

**BERKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCIES**

**CONSORTIUM**

**AGREEMENT**

# BERKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCIES CONSORTIUM

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY STATEMENT

The Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium values and celebrates the breadth and diversity of tradition, belief and culture across the communities it serves. It seeks to create and maintain services for adults and children whereby each person has an equal entitlement to high quality services and opportunities regardless of race, colour, nationality, citizenship, ethnic or national origin, religion, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, family circumstances, marital status or hours of work.

December 1999

The Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium is committed improving the lives of children and young people within the consortium area in line with the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*. To this end Consortium members will ensure the provision of services which enable children to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution and
- achieve economic well being.

February 2008

# BERKSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCIES CONSORTIUM AGREEMENT

This Agreement is made on the     day of                     between the following Adoption Agencies, hereafter referred to as individual members and collectively as the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

West Berkshire District Council

Reading Borough Council

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

Slough Borough Council

Wokingham Borough Council

It is agreed that with effect from 1 April 2009, the above member local authorities will work to the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium Agreement and protocols, to maintain and develop comprehensive adoption services across Berkshire.

**Signature**

**Date**

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## **Purpose of the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium:**

- To facilitate the placement of children for adoption within the area covered by member Authorities.
- To ensure maximum choice of placement at minimal cost.
- To co-operate in the development of shared services and arrangements including:
  - Training and support of professionals, panel members and adopters
  - Joint adoption panels
  - Joint Adoption support Services

### **1. Membership**

Membership of the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium consists of Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

Consideration may be given to other local authority adoption agencies seeking to become members of the consortium. In such circumstances agreement of all the members of the consortium would be required.

Membership provides for agreement on;

- Roles and responsibilities of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) in relation to the Consortium
- Interagency Placement Fees
- Monitoring and Review of Arrangements
- Practice standards

Member authorities will take individual responsibility for their own adoption policy and procedures in accordance with The Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations and Guidance. This policy will also take account of both local and national need in relation to adoption.

Member authorities will demonstrate and commitment to the services run on their behalf by the BAAS including providing members for the adoption panel as required.

Member authorities will aim to co-operate with other consortium members in relation to the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopters.

## **2. The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is operationally managed by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The strategic management responsibility resides with the Heads of Children's Service (or equivalent) in each of the unitary authorities that form the Berkshire Consortium.

The main roles and responsibilities of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS), are as follows:-

- Management, training, recruitment and co-ordination of Berkshire Joint Adoption Panels.
- Management of the Berkshire Letterbox Service, including relevant administrative and professional tasks as required.
- Telephone advice on enquiries covering all aspects of adoption.
- Quality practice and procedural advice to unitary staff, managers and Adoption Panel Members on complex adoption issues including the dissemination of information.
- Management of the Berkshire database of closed Looked After and Adopted Children files pre 1992, supported by a social work service.
- Assistance with staff, carer and panel members training needs.
- Assistance with complaints relating to adoption.
- Chairing Disruption Meetings.
- Co-ordination of information regarding waiting adopters and children needing families.
- Management of the Birth Parent Project including relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption.
- Manage the post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement.
- Provide support and financial assistance to specific pan Berkshire adoption support initiatives where each unitary takes the lead on one shared aspect of adoption support. These may change according to need and in agreement with the Consortium adoption teams.
- Fund and organise the following:
  - Three years membership of Adoption UK for all prospective adopters approved by Berkshire Consortium adoption agencies.
  - Arrange and fund annual adopter's conference or equivalent.

## **3. Monitoring and Review of Arrangements of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

Strategic management of the BAAS will be undertaken by the Heads of Children's Services (or equivalent) in each of the Consortium agencies. Decisions on funding arrangements or alterations to the main roles and responsibilities of the BAAS will be taken by this Management Committee.

Operational management of the BAAS will be delegated to and undertaken within the management structure of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

All staff working at the BAAS will be employed by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and subject to the policies and procedures therein.

In relation to changes within the BAAS that have significant financial implications i.e. recruitment of additional staff, the agreement of all members of the Management Committee is required.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service will provide an annual report to the Management Committee. This report will include detailed statistical information for use in each Consortium members Annual Report. In addition, the report will highlight trends within the Consortium and current issues both locally and nationally. If member agencies require specific information this can be requested from the BAAS.

If any member authority chooses to give notice to withdraw from the Consortium agreement, the remaining member authorities will meet to consider whether the scheme is still viable. If the decision is made to bring the agreement to a close, all debts will be settled within six months.

Member authorities will commit to the consortium agreement for a minimum period of three years from the date of signature and will give notice of one year if they decide to withdraw from the consortium.

The Service Manager of the BAAS will attend as required any of the meetings of the Management Committee and provide such information as requested by them.

The Management Committee will arbitrate on disputes between member agencies. If necessary, a binding decision can be taken by a majority of three out of the four non-involved member authorities.

A review of the BAAS and the Consortium arrangements including the financial contributions of each agency will be undertaken on a three yearly basis.

