

# **ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE**

Statement of Purpose



## CONTENTS

.....	
Adoption and Permanence Service Statement of Purpose .....	3
.....	
Children for whom adoption is the plan .....	4
.....	
Birth families.....	6
.....	
Prospective adopters.....	6
.....	
Other permanent legal carers.....	8
.....	
Approved adopters.....	8
.....	
Appendix A – Adoption and Permanence Service Structure .....	12
.....	
Appendix B: Experience and Qualifications of Current Staff.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

This statement of purpose has been produced in accordance with the National Minimum Standards 2011 for Voluntary Adoption Services and Local Authorities in England and Wales. It explains the aims, objectives and services provided by Plymouth City Council’s Adoption and Permanence Service. It is made available to staff, those affected by adoption and the general public.

Adoption and Permanence Service  
Services for Children and Young People  
Midland House  
Plymouth City Council  
Plymouth  
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# **ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

## **Aims and objectives**

Plymouth City Council upholds the right of every child to grow up in a stable and loving family environment, as described in the 1991 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We recognise that a child's best interests usually are served within their birth family and we will provide services to keep children at home or reunite children with their families at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

Some children cannot live with their birth families for a variety of reasons. We recognise that adoption and other permanent legal orders provide one of the most successful ways for these children to achieve stability for children in care. For children in care we have a duty to provide them with a safe, stable and loving alternative family and will work to establish permanency through:

- adoption
- alternative legal permanence options to include:
  - residence orders
  - long term foster placements
  - special guardianship

Where it is deemed that a child should be placed for adoption, our Adoption and Permanence Service strives to find permanent loving families, putting the child at the centre of the process.

We recognise the lifelong impact that adoption and other forms of permanence have on children, their birth families and adoptive families and will provide support and services before and after the legal order.

The specific objectives of our Adoption and Permanence Service are to:

- ensure that children in care who are unable to return to their family have the opportunity of a permanent family, with early assessment and planning, and minimal delay
- put children's welfare, safety and needs at the centre of the process, listen to their views and act in their best interests at all times
- recruit and support sufficient adopters to meet the assessed needs of children who require adoptive families
- provide counselling, advice and support to birth parents and other relatives and significant people, that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption and other forms of permanence
- provide a range of adoption and permanence support services for children and their parents, including the management of ongoing contact, counselling, annual reviews and support
- provide a confidential counselling service to adult adopted people who are interested in obtaining information about their birth history
- complete welfare supervision and court reports for non-agency (step parent) adoptions
- provide intermediary services from adult birth relatives only in exceptional circumstances (for example medical issues) or in the case of a birth sibling if they were previously a child fostered within Plymouth
- provide advice and consultation on adoption and permanence matters to childcare social workers and other professionals

## Values and principles

### **Children**

A child's welfare is the paramount consideration in all decisions relating to adoption and permanence. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet their emotional, physical and developmental needs during childhood and beyond. They deserve an enjoyable childhood with excellent parenting and education, with a range of opportunities to develop their skills and lead a successful adult life.

Children's wishes and feelings are important and should be actively sought throughout the adoption and permanence process, and taken into account wherever possible. Children should be matched with a family that can meet their needs and promote their sense of identity. Their ethnic and cultural background should be valued and promoted wherever possible and children's individual needs relating to health or disability should be taken into account.

Delays in adoption and other forms of permanence can have a severe impact on children's health and development and should be avoided wherever possible.

We will recruit high quality adopters and other permanent carers to meet children's needs. We recognise that family life can be achieved by a range of different family settings. Children have diverse needs and we recruit families from diverse backgrounds. Prospective adopters and other permanent legal carers will be welcomed and assessed efficiently in an open and fair way.

Adoption and permanence has lifelong implications for all involved and requires a lifelong partnership between many different organisations.

Our adoption and permanence service will be managed and staffed by highly skilled professionals and will provide a quality service in line with the National Minimum Standards.

