



KENT ADOPTION SERVICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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Purpose and Objectives of the Kent County Council Adoption Service

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for Kent County Council's Adoption Service as required under the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013, and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000). Kent County is committed to ensuring that children are able to remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child within the birth family, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting and these include adoption.

The purpose of the Adoption Service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of children who have been or may become adopted, birth families, and adoptive parents. This will include services in relation to those 'looked after' children with an adoption plan, and also in relation to the non-agency adoption service.

In order to achieve its aims the Adoption Service will:-

- Ensure that the needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Welcome those people, who are interested in becoming adoptive parents without prejudice, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval.
- Ensure that services are provided to all involved in adoption that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.
- Assess and prepare prospective adopters who can offer children a stable and permanent home.
- Provide help and support to achieve a successful and lasting placement.
- Monitor children through the process to minimise delay.

All those involved in adoption will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Core Values

The Adoption Service has as its Core Values:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages. The preferred communication methods of each child should be promoted and supported.
- Birth parents and families will be encouraged and supported to contribute to the planning and implementation of their child's adoption care plan
- Delays in the adoption journey of any child can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- Children should be allowed to live with brothers and sisters unless this will not meet their individual needs. People applying to adopt are expected to understand the importance of maintaining these relationships.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.
- Prospective adopters will be adequately prepared and supported to promote the child's social and emotional development, to enable the child to develop emotional resilience and positive self esteem
- Partnership working with others, internally and externally, to ensure that the Adoption National Standards are met.

Services Provided by the Kent County Council Adoption Service

The adoption service is structured as follows:

- Two Recruitment & Assessment Teams
- Family Finding Team
- Adoption Panel Management and Quality Assurance Team
- Post Adoption Support Team – in Partnership with Coram
- Barnardo's (CAFIS) commissioned to work on behalf of Kent to provide independent support for birth parents of children with adoption plans; counselling to adult adoptees; access to information post adoption; support for post adoption & post SGO contact arrangements

The Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC) has been commissioned to provide a full service from the point of enquiry until the child enters the UK with the adopters.

Recruitment & Assessment Team (R & A)

The focus of the Recruitment & Assessment Teams is to recruit adopters for all Kent children with a plan for adoption: the emphasis in the recruitment strategy is to identify families able to adopt sibling groups; children with disabilities/complex needs; children of minority ethnic groups; and foster to adopt carers. The recruitment of adopters is a priority for the Kent Adoption service. There are two Recruitment & Assessment Teams with their own team managers (see structure chart).

Kent's procedures are set out in the [Recruitment, Assessment & Approval](#) section, Kent Children's procedures online.

The following are normally the main steps in the process: Initial Enquiry

- Applicants can call the initial enquiry line on 03000 422 373 or enquire via email.
- Prospective adopters contacting the service are directed to the Kent Adoption and First4Adoption websites.
- Our monthly information events are advertised on the website and enquirers are able to attend without prior booking.
- Those attending the Information Session can book an initial home visit with a social worker; they can also book after the event.
- The initial enquiry form is completed in a follow up phone call by the initial enquiry officer and the home visit is confirmed.
- This will allow the potential adopter to further explore the adoption process whilst providing the adoption service with the opportunity to determine which applicants are most likely to meet the needs of Kent children requiring adoptive placements

- Applicants are given the Registration of Interest form following successful Initial Home Visit. If the application is accepted, prospective adopters will be given the necessary information required for Stage One of the process.
- If the social worker does not recommend progression of the prospective adopter's application to Stage one the applicants are advised of the reasons for this decision and possible action they may wish to take. They are also advised how to access the Kent County Council Complaints Procedure.

