



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCIES

National Minimum Standards for Adoption Support Agencies

This document contains a statement of national minimum standards published by the Welsh Assembly Government under section 23(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The statement is applicable to adoption support agencies as defined by section 4 (7A) of that Act.

The statement is accompanied, for explanatory purposes only, by an introduction to the statement as a whole, and a further introduction to each group of standards.

Each individual standard is numbered and consists of the numbered heading and numbered paragraphs. Each standard is, for explanatory purposes only, preceded by a title and where relevant, an indication of the intended outcome in relation to that standard.

Contents

Introduction

Structure and Approach

Use of Terminology

1. Statement of Purpose

Standard 1 – Statement of Purpose

2. Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

Standard 2 – Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

3. User-focused Services

Standard 3 – User-focused Services

4. Service Delivery

Standard 4 – Service Delivery

5. Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Support Agency

Standard 5 – Skills to Provide or Manage

Standard 6 – Suitability to Carry on or Manage

6. Management of the Adoption Support Agency

Standard 7 – Managing Effectively and Efficiently

Standard 8 – Monitoring and Controlling

7. Employment and Management of Staff and Management of
Volunteers

Standard 9 – Suitability to Work with Service Users

Standard 10 – Organisation and Management of Staff

Standard 11 – Sufficient Staff with the right Skills and Experience

Standard 12 – Fair and competent employer

Standard 13 – Training

Standard 14 – Accountability and support

8. Complaints and representations

Standard 15 – Complaints and representations

9. Records

Standard 16 – Case records

Standard 17 – Administrative records

Standard 18 – Personnel files for members of staff and volunteers

10. Fitness of premises

Standard 19 – Fitness of premises

11. Financial requirements

Standard 20 – Financial viability

Standard 21 – Financial Processes

Glossary

National Minimum Standards for Adoption Support Agencies

Introduction

This document contains the national minimum standards (NMS) which will, following full implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, be applicable to adoption support agencies (ASAs) and those who wish to be registered as ASAs in Wales.

Along with the Adoption Support Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005, these standards will form the basis of the new regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the regulation of ASAs by the National Assembly for Wales (the Assembly) .

These standards will be published by the Welsh Assembly Government under section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000 and will apply from December 30 2005 unless otherwise stated in any standard. The Assembly will keep the standards under review and may publish amended statements as appropriate.

The standards are intended to be 'minimum' rather than 'best possible' practice. Many ASAs will more than meet the standards and will aspire to exceed them. Minimum standards do not mean the standardisation of provision. The standards are designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of ASA, and to enable rather than prevent individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach to providing services to people affected by adoption.

Although the standards will be issued for use by the Assembly in regulating ASAs, they will also have other important practical uses. They may be used by providers and staff in assessing their own services, may provide a basis for the induction and training of staff, may be used by service users as a guide to what they should expect an ASA to provide and do and can provide guidance on what is required when setting up an ASA. Those involved in the provision of adoption support services will be encouraged to make full use of these standards in these ways.

Structure and approach

These draft standards focus on achieving good quality service provision for adoptive children, adopted adults and their adoptive and birth families.

The standards are grouped under a series of key topics:

- Statement of purpose
- Safeguarding and promoting welfare
- User-focused services
- Service delivery
- Fitness to provide or manage an ASA
- Management of an ASA
- Employment and management of staff and volunteers
- Right to make a complaint
- Record keeping
- Fitness of premises
- Financial requirements

Each standard or group of standards is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the ASA. The standards themselves are numbered and the full set of numbered paragraphs must be met in order to achieve compliance with the standards. The standards are intended to be qualitative, in that they provide a tool for judging the quality of service experienced by the agency's service users, but they are also designed to be measurable.

Wherever possible, throughout the standards, the Adoption Support Agencies (Wales) Regulations to which a particular standard is linked has been identified. However other regulations and/or primary legislation may be relevant. The note should therefore be taken as a general guide and not as an exhaustive legal reference.

In inspecting against these standards, the regulatory authorities will follow a consistent inspection methodology and reporting format across the country. The regulatory authorities will be looking for evidence that the regulations are being met and will use the standards to support this as well as inform the basis of any decisions made with regard to registrations, variations, and cancellations and enforcement.

It is intended that these standards will be used, both by ASAs and the regulatory authorities, to focus on securing good quality services for the agency's service users and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. All ASAs and their staff should aim to provide the best possible services for their service users, and observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual service user.

