



Children and Young People's Department

Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

March 2010

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Wirral Adoption Service Structure and Personnel:

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The Adoption and Permanence Team:

Team Manager

Sue Leedham

3 Senior Practitioners (includes 1 new post currently being recruited to which comprises of the Adoption Support Advisor role)
10 Full time equivalent Social Workers
1 Full time equivalent Post Adoption Support Social Worker
1 Half Post - Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist
1 Social Work Assistant
3 Team Support Officers
1 Panel Administrator

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The manager and all of the Adoption and Permanence Team social workers hold a relevant social work qualification and have extensive experience of Children and families social work. There are four social workers who have recently moved into the team, who are currently undergoing induction and training in the specialist area of adoption.

The manager has completed the ILM Level 5 management course and has access to other management training.

Introduction

Wirral Borough Council Children and Young People's Department is committed to ensuring the provision of a comprehensive Adoption Service.

The Adoption Agency's services are delivered within and comply with the following legislation and guidance:

- Children Act 1989
- Adoption and Children Act 2002 and Statutory Guidance
- National Adoption Standards for England, Department of Health 2001
- National Minimum Standards and Regulations Adoption, Care Standards Act 2002
- Adoption Support Agencies Minimum Standards (England)
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005
- Adoption Act 1976
- Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 2005
- Placement of Children Regulations 1991
- Adoption Support Services (England) Regulations 2005
- Disclosure of Adoption Information (post-commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005
- Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (pre-commencement adoptions) Regulations 2005

The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to enable them to:

- Be healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution.

- Achieve economic well-being

Wirral Borough Council believes that all children and young people have the right:

- to feel safe, happy and be healthy;
- to be valued, respected and loved; and
- to have high hopes for their futures.

Adoption Service Objectives

Wirral Borough Council seeks to ensure that all children grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their needs throughout childhood and into adulthood. Where children are unable to live within their own birth family, a range of services and resources will be provided in order to assist families to resume the care of their children. Where that is not possible, the Council aims through its Adoption Service, to find permanent alternative families who will promote the child's well-being and development by providing the highest possible standards of care according to his or her individual assessed need.

The objectives of the Adoption Service are:

- To provide children with a loving, permanent alternative family that can meet their needs and enable them to achieve their full potential
- To ensure that adoption is given active consideration as an option for all children who need to be cared for away from their birth family
- To recruit adopters in sufficient numbers and from diverse backgrounds so as to enable the Service to meet the needs of Wirral children requiring adoptive placements
- To provide support to children placed for adoption and to their prospective adopters in order to ensure that the placement is secure and stable
- To provide a range of support services to birth families, adopted children and adopters, in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance
- To ensure that all Wirral children, for whom adoption is an appropriate plan, are placed for adoption, supported and adopted in a timely fashion.

Guiding Principles

The work of Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Service is guided and informed by the following principles:

- The needs of the child are the central consideration in all decision making and planning processes.
- Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood that meets all of their needs.
- A child's sense of identity should be actively promoted, with particular awareness of diversity and difference.
- Children's wishes and feelings should be sought and taken into consideration in decision-making.
- Children should only be separated from their siblings where there is clear evidence to support this as being in the interests of the children.
- Continuing contact with birth families will be promoted where it remains consistent with the welfare of the child.
- Every child is entitled to information about their birth family in order to promote their sense of identity.
- All adoptive applicants will be welcomed equally, with openness and respect. No applicant will be discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity, culture, language, gender, age, financial status or sexuality.
- All applicants will be made aware of the issues considered during the assessment process and any concerns will be shared with applicants as they arise.
- Birth families will be treated with openness and respect.
- Birth families will be given access to independent professional help, advice and counselling.
- Birth families will be fully informed about the adoption process and what their rights are in respect of the process.
- Birth families will be given information about their child's adoptive family in a way that does not compromise the safety and security of the child or the prospective adopters.
- Adoption is a complex and emotive process. Adoption Service staff will conduct themselves at all times in a manner that is sensitive, open and respectful of the wishes and feelings of all those involved.

