

STAGE 1 POLICY

**ADOPTER RECRUITMENT**

**1.0 Stage 1 overview**

The registration of interest will be received by the recruitment staff in the hub and the team manager will be notified within 24 hours, usually on the same day. Unless additional or previously unknown information is on the ROI, the ROI should be accepted within 5 working days of the hub receiving it based on the previous assessments / decisions following initial assessment visit.

If accepting the ROI, the team manager will allocate to a social worker, if not already allocated. The hub recruitment staff will communicate with business support to initiate statutory / other checks and medicals.

The stage 1 process should be completed within 2 months (8 weeks) of the agency receiving the registration of interest.

Contact will be made with the prospective adopter(s) to advise them of the online system for completing a DBS check or if they are unable to complete this on line a form will be posted to them to complete prior to the first social worker visit.

The allocated social worker will contact the adopters within a further 24 hours and arrange a stage 1 agreement meeting. In this meeting, agreements will be made between the prospective adopter(s) and the social worker about the way they will be working together; the adopters preferred learning style and methods of communication. The meeting will follow the format of the stage 1 agreement meeting template and this will be signed by both parties and kept on the adopter record.

The social worker will explain the process for stage 1 and provide an overview of the range of checks and learning materials available. This discussion and the process as a whole should assist the prospective adopters and the agency in making an informed decision about whether adoption is right for them and whether they have the necessary skills to meet the needs of a child.

**2 .0 References and checks**

At the first stage 1 meeting the prospective adopters will provide required evidence of identity and the social worker will record this directly on to the online DBS verification system.

**2.1 Personal References**

Applicants will have been asked to provide the names of three personal referees who must be adults, have known the applicant(s) for at least two years and who are prepared to give personal references on the prospective adopter. Only one of the three can be a family member. A record of the references will be included in the Prospective Adopters Report.

Referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity, and it is desirable that the referees have direct experience of caring for children, either in a personal or professional capacity. Where there is a joint application, referees should know both applicants, or additional referees will be required.

Requests for written references will be sent by Business Support.

The personal referees should be asked to comment on the following;

* The length of time the referee has known the applicant, in what circumstances, how they met and how regularly they are in contact
* Where there is a joint application, the couple's relationship including its stability and quality, the couple's strengths and ways of coping with stress and how mutually supportive the couple is
* The applicants' general physical and emotional well being
* How the applicants relate to children, with examples, and what experience the applicants have of caring for children
* How the applicants have adjusted to childlessness, if this is the case, how they have prepared to become adoptive parents, how much they have shared with the referees and how open they are in talking about the issues surrounding adoption
* If the applicants have children of their own, how the referee thinks another child joining the family will impact and where the applicants are considering a child from a different ethnic background, how they will promote and support the child’s heritage as well as any impact on the other children and wider family
* Whether the referee has any reservations or whether the referee wholeheartedly supports the application.

A written reference must also be obtained from each applicant's current employer and all employers during the last 10 years. Where the applicant(s) work or have worked with children or vulnerable adults, all previous employers will be asked to provide a reference. Where the prospective adopter has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.

**2.2 Medical**

The prospective adopters will be asked to arrange for a medical appointment with their General Practitioner as soon as possible and it should be explained to the applicants that medicals can be a cause of delay in progression. They will also be asked to notify their personal referees that they will receive a request for an initial report and ask them to return it to the agency promptly.

**2.3 Previous Partner References**

 If the prospective adopters have ex partners, this will discussed and contact details should be provided by the applicant. The Recruitment and Assessment Social Worker will  contact the previous partners of the applicants and will seek references from them where they have been in a cohabitating or meaningful relationship regardless of if they parented or cared for a child together.  There are varied ways in which ex-partners can be traced and evidence of all attempts should be recorded on file. Where there are any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable. Children of the applicant(s) living away from home will also be contacted, references sought and an interview undertaken with them. Where an applicant has stated that they have experienced domestic abuse in a previous relationship, evidence should be sought to verify any claims either from the police or from local authority records.

Where a decision is made not to contact a previous partner, this needs to be agreed with the Operations Manager and a written record will be placed on file. Corroboration of any such circumstances should be sought through referees. These decisions need to be based on there being a serious/significant risk to the applicant and not just an expressed wish not to make contact

Any decision not to interview an ex partner where children have been jointly cared for must be discussed with and agreed by the Regional Adoption Manager. A written record of this agreement and the reasons for it will be placed on Charms.

**2.4 Local Authority Checks**

Adoption Counts must also ascertain whether the local authority in whose area the prospective adopter resides (or has resided for the last 10 years) holds any information about them that may be relevant to the assessment. If so, the agency must obtain from that authority a written report setting out the information. Local authorities asked for this information should comply promptly with these requests and provide this information within 15 working days. In requesting information from a local authority, the agency should seek to ascertain whether records held by social services and education departments hold relevant information about the prospective adopter.

**2.5 Overseas Checks**

Where an applicant has lived overseas for a period longer than six months, it is expected that an overseas check covering that country will be sought. If an applicant worked with children overseas, than a reference from their employer will be sought regardless of duration. The social worker should explain the significance of the DBS checks as well as the range of other checks undertaken and make it clear to the prospective adopters that if any of the checks undertaken reveal information that raises concerns about their suitability to adopt they may not be invited to progress to stage 2 of the process.

The stage 1 agreement form will be uploaded on CHARMS along with a record of the visit.

**3.0 Stage 1 activity**

* There will be a minimum of 3 face to face contacts with prospective adopters during stage 1 and these can be at the prospective adopter’s home or in the office. At least one of them should be at the prospective adopter’s home given the need to complete a health and safety assessment. In addition, communication will take place via email and telephone to offer the prospective adopters advice and support.
* Where the prospective adopters have a birth child or previously adopted child they should be given a clear explanation of the work that will be done with the child in stage 2 of the process, taking into account the child’s age and other characteristics. It should also be explained that where the child is of sufficient age and understanding they will need to undertake reasonable preparation work with them during stage 1. This would not usually involve the social worker undertaking any direct work.
* Where the applicants have a dog it should be explained to them that an authorised dog assessor will undertake an assessment of the animal during the stage 1 process and that they will be required to cover the cost of this.
* The prospective adopters will also attend 3 days of preparation training during stage 1. The worker will receive feedback from the social workers undertaking the training and if there are any issues / concerns these will be discussed with the prospective adopters with input from the social worker who undertook the training.
* The prospective adopters will also need to complete a self-assessment form, which should encourage them to reflect on their own relevant skills and experiences. They should also carry out online learning through First4adoption, which covers a wide range of subjects, such as identity, attachment, backgrounds of adopted children, etc. This should help prospective adopters to understand the rewards and challenges of adoptive parenting.
* A financial assessment form should be completed by the applicant/s and verified by the social worker. Bank statements and other necessary evidence should be viewed to verify income and expenditure as well as mortgage statements to ensure no arrears/risk of losing their home. If the applicant rents their home then a tenancy agreement / reference from their landlord must be sought to evidence the security of their accommodation.

**4.0 Stage 1 report**

Once the prospective adopters have made sufficient progress, and once all the checks have been received, a stage 1 report will be written by the social worker. The report will follow the agreed format, contain a summary of the activity undertaken and the social workers recommendation. A separate section will contain the prospective adopter’s views and a summary of their learning from the process. The report will contain a section completed by the manager together with their decision as to whether the prospective adopters should proceed to stage 2 of the process. If the decision is not to proceed to stage 2 the prospective adopters must be sent a letter advising them of this and reasons why.

If the prospective adopters wish to take a break from the process or the agency recommends a break between stage 1 and 2 this should be discussed with them and if agreed should be no longer than 6 months. If they require a break of longer than 6 months they will need to repeat stage 1. If they contact the agency within 6 months of going on a break they should be offed a re-entry interview with a view to establishing their suitability to proceed to stage 2 based on any changes in their circumstances.

Summary of stage 1 checks / activity

Statutory Checks / DBS (from Hub)

Medicals / GP medical (from Hub)

Overseas checks

Preparation Group Training

Programme of learning material

Referees agreed with written reports / questionnaires sent from the Hub. (Face to face interviews will take place in stage 2)

Employer’s references can be taken up in stage 1 or 2 (adopter choice unless working with children/vulnerable adults as these would be requested in stage 1). Same for education checks (birth/adopted child)

Ex partners – agreed with adopters / written reports sent from the Hub. (phone calls to verify or if required, face to face interview, by the social worker, in Stage 2)

Financial information – verify income and outgoings

Pet Assessments (Mandatory Dog assessments paid for by adopters)

Health and Safety questionnaire (Tasks requiring actions by adopters identified)

Individual work by adopters – self assessment questionnaire, family tree / Eco Map / E-Learning