



Assessment of Prospective Adopters

Policy and Procedure



‘Communication is important, so information should be accessible to everyone. People with sensory communication disabilities may need documents in easy read, large print, audio or Braille formats for example. Others may need face to face communication support through a British Sign Language Interpreter, deafblind interpreter, lip speaker or note taker (as recommended by the NHS Accessible Information Standard). If someone speaks (or reads) a language that is not English, they will need to have the appropriate language-spoken language interpreter and / or text translator’.



1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to address the preparation, assessment, approval and reviewing of prospective adoptive households. It provides information in relation to the assessment process and gives guidelines to the information required to complete the assessment.
- 1.2 This policy incorporates nationally set timescales for presentation of the completed Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) to the Adoption Panel (the Panel) and addresses Guidance and Standards. There is also reference to Approved Adoptive households' reviews.

2 Underpinning Legislation and Guidance.

- 2.1
- Preparing and assessing prospective Adopters Practice Guidance
 - Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013)
 - Statutory Adoption Guidance amended (2013)
 - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations (2013)
 - Statutory Adoption Guidance amended (2011)
 - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010)
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Practice Guidance on the Assessment & Preparation of Adopters (2006),
 - Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005),
 - Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations (2005),
 - Suitability of Adopters Regulations (2005),
 - Independent Review of Determinations Regulations (2005),
 - Looked After Children - referral to Adoption Register, (2004)
 - Sexual Offences Act (2003),
 - National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services (2003),
 - Adoption and Children Act (2002),
 - Adoption & Children Act 2002 Guidance Chapter 3 and Annexes A & D (2002)
 - Police Act (1997) (as amended),
 - Children (Protection from Offenders, Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (1997).

3 Values underpinning the Adoption Process

- 3.1 The Adoption Service should provide the following to minimise delays in the adoption process:
- A prompt, sensitive and positive response to enquiries that takes account of communication needs.
 - Forward planning of preparation groups to enable timely prospective adopters' attendance and engagement

- Timely allocation of all Registrations of Interest received and fast tracking to stage 2 of any applicants who are foster carers proposing to adopt a child currently placed with them and previously approved adopters returning to offer a home for another child.
- Timely and sensitive assessments.
- Timely and sensitive reviews.

3.2 The Adoption Assessment and Support Team within the relevant Locality Permanency Hub will follow up on all referral received from the Central Permanency Hub. All referrals will be allocated to a Social Worker within the Locality Permanency Hub **within 10 working days**. The Adoption Team will offer the following:

- Initial contact (phone call/email) with potential adopters should be made **within 5 working days** of an enquiry being received from the Central Permanency Hub. The purpose of the contact is to provide information and arrange an Initial Visit. This contact will enable the potential adopter(s) to raise questions and for the Social Worker to explore the person's wish to adopt.
- The Initial Visit will provide an explanation of the procedures involved and the legal implications of adoption and Together4Children's processes for assessment, approval, placement and support. The Initial Visit will provide detailed information, enable the potential adopter(s) to raise questions and for the Social Worker to explore the person's wish to adopt, reflecting on the parenting needs of children waiting for adoption and the impact on the potential adopter(s) and their wider family of caring for children with a range of complex needs.
- Second time adopters and previous foster carers will have the opportunity to move straight into Stage 2 of the assessment process. They should receive a tailored assessment (which may include elements of Stage One) to take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering in general and experience of the differing needs of the child they have previously adopted/fostered (Adoption Statutory Guidance, 2013). Also see [Foster Carers wanting to Adopt](#).

3.3 Following the completion of the Initial Visit, the Social Worker will complete the Initial Visit Form and make a recommendation to the Adoption Team Manager which will determine whether or not a Registration of Interest (ROI) form will be sent out to pursue their application. The write up of the initial assessment and authorisation by the Team Manager should be completed **within 15 working days** of the Initial Visit.

3.4 If the recommendation is positive, the potential adopter(s) will be sent a letter inviting them into Stage 1. A copy of the ROI, Initial Visit Form, Adoption Passport, training dates and the Statutory Checks Forms will be sent for completion; the documents will need to be signed and returned to the Locality Permanency Hub if the potential adopter(s) wishes to proceed.

