

Practice Guidance:

Review of Early Permanence Carers and Prospective Adopters

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1. Introduction

Prospective adopters are approved as 'suitable to adopt' by Adopt North East at a particular point in time, based on the information available to the Agency that has been gathered during the preceding assessment process. Following approval, as part of the Agency's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, approved prospective adopters will be subject to regular review until the making of an Adoption Order or, where no placement occurs, the termination of their approval.

As well as review at fixed points from the date of approval, the Agency will also exercise 'continuous vigilance' of prospective adopters' suitability to adopt and will, where it deems it necessary to do so, undertake a review at any point in time.

2. When should a Review be held

1. Regular review timescales where a child has not been placed for adoption or placed in an Early Permanence Placement with approved prospective adopters.

A Review will be held by the Agency six months from the date of the Agency Decision that the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt and then every six months thereafter until termination of their approval.

2. Regular review timescales where a child has been placed in an Early Permanence Placement with approved prospective adopters.

A Reviews of prospective adopters' continuing suitability where a child is placed in an Early Permanence Placement will be an integral part of the statutory Child in Care (Looked After Child) Review Process (4 weeks, 3 months, 6 monthly thereafter) until the end of the Early Permanence Placement (an Early Permanence Placement will end when the child moves or when the placement becomes an Adoption Placement – this will be the date of the Agency Decision that the child be matched with the Early Permanence Carers – whilst there is no change of carers, there is a change of placement and the Review timescales resets).

3. Regular review timescales where a child has been placed for adoption with approved prospective adopters.

A Reviews of prospective adopters' continuing suitability where a child is placed in an adoption placement will be an integral part of the statutory Child in Care (Looked After Child) Review Process (4 weeks, 3 months, 6 monthly thereafter) until the end of the placement or the making of an Adoption Order

4. Circumstances requiring a Review outside of regular timescales whether or not a child is placed for adoption or placed in an Early Permanence Placement with approved prospective adopters.
 - i) **A Disruption of an adoptive placement or Early Permanence Placement has occurred.**
 - ii) **A Multi-Agency Strategy Discussion has been convened and taken place in relation to concerns about the prospective adopters.**

5. Circumstances that may require a Review outside of regular timescales whether or not a child is placed for adoption or placed in an Early Permanence Placement with approved prospective adopters
 - i) **A significant change in the circumstances of the prospective adopters that comes to the attention of the Agency.**

Changes in circumstances which may warrant a review include:

- A change of accommodation
- A change in the support network
- A change in the household composition
- A change of employment role or change of employer
- A change in adoption leave entitlement
- A change in financial circumstances
- A change in emotional health and well-being
- A change in physical health
- A change in motivation to adopt
- A change in the working relationship with professionals
- Safeguarding concerns that do not result in a multi-agency Strategy Discussion being convened

- New information that comes to the attention of the Agency that differs from that on which the Agency Decision was made

The change should be 'significant' – that is to say, there is reasonable cause to believe that the change would have had a material impact on the decision of the Agency to approve the prospective adopters as suitable had it been known at the time.

3. How should the Review be undertaken

3.1 Reviews when no child has yet been placed

- Reviews will be Chaired by an Adopt North East Qualified Social Work Team Manager
- Reviews should be informed by up-to-date information contained within a Prospective Adopter Review Report, including:
 - Summary of strengths and vulnerabilities identified at approval
 - Summary of Family Finding Activity since approval/last Review
 - Summary of circumstances of adopters, including any relevant new information, for example updated Medical Advice, finance information, references or checks (in accordance with the Agency's Updating Checks and References Policy)
 - Summary of Disruption Minutes (where appropriate)
 - Summary of learning and development by prospective adopters, including attendance at Waiting Adopter Group, buddying, peer support, training and self-directed learning (including CATCH).
 - Reflective Feedback and views from Prospective Adopters
 - Analysis and recommendation by Social Worker

- Any other information relevant to consideration of continued suitability to adopt

Outcome of Review

Whilst approved adopters will not necessarily be subject to 'reassessment', a review should fundamentally review whether, in light of any updated information not available to the Agency Decision Maker at the point of approval, the approved adopters are 'still suitable to adopt' and decide whether to:

- Continue Family Finding
- Continue Family Finding with changed matching criteria
- Expand Family Finding to include national search on Link Maker
- Suspend Family Finding for targeted work / support within specified timescale
- Suspend Family Finding and reassessment (updating of AAR) and return to further Review within specified timescale
- Suspend Family Finding and provide Review Report to Adoption Panel for consideration of continued suitability within specified timescale (without updating AAR)

The Team Manager will record the main points of the meeting including the prospective adopters' views and send a copy to the prospective adopters within 10 working days.

3.2 Reviews when a child has been placed

From that date that the child is placed with adopters, the review process is governed by Regulation 33 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (for Early Permanence Placements) and Regulation 36 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 for adoption placements. Both require that the Local Authority responsible for the child must review the

child's placement within four weeks from the date on which the child was placed, the second review must be carried out not more than three months after the first, and subsequent reviews must be carried out at intervals of not more than six months thereafter until the end of the placement or the child is adopted. It is noted that a review can also be carried out at the request of the Independent Reviewing Officer, the child or the Early Permanence Carers or prospective adopters.

Whilst the Review is required to be a 'child-centred meeting' (IRO Handbook 2010), this does not mean that it should be child-focused to the exclusion of a robust and meaningful review of the placement provided by the Early Permanence Carers / prospective adopters. An Independent Review Officer must consider 'whether the placement is meeting the child's needs' (IRO Handbook 2010) and, in consideration of the child's needs, welfare and development, whether any changes need to be made to meet or assist their development (Reg 36(6) AAR 2005) and 'whether the child's placement continues to be the most appropriate available' (CPPCR 2010 Schedule 7(5)). There is therefore a strong statutory basis that the Child in Care (also known as a Look After Child or 'LAC') Review must also act as a review of the Early Permanence / Adoptive Carers.

- Reviews should be informed by up-to-date information contained within a Early Permanence Carer / Prospective Adopter Review Report, including:
 - Summary of strengths and vulnerabilities identified at approval
 - Summary of Placement since approval/last Review
 - Summary of circumstances of Early Permanence Carers / prospective adopters, including any relevant new information, for example updated Medical Advice, finance information, references or checks (in accordance with the Agency's Updating Checks and References Policy)

- Summary of learning and development by Early Permanence Carers / prospective adopters, including buddying, peer support, training and self-directed learning (including CATCH).
- Reflective Feedback and views from Early Permanence Carers / Prospective Adopters
- Analysis and recommendation by Social Worker
- Any other information relevant to consideration of continued suitability to adopt

4. Where the Review recommends that the Prospective Adopters' may no longer be Suitable to Adopt

The Adopter Review Report will be presented to the next available Adoption Panel.

The prospective adopter/s may attend the Panel.

The Panel will consider the report and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about the prospective adopters' continuing suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopters may at any time decide they no longer wish to adopt. They must do so to the Agency in writing. In this case, the Agency will inform the Panel and the matter will be withdrawn from consideration.

The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision within seven days of receipt of the Minutes of the Adoption Panel recommendation whether or not the prospective adopters continue to be suitable to adopt a child.

Where the Agency makes a qualifying determination that the prospective adopter is no longer suitable to adopt, the Agency Decision Maker will write to them within 10 working days.

The prospective adopters have 40 working days from their receipt of the notification of the agency decision to make any written representations or apply for a review by an Independent Review Panel. The applicants should decide which representation procedure to choose. They cannot choose both.

If the prospective adopter does not make any written representations, the Agency will proceed with its decision. The Agency Decision Maker will write to the prospective adopters at the end of 40 days. The prospective adopters' name will be removed from the agency's list of approved adopters.

If the prospective adopter makes written representations, the Agency is not obliged to refer the case to the Adoption Panel but will normally do so. If the applicant wishes their case to be referred to the Independent Review Panel.