



Adoption

Adopting with Hampshire



Hampshire
County Council

www.hants.gov.uk

About Hampshire's **Adoption** Service

Hampshire County Council is a local authority Adoption agency which provides a range of services and fulfils requirements which are set out in legislation. The service operates to a set of Guidelines and Minimum Standards which are also issued by the Department for Education. The service is inspected by Ofsted.

In addition to recruiting and assessing adopters, managing the approval process and providing training for prospective and approved adopters, the service provides support services to those who have been adopted or those who are birth parents or relatives of children who have been adopted.

Hampshire County Council's Adoption Service is part of the wider Children's Services team. The Directorate oversees welfare, wellbeing and education of children and works closely with a range of partners to offer Hampshire's children a positive start in life.

As a local authority adoption agency, Hampshire County Council does not discriminate on any grounds and welcomes applicants from all ages (over 21), backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic groups and faiths. The service places children from birth upwards.

Staff in the service have extensive experience of social work and adoption in particular and are well placed to advise families, and share their expertise with colleagues across the service, to the benefit of all applicants and clients who require support.

An adoptive family can make an immense difference to the life of a child. Families need effective preparation and support to be able to support an adopted child. Hampshire's adoption service supports adopters through:

- Comprehensive preparation training and workshops
- A thorough home study assessment and time for self-reflection
- Support from a case social worker throughout the process
- Advice and guidance with matching a child
- Support with linking and introduction to children, and the transitional process
- Ongoing training and workshops post placement
- Access to a comprehensive adoption support service - for anything from telephone advice through to more specific support if required
- Referrals to specialist services for the children you adopt if it is needed, including specialist support with health and education.

Read more online: [Statement of Purpose](#)

About **Adoption**

Adoption provides permanent families for children who are unable to live with their birth families.

When a family cannot look after their children, help and assistance is given to support a family to stay together. A child may be temporarily fostered while professionals work to support parents, and in most cases, children who have been fostered return to the care of their families. However every year a small percentage are not able to return home, and are placed for adoption.

Every adoption situation is unique but for adoption to be the plan for the child, there will be some reason why it is not in the child's best interests to remain in the birth family

It can often take time to make the decision for a child to be adopted, and it is never a decision taken by only one person. It is important that the right decisions are made, as once an Adoption Order is made, a child loses all legal ties with their birth mother and father and they become a full member of a new family, usually taking the new family name.



Meet the Children

Meet the Children profiles are based on real stories but names, locations and details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved. Any children featured are not waiting for families.

Caroline & Andrew - Siblings

Caroline is five years old and, like her brother, has blond hair and blue eyes. She is an easy-going child who will 'go with the flow'. Caroline loves her dolls and playing at 'being mum'. She is content to play on her own and amuse herself. When first placed with her current carers, Caroline became very insecurely attached to her foster mother. She would cling to her and become very distressed if left alone. However, she is beginning now to grow in confidence and continues to respond well to discipline and consistent routines and boundaries.

She is receiving therapeutic support for her attachment difficulties. Caroline has a mild developmental delay but she is expected to catch up with appropriate care and stimulation. She is talking well for her age. She needs help with personal care. Caroline is described as a lovable child who is very affectionate, and full of energy.

Andrew will soon be four. He has blond hair, blue eyes, a cheeky grin

and a good sense of humour. He wears glasses, and an eye patch for part of the day, to correct a squint. Andrew likes playing with trains, cars and trucks and watching TV. Andrew responds particularly well to routine but requires visual prompts. Andrew needs close supervision and clear, consistent boundaries as he regularly tests them. Andrew has a diagnosis of mild developmental delay, language delay and dyspraxia. He is receiving speech and language therapy and physiotherapy. He needs help with his personal care as he will put his clothes on back to front and sometimes has toilet accidents. He also needs help when eating and can become very impatient when waiting for food. However, his foster carers have worked hard with him and this is improving.

Although a challenging child, everyone involved with Andrew describes him as a likeable and endearing little boy.