- 3.5 If the recommendation is not positive, applicants will receive a letter informing of the decision. A copy of the Initial Visit document will be provided.
- 3.6 The completed ROI will be passed to the Adoption Team Manager for review. The Adoption Team Manager will decide **within 5 working days** whether to accept the Registration of Interest i.e. that the person/s may be suitable to adopt and should enter stage 1 of the process. The potential adopter(s) will be informed in writing that their Registration of Interest has been accepted and that they have been allocated an assessing Social Worker who will complete stage 1 of the process with them. Stage 1 starts when the agency notifies the applicants that the ROI has been accepted.
- 3.7 Prospective adopters will not be excluded on the grounds of age (as long as they are over 21), gender, health or disability, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or marital status. There is not an upper age limit for adoption, however, consideration will be given to the prospective adopter's ability to provide ongoing love, care and security until a child reaches adulthood and beyond.
- 3.8 Some aspects of the person's protected characteristics will be explored during the assessment process e.g. religion or beliefs – being aware that if a child's heritage has a different religion or belief that this should be respected, and the child encouraged to be aware of it.
- 3.9 Please refer to the Together4Children [recruitment](#) guidelines for further information.

4. Stage 1 Assessment

- 4.1 Stage 1 should take **no more than 2 months** from the acceptance of the prospective adopter's ROI. It consists of the completion of all required checks and written references and the completion of preparation training. Information provided from the Registration of Interest and all checks and references will be recorded on the End of Stage 1 Report.
- 4.2 The assessment should be undertaken by the social Worker who undertook the Initial Visit. Where this is not possible the Adoption Assessment & Support Team Manager should allocate to a Social Worker without delay. The assessing Social Worker will complete at least one home visit during stage 1 (more if required). This is to start developing the relationship with the prospective adopter(s) and to ensure families feel well informed and included in the process. During this visit, a Stage 1 Plan will be completed, prospective adopters may be supported with Stage 1 documents that include the family tree, eco-map, chronologies. Prospective adopter(s) will be provided with their workbook to support them with thinking and preparing for the areas of their lives that will be discussed within Stage 2. The Social Worker will ensure the prospective adopters have plans in place to ensure their GP medical is undertaken as soon as possible.
- 4.3 Once the statutory checks and the GP medical have been completed (see S.5 below), the assessing Social Worker will be required to complete an 'End of Stage 1 Report'. This report is completed to ensure any decision made regarding the progress of the assessment is evidence based and provides analysis as to how the Social Worker came to their recommendation and any recommendations / actions required in Stage 2.

- 4.4 Stage 1 ends on the date the ‘End of Stage 1 Report’ is signed by the Team Manager.
- 4.5 Where the applicants are not invited into Stage 2 the Team Manager and Social Worker will arrange to meet with the applicants to inform them of the decision; the recommendations of the assessment and a comprehensive letter clarifying the basis on which the decision is being made will be sent with a copy of the complaints information. The Independent Review Mechanism is not available for decisions made at stage 1.

5. Stage 1 Statutory Checks

Statutory Check	Guidance on Statutory Checks for Adoption
<p>Personal References</p>	<p>Legislation requires written references in stage 1 and good practice suggest interviews are most usefully completed at a later stage.</p> <p>Together4Children will require the following;</p> <p>Couples - 6 referees if possible (minimum of 4 to be visited):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 relatives – one from each applicant, with a preference that they have seen them with children, if possible. • 4 friends – must have known applicants for a minimum of five years, with a preference that they have seen them with children, if possible. <p>Single applicant – 3 references (all 3 to be visited)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 relative - With a preference that they have seen them with children, if possible. • 2 friends - must have known applicants for a minimum of five years, with a preference that they have seen them with children, if possible. <p>Referees should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have close knowledge of the prospective adopter(s) and if possible be able to comment on their ability to relate to children.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the prospective adopter(s) personally and be familiar with their family and home environment. At least one of the referees should have known the prospective adopter(s) for a minimum of 5 years. • Where a couple is applying, then at least one of the referees should have knowledge of them together as a couple rather than knowledge of only one partner. <p>Written references to be completed in stage 1</p> <p>Reference visits should be completed in Stage 2.</p>
<p>Adult Children/ Adults within household</p>	<p>Together4Children will require the following;</p> <p>For adult children living in the home or away from the home to be interviewed.</p> <p>For any other adults within the household to be interviewed.</p>
<p>Former Partner reference</p>	<p>Regulation 26 (d) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005) states that where the adoption agency considers it necessary, they can obtain a personal reference from the prospective adopter(s) former spouse, civil partner, partner.</p> <p>It is good practice from the learning from Serious Case Reviews for these references to be completed.</p> <p>Together4Children will require a former partner reference the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant has lived with a partner in a significant couple relationship, whether or not that has involved jointly caring for children, and whatever the time period of the relationship. • The applicant has been married to, or parented a child with, a former partner, even if they were not living together at the same address. • Where a relationship ends acrimoniously, applicants should be reassured that the context of the relationship breakdown will be taken into account when the reference is received.



