



Recruitment Strategy

2024-2025



About This Document

Title	Adopt East Adoption Recruitment Strategy
Purpose	To provide a strategy for the recruitment of prospective adopters who are able to meet the needs of children across the region and nationally
Updated by	Pam Whittaker – Executive Head of Adopt East
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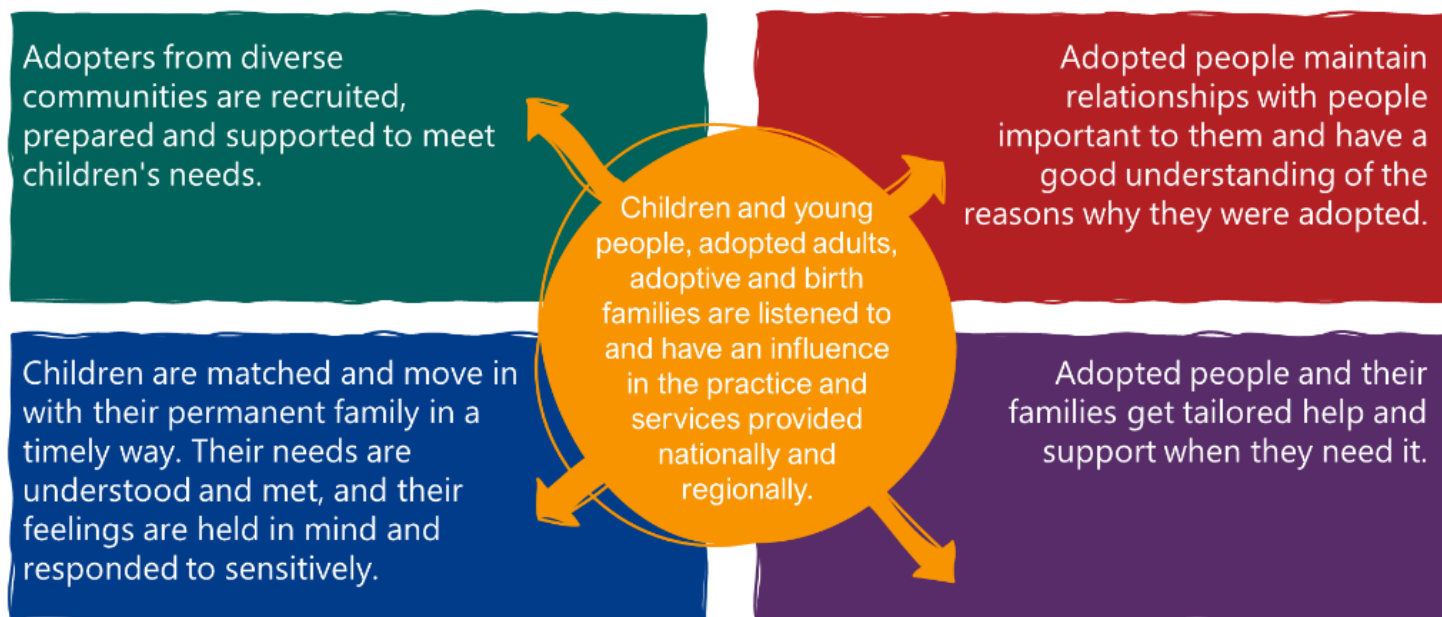
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30/4/23	0.1	First edition	Pam Whittaker
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1. Introduction

The Adopt East Alliance is made up of eight Local Authorities namely Bedford Borough, Essex, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock. It is also made up of 2 Voluntary Adoption agencies namely Adoptionplus and Barnardo's. Adoption UK represents the adopters voice for the region. All eight local authorities aim to work collaboratively across all member agencies to recruit prospective adopters who can meet the needs of children across the region and also nationally. If prospective adopters are not matched with an Adopt East child in a timely manner they are supported to look for a national match. This recruitment strategy covers all eight local authorities and should be read in conjunction with their localised Sufficiency Strategies. This strategy also sits along side the National Adoption England Recruitment Strategy and the National Recruitment Criteria, adopted by all Adopt East agencies.

