



SSAFA Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

2021

In Accordance with Schedule 1 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003.



About SSAFA

Founded in 1885, SSAFA is the oldest national tri-service military charity. SSAFA provides lifelong support to men and women in the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the British Army and the Royal Air Force – and their families. SSAFA also works with veterans of all ages to help them settle into life outside of the Forces. SSAFA supports thousands of people in the UK and on military bases around the world, offering a variety of services, including welfare support, housing, health and social care services, disability support, mentoring for injured, wounded and sick service leavers, and a registered Adoption Agency.

Historical Context of the Adoption Service

The Adoption Service (henceforth referred to as the Agency) within SSAFA has been in existence for over 50 years.

The Agency originally assessed childless serving British military couples as adopters for relinquished infants born to the military and supporting civilian community, and the assessment of prospective adopters took place solely overseas. Reports on relinquished infants were prepared wherever the need arose, and infants born to the military and supporting civilian community were placed in overseas locations including Germany, Hong Kong, Cyprus and Gibraltar.

Recent Context

In 2000 SSAFA made the decision to extend its adoption work to the assessment of prospective adopters for older children and sibling groups of children in the Looked After Children system in the UK. As a result of this decision, an Adoption Management Committee was formed, Adoption Panels were established in the UK and British Forces Germany and more adoption staff were recruited. In addition to the new staff, a number of sessional workers were engaged to undertake assessments and deliver training, and social workers from the wider SSAFA Social Work Service also undertook some adoption work.

Further changes since 2007 have resulted in an increase in permanent assessing social workers and a dedicated post adoption support social worker.

The Agency now has an established team of permanent and sessional social workers who assess applicants and support adoptive families throughout the UK; the service will offer support and advice to those interested in adoption based overseas however assessment, approval and the placement support is offered once applicants are UK based.

The Agency is committed to assessing families who can provide adoptive homes for children whose parents have requested adoption and those children in the Looked After Children system with a plan for adoption. The Agency is also registered in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Agency offers post adoption support to any family eligible to access the services of SSAFA, whether or not they adopted through the Agency. Counselling is provided for any birth parent thinking of placing a child for adoption and also for adopted adults.

Legislative Framework

The Agency operates within the requirements of the following primary and secondary legislation and guidance:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations and Guidance
- Adoption Agencies Miscellaneous Amendments 2013
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (Under Associated Child Protection Guidance) 2018
- Adoption and Children Act Guidance 2011
- Adoption: National Minimum Standards 2014
- The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) 2011
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003
- The National Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection) (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 – England
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Children Act 1989
- The Adoption Act 1976
- The National Adoption Standards
- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- Joint Inspection of Children's Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Act 2006
- The National Care Standards – Adoption Agencies (Scotland)
- Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987
- The Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
- Adoption Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989
- Other relevant legislation and regulations and guidance issued to local authorities, which highlight good practice relating to services provided by both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Our Commitment to Children

Underpinning all the work of the Agency is a fundamental commitment to promoting the safety and well-being of children.

The Agency is committed to providing secure, loving homes for children through the rigorous assessment of prospective adopters and to the provision of ongoing post adoption support to families to enable adoptive parents to meet the changing needs of their children.

Vision

Fulfilling every child's right to a secure, safe and loving family.

Mission

As the only Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) supporting the Armed Forces community, the Service exists to create safe, loving and enduring adoptive families, through the rigorous assessment of prospective military adopters and life-long post adoption support.

Values

Our values are the covenants and principles by which the Adoption team and our volunteers carry out their duties.

Understanding: Compassionately supporting adopted children, prospective adopters and adoptive parents to establish how to meet their needs.

Committed and Professional: Embodying our fundamental commitment to promoting the safety and well-being of children; accountable for our actions; open, transparent and acting in the best interests of the child.

Fair: Being consistent in how we work with people; acting with integrity and not making moral judgements; not discriminating; promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Courageous:

Standing by what we believe when we need to challenge accepted wisdom; trusting in our own ability and doing the right thing. Advocating for the needs of children looked after and the rights of Forces families to have the same opportunities to access adoption as the civilian population.

Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives set out the priorities of the Service and how we go about achieving them. They underpin our key processes as we work together to provide this unique and vital Service. These objectives, like the values of the Service closely reflect that of the wider organisation, to ensure a common sense of purpose within the team, promote the concept of 'One SSAFA' and contribute to SSAFA's vision and strategic objectives.

1. Understanding Need

To ensure that our adopted children grow up as part of a loving family, who can meet their changing needs during childhood and beyond.

