 

*“Working in partnership for adoption services”*

Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin's Local Permanence Hub Statement of Purpose

**2021**

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# Executive Summary

This statement of purpose sets out the key aims and objectives of Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council’s Local Permanence Hub (formerly Joint Adoption Service). This is conjunction with the Statement of Purpose for Together4Children explain the range of services available to children, prospective adopters, adoptive parents, birth family members and adopted adults.

Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub comes under the umbrella of Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership. The Local Permanence Hub aims to provide a service to all that is user friendly, welcoming and non-discriminatory.

## Our Vision

The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub believes that wherever possible, a child is best brought up within its own birth family. If a child is unable to live with their birth family, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council are committed to finding a permanent alternative family who can offer safe and stable care throughout the duration of a child’s life and into adulthood as soon as possible.

## Introduction

Shropshire and Telford’s Local Permanence Hub is part of the Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership. The Local Permanence Hub is provided jointly to both Shropshire Council and the Telford & Wrekin Council, Shropshire Council has management responsibility under the terms of arrangement with Telford & Wrekin Council which is regularly reviewed and has been in place since 1998. There are quarterly Adoption Service Management Meetings held comprising of membership from both Authorities, which scrutinises the effectiveness of the service to both authorities.

The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub’s Statement of Purpose in conjunction with the Together4Children Statement of Purpose provides all service users and stakeholders with a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Adoption Agency. It details the service provision as required under the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations and the National Adoption Standards and is compliant with the legislation and regulations requirements:

* + Children Act 1989
	+ United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child 1989
	+ Adoption and Children Act 2002
	+ Care Standards Act 2002
	+ Inter-Country Adoption Standards and Associated Regulations 2003
	+ Adoption Support Services Regulations and Standards 2003
	+ Children Act 2004
	+ National Minimum Adoption Standards 2014
	+ The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) regulations 2012
	+ The Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
	+ Statutory Guidance on Adoption July 2013

## Aims and Objectives:

* + To contribute to both council’s duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their respective areas by ensuring that all children are able to fulfil their potential.
	+ To maximise the contribution adoption can make to promoting permanent, secure and loving adoptive families
	+ To carry out the councils’ statutory duty towards children who are looked after and the councils’ corporate parenting role under the Children Act 1989 by ensuring that children are placed with families and carers who can offer them safe, stable care and promote their life chances
	+ To actively promote adoption as a permanence option for looked after children who are unable to remain in their birth families, including older children and children with special needs
	+ To promote the right of every child to have a permanent, secure and loving family, which embraces individual needs and differences and reflects their ethnic origin, or if this is not possible, that will respect and positively promote the child’s ethnicity, culture and identity.
	+ To ensure that all our services are accessible and delivered fairly, in accordance with the councils’ equality policy, and that the service is open and reflects the diversity of all sections of the community.
	+ To ensure that all services are provided in a timely manner and service users are given the opportunity to comment on the services they receive and participate in service development.
	+ To ensure that children’s views and feelings are considered and that all children receive age-appropriate information, life journey work and sensitively written life story books to help them understand their history and to prepare for their move to a permanent placement.
	+ To have an effective and good quality preparation and assessment processes
	+ To ensure that we assess and approve the best possible prospective adopters for children in need of adoptive families

## Principles and Core Values:

* We respect all children, young people and their families – by listening carefully to their views and acting on them wherever possible.
* We are open and trustworthy – by making decisions transparently, involving others and doing what we say we will.
* We believe in the potential of all children – by doing all we can to support their development and talents.
* We are caring and responsible – by acting as good corporate parents and going the

‘extra mile’ in our supportive approaches to all children.

* We will protect vulnerable children and young people – by taking firm urgent action when needed, sharing information and not tolerating oppressive behaviour.
* We engage with children and young people, helping to empower them through supporting their aspirations and giving them responsibility. We celebrate and support cultural diversity and children’s sense of identity.
* We believe that by treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things

The nature of the work undertaken by the Local Permanence Hub includes:

* Providing a child/children/young person with a permanent family through adoption
* The assessment, preparation and support of a wide range of prospective adoptive parents to meet the placement needs of babies, children and young people, which recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for all those affected.
* Providing counselling to pregnant women, their partners and extended family where possible, who are considering adoption for their unborn child
* Providing counselling for adopted adults, their birth relatives and significant others affected by adoption in accordance with schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
* Undertaking assessments and preparing reports for the court in stepparent, inter- country and other non-agency adoption proceedings.
* Providing an advice and consultancy service to social work colleagues who are working with a child and its family where adoption is the plan
* Adoption services are delivered in a sensitive way and confidentiality is respected.

