

**Family Finding**

1. **Family Finding Practice Principles**

* Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their needs throughout their childhood and beyond.
* Where possible this should be within their birth family, however when this is not possible finding an adopted family should be given serious consideration for each child.
* Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
* The child’s ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, gender identity and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
* The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.

1. **Objectives**

* To minimise delay in family finding, paying attention to the needs of the children at all times.
* Working in partnership with each local authority to track children with an adoption plan at the earliest stage.
* To provide advice and consultation to the local authority when considering a plan for adoption for a child
* At the earliest stage to use Adoption West data of available adopters within the region to identify potential local matches. Whilst, recognising the specific needs of children who may require a search of the national pool of adopters
* To maintain and support sibling relationships either by placing children together or through robust contact plans
* Early Permanence placement to be considered for all children. (See EP Procedures if this is agreed)

1. **Local Authority Permanence Planning**

Each of the six partner local authorities (BANES, Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire), currently have their individual permanency planning procedures and processes. This document acknowledges these differences.

One of the following meetings will be held within 6 weeks of a child becoming CLA or legal proceedings being issued. This will be chaired according to the current LA process:

* Permanence Option Meeting
* Care planning Meeting
* Permanency planning meeting
* Adoption Coordination meeting
* or equivalent

It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to notify/invite Adoption West, to these meetings. The option to join the meeting by Skype/telephone etc to be provided. If adoption is a potential plan for a child, consideration needs to be given to placing with a sibling who has previously been adopted. Minutes from the above meetings should be sent to the Adoption West agency adviser:

* Alison Hall - Bristol and North Somerset
* Rian Viner – Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire
* Rosa Baiges – BANES and Wiltshire

A permanence plan is required by the second CLA Review (4 Months)

1. **Should Be Placed For Adoption Decisions**

Each local authority is responsible for:

* managing the administration of the process for SBPFA decisions
* informing Adoption West Agency Advisors when a SBPFA decision is booked
* preparing the Child Permanence Report
* making the decision via their Agency Decision Maker
* informing Adoption West Agency Advisors when a SBPFA decision is made.

It is good practice for the relevant LA social worker to complete the child’s needs section of the Matching Grid in the Adoption Placement Report at this stage. This will be used as the basis of family finding for the child. It will also assist in the early identification of children who may be hard to place and the likelihood of Adoption West having adopters available to meet the child’s needs within four months.

Adoption West Agency Advisors will:

* provide advice to social workers, managers and the ADM
* track all children for whom a SBPFA decision is requested
* advise Adoption West family finder will inform the Family Finding Team Manager when a SBPFA decision has been made

1. **Adoption West Family Finding Guidance**

All children with a SBPFA decision will be tracked by Adoption West

A Family Finder (FF) will be allocated once there is a SBPFA decision and within 5 working days.

The FF will write the draft child’s profile and share with the relevant LA social worker and foster carer.

A Family Finding discussion /Skype meeting between the FF and the relevant LA social worker will take place within 10 working days of SBPFA. This discussion will agree:

* The content of the child’s profile
* If an anonymous profile can be circulated to Adoption West adopters
* The Family Finder will add the profile to LinkMaker and make available to AW adopters
* Identify if the child/ren may be considered “hard to place” and therefore an early decision will be required for an interagency search.
* Plans for lifestory work
* Assessment of contact needs
* Sibling assessment
* Requirements for court statements relating to family finding
* Agree any further activity at this stage i.e. pre-Placement Order

There is an expectation that Adoption West approved adopters and prospective adopters in Stage two will be considered as a priority and prior to a Placement Order being granted, Sharing information anonymously.

The Family Finder will:

* place the child’s profile on LinkMaker for Adoption West adopters,
* review all Adoption West approved adopters and those in stage 2 of the adoption process, to identify potential links for the child/ren,
* ‘short list’ PARS using the Matching Grid and have discussions with potential adopter’s social workers and then with adopters, albeit on an anonymous basis at this stage.
* CPR’s will only be shared with adopters who will have a family finding visit; unless a joint decision is made by the family finder and relevant LA social worker to do this at an earlier stage. Eg for harder to place children with complex needs and fewer adopters expressing an interest.
* Prior to family finding visits the Family Finder will advise the child’s social worker in writing of any updates that are required to assist the family finding process or for the Adoption Panel eg CPR and child’s medical. (is it worth noting that the Adviser will already have given some advice about amendments to the CPR and the role of the FF could be to liaise with the SW to ensure those are made?)