### **Adopted adults and birth relatives**

Adoption is a lifelong process for all parties including adopted adults, birth and adoptive relatives and those affected by other forms of permanence. The needs, welfare and rights of all parties affected by adoption should be valued and respected. Information and services should be available to enable affected parties to address the issues raised by adoption throughout their lives. These must be fully inclusive and non-discriminatory, acknowledging differences in people's circumstances and abilities. Agencies should work in partnership to provide these services.

The views and wishes of all parties affected by adoption and permanence should be sought and taken into account at each stage of the decision-making process.

Adopted adults have the right to have their identity safeguarded and to decide whether to be in contact with birth family members.

## Services provided

### **Children for whom adoption is the plan**

All adoption services provided by Plymouth City Council focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for children. These are defined by Every Child Matters: Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Wellbeing.

Plymouth City Council has a robust care planning process that always considers adoption as a possible permanence option, regardless of children's age or ability. A clear plan is made as soon as possible after a child comes into care, and no later than the four month review.

Wherever possible, we involve and consult the child at all stages of the adoption process, taking their views into account in a way which is sensitive to, and consistent with, their age and

understanding. If a child's wishes cannot be acted on then we will explain the reasons clearly to the child in a way they can understand.

When it is agreed that a child will be adopted, the adoption agency will give the child a clear explanation of the situation that is appropriate to their age and understanding. We have a written children's guide that is given to children before they are adopted. Where required, we will produce a guide in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. Systems are also in place to ensure that when a potential match is identified, clear and appropriate information about the prospective adopter is obtained for the child.

Before a child is adopted we obtain clear and appropriate information from the birth relatives about themselves and life before the child's adoption. This is incorporated into the child's permanence report, which is the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) form describing the child. The permanence report also includes information about the child's early life, the birth family's view about adoption and contact.

A key objective is to find adoptive placements for children who need adoptive families without delay. We seek to find the best possible match for each child with minimal delay. For example, although primary consideration is given to finding a match that reflects the child's religious, ethnic and cultural background, this must not delay placing a child if an otherwise suitable family is available.

Identifying suitable adopters for a child is done in partnership between the child's social worker and the Adoption and Permanence Service. The child will be discussed at monthly Resource Allocation meetings in order to consider whether any approved or prospective adopters are likely to be suitable.

If no suitable adopters are available within Plymouth City Council then the Adoption and Permanence Service will use a range of strategies to identify a family from another adoption agency. As a member of the South West Adoption Consortium, we have access to resources in authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies across the region. We have a clear family finding strategy outlining the process that will be followed if no suitable adopters are available within Plymouth City Council or the neighbouring area. This includes a range of activities including the National Adoption Register, commissioning a professional DVD of the child to show at family finding events, emailing the child's profile to other adoption agencies and advertising in publications such as Be My Parent and Children Who Wait.

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with other adoption agencies to ensure the best possible match for each child. We are strengthening our links with our local voluntary adoption agency Families for Children with a view to the potential for exploring a specific project to recruit adopters for older children and sibling groups.

We will work closely with the child's social worker to avoid delays in adoption. The child's social worker, adoption social worker and the child's foster carers work together in planning, implementing and monitoring this work including life story work for the child. This includes allocating an adoption social worker to each child with a plan for adoption, to provide a point of named contact to the child's social worker.

The Adoption and Permanence Support Team is responsible for ongoing planning to support the welfare and development of the child. They become involved at an early stage as required in order to implement any plans for ongoing support.

The child's social worker and adoption social worker create an adoption support plan for the child and their new family. This support plan takes into account the ongoing needs of the child following adoption. It will include arrangements for ongoing contact and counselling as well as adoption financial support.

We have close links with other agencies including CAMHS, health and education. These work alongside our existing Adoption and Permanence Support Team to tailor services around children's needs and ensure ongoing support as needed, in recognition of the lifelong implications of adoption.

### **Birth families**

We have a contract with Action for Children to provide our Independent counselling, advice and support for parents and other members of the child's birth family where adoption or other forms of legal permanence is the plan. We also enable birth parents to access a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child.

We aim to make a clear record of birth parents' views about adoption, permanence and contact in accordance with government recording practice guidelines. Birth parents are also shown and given the opportunity to comment on what is written about them or their circumstances before information is passed to the Adoption and Permanence Panel or to prospective adopters.