Circumstances where ex-partners may not be approached:

- Where undertaking a former partner check may put someone at risk. Ex-partner check may be waived where there was domestic abuse in the relationship. All efforts would need to be made to verify the circumstances; information should be collated about the period in question including verifying information through legal documents, police logs, speaking with referees, contact with a counselling service etc.
- When the former partner cannot be located despite reasonable efforts having been made to do this. It is the responsibility of the applicants to prove they have made all reasonable steps to locate ex-partner. If no address is available further checks of the electoral role, Social media and writing to previous family members may provide the required details.
- When the applicant has been an approved foster carer or adopter(s) since the end of the relationship, and the fostering service or adoption agency can confirm that they completed a satisfactory check with that former partner.
- Exceptionally, when an applicant raises objections to contact being made with a former partner and can offer strong person-centre arguments to justify not doing this check.

In such cases the requirement for completing the check can be waived at the discretion of the Adoption Assessment & Support Team Manager.

Where a decision is made to waive a former partner check for reasons relating to risk, such as domestic abuse, efforts will be made to seek independent corroboration of the abuse.

Where a former partner check is not made for any reason, efforts will be made to seek independent views on the nature of that relationship and the reason that is ended. Where possible, that will include interviews with an adult child or

	<p>another person who knew the household very well at the time of the applicant’s co-habitation with the former partner.</p> <p>Checks will not be waived simply because the applicant prefers that they are not undertaken, or because the relationship ended acrimoniously, or because they do not want their former partner to know about their application to foster or adopt. Decisions to waive a check should be based on sound reasons and must be discussed with the Adoption Assessment & Support Team Manager.</p> <p>Applicants will be expected to provide contact details of former partners, or where they do not have this, to contribute to the best of their ability with information to help in locating them. Efforts will be made to locate former partners using www.tracesmart.co.uk and www.192.com, as well as using the internet and Social media such as Facebook.</p> <p>In making checks with former partners, Together4Children will use the “Ex-partner reference questionnaire” and will send this with a standard letter setting out the reasons for the reference request. Additional to the questionnaire it is the expectation that the assessing Social Worker would follow this up with a verbal interview.</p> <p>Information obtained from former partners/co-parents may vary from providing reliable, essential information, to that which is misleading, therefore the information and its context should be weighed carefully. As far as possible, the Agency should verify this information and should be checked against other sources such as referees. Where questions about suitability to adopt arise as a result of information provided, these should be explored, perhaps during interviews.</p> <p>The outcome of the reference requests and interview will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.</p>
<p>Local Authority Check (previous addresses)</p>	<p>Together4Children will require the following:</p>



	<p>Local Authority checks to be completed for all addresses in last 10 years.</p> <p>The assessor should check all previous addresses where the applicant has lived with children.</p>
<p>DBS</p>	<p>DBS link to be sent out by admin on day ROI is accepted. Applicants are to complete the link and bring in their documents to be verified by admin or allocated give documents to Social Worker who visits. Permission for the agency to view the outcome of the DBS check needs to be sought at the outset from all persons being checked.</p> <p>Process; where trace is identified, interview completed with applicant and short report/risk assessment on suitability to adopt is to be presented to Senior Manager.</p> <p>All applicants and household members over the age of 16 to be DBS checked</p> <p>A person who has changed their gender identity, either through gender reassignment surgery or by changing their name and living in role, can apply for a DBS check through a 'Sensitive Applications Process' by contacting the Sensitive Applications Team. This enables the person to disclose their previous name and gender. If a person has a Gender Recognition Certificate, they can ask the Police to transfer all information to their new name; this is the name that will appear on the DBS certificate. If a person does not have a Gender Recognition Certificate and the DBS check is going to reveal information in their previous name / gender that would be printed on the certificate, the Team will contact them to discuss the options available. This is because it is a criminal offence to disclose whether or not someone has a Gender Recognition Certificate or amended birth certificate (s22 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004). In terms of Together4Children this information should only be discussed when absolutely relevant and necessary; ideally with the persons consent. Any documents relating to the person should be treated as highly confidential and locked away as appropriate. Gender Recognition Certificates</p>