If potential links are identified the CPR will need to be anonymised by the child’s social worker. This will be used to have further discussions and occasionally a visit to potential adopters pre placement order.

When the placement order is granted the child’s profile will be un-anonymised and photographs added to LinkMaker.

The Family Finder will then continue to review family finding progress every 8 weeks with the relevant LA social worker and or SW manager. This meeting will review progress and agree future FF activity, including attendance at activities days, individual profiles, whether a search for an interagency placement is necessary.

1. **Interagency Searches**

This process must not result in delay for the child. The use of LinkMaker and good communication between Family Finders and Social Workers will ensure early identification of the need for an interagency placement.

Should there be no suitable adopters within Adoption West, to extend the search to include other adoption agencies and so incur an Inter-agency fee, a decision is required by a senior manager.

Currently the budget for interagency fees remains with the local authorities the decision for out of region searches and therefore any subsequent placement, will be made by the local authority lead manager for the child.

When the financial responsibility for the interagency budget transfers to Adoption West, the decision for a national search and any subsequent placement will be made by the Adoption West Service Director or Service Manager.

When requesting permission for an interagency placement the Family Finder must provide information about:

* The child’s needs which may impact on identifying a family
* Adoption West adopters that were potential matches and why they have been ruled out
* The reason there is not a suitable AW family.

1. **Family Finding Visits**

These meetings are used to have a discussion with potential adopters about the child’s needs and how they may meet them. It is an opportunity to discuss the child’s needs in depth, how they present over time and the parenting approach and family life that would enable the child to develop. It is an opportunity for all parties to equally consider these issues. The meeting should be jointly prepared and planned by the Adoption West Family Finder and the social worker identified by the Local Authority who knows the child best.

The Matching Grid identifying the child’s needs should be used to develop questions that will be the basis of discussion with the adopters and thereby help to identify if the adopters can meet the child’s needs.

The child’s CPR (and other relevant documents, eg adoption medical?) should be shared with the adopters prior to the visit to enable them to fully consider the child’s history and needs.

There should be no more than 3 social workers present for the visit.

* Child’s social worker /author of the CPR. Someone who knows the child well and understands the sort of family that may meet their needs.
* The Adoption West Family Finder. This person will have knowledge and experience of the family finding and matching process, will be able to advise the social worker and contribute informed objectivity
* The adopter’s social worker will support the adopters before, during and after the matching visit, providing appropriate advice to the suitability of the adopters to meet the child’s needs.

If more than one family is identified as a potential match for the child, it will be Adoption West practice to visit up to three families.

To ensure a timely response for the child and adopters in the matching process:

* Dates for visits to potential families should take place as close as possible to each other and ideally no more than a week apart.
* The date for a linking meeting should be identified prior to the visits and take place within five working days of the last family visit.

Following the visits, the social worker and the family finder will complete the matching grid identifying how the adopters can meet the child’s needs (If this is referring to last column in the matching grid I think it should probably be the adopters social worker who completes it? The linking meeting should record somewhere the strengths and vulnerabilities of each potential family – the APR will include the summary of reasons why proceeding with the family chosen, but it would be good practice to have a record of the discussion if more than one family considered) as demonstrated in the discussion and clarifying strengths and vulnerabilities.

1. **The Linking Meeting/Discussion**

The decision for the potential match rests with the local authority and Adoption West will provide a consultation role. However, in the spirt of partnership working this should include an equal voice and all parties should be able to provide critical challenge when it is in the child’s interest.

Currently the process for agreeing the link between the child and adopters is different in each local authority. When a potential link is identified the matched must be booked into adoption panel for no later than 8 weeks’ time.

