

Statement of Purpose

1 September 2024

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1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives and a description of the service and facilities that it provides. It can be used by children, young people and families as a guide to what they should expect the service to provide and do. The Statement is approved by County Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children & Family Services, and Councillor Jim Hobson, Blackpool Council Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is a joint adoption service for Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council and became operational on the 1 April 2020. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is a Regional Adoption Agency hosted by Lancashire County Council. The regional agency operates under the terms of a partnership agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements, the budget, staffing and funding contributions for the two local authorities.

Services are provided in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011);
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

2. Welcome from County Councillor Cosima Towneley Cabinet Member for Children & Family Services, Lancashire County Council and Councillor Jim Hobson, Blackpool Council Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Council have worked together to deliver a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), 'Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool' since April 2020.

Our priority is, first and foremost, the recruitment of adopters who can offer a loving, stable, and safe home for children unable, for whatever reason, to remain with their birth families. We need to recruit adopters who can meet the needs of Lancashire and Blackpool's children requiring adoption. This includes sibling groups and those presenting with complex needs. We believe adoption and a lasting home improves

the life chances for children. To achieve this the Service is committed to supporting those stepping forward as adopters on their journey as caring and responsible parents.

. We look to achieve this through:

- Improved emotional security for adopted children (children with adoptive care plans)
- Developing and improving adopter skills and confidence, through ongoing support for those looking to become adopters
- Approved adopters who provide the range of adoptive homes our children require
- An increase in early engagement with adoptive families leading to a reduction in crisis intervention and adoptive home breakdown.
- An evolving skilled workforce, who feel confident delivering services.

These are significant and ambitious undertakings which will take time to achieve so we are proud to start our journey to modernise our adoption service in line with the National adoption strategy 2024-2027. Adoption needs are changing, and Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool have a clear vision to modernise our service to better meet the needs of children and their families.

We support and encourage openness in adoption. We know that where there is some level of ongoing communication and relationship between adoptive parents, the birth family and the adopted child, all parties can benefit. Embracing a spirit of openness primarily helps to strengthen an adopted child's sense of identity, reduce the sense of rejection, and enable them to thrive into adulthood.

We relish the challenge the next few years present and the benefits the actions within this Statement of Purpose will bring to adopters and adoptees. We wish it every success for the future.

3 Principles and Values

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own 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 taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption may have a severe impact on the health and development of a child and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- 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 first family/ birth relatives will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who will work together to deliver services.
- Birth/first parents and families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

Adoption England and The National Adoption Strategy

Adoption England is a collaboration of Regional Adoption Agencies working together with a central team working nationally, aiming to improve adoption practice and develop support and services to better meet the needs of children and families. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool as a Regional Adoption Agency works closely with other Regional Adoption Agencies both in the northwest, nationally and with Adoption England. Adoption England has published a three year strategy to modernise adoption and improve outcomes. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to working to develop services as outlined in the strategy.

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool provides an adoption service to:

Children in need of an adoptive family
 Birth relatives
 Prospective and approved adopters
 Children and adoptive parents who need adoption support services
 Adopted adults

4. Equal Opportunities

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of Lancashire County Council as our host. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability whilst being mindful of the need to avoid undue delay.

5. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool Aim and Values

Adopters in Lancashire and Blackpool were consulted as part of the work to form Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, regarding what adopters and their families wanted from a Regional Adoption Agency. These are the agreed aims and values agreed with our adopters.

Our aim: To support you and your family through your adoption journey

Our values:

- Friendly – we are welcoming, positive, understanding, and helpful
- Open and honest – we are clear about what you can expect from us
- Inclusive – we are non-judgemental, consistent, fair, and supportive
- Professional – we have knowledgeable and experienced staff who are passionate about what they do

6. The Work of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool

Children who cannot grow up within their birth families should have the benefit of a long-term stable childhood where they are loved and accepted as a unique individual, are assisted to achieve to their full potential, and well prepared for independence and adult life.

Adoption is a means by which this can be achieved for children where it is in their best interests. Adoption offers vulnerable children much needed stability, security, legal permanence and the support they need to achieve their potential within a loving home.