## The Organisational Structure of the Adoption Service:

## Together4children is an equal legal partnership between four Partner Local Authorities. Shropshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Staffordshire County Council provides the legal entity and accountable body for the partnership arrangement. The Regional Partnership Board holds accountability for Together4Children Regional Adoption Services, overseeing and directing the activity of the partnership. It is chaired by a Director of Children’s Services (on behalf of the four Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors/Strategic Leads responsible for adoption and permanency for each of the partners.

## The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub is provided jointly to both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council; however, Shropshire Council has management responsibility under the terms of a Joint Arrangement Agreement with Telford & Wrekin Council, which is regularly reviewed. There are quarterly Adoption Service Management Meetings held comprising of membership from both Authorities. We are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for the children in our care: ensuring all children and young people are safe and well looked after in a supportive environment, narrowing the achievement gap in education and work, ensuring the emotional wellbeing of children & young people by focusing on prevention and early intervention, keeping more children healthy and reducing health inequalities. For those children who cannot return to their birth families we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and permanent substitute families.

## Together4Children deliver services via a hub and spoke model enabling Local Authorities to benefit from core central functions and networked regional delivery. Central Partnership Functions are delivered via a Central Permanence Hub consisting of a central team who undertake a range of activity on behalf of the region. Partner Local Authorities retain direct service delivery functions within Locality Permanence Hubs, working within the Together4Children practice framework whilst maintaining clear links to local Children & Families Services.

## Functions that sit within the Central Permanence Hub are:

## Central co-ordination of functions across the Partnership

## Adopter Recruitment

## Regional Family Finding

## Adopter Training and Events

## Children’s (Permanency)Tracking

## Adoption Panel Advice and Management

## Adoption Panel Coordination

## Joint commissioning

## The functions of Locality Permanence Hubs are :

## Adopter Assessment and Support

##  Permanency Support Services

##  Children’s permanency in reach advice and support

## Service Structure:

**AdoptWestMids**

Co-ordinator

1 x 18 hours

**Adoption Support Social Worker**

1 x 37 hours

1 x 22.2 hours

1 x 14.8 hours

1 x 37 hours

**Life Story Workers**

1 x 37 hours

1 x 27 hours

**Adoption Team Manager**

1 x 37 hours

### Admin Services

**Coordinator**

1 x 37 hours

**Business Support Officers**

1 x 37 hours

1 x 23 hours

**Advanced Practitioner/Therapist**

1 x 30 hours

**Therapist**

1 x 30 hours

**Therapist**

1 x 18.5 hours

**Senior Adoption Social Worker**

1 x 37 hours

**Adoption Social Workers**

1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

1x 37 hours

**Service Manager Adoption/Fostering & Residential Services**

1 x 37 hours

**Adoption Support Team Manager**1 x 37 hours

1 x 37 hours

Currently the Adoption and Support Team has 9 fulltime equivalent qualified social workers (including the Team Manager) whose qualifications range from the Diploma in Social Work and Master of Science (Social Work).

The Post Adoption Service has 4 fulltime equivalent qualified social workers (including the Team Manager) whose qualifications range from the Diploma in Social Work and Master of Science (Social Work) and Master of Science (Psychology). 3 part time Therapists and 2 Life Story Practitioners whose qualifications range from Diploma in Social Work, Master of Science (Play Therapy), Diploma in Occupational Therapy and a wide range of specialist knowledge and expertise in relation to attachment, trauma, sensory integration and life story work. The team has 1 Letterbox Co-ordinator providing support with post adoption contact.

Social workers who are required to complete reports in relation to prospective adopters, adoption placement and any other reports that are required by the Adoption Service must have three years post qualifying experience in childcare social work (including direct experience of adoption work). If they do not have this relevant experience, then they can undertake this work under the supervision of a worker who fulfils the above requirement.

All social workers currently employed have a wide range of experience of working in the field of childcare safeguarding and family placement and while the team has had some staff changes over the past year the Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub is now fully staffed.

Through supervision and training, The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub ensures that all staff have the skills and knowledge to work effectively with adoption cases. The training available is reviewed regularly to make sure that it remains in line with practice and legal developments. Annual Appraisals are an integral part of staff development and progression. These can be reviewed on a six-monthly basis if required.

The service ensures that appropriate written procedural and practice guidance is available to staff and that this is updated regularly considering practice and legal changes. All policies and procedures pertaining to the delivery of Adoption Services are in the Together4Children Procedures Manual. This is accessible by all staff via Staffordshire Council’s SharePoint.

