

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 2009 -



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2008 - 2009

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the Nottinghamshire Adoption Service. It explains our values and principles, the services we provide and the way we provide them.

The Statement of Purpose is intended to provide information to:

- Children and young people (although a separate Children's Guide is also available)
- Birth family members
- Prospective adoptive parents
- Adoptive family members
- Agency staff
- Adoption Panel members
- Councillors
- Other adoption agencies
- Inspectors
- Members of the public

The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed and updated at least every twelve months.

The information provided meets the requirements of National Minimum Standards for Adoption and Regulations.

Your comments about the usefulness of this information and the way in which it is presented are welcome and should be sent to:

peter.hodgkinson@nottscc.gov.uk

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1. Values, aims and objectives

Nottinghamshire endorses the **values** which underpin the National Minimum Standards for Adoption:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services for those affected by adoption
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

In addition we are also committed to:

- Ensuring that services promote equality and do not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin, religion or culture.
- Improving standards of practice and service continuously to respond to changes in law, standards and best practice.
- Working in partnership with other local, regional and national organisations to improve standards and to participate fully in the development of good practice in adoption.

The **objective** of the Nottinghamshire Adoption Service is to provide an efficient, high quality adoption and adoption support service which meets the lifelong needs of all service users.

Service users are:

- Children who are waiting for an adoptive family
- Children who are placed for adoption
- Children who have been adopted
- Birth parents and other relatives of children who are to be, or have been, adopted
- Prospective adopters
- Adoptive parents
- Birth children of adoptive parents
- Adopted adults

Our **aims** are to:

- To recruit, assess and provide sufficient suitable families, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, to meet the needs of those children referred to the adoption service
- To refer children to the Regional Consortium and Adoption Register when unable to make a placement within our own resources and to avoid delay
- To work within the timescales outlined in statutory adoption guidance or to evidence clearly why this has not been achieved
- To provide a comprehensive adoption support service that is available to adopted children, adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults for whom Nottinghamshire has a statutory responsibility
- To provide a financial support scheme for the adoptive families of eligible children
- To provide an intermediary service for adopted adults and birth relatives
- To provide information and support to adopted adults and birth relatives seeking information about their own or their birth relative's adoption
- To provide a service for prospective inter-country adopters via the service level agreement with Yorkshire Adoption Agency Ltd. (formerly Doncaster Adoption and Family Welfare Society).
- To refer adoption enquiries by step-parents or relatives to the appropriate Fostering Team.

- To ensure that staff employed within the Adoption Service are appropriately recruited, trained, supervised and supported in carrying out their responsibilities.
- To involve and consult service users in the delivery and development of services
- To maintain the confidentiality and security of all adoption records

2. Children's Guide

Nottinghamshire's Children's Guide is an attractive full-colour booklet called "Understanding Adoption". This is sent to the child's worker as soon as the Adoption Panel has recommended that a child should be placed for adoption and this has been agreed by the Agency. It is intended that this book forms part of the direct work with the child in preparation for adoption.

The guide explains what adoption is and includes the following extract:

What Nottinghamshire Adoption Service wants to offer children who are adopted...

- We want to help children to understand about adoption.
- We will try our best to make sure brothers and sisters live together.
- We will remember that children's different religions and family backgrounds are important.
- We believe that children's wishes, feelings and thoughts are also important.
- Although finding a family can take a while, we will do our best to make sure children do not have to wait too long.
- We will offer support to adopted children and their families.
- If it is decided that it would be good for a child to have contact with their birth family, the social workers will do their best to help. This may mean help with passing on letters or for some children it may mean helping with visits.

3. Named Manager

The responsible manager for the Adoption Service is Rachel Coombs, Service Manager (Adoption) who is based at West Bridgford House, Loughborough Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7UN.