2. National Adoption England Strategy 2024 - 2027

This strategy sets out what the National Adoption England will support Regional Adoption Agencies and Local Authorities in the following areas:



One of the key strands of the strategy is the recruit adopters from diverse communities who are able to meet children's needs. Adopt East is connected with the national strategy group through the RAA leaders and the Recruitment Steering Group (NARSG). NARSG's ethos is built upon a commitment from all those involved in the adoption system across England, bringing together all the major stakeholders in the delivery of adoption services across England. Adopt East partners attend recruitment launches held by NARSG and make use of all the national resources available to support regional and local adopter recruitment.

3. Principles underpinning Adopt East recruitment

These principles underpin Adopt East's approach to recruitment:

- The underpinning value of the Adoption East Alliance is: "Family is at the heart of all we do." With this in mind, we expect that all children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond. Where possible this should be with their first/birth family, but where this is not consistent with their welfare, every effort will be made to secure an alternative stable home where the child will feel loved and valued.
- Adopted children deserve the best experiences in life, from excellent parenting and education to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents, skills and interests, in order to have an enjoyable childhood and successful adult life. Stable homes, emotional wellbeing and support are essential elements of this success.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's wellbeing. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality is fully recognised and positively valued and promoted.
- Disabled children and children with complex needs may have particular needs which should be fully recognised and taken into account.
- Delays in making decisions and in placing children with a family who can meet their developmental needs can have a severe impact on outcomes for children and should be avoided where possible.
- Evidence shows the importance of finding the right permanent family for children in care as swiftly as possible. Delay in decision making considerably reduces the life chances of children and legislation requires local authorities to consider Early Permanence as an option for all children where adoption is being considered. Therefore Adopt East are committed to recruiting and assessing carers who will be dually approved/temporarily approved as both foster carers and adopters in order to meet this requirement.
- Children, first/birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.
- A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the National Minimum Standards and New Practice Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, Alliance partners, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

Adopt East partners believe that all children have the potential to make a success of their lives and that every effort should be made to ensure that disadvantaged children are able to

fully participate in society. It is one of the key duties to make sure that these children are protected and can enjoy their childhood. The Adopt East recruitment criteria sets out how we will work with our adoption community.

4. Aims of the Adopt East Recruitment Strategy

Adopt East brings together the professionalism, skills and expertise of all eight local authorities and two voluntary adoption agencies from across the East of England. All eight local authorities work together to achieve the following recruitment aims:

- To develop key strands and messages for recruitment that will permeate through all media, aligned with the wider recruitment messages from Adopt East
- To actively participate in National Recruitment campaigns such as #youcanadopt, to ensure we maintain a national focus and are informed of the national trends and the subsequent local impact.
- To understand the needs and demographics of children currently awaiting adoptive families or who are likely to need adoptive families in the coming year by working alongside the local authority childcare teams.
- To understand the demographics of our local and regional community of prospective adopters and potential adopters to ensure that the most appropriate matches are made in terms of the child's individual needs which include, but are not limited to, culture, ethnicity, religion and disability.
- To understand the trends within the service and externally in relation to the skills and qualities required of adopters to meet the needs of children who are waiting for adoptive families
- To flexibly target recruitment activity based on the needs of these children
- To track the current prospective adopters and understand the capacity to approve adopters
- To appreciate that prospective adopters will often approach the service with a young baby in mind and to develop their knowledge about the characteristics of the children waiting, building on their learning throughout the process; to gently encourage them to widen their scope regarding the age range and type of child they could consider, but not to stretch them beyond their capacity.
- To understand why the plan for adoption changes and the characteristics of the children who are not placed.
- To understand trends from adoption disruptions and how learning from these might assist in the recruitment and training of prospective adopters.
- To manage the capacity to assess prospective adopters across the region wherever possible. Where demand outstrips capacity temporarily pause recruitment. However, when this decision is made the Recruitment Strategy Group will closely monitor capacity so that recruitment can resume as soon as possible.
- To maintain and update the Recruitment Strategy.

5. Adopt East Recruitment Criteria:

An agreed Adopt East recruitment criteria has been adopted by all Local Authorities across Adopt East as follows:

Adopt East welcome adopters from all sections of the community, we have children with differing needs that need loving families to grow up in.