Use of terminology

There is a glossary at the back of this document which gives a brief explanation of some of the terms used throughout.

1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

OUTCOME

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption support agency and the agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

STANDARD 1 - Statement of Purpose

- 1.1 There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption support agency which describes accurately what facilities and services it provides and to whom.**
- 1.2 The registered provider formally approves the Statement of Purpose and reviews, updates and modifies it where necessary at least annually.
- 1.3 The Statement of Purpose includes details in respect of the adoption support agency in accordance with Schedule 1 to the Adoption Support Agencies Regulations 2005.
- 1.4 An adoption support agency providing services to children produces a children's guide to the agency and its services and is suitable for all children who come into contact with the adoption support agency. The guide primarily includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children and is given to all children and/or their representatives. The children's guide is produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children to whom the agency may offer a service. The children's guide also contains information on how a child can make a complaint, including how to secure access to an independent advocate and how to contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales, as appropriate.
- 1.5 Oral and written communications are available, when necessary, in a format which is appropriate to the physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of the adoption support agency's service users, staff and volunteers. Arrangements are made for those who are unable to understand the document to have it read, translated or explained to them.
- 1.6 The adoption support agency's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and volunteers accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose.
- 1.7 All those working in an adoption support agency are aware of the contents of the Statement of Purpose and a copy is readily available.

[Regulation 3 - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide, Regulation 4 – Review of Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.]

2 SAFEGUARDING AND PROMOTING WELFARE

OUTCOME

The adoption support agency safeguards and promotes the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services. The agency's services are designed to meet the needs of those to whom the agency provides services.

STANDARD 2 - Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

2.1 The adoption support agency's service users are safeguarded from any form of abuse, exploitation and discrimination including physical, financial, psychological and sexual, through deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance in accordance with the agency's written policies and procedures.

2.2 Where the adoption support agency provides services to children:

- there is a detailed written child protection policy, including the management of and reporting plan for child protection issues;
- there are procedures for responding to suspicion or evidence of abuse and neglect which are in line with local Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) procedures to ensure the safety and protection of service users. This includes the involvement of the local authority and police and passing on concerns to the regulatory authority (where appropriate);
- the policy and procedures are in line with local ACPC procedures, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and 'Safeguarding Children – Working Together for Positive Outcomes'¹ (Wales);
- all staff and volunteers are trained in child protection and are aware of the agency's child protection policy;
- All staff, volunteers and service users have access to the agency's child protection policy.

2.3 All allegations and incidents of abuse in relation to the agency's staff or volunteers are followed up promptly and the details and action taken are recorded on a file, kept especially for the purpose, and on the service user's record.

2.4 The adoption support agency has written procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse which may be made by service users during the course of service provision.

[Regulation 16 – Arrangements for the Protection of Children]

¹ Welsh Assembly Government – March 2004

3 USER-FOCUSED SERVICES

OUTCOME

People affected by adoption receive a service from the adoption support agency that is appropriate and tailored to their particular need. They are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout their contact with the agency.

STANDARD 3 - User-Focused Services

3.1 People affected by adoption receive a service that is appropriate and tailored to their particular need. They are given clear information about the service they can expect to receive and what the service is designed to achieve.

3.2 The adoption support agency has in place written policies and procedures that reflect the following principles:

- Prospective service users are welcomed without prejudice and are given clear information on the services provided by the agency;
- Where the agency does not provide the specific service requested, or is not able to meet the prospective service user's particular need, the agency refers that person to an appropriate agency or service;
- In deciding whether to provide a service, or which service to provide, the agency listens to the service user's wishes and feelings and considers their welfare and safety;
- Where the service provision involves a child, their wishes and feelings are listened to and their welfare and safety are the paramount considerations;
- Where the service provision involves an adopted adult and their birth relatives, it is the wishes, feelings and the welfare and safety of the adopted adult which take precedence.

3.3 The adoption support agency ensures that systems are in place to respond promptly to the requests of and work with people who have been affected by adoption, at all times being respectful of their ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, sexuality, gender and disability and their experience and understanding of adoption.

3.4 The agency has written policies and procedures in place for working with service users with physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and for whom English or Welsh is not the first language.