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About the children who are placed for **Adoption**

Most children placed for adoption with a new family will have experienced abuse or neglect of some kind. In a small number of cases, children are relinquished or given up for adoption either at birth or in their early years, because the birth parent(s) feel that they are unable to offer a child all that they need or deserve for the future, or circumstances prevent them from bringing the child up as their own. When a child is relinquished support, guidance and counselling are offered to birth parents to make sure that a new family is what is best for both the birth parents and the child.

Age and Health

Children who need adoptive homes can be of any age. Typically, children who need adopting in Hampshire will be aged 2 years or more, and will either need adopting with their siblings or on their own. Some may have a medical condition, disability or have developmental delays as a result of their early life experiences.

No child comes with a guarantee of good health and future development, but for some children who need to be adopted there may be more uncertainties about how their pre-birth and early life experiences may affect them in the future.

Contact arrangements

Many children will also need some degree of contact with their birth relatives as this helps them to understand their early life history and helps with their identity and sense of belonging.

Ethnicity

Most of the children waiting to be adopted in Hampshire are of white British heritage, but Hampshire welcomes enquiries from those of any racial group, ethnicity or faith who feel they are able to offer a child the care and support they need.

Read more online: [Meet the Children](#)



About **Adopting**

Anyone who wants to adopt a child needs to be approved by a registered adoption agency - private or public.

There are no specific qualifications that you need to have in order to be able to adopt, although obviously you need to like children and want what is best for a child.

If you ask most parents what it takes to be a mum or a dad, it's likely the top responses will be "sense of humour" and "patience". It is a good place to start, and the role comes with challenges as well as rewards. It is important to be prepared, and be able to offer the right things to a child, including:

- Security and stability in your own life, to be able to offer the same to a child
- Willingness to adapt and learn about parenting a child who has had difficult life experiences
- Time to offer to a child and to meet their needs/development
- Acceptance of a child as they are, and not judging them for what has happened in their life
- Flexibility, tenacity and courage
- Energy - emotional and physical energy to participate in a child's busy life
- Show resilience and have "stick-ability"
- A good network of family and friends who can support you emotionally and practically
- The willingness and ability to ask for help when you need it.

Read more online: Meet the Adopters

Hampshire's **Adoption** Priorities

Finding the right homes for children in Hampshire who need adopting is our only priority. We regularly review the list of children we care for who are looking for new permanent families, and make sure first and foremost that applicants will be able to meet their needs and support the children.

In the majority of cases, this means finding adoptive families for sibling groups, children with disabilities, learning difficulties or special medical needs and children over the age of two years.

While we prioritise those with particular skills, we welcome enquiries from anyone who feels that they would like to adopt a child, and consider a range of factors and issues as part of the selection process. There is very little that will automatically exclude anyone from being able to apply to adopt and we will always discuss individual situations and circumstances with you.

Meet the Children

Rich & Charlene - Siblings

Rich is nearly six years old with blue eyes and light brown hair. He has a lively, bubbly outgoing personality with a huge capacity for fun and mischievousness!

Rich has suffered from emotionally neglectful parenting by his birth mother and, as a result, this relationship continues to be fraught and stressful. Rich has also been the subject of both physical and punitive parenting by his grandmother. His foster carers report however, that he has been able to form solid and warm attachments. He has established a particularly strong bond with the couple's older child and with his female foster carer. It appears that, despite having poor experiences with his female birth family carers, Rich has been able to resolve these issues. He has a positive relationship with his birth father and a very special relationship with his sister, Charlene, who he calls "my Charlene."

Rich is keen to learn; he embraces new experiences, has a very adventurous nature and an enquiring mind. He thrives on one to one attention, is brilliant

at imaginative play with his toys and, with the influence of the older birth child, is enjoying all 'boyish' activities.

Rich has a statement of educational need for global delay and currently attends a special school. His school reports suggest that Rich has settled very well and that he has a thirst to learn. Rich is a healthy young child with no medical problems. His behaviour does need consistent and firm management, tempered with warmth and understanding, to assist Rich in understanding the anger and emotional turmoil he can feel.

