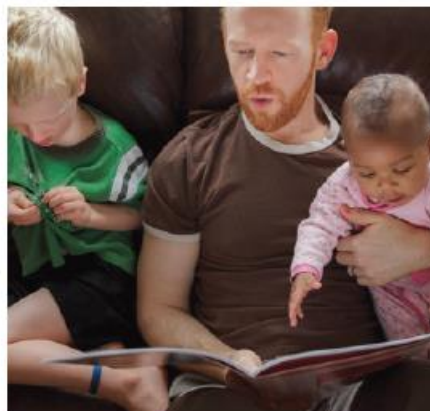




One
Adoption
Agency
NORTH & HUMBER

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

FOR YOUR ADOPTION JOURNEY



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INTRODUCTION

This document is the Statement of Purpose for One Adoption North and Humber, a shared adoption service between the five local authorities: North East Lincolnshire Council, City of York Council, North Yorkshire Council, Hull City Council and East Riding of Yorkshire Council. The Regional Adoption Agency is hosted by City of York Council.

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the relevant Regulations, Statutory Guidance and National Standards against which Ofsted inspect.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE

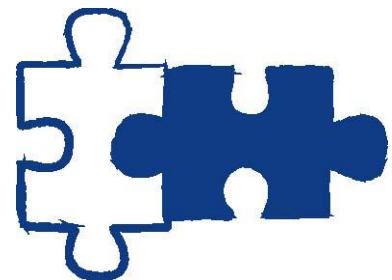
To ensure that:

- The needs, wishes, welfare and safety of children are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Each child who needs an adoptive family is matched as soon as possible with a family that will meet that child's needs for stability, warmth, security, safety and sense of self into adulthood and beyond.
- Sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds are recruited and supported to achieve successful and lasting placements for children.
- The wishes of all children, for whom adoption is the plan and those who are placed for adoption or adopted, are listened to. This will be done by consulting them at each stage in an age appropriate way and feeding back the outcome of this consultation to inform individual plans.
- Every attempt will be made to find an adoptive family to meet a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability, without undue delay and within the timescales laid down by Statutory Guidance.
- Children are helped to develop a positive sense of self via Life Story work and are encouraged to develop social and leisure activities which enhance their sense of self and self-esteem. This will be done by assessing, preparing and training adopters to understand the needs of children requiring adoption and by providing opportunities for support groups and family events.
- Children are encouraged and supported to enjoy and reach their full potential in their education. This will be done by maintaining effective working relationships with education colleagues to increase their understanding of the needs of adopted children, and by preparing prospective adopters to work closely with schools and education support services.
- Prospective adopters are involved in a comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process to help them understand the likely needs of children placed for adoption to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care.
- Prospective adopters are given clear information about the various processes involved in adoption such as matching, introductions and the placement of children.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live within their birth family will be valued and respected.

- A range of adoption support services to children and their adoptive families is provided in partnership with other agencies.
- Information is provided on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, their needs will change over time.
- All those affected by adoption are able to have their support needs assessed and where appropriate, services sought to assist them.
- Access to information about their adoption is made available for adopted adults in a courteous and sympathetic manner.
- The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption and that birth parents are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.
- The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.
- Services are regularly reviewed and developed in light of consultation with, and comments, compliments and complaints by, service users.

FACILITIES AND SERVICES

One Adoption North and Humber is the regional adoption agency (RAA) for the geographic area covered by North East Lincolnshire, City of York, North Yorkshire, Hull City and East Riding of Yorkshire Councils.



One Adoption teams are located in children's services offices of these five local authorities. They recruit, assess and train prospective adoptive parents and work alongside children's social workers to identify suitable prospective adopters for children who have a plan for adoption.

The family finding adoption social workers become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision making process and take the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible.

The adoption social workers work together with children's social workers to advise and plan for permanence and preparing children for adoption. The responsibility for identifying a suitable family for a child and then supporting this adoptive family is a shared task until the making of the adoption order.

A children's guide is available for all children for whom adoption is the plan and it is given to a child when the decision has been taken that adoption should be their plan. This includes a summary of what happens at each stage.