- 3.5 Service users are consulted on decisions made in relation to their service provision and have the opportunity to provide feedback to the agency during the course of the service provision. The agency makes every effort to seek the views of any children receiving a service in a manner that is appropriate to their level of understanding. Consultation with service users is recorded on their individual records.
- 3.6 Where services are commissioned by an adoption agency, a three-way working relationship is developed with the adoption agency and the adoption support agency working in partnership to most effectively meet the needs of the service user. Commissioning arrangements are underpinned by a written agreement and are reviewed at regular intervals.
- 3.7 The agency informs service users of their right to make representations and complaints and they are helped to do so if this is required.

[Regulation 17 – Provision of Services]

4 SERVICE DELIVERY

OUTCOME

The adoption support agency's service users receive a good-quality, professional service, based on their needs identified by an assessment and delivered by those who are appropriately qualified and experienced and have knowledge of adoption issues.

STANDARD 4 - Service Delivery

4.1 The agency has written policies and procedures for each service it provides and service provision accurately reflects those policies and procedures.

4.2 The manager is fully informed of the current level of service provision with regard to each service provided by the adoption support agency, and is aware which staff are involved in delivering each of the services.

4.3 The adoption support agency has a written policy and procedure on how it will decide whether to provide an adoption support service to particular service users.

4.4 Prospective service users are made aware that they may be entitled to request an assessment of their needs for adoption support services from their local authority in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations.

4.5 When deciding whether to provide a service to a particular person, the adoption support agency takes into account the outcome of any local authority assessment of the person's need for adoption support services which has been conducted.

4.6 The registered provider ensures that where the adoption support agency decides to provide a service to a particular person, the decision is based on an assessment of the person's need for the adoption support service.

4.7 The manager ensures that the individual responsible for the delivery of adoption support services to each individual service user:

- Provides each service user with a clear explanation of what is involved in particular service provision and obtains their informed consent to the service provision; and
- Monitors and reviews the service provision to each service user for whom they are responsible. This includes the length of the service provision and whether the service is delivering the outcomes that it is intended to achieve.

[Regulation 17 – Provision of Services]

5 FITNESS TO PROVIDE OR MANAGE AN ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCY

OUTCOME

The adoption support agency is provided and managed by those who are suitable and have the appropriate skills and experience to do so effectively and efficiently to provide the services specified in the Statement of Purpose.

STANDARD 5 - Skills to provide or manage

5.1 The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption support agency:

- possess the appropriate knowledge and experience of adoption law and practice and, where the adoption support agency provides services to children knowledge and experience of child care law and practice;
- have business and management skills to manage the work effectively and efficiently; and
- have financial expertise to ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

5.2 The manager:

- has a professional qualification relevant to working in an adoption setting, (or children's services where the agency provides services to children) which is either NVQ level 4 or DipSW or an equivalent professional social work qualification; **or**
- is accredited by or registered with either the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the British Psychological Society (BPS) or the United Kingdom Register of Counsellors (UKRC); **or**
- is registered as an Arts, Drama or Music Therapist with the Health Professions Council for England and Wales (HPC); **and**
- by September 2007 has a qualification at NVQ level 4 in management or another qualification which at least matches the competencies required by level 4; **and**
- by September 2007 at least two years' experience of working in an adoption setting (or children's services where the agency provides services to children) which may include managing an adoption support agency, within the past five years, and in addition at least one year's experience of working as a senior practitioner.

- 5.3 For the transitional period in relation to management qualifications, appointees to the post of manager who have no such qualifications begin appropriate management training within six months of appointment.
- 5.4 The manager exercises effective leadership of the staff (where appropriate) and operation, such that the adoption support agency is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible service provision for the agency's service users.

STANDARD 6 - Suitability to carry on or manage

- 6.1 Any persons carrying on or managing the adoption support agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with providing adoption support services and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the agency's services users.**
- 6.2 Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references required by regulation 5(3)(c) and set out in Schedule 2 to the Adoption Support Agencies Regulations 2005.
- 6.3 The manager has a satisfactory disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau in accordance with the Police Act 1997 as appropriate.
- 6.4 CRB checks are renewed every three years.
- 6.5 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcome.

[Regulation 5 – Fitness of Registered Provider, regulation 6 – Appointment of Manager, regulation 7 – Fitness of Manager, regulation 8 – Registered Persons – General Requirements.]

6 MANAGEMENT OF THE ADOPTION SUPPORT AGENCY

OUTCOME

The adoption support agency is managed effectively and efficiently with a clear management structure and clearly defined roles to deliver a good quality adoption support service.