Services are also provided to parents who are considering the relinquishing of their baby for adoption. This includes providing counselling and information on all the available options. We aim to include birth fathers in this process wherever possible.

Contact is a major issue for all parties in the adoption and permanence process. There is no legal presumption for or against contact with decisions being made on an individual case basis. The Adoption and Permanence Panel must consider contact arrangements when recommending a child for adoption or another form of permanence. They must also reconsider contact when matching a child with a permanent family. Any recommendations on contact will be reflected in the child's care plan, which is presented to the court. The court has the final say on whether to endorse contact recommendations.

Plymouth City Council supports ongoing contact arrangements as required. The Adoption and Permanence Service facilitates both direct and indirect contact (through our letterbox service) between birth families, children and significant others.

### **Prospective adopters**

#### Recruitment and advertising

The recruitment of prospective adopters is outlined in the Adoption Recruitment Strategy, April 2011. This analyses past trends, anticipated needs and previous recruitment activities in order to plan the most effective way to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children currently waiting. It states how we will prioritise applications in order to recruit adopters who are best placed to meet children's needs.

The recruitment strategy utilises creative and innovative techniques including:

- Newspaper, radio and television advertisements
- obtaining free publicity in the local media
- displays and presentations
- distribution of posters and leaflets to key locations
- word of mouth through existing adopters
- Yellow Pages and Yell.com
- detailed information on the Plymouth City Council website with an online enquiry facility
- any other recruitment activities that are deemed appropriate

The Adoption and Permanence Service aims to treat prospective adoptive parents with respect and openness and welcomes applications from all sections of the community, with each application being

considered on its own merits. The process is designed to be fully inclusive and does not overlook potential adopters who are single, older, same sex couples, gay or lesbian or whose ethnicity and culture are not shared with those of the children currently waiting.

If we receive an enquiry from someone who is not suitable for the children currently waiting in Plymouth then we immediately direct potential adopters to neighbouring adoption agencies.

### Adoption assessments

Enquiries from people interested in adoption can be made in a number of ways - telephone, letter, website form or email. Following an initial enquiry, an information pack is sent within five days. This includes a DVD about adoption in Plymouth and details of where further information can be obtained including: our eligibility criteria, the assessment, approval and matching processes, the Adoption Register, profiles of children waiting for adoption, adoption support, the complaints process and the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Prospective adopters are invited to an information session and/or home visit within two months. Both provide further information about adoption, the types of children requiring adoptive families and the assessment and preparation process. The information sessions also provide an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet with existing adoptive parents.

If prospective adopters wish to continue, and their social worker agrees that they have been provided with sufficient information and counselling then dependent on the current priority needs of the service, the application will be accepted. A number of checks including personal and employment references and police and health checks will be taken up.

A four-day preparation course for applicants will be provided at intervals throughout the year. This adheres to our equal opportunities and diversity policies and is organised in a way that encourages attendance. The course provides more detail about children who may be placed for adoption and their future needs, the skills that are necessary for an adoptive parent and the assessment procedures. Prospective adopters will also have the opportunity to talk to others who have adopted children, meet representatives from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and watch a DVD of birth parents talking about their experiences of adoption.

We aim to involve prospective adopters in a formal, comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process. We are committed to performing competency-based assessments that focus on each applicant's capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their needs. We use the BAAF Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) as an assessment tool. This is designed to provide a standard way of collecting, analysing and presenting information about prospective adopters. It aims to address all the areas to be considered during the preparation and assessment process and to facilitate the provision of information. Copies of the PAR will be made available to applicants.

The assessment is a two-way process in that the prospective adopter is thoroughly prepared for welcoming a child into their family for life. The assessment process must establish the suitability and stability of every applicant, however it is vital that they are fully aware of the process and its implications. All prospective adopters will need some form of adoption preparation, although we may tailor this to meet individual needs, for example those of single adopters, foster carers or second time adopters. We provide information, advice and counselling to prospective adopters throughout the assessment process. We prepare applicants for the task ahead in a sensitive way that identifies their strengths as well as issues they are likely to encounter and the skills they need to develop.