Services Provided for Children & Adults

Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service is responsible for service delivery for adoption under these broad headings.

- Full case responsibility for the child
- Preparation of the child
- Family finding and matching
- Minimising Delays
- Information on adoption, and support
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adoptive parents
- Post adoption support services

Case Responsibility

The adoption social worker takes on full case responsibility for a child with a care plan of adoption, once care proceedings are completed, and a placement order has been granted. Prior to the completion of proceedings, the adoption social worker will work jointly with the district social worker, as agreed at the 'Tasks and Timescales' meeting which will be held once adoption or 'Twin Tracking' has been identified at the four month statutory review.

Preparation of the Child

Wirral Borough Council recognises the importance of preparing a child for adoption. All those involved in the process, including the child's social worker, the adoption family finding social worker, foster carers, health service professionals and birth family members may directly or indirectly work with or have contact with the child during the preparation period. Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Service will aid and support the work of all parties involved in planning and preparation as follows:

- All children whose care plan is adoption will have an identified social worker.
- Every child will have a care plan, which is monitored and reviewed.
- When adoption has been identified as in the child's best interest, delays will be monitored and minimised.
- Statutory visits to the child will be adhered to and monitored. These take place six weekly in the first twelve months of the placement. If the child is not adopted within twelve months, visits then take place on a quarterly basis. As a matter of good practice, children who are placed for adoption are visited weekly for six weeks at the beginning of their placement.

- Wirral Adoption Service will provide advice and guidance to all parties involved in the adoption process.
- Wirral Adoption Service will assist a child to understand the reasons for becoming looked after and why he/she cannot return to live within his or her birth family, through life journey books and later life letters etc.
- Social workers use workbooks such as “Nutmeg gets Adopted” produced by BAAF, which tells children in a simple way, about the adoption process from start to finish. Using ‘direct work’ techniques, social workers help children work through some of the strong feelings associated with separation and loss.
- All children of an age and understanding are encouraged to share their views and opinions at their Statutory Review. Their wishes and feelings are also included within the child permanence report which is presented to the Adoption Panel, for a ‘Should be Placed for Adoption’ decision.

Family Finding and Matching

Adoption social workers are invited to attend a child/children’s four month looked after children review when, adoption has either been identified as their primary care plan, or when a twin track plan is being proposed.

Following the four month review a ‘Tasks and Timescales’ meeting is held between the area social worker with case responsibility, a social worker from the Adoption and Permanence Team and chaired by one of the adoption senior practitioners.

This meeting will identify the tasks needed to take the care plan forward and who is best placed to complete those tasks. It will also set time scales for completion of tasks in order to avoid delay in care planning. At this point the Adoption and Permanence Team mainly have an advisory role.

After the Adoption Panel has recommended the adoption plan for a child/children and either parental consent or a placement order has been obtained, the family finding process will begin. An adoption team social worker will take on the role of family finder and work closely with another adoption social worker who has case responsibility for the child/children, to ensure the following processes are incorporated in the family finding plan.

- To develop a clear picture of the specific needs of the child/children so that an appropriate family can be sought who matches those needs.
- Where it is in the child’s best interests, Wirral Borough Council will look to place children with adoptive families within its boundaries. However, due to safety considerations for the child it is sometimes inappropriate to place a child for adoption within Wirral’s boundaries. In the first instance we

would look to Wirral adopters who live outside of Wirral's boundaries. If no suitable match can be identified an adoptive placement will be sought outside of Wirral.

- To feature specific, local adverts to attract potential adopters for particular children. To feature children's profiles at pre-approval training.
- To be pro-active in identifying as many potential suitable matches as possible, either within the local authority if appropriate, through the Mersey Region Consortium and Adoption 22 Consortium, or through advertising in the publications, 'Be My Parent' and Adoption UK.
- To track the process of the family finding and update the Team Manager of the Adoption Team.
- To collate details of potential adoptive families from their Prospective Adopter Reports (PAR) and to hold a short-listing meeting.
- To shortlist down to two or three families using the child's matching needs and to visit one of those families, with the foster carer of the child, where possible.

