



Adoption & Permanent Families Service –August 2014 Statement of Purpose for Foster Care

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous amendments)
Regulations 2003 – Schedule 1; Fostering Service (England) Regulations, 2011

FOSTERING SERVICE*

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. Aims and objectives

To ensure that permanence plans for looked after children are made and implemented with minimum delay, and to influence practice and policies within Local Authorities and nationally to that end

To place and support children who are looked after by local authorities, who have suffered separation and may have been abused, neglected or have disabilities, with adopters, foster carers or members of their extended family network, with a view to maximising their capacity to live independent and fulfilling lives.

Children may be placed with:

- With Concurrent Planning carers as part of a plan to achieve permanence for them with as little delay as possible.
- Long term foster carers.
- With birth parents or relatives.
- or with respite carers to support a permanent placement.
- Adopters.

To provide counselling and support as appropriate to adults whose lives have been affected by adoption, fostering or other permanent placements.

2. Status and Constitution

Coram Family is a children's charity established by Royal Charter and Act of Parliament in 1739. The Adoption and Permanent Families Service is one of the child care services which are run by the charity. The Fostering Service is part of the Adoption and Permanent Families Service

3. Management Structure

See Annexures (B) and (C)

4. Services Provided

** The Fostering Service is an integral part of Coram Adoption and Permanent Families Service. This Statement of Purpose necessarily parallels aspects of adoption work but has a focus on foster care. Issues that are adoption – specific are omitted from this document.*

(a) Concurrent Planning Programme

The Coram Concurrent Planning Programme (CCPP) operates in partnership with the London Boroughs of Camden, Islington, Harrow, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth, Southwark, Ealing and the Tri-Borough. The CCPP offers a specialist service to children aged 0-2 years who are subject of care proceedings and where in the view of the local authority and the courts, on the basis of the past history, there is a likelihood that the children will need a permanent placement outside the birth family. In all cases there is still a prospect of the birth parents or other relatives being able to provide appropriate care within the child's timescales. Thus there is uncertainty about the outcome. The team provides dually approved carers who are approved as foster carers and also as adopters.

- The overall aim is to prevent drift and delay in achieving permanence for these children and to reduce placement moves.
- The CCPP provides concurrent planning carers who act as foster carers during the time that care proceedings are underway. They bring the children for contact regularly at Coram and are involved with the handover to the children's birth parents, helping to facilitate the child's attachment to his/her parent or relative.
- The CCPP supports the carers who receive intensive training and assessment prior to being approved as concurrent planning carers.
- The CCPP also provides support to the birth parents/relatives of the children.

This work with birth parents and relatives includes:

- (i) Supervised contact sessions
 - (ii) Encouragement of the birth parent to make use of specialist services such as drug clinics or psychiatric services.
 - (iii) Support to parents and relatives regarding their child's future and help in preparing life story books if their child is not returned to their care.
 - (iv) Support to parents/ relatives over the reunification process if the child is returned to their care.
- The CCPP provides reports on contact to the Courts and liaises closely with Children's Services, Children's Guardians and other professionals in planning for the child.

If the outcome of the care proceedings is that the child should return to birth parents/relatives, the CCPP will facilitate this, supporting all the parties. If the outcome of care proceedings is that the child cannot return to birth parents/relatives, s/he will then remain with the carers and be adopted by them. In this way the child's attachments are protected, whatever the outcome (a win/win situation for the child). In addition if the child is adopted, the adopters will have a real understanding of their child's family background to share with their child in future years. They will also be in a good position to support post adoption contact. The CCPP provides post adoption support to adoptive families and children in line with other Coram adopters.

(b) Long term fostering

For some children who are referred to Coram for permanent placement, the placement of choice may become long term foster care, not adoption. For example carers of children with complex disabilities sometimes believe they will receive more reliable financial support if the children are fostered than adopted. In addition birth parents of such children may wish to retain parental responsibility even though they are unable to provide

care for their child. They may request a foster placement rather than adoption. Likewise carers from some ethnic minority groups many chose long term fostering rather than adoption as the Western/UK concept of adoption is alien to them. Older children who feel loyalty to their birth family may not want legal severance of their tie to their birth family although they may want to remain living with their foster family. Some of these carers may later decide to apply for Residence Orders or Special Guardianship. Coram may approve and /or support foster carers for particular children in consultation with the referring local authority.

