



THE ADOPTION
AUTHORITY of IRELAND
ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA
na hÉIREANN

we will work to achieve excellence
in adoption and adoption related services,
with the best interests of children as our
primary consideration

Corporate Plan 2004 - 2007

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minister's foreword



BRIAN LENIHAN

I am pleased to present the first corporate plan of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The publication of the plan follows the Government's decision to replace the Adoption Board with a new independent Adoption Authority to oversee all aspects of adoption practice.

I am currently preparing legislation which will set out the precise functions of the Authority and make provision for a new board structure which will be representative of the parties involved in adoption, particularly those affected by adoption.

In launching this plan, I want to acknowledge the hurt experienced by some since the introduction of legal adoption in 1952. I also want to recognise the happiness that many have experienced in finding, through adoption, a secure and loving family to grow up in. I would also like to recognise the good work done over the years by the Adoption Board and the local agencies.

Much has changed in adoption practice since its introduction, not least the social attitudes of our community to adoption. It is increasingly a more open experience. The purpose of establishing a new independent Adoption Authority is to ensure that we have a modern efficient service, which is client focused, and which reflects best practice internationally.

The publication of this corporate plan is an important milestone in the modernisation of adoption in Ireland.

Brian Lenihan

Mr. Brian Lenihan
Minister of State with responsibility for Children

chairman's address



JIM O'SULLIVAN

I welcome the Government's decision to establish a new independent Adoption Authority with overall executive responsibility for adoption services. The Minister is preparing the necessary legislative framework and this corporate plan maps out the major changes necessary to establish the new Authority operationally.

Adoption practice and social attitudes to adoption have changed considerably over the fifty years since the Adoption Board was established and much has been learnt. The hurt and dissatisfaction that some people have experienced, which, in part, reflected social attitudes then and a lack of forward planning, needs to be acknowledged. Recognition must also be given to the good work that has been done in often difficult and sensitive circumstances.

We are now entering a new phase in adoption, which will present challenges and opportunities not only for the new Authority but for all our stakeholders. The overriding objective is to provide improved services to the public. The new Authority will lead and drive the change. In doing so the Authority will work closely with its stakeholders to build on the strengths of the current service and to tackle shortcomings. In particular, the Authority will develop more open and transparent ways of working, reflecting modern adoption practice. The Authority will set standards and will inspect services to ensure that standards are being met. Quality Customer Service will be at the core of the new organisation.

This corporate plan sets out challenging objectives for the next four years. Each year, starting in 2004, the Authority will publish a business plan setting out the specific measures to be taken to achieve its objectives and to report progress.

James J. O'Sullivan

Judge Jim O'Sullivan
Chairman

ceo's introduction



JOHN COLLINS

As the first CEO of the Adoption Authority, I look forward to leading the implementation of our corporate plan. This plan is ambitious and the next four years will be challenging.

I am supported by a new senior management team. In addition, a number of new staff have been appointed to augment the valued experience of our existing staff members. The new organisational structure set out in the plan is now being put in place to drive change. New services are being established and existing services improved.

As public servants we, the staff of the Authority, are committed to the ongoing programme of public service modernisation. Our focus is on delivering quality services to our clients and to measure accountability from all parts of the system.

We cannot make the changes set out in the corporate plan without the active support and involvement of all our stakeholders. The consultation we carried out with them has had a major impact on its content. We look forward to working closely with them in advancing our objectives over the next four years.

A handwritten signature in orange ink that reads "John Collins". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Mr. John Collins
Chief Executive Officer

use of language

The Minister for Children is preparing legislation which will replace the Adoption Board with a new Adoption Authority. The legislation is due shortly and the new Authority will be established early in the life of this corporate plan. The designation Adoption Authority, therefore, is used throughout.

The Adoption Authority recognises that the language and terminology used when considering adoption and adoption related matters can be open to different interpretation and can, on occasion, cause disagreement. There is a need for all concerned to continue to work towards an agreed vocabulary; we will promote this.

The language and terminology used throughout this document reflects current international best practice. However, where individual groups have expressed a wish for their members to be referred to in particular terms, this preference has been respected. Therefore, while the terms 'birth parents' and 'birth families' are generally recognised internationally, the terms 'natural parents' and 'natural families' are used throughout this document at the request of the relevant representative group.

section one

INTRODUCTION

The Government has decided to establish a new Adoption Authority to replace the Adoption Board. This independent body will be known as the Adoption Authority of Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Adoption Authority). This development reflects the changing pattern of adoption practice since the Board was established in 1952 and the need for the adoption service, nationally, to respond more effectively to current adoption needs.

