

Statement of Purpose

THOMAS CORAM FOUNDATION OF CHILDREN

ADOPTION AND PERMANENT FAMILIES SERVICE

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CORAM FOSTERING

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1. Details of the Registration Authority

Thomas Coram Foundation for Children (Coram) is a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) and Coram Fostering is a registered Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). Coram will recruit, assess and prepare and train adopters to provide loving and secure families to children requiring adoption across London and in surrounding counties. The fostering service registration relates only to the provision of placements of young children on an Early Permanence basis with households who are dually-approved as adopters and foster carers. Coram Fostering is not a stand-alone IFA and operates its Early Permanence service as an integral part of the Voluntary Adoption Agency.

Coram Adoption and Permanent Families Service office location is **41 Brunswick Square, London, WC1N 1AZ.**

Alongside the recruitment and support of adopters and the linking and matching of children to adoptive families, the VAA is commissioned by the London Borough of Harrow and the City of London to deliver the services of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Coram Ambitious for Adoption, for participating local authorities including Harrow, Bromley, City of London, Hillingdon, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster City Council and Slough Borough Council.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption delivers a hub of VAA activities for the recruitment and support of adopters and early permanence carers at its main office location at Brunswick Square. The family finding activities and local post adoption support services are being provided by Coram staff located at offices for each of the partner local authorities. This arrangement ensures continuity of local arrangements to support a child with a plan for adoption and the continued delivery of local services for adoptive families. The Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA works with each Local Authority partner to improve outcomes for children and adoptive families and meet the objectives of a regional adoption agency to:

- a. Recruit adopters for children needing permanent families through adoption.
- b. Identify children as early as possible for adoption or early permanence placements and contribute to care planning to minimise delay for children.
- c. Provide family finding and matching services.
- d. Provide adoption support services.
- e. Recruit, prepare, assess, train and support foster carers, who are dually-approved as adopters and foster carers to undertake early permanency placements.

2. Principles and Values Statement

The work of the Coram VAA is informed by the principles of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and for Foster Care:

- a. The needs, rights, wishes, safety and welfare of children are our paramount concern.
- b. Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice are intrinsic to the delivery of the service.
- c. Achieve positive and timely outcomes for children with a plan for adoption.
- d. To deliver effective family finding arrangements to ensure children's diverse needs [identity, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, culture and language and gender] are fully met within an adoption placement.
- e. All prospective adopters, adoptive families, children and carers are treated with respect at all times.
- f. Celebrate all family structures (e.g., single parents, couples who are heterosexual or gay, married, in civil partnerships or unmarried) that provide the nurture and parenting to meet the needs of children coming forward for adoption.
- g. The lifelong implications of adoption and the need for comprehensive support services to adopters, carers, and adopted children and adults, is recognised from the start.
- h. The service facilitates support to birth parents and relatives as appropriate to each family and access to records and intermediary services.
- i. Understand that birth parents and relatives with a plan for adoption of children experience a profound loss and can be supported to make a meaningful through letter box contact, providing photographs or a letter to read in later life.
- j. Encourage a spirit of openness so that children grow up with knowledge and understanding of their birth family and support direct and indirect contact between adopted children and birth relatives.
- k. The service actively supports early permanence as in the child's interest working closely with all partner Local Authorities to identify children who would benefit from early permanence fostering for adoption (FFA) placements optimising secure attachments.
- l. The service actively supports birth families of children in FFA placements working towards rehabilitation home where it is achievable within a child's developmental timescales and includes parenting coaching and supervision of contact arrangements.
- m. Encourage and support families to prioritise children's needs and make a commitment to the child on a permanent basis and with resilience to persevere through difficult times.

3. Aims and Objectives

In accordance with the provisions of the Children and Adoption Act 2002, all Local Authorities have a duty to establish and maintain an adoption service in their area, to meet the needs in relation to adoption: of children who have been or may be adopted; of adults who have been adopted; parents and guardians of such children and persons who have adopted or may adopt a child. Participating authorities to Coram Ambitious for Adoption have delegated this responsibility for adoption services to the regional agency.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption believes that children are best able to enjoy close and enduring relationships and to develop their potential within a family setting. This ethos is underpinned by Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that every child has a right to family life and if it cannot be provided by the family of origin it should be provided by a permanent alternative family.

We recognise that people who have been affected by adoption, both children and adults, may require additional support at different times over the years.

