



Appendix 1

Adoption Services

Statement of Purpose

Adoption & Permanence Team
47B East Dulwich Road
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020 7525 4453

October 2008

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S LOOKED AFTER SERVICES

ADOPTION SERVICES STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Statement of Purpose is a requirement of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

The Adoption Agency's policies, procedures and written guidelines accurately reflect the Purpose.

All members of staff and adopters are supplied with a copy of the Statement.

Statement of Purpose

Southwark Council's Child Care Principles and Objectives

Southwark Council is committed to providing excellent standards of care to Looked After Children, to maximising their life chances and to helping them enjoy stable and permanent relationships with significant adults. The Council expects that its Adoption & Permanence Team will work in partnership with all colleagues involved in the planning and care of Looked After Children, including colleagues in health and education. Our objective is to fully develop the corporate parenting role and to realise our commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children in public care.

Equality

- Every effort must be made to place children within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, wherever that is possible. Where this is not possible, plans must be put into place to keep the child's culture alive for them.
- Children who are looked after by Southwark must be given the opportunity to develop a positive identity and high self-esteem. Children will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision.
- Children with disabilities must be placed in an environment which recognises and caters for their disability and, at the same time, promotes their social inclusion.
- The disadvantages experienced by Looked After Children must be recognised and appropriate Care Plans made – for example, education

support, mental health provision and leisure opportunities. This is fully explored with adopters, addressed at matching and reflected in the Adoption Placement Report and the Placement Plan.

- Southwark is a widely diverse community. The differences in child rearing practices, family values and attitudes, across the different racial, cultural, religious and social groups living in the borough must be respected and understood.

The Child's Welfare

- The welfare of the child will always be paramount.

Participation of the Child

- The child must be encouraged and supported to participate in decisions that affect their life, insofar as this is consistent with their age and understanding.

Partnership with Parents and Family

- Parents with parental responsibility and significant adults in the child's life must be assisted to properly participate in the planning and decision-making processes concerned with their child's future. They must be properly informed and consulted and their wishes ascertained and respected. Access to independent support is facilitated through the Adoption & Permanence Team.

NB: Whilst parents retain parental responsibility, the exercise of this and the input of other family members may be limited as a result of court imposed limitations or decisions taken by the local authority in the exercise of its duties to those children for whom it has assumed legal responsibility. Such decisions must be based primarily on the welfare of the child and not the needs of the adults.

Maintaining Contact with Birth Families

- Insofar as it is consistent with their welfare, every effort must be made to ensure that the child maintains an appropriate level and type of contact with their birth family and community

Responsibilities Towards Looked After Children

- Under the Children Act 1989 the local authority has a duty to provide services to children in need and where children cannot remain in their families, to provide accommodation. Where children cannot return to their family of origin permanent alternative care must be identified.

- Looked After Children should not be disadvantaged by that status and the local authority must act as a good parent by ensuring that the child has a high standard of care and the opportunity to maximise their life chances.

Children's Rights

- Children must be made aware of their rights as Looked After Children and have information that allows them to make representations and complaints where necessary.

The Objectives of the Southwark Council Adoption Service

- To provide a comprehensive, high quality adoption service to Southwark's residents which is sensitive to the needs of all. A service which recognises differences and is reflective of ethnic origin, culture, faith, gender, disability, economic position and sexual orientation.
- To promote a secure, permanent family life we will consider adoption as an option for all children looked after by Southwark Social Services.
- To provide information, advice and guidance to residents wanting to adopt.
- To actively recruit families for Southwark's children needing adoption.
- To provide support to all those involved in adoption. This includes children and families after an Adoption Order is made and adults affected by adoption including birth family members
- To provide properly constituted adoption panels which are enabled to assist the department in developing and implementing its adoption services through training, support and consultation.
- To arrange counselling for birth parents, adopters, adopters' birth children and adopted children
- To provide information about intermediary services for birth parents and adopted children
- To provide open services to encourage and enable consultation with our service users.
- To be accessible and accountable for all our work.

