**Early Permanence Principle and Assumptions in Adoption West**

All children on the edge of care should be considered for EP placements, each LA within Adoption West is committed to consulting on possible placements with the RAA to ensure children may have an opportunity of an EP placement where appropriate.

All unborn children should be prioritised for EP placements if they cannot remain with their birth family.

All children who cannot remain with their birth families and look likely to have a plan for adoption will be considered for EP.

All relinquished children should be considered for early permanence.

Birth parents must be informed of the LAs plans to place their child with EP carers prior to the placement and be given written and verbal information about such placements.

Birth parents wherever possible should be given the opportunity to meet with the EP carers prior to placement.

EP carers will facilitate and enable contact with birth families and maintain confidentiality.

Good communication between all professionals is key to setting up and supporting EP placements.

**Assessment of EP Carers and Training**

EP work to prepare/assess adopters and their capacity to take on EP role must be completed during the assessment process i.e. within the agency assessing them as adopters.

EP carers will be trained, prepared and able to operate as foster carers.

All prospective adopters within AW will be assessed regarding their suitability to become EP carers unless they decide to ‘opt out’ – initial training (1/2 day) will be provided to all applicants to enable them to fully consider the implications of EP for their family circumstances and make a considered decision about what they would be able to offer.

All carers will attend the ½ day training for EP in Stage 1. and unless they decide to ‘opt out’ of EP they must also attend the additional EP training day in Stage 2 or prior to any placement.

All carers being assessed for EP must be offered the opportunity to link with EP carers who have had a placement as part of their assessment.

Regular workshops will be provided to child care social workers to offer information and advice in relation to EP placements. Posters and leaflets will be provided by the RAA for all team offices in Children’s Social Care.

**Tracking Process:**

All LAs within the 6 LAs of Adoption West will have clear EP tracking systems from the point of the Legal Planning Meeting (LPM). Each LA will make arrangements to track their own children at their discretion.

The RAA tracking process will follow a child throughout the journey from LPM to Adoption Order and earlier where information is available, in the case of some EP placements back to birth family.

The RAA tracking process will act as a link point between the RAA systems and the LA systems for EP placements.

The Fostering Placement Team in each LA – is a key part of ‘gatekeeping’ referrals for placements. There needs to be close links with the Adoption Family Finders so that potential EP placements can be considered.

**Case Holding Responsibility:**

Prospective adopters who wish to foster a child prior to adoption will be jointly assessed as prospective adopters and foster carers and one PAR will be completed by Adoption West.

The AW Adoption and Permanence Panel will make a recommendation on the applicants’ suitability to adopt and their suitability to provide foster care under an early permanence arrangement. The decision to approve the applicants as prospective adopters and early permanence carers will be made by the RAA ADM.

All decisions concerning the child, such as the decision to place the child with the EP carers and the matching decision when a placement order has been granted by the court will be made by the LA with responsibility for the child.

If a PO is granted and the match recommended at panel and approved by the ADM, the EP carers cease to be foster carers (the fostering regs. cease to apply) and the placement continues under adoption regulations.

There should still be a formal linking and matching process when considering whether an EP placement should become an adoption placement. This should include linking meetings, risk assessment meeting and consultation with medical advisor and the LA.

A formal decision regarding the suitability of the prospective adoptive placement will be taken by the local authority ADM following a recommendation from the Adoption West Adoption and Permanence Panel

**Legal Advice:**

Legal advice re general adoption law, panel regulations will be commissioned by the RAA (to be decided where from).

Legal advice regarding the legal case and the future of the child will be provided by legal advisors from the respective LA as the authority remains responsible for the child until an adoption order is made by the court.

**Family-Finding/Matching:**

All referrals for a child to be placed with EP carers will be made through the Front Door and the family finding team will lead on identifying/finding a suitable placement.

In the case of EP placements if a PO is granted a Child Appreciation Event will be held by the RAA at the point the formal match has been agreed (in appropriate cases).

**Panel Process:**

Adoption West is registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency and an Independent Fostering Agency. The Adoption West Adoption and Permanence Panel will recommend approval of adopters under Adoption Agency Regulations and early permanence carers under Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. EP carers can also be approved under Reg 25a for a named child if necessary – this approval would be made by the LA ADM.

The RAA panel will recommend the approval adopters and foster carers, any EP carer taking a placement will be dual approved by the RAA ADM.

Whilst the initial matching paperwork will not go to panel, it will form an important part of the paper trail and QA system when the case is formally brought to panel for a matching decision.

**Support for EP Carers:**

The RAA recognises that the role of an EP carer is complex and places additional stresses on the adopters. The RAA therefore commits to enhanced support for EP carers including EP support groups to cover different stages in the process, accessing peer-support networks and additional SW support.

Buddying / mentoring. EP carers with a new placement will be linked with experienced carers for additional support.

(See: Support of EP carers: Provisions and Expectations).

**Adoption Decision Making (ADM):**

The Adoption West ADM will make the decision to approve prospective adopters and EP carers.

All decisions concerning the child and their placement either through EP or adoption will be made by the ADM in the LA responsible for the child.

For children placed into EP placements through Reg 25a or possibly with siblings through Reg 24 the LA ADM (fostering) will make the decision to approve under Reg 25a. (Reg25a will only be used in exceptional circumstances or where an EP placement is being made through another agency/RAA).

For children placed under Reg 25a the placing LA is responsible for ensuring the fostering regs. are adhered to. If the prospective adopters have been approved by Adoption West this task will be delegated to the RAA adoption social worker to carry out supervision visits and other tasks as required by the Fostering Regulations and Fostering Minimum Standards.

The approval of early permanence carers will usually be made by the Adoption West ADM following a recommendation by the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

**Information Sharing:**

For EP to work effectively LAs must share all available information about the child with the RAA and partner agencies for the purposes of making an EP placement and agreeing the initial match.

**Health Assessments/Medicals:**

Medical advice will be provided, as much as is available at the time of placement. It will be provided by the AMA working within the LA responsible for the child, and the social worker where relevant.

EP carers will be given access to LA Medical Advisors wherever possible to help them in the initial matching process, this may be a telephone call or a face to face meeting if timescales allow.

**Life Story and Later Life Letter/Annexe A:**

EP is an opportunity for information gathering and sharing for a child’s life story.

At the point of EP placement Birth Parents must be informed about Sharing Stories: Mediation for Life Story Work and formally referred unless they do not consent to referral at this time. If they do not agree to referral at the start of the EP placement the LA must ensure that this is revisited during the placement regularly as this is in the child’s interests and may benefit the family and the adopters.

EP carers will be supported to keep records of the child’s daily life during the time they are fostered that can be passed on with the child should they return to birth parents or move to an alternative placement.

The Later Life Letter will be completed by the Child’s social worker.