



# Slough Children's First as a Voluntary Adoption Agency

Statement of Purpose 2023-  
24

## Summary

This Statement of Purpose explains the services Slough Children First as a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency provides, the governing principles and details of the service.

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# Slough Children First as a Voluntary Adoption Agency

## Context

Slough Children First (SCF) is a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2013). The Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2014 sets out the requirement for adoption agencies to compile a statement of purpose explaining what services are provided, the governing principles and details of the management of the Service.

The statement of purpose is for:

- Children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Social workers internal and external to the agency
- Adoption panel members
- Elected members
- Slough Children First Board Members
- Ofsted
- Members of the public

## The Aims and Objectives of the Voluntary Adoption Agency

The Voluntary Adoption Agency is part of a range of services delivered by Slough Children First which primarily seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. When it is not appropriate for a child to remain in the care of his/her birth family, a range of other permanency options will be considered, one of which is adoption. We aim to treat everyone with respect and fairness.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the legal framework for the Service. Slough Children First supports the basic principles that:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children, whenever possible, to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe, secure, stable, and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process
- Children's views should be listened to, recorded, and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs
- In addressing the process of matching, the Voluntary Adoption Agency will look at each child's needs holistically. No one aspect of their needs will take precedence over another where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all
- The Voluntary Adoption Agency is proactive in seeking to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of each child's ethnic origins, culture, language, and religion. However, no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be

identified

- The Voluntary Adoption Agency works in close partnership with children's teams across Slough Children First and with ongoing communication with independent reviewing officers to ensure that any delay in achieving permanence is avoided. We have in place fortnightly tracking meetings to ensure that we are aware of children at the earliest opportunity and have additional scrutiny for the progression of the plans. Additionally, a member of the adoption team attends permanency planning meetings that are held for every child that requires one
- Appropriate support is provided to all adopters following the placement of children by Slough Children First. The Voluntary Adoption Agency works effectively with placing authorities to maximize the long-term success of each child's placement.

## Ofsted Inspection

In February 2023, Ofsted undertook an inspection into the services provided by the VAA and found that we were Good in all aspects. The full report can be found [here](#).

## National Context

In 2021, the Government published 'Adoption Strategy, achieving excellence everywhere', which sets out a vision to deliver excellence in adoption services across England. The strategy aims to ensure that every adopted child and their family can access the services and support they need wherever they live and maximize children's outcomes in the short and long term.

Slough Children First has a strong track record of successfully placing children and we continually strive to improve our services and to deliver improved outcomes for our children and young people.

As part of the wider Government vision for the regionalization of local authority adoption services, on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the Slough Voluntary Adoption Agency joined the Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency partnership. The Slough Voluntary Adoption Agency no longer provides a recruitment and assessment service for prospective adopters, all enquires are directed in the first instance to Coram Adoption Voluntary Adoption Agency [www.coramadoption.org.uk](http://www.coramadoption.org.uk)

Our key areas for development are:

- To focus on our priority children by working closely with colleagues within Coram Ambitious for Adoption VAA to identify placements at the earliest opportunity. Where this is not possible, we work closely with neighbouring regional and voluntary adoption agencies, make use of national profiling events and adoption activity days, and ensure children are added on Linkmaker at the earliest opportunity.
- To consider early permanence placements for all children where this may be appropriate
- Increase early placement stability by providing focused adoption support delivered by an experienced social worker.
- Continue to develop the training and support offered to all adoptive families.

## Staffing

The Voluntary Adoption Agency works within the Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA partnership to provide services for Slough Children First. The Voluntary Adoption Agency have dedicated family finding Social Workers for Slough children who have a care plan of adoption and dedicated Adoption Support Social Workers who provide adoption support to adoptive families living in Slough and to adopters who are matched with children from Slough. The Voluntary Adoption Agency also provides support to birth family and adopters engaged in Letterbox contact along with an experienced worker who provides intermediary and birth records support to adopted individuals.

All staff are provided with a thorough induction and are supported by experienced staff to ensure that the principles and values of the agency are intrinsic in the way that the service works. Staff work in accordance with the agency's policies and procedures.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency actively promotes opportunities for the professional development of adoption social workers and all other social care social workers and business support staff, in order to increase their knowledge of good practice and personal development and to strive for service improvement at all times.

## Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures cover all the Voluntary Adoption Agency's activities for children, adopters and birth families, and are regularly updated to ensure that they reflect any developments in practice and legislation. Agency policies are available online internally and externally.

## Services provided by Slough Children First Voluntary Adoption Agency

All services provided are within the legal framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Children Act 1989, and associated guidance and regulations.