Children

Process of Referral

Work with Children Looked After by Southwark Children's Services is done by social workers based in the Children Looked After (CLA) Teams and specialist workers in the Disability Team.

As far as is safe and practicable, children are maintained within their family of origin. Where this is no longer possible then alternative carers need to be identified. The CLA Social Workers identify children where adoption is the care plan and then refer the children to the Adoption and Permanence Team. In some cases assessments of family carers are still in process but a parallel plan is required to avoid delay in family finding.

The Adoption Team Manager is a member of the Legal Planning Meeting. Her attendance ensures early identification of children for whom adoption may be a possible outcome.

The Team Manager, or a Practice Manager from the Adoption & Permanence Team convenes a referral meeting. This looks at timescales for the child, including presentation at Adoption Panel, Court Hearings and starts to put together the child's profile and the criteria for families. This meeting enables us to identify children who may need adoption so that we can begin consideration of their needs and their possible match with adopters either approved or adopters in process of approval. This information also assists in recruiting adopters. Some of these children will not need adoption but we believe that it is right to make some plans for adoption as a contingency to prevent delay should it become necessary.

The Adoption & Permanence Team offer pre-birth counselling to parents considering adoption. If the parent(s) decide to proceed with an adoption plan after the birth, the child is accommodated by a worker in the Referral & Assessment Teams and transferred to a Children's Looked After worker as soon as possible. The referral process to the Adoption & Permanence Team then follows the process outlined above.

Matching Children and Families

The Adoption & Permanence Team undertakes all recruitment of adopters. Family-finding plans for children are agreed and monitored through referral and progress meetings.

Advertisements for children have the name and telephone number of the adoption worker looking for a family for them.

Southwark is a member of the South London Adoption Consortium. Lists of children and approved adopters are circulated regularly.

The names of children are placed on the Adoption Register as soon as the Agency has decided that adoption is a suitable plan for the child if we have no Southwark approved adopter to meet their needs, In most cases for approved adopters we will continue to search for three months within our consortium for an appropriate match before placing their names on the Adoption Register.

We make use of inter-agency arrangements, both to identify families for Southwark children and to enable Southwark approved adopters to be linked with children from other agencies.

A Children's Guide to Adoption and the Process of Adoption is made available once the Adoption Plan is agreed. Children are prepared for adoption using a variety of age appropriate materials and techniques.

Adoption Panel

Southwark has two Adoption Panels, which meet on the first and third Thursdays of each month thus providing 24 panel meetings per year. To fulfil the requirements of the Adoption & Children Act (2002), the Adoption Panels recommend the approval of adopters, recommend that children are suitable for adoption and approve the match between adopters and children. They also consider the termination of approval of adopters if this is recommended following a review.

The medical adviser sits on both panels. The two panels also have joint training to assist in continuity. Panel membership complies with the requirements of the Adoption Agency Regulations, (2005) and an independent member chairs each Panel.

The Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering sits as a social worker on one Panel. Three other social workers from the department sit on the panels. This representation assists in the feedback of issues raised at Panel to the department.

The Team Manager, Adoption & Permanence Team acts as the Adoption Adviser to both Panels and a Practice Manager from the team deputises for this role. They also take issues raised by the Panel back to the department.

The Agency Decision Maker is the Business Manager for Children Looked After Services; he meets on a regular basis with the Panel chairs and vice-chairs to discuss any issues arising from the Panel recommendations and to gain an overview of the Panel's functioning. He also observes at least one meeting of each panel each year.

Annual training is provided for Panel members and Adoption & Permanence Team social workers.

