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Leicestershire Procedure for Adoption Recruitment Business

Rules and Standards for the Recruitment of Adopters

Applies to-

All children

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POLICY ON THE BUSINESS RULES RELATING TO RECRUITMENT CRITERIA FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

1. Purpose of the policy

- 1.1 Leicestershire County Council is responsible for providing an Adoption Agency for the children and families of Leicestershire and Rutland. There is a Service Level Agreement between Leicestershire and Rutland County Councils and Leicestershire, therefore, provides many aspects of the adoption service to Rutland County Council. One of the key aspects of the adoption service is the recruitment of prospective adopters.
- 1.2 An Adoption [Statement of Purpose](#) can be found on the Leicestershire County Council website. The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focussed and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.
- 1.3 The primary aims of the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency are to ensure that:
- Children, who are referred for an adoptive placement, are placed as a matter of priority, within a loving and supportive family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
 - Adoption is a life changing decision that affects children, their birth and adoptive families. It must be made, therefore, with the children's best interests, wishes and their needs at its heart and on the basis of sound evidence and high quality assessments.
 - Children should be helped to understand what adoption means and supported throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- 1.4 There are many additional aims of the service which encompass issues such as ensuring that children's needs are thoroughly assessed in reaching recommendations about adoption and that Panels are run efficiently and effectively. The following aims relate to recruitment of prospective adopters more specifically:-
- To regularly publicise adoption services to enable all members of the community to consider adoption as a positive option and to recruit carers from a wide variety of backgrounds to meet children's specific racial and cultural needs as well as any issues arising from disability or illness.
 - To recruit adopters who will respect the diverse cultures and lifestyles within society and who will bring up children knowing and understanding their origins.
 - To recruit adopters who will respect a young person's choice in terms of sexuality and religion.
 - To recruit, train and retain highly skilled and appropriately qualified staff

- Who have experience in the making and supporting of family placements, and in understanding the effects that the adoption process can have on all parties.
- To ensure all the workers in the service are committed to ensuring children and families receive the support and advice required to maintain stable family life.

1.5 This policy aims to ensure that the Leicestershire County Council complies with the sufficiency duty, which requires that the Adoption Agency recruits adopters who are able to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care, particularly in this instance, those who have a recommendation that adoption is in their best interests. An integral part of meeting this duty is the requirement for prospective adopters to be offered clear recruitment messages.

2. Legal Framework

This includes the following:

- DFE Statutory Adoption Guidance (revised 2013)
- The Children and Families Act (2014)
- DFE Adoption: National Minimum Standard (2014)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (2015)

3. Business Rules for Recruitment and Assessment of Adopters

3.1 Within Leicestershire County Council we have established business rules for the Fostering, Adoption and Placements Team to ensure all workers provide the same response to all potential applicants who are being recruited by the service. These should be reviewed by senior management on an annual basis or as required i.e. when informed by new policy or practice issues.

3.2 There are no hard and fast rules about who can adopt. You can be:

- Single, married, divorced or living together
- In a same sex relationship
- From any ethnic or religious background
- A homeowner or living in rented accommodation
- Employed or on benefits
- Already a parent
- Living with disabilities

- 3.3 An individual or couple cannot apply for an assessment of their suitability to adopt unless they meet, or would meet, the eligibility criteria to apply for an Adoption Order. These criteria are that:
- The prospective adopter/s is at least 21 years old.
 - At least one of the couple or the single prospective adopter is domiciled in a part of the British Islands or both of the couple or the single prospective adopter have been habitually resident in a part of the British Islands for a period of not less than one year ending with the date of the application for an adoption order, and
 - Neither prospective adopter/s nor an adult member of their household:
 - Have a conviction for offences against children
 - Have convictions for serious violent offences
 - Have convictions for drug offences as an adult
 - Are currently receiving support from a local authority in relation to the parenting of their own children.

3.4 The following specific criteria must be satisfied to enable Leicestershire County Council to consider an adoption application:

3.4.1 Residence and Location

Applicants must be resident in the UK and expect to remain the UK for the foreseeable future. Careful consideration would be given to applicants whose plan it was to move abroad in the near future.

Applications will be considered from within Leicestershire and Rutland Counties. We may also consider applications from neighbouring authorities within a 20 mile radius of the counties borders. The needs of the children waiting to be matched are likely to inform such decisions.

In exceptional cases, applications may be considered from further afield, but only where applicants are looking to adopt children for whom fewer families come forward e.g. older children aged 5 years and above, black and minority ethnic children, large sibling groups and children with disabilities.

3.4.2 Marital Status

Applicants may be single, divorced, married or in civil partnerships, or living together.

3.4.3 Length of Relationship

Couples who adopt should be able to demonstrate their relationship is stable and permanent. The length of their exclusive relationship with each other is one indicator of this but the quality and strength of the relationship will also be significant.

Although there is no hard and fast rule about the length of a couple's relationship, it is unlikely that an application would be accepted within the first two years of the couple permanently living together.

If applicants' have been in a relationship for more than one year but less than two, the Assessment Team Manager can be consulted as to whether an exception could be made. Such a decision is likely to be based upon other strengths noted within the assessment thus far, and if a couple will have been together for two years by the time their case is presented to Approval Panel.

3.4.4 Applicants with Children

We recognise that for some of our adopted children, they may be impacted upon by the competing demands of other children in the home and furthermore, a child's care plans may also recommend that they be placed in a home where they will be an only child to ensure that all of their particular needs are met. We also recognise, however, that adopted children and birth children alike can benefit in many different ways from growing up together.

