



Practice Guidance: Social Worker Visits by Adopt North East during Recruitment, Assessment and Placement

Document Title	Practice Guidance on Social Worker Visits by Adopt North East during Recruitment, Assessment and Placement
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1. What constitutes a 'Statutory Visit'

The Care Planning, Placement and Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the minimum visiting requirements for specific placement types. A Statutory Visit is a visit by a Qualified Social Worker to see child or young person in their placement and, if age-appropriate, alone, without their carer. It is good practice that the bedroom is also seen. as this is the child or young person's personal space. Accordingly:

1. It must be undertaken by a **Qualified Social Worker** (though not necessarily the allocated Social Worker)
2. It must be **at the placement** (meeting the child at school, contact, other meeting, in the community does not constitute as a Statutory Visit)
3. Age-appropriate attempts must be made to see the child **alone**, away from the carer – this is a primary safeguard against carer abuse.
4. When appropriate, the child's **bedroom** should be seen as this is the child or young person's personal space and can be an indicator of the quality of care received

Visiting requirements differ according to the type of placement [regulation 28]. However, the frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and the **Local Authority is responsible for arrangements relating to statutory visits**. The Local Authority can delegate some (but not all) visits to Adopt North East.

Timescales of Statutory Visits

Early Permanence Placements and Placement with Adopters

The child should be visited within **1 week** of the start of the child's first or any subsequent placement [regulation 28(2)(a)]. Thereafter, the child must be visited at intervals of not more than **6 weeks** for the duration of the placement [regulation 28(2)].

Early Permanence Placements where Carers are Temporary Connected Person Foster Care (Regulation 24 Approval)

Where a child is placed under Regulation 24 in a Connected Person Foster Care Placement (approved by ADM) the child must be visited at least **weekly** until the time of the first LAC Review. Subsequently, visits must take place at intervals of not more than **4 weeks**. This frequency reflects the potentially greater vulnerability of a child who has been placed with a carer before the assessment of that person's suitability to care for the child has been completed. These visits will allow the social worker to assess how the relationship between the child and carer is developing and identify at an early stage where there may be concerns about a child's welfare.

Non-Statutory Visits by Adopt North East Social Workers

During Stage 1

The prospective adopter/s will be allocated a Recruitment Front Door Social Worker if their Registration of Interest is accepted. They will commence Stage 1. The FD Social Worker will contact the prospective adopter/s to introduce themselves **within 3 working days of allocation**. This contact will include a discussion around expectations of the prospective adopter/s during stage 1. The call should also arrange a visit to the prospective adopter/s home.

Visit Frequency

An **in-person initial visit** by the allocated RAS worker should take place **no later than 4 weeks** from the prospective adopter/s commencing Stage 1. The visit should promote a positive working relationship between the prospective adopters and the Agency and discuss any checks and references that have been received or are outstanding. It is expected that the worker complete **monthly visits thereafter (in person or virtual)** until all Stage 1 checks are completed, or the case is reallocated (commencing assessment in Stage 1), the applicant withdraws, or the Agency informs them that they cannot progress.

Following the initial visit, which will be in person, further visits can be undertaken virtually in agreement with the worker's line manager. A further in-person visit may be required regardless to discuss contentious checks and references received.

Visits should only include the prospective adopter/s at this stage and not any existing children or referees.

Visit Purpose:

- To build a relationship between the Agency and the prospective adopter/s and identify any areas that may require further exploration if a Stage 2 assessment progresses.
- To continue developing the prospective adopter/s understanding of the adoption process and to signpost the prospective adopter/s to

resources, such as CATCH, where they can learn more about the needs of adopted children.

- To discuss any queries around Stage 1 checks.
- To discuss mandatory preparatory training and any learning they have gained from this.
- To complete some brief direct work with the applicant in some exceptional circumstances with management agreement, for example if they are struggling to provide referees the worker may be directed to complete an ecomap to identify who is in the support network who could provide a reference; or if the applicant has concerns around an ex-partner being contacted, the worker may be directed to complete a risk assessment.

During Stage 2

The prospective adopter/s will be progressed on to Stage 2 assessment by a Team Manager following review of their Stage 1 checks or if they are a second time adopter or foster carer who wishes to adopt a child in their care).

They will be allocated to a RAS Social Worker to complete the Assessment Adopters Report (AAR). The RAS Social Worker will contact the prospective adopter/s to introduce themselves **within 3 working days of allocation**.

Visit Frequency and Purpose

- 1) During the assessment process there should be a **minimum of 6 visits** to inform the assessment. There is a **presumption that these visits are all in-person** at the prospective adopter/s home. If a worker feels a visit needs to be virtual, this should be discussed with their manager and agreed beforehand. If the assessment relates to a couple, **at least 1 session should be completed with each applicant individually**.
- 2) **Referee visits will be in person**, unless agreed otherwise by a Team Manager. Virtual MS-Teams visits may be agreed by a Team Manager if the referee lives a significant distance from the North East or if they have already attended a Network Meeting as part of the assessment process.

- 3) Upon completion of the assessment and after the prospective adopter/s has read this, the RAS Social Worker will complete a **visit** to the prospective adopter/s to offer **support around preparing for panel**.

Post Approval Pre-Match

Once the prospective adopter/s have been to Adoption Panel and a decision has been made by the Agency Decision Maker, they are 'approved prospective adopters' for Adopt North East.

It is possible that the prospective adopter/s may have already been considered by the Family Finding Team for potential matches, however, there is no guarantee around how long they may wait for a match. It is vital that prospective adopters use any time they have whilst waiting for a match to continue developing their knowledge and skills (including attendance at the Waiting Adopter Group / Early Permanence Support Group / CATCH), so they are in the strongest position possible when considered for a match.

Visit Frequency and Purpose

Whilst waiting for a match it is expected that the RAS worker complete **monthly in-person visits** at the prospective adopter/s **home**.

It is acceptable to discuss profiles of children via telephone / MS TEAMS, in addition to the monthly visits. There is an expectation that prospective adopter/s will be supported to be prepared for a Family Finding visit, including discussion about the specific link. This work may be virtual or in-person. However, it is expected that **the worker does attend the family finding visit in person**.

If a worker feels any visit needs to be undertaken virtually, rather than in person, they must discuss their rationale with a Team Manager who will need to agree this beforehand.

The purpose of these visits will be:

- To continue building a relationship between the RAS worker and the prospective adopter/s and existing child/ren and identify any areas that could be strengthened, during the family finding process.

- To continue developing the prospective adopter/s understanding of the adoption process and to signpost the prospective adopter/s to resources where they can learn more about the needs of adopted children.
- To discuss any patterns arising from feedback from the family finding team and local authority social workers, as the AAR is considered for children.
- To discuss family finding / support opportunities, including the waiting adopters' group, profiling events, activity days and information events around therapeutic support or the needs of adopted children offered by ANE, and reflect on any learning they have gained from this.
- To continually seek the views of the prospective adopter/s and existing child/ren around how they are managing this often difficult and uncertain part of the process and offer support.

Post Approval - Match

Following a successful family finding visit and a match being booked into panel, contact between the RAS Social Worker and the prospective adopter/s should increase. **The RAS worker will support the prospective adopter/s in person at the meeting with the Foster Carer/s and also at the Life Appreciation Event.** They will also support them virtually during the medical consultation. They will also **chair an Initial Placement Planning Meeting**. This can be virtual or in-person. In addition, they will need to seek updates on how other elements of the matching process have gone outside of structured meetings, such as chemistry meetings or virtual contact with the foster family, in addition to liaising with other professionals involved.

There is often a gap of several weeks between a successful family finding visit and panel. It is expected that during this time the worker discusses the matching paperwork, matching panel, and the draft transition plan with the couple prior to panel and the **Placement Planning Meeting (PPM)**.

If there is an existing child, the prospective adopter/s will be supported to speak to them about the possibility that they may soon be matched with a

younger sibling. The worker should consider the most appropriate time to **complete some direct work with the existing child** and seek their views.

The worker must attend panel with the couple. If this panel is in person, then the worker will also attend in person. If the meeting is virtual, the worker will visit the prospective adopter/s home or ask them to come to the office, so the prospective adopter/s has support in person during and following the panel.

Following this will the RAS Social Worker attend the **Placement Planning Meeting in-person**, Chair the **Stage 1 Review**, attend the **Mid-way Review**, and Chair/attend the final **Review** during the transition. **It is expected that the social worker seeks to visit the prospective adopter/s, and any existing child at their home in-person, at least once during the transition process.** They are also expected to maintain regular contact by phone in between meetings and visits, so they have an updated view on how the prospective adopter/s and any existing child are feeling about the transition and the adopted child. Should the Social Worker have any concerns during this vital part of the process, they should seek advice and guidance from their line manager or another ANE manager if their line manager is not required.

Should a one-off **birth family meeting** take place, prior to, during or after transitions (but before the adoption order is granted) the RAS worker will support the prospective adopter/s. **If this meeting is in person, then the worker will also attend in person.** If the meeting is virtual, the worker will visit the prospective adopter/s home or ask them to come to the office, so the prospective adopter/s has support in person during and following the call.

The above may not apply if the prospective adopter/s are matched with a child who requires an early permanence placement. In this scenario, the RAS worker will attend the family finding visit in person and complete their sections of the ADM paperwork in discussions with the prospective adopter/s. If there is any form of transition, the RAS worker will apply the guidance above as far as practicable, in discussion with their line manager.

If the child is placed without any transition, **the RAS worker and Local Authority Social Worker are expected to visit within the first week of**

placement. The RAS worker will then share weekly visits with the child's social worker until the 20-day Child in Care review, **following which they will visit a minimum of 6 weekly** until the adoption order is granted, should this order be made.

Post-Placement

When a child has a placement order, their match goes to panel and there is an ADM decision, the child is 'placed' from the 'placement day' in their transition plan, when the transition plan moves from stage 2 to stage 3.

When a child is placed under **early permanence arrangements** they are 'placed' in a foster placement and the visit frequency below applies. The child is then 'placed' again if a placement order is made, the match goes to panel and the ADM decides the match, at which point the child's placement changes to an adoptive placement. This requires another 20-day review (or first adoption review) but **does not require a restart of the visiting frequency**, and will remain at 6 weekly, unless agreed otherwise due to level of need.

Frequency and format:

Once a child is placed, **weekly visits** will be shared between the Local Authority and ANE Social Workers until the 20-day review. **It is recommended that these workers alternate their visits to the placement where possible**, so the worker who knows the child best and the worker who knows the prospective adopter/s best visit the placement fortnightly during the first 20 working days of the placement and can provide proactive support and contribute meaningfully to the review. It is expected that any significant information gathered during visits or other communication with the family is shared by/with the respective social workers.

During the 20-day review visiting frequency should be discussed. The required visiting frequency reduces to six weekly. The Local Authority Social Worker and the ANE Social Worker should visit in-person alternately **resulting in 2 visits every six weeks until an adoption order is granted.** Visiting frequency should always be dependent on the needs of the family.

If a worker feels any visit needs to be undertaken virtually, rather than in person, they must discuss their rationale with a manager and agree this beforehand.

During placement **one or more visits must be 'unplanned'** – this is where no prior warning is given to the family that a Social Work visit will be undertaken. Whilst this can be inconvenient and challenging for some families, it is a necessary component of safeguarding a placement because it enables scrutiny of home conditions and care without time afforded in advance for a carer to prepare for a visit.

A final visit will be arranged to the family following the making of an adoption order, which could include attendance at a celebration hearing. All recording, including any information relevant to postbox, will be completed within 10 working days of the adoption order being granted and the case will be prepared for closure, or handover to the Post Adoption Support team.

The purpose of these visits will be:




- To provide proactive support to the family and promote a successful placement and, if needed, gather information for an assessment of adoption support needs and make an adoption support fund application for therapeutic provision.
- To maintain a relationship between the RAS worker and the prospective adopter/s and existing child/ren and develop a relationship with the child/ren placed, so they are in a good position to assess and provide necessary support.
- To continue developing the prospective adopter/s understanding of the needs of children with a plan of adoption and to signpost them to resources, support groups and social events that may benefit themselves and the child/ren.
- To gather information pertinent to care team meetings (if held), child in care reviews and the Annex A, which will be submitted as part of the adoption application, in partnership with the Local Authority Social Worker and any other professionals involved.
- To provide advice and guidance around proposed contact arrangements with birth family members and ensure letterbox





contact is given to the relevant persons, until the making of an adoption order.




2. How to Record a Visit

Narrative recording within the Case Note should evidence when the visit constituted a statutory visit. This means that the recording should always include recording of the following elements, even if negative (eg. *I did not see Melanie alone on this occasion as Melanie was playing with her sister in the lounge throughout the visit*)

This should include:

	<p>WHO</p>	<p>WHO UNDERTOOK THE VISIT?</p>	<p>Recording that you undertook the visit evidences that it was undertaken by a Qualified Social Worker</p>
	<p>WHERE</p>	<p>WHERE WAS THE VISIT?</p>	<p>The location of the visit is important – specify whether it was the placement / home or in the community</p>
	<p>WHEN</p>	<p>WHAT DATE AND WHAT TIME WAS THE VISIT?</p>	<p>Recording both date and time are important – it gives precision to ‘exactly’ when you actually did see a</p>

			child, young person, parent or carer
	SEEN	WHO WAS SEEN?	This evidences who was in fact 'seen' – be specific. Eg. If two out of three siblings are seen, say so.
	ALONE	WAS THE CHILD WAS SEEN ALONE?	If age appropriate, every effort should be made to see the child alone, away from the carer / parent
	BEDROOM	WAS THE CHILD'S BEDROOM SEEN?	A child's bedroom should be seen as this is the child's personal space and can be an indicator of the quality of care received
	HEARD	WHAT WAS SAID?	It is important to accurately record and attribute comments that, in the professional opinion of the Social Worker, are relevant.

	OBSERVED	HOW DID THEY PRESENT?	It is important to comment upon observations of non-verbal communication
	ANYTHING ELSE SEEN	ANY OTHER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CARE ENVIRONMENT THAT SHOULD BE RECORDED?	Professional judgment should be used to record other issues that may be of relevance to safeguarding or care planning
	ANYTHING ELSE SAID	RECORD OF ANY RELEVANT COMMENTS BY THE CHILD PARENT / CARER / OTHER PROFESSIONAL / NETWORK	Professional judgment should be used to record other issues that may be of relevance to safeguarding or care planning
	WHAT NEXT	WHAT SPECIFIC ACTIONS NEED TO HAPPEN AS A RESULT OF THE VISIT?	It is important to ensure that issues arising from the visit are dealt with and inform safeguarding and care planning for the child

Example of narrative recording:

Stat. Visit to Michelle Smith by A. Worker. Visit to the adoption placement where Michelle is placed (arrived 3.17pm. Left 4.32pm). Michelle was present as was Karen (Prospective Adopter). When I arrived, Michelle had just come in from school and was happy to talk to me alone in the kitchen whilst Karen watched telly in the lounge. Michelle spent time talking about what she had done at school. When asked, she said she was "happy" at Karen's although she "missed her Foster Carer Jenny". Michelle appeared comfortable at Karen's and relaxed in conversation. She was less anxious than when I last visited. Michelle agreed that we could go and see her bedroom which was tidy, well presented and had a number of personal items, including some cuddly toys. I asked Michelle if there was 'anything that she was worried about?' Michelle informed me that she had "still not got her teddy from Jenny's" and I said I would check with Jenny if it was at her home and if so, ask Jenny to send it to Karen. ACTION: Speak to Jenny about Michelle's teddy prior to next Contact. Karen confirmed that Michelle "had settled well" and that Michelle was "sleeping and eating well". Karen said she had "no concerns".