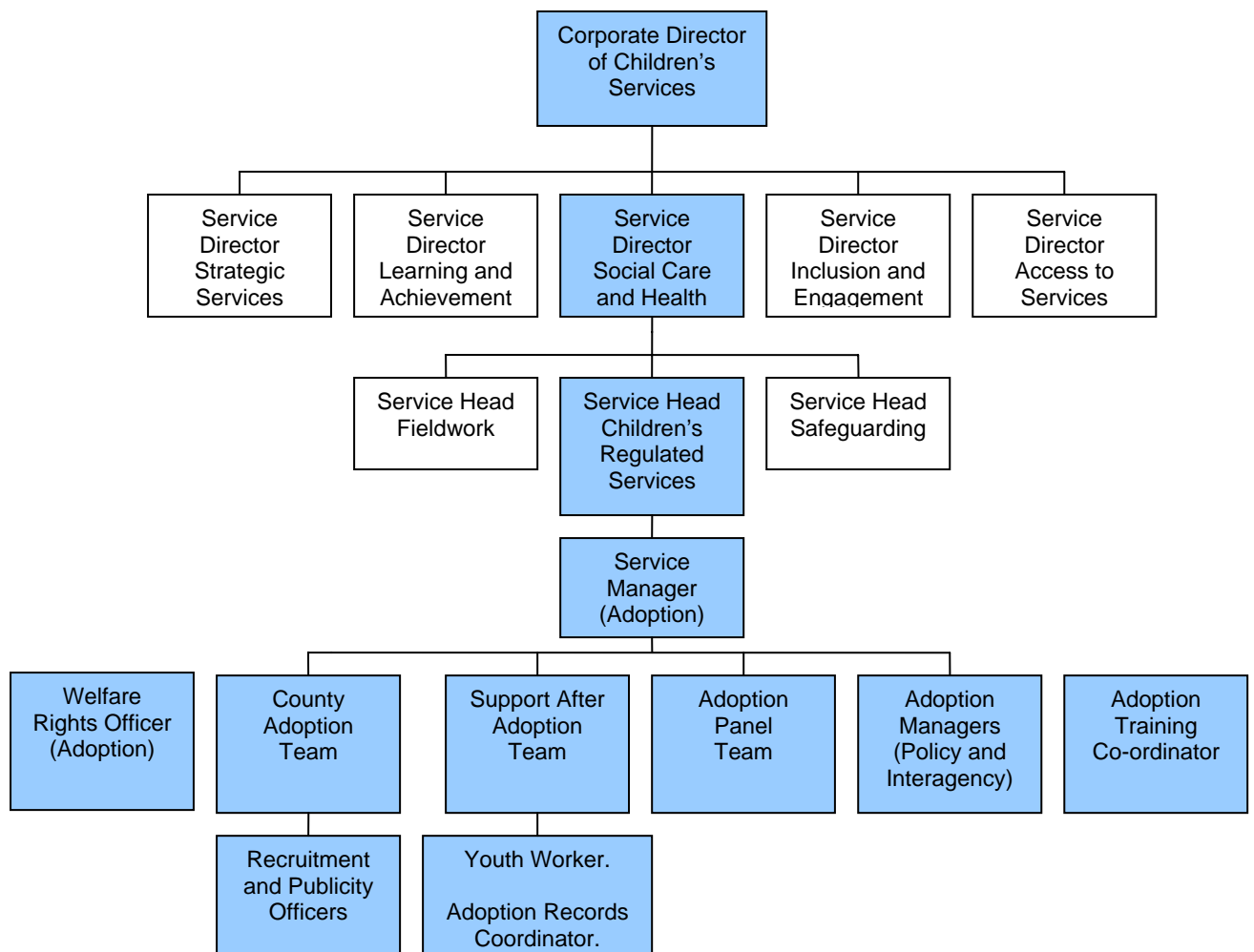
4. Relevant qualifications and experience of named manager

CQSW ,1979 - Goldsmiths College, University of London

Diploma in Management Studies, 2001 - Nottingham Trent University

Extensive experience of a range of social work settings in a number of different local authorities including 20 years of management experience in family placement.

5. Organisation and structure of the Adoption Service



The Nottinghamshire Adoption Service is based at Chadburn House, Weighbridge Road, Mansfield, Notts. NG18 1AH. The service is constituted as follows:

5.1 County Adoption Team (Forever Families)

The County Adoption Team is responsible for the recruitment, preparation, and assessment of prospective adopters throughout Nottinghamshire. Two jobshare Recruitment and Publicity Officers are also based within the Team. Once approved, prospective adopters have access to further training and support groups. Social workers continue to support prospective adopters when a child is placed with them and up to the point of the Adoption Order. Support may continue beyond this point, although responsibility is more often transferred to the Support After Adoption Team.

5.2 Support After Adoption Team

The Team is responsible for assessing the lifelong support needs of all eligible parties to adoption. In addition to information, counselling and advice, Support After Adoption provides a range of services, including an intermediary service for adopted adults and birth relatives. It is also responsible for responding to all requests for access and disclosure of information from the adoption files held in the Archive.

Support After Adoption is responsible for maintaining and supporting contact arrangements after the Adoption Order has been made. This includes the Letterbox Scheme which is a confidential postal arrangement between adoptive parents and members of the child's birth family

5.3 Adoption Panel Team

The team consists of the Panel Manager and two full-time Panel Co-ordinators.