	<p>should not be requested, and copies should not be kept on file</p>
<p>Overseas checks</p>	<p>Overseas checks are not a statutory requirement. Good practice evidences that these checks should be completed where possible.</p> <p>Together4Children require the following:</p> <p>As part of the assessment process, checks with an overseas authority are to be undertaken where possible. These will normally be undertaken where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the applicant has lived abroad for more than a year in one main country and can provide an address for the purposes of the check; • the period in question is within the last 10 years, and/or is of a relatively long duration compared with the time spent living in the UK; • it is not possible to obtain a sufficiently detailed and reliable employer reference from a recognised international company or organisation for the period in question; • the country in question has a sufficiently developed legal and administrative system to make it likely that a check might be considered valid and reliable. <p>In applying this policy, the Social Worker will use some discretion, taking into account individual factors, including the quality of personal references that cover the period during which the person was living abroad and the emerging evidence in the assessment more widely.</p> <p>The source of the check, and how it will be undertaken, will inevitably vary according to specific circumstances of the country in question.</p> <p>Efforts will be made to initiate checks at the initial stage of the assessment process in order to reduce the likelihood of delay in completing the assessment.</p> <p>The reasons for decisions about overseas checks will be recorded and made available within the assessment report.</p>



Employers reference	<p>Together4Children require the following:</p> <p>Current employer and previous employers (in the last five years) checks are completed. If they have worked with children/vulnerable adults' references will be sought from all jobs where worked with this group.</p>
<p>Education References</p> <p>- Head teacher/ Nursery</p>	<p>Together4Children require the following:</p> <p>It is recommended to seek education references if the applicant has a child in nursery or school or who has left school within the last year.</p> <p>Follow up any issues raised with a phone call / meeting</p>
Finances	<p>Together4Children require the following:</p> <p>Schedule 4 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005) (as amended) requires adoption agencies to provide details of the prospective adopter(s) income and expenditure in the prospective adopter(s) report.</p> <p>The assessing Social Worker will need to comment on the standard of living, any debts, attitude towards money and to view key documents. i.e. statements.</p> <p>Assessors may feel it appropriate to complete a full financial assessment and must be confident about the financial position of the applicants.</p> <p>Financial support needs to be assessed.</p>
Social Media	<p>Together4Children require the following:</p> <p>This is not a requirement however good practice would be to complete basic internet/social media checks of public areas. Please see Social Media Policy. Discuss with applicants anything that emerges.</p>
Area Health	<p>Together4Children require the following:</p>

Including - Health Visitor / School Nurses	It is not a statutory requirement but is good practice to check if the applicant has an allocated Health Visitor or has had one within the last year and a reference to be completed by Health Visitor.
Health and Safety	Together4Children require the following: Health and Safety checklist to be completed for all households. N.B fire extinguishers / fire blankets/ socket covers not required.
NSPCC	Together4Children require the following: Not regulatory requirement however to be completed as good practice.
Pets	Recommendations for Regional Partnership Pet questionnaire to be completed for all households where there are pets. Further assessment may be required where there are safety risks.
Health Assessments	Recommendations for Regional Partnership Adoption applicants must be given CORAM/BAAF Form AH, at the start of stage 1, to arrange a medical with their own GP. Medical reports are sent to the Agency Medical Adviser for her/his views on whether there are known reasons why the prospective adopter(s) would be unlikely to care adequately for a child until independence. The Medical Adviser may wish to supplement the information from the applicant's GP with enquiries from consultants or other medical personnel Together4Children to pay for all adopter(s) medicals.
Ofsted/childminding	Recommendations for Regional Partnership If the applicant is or has previously been a childminder then these checks need to be completed.
Armed Forces	Recommendations for Regional Partnership

	SSAFA check to be completed where applicants have been in the armed forces.
Residing Local Authority Checks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LADO • PPRC • Local data base 	Recommendations for Regional Partnership Checks to be completed for duration of time living within that Local Authority
CAFCASS	Recommendations for Regional Partnership Check to be completed on all applicants