2. Effective Support

To recruit, train and assess prospective adopters from the Armed Forces, the reserves and those recently ex-serving, within statutory guidelines and provide effective, ongoing post adoption support to our adoptive families.

3. Awareness and Understanding

To increase the recruitment of adopters and the reputation of the Service, by raising awareness within the military community and understanding of the Armed Forces within the adoption community.

4. Sustainable Resource

To ensure the longevity of the Service through a team with the requisite skills, sufficient time and the right support to deliver our Service, underpinned by a sustainable income.

5. Collaborative Working

To work collaboratively within SSAFA and with external organisations.

Aims

- To provide secure and sustainable adoptive placements for children in the Looked After Children system. The Agency particularly seeks to place children considered 'harder to place', including older children and children in sibling groups.
- To assess prospective adopters from the British military, members of the armed forces reserves community and some ex-military personnel up to 3 years ex-service, who can meet the needs of children from the Looked After Children system.
- To provide ongoing post adoption support to all adoptive families who are eligible to access the services provided by SSAFA.

Equal Opportunities

The Agency seeks to offer a service to all eligible people irrespective of their race, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or any disability.

Registered Provider, Responsible Individual and Manager

Registered Provider

SSAFA
Queen Elizabeth House
4 St Dunstan's Hill
London
EC3R 8AD

Responsible Individual

Stephen Richards
Director of Social Care Operations
Queen Elizabeth House
4 St Dunstan's Hill
London
EC3R 8AD

Registered Manager

Jill Farrelly
Head of Adoption
Queen Elizabeth House
4 St Dunstan's Hill
London
EC3R 8AD

Registration and Charitable Status

SSAFA is a Registered Charity; its registration number is 210760.

SSAFA is also a Registered Charity in Scotland; its registration number is SC038056.

The Agency is registered with OFSTED as a Voluntary Adoption Agency for England and Wales. No conditions are in force relating to this approval. The last inspection by OFSTED took place on the 5th December 2016.

The Agency was registered in Northern Ireland on the 1st May 2003 under the Adoption (NI) Order 1987. The last inspection by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority took place in March 2015. The Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety in Northern Ireland has imposed the following conditions:

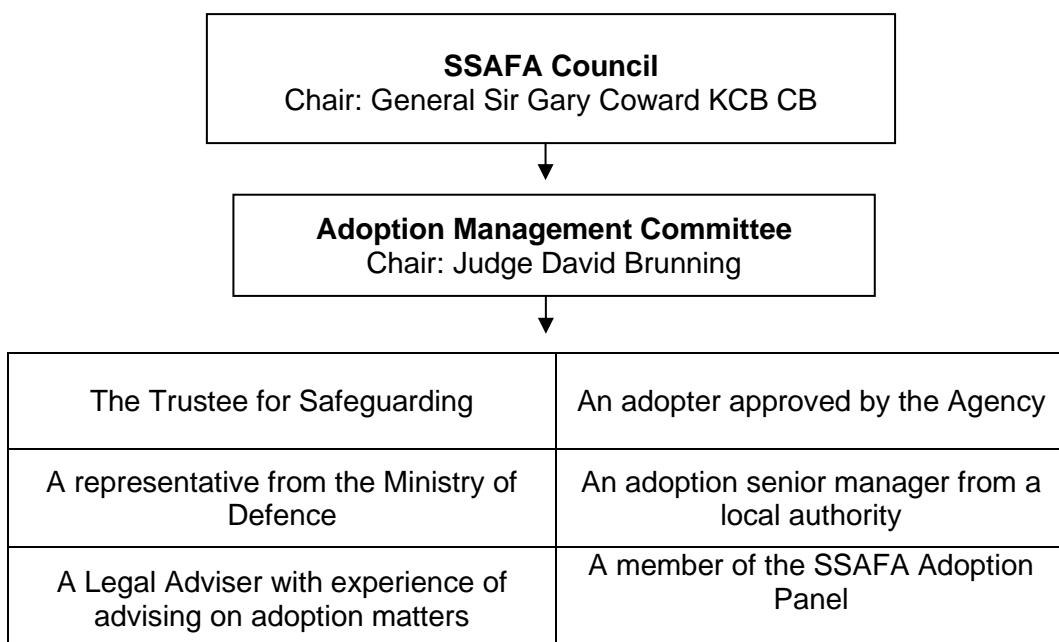
The society is required to have appropriate representation from Northern Ireland on its adoption panel and prospective adopters in Northern Ireland must be offered appropriate preparation courses.