Charlene is four years old. She is described by her foster carer as a lively, robust child with a huge sense of humour and is a real "character". She has very light brown hair and intense blue eyes.

Charlene, like Rich, has experienced neglectful and physically punitive parenting by her birth mother thus her attachment with her mother is rooted in insecurity. She has an intense loyalty to her birth father and her closest relationship is with Rich who she adores.

Charlene likes 'doing' rather than sitting and she is always on the go! She loves being outside on her bike, going for walks or simply playing in the garden. She loves all things 'girlie', especially dolls. She is great at imaginative play and is constantly chattering. She is a hugely sociable little girl who loves the company of adults and children.

Her foster carer describes Charlene's behaviour as a little challenging at times but her episodes of losing her temper have lessened as she has come to understand the boundaries in placement. She has thrived with the consistency, time and patience her carers have shown to her and this has had a significant impact on her confidence and her educational ability.

Charlene attends mainstream school where she is liked by staff and pupils alike. She is very proud of her achievements and the peer friendships she has established. Her carers report that Charlene is a hugely rewarding child to care for: she is abundant in her thirst for physical affection and will easily make you laugh.



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Hampshire's Adoption Criteria

Your age: You can adopt if you are over 21 years of age - this is a legally stated minimum age. There is no upper age limit for adopters, but Hampshire usually recommends that there is not more than a 45 year age gap between parent and child. Our main priority is in making sure that you will be able to parent a child you adopt until they reach adulthood.

Where you live: We welcome applicants who live in Hampshire or within reasonable proximity of the county. We particularly welcome applicants who have particular skills or expertise, or are able to look after older children, sibling groups or children with additional needs

Your home: You don't need to own your own home: you can rent or own a property. Our main concern is that you have a stable home to offer a child, with space for them to grow up safely and securely.

Who you live with: You could be single or in a stable relationship with a partner. If you are in a relationship, it does not matter whether you are living together, married or in a civil partnership. If you are divorced this is not an issue, though we will talk to you about your past relationships as part of the application process and explain why we need to do this.

Your life experience: If you or a member of your household has had a criminal conviction in the past, this will not necessarily stop you from adopting - it depends what the conviction was for and how long ago, so please ask us about this. You cannot adopt if you have had a "specified offence" - these are usually offences relating to children. We can explain more about this area if this situation applies to you.

Your Health and Lifestyle: Adopters need to be in reasonable health to care for a child - after all, you need to be there to keep up with a child's busy life and be there to look after them until adulthood. Hampshire does not exclude anyone who has general health problems, medical issues or disabilities - but we do need to know how this will impact on your parenting of a child, and the impact that any health-based lifestyle issues could have on a child you adopt. That's why part of the assessment process is a full health assessment that explores and interprets this type of information in more detail.

Your smoking habits: If you smoke or live with someone who smokes, please discuss this with us so we can explain our policy and what it may mean for you if you want to adopt a younger child. It is Hampshire's policy that children under the age of five, or any child that has health concerns such as asthma or who has a disability that limits their mobility cannot be looked

Meet the Adopters

Meet the Adopter profiles - are based on real stories but names, locations and details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

Peter & Carole

We are a married couple in our mid/late 30's. We were matched with two delightful, highly energetic and thoroughly exhausting little boys.

During a month of introductions, they walked into our home as if they owned it and did the same at their new grandparents, aunts and uncles. We felt they were here to stay!

Our older little boy has a significant speech and language delay and sees his paediatrician about mild epilepsy as well. However, he is making huge progress with both and is a delight to be around.

Like many couples, after several failed fertility treatments we decided adoption was the route for us. After an initial interview with Children's Services we were eventually invited to attend a training course. We were a little daunted by a 4 day course at first but found the experience very useful. An important bonus of

the course was the opportunity to meet couples all coming to adoption for different reasons.

We covered issues we'd otherwise never have thought of and the course helped us to see adoption more from the child's point of view, especially areas related to birth family. Contact was an area we felt quite sceptical about however the course was enlightening in helping us to understand the reasons why contact promotes good self esteem in children placed for adoption. In our particular case, one of the boys has letterbox contact with his father on an annual basis and they both have 'letterbox' contact with their mother every year and a 'face to face' contact every year as well.