Stage One Assessment Process - Time scale 2 months

- The social worker who undertook the home visit usually continues to support potential adopters during stage one.
- Prospective adopters are expected to complete First4Adoption e-learning before attending the 3 day preparation course as well as self-assessment forms.
- In accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, Kent County Council is required to carry out statutory checks and references in relation to all applicants. These include:
 - ✓ Barring and Disclosure Service (DBS)
 - ✓ Three personal references for single applicants and four for couples
 - ✓ Employment references (usually during stage two)
 - ✓ Local Authority checks
 - ✓ Medical assessment
 - ✓ Health visits or school checks if appropriate (or during stage two)
 - ✓ Housing (mortgage/rental status)

The Stage One Social Worker will make a decision along with the team manager if the applicant meets the requirements to proceed to Stage Two of the process. Those who are not suitable at this stage will be provided with a verbal and written explanation. Potential adopters are able to take a break of up to 6 months between stage one and two.

Stage Two Assessment Process - Time scale 4 months

Prospective adopters usually continue with their stage one Social Worker who will undertake a full assessment. Further checks as appropriate are taken during this stage (ex-partner, health visitor, school, adult children) unless a professional decision was taken that this was required during stage one. Prospective adopters attend a two day preparation course during this stage. Approved foster carers and second time adopters (approved after 2006) can proceed straight to Stage Two of the assessment process. Once the assessment is completed, it is presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a final decision

Non-Agency Assessments

The Non-Agency social workers were included in the R&A Service in late 2016. The progress of each case is monitored through supervision and monthly tracking meetings. There is a transition to a two phase process (mirroring that of the agency two stage process) so that all references and checks are completed in phase one to identify whether there are reasons that the adoption order is unlikely to be granted.

Procedures for the social workers undertaking non agency assessments are set out in the [Non-Agency adoption section](#), Kent Children's procedures online.

Family Finding

We will aim to place children with a family which understands and will promote their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. Placements will be secured in a timely manner. We recognise that for a small number of children finding the best possible match will exceed expected timescales. However, we are committed to finding legal permanence for all of our children.

The adopters' ability to accept the child's background, valuing birth parents as being important to children now and into their adulthood, understanding of the impact of neglect and possible abuse on the child, their own family structure and support, and their approach to child rearing will all be considered in an effort to find a family best matched to the child.

If appropriate families are not available in Kent, every effort is made to find a family through Adoption Match, Adoption Link Maker, sharing profiles with adoption agencies, Adoption Exchanges, Profiling and Pop up Events and Activity days/events and consultation sessions with adopters.

There are area based quarterly adoption practice development groups with the children in care services, led by a Practice Development Officer (Safeguarding Unit), and with input from the Family finding service.

Procedures for the family finding team are set out in the [Placement for Adoption section](#) guidelines.

Relinquished Babies

The Family Finding Team provides advice, information and counselling for parents (usually pregnant or new mothers) who are considering adoption for their baby. Some parents will decide against proceeding with an adoption plan. For those few parents each year who decide that adoption will be in the best interests of their child, Kent County Adoption Service will undertake the arrangements in consultation with parents.

Early Permanence Planning

The Family Finding Team works in partnership with district teams to promote early permanency for children, and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. There is one team manager (see structure chart) The Family Finding Team continue to attend to attend Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs) across Kent to offer guidance on such matters as sibling assessments, post adoption contact options, life story and identity needs, achievable plans, Kent adopters, along with guidance on the Adoption process. This has been successful and there has been an increased demand for Family Finding to attend PPM's.

The team have identified the need to expand this role further to include the tracking and monitoring of all children who become looked after. Consequently, existing resources have been creatively redirected to develop a new specialist senior practitioner role- Permanency Planning Lead, and have successfully recruited to this with the person commencing in February 2017.

The Family Finding team has continued links with the Independent Reviewing Service to consider how to jointly improve timeliness and tracking across Kent. The work between Children with Disabilities, Fostering and Family Finding has been further strengthened to consider how our children with disabilities can have their needs for permanence met and that adoption will always be considered as an option.

