on the needs of the children placed. This allowance is discretionary and is reviewed annually in respect of the needs of each placement and the child. Additional support through a one off settling in grant may also be made.

COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

Summary of the Complaints Procedure

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service.

The Complaints Policy sets out how complaints will be dealt with ensuring concerns raised are considered and any resulting adjustments made, where required.

- Stage 1 – Local Resolution
- Stage 2 – Independent Investigator is appointed
- Stage 3 - Independent Panel formal review by an Independent Panel of independent members plus the Complaints Manager.

Staff do ensure that all carers know how and to whom to complain.

Complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate.

The Customer Relations & Complaints Manager is Shagofta Noreen

- Email customerrelationsteam@lincolnshire.gov.uk

- Write to Customer Relations Team, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln, LN1 1YL or
- customerrelationsteam@lincolnshire.gov.uk
- Call 01522 843322

The Named Manager monitors all complaints and liaises with the Customer Relations & Complaints Manager and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager. This information is available to authorised persons only. All adopters have access to support and information regarding the complaint's procedures.

Independent Reviewing Mechanism

Prospective adopters are given written information about the role of the independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) as part of their preparation process. They are also provided with leaflets about the IRM when information is being prepared for presentation to panel. There have been no representations made to the IRM in 2021/2022.

NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES

Five complaints were made to the Adoption Service during 2021-2022

Of these complaints, the outcomes were – three were partially substantiated, and two were unsubstantiated.

All the issues raised in complaints were used to make changes to the service where this was appropriate.

ALLEGATIONS

Adopters can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures with all allegations managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer. In addition to the role of the supervising social worker, adopters can have access to an independent social worker who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters listed in the Regulations are monitored by the manager who ensures that the appropriate notifications to Ofsted and other agencies are carried out.

In 2021/2022 there were no allegations in respect of adoptive carers.

ADVOCACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Lincolnshire County Council commissions its advocacy for children through Voiceability Lincolnshire

Referral and Information Line: 44[0]300 303 1660

Website: www.helpline@voiceability.org

When might you want an advocate?

You can ask to speak with advocate if you:

- Have serious concerns about the care you are getting
- Want to be more involved in decisions being made about you and your future
- Want to fight decisions being made about you
- Want to make a complaint.

Office of the Children's Commissioner



The Children's Commissioner is Dame Rachel de Souza. She has a legal duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England with a particular focus on children and young people with difficulties or challenges in their lives, and those living away from home, in or leaving care, or receiving social care services.

The Children's Commissioner can be contacted: -

By writing to her at:

The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

Phoning her on Freephone: 0800 528 0731

Emailing at: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Visiting the website www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Lincolnshire Adoption Service works to the Lincolnshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council's intranet site.

The Adoption Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout their approval process. The adoption agency embraces the Customer Care and Service Standards, endorsed by the DfE, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Adoption UK, and the Consortium for Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation, or disability providing the adoption service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence. The minimum age for applying to adopt is 21 years old.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability.

However, Lincolnshire's Adoption Service recognises that it is unacceptable for a child to be denied adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and prospective adopter do not share the same racial or cultural background. If the prospective adopter can meet most of the child's needs, the service must not delay placing a child because they do not share the child's racial or cultural background.

The Lincolnshire Adoption Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

All policies and procedures concerning the adoption service are subject to Equality Impact Assessment.

OFSTED

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating, and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Questions or complaints

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is the Ofsted National Business Unit.

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is Ofsted.

The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. This number manages all general enquiries and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or write to:

Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Adoption Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

If you require this document in a different language or an alternative format such as large print, audio tape or Braille, please contact a member of the Adoption Service via telephone on 01522 554114.

The Statement of Purpose, Children's Guides and other information are also available on the Lincolnshire County Council website: www.lincolnshire.gov.uk