STANDARD 7 - Managing effectively and efficiently

7.1 The adoption support agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

7.2 The manager ensures that the adoption support agency is run in accordance with its Statement of Purpose.

7.3 The manager has a clear written job description which sets out the duties, responsibilities and level of delegation of the manager in managing the adoption support agency. The job description also specifies the person to whom the manager is accountable and/or who is responsible for ensuring that the manager carries out their duties and responsibilities. The manager must be notified in writing of any change in the person to whom they are accountable.

7.4 The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined.

7.5 Clear arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the manager is absent.

7.6 There are clear roles for managers, staff and volunteers (where appropriate) and well established lines of communication and accountability between manager, staff and volunteers.

7.7 The registered provider informs managers, staff and volunteers of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

STANDARD 8 - Monitoring and Controlling

8.1 There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption support agency and ensuring quality performance.

8.2 The adoption support agency has proper financial procedures and there is a reviewing procedure to keep them up to date.

8.3 Information is provided to purchasers of services and others with a legitimate interest. This includes:

- Charges for each of its services
- Itemised amounts paid for services

8.4 The company directors of the adoption support agency are responsible for ensuring that they: :

- satisfy themselves that the adoption support agency is effective and achieves good outcomes for its service users;
- receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the services of the adoption support agency every 6 months to be able to monitor progress;
- satisfy themselves that all conditions of registration imposed on the adoption support agency are met.

[Regulation 5 – Fitness of Registered Provider, regulation 6 – Appointment of Manager, regulation 7 – Fitness of manager, regulation 8 – Registered Person – General Requirements.]

7 EMPLOYMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF STAFF AND MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

OUTCOME

The staff and volunteers who work in the adoption support agency are suitable to work with the agency's service users and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for those service users. The number of staff and volunteers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption support agency.

STANDARD 9 - Suitability to work with service users

- 9.1 Anyone working in or for the adoption support agency is suitable to work with the agency's service users and to safeguard and promote their welfare, in particular children and young people where the agency provides services to children.**
- 9.2 There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff and volunteers which follow good practice in safeguarding service users, and in particular children, where the agency provides services to them. All personnel responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers are trained in, understand and operate these.
- 9.3 All staff and volunteers working in or for the adoption support agency are interviewed as part of the selection process and have written references checked to assess suitability before taking up their duties. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references.
- 9.4 All people working for the adoption support agency, including those who wish to work on a temporary, sessional or voluntary basis, have a satisfactory standard or enhanced disclosure, as appropriate, from the CRB in accordance with the Police Act 1997.
- 9.5 No person is allowed to begin work until written confirmation is received that the outcomes of all status, CRB and reference checks are satisfactory.
- 9.6 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. CRB checks are renewed every three years.
- 9.7 CRB checks for current staff and volunteers which need to be updated because it is three years or more since the last check was carried out, remain effective for a further 3 months from the date the Adoption Support Agencies Regulations 2005 came into force.

9.8 STANDARD 10 - Organisation and Management of Staff

- 10.1 Staff (including temporary and sessional staff) and volunteers (if appropriate) are organised and managed in a way which delivers an effective and efficient service.**
- 10.2 The work of all staff and volunteers is managed and monitored by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications.
- 10.3 There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability.
- 10.4 The level of management delegation and responsibility are clearly defined and are appropriate for the skills, qualifications and experience of the relevant members of staff.
- 10.5 The adoption support agency has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff and volunteers.
- 10.6 Professional supervision and consultation are provided at least 6 times a year for professionally qualified staff by appropriately qualified and experienced persons.
- 10.7 Volunteers should be supported through regular, scheduled supervision sessions with appropriate staff.
- 10.8 Staff are supported to undertake on-going training and appropriate professional and skills development.
- 10.9 Volunteers are supported to undertake on-going training which is relevant to their work in the adoption support agency.
- 10.10 The adoption support agency has an adequate level of clerical and administrative support, office equipment and infrastructure to enable staff to carry out their duties in an effective and efficient manner.
- 10.11 Administrative procedures are appropriate for dealing promptly and courteously with enquiries from service users.
- 10.12 All employees, sessional workers and consultants are provided with appropriate written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.
- 10.13 All staff understand the role of an adoption support agency and there is a clear understanding about how the agency works effectively with staff in other agencies such as local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and other adoption support agencies to achieve positive outcomes for service users.

10.14 All staff and volunteers have a copy of:

- the Statement of Purpose
- the child protection policy, where the agency provides services to children
- the policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters.
- details of the services offered
- the equal opportunities policy
- health and safety procedures
- complaints procedure.

STANDARD 11 - Sufficient staff with the right skills and experience

11.1 There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption support agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

11.2 The full-time equivalent staffing complement, in terms of numbers, grades, experience and qualifications, is adequate at all times to meet the needs of the adoption support agency and is in line with the Statement of Purpose.

11.3 Where a shortfall in staffing levels occurs, there are contingency plans to resolve them and to deal with priority work.

11.4 Staff policies encourage retention of salaried staff – including flexible working conditions, training, regular supervision, study leave, clear workloads, terms and conditions by providing support and training.

Qualifications

11.5 All social workers have a DipSW or equivalent professional social work qualification.

11.6 All counsellors, other than those providing birth records counselling under Schedule 2 to the Adoption & Children Act 2002, are registered with or accredited by either the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapists (UKCP), the British Psychological Society (BPS) or the United Kingdom Register of Counsellors (UKRC).

11.7 All Arts, Drama and Music therapists are registered with the Health Professions Council for England and Wales. Other staff involved in the provision of therapeutic services have appropriate professional qualifications.

11.8 Birth records counselling under Schedule 2 to the Adoption and Children Act 2002 is provided by qualified social workers who are trained and experienced in this type of counselling and who have a thorough understanding of the legislation surrounding access to birth records and the impact of reunion on all parties.

11.9 All medical advisors and other professional staff are professionally qualified and appropriately trained to work with the those affected by adoption, in particular the agency's service users.

11.10 All professionally qualified staff have appropriate knowledge and skills. This includes:

- An appropriate understanding of the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and associated Regulations and guidance, relevant national policies and procedures, and where the agency provides services to children, the Children Act 1989 and its associated Regulations and guidance;
- A sound understanding of the adoption process and adoption-related issues;
- Capacity to work with all those who may be affected by adoption (adoptive children, adopted adults and their adoptive and birth families);
- An appropriate understanding of the roles of other agencies who may be involved in the adoption process, in particular local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies, health and education;
- An ability to promote equality, diversity and the rights of individuals and groups; and
- An understanding of the importance of the complaints procedure.

11.11 All professionally qualified staff keep up-to-date with current issues in the adoption field and developments in legislation and guidance.

Other Staff and Volunteers

11.12 Unqualified staff and volunteers carry out their functions under the direct supervision of qualified and experienced workers, who are accountable for their work.

STANDARD 12 - Fair and competent employer

12.1 The adoption support agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and volunteers.

12.2 The adoption support agency has a public liability and professional indemnity insurance for all staff and volunteers. The insurance policy covers costs arising as a result of child abuse claims against any staff and volunteers.

12.3 The agency has comprehensive written health and safety and equal opportunities policies for all staff, volunteers and service users which covers all legal requirements.

12.4 There is a written whistleblowing policy which is made known to all staff and volunteers.

STANDARD 13 - Training

13.1 There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff and volunteers up-to-date with relevant professional, legal and practice developments.

13.2 There is a clear plan for ongoing training and appropriate professional and skills development of all staff involved in the work of the adoption support agency, through induction, post qualifying and in-service training. All new staff are given induction training commencing within seven days of starting their employment and being completed within ten weeks.

13.3 All volunteers undertake a period of induction which is completed according to a timescale agreed between the individual and the agency.

13.4 Induction training covers as a minimum :

- The aims, objectives and principles of the adoption support agency
- Health and safety policies and procedures
- Child protection policies and procedures
- The complaints policy and procedures
- Policies and procedures for record keeping
- The importance of confidentiality in the work of the adoption support agency

13.5 There is an appraisal scheme which identifies the training and development needs of all staff and volunteers involved in the work of the adoption support agency. Individual programmes of training are available, outcomes are monitored and linked to assessment of staff and volunteer needs and relate to the tasks assigned to them.

13.6 All employees and volunteers are kept informed of any changes in any legislation, guidance and case law that are relevant to their jobs and are given the opportunity to attend regular staff and team meetings to discuss current practice.

13.7 The effectiveness of training programmes for staff and volunteers is routinely evaluated and reviewed and updated at least annually.