Adopt East is committed and adheres to the National Recruitment Criteria issued in 2020:

- *All adopters must be willing to put the child and his/her needs first and foremost in all decisions affecting the child's welfare.*
- *All adopters must be able to provide a loving, calm, emotionally stable environment for the child.*
- *All adopters must be healthy and fit enough to keep the child safe, care and play with the child as they grow and support them into adulthood.*
- *All adopters must be able to provide a stable, safe home with room for the child to play and sleep.*
- *All adopters must be willing to respect the child's birth culture and family origins as an important part of the child's identity, providing information to the child as he/she grows up to explain their early life.*
- *All adopters should be supported by family, friends or community who will welcome the child and support the adopter/s.*
- *All adopters must be financially able to provide for the child's needs. If both parents work this includes one parent taking time from work in the first year to settle the child into the family.*
- *Adopters must be legally resident in the UK for 1 year before becoming an adoptive parent.*
- *Adopters must be over 21 years old.*

- *Adopters and those sharing their home must have no convictions for sexual offences or crimes against children.*



6. Adopt East Data for 12 months to 31/12/23:

An important starting point is to consider the children that are being placed for adoption to understand the likely need for prospective adopters. It is difficult to accurately predict the trends but if adoptions continue at a comparable rate then the sufficiency requirements are likely to be similar. The children's data across Adopt East is as follows:

243 had Placement Orders made in the 12 months to 31/12/23, an increase from 194 children in the previous year. Given that we have some prospective adopters waiting and there is likely to be some withdrawals or prospective adopters not feeling able to meet the needs of the children waiting, it is important that our sufficiency target is above the number of Placement Orders made.

Agency	BLA to ADM	# ADMs	ADM to PO	# POs	PO to match	# matches	Match to placement	# placed	Placement to AO	# AOs
Target timescale (days)	182		91		121		31		274	
Adopt East	242	309	137	243	163	201	24	213	279	214
ENGLAND	252	4052	100	3326	193	2861	22	2932	288	2951
Bedford Borough	241	23	107	17	181	17	17	19	281	9
Essex	282	66	171	51	135	37	29	45	262	44
Hertfordshire	215	28	87	22	195	30	27	30	284	53
Luton	222	29	105	19	138	12	10	11	253	14
Norfolk	271	73	133	68	186	62	26	63	322	44
Southend-on-Sea	229	3	115	8	228	10	36	12	240	8
Suffolk	203	71	158	51	92	29	17	29	271	35
Thurrock	202	16	130	7	160	4	11	4	219	7

Adopt East approval rate for prospective adopters for the 12 months to 31/12/23 is shown below, showing an increase on the previous year.

ASGLB RAA Dashboard - Adopt East 2023/24 Q3 - Approvals, Families Available, Families Needed, Adopter Gap, Children stuck and Assessment Pipeline

Agency	Families approved			As at 31-Dec-23							
	1-Jan-21 to 31-Dec-21	1-Jan-22 to 31-Dec-22	1-Jan-23 to 31-Dec-23		Families available	Families needed	Adopter Gap*	% children who had been waiting 3 months ago now placed	Open S2 cases	Cases pending S2	Open S1 cases
Adopt East	226	166	188		183	104	76%	38%	62	39	43
ENGLAND	3054	2460	2186		1830	1848	-1%	26%	991	304	995

Based upon our recent data it is predicted that our sufficiency target for 2023/24 should be to approve in excess of 200 adopter households across the region.

Key objectives for Adoption Recruitment in Adopt East

Objective 1 - To recruit the following prospective adopters within the Adopt East:

Target for each Local Authority:

Bedford Borough	12
Essex	45
Hertfordshire:	35
Luton	12
Norfolk	40
Southend on Sea	14
Suffolk	40
Thurrock	12

These current recruitment figures will leave a shortfall for some areas but we recognise that work is needed to develop the recruitment practice in certain areas such as Luton and Norfolk. Note that Norfolk has increased their recruitment target by 10 to realistically develop their practice to the point where it is comparable with their children's numbers. This will gradually reduce their placement costs. Also note that areas such as Suffolk still have a number of adopters waiting. All areas are aware of the national sufficiency

challenge so are keen to exceed their recruitment target as we know that there will be pressure for prospective adopters.