The Agency registered with the Scottish Care Commission on the 3rd March 2008. The last inspection by the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland took place in 2019.

Management Arrangements

The strategic direction and the work of the Agency are overseen by the Adoption Management Committee, which is accountable to SSAFA Council, the overarching trustee body for SSAFA. The Committee is chaired by an independent member and membership of the Committee is made up of the Trustee for Safeguarding, service users and independent members with personal or professional experience and knowledge relevant to the work of the Agency. The Chair of the Committee reports annually to SSAFA Council. The Head of Adoption reports to the Committee quarterly and the Independent Panel Chair provides an annual report.

Adoption Management Committee Structure



A representative from one of the three Service Family organisations or Welfare Services	An independent member with experience of delivering adoption services
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The Assistant Director Specialist Children and Families Service delegates the day-to-day management of the Agency to the Head of Adoption. In the absence of the Assistant Director Specialist Children and Families Service or the Head of Adoption, a clear protocol is in place to ensure effective management of the Agency at all times.

Registered Manager, Head of Adoption

The Head of Adoption (Registered Manager), Jill Farrelly, holds the Diploma in Social Work, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of H.E., (1996), the Post Qualifying Award in Social Work, TOPSW Consortium, (2007) and a Level 5 Award in Leadership and Management, ILM (2016). Jill has worked in a number of social work settings including working with adults and children with disabilities and working with young people aged 13 -21 years who have special needs. Prior to taking up the post with the Agency in 2008, Jill worked as an Adoption and Fostering Officer for 5 years with a local authority where she recruited and assessed prospective adopters, supported approved adopters waiting for placements and undertook family finding to identify suitable families for children. Jill is registered with the Social Work England and her registration number is SW47421.

Staff Structure

Including the Head of Adoption, the Agency has a permanent establishment of six social workers and one administrator.

The Head of Adoption is a full-time post and is responsible for the strategic development and operational management of the Agency wherever the work is being undertaken. The Head of Adoption is accountable to the Assistant Director Specialist Children and Families Service and has supervisory responsibility for the Practice Manager and five Senior Social Work Practitioners.

The Practice Manager is a full-time post and is responsible for the day-to-day practice management of the Adoption Service and takes a lead on Post Adoption Support. The Practice Manager is accountable to the Head of Adoption and has supervisory responsibility for Post Adoption Support Senior Social Work Practitioner and the sessional social work staff.

The four Senior Social Work Practitioners are full and part time posts based in the UK and are responsible for undertaking the full range of adoption activity in the UK. The post holders' are accountable to the Practice Manager and Head of Adoption.

The Post Adoption Support Senior Social Work Practitioner is a part-time post based in the UK and responsible for the provision of post adoption support in the UK and overseas. The post holder is accountable to the Practice Manager.

The Adoption Panel Administrator is a full-time post and based in SSAFA's Central Office in London. The Adoption Panel Administrator is accountable to the Head of Adoption.

Staff Qualifications and Experience

Practice Manager:

Kaley Vaughton holds DipSW (2002), University of Central Lancashire. She also holds the Post Qualifying Award (PQ1) (2007) St Martins College, Lancaster. Since qualifying Kaley has worked within a number of social work settings including Initial Assessment, Looked After Child, Permanence and Adoption Teams with Lancashire County Council and later with private fostering agencies. In 2013 Kaley took up the post of Safeguarding Lead for the Diocese of Blackburn before becoming an Independent Social Work practitioner and Safeguarding trainer. Kaley joined SSAFA Adoption Service in 2019. She is registered with the Social Work England, her registration number is SW64230.

The Senior Social Work Practitioners:

Ronnie Kane joined the team in April 2017 after working for a year as a self-employed Fostering Assessor. Ronnie has a BA hons Degree in Social work and qualified in 2008. He has spent almost all his Social Work Career prior to joining SSAFA, with the charity Barnardo's where he has worked in parenting projects before taking up management roles across North East England in Children's Centres and a homeless young people's project. Ronnie has delivered, and co-written parenting group work sessions designed specifically for parents of children who have additional needs such as ASD and ADHD. Ronnie is registered with Social Work England and his registration number is SW26670.

Margaret Boyle holds a Diploma in Social Work, (2001). Since qualifying, Margaret has worked in the field of children and families social work, including work in British Forces Germany and prior to joining the Agency Margaret worked in a local authority fostering team. Margaret is registered with Social Work England and her registration number is SW40206.