13.8 Training programmes reflect the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the adoption support agency.

STANDARD 14 - Accountability and support

14.1 All staff and volunteers are properly accountable and supported.

14.2 All staff and volunteers have clear written details of duties and responsibilities expected of them, together with the policies and procedures of the organisation.

14.3 All staff and volunteers who come into contact with service users receive management supervision and a record is kept by the line manager of the content

of the supervision and of progress made. Supervision sessions are regular and planned in advance.

14.4 Staff and volunteers receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager, which provide an opportunity to assess and comment upon performance and identify any training needs.

14.5 Each member of staff has the opportunity to attend regular staff and team meetings. Volunteers have the opportunity to attend staff and team meetings where this is appropriate to their role.

[Regulation 21 – Staffing of Agency, regulation 22 – Fitness of Workers, regulation 23 – Employment of Staff, regulation 24 – Staff Disciplinary Procedure.]

8 COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

OUTCOME

Complaints and representations are resolved quickly and are handled in a sensitive, thorough and non-biased manner.

STANDARD 15 - Complaints and Representations

15.1 The adoption support agency has a written complaints policy and procedure covering complaints and representations by service users, staff and volunteers. Where the agency provides services to children, procedures are in place to help them make a complaint if required.

15.2 The adoption support agency provides all staff and volunteers, others involved with the adoption support agency, service users and those who have been refused a service, with a copy of the agency's written complaints policy and procedure.

15.3 Any complaint is addressed seriously and without delay in accordance with the adoption support agency's complaints policy.

15.4 The complaints procedure:

- includes information on how to make a complaint;
- does not restrict the issues that may be complained about in relation to the services or the conduct of the agency;
- specifies how complaints will be handled;
- provides information on all other avenues for complaint, where appropriate, and the right and means for all concerned to access the complaints procedure of local authorities where appropriate, the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales and the Children's Commissioner for Wales;
- is accessible to people with physical, sensory and learning impairments and those whose first language is not English or Welsh.

15.5 All staff receive training in the complaints procedures covering the following areas:

- what constitutes a complaint;
- the procedure for dealing with a complaint and how this is recorded;
- to whom a complaint may be made outside the adoption support agency;
- the procedure to be followed should a complaint not be resolved promptly by informal means, including who should be notified and the keeping of records; and
- how a child can be assisted in making a complaint (if appropriate).

15.6 The adoption agency maintains a complete record of all complaints made and how they are dealt with including the outcome.

15.7 The adoption support agency reviews the records at least annually to check satisfactory operation of the complaints procedure, to identify any patterns of complaint and action taken on individual complaints.

15.8 The adoption support agency takes appropriate action from such review in relation to its policies and practices, as well as taking any necessary further follow up action in relation to individual cases. A written record is made of action taken.

[Regulation 19 – Complaints, regulation 20 – Complaints – Further Requirements]

9 RECORDS

OUTCOME

All appropriate records are securely maintained, retained and are accessible when required.

STANDARD 16 - Case records

16.1 The adoption support agency ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive and accurate case record is maintained for each service user, which provides full details of that user's contact with the agency.

16.2 There are written policies and procedures on case recording which

- are in accordance with regulation 12 of the Adoption Support Agencies regulations 2005;
- establish the purpose and format of records;
- cover arrangements for maintaining the confidentiality of information relating to adoptions
- ensures that manual/computerised indexes and case records are securely stored to minimise the risk from fire or water or other disaster.

16.3 All staff, including temporary and sessional workers and volunteers understand the instructions and compliance is monitored.

16.4 Any decisions made in respect of a service user and the reasons for the decisions are recorded on case records and are legible, clearly expressed, signed and dated.

STANDARD 17 - Administrative records

17.1 There is a written policy on case recording, which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of records, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

17.2 Separate records are kept for:

- Staff, employed and independent/sessional, and volunteers
- Complaints
- Allegations

17.3 There is a system to monitor the quality and accuracy of records and remedial action is taken where necessary.

17.4 Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear written policy on access.

17.5 Written entries in records are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated.

17.6 There is a system for keeping records of all complaints made and for handling these confidentially and securely. Records of complaints and allegations are clearly recorded on the relevant files for staff, volunteers and service users – including details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken. Separate records are also kept which bring together data on allegations and complaints.

17.7 Arrangements are made for any records which are taken away from the adoption support agency's premises to be stored securely.

STANDARD 18 - Personnel files for members of staff and volunteers

18.1 Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and volunteer.