A matching meeting will then be convened within two weeks and be chaired by the Adoption and Permanence Team Manager. If a match is not proposed then another family from the shortlist will be visited.

This proposed match will then be presented to Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Panel at the earliest date available.

Minimising Delays

Wirral Borough Council recognises that delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided. We have therefore set up a monitoring system, which will:

- Identify all children whose plan for adoption has been recommended at their second looked after children review.
- Identify all children where the plan for adoption has been recommended at the Adoption Panel.
- Track those children in care proceedings, where the plan is adoption.
- Place relinquished infants children less than six months old for adoption within three months of the 'Should be Placed for Adoption Decision'.
- Monitor all children in achieving an Adoption Order.

- It is the responsibility of the Adoption and Permanence Team manager to monitor the above information.

Information and Support

Wirral Borough Council believes that children have a right to information and support throughout the adoption process. All children will be provided with a copy of BAAF Publications, 'Adoption: What it is and What it means: What happens in Court', and Wirral's 'Children's Guide to Adoption' once a decision has been taken that adoption is the plan. Where it is appropriate, children will also be given pre-placement information about prospective adopters who have been identified for them. This information will take the form of photograph albums or video recordings.

Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters

Prospective adopters in Wirral Borough Council will receive a service that responds to their interests in adoption promptly, fairly, openly and with respect.

Prospective adopters will be supplied with an information pack about adoption within twenty-four hours of their enquiries. Leaflets cover the following areas:

- Initial visits and training.
- The sorts of children in need of adoption, including a description of a range of experiences, behaviours and needs of these children.
- The process involved in becoming approved as an adoptive parent and the timescale for approval.
- The role of the Adoption Panel.

Within two weeks of an information pack reply slip being sent back, enquirers will be offered an initial visit to explain the process, highlight the Wirral Children that we need placements for and to discuss their personal circumstances in more depth. This provides an opportunity for prospective adopters to ask further questions about adoption and reach a decision as to whether or not they wish to proceed to the preparation group stage. The adoption social worker will be making an assessment about the suitability of the prospective adopters to meet the needs of Wirral's children at the same time. Sometimes a second visit is necessary at this point in order to enable prospective adopters and social workers to make an informed decision about whether it is appropriate to move on to the next stage.

Recruitment Strategy

Wirral Adoption and Permanence Team considers applications to adopt children of all ages. Applications from people who are considering adopting a sibling group or an older child or a child with a disability, are prioritised.

In terms of recruiting adopters for specific children, children's profile sheets are produced for those children for whom we would find it difficult to recruit adopters. They are sent to other Local Authorities within the Mersey Region Adoption Consortium, and Adoption 22 Consortium. The BAAF publications "Be My Parent" and Adoption UK are also used.

Prospective adopters receive information about the recruitment, assessment and approval process in Wirral.

Wirral Adoption Service will not automatically exclude on any grounds, other than those stated in the Regulations, but will pay particular attention to the following:

- Single applicants must be 21 years of age. Married applicants must also be 21 years of age, unless one of the applicants is a birth parent in which case the applicant must be 18 years of age (this type of situation is more common to step-parent adoptions). We would advise such birth parents to seek legal advice on the matter.
- It is expected that the applicants will be of sufficient health and vigour to raise a child through his or her childhood.
- Encouragement to applicants to lead a healthy lifestyle, which may include a non-smoking environment. The negative impact on health and smoking is well established. The effects of passive smoking and the role model presented by parents to children also need to be considered, especially in relation to very young children or to children with particular health problems i.e. asthma.
- Where applicants have pets in the home, we would want to ensure that they are managed appropriately and that they do not present a risk to children. We issue BAAF guidelines "Placing Children with Dog Owning Families" to all prospective applicants as necessary.
- If the applicants are childless through infertility, they are advised that embarking upon an adoption application at the same time as undergoing infertility treatment can prove to be extremely stressful. We advise applicants to complete any treatment they may be undergoing, and to have a break before beginning an adoption application.
- Applicants are expected to attend all adopters' preparation groups and will be invited to subsequent training sessions.