Having recently completed the first 'face to face' contact, it is a rewarding and worthwhile experience for all concerned and, in the future, we can see it giving the children the chance to keep in touch with their roots. It will

also give us the opportunity to fill in some missing information about their family history.

Knowing what we know now, would we still contact Children's Services? Absolutely! It is wonderful to be a family and give love, a home and support to two little boys who desperately needed it.

Don't be fooled by all the positives here; having two children suddenly entering the lives of a childless couple is an exhausting process. There are moments of extreme joy and also extreme pressure when you wonder whether you are up to the challenge of bringing up two children.

Strong relationships and support networks are essential – you need a rock to lean on when things get tough, someone who will support you, talk with you, make constructive suggestions and, beyond all, let you know what a fantastic mother or father you are.



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after in a smoking household. If you have just stopped smoking, you will need to have stopped smoking for a year (and be able to evidence this by having been to your GP or participated in a recognised smoking cessation programme), before you can be approved to adopt.

Your family situation: We know and understand that the process of infertility treatment can be an emotional rollercoaster and that it takes time to adjust to news about your fertility and the plans you had to start a family. If you have recently received infertility treatment we will talk to you about this, and expect you to have taken some time - up to twelve months - between ending any treatments and applying to adopt.

If you have children of your own already and wish to expand your family through adoption, it's normal to have a gap of at least two years between the youngest child and any new adopted brothers and sisters. In some circumstances though, Hampshire recommends a bigger gap (of up to four years). It depends on your family situation. This is something we can discuss with you individually.

Your working life: We don't mind where you work or what you do - but we do need to talk to you about how you are going to support a child and what your plans are about working in the future. Many employers offer Adoption Leave, and it is Hampshire's expectation that an adoptive parent is able to take up to a year off work to help a child settle into family life (though this could take longer, depending on the needs of the child).

Money matters: It does not cost anything to adopt a child with Hampshire County Council, but we will need to make sure you are able to offer a child a secure home life. Adoptive parents are entitled to apply for universal benefits for which they are eligible (for example, Child benefit, child tax credits).

For some children, such as older children, brothers and sisters being placed together, or for children with learning difficulties, special needs or a disability, some financial assistance may be available depending on the needs of the child.

Your experience of children: You will need to have some experience of looking after children - from looking after any birth children you already have, taking care of nieces, nephews and neighbours children or even from a professional role. You could also have gained experience through volunteering with children (for example through sessions in a children's centre, helping with organisations like Scouts and Guides, helping at your local youth club etc). This experience is invaluable in helping you understand more about families and children in a range of circumstances - and will help you understand how you could help a child who has had difficult early life experiences.

Meet the Adopters

Mark & Tracey

"Adoption has provided me with a loving family and a place to belong to – it has given me a chance in life," said Chloe, 14 and adopted daughter of Mark and Tracey.

"We always wanted to have two children and when we realised we were not going to have a second child naturally we thought about adopting. It was a long process and quite emotional, as you take a long look at yourselves and your own childhood which is something people normally would not do. Our social worker was helpful. We had one child approved for us but the child's foster carer then said she wanted to keep her so that was a difficult time for us".

Later the same year they were matched with Chloe who had just turned four. "We remember going to see Chloe for the first time: she was the little face at the window and had her hair in pigtails. She was so excited. We were excited, too. We had one hour together

and we fell in love with her. We were happy and scared as we knew this was the start of a life long commitment. We have had 10 years of ups and downs and we would have loved to have had Chloe from a baby but we make the most of the time we do have with her”.

“The professionals around us have been really helpful: it has been an holistic package and we know that, together, we are trying to give Chloe the best life chances. The support and post adoption work is so valuable and it certainly has helped our family grow stronger. Our lives are different now and more rich for having our lovely smiley daughter join our family.”