18.2 Records are kept of the matters listed in Schedule 3 to the Adoption Support Agencies Regulations 2005 on each member of staff and volunteer.

[Regulation 18 – Records with respect to Services, regulation 25 – Records in respect to Staff.]

10 FITNESS OF PREMISES

OUTCOME

The premises used by the adoption support agency are suitable for the purpose of providing the services as set out in the agency's Statement of Purpose.

STANDARD 19 - Fitness of Premises

19.1 There are identifiable, suitable office premises to which staff and others with a legitimate interest have access during normal working hours.

19.2 There are efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. Premises have:

- facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room
- appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems and
- an appropriate security system

19.3 The premises and its contents are adequately insured (or there are alternative prompt methods of replacing lost items).

19.4 The adoption support agency has a Disaster Recovery Plan which will include both provision of premises and safeguarding/back-up of records.

[Regulation 26 – Fitness of Premises]

11 FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

OUTCOME

The adoption support agency is financially viable.

STANDARD 20 - Financial viability

20.1 The adoption support agency ensures that it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

20.2 Procedures exist to deal with situations of financial crisis, such as informing service users and those on behalf of whom the agency is providing services. This includes liaising with purchasers of services to safeguard the welfare of those receiving services through the agency and transferring case records where appropriate.

20.3 The adoption support agency conforms with Regulations and guidelines imposed upon businesses, including Income Tax (PAYE), National Insurance and VAT.

STANDARD 21 - Financial processes

21.1 The financial processes/systems of the adoption support agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

21.2 The adoption support agency has clearly documented financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers.

21.3 The adoption support agency has a clearly written set of principles and standards:

- governing its financial management; and
- describing the financial procedures and responsibilities to be followed by the manager, staff, consultants, professional experts, volunteers, directors and trustees;

which are communicated to its managers and accountants.

21.4 The adoption support agency's accounts are maintained and properly audited.

21.5 The registered provider regularly receives information on the financial state of the agency.

21.6 The agency publishes its charges for each of its services and has clear policy for the charging of fees and expenses for any additional services it is asked to provide. The statement is available on request to purchasers and others with a legitimate interest.

[Regulation 28 – Financial Position]

Glossary

This glossary is intended to be of general assistance to the reader in interpreting this document. The definitions provided do not affect any meaning that a term may have under any relevant legislation.

Adoption agency

A voluntary adoption agency (VAA) or a local authority adoption service.

Adoption Support Agency (ASA)

An agency registered by the National Assembly for Wales to provide adoption support services in accordance with section 8 of the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

Agency

An adoption support agency.

CRB – Criminal Records Bureau

A national organisation conducting police checks to enable an assessment to be made on the suitability of a person to work with children. Different levels of check are available for different levels of regular contact and supervisory responsibility of children.

Incorporated Body

Not a natural person or persons e.g. a registered company becomes a separate legal entity upon incorporation. Legal proceedings may be taken against the incorporated body itself but not usually the individual officers of the company.

Induction

Initial training or guidance given at the start of involvement with the adoption support agency.

Job Description

A written, agreed and up-to-date statement of the main tasks and responsibilities of a staff member's or volunteer's job within the adoption support agency, including an overall definition of their role and the person to whom they are accountable.

Manager

The registered manager who is in day-to-day control of the adoption support agency.

Organisations

Those bodies which have been incorporated to form a separate legal entity.

Policy

An operational statement of intent which helps staff and volunteers make sound decisions and take actions which are legal, consistent with the aims of the adoption support agency, and in the best interests of the agency's service users.

Procedure

The steps taken to fulfil a policy.

Registered Provider

A body corporate which is registered under Part 2 of the 2000 Act as the legal person carrying on the adoption support agency.

Registered Manager

A person who is registered under Part 2 of the 2000 Act as the manager of the adoption support agency.

Registered Person

Any person who is the registered provider or the registered manager.

Registration Authority/Regulatory Authority

The National Assembly for Wales

Statement of purpose

A document required by the Regulations which defines the objectives of the adoption support agency and covers those issues set out in the Regulations and national minimum standards.

Unincorporated Body

Person acting with at least one other to form a group pursuing a common aim which is not registered so as to form a separate legal entity. Legal proceedings may be taken against individuals within the group but not the named group itself i.e. each individual in the group has personal liability for the acts or omissions of the group as a whole.