(c) Concurrent Planning Subscription Scheme

Coram established a subscription scheme in September 2012 which is open to local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join in order to support the development of concurrent planning services throughout England and the UK. The scheme provides an annual membership which entitles the subscribing authority /VAA to receive a package of consultation, training and direct service provision (eg attendance by prospective carers at preparation groups). Members of the subscription scheme are offered membership at two levels, and the exact package of support can be tailored to individual requirements. Members currently include Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Essex, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Wolverhampton, Somerset, Luton, Milton Keynes, and London Boroughs of Kingston upon Thames, Enfield, the Tri- Borough Council and Brent . Barnados is using support to establish a concurrent planning scheme for use by local authorities in the North East. Two VAAs in the North West (Adoption Matters and Caritas Care) are also using consultation to establish a local scheme for local authorities in their region. St Andrew's Children's Society I Edinburgh has also joined the scheme. A number of other local authorities are in discussion with Coram.

5. **Aims and objectives, principles and standards of care**

Objectives

To provide foster placements which are safe and which meet the child's holistic needs, whether on a short term basis prior to rehabilitation to a family member or adoption, or occasionally on a long term basis.

Principles

The work of the Fostering Service is informed by the principles of the National Fostering Standards.

- The needs, rights and welfare of children are our paramount concern.
- Children are consulted about the services they receive in ways appropriate to their age and understanding.
- We work within an equal opportunities framework and value diversity. We recruit carers who reflect the ethnic, religious, language and racial backgrounds of the children needing placement in so far as that is possible, but avoid causing unnecessary delay by searching for close 'matches' when these are not available. We support carers to promote a positive sense of the children's identity and personal history. We recruit carers on the basis of their capacity to provide care for the children; carers include single carers as well as couples who are married, in a civil partnership, unmarried, heterosexual and homosexual.

- We value the role of birth parents and relatives of the children we place. We promote contact between the foster children and their birth family to the extent that this is in the interests of the children.
- We strive to work in partnership with the birth parents of the children placed and to involve them in planning for their children where appropriate.
- Where appropriate we plan for children to return to the care of their birth parents/relatives.
- We work in partnership with local authorities who refer children to the Fostering Service and with the multi-disciplinary and multi-agency network involved with the children.
- We have a rigorous policy to safeguard children's welfare and implement Coram's Safeguarding Policy.

Standards of Care

- We aim to provide a professional service which is delivered to a high standard, efficiently, and with sensitivity to the feelings of the children and other parties involved.
- We only employ staff with the appropriate professional/vocational qualifications and experience.
- Our recruitment and retention employment policies include appropriate safeguarding checks, and ongoing opportunities for supervision, appraisal and training for staff at all levels.

6. Staff List

See Annexure A.

7. Foster Carers update

Concurrent Planning*

- (i) 92 households have been approved over the life of the project. These include 14 single carers and 78 couples, of which 2 are same sex couples and 11 black or bicultural households.
- (ii) Four households have children in placement,
- (iii) Three households are approved and available for new placements
- (iv) Three households are in the process of home study assessment.
- (v) The project has a rolling programme of recruitment and provides information and training to prospective applicants.

8. Numbers of children update

(a) Concurrent Planning*

To date 70 children have been placed in concurrent planning placements and a further 26 have been placed with adopters. In January 2014 three children were in placement.

(b) Long Term Foster Placements

None

9. **Complaints**

None

10. **Recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing carers**

RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND ASSESSMENT - SUMMARY

- (i) The welfare of the child is Coram's paramount consideration in all plans for permanence, whether via adoption, foster care or kinship placement. Promoting the welfare of the child includes taking account of the following:
 - a. Avoiding unnecessary delay and achieving early permanent placements with the minimum of broken attachments and placement;
 - b. Ensuring as much continuity for children as possible, including reflecting or promoting the child's cultural, ethnic and religious background where this does not lead to delay. We have a commitment to recruiting adopters and foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds. However where a close ethnic/religious match is not available in an appropriate time frame it is in the child's interests to consider whether other families are available who can meet most of the child's needs and also have the commitment and capacity to promote a positive ethnic/religious identity.
 - c. We value children's histories and respect their relationship with birth relatives. We believe in openness and ensuring that children understand their personal history and where appropriate, have contact with birth relatives.