Rose Tiplady holds a BSc (Hons) in Health and Sociology (2000) and a Dip SW/MA in Social Work (2002), University of North London. She also holds the Post Qualifying Award (PQ1) (2007) St Martins College, Lancaster. Since qualifying Rose has worked within the Adoption and Permanence Teams in Southend Borough Council and most recently Lancashire County Council. Rose joined SSAFA Adoption Service in 2012. Rose is registered with Social Work England and her registration number is SW68784.

Roger Blades holds a Dip. Social Work (1984) and an M.Sc. in Applied Social Studies (1986) from the University of Surrey. Since qualification he has held a variety of management posts – both middle and senior – in Buckinghamshire, Devon and Torbay Social Services, as well as spending two years as a childcare inspector for the Care Standards Commission. He also has chaired fostering panels for Torbay and Cornwall. Prior to joining SSAFA, he worked for eight years as a post- adoption social worker for Devon County. Roger is registered with Social Work England and his registration number is SW21211.

Post Adoption Support Social Worker, Frances Robinson, received her BA Hons Degree in Social Work in 2012. After qualifying Frances worked for Barnardo's a Children's Advocate specially for 'looked after' children. Since then, Frances has been working for SSAFA for over 5 years as their Additional Needs, Disability and Support Groups Service Manager. This involves supporting Service families who have a child or adult dependent with an additional need/disability. It also includes managing the SSAFA's support groups service for bereaved families of Service personnel. Frances is registered with Social Work England and her registration number is SW96038.

Business Support Staff

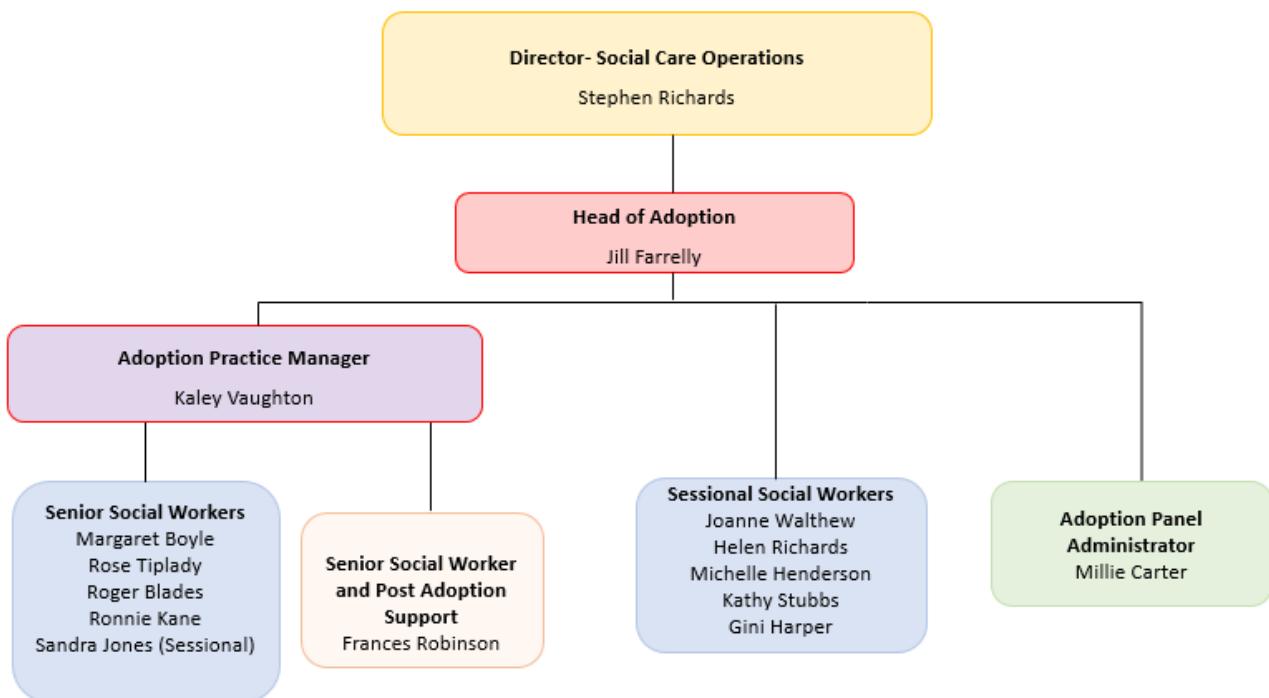
The Adoption Panel Administrator post is held by Millie Carter (full-time) and is based in the SSAFA Central Office in London.