The Authority will have overall responsibility for all adoption and adoption related services and will provide a range of new services. Legislation will underpin the new arrangements. In the meantime administrative measures are being taken to implement change on the ground. The Adoption Authority is also undertaking initial discussions with the Department of Health and Children about the possibility of taking over responsibility for foster care services in the context of the current Health Services Reform Programme.

This corporate plan will direct the transition from Adoption Board to Adoption Authority over the next four years, 2004–2007, and will enable the new Authority to deliver appropriate, comprehensive and quality services to our clients and stakeholders and to lead change in local services. Our aim is to build on the positive aspects of the work undertaken by the Adoption Board, local adoption agencies and health boards over the past fifty years, with a view to delivering a fully comprehensive, integrated, quality adoption service at national and local level in the future.

Our Corporate Plan 2004–2007 sets out the vision and guiding principles that will govern the operation of the new Adoption Authority and the objectives we will pursue over the next four years.

Each year we will publish a business plan detailing the particular measures to be taken in that year in order to meet our corporate objectives.

Consultation with our stakeholders during 2003 has been central to the development of this corporate plan, and the principles and objectives that will guide our work have been significantly informed and shaped by the adoption support groups and the local service providers with whom we work and without whom we could not achieve our goals. We would like to thank them for the very important contribution they have made. The consultation undertaken by the Minister for Children on the modernisation of adoption legislation, which also took place in 2003, has also informed the content of our plan. A senior management team has been put in place in the Adoption Authority during the course of 2003 to oversee its day-to-day operations and to develop its governance, internal management, and business planning processes.

The board and staff of the Adoption Authority welcome these developments and look forward to working together with all interested parties to achieve the highest standards of excellence in adoption and related services in the years ahead.

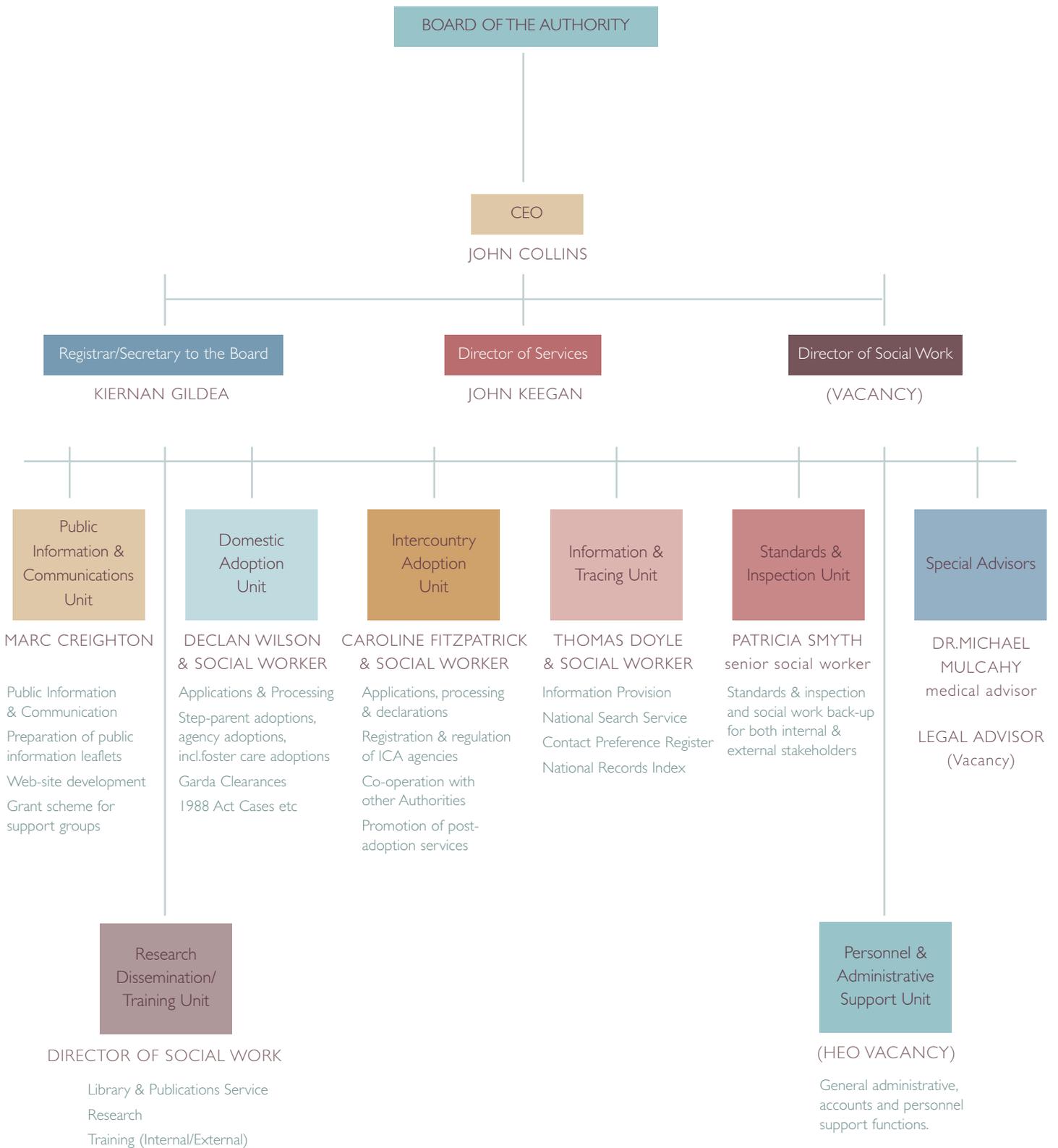
We will work to achieve excellence in adoption and adoption related services, with the best interests of children as our primary consideration.