6. Further Information on Criminal Checks

- 6.1 Where an agency will not learn the full history by conducting a criminal record check and other background checks for the prospective adopter, for example, where they have lived abroad for an extended period, it should decide whether it will carry out any other checks or take up additional references. The agency should ensure that it has sufficient information to justify continuing with Stage 1 but not delay the approval process. Where a decision is made not to proceed, the Team Manager will provide the prospective adopter(s) with a clear written explanation of the reason why
- 6.2 An agency may not consider a prospective adopter(s) suitability to adopt a child if the or any adult member of their household has been convicted of a specified offence committed at 18 or over, or has received a police caution in respect of a specified offence which they admitted at the time the caution was given. In such circumstances the agency will notify the prospective adopter(s) in writing, with reasons, without delay.
- 6.3 A ‘specified offence’ means:
- An offence against a child
 - An offence specified in AAR, Part 1 of Schedule 3;
 - An offence contrary to section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. This relates to goods which are prohibited to be imported under section 42 of the Customs Consolidation Act 1876 (prohibitions and restrictions relating to pornography) where the prohibited goods included indecent photographs of children under that age of 16; or
 - Any other offence involving bodily injury to a child, other than an offence of common assault and battery



- 6.4 Information that the agency has obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) should be retained by the agency on the prospective adopter(s) case record for a period of 6 months. This information will be destroyed when the agency decides that the prospective adopter(s) is suitable to adopt a child. The agency will note on the prospective adopter's case record that it has destroyed the DBS information and that this information had led the Agency to form a particular view without citing the information itself.
- 6.5 Where the criminal record checks disclose convictions or cautions for non-specified offences, the agency may consider that the prospective adopter(s) is not suitable to adopt. In such circumstances, the agency will exercise its discretion and decide whether to continue with Stage 1. Where a decision not to proceed is made, the agency will notify the prospective adopter(s) in writing, with reasons, without delay.
- 6.6 In circumstances where the application is a joint application, the agency may only inform the prospective adopter who is the convicted or cautioned individual of the specific reason for terminating Stage 1. The Social Worker must explain to that person that the agency will not inform the other person of the specific conviction or caution but will inform them that because of information obtained from the checks the joint application cannot proceed.
- 6.7 Where the checks reveal information about an adult member of the household that indicates that the agency must terminate Stage 1, the agency is restricted from disclosing information about that conviction or caution which prevents the application from proceeding. It may inform that individual and suggest that they inform the prospective adopter(s) but it may not do so itself. In such a case, the agency should counsel the prospective adopter(s) that the checks undertaken indicate that the agency must not continue with Stage 1.
- 6.8 The Agency should exercise its discretion and decide whether to proceed with the prospective adopter's stage 1 assessment. These discussions should be noted on their records and decisions agreed with and countersigned by the relevant managers.
- 9. Preparation Training**
- 9.1 Preparation training is an essential element of stage 1 and will include input from experienced adoptive parents. In order to maximise the use of resources and to avoid unnecessary delay Together4Children Locality Permanency Hubs will collaborate with each other to share places on each other's courses. Participants will be invited by letter /email stating requirements to attend all sessions.
- 9.2 The course leaders will provide a brief written report regarding each participant which will be forwarded to the Social Worker in the Adoption Assessment & Support Team responsible for completing the stage 1 assessment. Any areas of concern should be addressed with the prospective adopter(s) by those presenting the training at the time of the course and be followed up by the assessing Social Worker. This feedback should be shared with prospective adopters.
- 9.3 Family members of prospective adopter(s) should be invited to the Family and Friends

course which will give them an opportunity to understand the adoption journey. At the end of this training, families will be given a reflection sheet to give to the trainer who would feed this back to the assessing Social Worker..

9.4 Regional Quarterly Training and Development Meetings

This meeting will be held quarterly and a representative from each Locality Permanency Hub should attend. The aim will be to discuss the regional preparation training and additional training for prospective adopters. The purpose of the meeting will be to;

- Share feedback from prospective adopters on preparation training and additional training for prospective adopters.
- To share feedback from staff delivering training and discuss whether there needs to be any alterations or changes.
- To review all training offered to prospective adopters.
- Share new ideas on training and preparation for prospective adopters.

9.5 In addition, prospective adopters will be encouraged to complete the government e-learning modules available of the First4Adoption website (Gateway).