There is a free phone line for enquiries relating to adoption which is 0800 073 0291. There is specific information relating to adoption on the Slough Children First website:

<http://www.sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk>

Prospective adopters who make an enquiry to the Voluntary Adoption Agency receive a prompt and professional response from one of the agencies social workers and are offered advice in regards to adoption before being directed to Coram Adoption to progress the enquiry. All agency adopter assessments are now undertaken by Coram VAA Social Workers. Further information for prospective adopters can be found on Coram's Ambitious for Adoption website [www.coramadoption.org.uk](http://www.coramadoption.org.uk)

## Adoption Support Services

Slough Children First is committed to providing the full range of adoption support services to all adoptive families as required by the adoption regulations. These services are:

- Counselling, advice, and information
- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and birth parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a birthparent, birth sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child
- Services in relation to therapeutic needs of an adoptive child

- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, including making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions.

The Adoption Support Fund is part of a wider package of reforms introduced by the Government through the Children and Families Act 2014 and became available in May 2015. Slough VAA made 22 successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund during 2022.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency is committed to providing adoption support services as part of an overall integrated service for all children and families who are engaged with children's services and in the context of the local Preventive Strategy, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted children and their families also have access to mainstream services available to children and families with particular needs.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency has a dedicated worker providing counselling and support services to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service.

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is vested in the service manager for Slough's Adoption service, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the Adoption support social workers within the Voluntary Adoption Agency. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level will be raised by the ASSA to the Head of Service for Regulated Services

## Links to Other Agencies

Slough Children First are proud to be a partner agency in the regional adoption agency, Coram Ambitious for Adoption. Slough's VAA is also a member of the CVAA and all staff within the agency work openly with a number of agencies to deliver the services of the agency.

Further details of Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional adoption agency and our partnership working can be [here](#).

## Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker

Slough Children First and the Voluntary Adoption Agency's matching Panel is facilitated by Coram's Ambitious for Adoption's Adoption and Fostering Panel which is held weekly. Members of the Adoption and Fostering Panel include individuals with personal experience of adoption, adopters and adopted adults and other independent members with professional experience of adoption, fostering and looked after children. Panels are balanced as far as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and experience.

The overall functioning of the adoption panel is managed by the adoption panel adviser, including maintaining the central list of panel members and ensuring that annual reviews of panel members and training requirements are maintained in accordance with regulations.

Panel members and the Voluntary Adoption Agency's decision maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the panel on each agenda item, in the week prior to the panel meeting.

The recommendation of the panel is conveyed verbally to adopters on the day of the panel. The draft panel minutes are forwarded to the panel chair within four working days. The chair approves and finalises the minutes before they are passed to the agency decision maker.

The agency decision maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within seven working days of receiving the recommendation and final panel minutes, and this is conveyed to the adopters verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days, in line with regulatory requirements.

A decision as to whether a child who is the subject of care proceedings should be placed for adoption is made by the agency decision maker (ADM) at Slough Children First. The agency decision maker (ADM) is able to consult with the agency legal, medical and adoption advisor and to request any further information which is deemed necessary.

## LetterBox Service

The Voluntary Adoption Agency has a dedicated Social Worker who is available to support birth families with writing letters, re-establishing contact when this has lapsed and offering birth family and adopters counselling in relation to all aspects of post adoption contact. The letterbox service is supported by administration support from a Business Support Officer.

## Inter-country Adoptions

The Voluntary Adoption Agency by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

## Non-agency Adoptions

Slough Children First provides a service to people applying for a non-agency adoption (adoption not arranged through the Voluntary Adoption Agency). Initial meetings and subsequent assessments are undertaken by staff experienced in this area of work and reports are provided to the Court within timescales set. Adopters are made aware of their right to access adoption support services. The prospective adopters are also made aware of other alternatives available to them via written information and during the meeting with the social worker.

## Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

The Slough Safeguarding Partnership works together to promote the safety of Slough residents. It is the key statutory means to agree on how relevant organisations in Slough will work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and to make sure this work is effective. The Voluntary Adoption Agency ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance.

Systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Voluntary Adoption Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.

- Performance is monitored nationally via adoption scorecards that assess the effectiveness of planning and permanency (including adoption) arrangements for children
- Annual data is sent to Ofsted
- Quarterly information sent to the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB).
- Reports are provided on a bi-annual basis to SCF Board. Tracking meetings are in place to capture key milestones in the child's journey in care, including adoption progress and to avoid any unnecessary delay.
- Feedback from service users is pro-actively sought in order to inform future service provision from children, approved adopters, birth parents, adult adoptees, following birth records counselling and feedback from birth relatives, following enquiries about tracing adopted relatives. In addition, feedback is obtained and collated from adopters who attend the adoption training; adopters following life appreciation days; and from foster carers, after children have been moved on to adoption placements, regarding their views on this process.
- Children's wishes and feelings are also captured at events specifically organised for adoptive families.
- The adoption panel provides independent oversight of cases.
- Chairing of adoption disruption meetings is undertaken independently.