The Panel Manager acts in the role of the Agency Advisor as outlined by Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. Responsible for the recruitment, induction, training and appraisal of panel members, and for managing all tasks associated with Adoption Panel.

5.4 Adoption Manager (Policy and Development)

Responsible for reviewing and revising the Adoption Agency's policies and procedures and disseminating these to all staff. Also co-ordinates a workforce development project within the department designed to enhance the delivery of adoption-related fieldwork.

5.5 Adoption Manager (Interagency Liaison/ASSA)

Oversees the arrangements for all interagency adoption placements (Nottinghamshire children placed with other agencies' families). Also acts as Adoption Support Services Advisor in relation to the placement of children placed by another agency with families approved by another agency who live in Nottinghamshire.

The three non-operational Adoption Managers above all act as Professional Advisers to the Agency's three Adoption Panels.

5.6 Adoption Records Co-ordinator

The Adoption Records Co-ordinator receives and processes all requests for access to information from adoption records. The Co-ordinator works closely with the Support After Adoption Team, undertaking record checks and facilitating appropriate access to adoption records in line with the requirements of National Minimum Standards (see section 16).

5.7 Welfare Rights Officer (Adoption)

The WRO is based within the Welfare Rights Service but the post is funded by the Adoption Service. The WRO enjoys close links with the Adoption Service, working one day each week with the County Adoption Team and one day with the Support After Adoption Team. The purpose is to carry out tailor-made assessments of prospective adopters' to ensure that they maximise their income by claiming all benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled. This also ensures that if they qualify for adoption financial support, the local authority is not making payments which prospective adopters are entitled to from another source.

5.8 Adoption Training Co-ordinator

Based within the Learning and Development Unit, the post-holder is responsible for working with the adoption service to develop and facilitate a programme of training courses. An annual Guide to Learning and Development in Adoption is produced and adoptive parents are encouraged to access further learning opportunities.

5.9 Youth Worker

The Youth Worker is attached to the Support After Adoption Team and has received training in the particular needs of adopted young people. The role involves planning and delivering an established but developing programme of activities for adopted young people. This

includes supporting and enabling individual young people to attend and participate.

6. Adoption Panels

Nottinghamshire has three Adoption Panels, each of which has its own independent Chair and complies with the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. Panels are timetabled to meet in 10 of the 12 months each year so that in any one month at least two of the Panels will meet.

Two training days are provided each year for Panel Members, one of which is shared with workers from the County Adoption Team. Representatives from Support After Adoption and from Children's Services Teams have also been invited when appropriate, and in the interests of promoting good communication.

Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs attend a quarterly meeting which includes the Panel Manager, Professional Advisers and Agency Decision Makers, and is chaired by the Service Manager (Adoption). This provides an opportunity for an exchange of information between the Agency and Panel Chairs and a discussion about relevant issues.

Annual appraisals are carried out on all Panel members, the Chairs and Vice Chairs.

7. Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

The current team establishments are as follows:

County Adoption Team (Forever Families)

1 x Principal Team Manager
1 x Team Manager
9 x FTE Social Workers
2.5 x FTE Admin staff

Support After Adoption Team

2 x jobshare Team Managers
6.5 x Social Workers
4 x Admin staff

Adoption Panel Team/Adoption Managers

2 x FTE Adoption Managers
2.5 x Admin staff

All professional staff are GSCC registered and meet the requirements of the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005. All staff in the adoption service have an enhanced CRB check.

8. Adoption Improvement Group

To develop and sustain knowledge and expertise in adoption within Children's Services Teams, the Adoption Service is actively involved in a programme of development for children's social workers and team managers. The Adoption Improvement Group is led by the Adoption Manager (Policy and Development) and consists of a team manager and social workers from each Locality of the Children and Young People's Department. Through access to training opportunities and regular meetings where adoption-related issues can be discussed, the aim is to equip group members to act as mentors and resources to their colleagues who hold adoption cases.

9. Procedures for the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and support of prospective adopters

a) Recruitment

The Adoption Service has a Recruitment Strategy which is regularly reviewed and updated every twelve months.

The two Recruitment and Publicity Officers work closely with the County Adoption Team to publicise the need for adoptive parents and design recruitment campaigns, liaising with local media.

The County Adoption Team has a dedicated Freephone number for recruitment purposes, but also receives calls on its office number, in addition to receiving enquiries via the Nottinghamshire County Council website. All enquirers have the opportunity to discuss their interest in adoption with a social worker and are sent a comprehensive information pack within 5 days.