Additional Staff

The Agency has a core of 5 sessional social workers who complete the full range of adoption work. Sessional workers are fully embedded in the Agency and attend training events and team meetings.

Every social worker, permanent or sessional, is subject to a rigorous recruitment process underpinned by safer recruitment principles and receives regular supervision from a manager experienced in adoption work.

Organisational Structure



Monitoring and Evaluation

The Agency ensures that the services delivered are efficient, effective and of a high standard. Policies and procedures provide a framework for day-to-day service delivery. Quality assurance and monitoring processes ensure the Agency adheres to the relevant policies, procedures, legislation, guidance and standards.

The quality of the work and compliance with policies and procedures in individual cases is monitored by the Head of Adoption and Team Manager. The quality of work submitted to the Adoption Panel is overseen by the Team Manager and Professional Advisor to Panel and the Independent Panel Chair provides feedback to the Agency on the quality of work submitted for Panel's consideration. Panel recommendations are scrutinised and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker who is the Principal Social Worker at SSAFA and independent of the adoption team; the Agency Decision Maker also provides feedback to the Adoption Panel on Panel deliberations and recommendations.

Supervision of staff is a priority for the Agency and a comprehensive supervision policy is in place. The supervision policy requires all current adoption cases to be considered when supervisor and supervisee meet, and the frequency of meetings is generally expected to be monthly.

The Agency is committed to involving key stakeholders in the monitoring of the services delivered and highly values the feedback received.

Service users are represented on the Adoption Management Committee and users of the service receive feedback questionnaires to comment on the quality of the service they have received. Service users are also invited to give feedback on the Agency at adoption support events.

Service users are given copies of the SSAFA leaflet *Your Service, Our commitment* and a copy of the *Complaints Procedure for Prospective Adopters* in the Initial Information Pack. Any complaints or representations are fully investigated, and the findings reported to the Director of Client Services, the staff group and annually to the Adoption Management Committee.

Trustees of SSAFA are represented on the Adoption Management Committee and also receive an annual review of the Adoption Service, authored by the Chair of the Adoption Management Committee. A Vice President of SSAFA is also a member of the Adoption Panel and Adoption Management Committee.

Adoption Panel members give feedback on the work of the Agency both in their annual appraisal and at each Panel meeting.

External agencies are offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of the services provided and the quality of the prospective adopter assessments completed by the Agency.

Employees are involved in the monitoring and development of the Agency through a number of means. The Agency has two annual development events, which all employees in the Agency attend and during which they contribute to the development of various aspects of service delivery. All employees are offered the opportunity to give feedback through annual Performance and Development Reviews and Exit Interviews when they leave the Agency.

Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters

Recruitment

The Agency is committed to recruiting adopters who can meet the needs of children in the Looked After Children system with a plan for adoption, in particular adopters who are looking to adopt older children or sibling groups of children.

The Agency uses a number of means to attract prospective adopters, including publicity events, articles in military specific and national publications, media interviews, adverts on TV and radio, presentations to key audiences, digital communications e.g. SSAFA website, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and publicity leaflets. Word of mouth is also very effective in publicising the Agency, particularly given the often-close knit communities within the military.

An annual recruitment strategy identifies key target areas for the upcoming year.

Timescales

The Prospective Adopter Assessment Process is split into separate stages; Pre-Stage One, Stage One and Stage Two. Each stage has a specific timescale of ten working days, two months and four months respectively. However, if further time is needed to assess complex issues or to allow potential prospective adopter/s (PPA/s) time to reflect on their learning, Stage Two can be extended by up to a further two months and there can be a gap between each stage, the longest gap allowable between Stage One and Stage Two being six months.

Given the flexibility within the overall timescale, an assessment can take a minimum of six months or considerably longer depending on individual PPA/s' particular circumstances; however, the clear objective is to complete assessments within six months and within the set timescales for each stage. A provisional Panel date is scheduled at the start of Stage Two based on the required timescale and the individual circumstances for the PPA/s.

The timescale for completion of assessments for applicants in Scotland is six months, but the same caveats apply for an extension of the timescale if the PPA/s need further time for reflection or complex issues arise, which need further assessment. A provisional Panel date is scheduled at the start of the assessment to ensure that assessments are completed, as far as possible, within the six-month period recommended in the National Care Standards – Adoption Agencies (Scotland).