Consistent failure to adhere to the arrangements of the consortium and to make full use of the consortium will be referred to the Management Committee for discussion and further actions taken as necessary

### **Financial Arrangements for the BAAS**

The Consortium agencies will fund the BAAS via the current joint arrangement provisions. Fifty percent (50%) of the BAAS costs will be split equally between the consortium agencies. The remaining fifty percent (50%) will be based on usage for the preceding three years.

For the three years from 1 April 2009 the usage percentages are as follows:

West Berkshire District Council	15.31%
Wokingham Borough Council	9.65%
Slough Borough Council	23.51%
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	12.87%
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	7.76%
Reading Borough Council	30.90%

The financial arrangements will be reviewed in year ending 31 March 2012

A review of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service will be undertaken in 2015

#### **4. Interagency fees**

Placements made within the Berkshire Adoption Agencies Consortium will incur a fee equivalent to half the BAAF national inter-agency rates. Additional modules, including payment of post adoption fees will be by negotiation and according to the specific needs of each child.

Notwithstanding the above, no inter-agency fee will be charged for placements of children aged under one year.

Member Agencies agree the following departures from the standard inter-agency fees determined by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering on an annual basis.

Child placed before first birthday	-	No charges
Child placed under 5 years old	-	50% standard interagency fee. No post placement support module.
* Siblings or children 5 years plus	-	50% for first child
	-	25% for second child
	-	25% for third child

\* Plus £2,500 total post adoption support fee whether for one child or sibling group.

The Receiving Authority will invoice the placing Authority for the entire placement fee on placement and the post adoption module fee at the time the Adoption Application is lodged with the Court.

The placement fee covers the following services:

- A prepared placement with an adoptive family trained, assessed and approved by the relevant Agency Adoption Panel.
- Placement support to the carers from the Family Placement/Adoption worker until the adoption order is made. This to include home visits, access to other support networks and information on specialist local resources. This support should be provided according to the same standards that would apply as if the placement were in-house.
- To liaise with the placing authority worker and provide information on the progress of the placement until an adoption order is made.
- Completion of sections of the Annex A or B Court Report which relate to the prospective adopters and updated information on the child/ren.
- The receiving authority agrees to support the written agreements on direct or indirect contact arrangements.
- Payments do not cover provision of the Social Worker for the child, nor of the statutory supervision of the placement (unless there is agreement to supervise by the relevant team in the receiving authority. This agreement would have to be negotiated separately by the relevant responsible managers).

If an Adoption Application has not been lodged within one year of placement, a further one-third of the original placement fee at the current (reduced) rate, will be payable by the placing authority. A similar fee will be charged each subsequent year pending application for an Adoption Order.

In the event of the placement breaking down within the first year, a percentage of the original payment will be returned to the placing authority based on the length of time the child has been in placement. Where the disruption is found to be due to key information not included on the Form F and subsequently brought to the attention of the purchasing agency, the purchasing authority may be entitled to a refund of the whole fee.

The Receiving Authority will invoice the placing Authority for the entire placement fee on placement and the post adoption module fee at the time the Adoption Application is lodged with the Court.

If disputes arise over any aspects of these arrangements, the issue will be referred to the members of the Management Committee (who are not involved in the case) for resolution. At least a 3:1 majority is needed to reach a binding decision.



## **5. Practice Standards**

All practice in relation to work with children for adoption, their birth families, prospective adopters and anyone else involved in the adoption process should be in accordance with The Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations and Guidance, agency adoption policy and agency adoption procedures.

There is an expectation that member agencies will have common policies and procedures but these will allow for individual agency interpretation.

For reports to the joint adoption panels the expectation is that BAAF Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) and the Child's Permanence Report (CPR) will be used

Newly appointed adopters will be immediately available to consortium members unless recruited for a specific child or where a potential link is being considered for a known child, prior to adopter's approval.

Each local authority's approved adopters will remain available for their own use.

Prospective adopters or their approving authority, may seek a link outside the Consortium following the date of Panel approval without the agreement of Consortium members.

To safeguard confidentiality and objectivity in the matching process, the social worker will only access Prospective Adopter's Reports (PARs) with appropriate guidance from the agency's Adoption Team Manager or delegated person. A detailed list of the child's individual needs and matching criteria for an adoptive placement is required before Forms can be accessed.

Adopters may only be approached through their link worker or appropriate Team Manager. Social workers for children should not approach adopters directly even within their own agency. Responses to such enquiries will in all cases receive a timely response.

Where a potential match is being considered, the social worker for the child will immediately inform the adopters' agency, which will notify the Adoption Advisory Service.

Following a linking meeting, the family will be placed on hold until a match is confirmed or does not proceed. The adopter's agency will inform the Adoption Advisory Service of the outcome to ensure that the adopters are put on hold or are once again available.

A copy of each Agency's policy, procedures and standards documents will be lodged with the Adoption Advisory Service.

### **Monitoring arrangements for the Consortium**

A Consortium Committee will be established to regularly monitor and review the operational issues of the consortium arrangements; each member authority will

nominate a senior manager with responsibility for their adoption agency, to represent them on the Consortium Committee, the Service Manager of the BAAS will also be a member of this Consortium Committee.