- (ii) We welcome prospective adopters and carers and treat them with respect at all stages of the process. Whilst Coram's role is to prepare, educate and assess potential carers, we recognise that delivering a service to the children we aim to place depends on the motivation and resourcefulness of the carers we recruit. Our role in relation to (prospective) adopters/carers is:
 - a. To give them information to enable them in so far as possible to make decisions and choices about whether or not they wish to be assessed and approved as carers for Looked After Children.
 - b. To help them prepare for the complex task of adoptive parenting or fostering.
 - c. To advise them through the matching process and ensure they have as much information about the child as possible.
 - d. To provide support when they have children placed with them including via support groups and to refer families and children to other specialist sources of support when necessary.

- (iii) Concurrent Planning is a specialist programme which aims to ensure that decisions about children's permanent placement (with birth relatives or adopters) are reached with minimum delay, and avoiding unnecessary moves with consequent broken attachments. This gives the children the maximum opportunity to develop secure attachments.

Initial Response

All enquiries are dealt with promptly and helpfully – whether by telephone, letter or e-mail. Telephone enquiries are dealt with on the same day if at all possible. Letter and email enquiries are dealt with within five working days by telephone contact and also mailing of an information

pack. Enquirers are told about concurrent planning as well as adoption. We prioritise enquiries from black and bi-cultural applicants. Enquirers from outside our area are referred to First for Adoption, BAAF, or other agencies where appropriate.

The Concurrent Planning Project in London works closely with the adoption team to co-ordinate the initial response to enquiries – all enquirers whether regarding adoption or Concurrent Planning are told of both options (traditional adoption and concurrent planning). The team operates within the timescales of the two stage adoption process, whilst also taking account of the preferences of the applicants who may need additional time to consider the issues raised by concurrent planning which incorporates both the fostering and adoption tasks.

Within 5 days of their initial enquiry Concurrent Planning enquirers are invited to an individual meeting within 10 days. At the individual meeting they are provided with a Registration of Interest form to return when they feel ready to proceed to Stage 1.

If after consultation with a manager, it seems that Coram will probably not be able to place a child because there are no/few referrals that would match the enquirer's preference/capability, or that the demands of concurrent planning would be difficult for the enquirer to manage given their own circumstances, or for any other reason, we will explain our reasons for not proceeding in writing. Enquirers who are not able to proceed as prospective concurrent carers may be suitable to be considered as prospective adopters.

During Stage 1 statutory checks are taken up, the potential carers are invited to attend preparation groups for concurrent planning and also for prospective adopters. They will have an allocated social worker to discuss any concerns that arise. Stage 1 is expected to last 2 months unless there are delays in obtaining statutory checks or medicals, or unless the potential carers need additional time for any reason.

Stage 2 commences when the applicant has successfully completed Stage 1, and returns their application form. Stage 2 for adoptive applicants is expected to last 4 months unless the applicant chooses to take longer, or issues arise which need more time to resolve. Concurrent planning applicants have additional issues to consider and it is expected that many of these assessments may require an additional couple of weeks by agreement with the applicants. Some of the preparation groups may be completed during Stage 2.

Applicants who have previously fostered or adopted are likely to be fast tracked.

Preparation Groups

The preparation group course for prospective adopters consists of three days, one of which may be completed towards the end of the assessment process. In addition concurrent planning applicants are invited to attend two full day sessions on concurrent planning which cover issues regarding foster care including managing contact, working with birth parents, working in partnership with the Local Authority etc.

The preparation groups are designed to help people assess their own capacity and motivation to permanently care for a child by providing information, stimulating discussion and also through meeting experienced adopters/foster parents. Because of this element of self-selection, there is an opportunity for enquirers to decide whether or not to proceed. The groups are not formally assessed; however if the group leaders have particular concerns about any issues that arise, these will be shared with the individual and a comment made on feedback forms re any issues where further discussion would be helpful for the information of the social worker who assesses the applicant in Stage 2.

Statutory Checks

All statutory checks, DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as Registration of Interest forms are received. Applicants are aware that negative police/statutory checks may result in them not being offered an application form. Enquirers are advised to inform us of any adverse history or medical condition which any of these checks may reveal. Checks with employers or former partners are taken up in Stage 2, and are timed to take account of the applicant's concerns – e.g. an early check with an employer might affect the applicant's career prospects. .

Medical Assessment

Applicants will be asked to have their medical as soon as their Registration of Interest form is received. If there are known significant medical problems we will not progress the assessment until we have had an indication of the implications of this from Coram's Medical Advisor.