10. Stage 2

10.1 Stage 2 is about additional training and assessment and starts at the point that the pre-assessment decision is positive unless the prospective adopter(s) chooses to take a break between the end of stage 1 and the start of stage 2. Should they choose to take a break, prospective adopter(s) can take up to 6 months and re-join the process at the beginning of stage 2. If a prospective adopter wishes to take a break between Stage One and Stage Two, or an agency recommends such a break, this will be subject to a maximum time limit of six months. Six months should be sufficient in the vast majority of cases to enable prospective adopters to resolve, for example, a housing, employment or financial issue, or to recover from an illness or family bereavement. Where this break is longer than six months the prospective adopters will need to restart Stage One. In these circumstances, agencies should respond within five working days of contact from the prospective adopter and offer them a re-entry interview. The Stage One Plan should take into account activities undertaken previously (Statutory Guidance on Adoption, 2013)

10.2 The Assessment and Support Team Manager will allocate a qualified and experienced Social Worker to complete the full assessment within **4 months** from the start of stage 2 to the date of the Agency Decision Maker decision. Assessment and Support Team Manager will ensure they update Information Sharing Log when stage 2 is being launched. The assessing Social Worker should have **at least 3 years** post qualifying experience in childcare social work, or should be supervised by someone who has.

10.3 The Adoption Social Worker will draw up a stage 2 plan, to include a schedule of appointment dates, with the prospective adopter(s) at the outset of stage 2. This will include making a date for the completed assessment to be presented to the Adoption Panel **within 12** weeks (maximum) unless the prospective adopter(s) requires more

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time. The Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) will be used to guide the assessment process.

- 10.4 The assessment plan will be completed with the prospective adopter(s) and signed by the assessing Social Worker and their Team Manager, who will monitor progress of the assessment.
- 10.5 The views of referees should be taken into consideration and the Adoption Social Worker should interview referees in stage 2 to check out any contradictions in information gathered.
- 10.6 If the Adoption Social Worker forms a view during the assessment that the prospective adopter(s) may not be suitable to adopt; they should discuss their concerns with the Assessment & Support Team Manager and together decide on the best course of action.
- 10.7 If there are any issues of significant concern or where clarification is needed, the manager may arrange for a second person to visit the prospective adopter(s) to discuss these but must remain mindful of the timeframe for Stage 2. The second person could be a Team Manager or another Adoption Social Worker. A visit by another person provides a second opinion where necessary before the report to the panel is finalised in cases where clarification is needed but should not routinely be carried out. The author of the report and the countersigning officer should both sign and date the report, state their qualifications and experience and confirm that they have complied with ARR3.
- 10.8 To complete the assessment, the Adoption Social Worker will produce the Prospective Adopters Report, including an assessment of the prospective adopter's competencies.
- 10.9 The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 state that a stage 2 assessment should be completed **within 4 months** of a pre-assessment decision. Unless there are exceptional circumstances which means the agency cannot make the decision within that time frame or at the request of the prospective adopter. Reasons for any extensions should be recorded on the prospective adopter(s) records.
- 10.10 Prospective adopters must be kept informed on how they are progressing throughout the assessment and any difficulties should be shared openly.
- 10.11 Prospective adopters need to demonstrate a clear understanding of acceptable methods of discipline for children. Practitioners should explain why corporal punishment is not acceptable and provide advice on appropriate ways to help prevent inappropriate behaviour. Prospective adopters also need to demonstrate awareness and understanding of how and why an adopted child might display challenging behaviour (due to early childhood trauma, neglect and disrupted attachments, for example) and the potential need for a therapeutic parenting style.

Family Meetings

- 10.12 Having family meetings during the assessment or prior to matching prospective adopter(s) with child(ren) is considered to be good practice. Family members will be invited to a Family and Friends Course from Stage 1 and into Stage 2. However, if they



are unable to attend this course then a Family Meeting should take place during the Stage 2 Assessment when the assessing Social Worker explores support networks with the prospective adopter(s).

- 10.13 Meeting the family will ensure the opportunity to provide information about adoption early. on to the wider family/ friend's network. The importance of taking the prospective adopters support network on their journey towards adoption is evident when learning from adoption disruptions. The family meeting during the assessment offers opportunity to further assess the strength of the family support network and identify areas where further information may be required and any gaps in support. It offers opportunity to gather their views on the prospective adopters and gain understanding of the emotional/ practical support they can offer. Family meetings will support the completion of an evidence-based assessment; supporting the stability of adoptive placements later on.
- 10.14 It is recommended that all prospective adopters have a family meeting during Stage 2 (if they are unable to attend the Family and Friends Course) and a Family Review Meeting when a potential match is identified. The review meeting will explore the Identified support needs of the child(ren) and should seek to evidence the strength of the match and family's capacity to specifically meet the needs of the identified child(ren). The information gained within the review meeting should further inform the progression of the match and the proposed support plan. It is imperative that support plans are well informed, robust and realistic to meet the needs of children and families. This has the potential to support stronger matches and reduce the risks of disruptions by being very clear what support, the prospective adopters have and how robust this is.
- 10.15 Further training will be provided for the prospective adopter(s) during stage 2 which focuses on understanding the needs of children in care, including the impact of trauma and neglect on a child's ability to form positive attachments within a family. In addition, further training and reading materials will be provided in order for prospective adopters to enhance their learning through discussion in their assessment.
- 10.16 Once the PAR has been completed the Assessment & Support Team Manager will have **3 working days** to quality assure the assessment prior to sharing with the prospective adopter. Assessment and Support Team Manager should cross reference PAR with the ROI to ensure relevant checks have been completed. The prospective adopter(s) should have sight of the report for a minimum of **5 working days** to provide any views and comments to the Assessing Social Worker prior to its submission to panel.

11 Booking Processes for Adopter Approvals:

- 11.1 When Stage 2 of the Adopter Assessment is launched within the Information Sharing Log (ISL) within the Central Permanency Hub (CPH); the Information Sharing Log IT System (ISL) will automatically book a provisional Adoption Panel date. This date will be 13 weeks after Stage 2 is launched.
- 11.2 ISL will send an email alert to the Adoption Social Worker of this provisional date.

- 11.3 If this date is not achievable for whatever reason the Adoption Social Worker to discuss this with the Assessment & Support Team Manager to agree a new date.
- 11.4 The Adoption Social Worker will send an email to the Together4Children (T4C) Adoption Panel inbox requesting a provisional change of date. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request.
- 11.5 8 weeks prior to the Adoption Panel date the ISL will send an alert to the Adoption Social Worker to ask to confirm the Adoption Panel date.
- 11.6 The Adoption Social Worker will then email the T4C Adoption Panel inbox to confirm the Adoption Panel date.
- 11.7 4 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

11.8 **Booking Process for Brief Report**

- 11.9 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 11.10 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 11.11 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

12. The Adoption Panel

- 12.1 The Adoption Social Worker should arrange for the Prospective Adopter's Report and all other relevant paperwork to be submitted to Adoption Panel **11 working days** prior to Adoption Panel taking place. Where timescales are not adhered to the Agency will record the reasons on the adopter's case record.
- 12.2 The Social Worker will then submit the following reports to Panel:
- The Prospective Adopter's Report and any views expressed by the prospective adopter and any second opinion report completed
 - The Health Report.
- 12.3 The applicant(s) must be invited to make written observations on the content of the Prospective Adopter's Report and invited attend the Adoption Panel to make oral Representation, however, they are under no obligation to attend Panel.
- 12.4 The Adoption Panel will either:

- Recommend suitable to adopt.
- Recommend further work by the Social Worker.
- Recommend unsuitable to adopt

12.5 In addition, the Panel may, but is not required to, advise the Agency about the children the prospective adopter(s) is considered suitable for.

13. After Adoption Panel

13.1 After Adoption Panel has commenced, Regional Administration Officers will type up the minutes within **3 working days** and email to the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.

13.2 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser makes any amendments and sends back to the Regional Administration Officer when complete via email.

13.3 Regional Administrator uploads the minutes to SharePoint and then sends an email to the panel members to access SharePoint and review the minutes whereby they will have **3 working days** to undertake this task. Panel Members will be asked to make any changes in Blue and to initial their changes. Panel Members will also complete question 6 of the Quality Assurance Document for all agenda items which is located within SharePoint.

13.4 If panel members choose to not review the minutes within the timescale this is at their discretion, but the timescale will not be extended.

13.5 After **3 working days** Regional Adoption Agency Adviser reviews the amendments and finalises on SharePoint.

13.6 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser emails the Panel Chair to inform he/she that panel minutes are ready to ratify and sign off on SharePoint. Panel Chair has **2 working days** to undertake this task.