Adoption Panel Activity

Cases presented to Panel	2007-8	2006-7	2005-6	2004-5	2003-4
Children:					
Decision for Adoption	34	29	31	31	25
Applicants:					
Domestic Adoption	16	11	14	15	11
Inter Country Adoption	02	02	03	04	01
Matches:	31	14	18	29	17

As can be seen from the above table the slowdown in the work of the panels experienced in 2006-7 was corrected last year. We put on extra panel time to meet the demand and social workers from the Children Looked After Teams and the Adoption and Permanence Team completed endless reports to enable a record number of children to be considered at panel.

The court delays reported last year have eased considerably and many adoptions are completed quickly once the adopters make their application to the court. We are all still adjusting to the new Act and precedents, which affect our work, are being made regularly.

Children Matched for Adoption

Total 31

Age

<i>Under 12 months</i>	<i>1 year</i>	<i>2 years</i>	<i>3 years</i>
9 (29%)	6 (20%)	1 (3%)	5 (16%)
<i>4 years</i>	<i>5 years</i>	<i>6 years</i>	<i>8 years</i>
2 (7%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)
<i>11 years</i>	<i>13 years</i>		
1 (3%)	1 (3%)		

Numbers

Single Children	Sibling Groups
19	12 (6 x 2)

Ethnicity

	White	Black & Minority Ethnic
All Children	18 (58%)	13 (42%)
Single Children	8 (42%)	11 (58%)
Siblings	10 (83%)	2 (17%)

Gender

Female	Male
15 (48%)	16 (52%)

As with last year some children have been matched this year that cannot be “placed” for adoption because there is no Placement Order (4). Another child could not move in with her adopters, who are relatives, because they were awaiting a housing transfer.(This has now been resolved).

Duty Service

A joint Adoption and Fostering duty service is provided, Monday-Friday, 9.00-5.00; this is a telephone service. There is a departmental night duty service outside these hours and the Fostering Service provides its own out of hours support service. Use of the latter is made available in the early days of introducing and placing children in adoptive placements or at times of vulnerability if requested by the Adoption social workers.

Recruitment of Adopters

Advertising campaigns are conducted for general recruitment to a pool and for specific children needing families. A recruitment strategy is agreed each year based on the needs of the department and lessons learnt from the past. A senior worker acts as a recruitment manager for both the Adoption and Fostering Services. She co-ordinates activities and devises the recruitment strategy and ensures that it is implemented.

Criteria for recruitment are kept under constant review depending on the needs of children on referral.

Systems are in place to respond promptly to enquiries.

Adoption Information Sessions are held six times per year, providing an overview of the assessment, approval and matching process as well as information about the backgrounds of Looked After Children and the opportunity to meet with an adopter.

Initial appointments (usually home visits) are offered to all applicants meeting the criteria currently in place¹ and Southwark residents who request them. Social workers discuss the outcome of these appointments with their manager and a decision is made about whether to proceed with the application. All these decisions are reported to the regular Adoption & Permanence Team meetings so that all team members are informed about the enquiries being received and the applicants being invited to the next preparation course.

Applicants are given the opportunity to meet with an experienced adoptive parent within two months of their enquiry if they have not already done so at an Information meeting.

Preparation and Training

Applicants are invited to a preparation course, which uses the BAAF model, materials and workbooks.

At the end of the course all attendees are invited to write in formally to request an adoption assessment. Those who do not feel ready to proceed now have detailed information about what it takes to be an adopter and are encouraged to return if and when they feel ready. Similarly if the workers' assessment is that the applicants are not ready they will be advised about actions they can take to assist them in preparation for an adoptive assessment at some time in the future.

We run courses at least twice a year. We are working with Adoption Consortium colleagues to share places on courses to provide a range of times for applicants to attend. We have offered places on our courses to other agencies in return for a fee, and we have bought places for our families.

It is a requirement of our Panels that all first time adopters have completed a preparation course before they recommend their approval.

If we are unable to provide a place on a course in a reasonable time we will consider beginning the assessment; the applicants do the course during the assessment. This is usually to meet the needs of foster carers applying to adopt their foster child or applicants who appear to be a match for a Southwark child who is waiting.