- Where the enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure form indicates that the applicants, or an adult member of the household, has a caution or conviction leading to Schedule 1 Offender status, the applicant will be notified in writing specifying the caution/conviction as soon as possible and stating that their application cannot proceed. Where a CRB check is received with offences, which the Head of Branch considers relevant, a decision will be made as to whether this excludes the applicant from further consideration. If so, a letter will be sent advising of the adverse reference. Where the offence is considered to be minor or some time passed, the adoption social worker will discuss the contents with the applicant and write a report to be considered by the Service Manager for Looked After Children and the Head of Branch who will decide on whether the applicant can proceed.
- Applicants who work within Children's Services will be referred onto other local adoption agencies. Applicants with other links to the Division who work for another part of Wirral Borough Council will be considered on a case-by-case basis with referral onto another agency being an option where the link is considered too close to ensure adequate independence in terms of the approval process. When applicants are identified as knowing Panel members, the Panel can then be informed in advance to ensure that contingency arrangements can be made. One option will be for applicants to be taken to another Panel. Another would be for a Panel member to stand down during the discussion of that assessment.

Consideration will be given to each applicant irrespective of marital status, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or employment. No particular type of family, parent or relationship will be reviewed as inherently better than any other.

The following checks are required in relation to potential adopters:

- Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau
- Children's Social Care and Adult Social Services
- Personal References
- Family references
- Employment references if the applicant works with children
- Applicants ex-partners reference if there were children from the relationship
- Department of Health
- Medical
- Ofsted

Preparation

Wirral Borough Council provides adopters with a comprehensive preparation course. The programme utilises materials and exercises from a training course based upon British Association for Adoption and Fostering, which is nationally recognised.

The aim of the course is to equip prospective adopters with an understanding of the complexities surrounding Looked After Children and issues relating to adoption. The preparation course is an integral part of the process of raising awareness and informing prospective adopters of the challenges and difficulties they may face, as well as the rewards of adoption. In this way, prospective adopters are helped to make informed decisions about whether they can make the lifelong commitment to an adopted child/children.

The Home Study Assessments

The Home Study consists of interviews in the home of the applicants. Wirral Adoption Service utilises the BAAF Prospective Adopters Report format and guidance for gathering a range of information about applicants, their lifestyle and their capacity to adopt. Overall, the assessment is evidence based and is intended to ensure that applicants are equipped to meet the needs of children through Adoption. Among the areas being assessed are:

- The applicants' ability to build and sustain close relationships with a child.
- The ability to acknowledge and understand how past events or experiences have impacted on the child and the actual or likely implications for parenting.
- The applicants' ability to acknowledge and understand how a child's responses to being adopted may change over time.
- The applicants' ability to acknowledge and value the child's birth heritage.
- How the applicants own personality, past experiences and relationships have shaped their personality and attitude and the implications of these for adoptive parenting.

During the Prospective Adopters Report Assessment, we ask all adopters for an undertaking to contact the Service if a child who has been placed with them for adoption dies.

Approval

Following the home study, the adoption social worker writes a comprehensive report. Applicants will receive a copy of the assessment report before it is

presented to the Adoption Panel and are invited to provide their own comments in writing on the content of the report.

Prospective adopters will be made aware that at any time during the stages from initial enquiry through to assessment, Wirral Adoption Service may decide that it is unable to support an application to be approved. In such cases, enquirers or applicants can expect full verbal or written explanations regarding the reasons for this. If enquirers or applicants remain dissatisfied, they can make representation or complains through the Council's procedures.

If applications are not approved by the Panel, applicants may appeal to the Agency Decision Maker, or the Independent Review Mechanism.