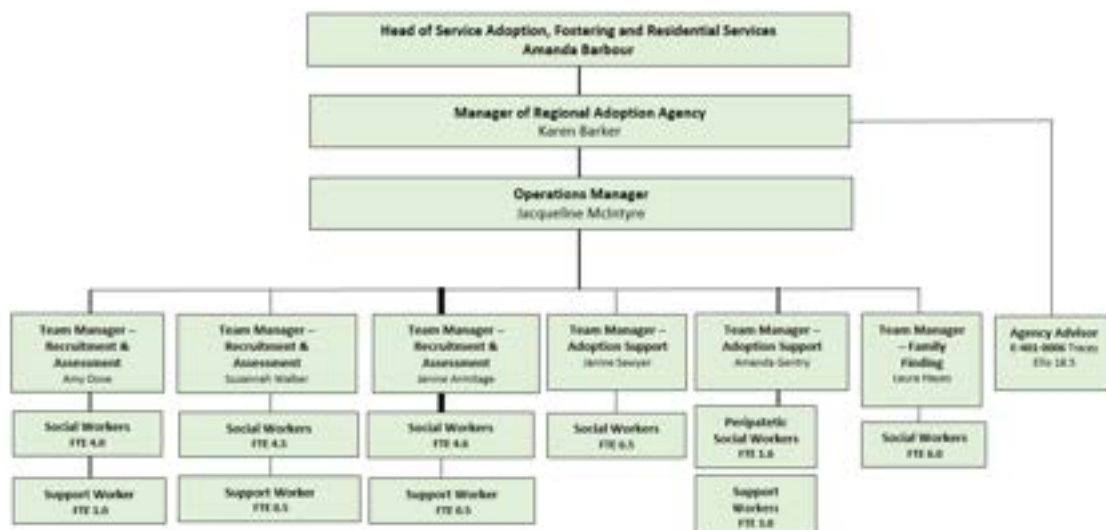
Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to trying to find adoptive families for the children of Lancashire and Blackpool. Where this is not possible Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool will provide information to the local authorities regarding why this cannot be achieved.

The service will undertake the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families.
- Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, a home study, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation courses
- Support the early permanence of children by recruiting Concurrent and Fostering for Adoption adopters to enable children with a plan of adoption or a likely plan of adoption to be placed within their homes at the earliest opportunity.
- Support for families who are waiting for a child
- Family finding for children who need a lasting homes through adoption
- Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after a child moves in to its permanent home. This includes workshops, training and support groups
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to another agency, which provides the service under contract to Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool
- Non-agency/step-parent adoption work
- The family finding teams become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest opportunity
- Children's social workers undertake the task of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption. The responsibility for matching and supporting adoptive families is a shared task till adoption order.

- An adoption letterbox service is provided which enables adopted children to have ongoing family links with their birth families
- Support and signposting information, counselling, and support as appropriate to adults, whose lives have been affected by adoption, including adopted adults and birth families
- Information about all aspect of the adoption service can be accesses via 0300 123 6727 or via <https://www.adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk>
- Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool has social media channels, facebook, x and Instagram which provide additional channels to share information with prospective adopters and wider audience.
- All enquires are followed through by an adoption worker
- Approved interpreters can be used when needed

7. Organisational Structure



Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool staff are based at County Hall, Preston, PR1 8XN, however they work across the whole of Lancashire and Blackpool.

8. Qualifications and Experience of Staff

Karen Barker (BA(Hons) in Applied Social Studies / Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) is the Senior Manager of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. Karen has worked across a range of statutory childcare settings over 30 years since qualifying as a social worker in 1989. Karen has been a manager for over 20 years, with over 15 year's management experience in permanency, fostering and adoption.

Jackie McIntyre (BSc Hons Psychology and MA in Social Work) is the Operations Manager of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. Jackie has worked for Local Authority Children's Services since qualifying in 2007, holding various roles within Safeguarding, Looked After Children and Fostering & Adoption. Jackie has held management posts within Fostering & Adoption since 2016.

The structure of Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is set out above. All social workers are qualified with a social work qualification and registered with Social Work England. They have relevant experience in children and families work and all have undertaken an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

The teams in Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool work closely together with colleagues in the Local Authorities to identify the children who require adoptive families and within the service to ensure that adopters and children are supported through their adoption journey.

9. The Service to Prospective Adopters

How to make an Enquiry

Enquirers can access information on adopting through Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool via the agency website - enquiries@adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk or by making contact through the dedicated enquiry line 0300 123 6727. At first contact, enquirers are invited to an information session. We welcome enquiries from those who live in Lancashire and Blackpool as well as those who live beyond Lancashire and Blackpool.