Applicants are supported throughout the process by their social worker, who will normally make 10 to 12 visits to compile all the information for the prospective adopter report. The PAR is

supplemented by an attachment style interview. This is a recognised tool for identifying how adopters make attachments in their relationships, and enables planning post adoption support.

A senior member of the adoption team will make a second opinion visit, usually the Adoption Assessment Team Manager. This is an additional opportunity to discuss any concerns or issues arising from the assessment process and to validate the content of the PAR.

If at any stage during the assessment process the adoption social worker obtains information that leads them to doubt the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt then we may decide to submit a short report to the Adoption and Permanence Panel. We will give counselling and advice to the prospective adopter fully explaining their decision.

We aim for the home study assessment to be presented to Plymouth City Council's Adoption and Permanence Panel within eight months of formal application. The Panel meets to discuss the prospective adopter's PAR and makes a recommendation about the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt. The agency decision maker (the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care or Head of Service children in care) makes the final decision regarding approval. This takes into account all the information surrounding the case and the panel's recommendation, and is made within seven working days.

If prospective adopters are unhappy with the decision then they have an opportunity to appeal within 40 days. This can either be through our complaints process, making representation to the Agency Decision Maker or can be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

### Matching

In seeking to match a child to approved prospective adopters we provide accurate, up-to-date and full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and an opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family.

The information about the child is provided on the child's permanence report, which includes a profile of the child and their family background including details of birth parents and siblings. The permanence report will assist in identifying a family that will match the child's needs and background.

Foster carers wishing to adopt children already in their care are entitled to the same information, preparation and support as other prospective adopters.

### **Other permanent legal carers**

In the case of children in care, the child's social worker is responsible for preparing and assessing applicants for Special Guardianship or Residence Order. In the case of Private Law applications and existing foster carers, it is the responsibility of the Adoption and Permanence Service.

### **Approved adopters**

All services provided to approved and existing adoptive parents aim to promote stability within adoptive families and therefore positive outcomes for adopted children.

We distribute a comprehensive manual to all newly approved adopters. This is also available online at [www.plymouth.gov.uk/adoptionmanual](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/adoptionmanual). The manual provides a useful reference guide to the adoption processes, sources of support and recommended reading.

Adopters and other permanent legal carers also have access to our Adoption and Permanence Support Team. This team is dedicated to providing specialist help to families by:

- providing individual support with any adoption related issues, including training and practical strategies on managing the behaviour of adopted children
- giving adopters advice and guidance on explaining adoption to children
- offering help with accessing other relevant resources

- providing training events that cover particular issues around adoption
- hosting regular social events and support groups including:
  - a post-adoption support group
  - a support group led by a clinical psychologist
  - a support group run by Adoption UK in Cornwall
  - a monthly daytime coffee morning/network group
  - access to Devon County Council's adoption support groups

## Support services

We have a duty to assess the need for support services. Anybody affected by adoption or other forms of legal permanence has the right to request an assessment.

Assessments for support services should consider the following, as appropriate:

- the needs of the person being assessed and how these might be met
- the needs of the permanent family and how these might be met
- the needs, including developmental needs, of the child and how these might be met
- the parenting capacity of the adoptive parent or permanent legal carer
- wider family and environmental factors
- the circumstances that led to the child being so placed or matched
- any previous assessment of needs for support services undertaken in relation to the person in question

The assessment procedure uses as a basis the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need. Before making a decision as to whether to provide support services, we allow the family opportunity to make representations. Where there is agreement to provide support services the adoption and permanence social worker prepares a support plan. Where services are being agreed for a new match, prospective adopters or permanent carers must agree this plan in advance of the Adoption and Permanence Panel recommendation. The support offered is flexible and can be reviewed at any stage.

## Inter-country adopters

We have a contract with an external agency, PACT ([www.pactcharity.org](http://www.pactcharity.org)), to provide an assessment service directly to inter-country adopters which includes counselling, initial visits, preparation training, home study reports, completion of paperwork to meet Department of Health requirements, and presentation of cases to the Adoption and Permanence Panel. The Adoption and Permanence Service provides support and supervision to inter-country adopters after approval.