Applicants will be informed that the whole adoption procedure from enquiry to presentation at the Adoption Panel should take no more than eight months as required by the National Adoption Standards for England. They will be given an opportunity to comment on their adoption report at least twenty-eight days before an Adoption Panel. All applicants are encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel. If applicants are happy to dispense with the twenty-eight day period, then they are asked to sign a 'waiver' to say that they wish to do so.

The approval process in relation to the assessment of foster carers as adopters should not take more than four months.

The Role and Function of the Adoption Panel

The composition, terms of reference and functions of Wirral's Adoption Panel are set out in the Adoption Agency's Regulations 2005. The Adoption Panel is a body of people who are empowered to consider whether: -

- A child in the care of the Council should be made available for adoption.
- Prospective adopters should be approved to adopt, and
- Particular adopters are suitable for a particular child or children.

The recommendation of the Panel is then passed to the Agency-Decision Maker. In Wirral this is the Head of Branch, Children's Services. The Agency Decision-Maker will decide within seven days, whether or not to support the Panel's recommendation.

Wirral's Adoption Panel meets monthly and the membership includes:

- An Independent Chair
- The Medical Adviser
- Two Social Workers from Children's Social Care

- An Independent Member who has previously adopted
- An Independent Member who is an Education Professional and also a vice chair.
- An Independent Member who is a Consultant Psychotherapist
- A Wirral Borough Councillor

The Panel also has two advisers who are not members, but are present when the Panel meet, to offer advice, the legal advisor and the agency advisor.

All members are subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks. Where applicants are identified as knowing Panel members or vice versa, Panel members can be informed in advance to ensure that contingency arrangements are made.

Panel members receive at least one days training per year.

Panel members are provided with reports relating to the adoption activity of the department, including regular statistical updates.

Panel members regularly receive relevant papers and information to enable them to contribute to the formulation of policy and practice. Likewise, practice issues arising from Panel discussions are considered and actions agreed and recorded.

Inter Country Adoption

Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service will arrange a service to people who would like to adopt a child from abroad.

Inter-country adoption is forming an increasing proportion of the work of adoption agencies in the United Kingdom and Wirral Adoption Service recognise that there are many circumstances in which people may wish to adopt a child from overseas.

Prospective adopters for inter-country adoption undergo similar preparation training as domestic adopters, although additional information is given regarding cultural issues and the legislative framework surrounding inter-country adoption. Prospective adopters are also informed about the specific criteria or procedures applicable in different countries.

Foster Carers Who Wish To Adopt Their Fostered Child

Foster carers who make a formal application to adopt children in their care are entitled to the same information and preparation as other prospective adopters.

Foster carers will be assessed in the same way as any other prospective adopters. However, the Assessment will focus on the specific long-term needs of the child in question. Some of the primary considerations to be taken into consideration are:

- The quality of the attachment between the child and the foster carers.
- The wishes and feelings of the child.
- The actual or likely availability of other adopters for the child.

Foster carers making a formal application to adopt a child in their care will be assessed within four months in line with the National Adoption Standards for England.

Partner Counselling and Adoption

Where a birth parent has remarried and their partner wishes to adopt the birth parent's child, Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Service counsel the family regarding the process and whether an alternative Legal Order might be more appropriate. Families who choose to adopt are then assessed by adoption social workers, and their case is presented to Court.

Services for Approved Adopters

Following approval, adopters receive written formal notification. They will be contacted by their supervising social worker within the Adoption and Permanence Team, who will provide them with clear information about how a match is made, Consortium arrangements and the Adoption Register. Regular contact will be maintained to ensure that adopters are informed of the efforts that are being made to identify a match.

Wirral Borough Council review approved adopters, if a match has not occurred, annually.

When a potential match is identified, prospective adopters are given full written information about the child, which includes emotional, developmental and health needs. The adopters will also be provided with clear and detailed information about any behavioural issues and the implications and demands that may be placed on their family.

They receive a copy of the child permanence report, and any other relevant information which is available. Prospective adopters are provided with every

opportunity to liaise and discuss with other professionals, such as those from Education or Health as well as any foster carers who have previously been involved with the child.