“When I knew that mum and dad wanted to adopt I was excited and scared,” says Gemma, Mark & Tracey’s own daughter. “I was worried about losing them, as up to then I’d had them all to myself. But now it feels as though she has always been with us, part of us.”

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The **Adoption** Process

1 Finding out about Adoption

Naturally, you’ll want to do lots of research into adoption before you make a decision about whether to adopt with Hampshire. We hope this publication helps you, and also recommend that you visit our website too - www.hants.gov.uk/adoption

We are also very happy to answer your questions and offer you the benefit of our experience, so invite you to call us via Hantsdirect, Hampshire County Council’s contact centre. An experienced call handler will put your call through to the Adoption Duty Worker if you ask. Call: 0845 603 56 20.

2 Making an enquiry

When you make an enquiry, we will ask for basic information about you and your family.

You can complete this form online (www.hants.gov.uk/adoption - and fill in the online enquiry form), or give the information over the phone. An enquiry form is also included in this pack which you can send back to us directly.

The information in this form will be considered by a suitably experienced adoption worker who will contact you for a telephone discussion which determines the next steps - you may be invited to attend an information session, offered an initial home visit or offered advice and information based on your current situation.

Information Session

Information Sessions tell you more about adopting with Hampshire and give you the opportunity to learn more about children who need adopting, as well as giving you the opportunity to hear the experiences of an adopter who has adopted a child with Hampshire. After this session, if you still wish to proceed, you will have an initial home visit.

Initial Home Visit

An initial home visit is an opportunity for you to have a discussion with an experienced adoption worker about adoption, the children who need adopting and why you would like to adopt a child. It is an opportunity for us to make an initial assessment about what you are able to offer a child, and make sure you are able to offer a stable, secure home environment to a child.

After this visit, an Adoption Manager will make a decision about whether to progress your enquiry and invite you to preparation training.

Advice and Guidance

It could be that as a result of the information you provide and the discussion you have with a duty worker and/or home visit, we do not feel you are ready to take the next steps towards adopting.

Our goal is to be as open and honest with you as possible, and want to help you have realistic expectations about adoption. If the decision is made not to progress your enquiry at any stage, this will always be discussed with you, and advice given about things you could do - such as volunteering with children - which could support a future adoption enquiry.

3 Preparation Training

If your application is progressed, you will be invited to attend Preparation Training, which is the start of the assessment process.

The compulsory four day preparation training course takes place regularly, and is the starting point for your home study (also called a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) or assessment). The training is a valuable insight into all areas of the adoption, as well as an opportunity for you to meet others who are starting their adoption journey at the same time as you.

During the assessment period, you will also be invited to attend additional workshops and support groups.

4 Assessment

The assessment or home study includes statutory checks (such as criminal record bureau checks), education checks if you already have children, and checks with other local authorities. We will also arrange for you to have a full health assessment.

We also ask for written references from people who know you well, including family members and friends, and will visit some of these people. If you have had significant relationships in the past, we will ask you about these and discuss getting in touch your ex-partners.

The assessment is detailed, and looks in depth at your life experiences, attitudes and approach to parenting and experience of children. The assessment will also obviously look at the age, number and gender of children you could adopt.

It will usually take up to eight months for an assessment to be completed.

5 Approval to Adopt

A report is prepared based on the assessment, which is then reviewed by an independent Adoption Panel who meet you and your social worker and make a recommendation about whether you should be approved to adopt. The final decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker.

If you are not considered suitable to adopt, you will be advised of your rights and potential next steps in a formal letter. This includes the right to make representation to the adoption agency with regard to that decision, or apply to the Secretary of State for an independent review.

Read more online: www.hants.gov.uk/adoption - Preparation, Assessment and Approval

6 Linking and Matching

Once you are approved to adopt, your social worker will discuss with you Hampshire children who are currently waiting for adoptive families, with a view to matching you. The most important consideration in matching is in ensuring that the match is right for both the adopter and the child. This can mean that there is often a wait between being approved and being matched.

