



# Family Finding and Matching

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. Summary of Policy.

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to address the issues when considering a proposed match between children being placed for adoption and approved adopters.
- 1.2. Timescales are clearly set out with the steps necessary to provide adopters with relevant information about the child. The policy sets out the process for completion of the Adoption Placement Report, Adoption Support Plan and attendance at the Adoption Panel.

## 2. Underpinning Legislation and Guidance.

- Adoption and Children Act (2002) Sections 1, 4, 18 and 120.
- Children Act (2004)
- Adoption and Children Act (2006)
- Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013) Part 4.
- Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations (2005)
- Adoption Support Services Regulations (2005)
- The Adoption Support Agencies (England) (Amendment) Regulations (2010)
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption (2013) Chapters 4 and 5
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013)
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption (2011)
- Guidance on Fostering for Adoption (2014)
- Children and Families act (2014)
- Children Social Work 2017
- Equality Act (2010).

## 3. Policy Statement:

- 3.1. The following 'Adoption Services' should be provided to the child:
  - The Child's Social Worker should counsel, inform and prepare the child for placement for adoption through the use of direct work and offer support following placement.
  - The Children's Guide to Adoption, in the format most appropriate to the child.
  - Independent advocacy via the Children's Advice and Representation Service (CARS), and/or SCC's 'Voice Project'.
  - A commitment to keeping brothers and sisters together unless this does not meet their individually assessed needs.

- A commitment to place children with adoptive/permanent families which reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language if this can be achieved within the child's time-scale (Statutory Guidance 4.7)
- An assessment of adoptive support needs prior to identifying a family.
- A timely response to ensure drift is avoided and an adoptive placement is achieved within the shortest possible period (Statutory Guidance 4.4)

#### **4. Procedures**

4.1. The Agency's paramount consideration will be the welfare of the child and the Agency will be mindful of the prejudicial nature of delay. With this in mind, the Agency will seek to adhere to the following maximum timescales when planning an adoptive placement:

- To identify and approve an adoptive placement within 6 months of the making of the Placement Order that the child should be placed for adoption.
- Where the child is relinquished and aged under 6 months, the adoptive placement will be matched and approved within 3 months of the adoption decision for the child.
- Where circumstances allow consideration is to be given to placing a child with approved adopters under Early Permanence to reduce the number of moves a child experiences.
- The Agency Decision Maker will consider the Adoption Panel's recommendation within 7 working days.
- The child's parents/guardians, and the adopter(s) will be notified of the Agency's decision, orally by the Child Social Worker, within 2 working days, and, in writing, within 5 working days. (Statutory Guidance 4.36 and AAR33).

4.2. The Agency will comment in its 6 monthly Report on its performance against these timescales. (National Minimum Standards 25.6)

#### **5. Family Finding Referral and Allocation**

5.1. Permanency Coordinators based within the Central Permanency Hub will attend Legal Gateway Meetings/Legal Planning Meetings within each Locality Permanency Hub to obtain information regarding children who are subject to PLO and identify whether there are any children who may have a plan for adoption or Early Permanence. If a Permanency Coordinator is unable to attend, then they should obtain the minutes from the meeting.

5.2. Following the Legal gateway meeting, the Permanency Coordinator will begin to track the child(ren) on the Information Sharing Log.

- 5.3. A Permanency Planning Meeting to be organised by the Child's Social Worker for early discussions regarding possible plans of adoption. This is to be attended by the Child's Social Worker, their manager, and a Permanency Coordinator. At this meeting, if a plan of adoption is likely, the Child Social Worker will need to complete a Family Finding Referral which is to be sent to the Permanency Coordinator within the Central Permanency Hub.
- 5.4. The referral needs to be fully completed, including brief background, details of geography (areas to avoid), any outstanding assessments, sibling assessments and court timescales. Ensuring sibling details are correct (if applicable). CMH document to be sent along with the referral.
- 5.5. Permanency Coordinator will then allocate a Family Finding Practitioner to family find for the child(ren). This will be done by email, ensuring that the Child Social Worker is copied in and is aware of who will be undertaking the family finding activity.