Applications for Adoption from Overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool has a contract with another agency to provide this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Information Events

All enquirers will be invited to attend Information Events which are held at different locations across the area. Information Events allow prospective applicants to find out more about adoption, the assessment and preparation process and to meet other prospective adopters. Information is also provided about Early Permanency via Concurrent Placements and Foster for Adoption. Prospective applicants are provided with the opportunity to express an interest in being assessed for dual approval as adopters and early permanency adopters. If enquirers wish to progress their interest, they request a Registration of Interest at the event or can do up to 6 months after attending the event.

Initial Home Visit

A home visit is undertaken once the Registration of Interest (ROI) has been sent out. A support worker from the Recruitment and Assessment team will undertake the visit to answer any questions, view the home environment and offer support with the completion of the Registration of Interest.

Stage 1 Pre-assessment process

Stage 1 begins on the day that Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool accepts the registration of interest from adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete.

The stage 1 process will include the following:

- A social worker will be allocated to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.
- All of the statutory references/checks will be completed including the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible which will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues, medical issues that need additional oversight and guidance
- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training /preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have.

Preparation Training

Prospective adopter(s) will be invited to attend preparation training in Stage 1 in person. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on our website.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 12 times per year based on need. Second or subsequent adopter training is provided at regular intervals as required.

Stage 2 - The Assessment Process

The stage 2-assessment process cannot begin until the stage one assessment has successfully been completed (apart from second time and foster carer adoptions) In some instances, applicants can proceed to stage two with outstanding checks subject to a management decision if it is deemed that not to do so would cause unnecessary delay.

The applicants complete a stage 2 application form which notify the agency of their wish to continue with the process. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long process during which a home study assessment is undertaken. This leads to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage 2 plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional panel date. The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a

variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, ex-partner, employers, and references.

Adoption by existing foster carers

Fostering families should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child (or the children's) plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

The service in conjunction with the child's social worker will then undertake a viability assessment to determine if that application should proceed. If the decision is made that the application is positive a social worker will be appointed to complete the assessment of the prospective adopter. If the viability assessment recommends that the full assessment should not be undertaken foster carers will be advised of their right to submit an application to court in certain instances.

A fast-track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. The process will bypass the stage one process and start at the beginning of stage two (as above). They will be offered training.

Second or subsequent adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again. If it is considered appropriate to proceed, they would need to complete the registration of interest form. A fast tracked process will be provided with Stage 1 and 2 being offered concurrently. They would be offered training specific to second time adopters.

10. Adoption Panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- Approval of the match between children and adopters
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan

The panels are chaired by independent chairs.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the district.

There are three Adoption Panels per month. They are held in County Hall Preston and Bickerstaffe House Blackpool.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel, with support from their Social Worker. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all of the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within 7 working days of the recommendation of the panel. They may make a decision different to that recommended by the panel.

Where prospective adopters or existing adopters disagree with a decision following consideration by the Adoption Panel and Agency Decision Maker, they have the right to make representation in certain circumstances in accordance with the Regulations. The prospective/adopter should make their representation within 40 days of receiving the written decision of the Agency Decision Maker. This is done by making representations either to the Adoption Service or the Independent Review Mechanism, www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

11. Beyond Approval

Matching and Support

Following approval adopters are offered additional training to help them prepare for a child coming into their family. Adopters are provided with information on University of East Anglia 'Moving to Adoption Model' which is the model used for transitioning children between foster carers and adopters.

Many adopters approved by Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool are matched with Lancashire and Blackpool children. The tracking of children in Lancashire and Blackpool allows early identification of children suitable for early permanence and the identification of potential links with early permanency adopters. Those children where early permanence is not suitable are still considered for links at the earliest opportunity. Adopters can be approached with details of a potential link following their approval. In the event approved adopters are not linked swiftly with a Lancashire or Blackpool child their profiles are usually uploaded to Linkmaker which is a website which is matching website that adopters may choose to access and contains both children and adopter profiles.

When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report (CPR) and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and their assessed needs. The CPR will contain details of proposed contact with the birth family including mailbox arrangements which are to be maintained by all parties once a child is adopted.

The adopters will meet with the child's social worker, child's foster carer and other relevant professional who are involved with the child such as medical advisor, teacher etc. This allows the adopter(s) to be able to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the child(rens) needs. A life appreciation day, highlighting significant events and adults in the child's life may be undertaken with the adopters. This is dependent on the child's circumstances.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen and contributed to by the prospective adopters before panel.

