



EXISTING FOSTER CARERS

**Adoption
Service**

Contents:

- 1.0 Introduction 3
- 2.0 Approval Process 3
 - 2.1.1 Timescale..... 3
 - 2.1.2 Assessment..... 3
 - 2.1.3 Preparation..... 3
 - 2.1.4 Matching 4
 - 2.1.5 Adoption Support 4

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Where a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting a child in their care, consultation should take place between the relevant Child Care Team, Fostering Service and Adoption Service to consider the appropriateness of this request being able to meet the child assessed life long needs in a permanent adoptive placement.
- 1.2 Existing foster carers who express an interest in providing a permanent placement for a child already in their care will be considered alongside any other carers/adopters who express an interest as a result of the family finding process.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

A key factor to be considered is the existing carers' willingness to offer the same level of legal security as other potential carers e.g. adoption or special guardianship order. This has to be balanced against other factors such as existing attachment. It is necessary to consider life long matters for the child and the future safety and security of the placement.

- 1.3 If the child has been in placement for a long time, consideration will be given the level of attachments and in these circumstances whether it is appropriate to search for an alternative placement.
- 1.4 Foster Carers can apply for an adoption order after the child has lived with them for at least one year preceding the application and have given the local authority three months notice of their intention to apply. **This can occur without the support of the local authority.**

2.0 Approval Process

- 2.1 Existing foster carers will go through the same preparation and approval process as other prospective adopters. The main differences are:

2.1.1 Timescale

The timescale applying to the process is **four months** from the date of the application to adopt.

2.1.2 Assessment

The Assessment process undertaken will meet the requirements of the process as for other prospective adopters. Additionally, it will consider the relationship between the child and the foster carers.

2.1.3 Preparation

Regulations allow the agency to decide on the form of preparation, which is most appropriate for the particular prospective adopter. In the case of existing foster carers this may be adoption preparation groups provided by the agency or a dedicated one day training course for foster carers. Recognition is given to where this is not available, a form of individual preparation may be appropriate.

2.1.4 Matching

1. Where there is a proposal to match a child with existing foster carers, it is acceptable for the selection and matching to take place prior to an application to Panel for foster carers to be approved as prospective adopters. The proposed placement can then be considered by the Panel simultaneously with the approval of the carers as prospective adopters.
2. The agency must inform the foster carer in writing of the date on which the child's placement with them becomes a placement for adoption.

2.1.5 Financial Support

Financial support is one element of a range of Support Services that can be provided to support the child's placement. In adoption, a proposal for financial support should be part of the Adoption Support Plan which is presented to the Adoption Panel at the time of a match. In Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order the need for financial support is addressed and proposals made as part of the report for Court. To qualify for financial support, certain criteria need to be met. **The assessment looks at the child's needs in relation to the family's resources.**

In adoption and special guardianship, financial support can also be considered for a child post order to ensure the placement can continue.

Where a foster carer is making the transition to adoption or special guardianship for a child, there will be a period of adjustment and transition. To support that process, it may be appropriate to continue to provide an element of remuneration to allow the carer to adjust to their new role and family composition. However, the period of remuneration cannot be for more than 2 years unless there are exceptional circumstances relating to the needs of the child.

Financial support can be paid either as an ongoing allowance which is reviewed annually, as a single payment or a series of payments. Both the Special Guardianship and the Adoption Support Regulations allow conditions to be attached to the payment of financial support

The child must meet one or more of the following criteria for financial support:

- Where the financial support is necessary to ensure that the carer can look after the child
- Where the child needs special care which requires greater expenditure of resources by reason of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the continuing consequences of past abuse or neglect
- Where it is necessary to make any special arrangements to facilitate the placement by reason of:
 - the age or ethnic origin of the child; or
 - the desirability of the child being placed with the same adoptive parent as his brother or sister (whether full or half blood) or with a child with whom he/she previously shared a home
- Where support is to meet recurring costs in respect of travel for the purpose of visits between the child and a related person

- Where it is appropriate to make a contribution to the following kinds of expenditure:
 - legal costs (including fees payable to a court in relation to the application for the Order);
 - introductions of the child to the prospective carers;
 - expenditure necessary for the purpose of accommodating and maintaining the child e.g. furniture, domestic equipment, alterations/adaptations to the home, means of transport and other items necessary for the purpose of looking after the child.

In exceptional circumstances the local authority may continue to pay a financial payment beyond the two years. This is subject to Senior Manager approval

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Where a foster child is matched for adoption with his or her carers, particular attention needs to be given to the question of adoption allowances as benefits can be adversely affected where boarding out allowances have so far not had any effect. Currently the Benefits Agency regards adoption allowances as income and therefore the implication of any allowance will need to be considered by the family.

Appropriate welfare rights advice should have been considered prior to presenting the proposed placement to Panel and a full picture obtained of the financial implications of adoption with or without allowances.

Where an adoptive parent previously fostered the child they are adopting and was in receipt of an element of remuneration (i.e. a professional fee) for the child, the local authority may continue to pay that element of remuneration for two years (or more in exceptional circumstances) from the date of the adoption order.

Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005