The Service Manager for the Local Permanence Hub is Lisa Preston, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Residential Services.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is Erika Ower, Permanence Support Manager.

## Services Provided for Children

## The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub is committed to ensuring the best possible permanent outcome for children. This will enhance life chances and promote a sense of safety, security and support the wellbeing of children.

The safety, security and well-being of children are an integral part of all care planning decisions.

The particular needs of disabled children and those with special needs will be fully recognised within the care planning process and in achieving permanency through adoption.

Adoption will be considered as a positive option for all Looked after Children who are unable to live with their birth family.

Once a child becomes looked after by the Local Authority, their plan for permanence must be considered by the time of their second statutory looked after review. Where it is clear that adoption is the plan, this must be agreed by the second Statutory Review.

In some situations, early permanence options for a child will need to be considered pre-birth.

These cases will initially be considered at a legal planning meeting. Once the recommendation

is made for the need to consider early permanence, a referral will be made to the adoption service.

The wishes and feelings of all children will be listened to and recorded. These wishes and feelings will be acted upon. Where it is not possible to act upon the wishes and feelings of a child, the reasons for not doing this will be clearly recorded on their file.

Birth family members will be encouraged to be involved in the care planning process for their child and their wishes and feelings will be listened to and acted upon. Where it is not possible to act upon the wishes and feelings of birth family members, the reasons for not doing this will be clearly recorded on their child’s file.

The Child Permanence Report will provide a detailed and honest account as to why a child is unable to remain within their birth family. This document will be sensitive to the needs of the birth family. The report will be of a high standard to enable a decision to be made regarding a child’s suitability to be placed for adoption, to facilitate the identification of a suitable match and ultimately provide the child with a clear and honest account of their birth family history and the circumstances of their adoption.

All children with a plan for Adoption will be given the Together4Children ‘Children’s Guide to Adoption’. Foster carers, prospective adopters and social workers are responsible for supporting the child to understand the guide and answering any questions children have about adoption.

Carers and significant others involved in a child’s life will be encouraged to collect mementoes for a child from their past. These will be kept in the child’s memory box and given to adoptive parents to share with children as and when they are ready.

Existing carers who express an interest in adopting a child already in their care will always be considered and explored if appropriate.

All children moving onto adoption will have a Life Story Book which will explain to the child in a language they understand the reasons they are being adopted. This will be provided to all children by the second Statutory Review of their adoption placement or at the very latest within 10 working days of their adoption ceremony.

All children moving onto adoption will receive a Later Life Letter. This will be written by the child’s social worker and the adoption social worker and are intended to be shared with children when they are old enough to fully understand their birth family history. These will be provided to all children at the very latest within 10 working days of their adoption ceremony.

Children will have access to specialist help wherever needed to help them understand their journey and to help them make the transition to their permanent family. This help can be accessed for children already adopted, placed for adoption or for whom we are still trying to identify a family. This support will be provided by specially trained workers who have experience within the field of adoption.

Child Appreciation meetings are held prior to attendance at adoption panel for most children with the exception of children who are being adopted by their foster carers if the foster carer feels they already have enough information about the child’s family and background.

If all attempts to identify a suitable family are not successful, the care plan for the child will be reviewed initially 3 months following the making of a placement order and thereafter 6 monthly to determine whether a care plan of adoption is still appropriate.

All children placed for adoption will have an adoption support plan in place. The support plan will holistically consider the support needs of the family and address the need for any on-going adoption support such as financial support or therapeutic intervention. The support plan will also detail the level of post adoption contact between birth family members, adopters and adopted children. The expectation is that letterbox contact arrangements will be in place for all children. These will be managed by the Letterbox Co-ordinator. Some children will have direct contact either with a birth parent or birth relative. Support with these arrangements will be managed through the Permanence Support Service. Adoption Support plans are reviewed on an annual basis. Adoptive families are entitled to request an assessment of their support needs at any time.

Once a child is adopted, the Local Permanence Hub will store children’s adoption files electronically. All original documents such as birth certificates, legal orders and letters from birth family members will be scanned onto the electronic file but will also be retained in paper form and kept in a secure storage facility. All records will be made available to adopted children once they reach 18 years of age at their request, or in some circumstances before, if an adoptive parent makes a particular approach on behalf of their child. Adoption files will be retained for 100 years.

## The Services Provided to Birth Families

The Local Permanence Hub will endeavour to support all birth family members affected by adoption. The Permanence Coordinator who comes under the Central Hub will write to each individual birth parent to offer advice and guidance about the process of adoption and will also be offered support from the Permanence Support Team.