The proposed match is taken to the Adoption Panel, with all the relevant paperwork. The child's social worker, adopter's social worker, family finding social worker and adopter(s) will attend panel. The process for panel is the same as approval with the Adoption Panel making a recommendation on the suitability of a match. Decision making for children to be matched for adoption is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's statutory local authority. If the adopter is being matched with a child from an agency outside Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, they will attend that agency's panel.

If a match is agreed there will be an introduction planning meeting to plan for the introduction, and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the Early Permanency route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering.

Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to moving home, or once the child has moved and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information and promote ongoing family links.

12. Annual Reviews of Prospective Adopters

We aim to match approved adopters and children at the earliest opportunity working proactively with adopters to enable placements to be made. The clear focus is on placing children in loving homes but there may be occasions where there is an interval between an adopter being approved and a child being placed.

13. After a child moves into its family home

Visits will be made by the child's social worker and the families assessing social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and adopter(s).

The child remains a Child Looked After until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six weekly. The first four weekly visits will include an unannounced visit. Statutory visits are the responsibility of the placing local authority. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and the worker for the prospective adopters will give advice, however this is normally at 10 weeks of placement. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family and child's social workers.

Life story material will be provided for the child by the child's social worker and given to the adopters for safekeeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a Later Life Letter is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

14. Adoption Support

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool has a specialist Adoption Support Team which offers a range of services. They also signpost to other services for those affected by adoption such as:

- Adoptive parents
- Adopted children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Adopted adults

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to working in partnership with other local services such as Education, Health and Children's Services.

Adoptive Families

The Adoption Support Team will undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund. This is a central fund provided by the Department of Education for access to therapeutic support for adoptive children and their families. Outcome measures will be used with the family to better understand the impact of any therapeutic support and intervention.

Current Activities and Support for adoptive families:

- Advice line and newsletter
- Support groups
- Assessing for Adoption Allowance
- Peer Mentoring Service
- Training and workshops
- Assistance with and review of ongoing contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- Annual social events for adoptive families
- Links with mental health and educational services
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories

Adopted Children and Young People

Current support for adopted children:

- Social groups and activities

- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children
- Information about accessing records from the age of 18 years

Birth Relatives

Current support for birth relatives:

- Advice and counselling
- Support in writing letterbox and contact arrangements
- Enabling parents to record on their child's record whether they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18

Adopted Adults

Current support for adopted adults:

- Discussion and advice about wishes around contact with and from birth relatives

Information about adoption services for people who have been adopted can be accessed via our Adoption Advice Line: 0300 123 6728 or via the website <https://www.adoptionlancashireblackpool.org.uk>

Ongoing Contact and the Letterbox Service

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child, and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Contact is about maintaining links between the birth and adoptive family and may include letterbox, virtual or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, brothers and sisters or extended family members.

A maintaining contact service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent, or any other relative, or with any other person, the agency considers relevant.

15. Complaints, Comments, Compliments:

Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to the process of continuous improvement. Compliments, comments and complaints provide opportunities to review services and promote service developments.

Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue. In certain situations the Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool managers will be the

most appropriate person to talk to. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, you have the right to progress to a formal complaint.

Complaints:

If you are a child, or your complaint is on behalf of a child, then you should contact the local authority, which has responsibility for that child. The local authority will be responsible for handling your complaint as it retains responsibility for the welfare of each adopted child. Most issues can be resolved speedily and effectively through informal discussions with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker, depending on the particular issue.

However, if you are not satisfied with their response, you can contact the Complaints section of the relevant local authority by clicking on one of the links below;

Lancashire County Council

www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/

Blackpool Council

www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Social-services-complaints.aspx

If you are an adopter, prospective adopter, and you wish, to complain about a service provided by Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, you should make the complaint to Lancashire County Council which is the host agency for Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool and which will investigate all complaints about Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool.

Lancashire County Council

www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/

Compliments and Comments

If you want to make a comment or compliment about a service provided by Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool, you should make the compliment/comment to Lancashire County Council

Lancashire County Council

www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/get-involved/compliments-comments-complaints/

If you are a birth parent you will need to make a complaint via the respective local authority which worked with you child using the links below

Blackpool Council

www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Social-services-complaints.aspx

Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted Contact details

Ofsted National Business Unit

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 123

Email: enquires@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk