



# Adoption Panel Processes and the Management of Adoption Panel Papers

Policy and Procedure

**‘Communication is important, so information should be accessible to everyone. People with sensory communication disabilities may need documents in easy read, large print, audio or Braille formats for example. Others may need face to face communication support through a British Sign Language Interpreter, deafblind interpreter, lip speaker or note taker (as recommended by the NHS Accessible Information Standard). If someone speaks (or reads) a language that is not English, they will need to have the appropriate language-spoken language interpreter and / or text translator’.**



## **1.0 Purpose:**

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to outline the panel processes relating to booking onto panel and the processes prior, during and post panel. The policy also considers the administrative support provided to ensure that the Adoption Panel papers are prepared and retained effectively to enable Adoption Panel members to carry out the following functions:

- Approval of Prospective Adopter(s) (Full and Brief Reports)
- Matching children to Prospective Adopter(s)
- De-registration of Prospective Adopter(s)
- Relinquished Children
- Children where there is no court involvement
- Adoption Placement Disruptions

1.2 For the Agency Decision Maker's process for children with a plan of adoption (and where a plan changes away from adoption) please refer to the policy; 'Children's Plans and ADM Process'.

## **2.0 Underpinning Legislation and Guidance:**

2.1 The following underpin this policy:

- Children Act (1989)
- Adoption and Children Act (2002)
- Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Adoption and Children Act (2002) Guidance Chapter 6
- General Data Protection Regulation (2016)
- Data Protection Act (2018)
- Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005)
- Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations (2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations (2012)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2013)
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption (2013)
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption (2014)

- The Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (2018)

### **3.0 Booking Processes for Approvals:**

- 3.1 When Stage 2 of the Adopter Assessment is launched within the Information Sharing Log (ISL) within the Central Permanency Hub (CPH); the Information Sharing Log IT System (ISL) will automatically book a provisional Adoption Panel date. This date will be 13 weeks after Stage 2 is launched.
- 3.2 ISL will send an email alert to the Adoption Social Worker of this provisional date.
- 3.3 If this date is not achievable for whatever reason the Adoption Social Worker to discuss this with the Assessment & Support Team Manager to agree a new date.
- 3.4 The Adoption Social Worker will send an email to the Together4Children (T4C) Adoption Panel inbox requesting a provisional change of date. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request.
- 3.5 8 weeks prior to the Adoption Panel date the ISL will send an alert to the Adoption Social Worker to ask to confirm the Adoption Panel date.
- 3.6 The Adoption Social Worker will then email the T4C Adoption Panel inbox to confirm the Adoption Panel date.
- 3.7 4 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

### **4.0 Booking Processes for Matches:**

- 4.1 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 4.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the provisional panel date.
- 4.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required to the Child and Adoption Social Worker.
- 4.4 To note, the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser for the match can be any Regional Adoption Agency Adviser within T4C and does not need to be a Regional Adoption Agency Adviser located within the Child's Local Authority for this to proceed.

## **5.0 Booking Process for Deregistration of Prospective Adopter(s)**

- 5.1 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 5.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 5.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

## **6.0 Booking Process for Relinquished Children or for Children where there is no Court Involvement:**

- 6.1 The Child Social Worker in liaison with the Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 6.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Child Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 6.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Child Social Worker and Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted.

## **7.0 Booking Process for Adoption Disruptions:**

- 7.1 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 7.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 7.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

## **8.0 Booking Process for Brief Report**

- 8.1 The Adoption Social Worker would need to request an Adoption Panel date via a booking form.
- 8.2 This form will be sent to the T4C Adoption Panel inbox. A Regional Administration Officer will be monitoring the inbox on a daily basis and action this request and email the Adoption Social Worker confirming the panel date.
- 8.3 5 Weeks prior to the panel date ISL will send a reminder alert to the Adoption Social Worker detailing when the paperwork needs to be submitted and the list of documents required.

## **9.0 Panel Agenda:**

- 9.1 Each panel will aim to hear 5 items, with a maximum of 3 approvals or 3 matches.
- 9.2 However, the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser will review this and ultimately the number of cases and types of cases heard at the Adoption Panel will be at the discretion of the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.
- 9.3 Each panel slot will be an hour and an extra 15 minutes per panel slot per child.
- 9.4 To note, if prospective adopter(s) are resigning, then this does not need to be allocated a panel 'slot' but will be heard under AOB.
- 9.5 However, if T4C are terminating the registration then this will be a full allocated panel slot.

## **10.0 Paperwork Required for Panel:**

### **10.1 Approval of Prospective Adopter(s):**

Prospective Adopters Report (to include MA comments)

The Health Report

### **10.2 Match:**

Prospective Adopters Report

Minutes from Prospective Adopter'(s) approval

Updated Child Permanency Report (CPR) including updated photographs

Carers Report

Adoption Placement Report and Adoption Support Plan

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Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Decision Sheets for both Child and Prospective Adopter(s)

Medical Advisers Report

Legal Advice

10.3 Deregistration due to resignation by Prospective Adopter(s):

Deregistration report

10.4 Deregistration due to termination of approval by Adoption Agency:

Deregistration report

Any report from prospective adopter(s)

Prospective Adopters Report and previous panel minutes

10.5 Disruption:

Minutes from disruption meeting

Minutes from prospective adopter's approval (if inter-agency to request)

Minutes from panel relating to the match (if inter-agency to request)

Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Decision Sheet for match

10.6 Relinquished Child:

Form CPR

Health Assessment

Welfare Checklist

10.7 Children where there is no court involvement:

Form CPR

Health Assessment

10.8 Brief Report

Brief Report

**11.0 Submission of Adoption Paperwork:**



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- 11.1 11 working days prior to the Adoption Panel date, paperwork must be submitted to Adoption Panel by the Adoption Social Worker.
- 11.2 Each Locality Permanency Hub has different Case Management Systems. Hence, the process of submission within each Locality Permanency Hub will remain the same.
- 11.3 For the Joint Adoption Service (JAS) and Stoke-on-Trent Locality Permanency Hubs; adoption paperwork will continue to be submitted via the Liquid Logic Case Management System (LL).
- 11.4 For Staffordshire Locality Permanency Hub- this will come to the adoption panel email inbox.
- 11.5 Regional Administration Officers then send the papers to the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.
- 11.6 For papers coming from Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Locality Permanency Hubs for these to be uploaded to SharePoint for Regional Adoption Agency Advisers to access.
- 11.7 For papers coming from JAS Locality Permanency Hub this will be work flowed through Liquid Logic (LL) Case Management System to the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.
- 11.8 Papers are then quality assured by the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.
- 11.9 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser will make contact with Adoption/Child Social Workers and/or Team Managers for updates and amendments if needed.
- 11.10 If an early ratification is needed of the ADM decision, then the appropriate Team Manager must have a discussion with the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser prior to panel who will then make a decision whether this request can be accommodated.
- 11.11 For papers that have come from JAS Locality Permanency Hub request for amendments would be requested through the LL Case Management System workflow.
- 11.12 For papers coming from Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Locality Permanency Hubs amendments would be requested within the document and this document emailed and sent back to the Social Worker to amend.
- 11.13 Once the papers are quality assured and amendments have been made the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser informs the Regional Administration Officer via email.





- 11.14 The Regional Administration Officers upload the documents to SharePoint within 5 working days before the Adoption Panel date and email panel members that the documents are now uploaded to SharePoint.
- 11.15 Regional Administration Officers will then finalise the Agenda and timings alongside the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and upload this and the Adoption paperwork onto the SharePoint Site.
- 11.16 Panel Members will access SharePoint and read through the panel pack and generate their questions on the appropriate documentation 'Question Sheet' within SharePoint.
- 11.17 If any Panel Members identify any the following:
- areas of information that are missing from the panel pack
  - corporate/sensitive questions that need an answer/clarification without the applicant present on the day of panel
  - third party information requiring clarification (e.g. references / police information etc)

Then they will need to contact the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser at least two full working days prior to panel. This allows time for the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser to contact the Social Worker to clarify the relevant information.

- 11.18 In addition to the above panel members will complete questions 1-5 on the Quality Assurance Document for each agenda item.
- 11.19 Panel Members are:
- T4C employees
  - LA Councillors
  - Independent members
  - Medical Advisers
- 11.20 If an item needs to be removed from Adoption Panel at the eleventh hour this information to be recorded within ISL system by the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser or delegated to the Regional Administration officer.
- 11.21 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and Panel Chair will have a discussion prior to panel to collate all panel member's strengths and vulnerabilities comments and ensure that panel questions are relevant, appropriate and are sufficiently different from each other.