The views of birth family members will always be sought regarding the plan of adoption and will

include their views or preference for the child’s religion and any future contact plans. These views should be recorded both on the Child’s Permanence Report and the child’s adoption file. Future contact plans will consider the importance of frequency of contact, who should be involved in the contact arrangements and also the review of any contact plans.

Birth parents will be advised they can seek support with writing letters to their birth child or any other adoption related matters either from the letterbox coordinator or the Permanence Support Team. This support also extends to birth family members.

The child’s social worker will make every effort to obtain clear and appropriate information about birth family members, family history and any hopes and aspirations they have for their child’s future. They will also be asked to contribute to the child’s life story through the provision of photographs, letters or mementoes.

Where considered appropriate, birth parents will be given the opportunity to meet with the adopters prior to placement. Adoptive parents will be reminded of the importance of keeping safe any material provided by the birth parents or extended birth family members for the child to have in later life.

Birth family members have the right to make representations or complaints through Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council’s complaints procedures.

## Assessing Adopters, Family Finding for children and Adoption Support Services

## Marketing and recruitment of Prospective Adopters, family finding for children and Adoption Support Services falls within the remit of Together4Children’s Central Hub

## Please see Together4Childern Statement of Purpose for further details.

## Non-Agency and Step-Parent Adoptions

People who make an enquiry regarding non-agency and Step-Parent (Partner Adoptions) Adoptions, are given information by the Local Permanence Hub Staff or they can view information on our website. If appropriate they are offered a home visit appointment to discuss their specific circumstances and are advised about procedures and about the status of non-related children.

The relevant assessment, statutory checks and Court reports are undertaken in non-agency adoptions when area residents have given notification of their intention to apply to adopt. This includes step-parent adoptions, adoptions of a close relative such as a niece, nephew or grandchild and children who have been adopted in another country and the adoption is not recognised in the UK.

## Inter-Country Adoptions

All family’s wishing to proceed with an overseas adoption will be referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre for advice, training and support.

The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub undertakes assessments of people wishing to adopt a child from a country outside of the United Kingdom. In such cases a set charge is made for the work involved, which includes undertaking the assessment, consideration by Adoption Panel, following up references and statutory checks and all administration.

Where people are seeking to adopt a related child from overseas the set charge will also apply, although the Adoption Service may reduce or waive the fee in exceptional circumstances.

While it is recognised that the needs of most children will be served more effectively by adoption within the U.K it may in specific circumstances be appropriate to consider applicants not domiciled in the U.K to meet a child’s particular needs with respect to race and culture.

## Agency Decision Makers

Adoption panel functions and management sits within the Central Hub.

For decisions regarding the suitability of children for adoption, these are referred straight to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker pertaining to the child in that decisions for Shropshire children’s suitability for adoption are made by the Shropshire ADM and decisions for Telford children are made by Telford and Wrekin’s ADM. If the child however is being relinquished for adoption by their birth parents, the case will be referred to the Adoption Panel prior to being presented to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision Makers for Shropshire Council are the Assistant Director for Children’s Services Sonya Miller and the service manager for compass, assessment, missing and exploitation, Jeanette Hill. The Agency Decision Maker for Telford and Wrekin Council is the Director for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Help, Darren Knibbs. The second Agency Decision Maker for Telford and Wrekin Council is the Service Delivery Manager, Child Protection & Family Support, Assessment, Tina Knight.

The Agency Decision Maker for Adopter approval decisions is the Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Residential Services, Lisa Preston.

The Adoption Panel Agency Advisor (who falls under the Central Hub) in conjunction with the panel chair and the Manager of the Adoption Service is responsible for producing the Annual Adoption Service Report, this is provided to the executive side of the council and is made available for all staff and interested parties, such as adopters. Together 4 Children is responsible for providing a 6-monthly Activity and Performance Report.

## The System in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services

All workers have monthly supervision. This focuses on the completion of key tasks but also equally important the growth of the reflective practitioner through an individual workforce development plan. All workers also have an annual appraisal, which measures performance and outcomes for individual children and adopters and also provides a focus on the development of the reflective practitioner. Supervision and appraisal standards are closely monitored by the agency for compliance with national and service standards.

 All enquirers are advised of the service’s complaints procedure and encouraged to provide feedback of their experiences of the service. To this end, all enquirers who receive an initial visit are given a feedback form requesting their comments.

All prospective adoptive parents are asked to provide feedback regarding their attendance at adoption panel. The panel are provided with this feedback through the annual report.