The aims and objectives of Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA are:

- To work closely with participating Local authorities to identify children who are looked after where adoption is the plan and, in their interest, seek to place a child with permanent families as expediently as possible.
- To secure for each child a loving family to 'belong to' on a permanent basis and to form secure attachments and reach their potential and developmental milestones.
- Through the location of adoption services within each local authority children with a proposed plan for adoption will be identified and matched early to avoid delay in the child's journey to permanency.
- Actively recruit, prepare, assess and support adopters and carers from a diverse range of backgrounds who have the ability to meet the needs of children needing adoption within the regional agency and beyond.
- Coram adopters will be supported to consider matching options for children identified with a plan for adoption within the RAA.
- To recruit and support carers who are willing and able to be dually-approved as foster carers and as prospective adopters to undertake early permanence placements for children aged 0-3 where the final care plan remains uncertain.
- To provide post placement support to newly created and existing adoptive families.
- To provide access to information, counselling, intermediary services and support as appropriate to adults whose lives have been affected by adoption, including adopted adults and their birth relatives.
- To promote best practice in permanence planning for children by undertaking research and disseminating information to the professional network; This includes providing

information through the Coram Centre for Early Permanence which hosts the Early Permanence Subscription Scheme.

- To work with each local authority within the RAA to enable best outcomes for children where adoption is the plan by:
 1. Investing in our workforce to ensure staff have the right skills, knowledge and capacity for reflective and inspired practice to deliver excellent services.
 2. Actively listening to complaints and feedback from users of the service learning and developing to inform the cycle of provision.
 3. Engaging with young people and adopters by experience by coproduction approaches that inform the work of the regional agency.
 4. Safely commissioning the delivery of services for adopters and children through the network of specialist adoption support services.
 5. Delivering sufficiency in the commissioned regional adoption agency to enable best chances for children requiring adoption in timely placement and quality in line the scope of the service specification for the RAA and the scale and quality of the delivery system.

4. Registered Managers / Responsible Officers

Sue Lowndes, Managing Director of Coram Ambitious for Adoption is the **Responsible Individual** for the Voluntary Adoption Agency and the services of Coram Ambitious for Adoption, under Regulation 5 of the Voluntary Adoption Agency (England) Regulations 2003. Sue is also **Responsible Individual** for Coram Fostering. Sue is **Agency Decision Maker (ADM)** for recommendations from Coram Adoption and Fostering Panel regarding the approval of adopters and foster carers.

Sarah Byatt, Head of Service, **Adoption Manager** for the VAA, overseeing the recruitment, training, assessment and approval of prospective adopters and foster carers and the post adoption support of families. Sarah manages the work of the Early Permanence Service.

Hannah Moss is the **Registered Manager** of Coram Fostering for the provision of Early Permanence Programme within the Adoption Service.

LA Agency Decision Maker.

Each participant local authority to the RAA has a nominated senior officer with experience of adoption services as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADMs retain a twofold responsibility in relation to adoption i.e. (1) the responsibility for decisions for a Looked After Child and/or relinquished babies to be placed for adoption and (2) the consideration of a panel

recommendation for placement of a child and the decision to place a child with a particular adoptive family (the match).

The nominated ADM for each participant local authority is as follows:

- London Borough of Harrow - Peter Tolley
- London Borough of Redbridge - Caroline Cutts
- London Borough of Bromley - Janet Bailey
- London Borough of Waltham Forest - Heather Flinders
- The City of London - Chris Pelham
- London Borough of Hillingdon - Julie Kelly
- Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea - Glen Peache
- Westminster City Council - Nicky Crouch
- Slough Borough Council – Carol Douch

5. Staffing

See Structure Chart Appendix A

- **Sue Lowndes:** Managing Director and Head of RAA
Sue.lowndes@coram.org.uk
- **Sarah Byatt:** Head of Service, London Adoption and Permanent Families Service
Sarah.byatt@coram.org.uk

Coram Adoption Managers:

- **Maggie Davies:** Recruitment and Assessment & Lead RAA link
Maggie.davies@coram.org.uk
- **Gillian Kirsch:** Recruitment and Assessment
Gillian.kirsch@coram.org.uk
- **Heather Atkinson:** Recruitment and Assessment
Heather.atkinsonSL@coram.org.uk
- **Hannah Moss:** Early Permanence
Hannah.moss@coram.org.uk
- **Laura Harris:** Adoption Support
Laura.harris@coram.org.uk
- **Tony Quinn:** Coram Adoption and Fostering Panel Advisor
Tony.quinn@coram.org.uk

Coram Service Managers [Ambitious for Adoption]:

London Borough of Harrow and London Borough of Hillingdon
Hellan Timothy-James Hellan.timothy-james@harrow.gov.uk

Harrow Council Children's Services
Harrow Council Civic Centre Station Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 2UW

London Borough of Redbridge and London Borough of Waltham Forest

George Layzell George.layzell@walthamforest.org.uk

London Borough of Redbridge Children's Services Station Road Centre,
Barkingside, Essex, IG6 1NB

London Borough of Bromley

Elena Muller Elena.muller@bromley.gov.uk

Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley, BR1 3UH

Bi-Borough [Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster City Council]

Sally Beaumont Sbeaumont@westminster.org.uk

4 Frampton Street, Marylebone, London NW8 8LF

Slough Borough Council

Raheela Khan Raheela.Khan@scstrust.co.uk

Slough Children First, Observatory House, 25 Windsor Road, Slough, SL12EL

Qualifications and Experience of Staff

All the professional staff involved in Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA hold relevant qualifications including: CQSW's, DipSW or Degree or Masters approved Social Work qualification. All SW staff are registered with Social Work England.

Social workers, managers and leaders of the services have opportunity for continuing the professional development and to attain post qualifying training and awards relevant to the service.

6. Adoption and Fostering Panel

- The Adoption and Fostering Panel for the region is constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance. There is a central list of over 20 approved panel members, including three Chairs and three Vice-Chairs. The work of the panel is supported by a Panel Adviser and Panel Administrator.
- 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 purpose of the panel is to consider all applications for approval from prospective adopters and foster carers (for early permanence) and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.
- The panel considers all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren from the RAA and suitable adopters. This recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the relevant Local Authority of the child being placed.

- The panel also consider placements for adoption where the birth parent(s) request their child be adopted. The recommendation of the match goes to the ADM for the relevant Local Authority.
- The panel consider, on occasion, 'brief reports' on adoption and fostering applications during Stage 2 of the assessment on whether the assessment to approve adopters should continue if the agency is considering terminating the assessment. The recommendation is made to the Agency Decision Maker for the RAA.
- The panel consider on occasion reports on proposed or actual placements for the purpose of information and advice, and on the progress of placements from time to time.
- The panel consider reports on disrupted placements, reports of any case referred to the IRM and advises on lessons to be learned.
- The panel perform a quality assurance function, commenting on the standard of reports received and the quality of assessments.
- To provide an annual quality report on the work of the Panel is received from the panel advisor and submitted to senior managers for inclusion in progress reporting to the Trustees, and the Strategic Governance Board for the RAA.
- To be provided with training, including mandatory courses, such as equality and diversity, safeguarding and other learning events relevant to panel activity.

7. Adopter Assessment

Stage 1

- Potential adopters who contact Coram and meet the criteria to be considered will be given an initial interview by a member of the Social Work team. This will be recorded as an initial interview.
- Enquirers will be asked to agree to their information being held by the agency, according to GDPR regulations.
- After the initial interview the social worker will make a recommendation to their manager about whether the applicant(s) are suitable. If the manager confirms that they meet the requirements and are ready to proceed they will be encouraged to submit their Registration of Interest (ROI). If the information submitted in the ROI evidences that the enquirers are not currently suitable, they will be offered information and advice about what they would need to do to meet the criteria, for example they may need additional childcare experience.
- Once the enquirers meet the criteria for assessment their ROI will be accepted, and they are deemed to be in Stage 1 of the adopter assessment process. The prospective adopter will be allocated a social worker from the Coram Recruitment and Assessment Team to undertake Stage 1.

- Stage 1 includes Stage 1 statutory checks, and these must be completed and reviewed by the line manager before Stage 2 can commence. In addition, the prospective adopters will be asked to complete a series of work sheets in order to increase their understanding in relation to adopting a child from care.
- Every effort will be made to complete the work of Stage 1 within two months, unless there are clear reasons why it needs to take longer, for example when a disclosure and barring service or medical check is delayed, or if a prospective adopter needs more time for personal or other reasons. Stage 1 of the process is adopter-led, and a Stage 1 agreement will be completed based on the individual circumstances and needs of the prospective adopter and be allocated to a social worker in the Recruitment & Assessment Team.