Each locality has an adoption support service advisor and support groups, and training sessions for adoptive parents are provided. The adoption teams undertake assessments for adoption support services, provide post-adoption support and also provide a contact service to facilitate the exchange of correspondence between adoptive and birth families.

Independent Adoption Support Agencies (ASA) are commissioned to provide a direct advice and counselling service to all those living within the RAA affected by adoption. This includes counselling for adopted adults who wish to access their birth records.

The Yorkshire Adoption Agency, a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), with national recognition for its expertise in assessing, advising and supporting families who wish to adopt overseas, provides advice on inter-country adoption for those living within the RAA, via a service level agreement.

RECRUITMENT POLICY

One Adoption North and Humber covers a large geographical area and aims to recruit suitable prospective adoptive families able to offer homes to children across the region needing adoption, and also, via national matching tools, to children further afield.

Enquirers can access information on adopting with One Adoption North and Humber via the website (<https://www.oneadoption.co.uk>) or calling 0345 305 2576.

One Adoption North and Humber will progress all expressions of interest in adoption promptly. General information sessions are run at frequent intervals across the region for all those interested in finding out more about adoption.

The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.

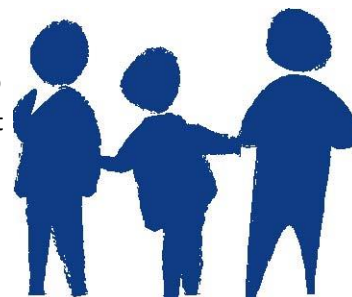
Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability, and the need to avoid undue delay.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

One Adoption North and Humber's aim is to provide a suitable adoptive family for all children requiring adoption. Enquiries about becoming an adopter are therefore welcome from all people, regardless of race, religion or sexuality; and whether single or married, employed or not. Black and ethnic minority adoptive families are under-represented nationally and locally, so we particularly welcome interest from such families.

Registrations of interest can only be considered from people who are not already pursuing an application with another agency.

Those considering adoption need to be over 21 and able to offer a permanent, stable and caring home to a child who will have experienced an unsettled start to life. Individual circumstances, including age and health, will be taken into account in deciding whether someone has the potential to offer a good adoptive home to a child. While open to enquiries from all, priority has to be given to those most likely to best meet the needs of children waiting.



In the case of married/civil partnership and unmarried couples, there is a requirement that the relationship is for longer than 12 months and the agency has to be confident of the permanence and stability of the relationship. In assessing the quality and stability of a relationship, the views of two personal referees who have known the applicants as a couple will be taken into account.



If a person is making a single application but is married or in a civil partnership, the court must be satisfied that the person's spouse or civil partner cannot be found; or the spouses/civil partners have separated, are living apart and the separation is likely to be permanent; or the person's spouse or civil partner is incapable of making an application for an adoption order by reason of physical or mental ill health.

There is a statutory prohibition to adoption if the prospective adopters or any member of their household, aged 18 or over, have been cautioned or convicted of specified offences, including sexual offences and offences against children. Details of statutory prohibition criteria will be made available on request.

Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago it was committed and the applicant's reflections on this.

By law, the applicant (or at least one of them) must have their domicile in the British Isles and the applicant (or at least one of them) must have their habitual residence in the British Isles for not less than one year before the date of the adoption application. Domicile and Habitual Residence are complex legal terms and any applicants where it is unclear whether or not they can meet these requirements will need to obtain their own legal advice regarding this. It would be expected that where applicable, applicants have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK.

Applicants may be in paid employment or not. All applicants will need to consider the financial implications of increasing their family and will be required to provide information about any County Court judgments or voluntary bankruptcy agreements.

Applicants are required to have a full medical with their GP and to undergo any further tests/checks that may be required by the adoption panel's medical adviser. The medical adviser will advise on the applicant's ability, from a general and mental health point of view, to meet the needs of a child throughout their life.

It is unlikely that a child under five, or a child vulnerable to chest complaints, would be placed in a household where one or both parents smoke (including electronic cigarettes), due to the known impact of smoking on a child's health. Applicants who have been smokers would be expected to have given up at least six months before making their application.