Enquirers who indicate a wish to proceed receive an initial visit from a social worker within two weeks to discuss their personal circumstances in relation to their interest in applying to adopt.

b) Preparation

Enquirers are required to attend Preparation Groups which are run three or four times each year. Whilst the primary aims are to educate and inform, those who attend are made aware that this is part of the assessment process and that any issues or concerns will be discussed with them.

Preparation Groups consist of 8 sessions run over 4 days, and are based on a model developed by BAAF.

Enquirers who have attended the Preparation Groups are asked to complete an evaluation form and to confirm whether they wish to proceed with a formal application.

c) Assessment

Once it is agreed to proceed with an application a social worker will be allocated as soon as possible. Assessments may be prioritised according to the resource that the prospective adopters are offering.

The home study is undertaken in compliance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Practice Guidance for the Preparation and Assessment of Prospective Adopters.

Applicants are also provided with the following learning opportunities as part of the assessment process:

- sessions at a Family Centre where they have the opportunity for direct, supervised experience with younger children.
- meetings with approved, experienced adopters
- a Sexual Abuse Awareness Day which builds on the information provided during the Preparation Groups.

If concerns arise during the assessment

If at any stage once the application has been made concerns arise about the suitability of the prospective adopters this will be discussed with them. The social worker will need to decide, in consultation with their manager, how such concerns should be addressed. If it is not possible to resolve the issues to the agency's satisfaction, the applicants may choose to withdraw. If they are not willing to do so and the concerns remain, the social worker will prepare a brief report for the Adoption Panel. The applicants will have the opportunity to read and comment on this report and to attend Panel when it is presented. If Panel recommends that the assessment should not continue, and this view is supported by the Agency Decision Maker, the applicants have the right either to make representations to the Decision Maker, or to refer the matter to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Applicants who are making a second or subsequent application

The Agency has a policy for how such applications are pursued and provides applicants with an information leaflet which describes the process.

Foster carers who apply to adopt the child in their care

The Agency has a policy for how such applications are pursued and provides applicants with an information leaflet which describes the process.

d) Approval

Applicants are encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel. They are provided with a leaflet in advance explaining the panel process and are sent pen pictures of Panel members before they attend. After the meeting, they are asked to complete a simple evaluation form about their experience.

If approved, the prospective adopters are invited to the Contact Day which looks at the importance of contact and uses the real-life experience of approved adopters to illustrate this.

If the Panel recommendation and/or the agency decision is not to approve applicants as suitable to adopt, applicants are advised of their right to make representations either direct to the Agency Decision Maker for a review, or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Applicants are provided with full information about how to request a review.

e) Support

In addition to the various forms of support outlined so far, Support Groups, social events and opportunities for further training are provided for prospective adopters once approved and into placement.

Prospective adopters are offered free membership of Adoption UK for the first year following the making of the Adoption Order.

Adoption UK has been commissioned to develop support groups for adopters who live in Nottinghamshire.

10. Disruptions

Compared with a national disruption rate of around 20%, Nottinghamshire's rate for pre-Order disruptions has always been significantly lower. From January 2001 to December 2008 the average disruption rate is approximately 6%.

A disruption meeting is held for every pre-Order disruption and the Department aims to learn from these experiences and apply the learning in improved practice.

Post-Order disruption meetings are now being introduced and will be evaluated.

11. Arrangements for applications for Inter-Country Adoption

Nottinghamshire has a service agreement with Yorkshire Adoption Agency Ltd. (*formerly the Doncaster Adoption and Family Welfare Society*) which accepts all referrals from those people living in Nottinghamshire who are considering adopting a child from overseas. All such enquiries are re-directed to this agency.

Contact details are as follows:

Jubilee House, 1 Jubilee Road, Wheatley, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
DN1 2UE

e-mail: info@yorkshireadoptionagency.org.uk

Tel: 01302 349909

12. Arrangements for applications for Non-Agency Adoption

Applications are dealt with by experienced social workers in the Fostering Team in whose area the applicants live.

13. Adoption Support Services

The Adoption Service provides a range of support services for all parties affected by adoption as required by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005. These services are intended to reflect the life-long nature of adoption, and therefore the need for any party to access services at any stage.

a. Birth family members

Nottinghamshire provides an Independent Birth Family Counselling Service, commissioned from an external agency, which is available as soon as the agency agrees that a child should be placed for adoption.

Counselling, advice and information is available to all birth relatives from the Support After Adoption Team.