13.7 Panel Chair contacts the Regional Administration Officer when completed and Regional Administration Officer then sends an electronic invite to book an allocated time slot within the Agency Decision Maker calendar to review the paperwork.

13.8 The ADM accesses and reviews the paperwork:

- For Stoke-on-Trent a SharePoint email link is sent to the ADM.
- For Staffordshire County Council a SharePoint email link is sent to the ADM.
- For Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire ADM's, this is work flowed direct to them via Liquid Logic.

- 13.9 The ADM for approvals will be T4C Head of Operations; Scott Crawford
- 13.10 The Agency Decision Maker will consider the Panel minutes and the Panel's recommendation and will make a decision and complete a Decision Sheet and send via email to the Regional Administration Officer.
- 13.11 This decision is to be made within **5 working days** of receipt of the minutes and conveyed to the prospective adopter(s), orally within **2 working days** by the Adoption Social Worker and in writing within 5 working days of the Agency decision by the Regional Administration Officer. (Where these timescales are not adhered to the Agency will record the reasons on the prospective adopter(s) record).
- 13.12 Where the ADM does not accept the Adoption Panel's recommendation, he /she may discuss with another senior person in the Partnership who is not a member of the Panel.
- 13.13 The final decision and the reasons for that decision should be recorded in the prospective adopter(s) record.
- 13.14 Where the Agency Decision Maker considers that the applicant(s) are not suitable to adopt, or approval is being terminated Regional Administration Officers will notify the prospective adopter(s) in writing via a Qualifying Determination letter of the specific reasons for this decision.
- 13.15 Within this letter the Agency will also advise that the prospective adopter(s) have 40 working days from the date of the Qualifying Determination letter in which to submit any representations to the Agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism. Regional Administration Officers will provide an IRM leaflet for additional information regarding the process with the Qualifying Determination letter.
- 13.14 If the prospective adopter(s) accepts the Qualifying Determination this will become the Agency decision.
- 13.15 Where the Agency receives representations from the prospective adopter(s) within the time period allowed, it will consider referring the case with any new and relevant information back to the Adoption Panel. This would be for consideration to be heard by different panel members and chair.
- 13.16 Where the Agency refers the matter back to the Agency Decision Maker who must take into account the recommendation of both the original Panel and any subsequent recommendation.
- 13.17 Please see [Panel Policy](#) for further details.
- 13.18 Approved families will be referred to Link Maker no later than **three months** from the date of their approval. However, their details should be added as soon as possible after approval if no prospective links to a child have been identified. This should be

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discussed with the applicants post approval, but remains their decision as to whether, and at what point they choose to utilise this resource.

- 13.19 The Adoption Social Worker will maintain appropriate indirect/direct contact every 6 weeks with the approved family and at least quarterly face to face meetings in order to reassure adopters whilst waiting for a child and update information on their records.

14. Review

- 14.1 Where a match with a child has not been identified after the prospective adopter(s) have been approved for 12 months a review will be carried out at 10 months with the report finalised at 12 months. to explore the implications and possible reasons why this may be the case. An additional review should be carried out where circumstances remain the same at 24 months. This should be presented to the Adoption Panel in circumstances where the prospective adopters are to be deregistered.

- 14.2 A review should also be undertaken where there has been a **significant event** within the prospective adopter household that may impact upon the family's current capacity to adopt a child. For Example;

- Bereavement involving close family or loved one
- Onset of serious medical condition
- Event or occurrence that has a serious impact on family resources
- Finances and/or ability to provide a secure home for a child

- 14.3 Waiting adopter's medicals must be updated **every 3 years, but as a matter of good practice, these should be renewed after 2.**

- 14.4 DBS checks should be repeated **after 2 years.**

- 14.5 Where the Agency completes its review and considers that the prospective adopter(s) may no longer be suitable to adopt, it will prepare the Prospective Adopters Review Report, clearly setting out the reasons why. The report will be shared with Prospective adopter(s), who will be invited to provide comments.

15. Guidance/Standards

- 15.1 The Review should consider how prospective adopters are coping with the wait, any changes and whether they wish to amend their approval criteria. The review after one year should be completed by a Senior Adoption Social Worker and the family's Adoption Social Worker. If the family wait over two years, the Assessment & Support Team Manager should undertake the review.

- 15.2 If a decision is made that the prospective adopters are no longer suitable to adopt, they still have the option to make representation to the [Independent Review Mechanism \(IRM\)](#).