Where applicable, enquirers should have completed any fertility tests and treatments and had time to grieve. We recognise that this is a very individual experience so encourage enquirers to discuss their particular circumstances with us.

Enquirers who are considering whether to have a family by birth, or by adoption, will need to have clearly determined that adoption is the course that they wish to pursue, prior to making an application.

Registrations of interest are welcome from those who reside within the geographical area covered by One Adoption North and Humber, or within reasonable travelling distance.

Applicants may own their own home or live in rented accommodation. They will have to demonstrate that they have a secure home environment in which to bring up a child and will need accommodation appropriate to the number and ages of the children they are seeking to adopt. However, it is usual for sibling groups to share a bedroom.

Applicants are encouraged to gain an understanding of, and where possible experience with, children of the age group in which they are interested. It is expected that the main carer for the child will be in a position to provide full-time care for at least the first six months of the placement and to be flexible in their plans to return to work, based on the best interests of the child.

Applicants should be able to demonstrate that they can make warm relationships and have accessible and established support networks of family and friends who will be in a position to provide support with parenting.

A 'fast track process' is provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents and previously approved adopters. The necessary checks usually completed in Stage One of the approval process are undertaken concurrently with the assessment process, so these applicants bypass the Stage One process and start at the beginning of Stage Two.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

An enquiry can be made via the website or by telephone. Enquirers can speak with a social worker to discuss their circumstances and interest in adoption if they wish or proceed straight to completing an online form, to attend an Information event.

If an enquirer decides that they are interested in proceeding following an information event, they will be invited to complete an expression of interest form which starts the process of being assessed for adoption.

When the completed expression of interest form is received, an initial home visit by an adoption social worker will be arranged. There may be circumstances in which it would not be appropriate for the adoption agency to proceed with an expression of interest. In this event a written explanation of the reasons for this will be provided, along with information about other agencies that could be approached. This decision will be based on information provided by the enquirer and discussion with the visiting adoption social worker.



After the home visit, prospective adopters will be invited to submit a Registration of Interest and Stage One of the assessment process commences. This should take no longer than two months to complete. At the start of Stage One, the allocated adoption social worker and prospective adopter(s) will produce a written agreement (Stage One plan) which will set out the responsibilities of both. Within Stage One, police and health checks will be undertaken along with other references.

The prospective adopter will need to provide the names of four personal referees, two of whom are not related to them. The adoption social worker will interview each referee and make a written report of these interviews. If the prospective adopter has children at school, the school will be approached for a reference. If they work or volunteer (or have done so in the past) with children or vulnerable adults, the employer or organisation will be approached for a reference. If a prospective adopter has parented children with a previous partner, the previous partner and any adult children will need to be contacted; in some other instances it may be necessary to seek references from other ex-partners also.

The adoption social worker will also explore with the prospective adopters the preparation most appropriate for them and agree what training will be undertaken and tasks completed in Stage One.

At the end of Stage One the prospective adopters will be informed of the decision regarding their suitability to proceed to the next stage, based on the information gathered in Stage One. If the decision is not to progress, a written explanation will be given explaining the reasons they will not be able to proceed to Stage Two.

When prospective adopters have been told that they can progress to Stage Two they must notify the adoption service that they wish to proceed within six months. If they do not notify the service within the six month period and wish to pursue adoption at a later date, they will need to complete Stage One again.

Stage Two is focused on intensive training and assessment. An assessment plan will be completed with the prospective adopters which will detail the assessment process, dates of meetings/visits and agreed training. Stage Two should be completed within four months.



The completed assessment is then presented to the adoption panel. The adoption panel consists of independent members, some with personal experience of adoption, alongside social workers and other professional workers. The adoption panel considers all recommendations about adoption. Prospective adopters are encouraged to attend panel.

The assessing adoption social worker completes the prospective adopter's report and recommends whether or not the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child. The prospective adopter will be provided with a copy of this report (minus references) and invited to send observations on the report within five working days.

The panel recommends whether applicants would make suitable adopters and this recommendation is then considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The panel also offers advice to the agency on such things as the characteristics of children that it believes the prospective adopters would be best suited to parent. The Agency Decision Maker decides whether applicants are approved as adopters. This marks the end of Stage Two of the approval process.

The prospective adopters are informed of the outcome in writing. If they disagree with the decision, they have the right to request an independent review. The agency will provide a letter detailing the reasons for the decision. The prospective adopters have 40 days to make representation to the agency or ask for the matter to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism.

THE MATCHING PROCESS

An adoption social worker is assigned to an adoptive family (usually the worker who completed their assessment) and guides them through the process of considering and being matched with a child, including attendance at the adoption panel of the local authority placing the child.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

When a match is being considered, prospective adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. This report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the contact service with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adoption social workers work alongside child care social workers to identify suitable prospective adoptive families for children needing adoption. Matches for these children are considered by an adoption panel. Prospective adopters are invited to attend part of the panel meeting considering the match.

Prospective adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; foster carers; teachers, etc to enable them to make an informed decision. A life appreciation day will usually be arranged, depending on the child's age and circumstances, to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences.

If there is agreement to proceed to a match, details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters and any adoption support arrangements, will be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the Adoption Placement Report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel, and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.



When a child is placed, the adoption social worker offers support and advice in adapting to the realities of life as an adoptive family. This support will continue up to the point that a child is legally adopted and beyond this if required.

ADOPTION PANELS

The main purpose of an adoption panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- people to be approved as adoptive parents
- whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- approval of a match between children and adopters, and
- placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan.

There are two joint adoption panels in One Adoption North and Humber; one covering York and North Yorkshire and the other Hull, East Riding and North East Lincolnshire. They each have an Independent Chair with significant experience of family placement work.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience.

All applicants are invited to attend the adoption panel. The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within seven working days of receiving final minutes of the recommendation of the panel. They may make a decision different to that recommended by the panel.

The Head of Agency for One Adoption North and Humber is the Agency Decision Maker to consider the approval of prospective adopters.

Decision making for children to be matched and placed for adoption, is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's home local authority. The agency decision is notified to a child's parents, guardian, prospective adopters and social workers. They will be informed verbally of the agency decision within two working days and the decision will be confirmed in writing within five working days.

CONTACT IN ADOPTION

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information.

Some children placed for adoption retain indirect contact with their birth family by means of an agreed exchange of cards or letters sent via a contact service administered by the adoption team. Other children will continue to have direct, face-to-face contact with some members of their birth family, usually arranged via a social worker.

ADOPTION SUPPORT

Adoption social workers offer advice to adoptive families across the region and details of how to access support are available on the One Adoption website.

All adopters are invited to take part in support groups, attend training courses and annual social events. The support groups are informal and welcoming and are available for all adoptive families living in the area. Training courses cover topics such as parenting strategies, life storybooks and talking with children about adoption.

Adopted children are invited to social events where they can meet other adopted young people. There are groups for adopted young people held across One Adoption North and Humber.

Independent support and advice for adoptive families living in the One Adoption North and Humber area is provided by an independent adoption support agency. Staff in the One Adoption North and Humber teams can provide information and arrange referrals.