Once you are identified as having the potential to meet the needs of a particular child, your social worker will contact you to discuss the details. If you would like to find out more, you will be given written information, including medical and health information about the child, and you will meet with the child's social worker. You will also have the opportunity to meet with an adoption medical adviser to discuss any health issues the child may have and to meet with other professionals involved with the child, including the child's foster carer. There will be discussions around the support, including financial support, that you may require to meet the needs of the child and your needs as an adoptive family.

If everyone wishes to proceed with this proposed match, then a meeting is held between all those involved before the match is presented to the Adoption Panel.

If the match is recommended by the Panel and the Agency Decision Maker approves the match, your social worker will start the process of introducing you to the child. This process will depend on the child/ren you are matched with and their needs.

Waiting for a match

If you have been approved as a Hampshire adopter for three months, and have not been matched with a child, Hampshire will work with you to promote your approval more widely.

Hampshire County Council works as part of a consortium with other local authority adoption agencies (principally Surrey County Council and Oxfordshire County Council) and will promote your availability as adopters with our partners and at local and national Adoption Exchange days where details of children and potential adopters are promoted more widely. Your details will be added to the National Adoption Register for England and Wales.

7 Ongoing Support

The support, help and advice you have received throughout the process of adopting does not stop when a child is placed. You will continue to receive visits from your social worker for a while once a child is placed with you to ensure you are receiving the help and support you need. Once an Adoption Order is made, Hampshire's comprehensive adoption support service offers one-to-one advice and support where it is needed. The support team also offer access to a range of support groups, workshops, training days and family days, as well as being able to signpost you to a range of other services and networks across Hampshire who support adopters.

Are you ready to **Adopt**?

It is important to give a lot of thought and consideration to adoption - it is a major, life-changing decision to adopt a child. These three questions have been created to help you think through whether adoption is right for you, whether you need to find out more information or call us to ask questions before making a more formal enquiry.

1 Are you ready?

The decision about whether to adopt a child is, quite literally, life changing for both you and for a child you welcome into your family. To help you prepare, think about these areas:

- Understand more about what being an adoptive parent can involve and specifically, what some of the differences and issues may be in parenting an adopted child.
- Know whether you are able to adopt - there are very few things that will actually stop you from adopting altogether, but there are some things that will also limit the age of the children you can adopt (eg smoking).
- Consider when might be the right time to adopt, for you and any other children involved.
- And, if you are considering adopting because you have been unable to have your own children, are you emotionally prepared for adoption, and have emotionally adapted to not being able to have your own children?

2 What can you offer a child?

It takes special people to offer special children a secure and stable home. How will your skills and abilities help you be a good parent? Here are some things to consider:

- Understanding what children want and need - your experience of looking after children for friends, family or in a professional role can help with this and doing voluntary work with children can help you understand how different families work. What experience do you have?
- Think about disabilities, learning difficulties and medical conditions and whether you are able to support a child with needs like these - if you think you might be able to, what do you need to ask or find out to help you make that choice?
- Consider culture, heritage and race and how important these can be in a sense of identity; and whether you would be able to offer a child from a different ethnic group a home with you.
- How contact can play a role in helping a child understand their identity and come to terms with their early life. How comfortable are you with the idea of contact with a birth family - either face to face or indirectly by letter (via an intermediary service like Hampshire's Adoption Information Exchange)?

3 How long can adoption take?

Adoption is not an overnight option, it will take time. Familiarise yourself with what's involved in the journey, including:

- The process of enquiry and application
- The need for training and preparation process as well as the approval process
- The process of matching and linking you with a child
- The legal processes involved
- Understand how Hampshire supports adopters through the process of adoption, after adoption and through a child's life.