Foster to Adopt

'Foster to adopt' is used for babies and children who are in the care of Kent County Council where the plan is likely to be adoption, but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family. The majority of children go on to be adopted. Foster to adopt protects children from experiencing multiple moves within the care system. It provides children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care whilst detailed assessments of their birth family are completed and the Court decides on the plan for the child.

Consistent care for the child reduces possible future harm and it supports the child in developing healthy attachments. Babies and children are placed with approved adopters who have been assessed and approved as temporary foster carers for the child. The foster to adopt carers will provide the day to day care for the child and will continue to work with the child's social worker to ensure that the child has all of their needs met.

At the same time, the child's social worker will continue working with and assessing the child's birth parents to see if they have made the changes needed to have the child returned to their care. The Court will make the final decision on the plan for the child. If the decision is that the child should be adopted then foster to adopt carers can go to an adoption matching panel and if panel agree, will become the adopters for the child. Alternatively, if the Court decides that the child should be returned to their birth family then the child is returned. As part of developing the scheme in partnership with Coram, discussions took place with Judiciary, CAF/CASS and health who have all engaged and been positive about the scheme. Kent continues to work in partnership with Coram to develop this scheme including foster to adopt training workshops.

Adoption Panel Management & Quality Assurance Team

The panel team comprises one full time Team Manager/Agency Adviser and one Panel Adviser (see structure chart). Four panel meetings (including the Dual Panel commencing January 2017) are held each month Quality Assurance by the Agency/Panel Advisers is regarded as a high priority.

Training and briefing to Panel Members is provided to enhance their understanding of Adoption Issues and their competence in considering and making evidence based recommendations to the ADMs.

Panel Team Manager/Agency Adviser and Panel Adviser offer advice to social workers thinking about adoption as a plan for children, practice guidance in writing CPR's, in consultation with the Practice Development Team (Safeguarding), plus general advice on adoption and children permanency care planning matters- including the importance of adhering to timescales.

Information for Panel applicants about the procedural operation of the Panels is available, including formal interviews, inductions and appraisals.

ADM Decisions are made in a timely manner and with careful scrutiny of reports submitted by social workers and recommendations from the Adoption Panel submitted.

The feedback from social workers, adoption applicants and panel members is incorporated into service improvement plans.

The majority of the members of the Kent Adoption Panels are independent. Members of the Central List have a combined pool of professional and personal knowledge, experience and skills as adopters and adoptees including background in adoption and fostering work.

The quality assurance and scrutiny role of the Panels is done through a feedback form at each meeting. It identifies all issues including the quality of assessments, child permanency reports, Life Story Work, birth relatives' support and the voice of the child. This feedback from the Panels has been used to improve services and practice. In addition the Chairs provide their 6 monthly reports.

The Agency Decision Makers, Head of Adoption, Agency Advisers, Medical Advisers, Panel Chairs all have regular meetings to review and plan better working methods designed to ensure better outcomes for children and their families.

An extra adoption panel was created with foster to adopt in mind. Panel members have been recruited and they will receive training on the dual approval requirements and process in early January so the panel will be fully functioning by the end of January 2017.

Procedures for the Adoption Panel service are set out in the [Adoption Panel section](#), Kent Children's Procedures online.

Post Adoption and SGO Team (PAST)

Kent Adoption service was led by Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency between 2012 to January 2016. The contract between Kent County Council (KCC) and Coram, prior to January 2016 meant that Coram managed the delivery of the majority of the adoption services for KCC; the current contract has a focus on the further development of the post adoption support menu and the multi-disciplinary team model. The Coram vision for the Post Adoption Support Team (PAST) model practised in Kent, developed since 2014, was based on recognition that adopters and adopted children require timely skilled clinical and social work expertise in-house. The approach was developed in conjunction with adopters and the Tavistock Institute. Coram has written a paper on the development of the model, its effectiveness and how it could be replicated.