For adopters previously assessed under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 who wish to be re-assessed, there is a 'fast track' process, which comprises of Stage Two and any additional preparation and training the Agency feels is appropriate. The timescale for completion of Stage Two remains four months, but the timescales for additional preparation and training will be discussed on an individual basis.

Assessment

The Agency prioritises the needs of children in all its work and seeks to prepare prospective adopters as well as possible for the challenges they will face. The preparation and assessment process is therefore necessarily detailed and robust and requires the full participation of PPA/s.

Pre-Stage One – Timescale Ten Working Days

Due to the vast geographical area the Agency covers, Information Evenings are not feasible. The Agency seeks to overcome this through having an accessible duty worker who can provide preliminary information for enquirers at a very early stage. Enquirers who contact the Agency can speak to the duty worker in addition to receiving the Initial Information Pack.

When the duty worker speaks to enquirers, they provide comprehensive information about the adoption process and the needs of children for whom adoption is the long-term plan. Factors which may preclude an assessment, such as certain criminal convictions or serious health conditions are explored to ensure enquirers understand at an early stage if they cannot pursue adoption as a means of completing their family. Whilst smoking is not a bar to being assessed, it will impact on the ages and needs of children local authorities may consider placing with prospective adopters who smoke.

If, following this initial conversation with a duty worker, the enquirers wish to pursue their interest in adoption, an Information Exchange Session, home visit is completed with the PPA/s during which comprehensive information is given about the potential background factors of children needing an adoptive family, the following two stages in the adoption assessment process and the expectations of the PPA/s and the Agency throughout this process.

Where the Agency assesses that it is appropriate for the PPA/s to proceed to Stage One, the PPA/s are asked to submit an Expression of Interest. Where the Agency assesses that there are reasons for the PPA/s not to proceed to Stage One, these are given both verbally and in writing to the PPA/s. There is no recourse for the PPA/s to make a representation to the Independent Review Mechanism at this stage, but should they disagree with the decision they can access the Agency's complaints procedure. If the Agency does not have the capacity to work with the PPA/s, it will refer the PPA/s to First4Adoption the National Gateway for Adoption or signpost them to another agency if the PPA/s wish this.

Stage One – Timescale Two Months

Once an Expression of Interest has been accepted, which the Agency must do within five working days of receipt, a social worker is allocated and arranges a home visit or pre-planned telephone call to the PPA/s, who are then referred to as Prospective Adopters (PAs). The social worker completes a Stage One Assessment Plan with the PA/s and provides comprehensive guidance on the requirements of the PA/s in Stage One, including the completion of a portfolio of evidence; the Portfolio Evidence Checklist is detailed at Annex A. The social worker also explains that the Agency will complete the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service and local authority checks and written references during this stage. The Agency undertakes four references, including two family references and during Stage One, referees will be asked to provide a written reference; face-to-face interviews will be undertaken in Stage Two.

All PA/s will be required to undertake a medical check; where a PA has a long-term health condition and is receiving ongoing treatment the Agency Medical Advisor may wish to contact the relevant medical professional for additional information.

Stage One is not completed until the PA/s have submitted their Portfolio of Evidence and the Agency has received all the necessary checks and references. Once all the information is received, a manager in the Agency reviews all the information and makes a decision regarding the PA/s being invited to submit an application to proceed to Stage Two.

If the Agency does not invite the PA/s to submit an application to proceed to Stage Two, it will provide the reasons for this to the PA/s both verbally and in writing. There is no recourse for the PA/s to make a representation to the Independent Review Mechanism at this stage, but should they disagree with the decision they can access the Agency's complaints procedure;

the PA/s can also contact First4Adoption the National Gateway for Adoption to raise general concerns about the process.

Adopter Preparation Training

The Agency has its own Adopter Preparation Training course and accompanying literature, which are given to each PA. In addition to the main trainer, social workers from the Agency contribute to the training course and complete training reports on each PA, which are subsequently shared with them.

The training takes place over four days at the Central Office in London and there are three training courses per year. Bed and breakfast accommodation and lunch is provided by the Agency, but PAs are expected to fund their own travel in the UK. If the requirement to fund travel expenses would compromise a PA's ability to attend the course, the Agency will consider offering some financial support.

PAs will be invited to attend the earliest Adopter Preparation Training course available within Stage One. However, completion of the Adopter Preparation Training prior to Stage Two does not guarantee that a PA will be invited to submit an application to proceed to Stage Two.

Attachment Style Interviews

The Agency, in addition to following the BAAF Prospective Adopter Report format, completes Attachment Style Interviews on all PAs.