Preparation work focuses on not only the prospective adopters but also any child or other adult within the household. Wirral's Adoption Service makes every effort to prepare and protect all those involved.

Approved adopters will be supported from the point that the child is introduced to them through to the making of an Adoption Order. After the adoption, direct support sometimes continues as necessary – if this is not needed, then the carers are informed that they are welcome to come back to the Adoption Team for advice, and to request support at any time. On request and subject to an assessment of needs, they will be offered or assisted in obtaining appropriate support throughout the duration of the adoptive placement. Visits to adopters with a child in placement will take place weekly at first and then reduce to monthly, depending on need. Where adopters are awaiting placement, the visiting pattern is decided in agreement with the Adoption and Permanence Team Manager.

Wirral Borough Council also offers adopters informal support, which can assist them by facilitating contact with other adopters and keep them up to date with the local and national developments in adoption. There are well-established adopters support groups in Wirral, which meet on a regular basis.

Services for Birth Families

Wirral Borough Council is committed to ensuring that birth parents are fully consulted about the care plans for their children. It is recognised that adoption is a life-long process for all those involved. As part of our commitment we include birth parents in the process.

All birth parents will be invited to convey their wishes and feelings to Looked After Children reviews on their children. If the care plan is for adoption they will be given written information about what adoption means. Birth parents will also be given the opportunity of reading what is written about them within the child permanence report presented to the Adoption Panel. They are also encouraged to contribute to what has been written. The child permanence report will be signed wherever possible by birth parents. This information will be shared with panel members. Its aim is to provide the birth parents with an opportunity to give positive information about themselves to the Adoption Panel and to their child in later life.

Counselling

Wirral Borough Council ensures that adoption counselling is made available to birth family members.

This is a delicate and sensitive role and there is an acknowledgement for the birth family's experience of grief and loss. Where it is not appropriate for Council social workers to provide this type of support then referrals can be made to the voluntary organisation, After Adoption, with whom Wirral Adoption Service has a working relationship. Birth family members often access this support as it is seen as independent from the child's social worker.

Other services provided by 'After Adoption', an independent organisation under contract with Wirral Borough Council are as follows:

- Help line service.
- Counselling.
- Support groups.

Relinquished Infants

There are occasions when mothers voluntarily opt to request their child be placed for adoption. Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service recognises that such situations must be handled with great sensitivity. Relinquishing a child for adoption is a complex situation for both birth mothers and birth fathers, and their families.

In these situations, the expectation is that a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by Panel within three months of the agency agreeing that a child 'Should be Placed for Adoption'.

Post Adoption Support Service

Post-placement, and depending upon assessed needs, a child may receive information via the Council's letterbox contact system. All letterbox arrangements entered into are child focused and must be in their best interests. Adopters and birth parents are encouraged to understand that if an older child indicates that he or she does not wish the information exchange to continue, that we should fully respect their wishes. The Adoption Service oversees the system and information is passed on between birth family members, including siblings and children or adopters acting on behalf of children. The type of information passed on, together with the frequency of exchange are set out in a written agreement, which all parties sign and are expected to adhere to. Birth family members are offered assistance to write letters to place on an adopted child's file. If the birth parent does not wish for a Wirral Borough Council social worker to undertake this task with them, then a referral will be made to contracted adoption service providers if they prefer this.

Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Service is committed to supporting children, young people and their adoptive families throughout their lives. The child's needs for Adoption Support Services are assessed at different stages of the Adoption Process. These are as follows:

- When Wirral Borough Council is considering adoption for the child.
- When it is proposed that a child be placed with particular prospective adopters.
- When a child's placement for adoption is being reviewed.
- The child's needs will also be assessed following a request from the child or the adoptive parents at any point following the making of an Adoption Order.
- Where support services are agreed, a support plan will be prepared.
- The plan, where necessary, will make reference to other services such as those provided by Education or the Health Care Trust. Such other services will, therefore, be consulted in the preparation of the plan.
- The primary goal of the provision of Adoption Support Services is to ensure the continuance and success of adoptive placements. In the event of adoption placements disrupting, a meeting will be held with a view to establishing what action can be taken, both to enable good planning for the child concerned and with a view to contributing to our understanding of factors affecting the outcome of Adoption. Our aim is to prevent adoptive placements disrupting and best practice would be to ensure that a meeting is held pre-disruption to ensure that all services possible have been utilised with the aim of preventing the breakdown.
- Financial support can be requested after an adoption order has been made and means tested assessments will be undertaken by the Adoption and Permanence Team.

Wirral's Adoption and Permanence Team provides the following support services:

- Written information about the services we provide.
- Telephone advice and support, through the Adoption Team's duty system, which operates Monday – Friday 1pm – 5pm. There is an emergency duty system for out of office hours.
- Initial assessments of children and families to establish if sign posting, advice or a full assessment is needed.
- Support for contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families.

- Therapeutic services through Child Psychotherapist or mainstream Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Counselling in preparation for tracing and intermediary services.
- Access to support groups and links to other adoptive families.
- Access to information about videos, books and training through newsletters.
- A rolling programme of training on issues of behavioural management, attachment, contact, life story work and parenting.
- A bi-monthly newsletter for both adopters and children.
- Mums and tots group – adoptive parents only.

Services for Adopted Adults

Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service provides a service to adults in relation to birth records and Schedule II counselling.

This is provided to adopted adults to enable them to:

- Obtain a birth certificate.
- Locate their adoption file.
- Trace birth family members.
- Take no further action after the counselling if they wish.

The purpose of the counselling is to ensure that the adopted person has considered the possible effect of any enquiries, both on himself/herself and on others. It is imperative that the information sought and to which the adopted person now has a legal right is provided in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Wirral Adoption Service carries out the initial searching work on Schedule II cases. If the service user wishes to contact birth family members directly, then the case is referred to 'After Adoption', where there is a service level agreement for this work.

Intermediary Services

On occasions, relatives of children who go on to be adopted try to find out information concerning their welfare or to ask for contact with them. Some of the issues arising are addressed in the Department of Health's "Intermediary Services for Birth Relatives" (2000).

If an adopted adult over the age of 25 wishes to trace birth family members, they are referred to After Adoption who will undertake the following work on our behalf:

- The Local Authority will act as the intermediary for adopted adults aged between 18 – 25 years.
- Tracing and then contacting the adoptive relative, ascertaining their wishes and feelings on the possible meeting with their birth relative.
- Facilitating and sometimes attending the meeting.
- Recording and placing records on the adopted persons file.

Where a birth relative passes on information of a medical nature as relevant to an adopted person, Wirral Adoption Service will record this on the adopted persons' file and will contact the National Health Central Register (Adoption Section) to facilitate contact between the birth relatives' General Practitioner and the adopted persons General Practitioner.

Wirral's Adoption and Permanence Team will agree to place on an adopted person's file, information to the effect that a birth relative would welcome contact from an adopted person, should they express an interest in this possibility.

An adoptee can request two types of veto's (absolute or qualified). An absolute veto would prevent an intermediary agency from making an approach under any circumstances.

With a qualified veto the Local Authority can approach under circumstances specified by the adoptee.

Arrangements for Monitoring and Evaluating the Quality and Effectiveness of Wirral Adoption Service.

Wirral Borough Council is committed to providing services, which comply with Regulations, National Adoption Standards and Adoption National Minimum Standards. We are always looking to further develop and improve the range and effectiveness of its services for anyone affected by adoption.

Monitoring and evaluation takes place in the following ways:

- Staff working in adoption have a supervision contract and are provided with supervision at least once a month. Supervision includes the completion of a Keys Issues Exchange with all workers, including administrative staff every year.