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- 11.22 The Regional Adoption Agency Adviser will finalise these comments and questions and separate the questions into questions for the Social Worker and questions for the prospective adopter(s).
- 11.23 The Regional Administration Officer will then send this information via email to the appropriate Social Worker to share with prospective adopter(s) no later than 24 hours prior to Adoption Panel.
- 11.24 Prior to panel the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and the Regional Administration Officer will ensure that each panel is quorate.
- 11.25 Where a meeting does not meet the quoracy requirements, the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser in conjunction with Panel Chair should arrange for the meeting to be postponed.

**12.0 Invitations to Adoption Panel:**

- 12.1 The Adoption Agency Regulations clearly state that it is not mandatory for prospective adopter(s) to have to attend Adoption Panel and therefore for this to be clear within the invitation letter.
- 12.2 Regional Administration Officers send out invites to the Social Workers via email 5 working days before Adoption Panel. The email contains only initials of prospective adopter(s) and not their full details.
- 12.3 It is an expectation that the authors of the reports (CPR/PAR) must attend panel. If this cannot be achieved for whatever reason, the Social Worker must discuss this immediately with the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser to consider whether this should continue to be heard on panel and/or removed to a later panel date.
- 12.4 Regional Administration Officers then send out an invite letter via secure email to the prospective adopter(s) 5 working days before panel.
- 12.5 Regional Administration Officers upload the prospective adopter(s) invite letter to the appropriate Case Management System on their record.
- 12.6 Regarding matters heard at Adoption Panel relating to Children where there is no court involvement it may be appropriate in certain circumstances to invite the young person to attend Adoption Panel to enable the child's voice to be heard. For example, usually an older young person who is making an active decision to be adopted, often by their foster carer. This decision to be made by the Child's Social Worker and Adoption Social Worker.

**13.0 Business Processes/Protocol during panel:**



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- 13.1 During panel there will be two Regional Administration Officers taking the minutes and a rota in place to manage this.
- 13.2 Start of Panel:
- 13.3 Panel Chair will briefly review the questions and confirm with panel members who is asking which questions and the order of them to be asked.
- 13.4 Meet and Greet Process:
- 13.5 The Panel Chair will go out to attendees to welcome them to T4C Adoption Panel to:
- Introduce themselves as the Panel Chair and explain the adoption panel process and the purpose of panel's role.
  - Explain that the attendees will be brought into adoption panel, introductions will take place, Panel Chair will ask some initial questions then hand over to other panel members to ask questions.
  - Advise that questions will be asked from the report, reassuring the attendees that this is to offer clarification on aspects of the report, and that it is good to hear from themselves, in their own words.
- 13.6 Further explanation will be given if there is exceptional circumstances whereby:
- it has been decided by the Panel Chair and Regional Adoption Agency Adviser that the Social Worker(s) will be seen alone. The Panel Chair will explain to the prospective adopter(s) why the Social Worker(s) are going into panel without them for example third party information needs to be discussed.
- 13.7 If the prospective adopter has a support person with them, the Panel Chair to explain that any area of the assessment can be questioned, so they would need to be happy that their support person can be present for any topic and that the support person is not there to answer any questions or be involved in the discussion.
- 13.8 Attendees to enter panel:
- 13.9 Panel members, Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and Panel Chair to close their laptops during panel and to only access their laptop if information needs to be retrieved for agenda item. If notes need to be written, this should be done via paper and pen. The reason for this is to not create a 'barrier' between attendees and panel members.
- 13.10 When attendees are brought into panel, the Panel Chair will open the panel discussion with the information that has been discussed in the 'meet and greet' so

that it is reiterated to attendees again and recorded in the minutes by the Regional Administration Officer.

