



## Practice Guidance: Network Meetings

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### **Network meetings during assessment**

There is an **expectation that a network meeting is undertaken during all Adoption Assessment Reports (AAR)**. Guidance around network meetings have been developed following learning from; practice within other Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs), positive outcomes where the support networks have contributed to that outcome, and disruptions when issues around support have been noted. Network meetings are considered by the agency to add valuable evidence to assessments and provide greater security to placements for children.

Prospective adopters will be made aware that a network meeting will form part of their assessment from the earliest stages. This will be discussed in information events, initial meetings, within correspondence with referees and during assessment visits. It is expected that **prospective adopters take responsibility for informing their network** of the meeting and invite them to an agreed date. The assessing social worker will then facilitate.

**Prospective adopters should make efforts to strengthen their network** from the point of registering their interest in adoption. It is important that the Social Worker completing the assessment can evidence that an applicant

has sufficient immediate support, for a child or children to be placed, and demonstrates a capacity to continue developing their network.

It is recommended network meetings takes place **around 3 weeks prior to the assessment being completed**, however, this is at the assessing social worker's discretion who may feel they need to facilitate one earlier. It is anticipated that these meetings last between 90 minutes - 2 hours.

### **Preparation for a network meeting**

The Assessing Social Worker and applicants will agree a date the network meeting will be facilitated during the assessment. The applicants will confirm expected attendance to their Social Worker. There is a presumption that the **network meeting take place in the applicant/s home**.

The applicant will be responsible for inviting members of their network and the network will take responsibility for their attendance, evidencing the effectiveness of the network.

It is **expected that Network meetings take place during working hours**. If an Assessing Social Worker agrees, at their discretion, to complete the network meeting after 5pm they will be **expected to take their time back** via flexi before 7pm and toil after 7pm. It is expected that the network is motivated to attend the meeting with advance notice and recognise, that if their support was required in an emergency, this may occur during working hours.

Any member of the network who proposes that they can provide regular practical support **should attend the meeting in-person**. It is preferred that any member who can provide emotional support also attends in person, however, they can attend virtually if geography or exceptional circumstances are a barrier to their in-person attendance.

The Assessing Social Worker will briefly speak to the prospective adopter/s prior to the network meeting taking place, setting out what will be covered in the meeting and expectations. This may include discussion around how

any materials are sent to the network prior to the meeting, if the Assessing Social Worker feels this would be useful.

### **In the network meeting**

It is recommended that Assessing Social Workers consider the proposed format below when facilitating network meetings. Despite this, Assessing Social Workers will use their professional judgement to tailor the contents of the network meetings they facilitate to ensure this meets the specific needs of the applicants and their network.

#### **1. Introductions**

A round of introductions, explanation of the purpose of the meeting and 'house rules'. It may also be helpful to ask the network if they have any questions they want to cover in the meeting.

#### **2. An overview of the journey of an adopter**

This could include a summary of the assessment process, panel, family finding, early permanence, matching panel, introductions, support offered post placement, and adoption applications. It may be helpful to ask the network how they think going through the assessment, family finding and matching stages may feel. The Assessing Social Worker may find this part of the meeting is more succinct if they provide relevant flowcharts with the network in preparation of the meeting.

#### **3. The child's journey**

This could include the reasons a child may have a plan of adoption and their experiences before they are placed with their adoptive family i.e., abuse, neglect, loss, and disruption. It would be helpful for this to include some discussion around the benefits to a child of Early Permanence, safely maintaining links to birth family members and the agencies policy regarding name changes.

#### **4. Therapeutic parenting**

This could include discussion around providing a secure base to a child who has experienced developmental trauma, and what this can look and feel like for adopters and children. The network should be invited to attend the 'Family and Friends Training, where they can develop their knowledge, once a child is placed under Early Permanence or a match is identified.

It is **expected that the network is made aware of the support available from Adopt North East** pre and post adoption order, with encouragement to support their friend or family member to access support when needed. This will include information about the 'Waiting Adopter' and 'Early Permanence Support' groups, CATCH and the Post Adoption Support team.

#### **5. Support available from the network**

Following relevant information being shared with them, the network can be supported to explore any hopes and worries. They may also consider what they feel the biggest rewards and challenges their friend or family member may experience during their adoption journey. Following this, the assessing social worker may choose to offer some additional reflections. **The network will then, with support from the assessing social worker, set out what practical and emotional support they can commit to offering.** It may be useful to consider the example questions below when planning this part of the meeting:

- Is there a member of the network who can provide support during the transition period, particularly if there is a single applicant?

- Which small number of key members in the network will visit in the early weeks of placement, providing any form of support needed except completing care tasks for the child?
- Is there a member of the network that can be identified as a key support outside of the household, for any existing child/ren?
- Who would help in an emergency?
- Would the applicant/s accept help from anyone with practical tasks like cooking and cleaning?
- Who could offer an ear to listen, with no judgement?
- How can the network enable the applicant/s to offer a secure base to a child/ren whilst maintaining their own, and any existing child's, physical and emotional wellbeing?
- Are there any behaviours or scenarios that the applicant/s may struggle with and what can the network do to help them remain resilient and empathetic?
- Which members of the network could help with practical tasks, once the child is more secure in their primary attachments i.e. completing school runs and providing childcare?
- Who will tell prospective adopter/s when they think they need to reach out to their allocated Social Worker or the Post Adoption Support Team when needed.

The assessing social worker will take some notes during the meeting and reflect the discussions and commitments of the network members within the assessment.

### **After the meeting**

The assessing social worker may choose to send an email to all attendees thanking them for their time and signposting them to other useful resources or ask the applicant/s to send this to their network directly. This may include a reminder that family and friends training is available, when a child is placed under Early Permanence arrangements or when a match is identified, and that a further network meeting may be held if needed.

If referees attend the network meeting, and their reference visits remain outstanding at that time, the assessing Social Worker may complete the visits to these referees virtually instead of in-person, in discussion with their manager. An in-person visit may still be required if it is felt that the referee has information pertinent to any vulnerabilities noted in the assessment.

### **Ongoing opportunities for development of the network**

The network should be made aware of family and friends training and be encouraged to request a place when a match is identified.

**Further network meetings may be considered on a case-by-case basis during the matching process or post-placement.** For example, a network meeting may be required pre-placement or shortly after placement if the match is considered complex by the Social Worker and Team Manager.

A network meeting may also be convened at any time in response to challenges post placement or prior to any significant changes, such as an adopter returning to work or a child/ren commencing nursery or school.