## Evaluating and Responding to Feedback

Where a shortfall in services is identified or an expression of dissatisfaction about a service is received by the Voluntary Adoption Agency, this is referred to/considered by the relevant manager in the first instance (including where necessary liaising with external agencies/ organisations) and where it is reasonable for the Voluntary Adoption Agency to do so, action will be taken to address the issue.

Where the expression of dissatisfaction constitutes a 'complaint' the matter will be dealt with via Slough Children First complaints procedure.

## Management of the Service

The Voluntary Adoption Agency decision maker is: Sue Butcher

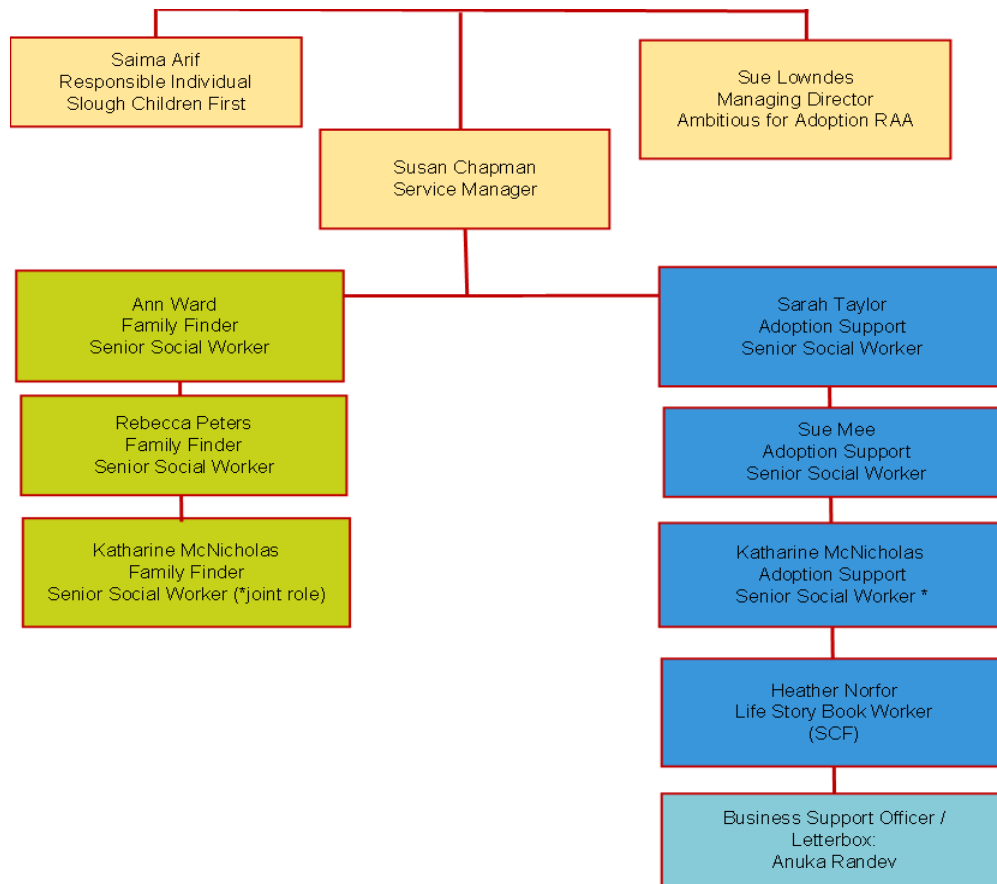
c/o Slough Children First, Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 2EL

The responsible individual is:

Saima Arif, Head of Service for Regulated Services

Slough Children First, Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 2EL





The day-to-day management of the work of the Voluntary Adoption Agency is undertaken by the Service Manager/Registered Manager who is supported through direct line management from the Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA Director and oversight from the Slough Children’s First Registered Individual.

The Voluntary Adoption Agency employs qualified, and staff significantly experienced in adoption:

- One Service Manager who manages family finding services and adoption support services.
- Two full-time Senior Social Workers, one dedicated to family finding and one dedicated to Adoption Support and letterbox.
- Three part time Senior Social Workers working as both family finders and adoption support
- One full time dedicated Life Story Book Worker
- One full time Business Support Officer

## The Complaints Procedure

All prospective adopters engaging with the Voluntary Adoption Agency and all birth parents and where appropriate family members of children for whom the Voluntary Adoption Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Slough Children’s First complaints procedure.

All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services and other relevant organisations.

Other service users are also provided with details of the complaints process as appropriate.

## Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED

National Business Unit  
Royal Exchange Buildings  
St. Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## Details of the Children's Commissioner for England

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