The Medical Advisor sees and comments on the medical reports. (S)he may follow up any concerns with the GP/hospital consultant. The Medical Advisor's opinion is taken into account in assessing the applicants' suitability alongside other information.

Assessment of Carers

The relationship between the worker and the applicant(s) is a professional one within which the worker is making an assessment and will make a recommendation to Panel. The worker will approach the assessment with openness and honesty and will share any reservations and concerns s/he has with the applicant(s). We hope that a relationship of mutual respect and trust will develop during this process.

An adoption assessment is expected to take 4 months, but in concurrent planning is often extended by 2-4 weeks to take account of the additional discussion required to encompass both the fostering and adoption elements of the proposed future role of the applicant. If the applicant requests a slower pace or if other significant issues are identified, the process may be extended. Most of the work of the home study is completed by one social worker, but joint interviews or second opinion interviews may be arranged if areas of particular concern emerge. All home studies are regularly discussed in between the worker and her/his manager and are also discussed by the team at a mid point in the process. Applicants are given to understand that we see the process as a shared responsibility between themselves and Coram and that we will raise concerns with them. This generally enables us to resolve concerns or sometimes applicants may decide that this is not a good time to proceed with their application.

Applicants see their Prospective Foster Carer/ Adopter Report and may contribute to it/correct it or attach their own written comments. They may have up to 5 days for this work. Applicants may attend panel if they wish, however the Panel's recommendation is based on the social worker's assessment and is not dependent on the applicant's attendance.

In the course of the home study, the topics listed on the Prospective Carer/ Adopter Report are covered, and each applicant is offered at least one individual interview. Particular attention is paid to attitudes to race and other equal opportunities issues; attitudes to sex and sexuality; how applicant(s) express anger and how comfortable they are about acknowledging conflict and differences of opinion; the stability of their partnership for applicants who are part of a couple; whether the applicant has been able (or not) to reflect on any experience of loss and on their childhood years and formative experiences and to what extent (s)he has put them in context and constructed a coherent account of these events. The availability of support networks and reliable adult confiding relationships is also significant. At least one visit is paid to the applicant's house,

and a health and safety check undertaken. We also discuss types of children/ backgrounds the applicant would consider.

Former Partners with whom the Applicant has previously cared for a child

Coram will contact former partners with whom any applicant has previously cared for a child to ask whether the former partner has any reason to be concerned for the welfare of a child who may be placed with the applicant. S/he will also be asked whether there was any history of violence on the part of the applicant. If there is positive response to such an enquiry it will be followed up – usually with an interview. If there are particular circumstances why the applicant would prefer Coram not to contact a former partner (e.g. fear of violence), Coram may use discretion and it will record the reason in the Panel report. Panel's views on this will form part of the basis for their recommendation.

Interviewing Members of Extended Family/Adult Children

If members of the extended family are expected to play a particular role in an adopted child's life (e.g. by providing day care for a working parent) they should be interviewed. Family members or friends who may **regularly** provide back-up care should complete DBS checks.

Where possible grown up children of the applicant(s) including those who live away from home should be interviewed. They can provide useful information on parenting skills and insight into the applicant's ability to keep children safe and to protect them from abuse. Involving them appropriately in the process can ensure greater understanding of their new sibling and support for their parents. Where an interview is not possible, adult children should receive a letter explaining their parents' plans and seeking their comments. The comments of adult children should be taken seriously. They do not have an automatic veto but their views should be considered. If we can obtain their permission their comments will be shared with the applicants.

Referees

At least three personal referees need to be interviewed. One of these should be a family member. If a couple is applying jointly, we require a reference from each side of the family if possible. Two referees who are not family members are required. Additional referees may be needed if there are issues about a particular stage in the applicant's life about which we need to obtain another view. A written summary of each interview is necessary. **Interviews with referees are confidential and referees should be assured that we will not disclose anything said in confidence but if there are court proceedings at a later stage, the court may do so.** Referees are asked to sign the summary of the interview which goes to Panel.

Panel:

The approval report is presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel. Applicants are invited to attend Panel, but this is not compulsory. Panel's recommendation is submitted to the agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision. The applicants will be informed promptly – immediately after Panel if they attend or within 24 hours if they choose not to do so.

Decision Maker:

The Decision Maker will reach a decision based on the minutes of the panel plus all the reports considered by Panel within seven days of receiving the minutes of the meeting – usually sooner. If the Decision Maker approves the application, the applicant/s will be informed within 2 days, and in writing. Applicants will be informed of their right for a further consideration of their

application before the same panel, or to request that their application is considered by the Independent Review Panel (IRM).