## 6. Family Finding

- 6.1. Family Finding Practitioner will liaise with Child Social Worker to ascertain all relevant information regarding child(ren). Family Finding Practitioner to arrange a meeting with the Child Social Worker to form an Adoption Plan. The Adoption Plan will need to consider the following;
- Action to take to family find and if there is permission to start this prior to ADM
  - Seeking external placements
  - Funding
  - When there can be referral to Link Maker
  - Exchange events, activity days
  - Whether there can be any 'soft introductions' (see [Introductions Policy](#))
- 6.2. Permission to seek an external adoptive placement or other funding should be sought from the Together4Children Senior Leadership Team.
- 6.3. Workers may start to plan prior to the Agency Decision Maker agreeing the child should be placed for adoption.
- 6.4. A profile of the child, and where appropriate, video footage of the child will be compiled by the Family Finding Practitioner in consultation with the Child's Social Worker and foster carer.
- 6.5. Adoption enquiries, external to the Partnership, cannot be made unless there is parental consent provided after the Agency Decision Maker decision; the Placement Order has been granted, or unless the authorisation of the court has been sought by the Local Authority and been granted.
- 6.6. When the Agency Decision Maker has made the decision that adoption is the permanence plan for the child, family finding activity will begin.
- 6.7. The Family Finding Practitioner will attend the monthly Locality Permanency Hub and Regional Family Finding Meetings to establish whether there are any potentially suitable

prospective adopters (including families going through the assessment process) and subsequently, will request copies of any available Reports in order to draw up a short list. The purpose of the Regional Family Finding meetings are as follows;

- For each Locality Hub to share children's profiles (Inc. 'harder to place')
- For each Locality Hub to share prospective adopters' profiles (Inc. those in stage 2)
- To explore and establish early links for children whose plan is adoption and for 'harder to place' children
- To ensure the best use of available prospective adopter households regionally
- To identify children where an inter-agency placement is required
- To identify children for whom placement finding has not been successful, in order to consider resources and care planning options

6.8. If no approved adopters are identified within Together4Children Permanency Partnership, or where a child's needs are known to be harder to place (e.g. those with additional health needs, learning disabilities, birth family genetic factors, large sibling groups or older children), the Permanency Coordinator will escalate the resource shortfall to the Together4Children Senior Leadership Team who will consider whether funding for an inter-agency placement is required, and any additional funding that may be necessary e.g. for the use of specialist publications.

6.9. Such enquiries will include referral to 'Link Maker', consideration also to be given to exchange days and activity days.

## 7. Matching

7.1. Where there has been expression of interest in a child from a number of approved adopters, then a linking discussion will take place. This will be organised by the Permanency Coordinator who will formally review all Prospective Adopter Reports (PARs) and present families they feel are best able to meet the needs of the children. Where deemed appropriate more than one family can be considered. The three most appropriate families will be presented to a 'Matching Meeting'. This discussion, and the short-listing decision-making process should be held in a timely fashion; involve the views of the Child's Social Worker; be recorded and an anonymised version placed on the child's records. A record will also be maintained on the case management system stating the date when the Social Worker was presented with the PARs.

7.2. The adopters' wishes will have already been ascertained as to whether they wish to be informed every time their report (PAR) is presented to a Social Worker as a potential match, or whether they only want to be informed when the Social Worker has placed them as the first choice and wishes to meet with them to discuss their child in detail. These views should be recorded within the matching plan document.

7.3. Although the Agency may consider a number of choices of prospective adopter for a child, only one match will be presented to the Adoption Panel. A matching meeting will use the 'matching matrix' to determine which families presented as a result of the linking discussion best appears to meet the child's assessed needs. (Statutory Guidance 4.21).

- 7.4. A matching meeting should be held when a family has been identified as a possible match for a child. This will also be the case for Early Permanence placement and where the child's foster carer(s) express a wish to be approved as an adoptive parent for the child.
- 7.5. Where the existing foster carer(s) express a wish to be approved as an adoptive parent for the child, the matching meeting should take place prior to the adopter assessment process taking place. In such a case there should be agreement as to the package of financial support that would be available to the foster carers should the matching meeting achieve a positive outcome.
- 7.6. The matching meeting should consider any financial and/or practical support that may be assessed as necessary for the proposed adopters. Advice may be sought from the Permanency Support Team.
- 7.7. Any request for financial support for an adoptive placement should be presented by the Child's Social Worker to the respective Local Authority to make a financial decision. This will require the completion of the financial assessment, and a short report outlining the circumstances of the placement and reason for request.
- 7.8. The Agency will take the following steps in relation to a prospective adopter with whom it proposes to place a child:
- Provide the prospective adopter(s) with the child's Permanence Report, and other relevant information, such as health and educational needs reports, photos or videos of the child (Statutory Guidance 4.23 and AAR 31).
  - The prospective adopter will be asked to confirm in writing that all information about the child will be kept confidential and returned to the Agency on request. (On the Matching Plan completed following adopter approval)
  - The Agency will meet the prospective adopter(s) to discuss the placement and seek their views about the placement and about the contact arrangements which are proposed for the child, including meeting the child's birth parents (Statutory Guidance 4.25).
  - The Agency will inform the prospective adopters of the placement planning procedures. (NB. In an inter-agency placement, the adopters' agency will explain the introduction and placement procedures used by the child's agency). (Statutory Guidance 4.23; AAR 31).
  - Where a Fostering for Adoption (FFA) placement is to be made then the Together 4 Children's FFA & procedures should be followed.
  - Until foster carers are approved as prospective adopters, then the child's placement with them will continue under Fostering Regulations.
  - The status of the placement will change from the date that ADM gives confirmation of the match. Adoption financial support commences from this date and fostering allowances cease.

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- When a shortlisted family has been identified/ approved by another agency, an Adoption Support Meeting will take place.
- A Child Appreciation Meeting will be organised by the Family Finding Practitioner prior to Matching Panel. (Please see [Child Appreciation Meeting Policy](#)).
- Meetings between prospective adopters and foster carers, medical advisers, schools or nurseries should be organised and a discussion on who will arrange these should take place at the matching meeting.

7.9. Before the proposed placement proceeds, the Agency will undertake the following:

- Carry out an assessment of the prospective adoptive family's needs for Permanency Support Services and complete an Adoption Support Plan.
- Consider the contact arrangements recommended for the child.
- Prepare the Adoption Placement Report, (to be written by the Adoption Social Worker and Child Social Worker and contributions from the Family Finding Practitioner and prospective adopters) which will cover the following:
  - Why the Agency is proposing the placement
  - The adopters' views about the placement and the contact arrangements
  - The Agency's proposals for adoption support
  - The Agency's proposals concerning contact
  - Any other information the Agency deems relevant

7.10. The Agency will notify the prospective adopter(s) that the proposed placement is to be referred to the Adoption Panel; give them a copy of the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan and invite them to send their comments, to be received within 10 working days (AAR31.3)

7.11. When 10 working days have elapsed (or earlier if the adopters' views are received sooner) and 11 working days prior to the Adoption Panel date, the following paperwork must be submitted to Adoption Panel by the Adoption Social Worker:

- Adoption Placement Report and Adoption Support Plan
- Minutes from Prospective Adopter'(s) approval
- Updated Child Permanency Report (CPR) including updated photographs
- Carers Report
- The prospective Adopter's Report
- Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Decision Sheets for both Child and Prospective Adopter(s)
- Medical Advisers Report
- Legal Advice

7.12. In an Inter-Agency Placement, any consideration of the placement by the Adoption Panel will only take place following consultation between the agencies. Each agency will open both a



prospective adopter's case record and a child's case record, using information supplied by the partner agency.

## 8. Adoption Panel and ADM

### 8.1. Booking Processes for Matches:

- 8.2. The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 8.3. 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 provisional panel date.
- 8.4. 5 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 to the Child and Adoption Social Worker.
- 8.5. To note, the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser for the match can be any Regional Adoption Agency Adviser within T4C and does not need to be a Regional Adoption Agency Adviser located within the Child's Local Authority for this to proceed.
- 8.6. **11 working days prior** to the Adoption Panel date, paperwork must be submitted to Adoption Panel by the Adoption Social Worker.
- 8.7. The Adoption Panel will make a recommendation as to whether the child should be placed for adoption with the specified prospective adopter(s). They will also have regard for the following:
- To make the child's welfare and post adoption support the paramount consideration
  - To consider the child's wishes, feelings and needs (including those arising from his/her age, sex and background)
  - To bear in mind the likely effect on the child (throughout life) of ceasing to be a member of his/her birth family and of being adopted
  - To give weight to the role of the birth relatives, and any other person considered significant, in terms of contact, their ability to care for the child and their wishes concerning the child's future
  - To identify any harm the child has suffered or may suffer
  - To give due consideration to the child's religious, cultural, racial and linguistic background and how these needs may be met
  - To have regard to all the information presented
  - To request any other information considered necessary
  - To obtain legal advice if necessary
  - To consider the Agency's adoption support services proposals
  - To consider the Agency's proposals regarding contact for the child with any person
  - To consider the exercise of 'Parental Responsibility by the parent/guardian/prospective adopter and whether this should be restricted

- 8.8. The Adoption Panel may then give advice about adoption support, contact and parental responsibility.
- 8.9. The Adoption Panel may only make a recommendation concerning a proposed placement where, at the same meeting or as a result of a previous ADM decision, a recommendation has been made that the child should be placed for adoption, and that the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child. In an Inter-Agency Placement, the recommendation concerning the child, or the adopter must have been ratified as a decision.
- 8.10. The ADM for Children's plans and matches will be the child's ADM. Hence:
- Shropshire Children: Interim Assistant Director–Children's Social Care & Safeguarding
- Staffordshire Children- Assistant Director, Looked After & Disability Services
- Telford & Wrekin Children: Interim Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support/ Child Protection & Family Support (Assessment & CATE) Service Delivery Manager.
- Stoke-on-Trent Children-Assistant Director for Childrens Services
- 8.11. The Agency Decision Maker will then consider the Adoption Panel's recommendation and any advice offered on the matters detailed above. They will reach their decision having regard to the reports submitted to Panel and the minutes of the meeting. They will also pay particular notice to the reasons for the Panel's recommendation and any recorded concerns.
- 8.12. This decision is to be made within 5 working days of receipt of the minutes.
- 8.13. The Agency's decision and their views on the Panel's advice will be recorded on both the child's and the adopter's records.
- 8.14. If the Agency Decision Maker does not accept the Panel's recommendation, they will discuss this with another senior person in the Agency, who is not a Panel member. The outcome of that decision must be recorded on the child's file and also on the adopter's file.
- 8.15. No member of the Panel will take part in the decision making and the Agency Decision Maker will be a Senior Manager Together4Children.
- 8.16. As soon as possible after making the decision to proceed with the placement, the Agency will undertake the following:
- The prospective adopters' Social Worker will convey the decision orally to the prospective adopters within 2 working days and in writing within 5 days
  - The Child's Social Worker will convey the decision orally to the birth parents within two working days and in writing within 5 working days
  - Explain this decision to the child (having regard to his/her age and understanding).

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- Other birth family members who have been consulted about the child should also be informed as appropriate
- The Agency should ensure that the child's Independent Reviewing Officer is informed

8.17. The Agency will place the following information on the child's adoption record: to be removed in the event of a disruption to the placement

- The prospective Adopter's Report
- The Adoption Placement Report, with any views expressed by the adopter
- A copy of the Adoption Support Plan
- The minutes of the Panel, the recommendations, and the reasons, and any advice
- The record and the notifications made of the Agency's decision

8.18. Please see [Panel Policy](#) for further details

8.19. The Agency will undertake the formulation of [Introduction's Planning](#).

8.20. Once the child is placed, Family Finding Practitioner will complete the Post-Box referral.

8.21. Family Finding Practitioners will cease involvement once a child is placed, or if it is an Inter-Agency placement, after the next LAC Review.