The Therapists and a Clinical Lead (Supervisor) remain employed by Coram and work alongside the Kent Team Manager and Social Workers (see structure chart). The team developed between Kent and Coram focuses on timely assessments and interventions undertaken primarily 'in house' unless the children and their family reside outside of the Kent area and therefore a more localised service is required or if their requirements cannot be met within the PAST due to the absence of the required skill base.

The model of post adoption support is being expanded in 2017 to include SGO support work. The work was scoped by Coram including options for developing the service delivery models. A SGO senior social worker is building on the work started by Coram, including providing advice and information to child care social workers with a view to growing the service as requests for support is made and there is an increase in applications to the Adoption Support Fund.

The PAST provides a range of services to adopted children and their families including:

Advice & Assessment

- Provision of information, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals through the advice line.
- Consultation, assessment and intervention to adopters and their families through initial telephone or face to face consultation, brief therapeutic intervention (6 sessions) and therapeutic life story work.
- Intensive family interventions to bring a deeper understanding of children and young people's state of mind, mental health and wellbeing; and to support adoptive parents in parenting their children to bring about their social and emotional development.

Group and workshop programme

- Incredible Years Parenting programme for adopters with children under 9 years. The partnership has delivered four Incredible Years Parenting Programmes, with the

- STOP parenting programme for adopters with adolescents - first delivery of the STOP programme took place in December 2016/January 2017. Kent staff from PAST have been trained to deliver future programmes. The vision is to train adopters to co-facilitate the programme with a Kent/Coram staff member. Coram's developmental role will end when Kent is able to provide the training programmes through its own trained staff in 2017.
- The development of a Parenting Programme (on-going) specifically geared for adoptive parents with autistic children –to be piloted in March 2017 led by PAST and a Kent educational representative. Intensive Adoptive Parent Support Groups (ongoing)- 2 Groups, one in East Kent and one in West Kent, facilitated by clinical staff, each running for 8 weeks for 2 hours.
- Learning and Development workshop programme for adopters, and their families – (Rolling programme running from September to the following July each year). Includes topics such as explaining adoption, 'Whose in charge', Transitions, Social media, siblings and parenting adolescents.
- In addition close working relationship with the Adoption Support Fund has been developed including a senior representative from the fund speaking to adopters directly on three different occasions.

Supporting Education

Education conference held on 7th October 2016 attended by adopters, Senior Managers, social workers, teachers and educational representatives focusing on educational issues for adopted children and the support needed. Following on from the conference, a workshop on attachment and developing adoption friendly schools is being delivered in March 2017 by the Adult Therapist in the team. In addition, a workshop for adopters on educational matters including the use of pupil premium is being delivered in March 2017 by the Virtual School, Kent in conjunction with an adopter.

Pilot mentoring scheme

This became operational following 2-day training for adopters who were recruited to be mentors. The objective of this scheme is to support adopters in early placement. Learning is being incorporated into the continuous development of the scheme.

Young people's participation group

Strengthening adopted children and young people's voices - developed by family therapist and senior social worker from PAST, in conjunction with Coram 'Adoptables'.

Advisory Board

Strengthening the voice of adoptive parents - This group has Terms of Reference and quarterly meetings are chaired by the PAST Team Manager. It serves as an advisor and critical friend to the service.

Procedures for adoption support are set out in the [Adoption Support Section](#) and Education Policy for children Adopted from Care, Kent Children's procedures online.

Services to Birth Parents & Adult Adoptees

Barnardo's (CAFIS) Adoption Support

Contact, intermediary and birthparent support services are provided by a commissioned service provided by Barnardo's, the children's charity.

Independent Support Service to Birth Parents

To provide a support and counselling service to birth parents prior to an adoption taking place, where a child is (or children are) in care and looked after by Kent County Council, and for whom adoption has been identified as the plan.

Birth parents will have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child. This may include counselling on the procedures for placement for adoption and adoption itself.

Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Service for Adult Adoptees

To assist adopted persons, either adopted through Kent County Council or who are resident in Kent, and who are aged 18 or over, to obtain information in relation to their adoption, and to facilitate contact between such persons and their adult birth relatives. Adopted adults may wish to use either one of these services i.e. "access to birth records" only, or "intermediary services" only (having completed their own research into their pre-adoption background), or they may wish to use both services. Advice will be given, as appropriate, on tracing birth relatives.

Access to Information and an Intermediary Service for Birth Relatives

To provide access to non-identifying information regarding the adoption and advice and support to birth relatives aged 18 and over, who require intermediary services, when the adoptee has reached age 18 or over. Information on counselling for the applicant and the subject of the application should be made available. Priority given to relatives of people adopted before 12th November 1975.

Contact Services

A contact service for children under the age of 18 who have been adopted, or who are the subject of a Special Guardianship Order and who have contact with their birth relatives. The contact services include both an Indirect Letterbox Service and also a Direct Contact Service (face to face) as defined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Children Act 1989.

Procedures are set out in Access to Birth Records and [Adoption Case Records](#), Intermediary Services in Kent Childrens Procedures online

Inter Country Adoption

Kent has a contract with The Intercountry Adoption Centre (IAC). This is a full service provided from the point of enquiry until the child enters the UK with the adopters. The service includes provision for first time adopters, adopting again, and

kinship applicants or those who have already identified (and sometimes adopted) the child in the State of origin.

IAC specialist knowledge of adoption procedures and practices in States of origin and its involvement in the adoption application up to the time the child arrives in the UK can bring clear casework benefits and in addition reduces costs to the Local Authority, for example in relation to social work practitioner and management time, panel time and administrative time.

Procedures for [Inter Country Adoption](#) are set out in the inter country section, Kent children's procedures online.

Management & Monitoring of the Adoption Service

As stated earlier, Kent Adoption Service was led by Coram Voluntary Adoption Agency between 2012 and 2016. Kent County Council re-established management of the Adoption service in January 2016. The permanent appointment of a Head of Adoption in Kent and the appointment of permanent Team Managers, secured a focus on service delivery and ensuring the success and ambition of the Coram (VAA) management in the last 4 years continued. This entailed significant review of the staffing including budgets and team structures resources to ensure that there was sufficient capability within the service to deliver the adoption service.

Performance is measured through Kent performance management systems and this includes the development of a team operational dashboard (TOD) with data available at a team and individual level so activity can be tracked by managers supporting the ongoing focus on timeliness.

The continued focus of robust tracking systems across Kent supports the early identification of children for whom the plan is likely to be adoption. This in turn creates early identification of matches and has reduced the time taken for children moving to their adoptive placement following a placement order.

The Head of Adoption continues to work in partnership with the Children in Care Service Managers and reviews the process and tracking to ensure that the decision making is robust and the Adoption Service is impacting on permanency planning meetings to reduce delay and speedily progress plans for adoption. There continues to be a close working relationship between the R&A team and the Family Finding team in the matching process. There are weekly linking meetings, chaired by the Head of Adoption and attended by the three managers from teams. Every approved adoptive family and those being assessed in stage two (unless they have expressed a preference to wait until after approval) are considered for the children identified as needing adoptive parents.

Possible links are followed up with the Family Finding and Recruitment & Assessment social workers with a sense of urgency to avoid delay. Approved adopters and those in stage two are regularly sent profiles of children so that they can self-select and express an interest. This is in addition to being invited to Profiling events and having the possibility of arranging a meeting with a Family Finding social worker. There is an emphasis on making sure that all Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding social workers have a good awareness of the families and children coming through the adoption process.

Each potential match is carefully tracked to ensure timely placement of the child. There is an expectation that the social workers prepare the court application so that it can be submitted at ten weeks unless there is good reason for this to not happen. An after adoption feedback form is sent to each family after the adoption order is granted.

The Adoption Service continues to provide an annual report to the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Adoption 'Deep dive' takes place quarterly and is chaired by the Corporate Director of Health & Social Care and the Director of Specialist Children's Services.