Independent Review Mechanism:

The IRM considers the application with all the reports available to Panel plus any additional reports from the applicants and the agency. The IRM's recommendation is then sent to the agency and submitted to the ADM. The ADM then reconsiders application and makes his/ her decision which is final.

Reviews

1. Foster carer reviews will be conducted when the need arises, but at least annually.
2. When conducting the review, the agency will seek the views of:
 - (i) The carer/s
 - (ii) Any child placed with the carer/s if s/he is of an age to understand
 - (iii) Any local authority which has placed a child with the carer during the period under review
 - (iv) The carer's link worker
 - (v) The child's social worker
 - (vi) The child's parent/s and any person who has parental responsibility in respect of the child in placement
3. The fostering panel will be asked to consider reports on the first annual foster carer review and may be asked to consider other reviews if particular concerns arise. These reports will be shared with the carers. If there is a recommendation to remove the carer's approval, s/he will have the right to represent his/her views as at the time when their approval report is considered. Depending on the outcome of Panel and the ADM's consideration of Panel's recommendation, the foster carer has the right to approach the IRM to have their case reviewed. As with applications to be approved, the IRM's recommendation is submitted to the ADM, whose decision is final.
4. DBS checks, other statutory checks, medicals and references will be updated every three years, and this will be confirmed by the Annual Review.

Supporting Placements

1. Social work visits to foster/adoptive families should be appropriate to the needs of each placement. As a minimum, all foster/adoptive families should be visited within a week of the child being placed, thereafter weekly/fortnightly till the first review, two/three weekly to the second review, two/four weekly till third review. After this visits should be no less than six/eight weekly. Occasionally unannounced visits to foster homes will be undertaken – not less than annually.
2. Social workers should keep in telephone contact with carers/adopters between visits. Carers/adopters should have the office phone numbers of their social workers, the relevant manager and the secretary to the worker. Carers/adopters should also have the EDT phone number of the local authority which is the care authority for the child placed with them. They should also have the home phone/work mobile number of their social worker and/or her manager. Calls should be responded to promptly, the same day if possible.

3. Where necessary, Coram will refer carers/adopters and their children to appropriate specialist services. These include Education Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Community Paediatric Teams. Coram has a contract with the Children and Families Department at the Tavistock Clinic to access assessment and brief treatment for children and their carers.
4. Coram provides a menu of support services including:
 - Regular support groups for Concurrent Planning carers
 - Ongoing foster carer training and development (as outlined in the Fostering Skills Programme programme)
 - Baby Care Skills Information Sessions
 - Placement visits by the family support worker to provide support and guidance in the first week of placement commencing for Concurrent carers and subsequent visits as and when needed.
 - Information group for Concurrent Planning carers' relatives and friends.
 - Study days.
 - Annual picnic and Christmas Party
 - Newsletter.
 - Consultation and advice on behavioural problems.
 - Consultation and advice on talking to children about their history.
 - Support in arranging contact.
 - Support to birth parents
 - Supervised contact in Concurrent Planning cases.
 - Books and DVD library.
 - Parenting Skills training
 - Story stem work with children and parents

Jeanne Kaniuk
Head of Adoption and Permanent Families Service
August 2014

Annexure A

STAFF LIST

- **Head of Service/Responsible Person** – Jeanne Kaniuk, BA (Hons) Social Work, 1971. 40 years experience as a social worker in child care; 34 years experience as manager of the Adoption and Permanent Families Service at Coram.
- **Manager, Concurrent Planning** – Alice Kathleen Noon, BA Hons English Literature, University of Nottingham 1981, Certificate of Qualification in Social Work Croydon College 1990 Certificate of Management Studies Lewisham College 1999, Graduate Diploma in work with Children and Families including Enabling the Professional Development of Others -Royal Holloway/University of London 2009, 24 years of experience as a social worker and manager in both local authority and voluntary adoption agencies.
- **Senior Social Work Practitioner – Philip Kane**

Qualifications: Dip SW 1995, Child Care Award 2002

Experience: 15 years experience as a children's social worker in the London area. Posts include working for Local Authorities 1997 – 2002 /2007 – 2012 (Youth offending, child care, fostering and adoption); CAF/CASS 2002- 2004 (Family Court Advisor); 2004 -2007 Independent Social worker (Children's Guardian, independent work for fostering agencies); Coram Concurrent Planning October 2012 – present.