We regularly ask panel members for their feedback on the process of the panel and evaluate this to continuously improve the effectiveness of the panel.

We seek the views of adopters throughout their adoption journey at our attendance at adoption social events and also coffee mornings. These views are considered in the future delivery of adoption services.

We seek the views of adopted children through the adoption social events and through their access to adoption support services.

Mechanisms are in place which regularly audits the delivery and development of the adoption service against National Minimum standards and the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

## Complaints about the service

Complaints regarding the Local Permanence Hub are managed via the Shropshire Council

Children’s Services Complaints Procedure:

Stage 1:

The expectation is that the majority of complaints should be considered (and resolved) at this stage. There is a 10-working daytime limit for this part of the process and most Stage 1 complaints should ideally be concluded within this time limit.

Written acknowledgement of all complaints will be sent to the complainant or representative within five working days. Where we cannot provide a complete response within 10 working days, we can implement a further 10 working days’ extension.

The maximum amount of time that Stage 1 should take is 20 working days and in most cases the local manager responsible for the service will be able to resolve your complaint.

If necessary, to ensure that a young person who is making a complaint receives suitable support to do so, we may also suspend Stage 1 until an Advocate has been appointed.

Stage 2:

If the person complaining is not satisfied with the response at this stage, they can ask for their complaint to be independently investigated

This investigation will be arranged by the Feedback and Insight Team and carried out by an independent person - someone who is not directly involved with this service. This investigating officer will prepare a report which, after being considered by Children’s Services, is provided to the complainant.

In some instances, it may be more appropriate for a complaint to move straight to Stage Two of the procedure.

The Childrens and Adults Statutory Complaints Team can advise further on this.

Stage 3:

If anyone complaining is still unhappy then they have the right to ask for their complaint to be considered by the Complaints Review Panel. The Panel has three members, two of whom are local councillors and a third member who chairs the Panel and is entirely independent of

Social Services and the Council.

If the complaint reaches this stage, the Childrens and Adults Statutory Complaints Team will maintain contact with those making complaints.

An acknowledgement will be sent within 5 working days and a full reply within a further 15 working days depending upon the complexity of the issues raised. If the complaint is a complex one and needs more time to be investigated, this will be explained at an early stage, you will be told of any delay and advised of the timescale for provision of a full reply.

The Adoption Service is committed to learning from complaints and to use this learning to improve service delivery.

What if complainants are still not satisfied?

This is as far as complaints can go within Children’s Services, but if you remain dissatisfied, you can complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman looks into complaints about local councils.

The kinds of complaints they deal with are:

If the council.

* does something wrong
* does something they should not have done
* fails to do something it should have done

Contact the Childrens and Adults Statutory Complaints Team who will send you a copy of the Ombudsman’s leaflet “Complaint about the Council.”

Contact details for Childrens and Adults Statutory Complaints Team

 Shropshire Council

Shirehall Abbey Foregate Shrewsbury

Shropshire SY2 6ND

## Service Development

The Local Permanence Hub will be inspected as part of Ofsted’s Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services. The Adoption Service will be inspected according to the standards laid down in the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2011 and 2014 and other relevant Adoption Agency Regulations and Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014. All recommendations from any future Ofsted inspections will be auctioned without delay.

The Local Permanence Hub is currently judged as ‘Good’ from Shropshire’s perspective in September 2017 and ‘Outstanding’ for Telford & Wrekin perspective in January 2020.

Service Development is managed through the Together4Children Permanency Partnership and through the Joint agreement of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

The Shropshire and Telford Local Permanence Hub is situated in Shropshire local authority and is co-located with Shropshire Council’s fostering colleagues and children’s teams, is it hoped this will facilitate more joined up work, particularly in the area of early defensible decision making which facilitates permanency for a wider range of children and in embedding Early Permanence across the council.

The service will continue to identify how we can work more effectively for the benefit of children and young people and also adopters. We are always keen to hear of ways in which we can improve, we welcome feedback from anyone.

## Service and Other Agency Contact Details Local Permanence Hub

Mount McKinley Anchorage Avenue Shrewsbury Business Park Shrewsbury

Shropshire SY2 6FG

01743 250138

ss-adoption@shropshire.gov.uk

 **Together4Children** **Regional Permanency Partnership**

Central Permanency Hub

 1 Staffordshire Place

Tipping Street

Stafford

ST16 2DH

 www.together4children.co.uk

## Ofsted

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

## Coram & British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (Coram/BAAF)

www.Coram/baaf.org.uk

## Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC)

[www.icacentre.org.uk](http://www.icacentre.org.uk/)