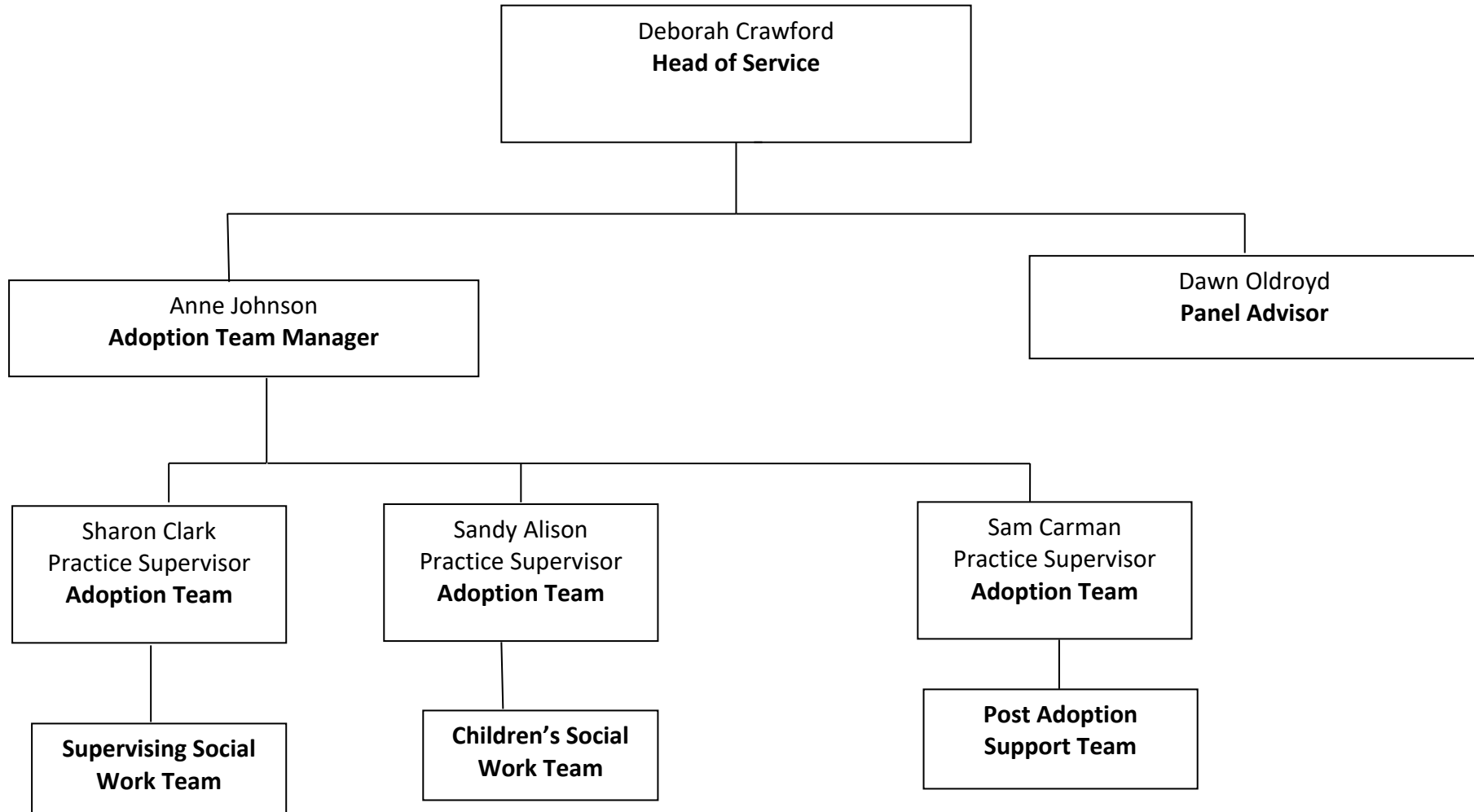
A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

Deborah Crawford – Head of Service, Regulated Services
County Offices
Newland
Lincoln
Lincs
LN1 1YL