- **Lead Senior Social Work Practitioner - Michael Meaghan**

Qualifications: BA (Hons) Sociology (1980); MSc and CQSW (1983); Diploma in Family Therapy (1984); MA in Applied Social Research (1993); awarded Post Qualifying Graduate Diploma with Children & Families (2008).

Experience: Over 25 years experience in children's and families' work; has worked as a senior counsellor for the NSPCC and as a Social Work Practitioner, Training and Development Officer, Practice Manager and Team Manager in several inner London social work teams; has also worked in hospital, long term, and referral and assessment teams. Joined the Coram Concurrent Planning Project in June 2005.

- **Contact Supervisor and Family Worker – Donna Andrews**

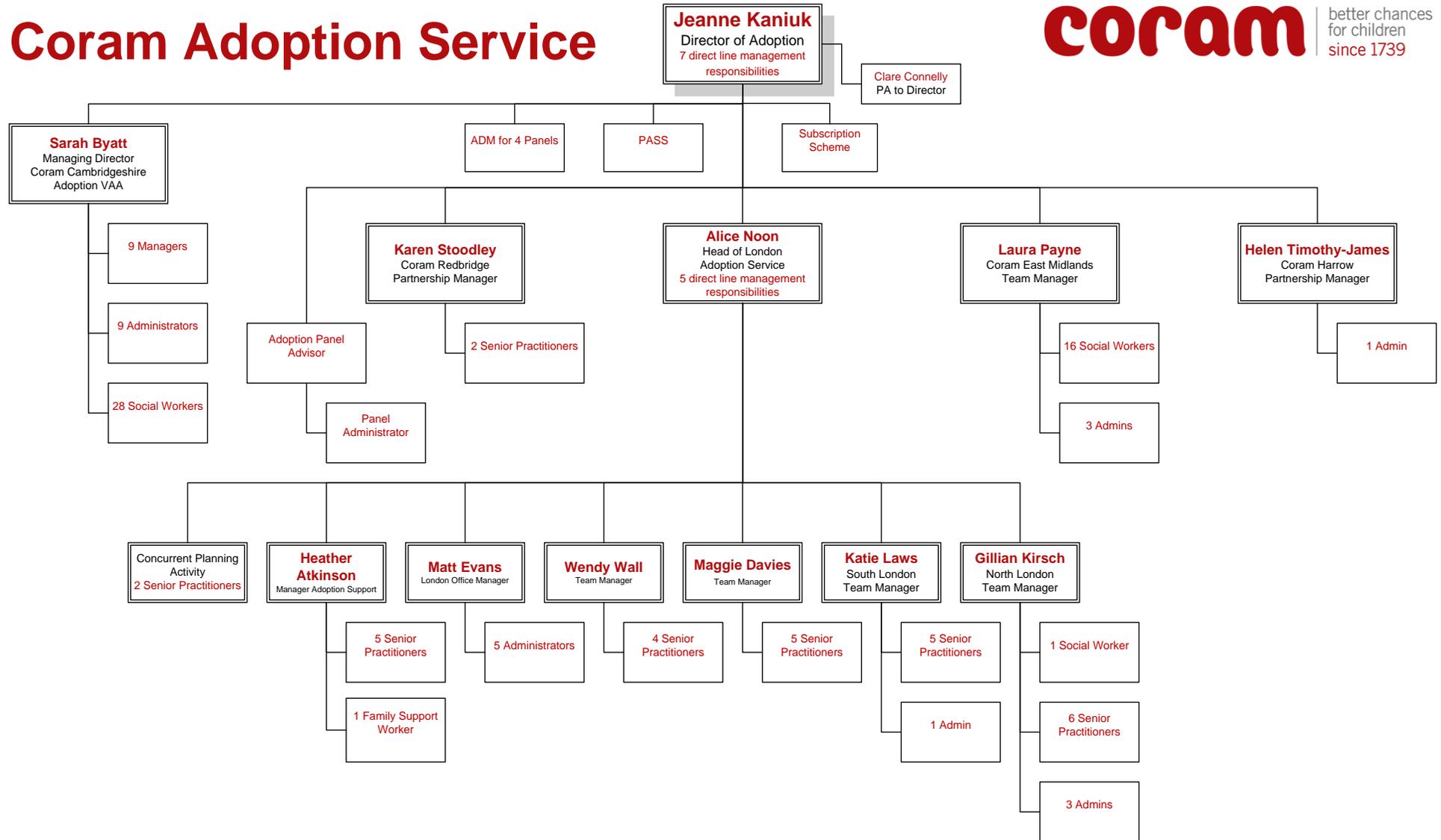
Qualifications: N.N.E.B: Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities: City and Guilds level 1- Parent Education; Counselling Skills and Studies level 1 and 2