John Collins
Kiernan Gildea
John Keegan
Marguerite Corcoran
Orla Kennedy
Caroline Fitzpatrick
David McGrath
Maeve Donaghy
Anne Corr
Imelda Regan
Declan Wilson
Joan Groves
Marina Flanagan
Jim Martini
Tom Doyle

INTRODUCING OUR TEAM...

Colm Hassett
Nigel Galloway
Patricia Smyth
Michael Clasby
Celia Loftus
Grainne O'Malley
Patty McGinnity
Marion Middleton
Heather Houston
Noreen Keane
Emer O'Carroll
Marc Creighton
Jennifer Ryan
John Murphy
Vinny McPartland

ORGANISATION CHART



section two

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Minister for Children is putting a new structure in place for the Adoption Authority. During the period covered by this corporate plan, amending legislation will be introduced that will broaden the remit of the board to enable it to more fully involve clients, service users, service providers and relevant professional experts. The Adoption Authority will be established as an independent, quasi-judicial, statutory body appointed by government. A senior management team is now in place and new staff are being recruited to carry out the main functions of the Authority. These functions will be

- to plan and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services
- to make adoption orders, issue declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt, and maintain the adoption registers
- to set down guidelines and standards for the provision of all adoption services and to provide for review and evaluation of those services
- to register and inspect against approved standards all agencies providing adoption services
- to undertake and promote research and publish information about adoption and related services
- to provide information directly to the general public and support others in the provision of information on adoption services.

The staff and functions of the Adoption Authority of Ireland are detailed in the organisation chart above.



section three

WHO WE SERVE

The Adoption Authority has working relationships with a wide and diverse network of stakeholders and stakeholder groups. We value these relationships and will actively promote their development during the next four years.

THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN at the Department of Health and Children

- whom we advise and to whom we report.

OUR CLIENTS – the primary focus of our services

- our most important clients – the children on whose behalf we provide adoption services
- adult adopted people
- natural parents and families
- adoptive parents and families

THE ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS with whom we work

- representative groups of adopted people
- representative groups of natural families
- representative groups of adoptive families
- representative intercountry adoption groups
- other voluntary groups

THE LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS that we work with

- the health boards
- the registered adoption agencies
- other public and regional bodies
- mediation agencies
- The Courts Service
- The Garda Síochána

THE INTERNATIONAL BODIES with which we work

- The Hague Commission
- central authorities under the Hague Convention
- adoption authorities in countries with which Ireland has adoption agreements.

section four

OUR OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The work of the Adoption Authority will be guided by the operational principles set out below.