## Adopted adults

A confidential counselling service to adult adopted people who are interested in obtaining information about their birth history is provided. This is dealt with by our specialist Adoption Support Service who are highly trained in this area. They have links with the local tracing group and attend family history days at the local library to raise awareness of the services that are available.

## Management, staffing and structure

Plymouth City Council's Department of Services for Children and Young People is responsible for the arrangements for children and families within the City who require a service and those children

who are in care. The Adoption and Permanence Service is part of the Permanency and Placements service which also includes the Fostering Service. The agency provides all the services required under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (amended 2011). Please see [Appendix A](#) for a summary of the structure of the adoption service.

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care is the 'Responsible Person' for the Adoption and Permanence Service. She acts as the agency decision maker, along with the Head of Service for Children and Young people in Care. The Adoption and Permanence Support Team Manager acts as the Adoption Support Service Advisor.

The Adoption Agency Registered Manager is the Permanency and Placements Service Manager. She is a qualified Social Worker and has worked in Child Care Services since 1983. She has a Level 5 'Introductory Diploma in Management' with the Institute of Leadership and Management. She is based at the following address: Permanency and Placements Service, Department of Services for Children and Young People, Plymouth City Council, Plymouth, PL1 2AA and can be contacted by telephone on 01752 308777.

The Adoption and Permanence Service consists of an Adoption Assessment Team, Adoption and Permanence Support Team and administrative staff. Each team has a separate Team Manager and the administrative staff are managed by an Admin Support Manager. The teams consist of qualified social workers and experienced support workers with a wide range of experience in children and families work including child protection, preventative work, risk assessment, fostering and adoption. The team is experienced in providing a variety of adoption and permanence services, including the family finding and placement of children; the assessment, preparation and approval of adoptive parents; facilitating training and preparation groups; and presenting cases to court and adoption and permanence panels. Appendix B lists the qualifications and experience of the current staff group.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Targets for the Adoption and Permanence Service are set on an annual basis through discussion with the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care.

A range of mechanisms are in place to monitor the performance of the service:

- Written reports on the management and outcomes of the agency are submitted to Councillors and ratified by the relevant cabinet member every six months
- The service has information systems to capture key milestones in the adoption process. Performance reports have been developed to monitor progress over the year.
- Quality issues are addressed through regular supervision and file audit.
- Feedback from users and other stakeholders is obtained on a regular basis and informs the strategic development of the service.
- Feedback questionnaires are sent to adopters after an Adoption Order has been granted, seeking their views on all aspect of the adoption process. Additional one-off questionnaires are periodically sent to service users.
- Disruption meetings are chaired by the Fostering Reviewing Officer to ensure independence.
- The Adoption and Permanence Panel provide independent oversight of individual cases and the overall running of the Adoption Service. The Panel is governed by comprehensive policies and procedures; Panel members are trained; the Service Manager observes Panel twice a year; and senior managers observe periodically. The Panel's audit and quality assurance role is used to oversee timescales for children and any drift.
- Individual aspects of the service are evaluated as required. For example, prospective adopters who have attended our family finding evenings – in which DVD's of children awaiting adoption were

shown – completed an evaluation form to inform decisions on whether to continue with the project in future.

- All prospective adopters are regularly informed of the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

## Complaints Procedure

Plymouth City Council believes that service users, their carers and their families have the right to express their views and make complaints, suggestions or representations about the services we arrange and deliver, and that by doing so we can improve quality and effectiveness.

Suggestions and complaints are viewed as a positive means of ensuring the quality of service is reviewed, both at a local level and through the formal departmental complaints procedure.

**A complaint** is a verbal or written expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet. It may be about the organisation, about the implementation of decisions, about the quality or appropriateness of services, or about their delivery or non-delivery.

**Representations** include enquiries, suggestions and statements about such matters as the availability, delivery and nature of services and will not necessarily be critical.