Experience: 30 years experience of working to support children and families; 1982 -1992 Nursery nurse in Day nursery and in education setting; 7 years as Project Manager for Toy Library Service for families with children with special needs; 2 years as Education Tutor developing parenting skills. 2001-2008 Home School Link Officer with families with vulnerable children. 2009 -2011 Family Support Worker at Coram Family Assessment Centre. 2011 to present Contact supervisor and Family Worker Coram Concurrent Planning Project.

Other members of Coram's London Branch of the Adoption and Permanent Families Service support the work of the dedicated concurrent planning staff who are embedded within the London teams

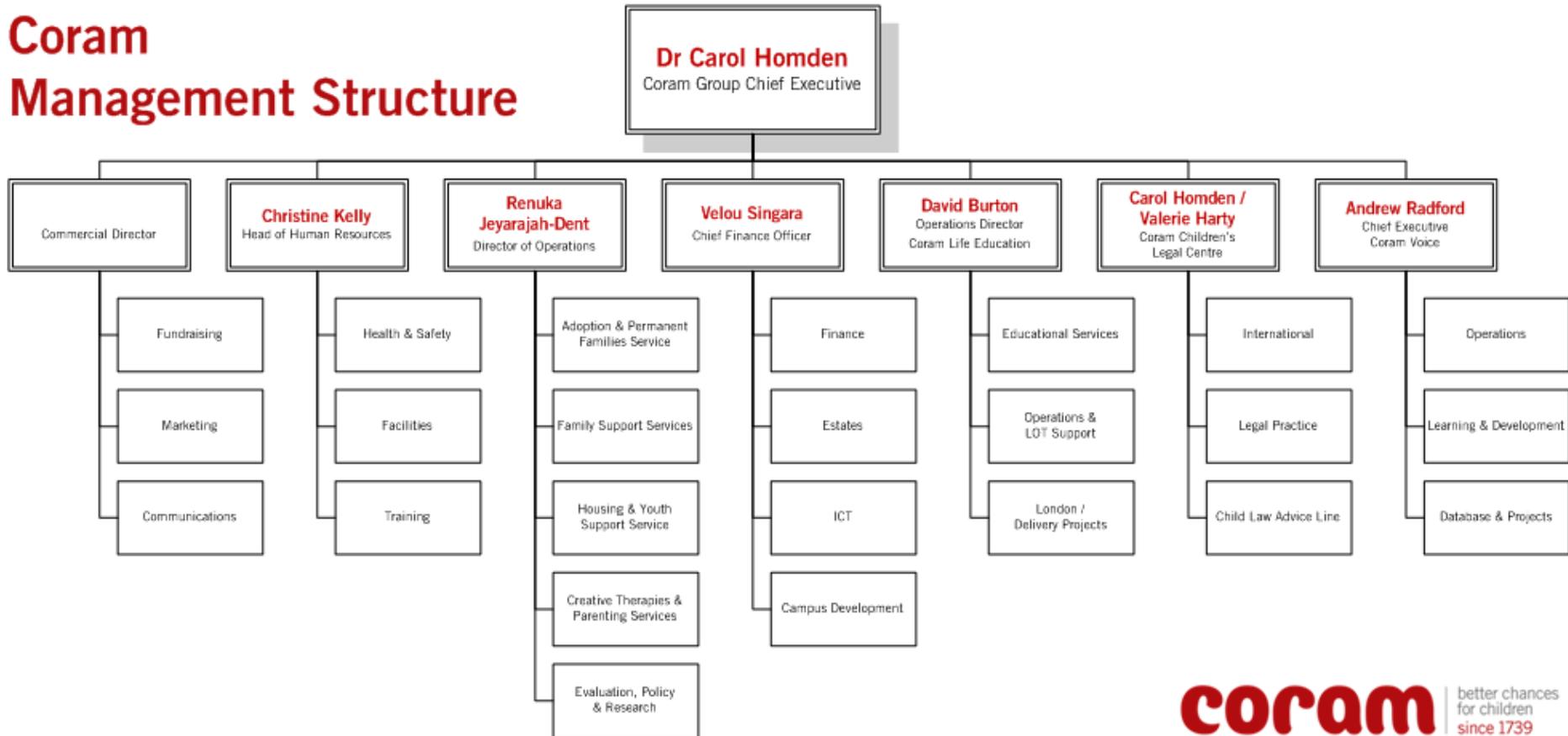
Schedule C-Coram Adoption & Permanent Families Service Management Structures – 2014 and Beyond