Ask for Information Pack (sent within 5 days)

Completion of Enquiry Form and Duty Call

Invitation to attend Public Information Session

2 months

Initial Home Visit by Adoption Social Worker

(If all parties agree), invited to complete a formal application

Attend Preparation Training Course Statutory Checks, References, Medicals

Assessment/home study report commences (with social worker)

Adoption Panel considers report (applicants invited to attend)

8 months

Agency Decision

Approved as "Suitable to Adopt" and available to be matched with a child

National Timescales

Regulations and National Minimum Standards
for Adoption Agencies

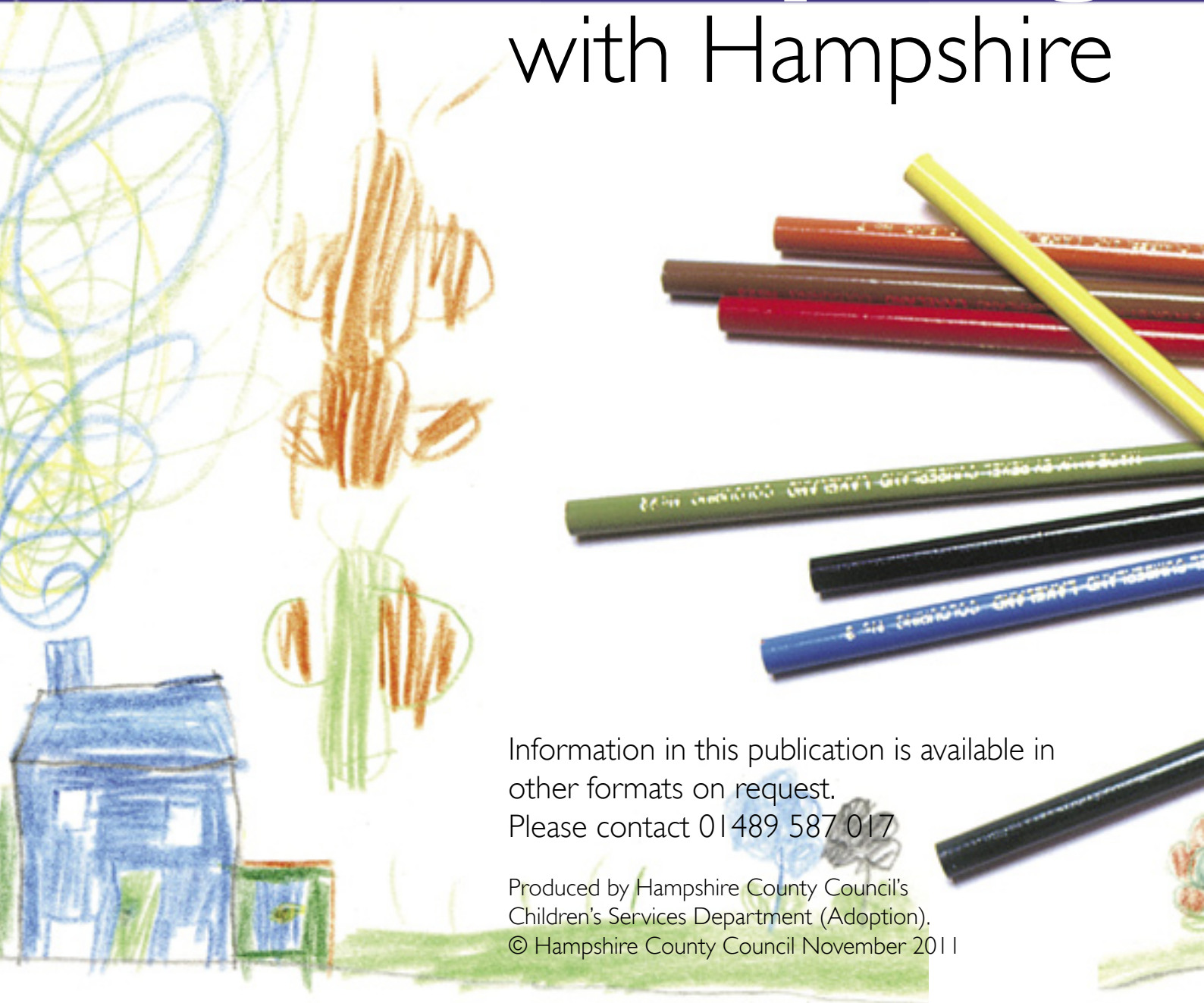


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Information in this publication is available in other formats on request.

Please contact 01489 587 017

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