Assessments

Adopters' assessments are completed using the Prospective Adopters Report format developed in Southwark. Assessments are completed within eight months from initial application to approval. We encourage applicants to think

¹The criteria for accepting enquiries from prospective adopters is related to the needs of the children identified in Southwark as likely to need adoption. This is kept under regular review. Enquirers are informed of this and invited to reapply at a later date if they do not meet the criteria now but may do in the future.

about what they have to offer in terms of their personal experience, faith, culture, ethnic origin, knowledge and skills gained through their lives. If there are areas which need development, we work with them to explore ways of adding to their competencies and building their capacity. We have an open inclusive approach, evaluating applicants for what they have to offer.

We require that applicants have sufficient time and space to meet the demands of adoption. All applicants are encouraged to think carefully about their support networks, including family, and single-sex households are asked to consider who will provide role models for a different gender to them.

For safeguarding and verification purposes a number of checks are undertaken, eg CRB, Social Services, NSPCC, the local education authority and probation service will be contacted and invited to comment, two personal references are requested and referees visited. A family member will also be asked to act as a referee, they will usually be visited. The current employer will be contacted to verify the national insurance number and asked if they wish to comment on the application. All employers will be contacted if the applicant has worked with children or vulnerable adults and asked if they have comments to make; the applicant's GP will undertake an adoption medical. Previous partners will be contacted if they parented a child with the applicant.

Applicants are given a copy of their assessment report and given two weeks to add their comments. Applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel when their approval is being considered. At this panel, the recommendation will be made as to whether the applicants should be approved as adopters. Recommendations are made solely on the basis of parenting capacity. All Adoption Panel papers and draft minutes will then be passed to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision. Applicants will be informed of this decision within seven working days. Where the decision is made that the applicants should not be approved as adopters, the applicants have 40 days to make further representations to the agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism. All applicants are given information about the IRM and the Southwark Complaints Procedure.

Post Approval and Adoption Support

Identifying support needs to sustain lifelong placements is an integral part of the adoption service and assessment process.

All adopters have an allocated link worker in the Adoption & Permanence Team. Once approved, this worker helps them consider children and works jointly with the child's social worker when they are linked. Should a link not be made within a year, then the adopters will have an annual review of their approval as adopters. This review will be conducted by a different Adoption social worker.

At the point of linking, the Adoption social worker and the child's social worker carry out a needs assessment to consider support to the placement

immediately and in the future. A variety of issues must be considered - medical and therapy needs, educational needs, identity issues and life story work and contact issues are always included. These are outlined in the Southwark format for the Adoption Placement Report.

Various resources are available to Children Looked After by Southwark including the Agency Medical Adviser, the Carelink Therapy Services and the Educational Project. Any or all of these can provide appropriate support to the adoptive child, including after adoption.

Approved adopters are supported during introductions and their support needs will be reviewed at every Looked After Child Review until the making of the Adoption Order. They will receive regular visits from the child's social worker and either the Southwark Adoption social worker or their agency Adoption social worker if this is an inter-agency placement.

Financial support is considered for each match, in line with the borough's scheme. All on-going regular payments are reviewed annually. Adopters are given written information about the Southwark scheme. All adopters (except foster carers adopting) receive a £500 settling in grant for each child which is not means tested. Additional short-term financial support can be considered lasting up to a year after the placement of the child. After this, if there is a need for regular financial support, adopters are assessed for the Southwark scheme. Adopters can apply for an assessment of need for specific services or support as required by the Adoption and Children Act (2003).

Where a child is placed with adopters who live outside the borough, support by the Southwark Adoption social worker may continue for a period of three years from the date of the Adoption Order, if the adopters request it. After that time any further support is provided by the local authority in which they reside.

Adopters who live in Southwark are provided with a service until a child is 18 years of age. Regular financial support may continue until a young person is 21 years if they remain in full time education.

Adopters are given details of Adoption UK and encouraged to join local groups. Their first year's membership is paid for by Southwark after they are approved as adopters.

In addition to Adoption social workers, the Adoption & Permanence Team has two Adoption Support social workers. These workers provide support as follows:

- Organising and supporting the indirect contact service after adoption. This often involves providing support to birth family members, as well as adopters, about maintaining and making use of contact arrangements.
- Telephone counselling and advocacy with other agencies for adopters
- Co-ordinating support to direct contact arrangements where there is no Child Looked After worker eg for siblings of the adoptee.

- Counselling, access to records and intermediary services during reunions are offered to adopted adults placed by Southwark or living in Southwark.
- Undertaking Support Needs Assessments for Adopters and young people under 18 years of age for whom Southwark has responsibility.
- Undertaking financial assessments
- Supporting and fast tracking requests for services
- Responding to requests for education, health and therapeutic support by discussion and referral to identified named dedicated workers in these areas.
- Facilitating support groups for Adopters
- Developing support groups for adopted adults in conjunction with the South London Adoption Consortium.
- Arranging independent support for birth parents
- Organising an Annual Adoption Party for all Southwark approved adopters, children placed for adoption and adopters and children living in Southwark.
- Providing a Southwark Adoption Newsletter twice a year to our Adopters' mailing list.

We are always investigating ways of increasing our adoption support services. The South London Adoption Consortium has jointly commissioned the Piece of Cake course to provide independent support for Consortium adopters for the last three years. All Adoption social workers in the team also contribute to the adoption support service in particular remaining the key worker for families that they have assessed as adopters.

Overseas Adoption

Enquirers are sent an information pack outlining the procedures and fees for the service. An initial appointment is offered in the office with a social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Team.

Southwark subscribe to the Inter Country Adoption Centre and applicants are referred to their preparation groups.

Sessional workers who are experienced in overseas adoption work are commissioned to do the adoption assessments. Applicants are invited to the Panel considering their approval. This is a growing part of the Adoption Service.

Adoption social workers provide the post placement services required for children placed from abroad. These vary according to the country of origin and their requirements.

Monitoring and Evaluating the Service

Family-finding plans for children are monitored through regular progress meetings following the referral meeting and at children's statutory reviews. The latter are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Children and carers are provided with information as to how to make a complaint and this is clarified and reinforced at each review.

General statistics (including timescales) on children referred, children placed for adoption, disruptions and adoption orders, and approvals of adopters and all complaints are kept by the Team Manager, Adoption & Permanence Team and regularly reported to managers. An annual report is prepared for the Panels and the department. User evaluation forms are promoted to assist with service development.

The Adoption Panels provide annual feedback on the work of the panel to the Children Looked After Service by way of an annual report and review meeting each summer.

The Adoption & Fostering Service Manager keeps Council Members and Divisional Managers informed of the work of the Service and legislative changes through presentations at Corporate Parenting Panel and specific meetings with the Assistant Director, Specialist Children's Services and Safeguarding

Southwark operates a performance management system with annual Service Plans and Team and individual work plans. These are reviewed every six months.

The Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering, is responsible for reviews of Adoption Policy and Practice in the department. All procedures were reviewed in January of this year.

There have been no disruptions of adopted children this year or in the past 4 years.

Conversion Scheme.

Since the inception of the Southwark's Conversion Scheme in 2005, we have enabled 32 children to be adopted by their Foster carers to date. Of these, 12 children were 12 years or older at the time of the adoption order.

Adoption Orders 2007-2008

33 adoption orders were granted last year and with the 11 Special Guardianship Orders also made by the courts many children in very difficult circumstances left the care system for permanent placements where hopefully they will thrive and achieve their potential

Management of the Service

Responsibility for the Adoption Service rests with the Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering, Children Looked After Services. The Service

Manager is responsible to the Head of Children Looked After Services. The Service Manager, Susan Sinclair, is based at the Adoption and Fostering Service (address below).

The Adoption & Permanence Team is part of the Adoption and Fostering Service based at:

Children Looked After Services Office
47B East Dulwich Road, London SE22 9BZ
Reception Tel. No. 020 7525 4453

The Adoption & Permanence Team consists of one Team Manager, two Practice Managers, one Senior Practitioner (Adoption Support) and nine full time equivalent qualified social workers. The Team Manager is responsible to the Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering.

An administrative team of two senior and three executive officers supports the Adoption and Fostering Service as a whole. This administrative team is supervised by the Support Services Manager.

All Children's Services social workers in Southwark have a responsibility to assist in the provision of the Adoption Service. Referral & Assessment, Alternatives to Care and Family Resource Teams provide local services to children and families and Family Support Teams work with families who have, or are in danger of, having a child protection plan. These teams also work with some children who become looked after and eventually need an adoption plan.

Staff Details

The Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering, holds a CQSW social work qualification (1978), BA Business Studies, MA Applied Social Studies and has completed the CHSSM qualification.

In the Adoption & Permanence Team, The Team Manager, two Practice Managers, one Senior Practitioner and all social work staff have first qualifications in social work (CQSW/ Dip SW).

Ten staff have their PQ1, eight staff members have their Child Care Award or equivalent and three are undertaking the course.

Three members of staff have their Practice Teaching qualification and one member of staff is currently studying for this as part of her post qualifying training,

The Team Manager and one Practice Manager have successfully completed the Certificate in Health and Social Services Management.

The Team is committed to offering placements to student social workers. They are carefully supervised and supported by their Practice Teacher and the rest of the Team. The team has supported 1 student in the last 12 months, There are no students currently placed with the team.

All staff have enhanced CRB checks, which are updated every three years; this includes sessional and temporary staff.

All staff are registered with the General Social Care Council.

Each team member works to an individual performance assessment work plan. This is appraised every six months as is their Training and Development Plan.

The Adoption & Permanence Team is fully staffed.

Making a Formal Complaint

We always try to provide good, quality services, but we know that sometimes we get things wrong. Comments and complaints can help us to get things right. We try to resolve differences as soon as they arise between people.

If people are not happy with the service that they or a member of their family are receiving, or if they have applied for a service and been refused, they have the right to complain. They will normally receive our reply within 28 days.

There has been one allegation against an adopter this year and this is currently under investigation.

The Complaints Procedure

The complaints procedure has three stages:

1. At Stage One, the staff or agency providing the service will deal with a complaint. We can sort out many complaints quickly this way.
2. If the reply does not bring satisfaction this can go to Stage Two. A formal investigation by an investigating officer who does not work for us will commence.
3. If this still does not bring resolution, Stage Three can be started. We will refer the complaint and our reply to a review panel made up of two of our officers (not involved in the complaint) and an independent person who will chair the panel

Complaints will be in writing either by letter or using a complaints form. All service users are provided with a complaints form as a matter of routine. Complainants may also telephone a manager in the Adoption & Fostering Service or contact them by e-mail.

All formal complaints can be sent to:

The Complaints Officer
Mabel Goldwin House
49 Grange Walk
London SE1 3DY

Complaints Officers can also be contacted by telephone on 020 7525 3977 or by e-mail to - sscomplaints@southwark.gov.uk.

All service users may also contact the Local Government Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the response to their complaint by calling 0845 602 1983 or through the website at www.lgo.org.uk

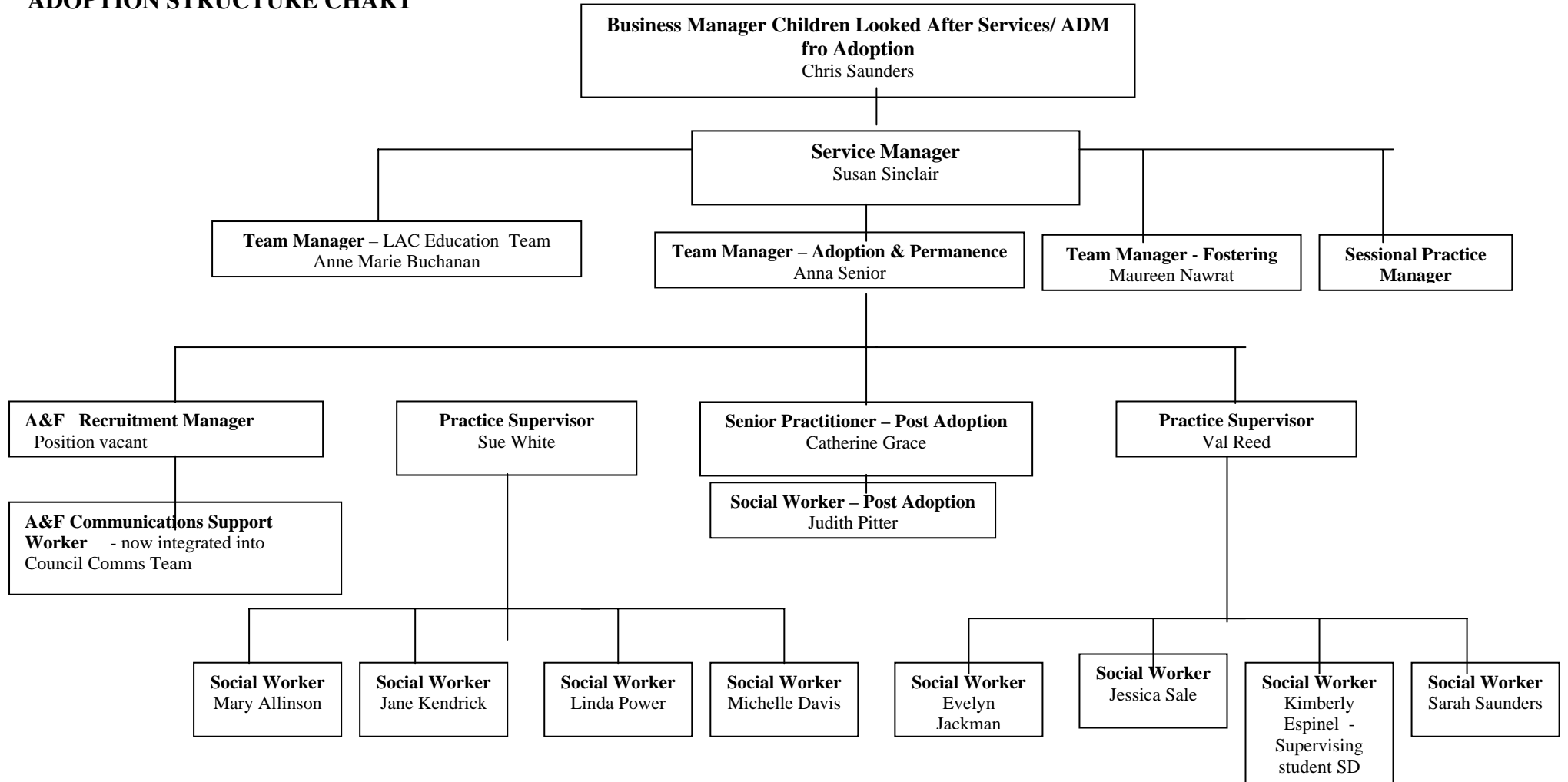
OFSTED

Ofsted is the registration authority for Southwark's Fostering Service. Any query relating to the registration of this service should be communicated to Ofsted

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Susan Sinclair, Service Manager, Adoption & Fostering 2008

ADOPTION STRUCTURE CHART



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