- 13.11 Panel Chair to clarify that adoption panel cannot make a decision today, only a recommendation. The minutes will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the final decision and this process usually takes no longer than 3 weeks from panel date. This decision will then be confirmed in writing to prospective adopters.
- 13.12 Panel Chair will proceed to instigate a round of introductions for the attendees.
- 13.13 Panel Chair will ask their initial questions; Panel Members will be invited to ask their questions.
- 13.14 During minuted discussions, Panel Members are to be mindful of the use of emotive language and any direct judgement or criticism of practice or professionals in front of attendees. Comments should be made as if the prospective adopter(s) were in the room. Any issues regarding practice will be taken forward by the Regional Agency Adoption Adviser, following up with the most appropriate Team Manager to whom the concern relates. The minutes will not provide 'detail' of this conversation but only an overview of this discussion.
- 13.15 Once all questions have been asked by panel members; Panel Chair will confirm whether panel members have no other additional questions. Prospective adopter(s) are then offered the opportunity to ask questions and/or make any additional comments.
- 13.16 Social workers, prospective adopter(s) are then asked to go back to the waiting room while panel members deliberate and conclude.
- 13.17 After deliberation, the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser will then collect the attendees to bring them back into the room to hear the recommendation. However, there is flexibility to give the recommendation in the waiting room if the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and Panel Chair feel that this is appropriate for situations where panel will not be making a positive recommendation for example.
- 13.18 If the decision is to share the recommendation in the waiting room, this will be minuted by the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser and passed to the Regional Administration Officer to then include in the minutes.
- 13.19 At the end of Panel, attendees are asked to complete a feedback form by the Panel Chair and the Regional Administration Officer will send this via email.
- 13.20 When feedback is received via email the Regional Administration Officers will collate this feedback and store on SharePoint.

13.21 Regional Adoption Agency Advisers will review the feedback forms on a monthly basis and update the Principal Manager as and when appropriate in relation to improvement of practice and learning as well as incorporate this feedback into the annual panel training sessions.

#### **14.0 Business Processes Post Panel:**

14.1 After Adoption Panel has commenced, Regional Administration Officers will type up the minutes within 3 working days and email to the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.

14.2 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser makes any amendments and sends back to the Regional Administration Officer when complete via email.

14.3 Regional Administrator uploads the minutes to SharePoint and then sends an email to the panel members to access SharePoint and review the minutes whereby they will have 3 working days to undertake this task. Panel Members will be asked to make any changes in Blue and to initial their changes. Panel Members will also complete question 6 of the Quality Assurance Document for all agenda items which is located within SharePoint.

14.4 If panel members choose to not review the minutes within the timescale this is at their discretion, but the timescale will not be extended.

14.5 After 3 working days Regional Adoption Agency Adviser reviews the amendments and finalises on SharePoint.

14.6 Regional Adoption Agency Adviser emails the Panel Chair to inform he/she that panel minutes are ready to ratify and sign off on SharePoint. Panel Chair has 2 working days to undertake this task.

14.7 Panel Chair contacts the Regional Administration Officer when completed and Regional Administration Officer then sends an electronic invite to book an allocated time slot within the Agency Decision Maker calendar to review the paperwork.

14.8 The ADM accesses and reviews the paperwork:

For Stoke-on-Trent a SharePoint email link is sent to the ADM.

For Staffordshire County Council a SharePoint email link is sent to the ADM.

For Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire ADM's, this is work flowed direct to them via Liquid Logic.

14.9 The ADM for approvals will be T4C Head of Operations; Scott Crawford

14.10 The ADM for Children's plans and matches will be the child's ADM. Hence:

Shropshire Children: Interim Assistant Director–Children's Social Care & Safeguarding

Staffordshire Children- Assistant Director, Looked After & Disability Services

Telford & Wrekin Children: Interim Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support/ Child Protection & Family Support (Assessment & CATE) Service Delivery Manager.

Stoke-on-Trent Children-Assistant Director for Childrens Services

14.11 The Agency Decision Maker will consider the Panel minutes and the Panel's recommendation and will make a decision and complete a Decision Sheet and send via email to the Regional Administration Officer.

14.12 This decision is to be made within 7 working days of receipt of the minutes and conveyed to the prospective adopter(s), orally within 2 working days by the Adoption Social Worker and in writing within 5 working days of the Agency decision by the Regional Administration Officer. (Where these timescales are not adhered to the Agency will record the reasons on the prospective adopter(s) record).

14.13 Where the ADM does not accept the Adoption Panel's recommendation, he /she may discuss with another senior person in the Partnership who is not a member of the Panel.

14.14 The final decision and the reasons for that decision should be recorded in the prospective adopter(s) record.

14.15 Where the Agency Decision Maker considers that the applicant(s) are not suitable to adopt, or approval is being terminated Regional Administration Officers will notify the prospective adopter(s) in writing via a Qualifying Determination letter of the specific reasons for this decision.

14.16 Within this letter the Agency will also advise that the prospective adopter(s) have 40 working days from the date of the Qualifying Determination letter in which to submit any representations to the Agency or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism. Regional Administration Officers will provide an IRM leaflet for additional information regarding the process with the Qualifying Determination letter.