In order to support this approval target, Adopt East partners will ensure that our prospective adopter experience is engaging and welcoming throughout their journey. All promotional material, events and interactions to be managed in an open and engaging manner, recognising the wide diversity of characteristics, skills and experience that our prospective adopters come to us with.

Objective 2 - To increase our recruitment of adopters from diverse backgrounds, in particular from Black Caribbean and Black African communities

We need a wide range of adopters who are reflective of the Adopt East children and community. We need to be creative in our recruitment approach utilising the skills and support of existing adopters from diverse backgrounds. Operating in a culturally sensitive way is crucial. A black adopters support group has been established and work will be undertaken to explore how we engage with the community. Our children who are mixed black Caribbean and mixed black African in particular wait longer than other children so this will be a key objective for 2024-25.

Objective 3 - To support prospective adopters from the first point of contact through the process to understand the diverse characteristics of the children waiting for adoption and to develop prospective adopters understanding of the need for therapeutic reparenting.

Ensure that all key points of contact incorporate key messages about children requiring adoption. Use key training such as adopting siblings, thinking about our children and Early Permanence to promote initiatives. We will continue to promote the joys of adopting children with additional needs. We are committed to working with our adopter community and Adopter Voice to ensure that adopters are supporting our messaging in preparing and supporting prospective adopters with the task of parenting children with a plan for adoption.

Objective 4 – To maintain the timeliness of approvals to ensure that there is a consistent supply of adopters across the region

Ensure that 80% of prospective adopters are approved within 4 months of the stage 2 assessment and that prospective adopters are moved through stage 1 in a timely manner.

Objective 5 – To provide a steady supply of dually approved or temporary approved carers across the region to take children on a fostering to adoption basis

Ensure that a 30% of all prospective adopters are available for children to be placed for Early Permanence.

Objective 6 – To engage in regular recruitment campaigns to promote the needs of our children around an open and flexible approach to keeping in touch (contact) arrangements

Train and develop prospective adopters understanding of the need for adopted children to maintain ongoing relationships with their first (birth) family.

Objective 7 – To work with our Voluntary Adoption Agencies partners to fill any sufficiency gaps that we have across the region

Regular meetings will be held with the Matching Co-ordinator and VAAs. VAA partners are visible and active participants throughout Adopt East.

Objective 8 – Ensure that each LA has a minimum of 10% of enquiries converted into prospective adoptive approvals

Each LAs to monitor this target and where it follows below to review their recruitment practice to ensure that they are using a strengths based approach throughout their recruitment and assessment processes.

Conclusion

This strategy will be regularly reviewed through the Regional Practice Group with tasks delegated to the relevant workstreams. The Executive Head along with Practice Leads in the Local Authorities will be responsible for ensuring that the strategy is implemented and monitored.

Principles for managing sufficiency

Given that we are now moving to a period of time where we do not have the same number of adopters waiting across the region we need to be smarter about making best use of our adopters. Following these principles is likely to mean that more children are matched across the region as we are making better use of our supply of adopters. It is not meant to removed professional discretion but its important that we are thinking of all of the children across the region.

- Early links are only made up to 6 weeks prior to a final hearing
- All workers and managers remain open minded to all approved families. At the family finding stage they should not be looking at approval issues.
- A maximum of 3 families should be considered at any one time. Workers should not start further conversations until they have closed off previous discussions on honest feedback provided.
- Dually approved carers are currently in short supply and as such should not be used for other children without a clear rationale.
- 0-2 children with no additional needs should not be opened upon on linkmaker. If your agency does not have adopters available then contact the matching co-ordinator and she will provide details of a maximum of 3 families who are available. (opening children up on linkmaker is causing blockages with adopters across the region and also family finding workers are getting a flood of enquiries that they are having to deal with)
- Sibling adopters should not be approached for single children unless there are no adopters available across the region.
- Adopters available to take older children should not be approached for younger children unless there are no adopters available across the region.

Any decisions made outside of these principles should be referred to the following:

- Bedford – Team Manager
- Essex – Service Manager
- Herts – Service Manager
- Luton – Team Manager
- Norfolk – Head of Service
- Southend – Team Manager
- Suffolk – Service Manager
- Thurrock – Team Manager

Pam Whittaker

Reviewed May 23