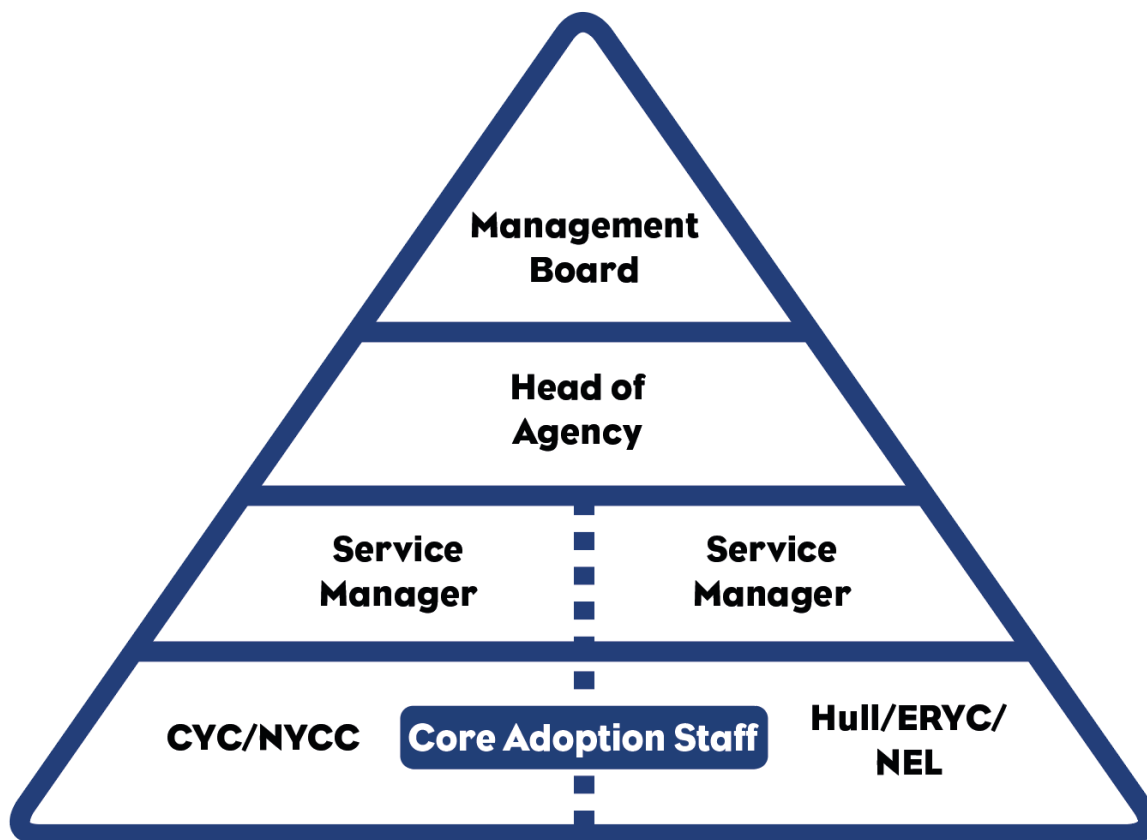
For families needing more intensive support, an adoption support needs assessment is undertaken. Information on how to request an assessment is on the One Adoption website. Adopters can access more specific support by telephone or using the online enquiry form to select their local office and then select 'adoption support' to request this.

The manager will then allocate an adoption social worker to meet with the adopters to undertake an assessment of their family's adoption support needs to identify what services would be most suitable. An agreed adoption support plan will then be identified as an outcome of the assessment.

Where therapeutic services are identified as a need, a suitable provider is selected from an Approved Provider List and an application is made to the Adoption Support Fund towards the cost of the therapy.

The adoption support social worker will work with the family around the adoption support plan. There will be a regular review of the plan.





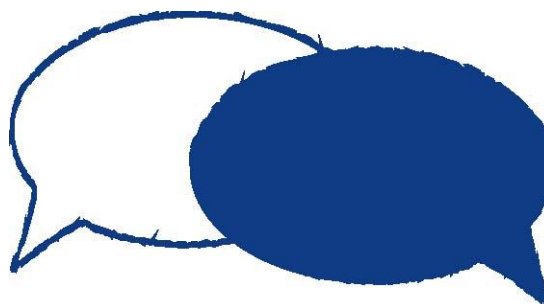
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The regional agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the five local authorities.

One Adoption North and Humber’s model retains adoption staff within each partner local authority. It delivers a single service through the Head of Agency and two Service Managers managing the entirety of the adoption service across the North and Humber area. Service Managers each manage a single team across grouped local authorities and report directly to the Head of Agency.

Adoption social workers remain employed by their local authority, reporting to a team manager, who in turn reports to one of two Service Managers, accountable to the Head of Agency.

Alongside the Head of Agency and two Service Managers, there are seven team managers and seven teams of adoption social workers and support workers working across One Adoption North and Humber. All social workers are registered with Social Work England and have an enhanced DBS check and our staff have extensive experience of social work with children and families.



There are support workers in the agency who undertake a variety of functions and have experience in working with adopted children and families. Support workers have a range of experience and relevant qualifications.