The process for deciding upon a link should include, the social worker and family finder involved in the home visit, the SW manager and AW senior practitioner or manager.

The meeting should:

* use the Matching Grid to analyse the information from the family finding visits
* agree the family who can best meet the needs of the child.
* consider the child and adopters support needs that will form the basis of the Adoption Support Plan
* confirm the date the proposed match will be presented to Adoption Panel
* agree tasks and responsibilities in the preparation of the adopters prior to presentation at Adoption Panel

The completion of the Adoption Placement Report will be the joint responsibility of the child’s social worker and the adopter’s social worker, assisted by the family finder where necessary.

The family finding social worker and the relevant LA social worker should provide written feedback to all adopters who have been visited and not chosen. This feedback should be shared with the adopter’s social worker, who is responsible for sharing the feedback with the adopters.

1. **Information Sharing with Adopters**

Adoption West will be responsible for ensuring the adopters have access to the information about the child that will assist their understanding. This will include a meeting/telephone discussion with:

* the child’s medical advisor
* any relevant medical specialist
* the education provider
* foster carer
* other key people identified by the social worker and family finder
* arranging a Child Information Meeting

1. **The Child Information meeting**

The purpose of these meetings is to bring together individuals who have significant knowledge and experience of the child, with the purpose of sharing this with the adopters, thereby increasing the chance of a better outcome for the stability of the placement. It collates a chronology and contextualised life story for the child. Also bringing together the factual and emotional chronology of the child’s life and assists in identifying areas that may require support going forward.

The meeting will be held for all children aged over 3 years or defined as “hard to place”. These meetings will be chaired by an Adoption West FF social worker/DTM or TM.

1. **Adoption Placement Planning Meetings**

Prior to the Adoption Panel the family finder, in consultation with the foster carer, adopter’s social worker and relevant LA social worker will draft a transitions plan and share with all parties.

The Adoption Placement Planning meeting will be convened for a date as soon as possible after the Panel date. The meeting will agree the placement and transitions plan. This meeting will be chaired by the Adoption West manager or the LA according to their current arrangement.

A minimum of one review meeting will take place during the transitions process in order to

* review the progress of the transition plan,
* make any necessary changes to the plan,
* consider any additional support needed for the placement
* agree the placement date and sign the Adoption Placement Plan.

Additional review meetings can be included in the plan as required for each child’s individual needs and specific transitions plan.

This meeting will be chaired by the person that chaired the Adoption Placement Planning meeting. The family finder will minute the meeting.

For guidance regarding transitions plans for children please refer to Adoption West: Transitions Policy Good Practice Guide in Moving Children to Adoption.

1. **Adoption West Terminology**

**Adoption Placement** **Planning Meeting –** meeting to complete the APP and **The Programme of Introductions**

**Adoption Placement Report - Matching Grid** – Pages 5-6 of this report. This is the key part of an APR and focuses on the child’s needs and how the linked adopters can meet them.

**Child Information Meetings-** meeting to be convened to explore the child’s history and consider how this may impact child following move to adopters

**Family Finder** – either a specific role or the social worker responsible for the family finding activity

**Family Finding** – the process of identifying the most suitable adoptive family for a child, that should be progressed as an adoption match. NB Adoption West does not undertake ‘family finding/homefinding’ for adopters, rather we support adopters in making links.

**Family Finding Meeting-** meeting/discussion between Family Finder and child’s social worker/manager to plan FF activity and review progress

**Hard to Place –** children over the age of 4 years,/, disabled children, black, Asian and ethnic minority children and sibling groups

**Linking Meeting** – the meeting where it is agreed to progress with a family who best meets the need of the child/ren. The child will be linked to the adopters until a decision about the match is made by the agency decision maker for the child following a recommendation by the Adoption Panel

**Matching Panel –** the formal process of agreeing the link of a family with the child by the Adoption Panel

**Review Placement Planning Meeting –** meeting to review introductions, agree move date, with managers agreement, and sign the Adoption Placement Plan

Alison Lewis

Adoption West

Service Director

July 2020