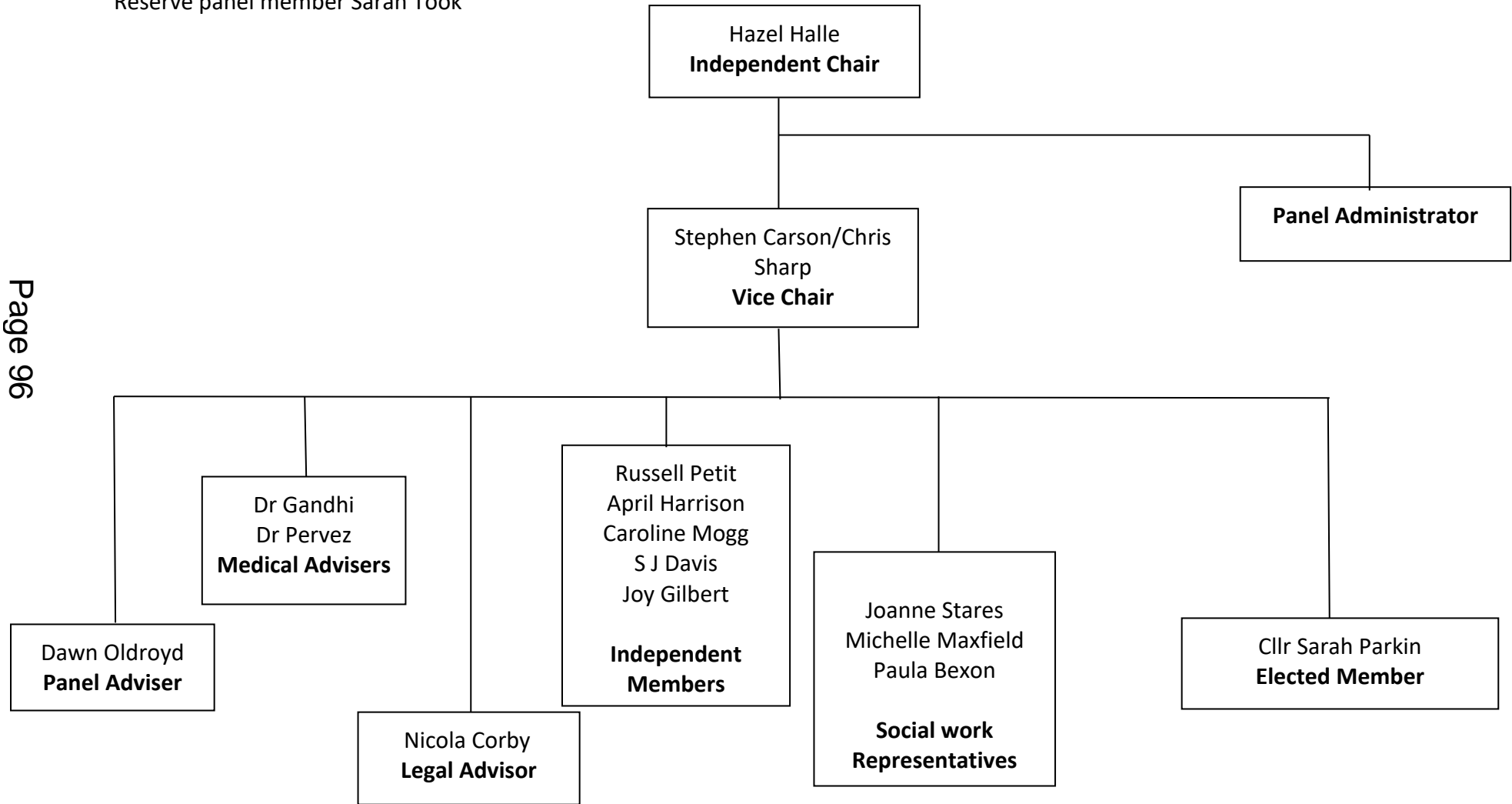
Telephone: 01522 552781

Email: deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1
Leadership structure



Appendix 2
Adoption and Permanence Panel
Reserve panel member Sarah Took



Appendix 3
Adoption Service - Staffing

Position	Qualifications	Length of time in LCC Adoption Services
Head of Service Regulated Services (Deborah Crawford)	DipSW Diploma in Higher Education BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies PQ1 in Social Work Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work	29 years including 10 years in Regulated Services
Team Manager Adoption Services (Anne Johnson)	Certificate in Qualified Social work Certificate of Education Diploma in management PQ6 [Practice Teaching award]	43 years (26 years in Regulated Services)
Practice Supervisor Adoption Services (Sharon Clark)	BTEC ND Social Care BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies DipSW	17 Years
Practice Supervisor (Sandy Allison)	BSc (Hons) Social Work and Social Work Policy DipSW	20 years
Practice Supervisor Sam Carman	CQSW	8 years [3 years in regulated services]
Juliet Collingwood	BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies	4 Years
Supervising Social Worker (Julia Mann)	CQSW BA Combined Studies MA Health Services Studies Post graduate diploma in Social Studies PQ1	18 Years
Supervision SW Lorraine Wallace	BA[Hons] Social work	2 years adoption 6 years reg services
Supervising Social Worker (Debra Green)	BA (Hons) Social Work	11 years
Supervising Social Worker (Hannah Fawn)	BA (Hons) Social Work	7 years
Social Worker (Wendy Jennings)	BA (Hons) Social & Behavioural Studies MA, DIPSW Social Work CACDP Level 1 CACDP Level 2	13 years
Social Worker (Mark Abdul)	BA (Hons) Social Work	8 years

Position	Qualifications	Length of time in LCC Adoption Services
Social Worker (Kristin Daniilidis)	BA (Hons) Social Work	10 Years
Social Worker (Claire Liddan)	BA (Hons) Social Work	7 years
Supervising Social Worker (Kelly Shaw)	BSc (Hons) Social Work	7 years
Social Worker (Laura Tyrrell)	BA (Hons) Social Work	6 years
Social Worker Vittoria Pola	Degree in Social Work	5 years
Adoption Support Worker (Dawn Button)	HNC Business and Finance	23 Years
Early Help worker (Claire Leeson)		1 Year
Post Adoption Support Social Worker (Pat Mills)	BA (Hons) Social Work Higher diploma in therapeutic play MA Integrative psychotherapy/ child psychotherapy Level 1 /2 and advanced EMDR Theraplay 1 and 2 DDP 1 and 2	10 Years
Post Adoption Support Social Worker (Jane Thornton)	BA (Hons) Social Work	8 years
Adoption Support Social Worker (Jo Poole)	BA (Hons) Social Science CQSW Certificate in Counselling Advanced Certificate in Counselling	17 Years
Early Help Worker Sarah Clarke		2 years
Post Adoption Support Social Worker Sian Griffin	BA [Hons] social work	4 years