Stage 2

- Stage 2 is the full assessment of prospective adopters. Once statutory checks have been satisfactorily received, the prospective adopters will meet with their allocated social worker and a manager to discuss whether the agency will accept a formal application into Stage 2, with particular reference to the children whom the agency seeks to place for adoption/early permanence.
- An assessing social worker is allocated, and a Stage 2 agreement set up. The allocated social worker will be responsible for completing the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). Once completed the PAR will be viewed by prospective adopters/foster carers and they are given five days to review it or to attach their own comments.
- If applicants wish to be considered for dual approval as foster carers for the purpose of early permanence placements, they will need to undergo dedicated assessment and training in relation to the role and expectations of foster carers.
- Prospective adopters/foster carers are invited to attend the meeting of the Adoption Panel at which their approval will be considered, but if they do not wish to attend, this will not influence the outcome of the Panel.
- The panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), in relation to approval. If the ADM agrees with the recommendation the prospective adopters/foster carers will be informed of their decision within five working days.
- Coram is guided by the statutory timescales for the adoption approval process and prospective adopters/foster carers are asked to ensure that they are able to meet these at the start of the assessment. This is a child-focused process, and applicants are expected to understand our commitment is to the welfare of children needing permanence through adoption.
- Once an adopter's or dual approval as foster carers and adopters is confirmed the allocated social worker will work with the adopter to identify a child who will benefit from the skills and experience of the prospective adopters. This will include working with colleagues in Ambitious for Adoption, and also referring children to other agencies and to Link Maker.

8. Family Finding, Matching and Placement

- Family finding activity within the RAA is undertaken by Coram staff co-located within the partner Local Authority within the RAA.
- The activity is linked to the permanence planning arrangements for each Local Authority partner, the regional agency managers are fully informed of the children with a potential plan for adoption through the chairing of permanence planning meetings.
- Family finding activity includes early information sharing of children with a plan for adoption with Coram RAA approved adopters, the use of exchange events and adoption activity days where required as well as forums such as Link Maker.
- When a child is identified by an adopter, there will be a series of meetings with the RAA partner Local Authority or other agency where applicable, to ensure that adopters have full information about the child – as far as is available. This will include meeting with the Medical Advisor, the current foster carer, the child's school, when applicable, and may also include a child appreciation day to gather detailed information about the child's experiences and history to date. Prospective adopters are entitled to all available information about the child that they are considering and will need to feel confident that all information about the child has been shared with them.
- When a child is placed for adoption with a Coram approved adopter the allocated social worker for the adopters will visit the placement regularly and reports will be provided to the placing authority. The allocated SW will also attend all reviews and any other meetings that are convened in relation to the placement.
- If a child is placed on an Early Permanence/fostering basis when the final care plan is not yet determined, the placement will be supervised, managed and supported in line with fostering regulations.

9. Adoption Support

- Coram offers its approved adopters support post placement and post order. Post placement support is provided by both the allocated child's social worker and the Coram social worker. Once a child is adopted support is provided by the Coram adoption support team and the placing or residing Local Authority.
- Statutory adoption support for the RAA is provided by co-located Coram staff, which includes a range of adoption support services; advice, guidance and information regarding relevant services including counselling, birth records counselling, support with contact arrangements (direct and letterbox), intermediary services, access to adopter peer support and more targeted support through access to therapeutic support via the adoption support fund.
- All Coram approved adopters, early permanence carers and those families within the RAA partnership can access services delivered directly by the Coram Adoption Support Team and or the Coram Creative Therapy Team. Some of these services are delivered through the Adoption Support Fund. These are all currently delivered online through

virtual platforms and include access to the adopter hub [peer support], therapeutic parenting support, workshops and webinar series, harmony group [music therapy] for pre-school children, and parenting programmes such as The Incredible Years and the STOP programme [parents of teens].

10. Monitoring, Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Services

Coram Ambitious for Adoption will undergo regular internal and external scrutiny to ensure that services are robust and of good quality. This will be achieved by:

i) Supervision & oversight of the service:

- a. All social workers/senior practitioners/ managers receive regular reflective supervision and annual appraisal. The frequency depends on the needs of the supervisee but is generally not less than monthly. Coram has a supervision policy.
- b. Regular file audits are undertaken by Managers to ensure compliance and to identify good practice and areas of improvement.
- c. Assessments of prospective adopters/foster carers are discussed in group supervision sessions as well as in individual supervision, and second opinion visits to adoptive applicants are undertaken if appropriate.
- d. Regular team meetings take place and whole service meetings to consider and analyse performance across the service and for staff to take part in thematic practice development sessions.
- e. There is an induction programme for new staff and Adoption and Fostering Panel Members. All panel members have annual appraisals to monitor performance and ensure on going improvements in the delivery of panel.

ii) Safeguarding:

- a. All safeguarding issues or serious concerns about placements are discussed with the Managing Director and/or Head of Service for the local authority partner by the relevant Manager and are acted on and recorded by the social worker in accordance with the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.
- b. All safeguarding concerns are reported to the appropriate statutory authority promptly investigated to ensure that children are safe and receiving appropriate care and that any lessons about the future operation of the service are disseminated and learnt.
- c. There is a quarterly return of safeguarding referrals and file audits to the Children's Services Committee, including quarterly and annual summaries to review themes and take any action necessary.
- d. Where children are placed for adoption or foster care, any safeguarding concerns, complaints, accidents, serious illnesses of

children, children missing, deaths of children are fully notified and recorded as required and referred to the Managing Director. Such events, incidents and concerns will be appropriately.

iii) Adopter and Carer feedback on the service:

Evaluation forms are completed by prospective adopters/carers and adopters at key points in the adoption process, including those who have attended: the information events; preparation and training groups; panel; post placement and post adoption order.

Regular engagement events are held with Coram Adopters and Adoptive families accessing local authority services to listen to experiences and contribute to the ongoing improvement and development of services.

iv) Financial and Business Management

- a. Monthly finance returns to monitor and ensure that the Service is within budget. This includes statistics in relation to referral and placement trends in order to monitor the ongoing viability of the Service.
- b. Quarterly reports are made to trustees summarising the trends arising from the data; planning is then tailored to changing circumstances.
- c. Quarterly progress reports are received by the Strategic Governance Board for the regional agency made up of Director of Children's Service across participant authorities to ensure continuing sufficiency of resource, capacity to meet increased or shifting patterns of demand for the services across the functions of adopter recruitment, family finding and adoption support.
- d. An Operational group of Heads of Service for participant local authorities is chaired by the Managing Director for the services meeting throughout the year to review outcome against the service specification for the regional agency, key performance indicators using qualitative and quantitative data analysis and diagnostics to support continuing quality in delivery.
- e. Coram undertakes a periodic user satisfaction survey of adopters or carers asking for information on the adoption support they have received and their overall experiences (both positive and negative) of the adoption and early permanence process, with an opportunity for them to provide suggestions regarding improvements. These reports are taken to managers for discussion, and suggestions are implemented if appropriate.

v) Data

- a. Child level data from across the partnering local authorities is captured centrally using a Coram-i developed tracking tool. Local authorities provide Coram with regular updates to ensure the tracking tool is maintained and is a live reflection of the children with a plan for

adoption across the RAA.

- b. Adopter data is recorded in 'Charms', a case management system used to track the number of enquiries received from potential adopters, attendance at information evenings and progress made throughout the adopter journey. All details of the assessment including timescales are recorded on Charms. This data is used to submit returns to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) as well as other national data collections.

vi) Compliments/complaints feedback

- a. Coram welcomes feedback from service users on the service they receive, including complaints and compliments. Service users are provided with a leaflet about the complaints process.
- b. The outcomes of complaints are monitored to ensure that lessons are learned, and service provision can be improved as a result. The Coram complaints officer is responsible for collating the quarterly monitoring data for all departments and reporting outcomes to the Senior Management Team, Audit Committee and Children's Services Committee. The reports contain a summary of any service issues and action taken to resolve the situation.
- c. The Managing Director has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing all complaints that relate to the service (including informal complaints). They are also required to assess the outcomes of the complaint to determine whether any changes in policies, procedures or working practices are appropriate.

Coram's Complaints Process can be accessed from link below:
<https://www.coramadoption.org.uk/your-comments-or-complaints>

The Children's guide has information on who to contact if they are unhappy about a service from Coram. It includes contact details for Coram managers, independent children's advocacy services for children and the Children's Commissioner for England.

The Children's Commissioner for England can be contacted by young people at:
Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT
Freephone: 0800 528 0731

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk>

11. Legal References

This statement of purpose is written in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations, and the Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013.

It fulfils the requirements of Regulation 2 and 4 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; Regulations 3 and 24B and Regulations 4 and 24C of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003; and of Regulations 5 and 6 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005. The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 2003 – Schedule 1, Draft Adoption Regulations July 2014; Fostering Service (England) Regulations, 2011.

It also fulfils the requirements of Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014.

12. Details of Registration Authority

The Registration Authority is Ofsted whose address is:

Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

E mail: Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

<https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-form>

The Registered Provider is Coram, which 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 main childcare services which are run by the charity.

The charity's address is:

Coram, 41 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1A

APPENDIX A