14.17 If the prospective adopter(s) accepts the Qualifying Determination this will become the Agency decision.

14.18 Where the Agency receives representations from the prospective adopter(s) within the time period allowed, it will consider referring the case with any new and relevant

information back to the Adoption Panel. This would be for consideration to be heard by different panel members and chair.

- 14.19 Where the Agency refers the matter back to the Agency Decision Maker who must take into account the recommendation of both the original Panel and any subsequent recommendation.

**15.0 Distribution of Letters:**

- 15.1 Regional Administration Officers will update the ISL with the outcome of Adoption Panel.

- 15.2 Regional Administration Officers send out an outcome email and panel minutes confirming the ADM decision to the relevant Social Workers and Team Managers.

- 15.3 For an approval or deregistration outcome the minutes and ADM decision sheet would be uploaded to the Prospective Adopters record and for a match this would be uploaded to the Child and Prospective Adopter(s) record and for relinquishment the Child's record.

- 15.4 Approvals:

For an approval; Regional Administration Officers send a letter to the prospective adopter(s) and this then gets saved onto the prospective adopter(s) record within the appropriate Case Management System.

- 15.5 Matches

For matches; Regional Administration Officers send a letter to Birth Parents via Special Delivery. Regional Administration Officer to confirm that birth parents address is correct. If address is unknown for this letter to be passed to the Child's Social Worker to pass on at their next meeting. This letter to be saved onto the Child's record on the appropriate Case Management System.

- 15.6 Regional Administration Officers also send a letter to Prospective Adopter(s) and this gets saved onto the Prospective Adopter(s) record on the appropriate Case Management System as well as the Child's record on the appropriate Case Management System.

- 15.7 For an 'out of region' match with prospective adopters again the Regional Administration Officer the process is the same as above.

- 15.8 However, prior to this the 'out of region' Prospective Adopter(s) will need to have a record created for them within the appropriate Case Management System that relates to the child. For this to happen, the Regional Administration Officer will ask

the Child's Family Finding Practitioner to create this record on the Case Management System.

15.9 The above process will be the same for when a child is matched with Prospective Adopter(s) within the T4C region but whereby the Prospective Adopter(s) have been assessed within a different Locality Permanency Hub compared to the Child.

15.10 De-registration:

Regional Administration officers would send a letter to Prospective Adopter(s); however, if the deregistration was due to Agencies recommendation, a Qualifying Determination Letter would be sent and saved on the Prospective Adopter(s) record within the appropriate Case Management System.

15.11 Relinquishment:

Regional Administration Officers would send a letter to birth parent and then save to the Child's record within the appropriate Case Management System.

**16.0 Storage and Retention of Records:**

16.1 Adoption Packs are electronic and stored on SharePoint.

16.2 If a panel member has a specified need for a printed version of the documents this will be considered by the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser. If a panel member or member of staff has a specified need for information to be made available in either alternative languages or formats this will be considered by the Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.

16.3 If a paper Adoption Panel pack is produced this must be classified as 'Confidential' and GDPR 2016, DPA 2018 compliant regarding the protection of personal information and to safeguard and secure data to prevent unauthorised access.

16.4 Any paper copies of Adoption Panel packs are kept for a **maximum of 3 months** before being destroyed and placed in confidential waste.

16.5 Electronic Panel documentation- minutes/letters are uploaded/completed into Case management systems against the child/adult's record as an attachment and are subject to retention schedules.

16.6 To ensure that each child and prospective adopter file has relevant and updated documentation on their file relating to PAR's, CPR, Minutes for example.

**17.0 Roles and Responsibilities:**

17.1 The Regional Adoption Agency Adviser has overall responsibility for the overall day to day delivery, quality assurance and management of specific Adoption Panels



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within the region, whilst contributing to the overall coordination of the Adoption Panel Services across the Together4Children Regional Permanency Arrangement.

- 17.2 The Business Coordinator is responsible for providing an effective service for coordinating the Regional Adoption Panel, the Quality Assurance of Child's Permanence Reports and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- 17.3 The Regional Administration Officer is responsible for co-ordinating and supporting administrative tasks of the Together4Children Central Permanency Hub with a primary focus on Regional Adoption Panel, the Quality Assurance of Child's Permanence Reports and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- 17.4 All staff are responsible for following the guidance within this policy.