Ireland has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and will shortly ratify the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption. A key principle underpinning both these international instruments is that adoption should be carried out in the best interests of the child and with the authorisation of competent authorities. In conformity with these international instruments, and reflecting the National Children's Strategy, our pre-eminent operational principle is expressed as follows:

“ THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD WILL BE OUR PRIMARY CONSIDERATION. ”

Our other operational principles embrace

- compliance with the requirements of the Adoption Acts
- openness, respect, transparency, and accountability in our operations and relationships
- continuing consultation with, and input from, our stakeholder groups and all interested parties
- delivery of an integrated, high quality, efficient and effective client-focused adoption service
- decision making and action based on best practice and excellence.

section five

OUR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES 2004 - 2007

The following are our corporate objectives 2004–2007 and the key tasks that need to be accomplished to achieve these objectives.

objective one

We will introduce major organisational change to ensure that the Adoption Authority is and remains an efficient and effective organisation.

KEY TASKS

We will introduce appropriate governance arrangements for the new Adoption Authority.

We will put new organisational structures in place and continue to develop and deploy more efficient and effective organisation management processes.

We will publish a corporate plan every three years¹, and an annual business plan to report progress.

objective two

We will develop as an organisation committed to open and consultative processes. We will facilitate all our clients through the provision of information, advice and other appropriate supports.

KEY TASKS

We will establish a public information and communications service to promote awareness of adoption and adoption services among adopted people, natural parents and families, adoptive parents and families and the wider general public.

We will develop an appropriate level of involvement and other support arrangements with stakeholder groups both as a means of securing their input to the development of our services and supporting them in their activities.

We will seek to have our administrative procedures and practices made subject to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Acts and other relevant public accountability legislation.

We will develop appropriate feedback systems for our clients and stakeholder groups.

¹ This initial corporate plan covers a four-year rather than a three-year period, from 2004 to 2007, because it oversees the transition from Adoption Board to fully independent Adoption Authority.

objective three

We will develop as a centre of excellence and leadership, which promotes the delivery of quality, accountable, client-focused adoption services.

KEY TASKS

We will develop and embed quality standards and systems of inspection for adoption services.

We will develop evidence based research programmes and disseminate the findings of best national and international research.

We will provide and support training and specialist advisory services for those working in adoption, in order to reinforce best practice.

We will put in place transparent and accessible appeals procedures in relation to our legal functions, and transparent and accessible complaints procedures in relation to our administrative processes and practices.

objective four

We will develop an integrated adoption service which addresses the needs of all parties involved in the adoption process, having regard to available resources.

KEY TASKS

We will put in place an integrated set of standardised frameworks for the delivery of adoption services, in order to ensure provision of a uniform and timely service at local level across the country.

We will introduce, in co-operation with the Department of Health and Children, a number of new services as follows:

- an information and tracing service
- services necessary for the implementation of the Hague Convention
- a range of post-adoption services.

We will commit to the continuous review and development of services so that we can plan for changing needs.

We will ensure that services and information about services is more easily accessible.

objective five

We value our staff and with their co-operation we will continue to develop their capacity to deliver a quality service to our clients.

KEY TASKS

We will put in place human resources policies to meet the developmental needs of the staff and the organisation and we will use the Performance Management Development System (PMDS) to support the processes arising from this policy.

We will establish a partnership committee to address staff needs and concerns in relation to the transition to the Adoption Authority.

We will provide adequate support services and training for staff, including accommodation, records management, and information technology.

We will commit to providing staff with challenging and rewarding work experience aimed at enhancing their career potential while addressing the needs of the organisation.

objective six

We will measure and evaluate our performance during the delivery of our corporate objectives and we will publish the results.

KEY TASKS

We will develop internal audit procedures and be subject to external audit in terms of measuring and evaluating our performance against stated objectives.

In our annual business plan we will establish performance targets designed to achieve the objectives set out in our Corporate Plan 2004–2007.

We will publish an annual report reviewing progress under this plan.

We will put in place arrangements to measure client satisfaction with the implementation of this corporate plan.

section six

THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE WORK: RESPONDING TO CHANGING NEEDS

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Consultation with stakeholders and stakeholder groups during 2003 has identified areas where progress is necessary to meet changing needs. A report on the consultation is available on our website at www.adoptionboard.ie. Key issues for the Adoption Authority, identified during the consultation process, are

- a need to develop our policy-making and implementation abilities, our standards-setting, inspection and decision-making capacities, and our international liaison
- a need for a more strategic focus, based on greater consultation and interaction with stakeholder groups, and a capacity to provide and disseminate 'best practice' advice and guidance as required
- a need for more transparent, open and timely decision-making procedures and practices, particularly in the context of greater delegation of the delivery of adoption services to regional and local levels
- a need for greater clarification of the role and responsibilities of the new Adoption Authority, leading to the provision of better information and advice to the general public regarding the range of adoption and related services available.