Applicants having their own birth children should not be prevented from applying to adopt with Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency. If the youngest birth child however, is under two years of age, they are unlikely to be accepted into the adoption process at that time. There should normally be a two year age difference between the age of the youngest child in the existing family and the age of the child to be placed and this should be carefully explored with applicants when they enquire into the service.

3.4.5 Second or Subsequent Applications

Where applicants have previously adopted, the Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency recommends that applicants do not seek to apply to adopt again within a year of the making of an Adoption Order. Such timescales ensure that the previously adopted child has been given time to settle into their new family.

Where applicants have previously adopted, careful consideration should be given to the presenting needs of the adopted child/ren already in placement before accepting the applicants into the adoption process.

An exception to this rule may present if a subsequent child is born after the adoption of an older sibling. In such circumstances, the previous adopters are likely to be approached, even if a year has not passed since the making of an Adoption Order,

as the Local Authority are committed to ensuring – where possible – that siblings grow up together. Careful decision making would be required in such circumstances.

3.4.6 Diversity

Applications are welcomed from a wide cross-section of society. People with disabilities will receive the same consideration as other applicants in terms of their capacity to parent an adopted child. Applicants from black, Asian and inter-racial families are actively encouraged. Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency will consider applications from people of all religious faiths, or those applicants who have none.

In all cases the deciding factors in accepting an application will be:-

- The qualities and skills which people bring to the task of adopting a child from care.
- The potential for promoting the welfare of the child throughout childhood and beyond.

3.4.7 Infertility

Many years of practice wisdom suggests that people need time to address their loss before they can fully embrace the positive benefits of adoption.

Applicants are expected, therefore, to have completed any ongoing investigations, treatment or counselling for infertility before proceeding with the adoption application. If applicants decide to resume treatment once their application is underway, the application will be placed on hold and resumed after agreement has been reached between the applicants, assessing social worker and Assessment Team manager.

There is no hard and fast rule as to the length of time which needs to have lapsed before applicants can enquire with the Agency following the completion of fertility treatment, however, the likelihood of being invited into the adoption process within 6 months of the end of treatment is less. All applications, however, would be considered on an individual basis.

3.4.8 Pregnancy

If applicants become pregnant during the assessment process it is likely that the Agency will wish to withdraw their application at that stage. Applicants may choose to apply in the future and, if so, the Agency will give due consideration to taking up a new application.

3.4.9 Accommodation

The assessment of the accommodation will take into account the likely safety of a child placed and whether there is sufficient space for all the family, recognizing that many adoptive children need a room of their own. Applicants are not likely to be accepted into the adoption process if they do not have a spare bedroom.

Consideration should also be given to applicants who have one spare bedroom but who express an interest in adopting a sibling group of two. In such a circumstance, if the applicant/s is expressing an interest for a sibling group of two of the same gender, potential adopters should be advised that this would be considered as part of the assessment and that, of they were to be successful, careful matching would be required to ensure it was appropriate to place such a sibling group into one bedroom to share.

3.4.10 Health

The Agency will need to be satisfied that each applicant's state of physical and mental health is such that they will be able to care for an adopted child throughout childhood and beyond.

If any health issues are disclosed or arise during the assessment process the Agency would need to consider whether the applicant/s health needs could impact upon their ability to care for child/ren (both immediately and in the future) and whether such needs could be overcome.

Where necessary, the Assessment Team would seek advice from the Medical Advisor to Panel as to the applicant's health needs and the potential impact of these upon their ability to care for a child.

3.4.11 Smoking

Smoking affects the health and wellbeing of both applicants and children. Applicants who smoke should be advised that this will restrict the age and type of child who may be placed with them.

Research evidence has concluded that children (particularly those under 5 years old) are more likely to suffer health problems if they live in a household where people smoke. It is therefore, unlikely that households where one or both applicants smoke would be considered for applications for children under 5 years old.

Smoking may also prevent the placement of children of any age with certain health histories or medical issues.

3.4.12 Non-drivers

It is important that potential adopters think and plan for the care of the child

regarding both day to day arrangements like getting to school or activities and to emergency appointments. The business rules in respect of foster carers and their ability to drive could be said to be stricter because of the differing needs to foster children e.g. their often attending education provision and birth family contact in a different area. In the case of prospective adopters, however, there is no necessity to be able to drive.

An applicant's plan to overcome any related issues in the event of their not being able to drive and / or having access to a car, however, should be carefully explored during the assessment period.

3.4.1 Working Arrangements

As a basic requirement, the adoptive parent or one of the adopters (if a couple) would be expected to take a minimum period of time off from work (equivalent to the 9 months paid statutory adoption leave) immediately after the placement of a child, to allow relationships within the home to develop.

Each case will be different, particularly as people's working patterns can be so variable and the needs of adopted children waiting to be matched can also be different.

3.4.2 House Move

Careful consideration would be given to an applicant/s if they are considering moving house in the next six months when enquiring into the Agency. Such a move is likely to prevent application into the adoption process at that time.

Undergoing an adoption assessment at the same time as a house move is avoided where possible because the Agency wants to ensure that applicant/s can be matched to a child in a timely manner following their approval and that moving home does not have an adverse effect on a recently placed child.

3.4.3 Previous Partners

Applicants to be aware that we will need to take references from previous partners with whom they have had a significant relationship. This will include partners with whom they had children or with whom they shared a parenting relationship (e.g. an ex-partner with child/ern who they shared parenting of). If the applicant has concerns about this, establish if they would consider having a discussion with the Assessment Team Manager to explore the issues

3.5 There is an expectation that applicants should provide accurate information and allow the agency to confirm this wherever possible by reference to third parties,

statutory agencies, health professionals and others. Refusal to consent to such checks will result in the agency being unable to proceed with their application, unless there are exceptional circumstances.