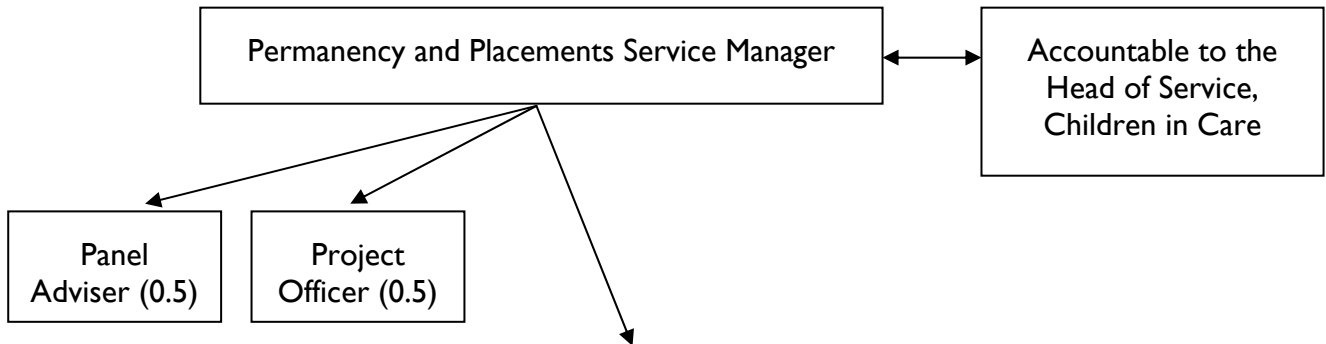
The complaints procedure is provided to all staff and is readily available on request and is published on the Plymouth City Council website. The procedure informs how to make a complaint, does not restrict the issues that may be complained about and specifies how they are handled. Information is also provided on other avenues of complaint where appropriate. The complaints procedure is accessible to people with a disability or sensory or learning impairment and to those whose first language is not English.

Children have access to an independent advocacy service in accordance with the “Get It Sorted” regulations.

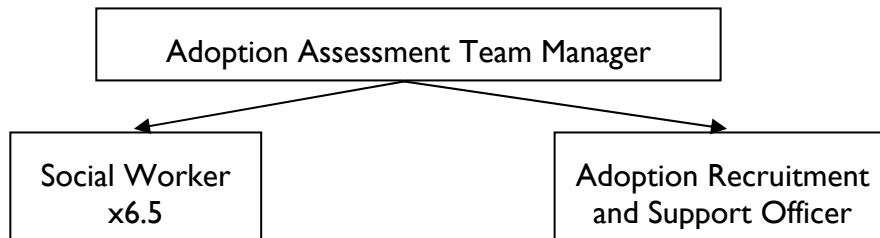
For further information or advice about the Complaints and Representations procedure please call the Customer Relations Team on 0800 0681249.

The organisation responsible for inspecting UK adoption agencies is Ofsted. If you wish you can contact Ofsted at NBU, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann’s Square, Manchester, M2 7LA. Telephone: 08456 404040

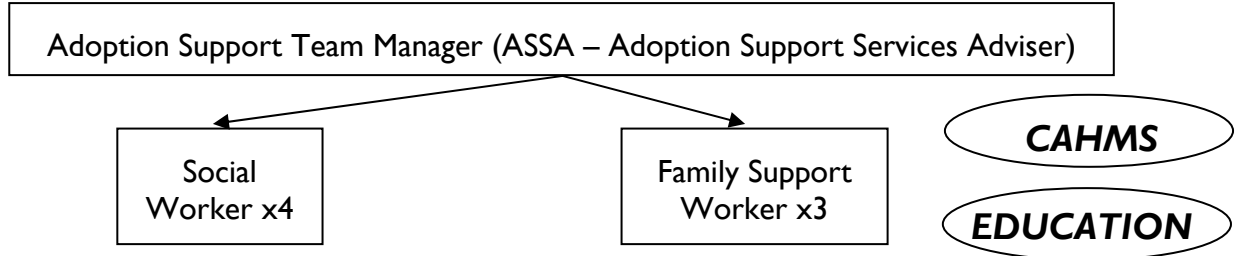
## APPENDIX A – ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE SERVICE STRUCTURE



### Adoption assessment team



### Adoption and permanence support team



### Clerical services and support