Support After Adoption provide assistance, including mediation services to birth families in relation to arrangement for contact, when a family wishes to lodge information on a child's file, or with issues arising from Letterbox contact.

b. Adopted children

Support After Adoption provide activity days and workshops for children and young people. This is undertaken in partnership with the Youth Service, which provides a dedicated Youth Worker and a core of Youth Workers with training in adoption awareness. There are four activity days a year for 8-12 year olds, and four for 13-18 year olds. A group of young people meets regularly to plan their own events for the future. The activities are designed to build self-confidence and help young people form positive relationships, by taking part in team activities together with others who have shared similar past experiences.

Support After Adoption can also provide individual support and therapeutic input when required.

c. Adopted Adults

Support After Adoption provides advice and information by phone, e-mail and face to face social worker support, regarding access to records, intermediary and reunion work.

d. Adoptive parents

Support After Adoption provides an inclusive service via a mailing list, which offers information, conference and training events. Links to other adoptive parents can be facilitated. Social work support can be offered to individual families, as well as the Letterbox contact Scheme, welfare rights assessments and the Post Adoption Linking Scheme (PALS).

14. Monitoring and evaluating the provision of services

All staff within the Adoption Service are expected to work within the principles of the User Involvement Strategy for the service. This strategy expects that service users will be consulted and involved regarding the quality of service delivery and proposals for developments. The feedback from service users is central to regular review of the quality and effectiveness of the services we are providing.

In addition to User feedback the following mechanisms are also in place:

- Adoption panel feedback on the quality of reports and aspects of agency policy and practice
- Opportunity for all workers and applicants attending Panel to comment on their experience
- Regular supervision and annual appraisal of all staff which highlights potential areas for development
- Monitoring of issues raised within the Complaints process
- Learning from Disruption Meetings

- Routine quality audit mechanisms which operate within the Children and Young People's Department.

15. Ofsted Inspection

The Adoption Service was last inspected by Ofsted in April 2008 and achieved an overall quality rating of "good"

The following ratings were achieved for each of the four areas inspected:

- Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe - Good
- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do - Outstanding
- Helping children make a positive contribution - Outstanding
- Organisation - Good

The full report can be found on the Ofsted website or by using the following link:

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_view/\(leaid\)/891](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/oxcare_providers/la_view/(leaid)/891)

16. Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records

Nottinghamshire Adoption Service adheres to the requirements of Regulations and National Minimum Standards in the way it manages adoption case records.

Paper files are stored in secure conditions within the County Council's archive facility at New Ollerton. Requests for access are made to the Adoption Records Co-ordinator who will request the necessary files from the archive. These are delivered to the Adoption Records Co-ordinator and kept securely in locked cabinets until no longer required. Access is carefully controlled and anyone who accesses the records is required to sign a Confidentiality Undertaking. A record of who has accessed the file, when and for what purpose is made and kept on the file. It is not our policy to allow adoption case records to leave the building until they are returned to the archive.

Adoption case records where there has been an Adoption Order are kept for 100 years. A policy is in place which determines the retention of case records in other circumstances. The same approach is taken with both agency and non-agency adoption.

Access to **electronic case records** is restricted at the point where a child is placed for adoption and further restricted once the Adoption Order is made. This means that records can only be accessed by those who are

entitled to do so. Beyond this, the authorisation of the Service Manager (Adoption) is required before the file can be “opened” to anyone else for a specific purpose.

17. Complaints Procedure

As part of the principle of honest, open working relationships between staff and service users, staff will attempt to address any dissatisfaction expressed by a service user informally, whilst recognising the service user’s right to make a formal complaint.

Complaints about the service received from any part of the adoption service are dealt with under Nottinghamshire’s Complaints Procedure. A service user or somebody acting on their behalf can make a complaint.

If a formal complaint is received, the first step will be for the Service Manager (Adoption) to investigate all relevant issues and attempt to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant.

If this is not possible, the complainant can contact Customer Relations to request an independent investigation. Customer Relations can be contacted by:

- Filling in the online complaints form on our website www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk
- Phoning the free hotline on **0500 355191**
- E-mailing complaints@nottscc.gov.uk
- Or writing to:

Chief Executive
Nottinghamshire County Council
County Hall
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 7QP

The outcome of the independent investigation will be reported to the service user.

If the outcome is still not acceptable to the service user, then a Review Panel will consider details of the complaint, assess whether every effort has been made to resolve it and decide if any further action is necessary.

If a Customer is still dissatisfied then they are informed of their right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman.

18. Contact details for Ofsted

Nottinghamshire's Adoption Service is subject to inspection by Ofsted whose contact details are as follows:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404045

www.ofsted.org.uk

19. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually by the Adoption Management Team, and be formally adopted by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services.

**Nottinghamshire Adoption Service
Statement of Purpose
December 2008**