Complaints Procedures

The majority of complaints made of the Adoption Service are resolved through a problem-solving approach within the service and we always welcome hearing from those affected if however, concerns remain unresolved Kent County Council has a comprehensive Complaints Procedure. Complaints are valued as a way of improving the services which are provided. If a complaint is not resolved in this way, the matter is progressed through a formal complaints procedure outlined as follows.

Step 1

Contact us with details of your complaint:

- write to Kent Children's Social Services, Customer Care, Kroner House, Eurogate Business Park, Ashford, TN24 8XU
- call 03000 410304
- email cscomplaints@kent.gov.uk
- Text 0786000 8025, start your message with the word complaint.

We can help you put your complaint in writing or give you advice.

Responses

We will then look into the issues and try to help, and you will receive a written reply from a senior manager. We aim to resolve your complaint within 10 working days, and by 20 working days at the latest. If your complaint will take longer we will keep you informed of the progress.

Step 2

If you are not satisfied with the [first response to your complaint](#) you have the right to take it further.

Investigation

You may be entitled to an investigation or take your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. Contact us for advice.

If we investigate your complaint:

- an investigating officer who is new to your case will look into the issues raised
- an independent person from The Young Lives Foundation, the children's charity, will also be appointed to consider your complaint
- The investigating officer and the independent person will contact you to make sure they fully understand the complaint.

Responses

When the investigation is complete, we will send you a full response. We aim to do this within 25 working days of the investigation starting, but it can take longer. We will keep you informed of progress. Where it is not possible to complete the investigation within 25 working days, it may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days.

Other organisations that can help:

Local Government Ombudsman

If you remain unhappy with the response to your complaint you have the right to take your complaint to the [Local Government Ombudsman](#) who is independent of Kent County Council. You may contact them at any time but they would normally expect you to complete our complaints procedure first.

The Young Lives Foundation

If you are a child or young person in care, you can get help to make a complaint from The Young Lives Foundation:

- call 01622 683815
- email advocacy@ylf.org.uk
- [The Young Lives Foundation website](#).

Ofsted Contact Details

Ofsted
NBU, 3rd Floor
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040
Fax: 08456 404049
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Name and Address of Manager

Sarah Skinner - Ba (Hons), MA and CQSW - Head of Adoption

Address: Kent Adoption Service, The Stable Block, Oakwood House, Maidstone,
Kent ME16 8AE Tel: 03000 420508

Qualifications and Experience of Manager

Sarah Skinner – Qualifications and Experience

Sarah Skinner was awarded a BA (Hons) Social Science from Bristol Polytechnic in 1985. She then went on to study at Warwick University in 1987 where she graduated with a MA Applied Social Studies & CQSW. This was followed by completion of the Advanced Social Work Diploma, Goldsmith University 1991.

Sarah has a sound working knowledge and experience of operational, strategic planning, service delivery and managing budgets across a variety of teams and services in children's service within the local authority and can demonstrate a proven record of achievement. Alongside the Adoption Service these include Children and Families, Policy and Performance & the Independent Reviewing Service and Virtual School Kent. Sarah has experience of project/change management and working in partnership with multi agency colleagues and other sectors within KCC such as Education, Youth Offending Service, Advisory Service Kent, The Educational Psychology Service, Connexions. She has experience of developing and implementing service planning, performance and quality assurance in a multi-disciplinary and partnership environment.

Sarah has gained a thorough knowledge of adoption legislation and other relevant child care legislation and regulations that impact upon the well-being of children in care and those who have left care. She is fully aware of the Adoption Vision for Change agenda and is developing this initiative in Kent.

Sarah has presented many reports to senior managers in Kent regarding the adoption service and other areas of work she has engaged in. This has included strategic boards such as The Corporate Parenting Panel, The Kent Corporate Parenting Group and The CAMHS Strategy Board as well as to Specialist Children's Senior Management.

Sarah returned as Head of Kent Adoption Service in July 2016

Structure Chart