- All staff are subject to Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks prior to being offered a post within the team, and Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed at an interval not greater than every three years.
- Wirral Borough Council has good quality management information systems, which are used to track both children for whom adoption is the plan, and prospective adopters. The object of tracking is to ensure that wherever possible, delay is avoided so that children are placed and prospective adopters assessed within National Standards timescales.
- The Children and Young People's Department Quality Assurance and Review Unit and the Head of Branch (Children's Social Care), monitor the timescales affecting children. Reasons for potential or actual delay can therefore be identified, Senior Managers are informed and actions taken to remedy the situation.
- An Adoption Task Force meets on a monthly basis, consisting of the Head of Branch for Children's Service, Principal Manager Childcare, Service Manager Looked After Children, Team Manager Adoption, and any other relevant staff members. The aim of the group is to improve the Councils' performance in relation to adoption by identifying obstacles and shortfalls and ensuring that they are dealt with.

The Adoption Panel has quality assurance and monitoring functions in relation to children and prospective adopters. It is concerned with:

- Monitoring the quality of reports presented and work carried out.
- Monitoring the progress of children towards becoming adopted.
- Advising the Council in relation to practice issues.
- Performance in relation to children placed for adoption, as measured against the National Performance Assessment Framework.

Training

Wirral Borough Council attaches importance to the ongoing training of all staff involved in adoption work, seeing this as integral to the delivery and development of good quality Adoption Service.

Members of the adoption team are involved in the delivery of training to adoption panel members and area social workers.

In terms of research, Wirral Borough Council Adoption Service are willing to co-operate with appropriately authorised research programmes or to collaborate with other adoption agencies seeking to enhance our understanding of adoption issues and will explore ways of monitoring outcomes for children.

Complaints and Representations Procedure

Wirral Borough Council Children and Young People's Department has in place a Complaints and Representation Procedure and a designated Complaints Investigating Officer. The Complaints Procedure underpins all service areas and ensures comments and complaints are heard and responded to in a fair and timely way. The procedures reflect the three stages and timescales in line with current Regulations. We aim to problem solve within 10 days.

When a person using our service has a query or is not satisfied with the service they are receiving, every attempt will be made to resolve the problem. The Council have a specialised Children's Complaint Officer who will work with children to attempt to find a resolution. However, should the matter become a formal complaint, the complaints procedure would be followed. In such cases the complainant is advised to put their complaint in writing. Leaflets giving details of the procedure are made available to people who use our service, these explain the complaints process in full.

Wirral Borough Council has also produced information and leaflets for children who wish to make a comment or complaint. All Looked After Children are provided with a handbook and with this they receive information about how to make a complaint and how to obtain access to an independent person who can help them with the process from Wirral Independent Resource for Equality and Disability (WIRED) or BACUP.

All those involved in the adoption process, children, birth parents and adopters, are advised of their right to complain to OFSTED (see contact details at end). During the period March 2008- March 2010 there was just one formal complaint received regarding the adoption service.

Corporate and Management Responsibilities

Wirral Borough Council's Adoption Policy is an integral part of our commitment to Corporate Parenting.

An identified outcome within the Wirral Children and Young People's Plan is to "increase the number of permanent placements for children in Wirral and Merseyside". Part of this strategy is to increase the percentage of looked after children that are adopted.

We have clear plans and targets to complete the following:

- Improve placement choice for children.
- Promote the adoption of children.
- Increase placement stability.

- Improve the recruitment of adopters.
- Minimise all delays.

Useful Contact Information:

OFSTED

Royal Exchange Buildings St. Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA
0800 389 5690

Complaints

Children & Young People's Department
Complaints
Hamilton Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
Wirral, CH41 4FD
Telephone number: 0151 666 4239

IRM

Contract Manager,
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
Unit 4,
Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ
Tel No: 0845 450 3956

Independent advocates

WIRED
Unit 14, Cavendish Enterprise Centre
Brassey Street
Birkenhead
CH41 8BY
Tel number: 0151 670 1500

BACUP

224 Liscard Road
Wallasey
CH44 6TN
Telephone number: 0151 630 4868

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL

