



**PEOPLE AND ECONOMY
DIRECTORATE**

ADOPTION POLICY

POLICY INFORMATION SHEET

Name of Document	Adoption Policy
Reference Number	CIC/AS/11
Service area	Children in Care Division, Children & Family Services Department
Target Audience	All Staff in Halton Borough Council Children and Family Services Department
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Date policy was approved	
Date policy is effective from	1 st July 2013
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Status: Mandatory (all named staff must adhere to guidance) Optional (procedures and practice can vary between teams)	Mandatory
Location of Document	tri.x Halton Children's Services Procedures Manual – Local Resources
Related document(s)	The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review The Adoption & Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011) National Minimum Standards for Adoption (April 2011)
Superseded document(s)	April 2012
Responsible officer(s)	Divisional Manager, Children in Care
Any other relevant information	

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The [Adoption and Children Act 2002](#) and [first revisions of February 2011 and July 2013](#) represents a comprehensive review of adoption services translated into legislation and regulations. It was introduced in response to changes in the age profile and level of need of children waiting to be adopted; cultural changes in attitudes to adoption and in the range of prospective adopters; and in recognition of the continuing support needs of both adopted children and prospective adopters. Revision of the [National Minimum Standards for Adoption](#) and [Adoption Guidance](#) was implemented from the 1st April 2011.
- 1.2 The key characteristics of adoption services it introduced, and which are implemented in Halton, are:
- A focus on the needs of the child whose interests are paramount in all decisions relating to adoption. This means timely permanence planning for the child and decisions taking account of all relevant information which includes considering the wishes and feelings of the child if of sufficient age and understanding. The Directorate is committed to adoption as a positive option for children unable to be cared for by their birth families on a permanent basis. Consideration should therefore be given to adoption as a possibility for all children and young people in this position.
 - Highly skilled professionals leading a quality service delivered to national minimum standards.
 - A focus on finding permanent families for children waiting for adoption. A commitment to adoption as an option for all children who cannot be cared for by their birth families on a permanent basis calls requires as wide a range of potential adopters as possible. Other than those under 21 years, excluded from assessment by Adoption Regulations, or those excluded following Enhanced Criminal Records Disclosures, all applicants will be considered only in terms of their ability to parent a child in a safe and stable way that meets the child's developmental needs.
 - An efficient and child focussed legal process
 - Efficient, fair and open assessment processes
 - Access to adoption support services

2. HALTON'S VISION FOR ADOPTION SERVICES

- 2.1 Halton Borough Council is committed to delivering a range of high quality adoption services, providing assistance and support to meet the needs of children, birth families, prospective adopters, adoptive families and adopted adults. In all adoption services the welfare of the child will be the primary consideration throughout the lifetime of the child.
- 2.2 Halton Borough Council believes that, where possible, it is best for children to be brought up by their own birth family. However where this is not possible, adoption should be seen as a positive option for children providing an alternative means of growing up in a loving family and providing a sense of permanence and belonging.
- 2.3 A child's life chances will be enhanced by adoption through the provision of:
- Opportunities to form secure attachments.
 - A family of their own to help them develop a positive sense of their own identity.
 - Emotional and physical security and stability.
 - Significant caring relationships that they can expect to last for life.

This will be achieved by promoting:

- Child focussed services that take account of family history and culture.
- Support Services for the adoptive family in order to promote stability
- Adoption planning that meets the short and long term needs of the child and is progressed with the minimum of delay.
- Efficient recruitment and assessment processes

3. CONTEXT

- 3.1 This is an inclusive policy for all children and young people regardless of age, racial origin, disability, religion, culture and sexual orientation. The policy operates within the legal context of the following:
- [Children Act 1989](#)
 - [Children Act 2004](#)
 - [Adoption and Children Act 2006](#)
 - [United Nations – Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989](#)
 - [Local Authority Adoption Service \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)
 - [The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005](#)
 - [The Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005](#)
 - [The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services \(Pre-Commencement Regulations 2005](#)
 - [Adoption Support Services \(Local Authorities\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)
 - [The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005](#)
 - [The Disclosure Of Adoption Information \(Post-Commencement Adoptions\) Regulations 2005](#)
 - [The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005](#)
 - [The Suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005](#)
 - [Adoption National Minimum Standards 2003 – revised 2011](#)
 - [Health Act 1999](#)
 - [Adoption and Children Act 2002, first revision February 2011](#)
 - [The Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determination \(Amendment\) Regulations 2011](#)
 - [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Service Regulations 2013](#)

- [The Adaption Agencies \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#)
- [Statutory Adoption Guidance – Chapter 3 – July 2013](#)

4. A COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE

- 4.1 Halton provides an adoption service meeting the needs of all parties at all stages of the adoption process. In addition to services focused on the best interests of the child, we provide appropriate advice, information and support services to adoptive families and to birth families. In particular adoption support services are available to adoptive families aimed at encouraging adopters to adopt older children, or children with special needs. In some cases we may provide such services via an independent agency, contracted for this purpose or through collaboration with other Local Authorities in consortium-type arrangements.
- 4.2 We have a commitment to an ongoing recruitment campaign to seek adopters, targeted via the media and have one point of contact for applicants providing a co-ordinated response to enquiries. We are committed to an inclusive recruitment strategy within which priority will be given to prospective adopters for older children, children with special needs and those who are seeking or willing to adopt sibling groups.

5. AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

- 5.1 A child-centred adoption service requires attention both to timescales and to quality. These are important throughout the process from the perspective of children who are in care and, if we are to secure a pool of appropriate adopters, from that of people enquiring about adoption.

Adoption Plan

- 5.2 The decision about a Permanence Plan, which may be a plan for adoption, will be considered by the time of the child in care's second statutory review. The Safeguarding Unit, who have the responsibility for chairing children's reviews, will pass information on permanence plans for adoption to the Adoption Service which will then monitor the permanence plan in order to progress it within the appropriate timescales. Should the plan for adoption be twin tracked at this stage, the Adoption Service will be notified of the review meeting that identified the plan of adoption.

Adopters

- 5.3 If local recruitment processes do not result in an early match for a child we will extend the search for adopters for specific children beyond Halton via local consortia, national agencies, advertising and the Adoption Register as necessary. When a child is to be the subject of an advertisement in the media, this will be with the child's agreement, subject to age and understanding, and with their full involvement in the preparation of such an advertising campaign.
- 5.4 We will aim to visit all enquirers about adoption within one month of their first contact. All prospective adopters attend an adoption specific training programme. We aim to offer a high quality and imaginative training and assessment process including input from people with personal experience of adoption and others with expertise as appropriate. Assessments of prospective adopters are based on the approved BAAF model.

- 5.5 Except for those people excluded by Adoption Regulations, we recognise the potential of all applicants and will not automatically exclude any person from adoption assessment on any grounds. We will however pay particular attention to the applicant's health (including whether they smoke and their use of alcohol or habit forming drugs) and the presence of dangerous pets in the home.

Practice Guidance

Halton Borough Council will not place a child under 5 years of age within a household where an applicant smokes

- 5.6 Even where concerns exist around one or more of these issues, such concerns may be outweighed by other factors, for example the applicant's ability to offer a particular skill or resource.
- 5.7 Where the prospective adopters and the Directorate have decided to proceed with a Registration of Interest, the Adoption Panel will make a recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will make a decision within four months of this agreement.
- 5.8 Existing foster carers will be offered information and preparation either individually or if available via attendance at specific preparation training for foster carers and second time adopters.
- 5.9 In relation to relinquished babies, an assessment will be completed by the relevant child care team to explore all possible options available to the expectant mother. If the person concludes they wish to relinquish the baby at birth for adoption, the child care team social worker will undertake all necessary processes with the birth parent and child when born. In these instances the expectation is that a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by Panel within three months of the Agency agreeing that the child should be placed for adoption.
- 5.10 Adopters are encouraged to attend the Adoption Panel. All prospective adopters will be informed of their right to make representation and complaints.

Staff

- 5.11 The staff working with the Adoption Service will be appropriately trained, supported and supervised. Staff completing reports for the Adoption Panel will have the necessary qualifications and experience:
- Post qualifying experience attaining PQI Child Care or Consolidation Award
 - Social worker responsible for recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of adoptive families **or**
 - Social worker responsible for a child placed for adoption who has been involved in all stages of the adoption process

Adoption Panel

- 5.12 Halton Borough Council will ensure that: -
- There is a sufficient number of Adoption Panel Meetings to ensure that the timescales set down within the Adoption and Children Act 2002 are met in full.
 - Adoption Panel central list includes a range of members from different professional and personal backgrounds: members who have had personal experience of adoption and who have worked in a professional capacity in adoption.

- The Chair of the Panel provides quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months, monitoring quality of reports presented to the Panel and timescales.
- Minutes of Panel meetings reflect any issues raised by Panel and the information provided by those presenting applications.
- The Agency Decision is made following consideration of the recommendations of the Panel and the final Panel minutes agreed by the chair of the Panel.

6. A CHILD FOCUSED SERVICE

- 6.1 The best interests of each individual child will be central to care planning and the wishes and feelings of children, subject to age and understanding, will always be taken into consideration. The adoption process and implications of adoption will be discussed with children in a child-centred and age-appropriate manner.
- 6.2 We acknowledge the importance of the child's history and heritage and will ensure that all information relating to the child is available both to the child and their adopters. A Life Appreciation Day will be held for every child to be placed with prospective adopters where felt to be appropriate. Every child will have lifework and later life letters completed, adopters will be provided with comprehensive information about the child and adoption files will be properly maintained in anticipation of the child wishing to access their file and other protected information at a later stage.
- 6.3 In training and supporting adopters we will encourage them to be open and at ease about the child's origins as the child grows up. An open attitude to adoption will be a pre-requisite for any adopter who wishes to be approved. Adopters will be encouraged to update lifework with a child as their understanding develops.

Contact

- 6.4 The question of contact, either direct or indirect, with previous carers, birth families and others, will be considered in all cases. Contact arrangements will be in the best interests of the child and, particularly in the case of direct contact, the child's wishes and feelings will be a significant factor in determining best interests.
- 6.5 Subject to assessment, assistance will be provided in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, sibling, guardian or related person of the adoptive child. This may take the form of financial support, supervision of arrangements or operation of a "letter-box" scheme to facilitate indirect contact and exchange of information between adopters and birth parents as long as this remains in the best interests of the child.

7. BIRTH PARENTS AND BIRTH FAMILIES

- 7.1 We will work with birth parents and significant birth family members to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for the child. We will make every effort to ensure that birth parents and significant birth family members have a full understanding of the adoption process, the legal implications and their rights. Birth parents will have access to a support worker independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as the plan for the child and we have a contract with an Adoption Support Agency to facilitate this.
- 7.2 We believe it is important that birth parents have the opportunity to give their account of events, and to see and comment on what is written about them in reports

for the Adoption Panel. The Child's Permanence Report will not be accepted at Panel unless it is confirmed that the birth parents have seen and signed it or that the birth parents have declined to be involved in the process. Birth parents will be given the opportunity to provide additional information and to give their views on a separate document that will be submitted to Panel with the Permanence Report

7.3 Where it is in the child's best interests for there to be ongoing contact with birth parents and families, birth families will be involved in discussions about how to achieve this and helped to fulfil agreed arrangements through practical or financial support.

7.4 Birth parents and birth families will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints

8. ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

8.1 The assessment of the adopters will cover all relevant areas and how these may impact on a child, especially the personality and attitude of applicants, the stability of a relationship where a couple are applying and the lifestyle of the applicants.

8.2 The assessment will focus on the potential of the applicants, both in terms of parenting in general and in terms of their ability to understand and manage any additional needs of children placed for adoption.

8.3 Applicants who work within the Children and Enterprise Directorate will be referred to other local adoption agencies. Applicants with other links to the Directorate, or who work for another part of Halton Borough Council, will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with referral to another agency being an option where the link is considered too close to ensure adequate independence in terms of the approval process.

9. INTERMEDIARY SERVICES

9.1 When appropriate, we will assist adopted persons, birth families and other significant people to obtain information about themselves or other people who were involved in the adoption process. We have an arrangement with an Adoption Support Agency for provision of this service.

9.2 When appropriate, and if requested, we will also share non-identifying background information with the birth family (with the full knowledge and agreement of the adoptive parents) and with the adoptive family.

9.3 We will give priority to applications for disclosure of information in relation to adoptions which took place prior to 12 November 1975 in recognition that birth relatives who relinquished a child for adoption before that time may now be elderly and would benefit from early access to services.

9.4 A counselling service will be provided, if requested, to any person who makes an application to the agency or is the subject of an application and is considering whether to agree to the disclosure of identifying information.

9.5 We will maintain adoption files and records in the prescribed manner to facilitate adopted persons and birth families access to information.

10. POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

- 10.1 Within Halton, a range of post-adoption services are available, subject to assessment, to all parties involved in adoption, whether through directly provided services, or through those provided on behalf of the Council by independent agencies. These include financial support, individual and group support, training, counselling, information and advice.
- 10.2 We have a dedicated social work post to provide and develop adoption support services and we will continue to develop support services to meet the needs of adoptive families as they arise.

11. RESEARCH AND MONITORING

- 11.1 As a Directorate, we will be willing to co-operate with appropriately authorised research programmes, or to collaborate with other adoption agencies to enhance our understanding of adoption issues.
- 11.2 Rigorous monitoring of standards of social work and adoption practice will be undertaken to ensure that positive outcomes are achieved for the children for whom we are responsible.