Stage Two – Timescale Four Months

Stage Two commences when the Agency has received and accepted an application from the PA/s. Within seven working days of Stage Two commencing, the assessing social worker will have a detailed discussion with the PA/s either in a face-to-face meeting or pre-arranged telephone call. The assessing social worker and the PA/s complete a Stage Two Assessment Plan, which details the expectations of each party, the dates of each assessment visit, the planned Adoption Panel date and any relevant information relating to the individual PA/s.

Assessing social workers discuss with the PA/s the content for each of the assessment visits and 'homework' pertinent to the assessment is often set for PA/s between each session.

Additional Assessment Content

The Agency routinely interviews at least two family members as part of the assessment; this includes one extended family member for each referee but if a PA identifies extended family members who will have significant involvement in the life of any child placed including sole care of the child on occasions, these people may also be interviewed and will always be vetted through the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Line managers of the PA/s will also be asked to provide a written reference in Stage Two, as will all voluntary references where the PA has worked with children.

Adult children of the PA/s, including those who live away from home, are interviewed as they can provide useful information on the PA/s parenting skills. Younger children of the PA/s are seen as part of the assessment and their understanding and views about having an adopted sibling are sought in an age appropriate manner; information on the child is also sought from the child's school. Neither adult nor younger children can veto their parent's assessment, but the views and information they share are given due weight.

The Agency policy is to contact and seek a reference from all ex-partners with whom a PA has had a significant relationship. Where a PA has parented children with a previous partner, interviews are undertaken unless there are significant reasons why contact with a previous partner would be detrimental to a PA, for example if the relationship was abusive. In this instance, the Agency seeks information to verify the PAs account of this relationship through family members or friends who knew the PA at the time of the relationship. The Agency expects PAs to provide contact details for their ex-partners.

The Agency policy is to complete Second Opinion Visits where it is identified that further information would be beneficial to the assessment and the Adoption Panel recommendation process or concerns have been identified. Second Opinion Visits are completed once the draft Prospective Adopter Report has been completed and PAs will be informed at this stage if a second opinion visit is required.

The PAs will complete a Health and Safety questionnaire on their property, which will be verified by their assessing social worker and PAs will also be asked to complete Pet Questionnaires on some household pets.

Approval Process

The completed assessment, on which the PA/s will have had an opportunity to comment, is presented to the Adoption Panel. PA/s are expected to attend the Adoption Panel unless there are operational reasons which prevent this; however, it will not affect the Adoption Panel recommendation process if PA/s choose not to attend.

The Adoption Panel makes a recommendation in respect of the approval of PAs and the PA/s will be informed of the recommendation at the Adoption Panel.

Within seven working days, the Adoption Panel minutes and recommendations are reviewed by the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Principal Social Worker, for the final decision to be made. The PA/s will be informed orally within two working days of the decision and in writing within five working days of the decision. If the PAs are not approved the reasons will be given and the appeals process outlined; please see Summary of Complaints Procedure for details of this process.

Review of Approval

The approval of PAs is reviewed when it is considered necessary, or within twelve months if no placement has been made. An updated report, including medical information and DBS checks are completed. Whilst the Head of Adoption considers the Annual Review Report, all Annual Reviews where there are recommended changes are presented to the Adoption Panel to enable Panel members to maintain up to date knowledge of the progression of approved adopters.

Linking and Placement

Once PAs are approved, the Agency seeks permission from all PAs to place their names on the National Adoption Register. The assessing social worker for the PA/s remains their Social Worker following approval unless there is a significant reason why the worker should be changed and the PA/s and the Social Worker work closely together to identify an appropriate link.

Most children are placed through inter agency agreements. The Agency offers intensive support to PAs during the matching process, introduction stage and post placement; the

Agency may also carry out statutory visits on behalf of the placing local authority in locations which are distant.

The Agency does its utmost to ensure that PAs are given full, accurate and up to date information about the children they may have placed with them; as such, the Agency has an Expectations Document which is given to all placing authorities and which details the information the Agency expects to be provided with. The Agency also completes a file review of the placing authority's files on the children to ensure all available information has been given to PAs.

Post Placement

Once a child is placed, anonymised Placement Update Reports are presented to the Adoption Panel every three months from the date of placement until the granting of the Adoption Order.

Post Adoption Support

Post adoption support is available to all adoptive families who are eligible for SSAFA's services, even if they did not adopt through the Agency. This service may be provided by the Agency or, where appropriate, by a SSAFA social worker under the supervision and guidance of a manager in the Agency.