Coram Adoption Service

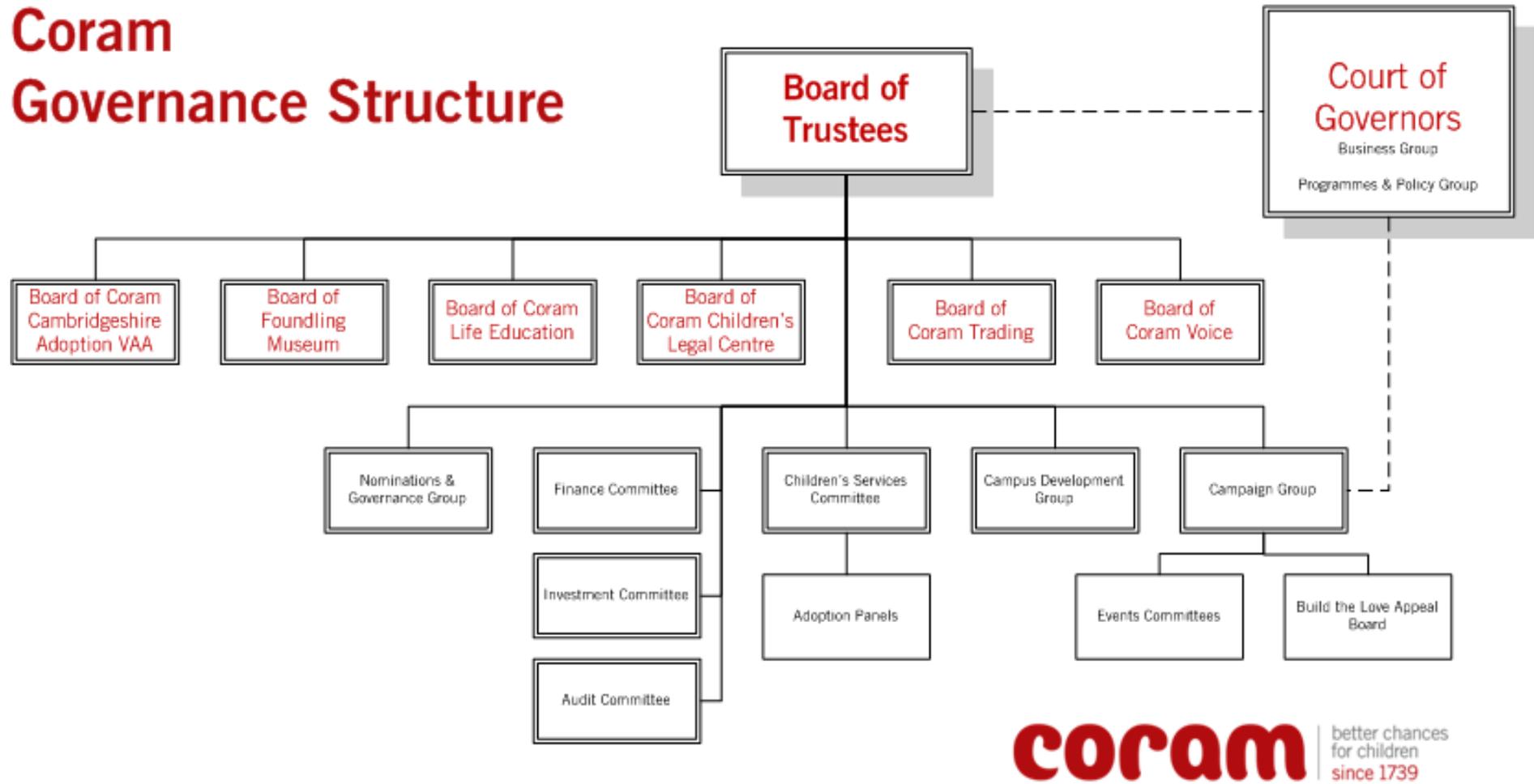


Annexure B

Coram Management Structure



Coram Governance Structure



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