Information is available about all aspects of the adoption service online:

Online: www.oneadoption.co.uk

Phone: 0345 305 2576

Facebook: www.facebook.com/oneadoption

HEAD OF AGENCY, RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS AND REGISTERED MANAGERS

Tom Maxwell is Head of Agency, based at West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA.

Each of the local authorities making up One Adoption North and Humber has a Responsible Officer, often known as the Registered Manager, responsible for the delivery of the adoption service within that local authority area.

City of York Council's Registered Manager is **Sara Sherwood**, based at West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA.

North Yorkshire Council's Responsible Officer is **Claire Dimmey**, based at County Hall, Northallerton, DL7 8AD.

Hull City Council's Responsible Officer is **Michele Priest**, Kenworthy House, 98-104 George Street, Hull, HU1 3DT.

North East Lincolnshire Council's Responsible Officer is **Paul Cowling**, Cleethorpes Civic Offices, Knoll Street, Cleethorpes, DN35 8LN.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Responsible Officer is **Ian Wilson**, County Hall, Cross Street, Beverley, HU17 9BA.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROVISION OF SERVICE

One Adoption North and Humber produces six monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the regional adoption agency's work. These six monthly reports and an annual report are provided for the Executive/Cabinet Member in each of the five local authorities making up One Adoption North and Humber.

Adoption panels receive regular updates on the outcomes for children and prospective adopters considered at panel in the previous 6 and 12 months. Panel chairs provide bi-annual reports regarding business over the six months and meet twice a year with the Agency Decision Maker and senior managers from the agency.

Feedback is sought from young people, enquirers, adoptive parents and other service users at key points in the adoption process.

Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training and externally commissioned trainers.

A management information system is in place to ensure that the RAA is meeting targets and objectives.

Local authorities comprising the RAA are monitored by external inspections undertaken by Ofsted. The work of the RAA is considered as part of these inspections. Reports are available from the Ofsted website and direct from this service upon request.

CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

If people are unhappy with the service received they can talk to their social worker or the service manager, who will try to resolve matters. If the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily, it can be passed to the complaints team of the social worker's employing local authority, who will deal with all complaints relating to the operational delivery of the agency. The details of each local authority's complaints process can be found on that local authority's website.

Complaints relating to the strategy and policy of One Adoption North and Humber will be dealt with by the host authority, City of York Council, under its complaints procedure. It can be found on City of York Council's website.

All prospective adopters are invited to attend panel on the day their assessment is being considered. Prospective adopters wishing to adopt have an entitlement to consider their home study assessment report, which will be presented to the adoption panel. They can make written representation to the panel, via the agency adviser, about any concerns within 10 days of receiving the report.

If the Agency Decision Maker decides that somebody is not suitable to adopt, they must inform the prospective adopter giving the reasons for this and the recommendations of the panel. The Agency Decision Maker will advise the prospective adopter of the process thereafter. The prospective adopter has a 40 day period in which to decide whether to accept the decision; to make a verbal or written representation to the Agency Decision Maker or apply to the Independent Review Panel for adoption.

If the person makes a representation the Agency Decision Maker must give due consideration to any information provided before making a final decision and writing to the person with that decision. If the person disagrees with the Agency Decision Maker's final decision, they can ask for the matter to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism for adoption.

The Children’s Guide to Adoption and Guide to Adoption Support include advice on who the child can speak to regarding a concern or complaint.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AVAILABILITY

This Statement of Purpose is available in a format that is appropriate to physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and the language of children, birth parents, adoptive parents and staff, if so requested.

The Statement of Purpose is published on One Adoption North and Humber’s website and is revised annually.

One Adoption North and Humber’s policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff reflect the Statement of Purpose.

REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

Ofsted inspects local authority adoption services and can be contacted at:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

<https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-form>

Customers can make complaints directly to Ofsted.

Dame Rachel De Souza, Children’s Commissioner for England can be contacted directly by young people by emailing info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk. Freephone 0800 5280731.

Children’s Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/get-advice



Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014

Care Planning Regulations 2010

Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)

Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

Local Authority Regulations 2005

Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011

Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012

Care Planning, Placement and Case and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments)
Regulations 2013

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Care Standards Act 2000



One Adoption North and Humber

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