The Agency pays for all approved PAs to join Adoption UK for two years after their approval and for LGBT adopters to have free membership of New Family Social.

Where appropriate, the Agency facilitates contact between PAs who have adopted similar age children to establish an informal support network.

Central List and Adoption Panel

The Agency's Central List is made up of people who have either personal experience of adoption or professional experience relevant to the role of Panel. The Agency is fortunate to have Central List members who are adoptive parents, were adopted as a child or who are birth parents as well as members who represent a variety of professions including social work, the Armed Forces, health visiting, educational psychology and counselling. The Agency also has a medical advisor who is a member of the Central List. The Post Adoption Support Social worker is an agency representative on the central list.

The Agency Central List has one member from Northern Ireland as it is a requirement of the Agency's registration in Northern Ireland. The Agency is currently (August 2019) recruiting a member from Northern Ireland as the previous post holder has resigned.

The Agency has a legal advisor who is not a member of the Central List. However, his advice is received in writing before each Adoption Panel meeting or in exceptional circumstances he will attend the Adoption Panel to give advice.

The performance of all members of the Central List is reviewed annually by the Independent Panel Chair and Professional Advisor. The Independent Panel Chair's performance is reviewed by the Agency Decision Maker and Professional Advisor and includes feedback from members of the Central List.

Inter-country and Step-parent Adopters

The Agency does not complete Inter-country or Step-parent Adoption assessments. However, information and guidance about alternative agencies who do offer this service can be provided for anyone wishing to pursue this route to complete their family.

Summary of the Complaints Procedure

Corporate Complaints Procedure

The corporate complaints procedure for the SSAFA Social Work Service, of which the Agency is a part, is summarised below:

- Stage One On receipt of a complaint the member of staff receiving it will advise their Line Manager within one working day and offer to meet with the complainant within five working days.
- Stage Two If the complaint cannot be resolved the Line manager will be informed and the complainant given the opportunity to make direct contact with that Line Manager. The complaint will be recorded in the Complaints File and a Senior Manager, usually the Head of Adoption, must be advised of any policy issues which may be revealed. This stage should be completed within ten working days. If unresolved the matter proceeds to Stage Three.
- Stage Three If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the Senior Manager within the service will discuss the matter with the Director of Health and Social Care. Within five working days of receiving the complaint an Investigating Officer will be appointed. Their work should be completed within twenty-eight working days of receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible a written estimation of the timescale will be given to the complainant and member of staff. On completion of the investigation the complainant will receive written details of further action to be taken, if any, and details of how to appeal the findings if they are not satisfied.
- Stage Four An Appeal must be within twenty days of the complainant receiving the information above.

Adoption Panel

The complaints procedure relating to Adoption Panel decisions is as follows:

Where the Agency is not proposing to approve PAs (known as a Qualifying Determination) the Agency Decision Maker must send the PA/s a standard letter notifying them of this and outlining three options:

- To accept the determination
- To make a written representation to the Agency
- To apply for a review by the Independent Review Mechanism

Any representation made to the Agency or application for a review by the Independent Review Mechanism must be made within forty working days, starting on the day the standard letter was sent.

If the PA/s choose to make a representation to the Agency, their case may be re-presented to the Agency Adoption Panel; however, if they choose this option they cannot then apply to the

Independent Review Mechanism. PAs must choose which way to proceed and they are given full information about each option in order that they may make an informed decision.

The recommendations from either the Agency Adoption Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism are submitted to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision. The PA/s are then notified in writing of the decision as soon as possible after the decision has been made.

National Gateway for Adoption (First4Adoption)

If a PA or PPA is dissatisfied with the service they have received from the Agency, they can register their dissatisfaction with the National Gateway for Adoption.

Details of the Registration Authorities

The Registering Authority in England is:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone 0300 123 1231
Email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Website www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Registering Authority in Wales is:

Care Inspectorate Wales
Welsh Government office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ

Telephone 0300 7900 126
Email ciw@gov.wales
Website <https://careinspectorate.wales/>

The Registering Authority in Scotland is:

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Care Inspectorate)
Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee, DD1 4NY

Telephone 0845 600 9527
Email enquiries@careinspectorate.com

The Registering Authority in Northern Ireland is:

Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety
Child & Community Care Directorate
D1.4 Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3 SQ

Telephone 028 9052 0500
Email webmaster@health-ni.gov.uk

Date of Document

The Statement of Purpose was reviewed in January 2020.