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADOPTION PRACTICE IN IRELAND AND INTERNATIONALLY OVER THE PAST FIFTY YEARS

Over the past fifty years adoption practice has moved on from an essentially closed 'clean break' arrangement towards more open forms of practice today. The number of children placed for domestic adoption has significantly declined while there has been a marked increase in intercountry adoptions. An increasing demand for adoption information and for greater openness and transparency in the area of adoption has also been a key development over recent times. The table below demonstrates this.

TRENDS IN ADOPTION

Domestic Adoption Orders	1954	1964	1974	1984	1994	2002
Family Adoptions	68	63	129	297	200	167
Non-Family Adoptions	820	940	1286	898	224	99
Totals	888	1003	1415	1195	424	266
Intercountry Adoption	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
Declarations of eligibility and suitability granted	40	63	117	206	282	399
Adoptions effected overseas	30	44	72	147	225	357
Adoption Information and Tracing	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Enquiries (written and phone)	711	1049	1010	2059	2410	2617

THE PUBLIC SERVICE MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

The programme emphasises the delivery of quality public services to the citizen as efficiently and effectively as possible, and the avoidance of unnecessary procedures, regulation and red tape.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS OF THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CHILDREN

The rapidly changing nature of Irish society and the need to fully take on board the changing trends and practices in adoption since the enactment of the initial adoption legislation more than fifty years ago, forms the backdrop and sets the broad context for the proposed new adoption legislation provisions.

Over the period of this corporate plan the work of the Adoption Authority will continue to be influenced by and help shape the social, legal and operational environment for adoption and adoption-related services in Ireland.

section seven

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The programme of change set out in our corporate plan is challenging. A number of critical success factors will impact on our ability to deliver it.

- A clear legislative framework, which empowers the Adoption Authority to carry out its expanded remit.
- Co-operation and active support from our stakeholders.
- Provision of the necessary human and financial resources at the central and local level.
- Building the capabilities of our staff, and supporting capacity-building in the wider adoption services.
- Benefiting from the opportunity to reorganise and develop adoption services that the wider health service reform provides.
- Continuing progress at all levels of the adoption service in implementation of the Public Service Modernisation Programme.

section eight

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

A priority task for the Adoption Authority under Objective 1 of our corporate plan 2004–2007 is to introduce and implement effective corporate governance arrangements in the delivery of adoption and related services.

Corporate governance is defined as ‘the system by which an organisation is directed and controlled in order to achieve its mission and objectives and meet the necessary standards of accountability and integrity’.

Formal corporate governance arrangements are essential to ensuring that the Adoption Authority is working effectively to develop an integrated adoption service at both national and local level.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The key principles that will underpin our corporate governance arrangements are:

- that we act legitimately in compliance with our legal requirements, within the authority conferred, to observe due process in all our activities, and respect the rights and aspirations of our stakeholder groups and the general public
- that we meet publicly declared standards of performance, particularly relating to quality, equity, value-for-money in the use of public resources, and delivery of agreed outputs
- that we account to stakeholders and to the general public for our actions, as guided by the principles set out in this corporate plan, in relation to quality, accountability, equity and customer focus.

KEY UNDERTAKINGS

The Adoption Authority will ensure that its corporate governance arrangements and related mechanisms devoted to public accountability, rule of law, transparency and citizen participation are consistent with the above principles.

We will carry out our duties within the law and without self-interest or favouritism. We will be responsive to the needs of our customers and the general public at all times, and will keep them informed of our actions and the reasons and rules that lie behind our actions. We will observe due process in our activities and respect the rights and aspirations of stakeholders and the general public at all times.

Meeting declared standards, both in relation to the quality and delivery of our services and as regards broader equity, accountability, and value-for-money considerations, will be a priority during delivery of this corporate plan.

section nine

IMPLEMENTATION

Our corporate objectives and the key tasks underpinning each of them are set out above. They will be implemented through the annual business plan. There will be a business plan for each year of the corporate plan. The business plan will translate each of our corporate objectives into practical actions and targets against which progress can be measured.

The publication of our annual business plan and annual report will enable the Adoption Authority and the general public to assess progress towards the achievement of our corporate objectives throughout the 2004–2007 period. The annual business plan will also inform the work of each division within the Adoption Authority and will be reflected in the role profiles of individual staff members under the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS).