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Fostering for Adoption

Policy and Procedure

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#  Early Permanence is a child centred practice that aims to ensure that those children unable to live safely with their birth families are placed with their permanent substitute families at the earliest possible time, preventing multiple moves and the associated trauma of separation from and loss of attachment figures.

1. Introduction

Early Permanence is an umbrella term which covers both Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning. Both are routes which enable babies and older children to be placed with foster carers who could become their adoptive families as soon as possible after leaving their birth family.

There are clear benefits for children of being placed under Fostering for Adoption or with Concurrent carers, the benefits include;

* Children have one placement with carers who may become their adopters.
* It allows the child and their carers to share key developments, milestones, experiences and achievements from the earliest stage.
* It avoids disruption and damage to the child’s capacity to develop consistent attachments often caused by temporary foster care relationships or multiple placement moves.
* The likelihood of future behavioural and attachment difficulties and the resultant potential for placement breakdown are reduced.
* Where there are contact arrangements with the birth parents/family during the period of temporary foster care, it allows the carers to develop a wider understanding and knowledge of the child’s parents and enhances the information and perspective available to the child regarding their birth family in later life.

**Fostering for Adoption or Concurrent Planning?**

There are many similarities between Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning. For both routes:

* The aim is to minimise the number of times children are moved between homes before they are adopted.
* Adults take the risk and uncertainty rather than the child.
* Approved adopters act as the child’s foster carer for a period whilst the Courts make their decision.
* In most cases the children are very young.
* All carers must comply with fostering regulations; they are caring for the child on behalf of the LA and have limited delegated parental responsibility and no involvement in decision making.
* All carers would be expected to transport a child to contact with their birth parents / family. There may or may not be a direct handover depending on an assessment of risk, but positive working relationships will always be encouraged even if that is through a written contact book rather than face to face meeting.
* All carers would be expected to work with parents and to clearly and thoroughly communicate information regarding the child, their routine, progress and any milestones in their development.
* In a minority of cases for either route, the child may return home, or to family members, if the Courts decide this is in the child’s best interests.

There are also a few differences between the routes;

* **Route to approval** – In Fostering for Adoption, temporary approval is given to already approved adopters, under Care Planning Regulation 25A by the child’s local authority. In Concurrent Planning, carers are presented to both adoption and fostering panels for approval at the outset.
* **Registration** – in Fostering for Adoption, registration (and responsibility for training and support) lies with the child’s local authority which may not be the same as the adopters. In Concurrent Planning, the approval is held by the adopter’s agency.
* **Local authority plan** – in Fostering for Adoption, the local authority plan is adoption. In Concurrent Planning, there is a possible rehabilitation plan; Plan A is return home to family and adoption is plan B.

**Fostering for Adoption**

This policy deals with placement of a child with carers who are temporarily dually approved both as foster carers and adopters for a particular child under Fostering for Adoption regulations.

Adoption@Heart is committed to ensuring that a Fostering for Adoption placement is an option for as many of our children as could benefit from this child centred pathway and our aim is to ensure that this placement is achieved at the earliest point in the care planning process.

We demonstrate our commitment to this recruiting and assessing prospective adopters who are able to take the additional uncertainty that comes with a Fostering for Adoption placement. From the point of enquiry through to approval we will provide our adopters with information, support and Fostering for Adoption training with the aim of approving the majority of adopters with the capacity to consider a Fostering for Adoption Placement. Decisions about whether they have the capacity to manage this will be made post approval based on the specifics of the individual child and their circumstances.

2. Legal Context

In 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) consultation, *Adoption and Fostering: Tackling Delay*, introduced the concept of FFA as a new route to achieving early permanence for children. An update to the *Children Act. 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review* (DfE, 2013) on ‘Temporary approval of prospective adopters as foster carers’ was published in May 2013.

The Children and Families Act 2014 in England has introduced legislation requiring local authorities to consider FFA as part of their care planning for permanence for a child, and provided Statutory Guidance, *Early Permanence Placements and Approval of Prospective Adopters as Foster Carers*, in July 2014. This was later subsumed into the Volume 2 *Care Planning, placement and Review* statutory guidance issued in 2015.

The legislation and guidance states that local authorities **must** consider a placement with a local authority foster carer who has been approved as a prospective adopter whenever it is considering adoption or where the decision has been made that the child ought to be placed for adoption, but where the agency does not yet have authority to place the child for adoption through either a placement order or parental consent. (section 22C(9B) Children Act 1989 (as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014).

Before giving this approval, the LA must assess the suitability of the person to care for the child as a foster carer and consider whether the proposed fostering placement will safeguard and promote the child’s welfare and meet the child’s needs as set out in the care plan.

For the vast majority of children placed under these arrangements the anticipated outcome is that the child will be adopted. The arrangements enable the placement of a named child with their intended adoptive family at the earliest possibility. This can also reduce the delay in the placement of young children with their prospective adoptive parent/s and might also reduce placement changes and disruption during the crucial early stages of their development.

The temporary approval expires when;

* The placement is terminated by the LA

**or**

* The approval of the prospective adopter is terminated

**or**

* The prospective adopter is approved as a foster carer or gives 28 days’ notice stating that they no longer wish to be temporarily approved as a foster carer **or**
* The child is placed for adoption with the prospective adopter under the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

3. Children for whom Fostering for Adoption might be appropriate

Fostering for Adoption can be used for any child who has a Local Authority plan of adoption at any stage of the Looked After process.

There are a range of circumstances which may suggest that in planning for a child Fostering for Adoption might provide the most child-centered plan, however it is essential that the LA/Trust has fully explored its responsibilities to engage the birth parents and the wider family in identifying solutions and providing a placement.

The majority of the children who are suitable for Fostering for Adoption will typically fall into one of the following scenarios:

* + The birth parent(s) have had one or more children previously placed for adoption or in another form of permanent placement and the evidence strongly indicates that their circumstances have not changed and they pose the same risks as they did for the previous child(ren).
	+ The local authority does not have a pro-active plan to rehabilitate the child as the circumstances of the parent(s) are such as to pose a serious on-going risk.
	+ The child is the first child of his/her birth parent(s), however the circumstances of the parent(s) and the perceived risks to the child are such that there is no proactive plan to return the child to the care of his/her parent(s) or to other family members.
	+ The birth parent(s) have indicated that they may want to place their child for adoption but have not yet formally consented (Section 52(3) Adoption and Children Act 2002).
	+ The Fostering for Adoption arrangement may also allow for siblings to be placed together where the plan is removal of a baby at birth and where there is another related child who has already been adopted or is placed for adoption.

4. Situations where these procedures do not apply:

* The child is likely to return home.
* There is a possibility that wider family and friends might still be a viable option, for example where they are actively contesting an adverse kinship assessment or are seeking to become party to the legal proceedings.
* A permanence placement other than adoption is more appropriate for the child.

The risks involved in each individual situation must be carefully assessed. Possible contradictions to such an arrangement include:

* The child's health and developmental needs are very uncertain;
* The outcome of court directed assessments are outstanding, if applicable.
* Levels of ongoing contact will mitigate against a successful placement transition for the child;
* The impact of known new relationships or changes in family dynamics within the birth family have not been fully assessed and evaluated.

5. Making the Fostering for Adoption Plan

At the point where a child/unborn child is identified as potentially unable to remain with birth family and likely to need an adoptive placement, a Fostering for Adoption placement **must** be considered. All young children or unborn babies will be considered for Fostering for Adoption as a matter of best practice where identified via the Local/ Authority's/Children’s Trust usual Permanency Planning Process, through a pre-birth conference, or legal planning meeting prior to the initiation of court proceedings.

The Local Authority/Childrens Trust must be able to demonstrate why the child should not be placed with or returned home to birth parent/s' care, why the child should not be placed with family or friends, why no other permanency plan is appropriate and why fostering to adopt is the most appropriate plan for the child.

Designated managers and senior social workers from Adoption@Heart will attend key permanence planning meetings in each Local Authority or Trust with a view to being alerted to and fully involved in discussions about children potentially in need of Foster for Adopt placements at the earliest possible point in the process. This will include unborn children.

Please note that whilst the LA/Trusts key planning meetings are the primary notification route, at any stage of planning where it is identified that a plan of adoption is one of the outcomes being considered for a child we would encourage the Children’s Social Worker to involve the Family Finding Team at the earliest possible point. (Ideally at 20 weeks gestation +). This early involvement ensures that the Family Finders can contribute their specialist knowledge to the decision-making process, provide advice and guide Social Workers in the right direction prior to a key meeting being held.

*In making decisions about which cases are most likely to be suitable for Fostering for Adoption the criteria in section 3 above should be followed. The Screening Matrix (appendix 1) provides a useful tool to aid decision making.*

Following the key planning meeting a Family Finding Support Worker (SuW) will be allocated for all children where there is a potential plan of FFA. The Family Finding Support Worker to contact the Childs Social Worker to discuss the case, provide information and guidance and complete a Notification form. Please note there is no specific Referral Form for Fostering for Adoption; the standard Notification Form is used and has space for the provision of information pertaining to the child’s Early Permanence needs. When completing the Notification Form, it is important that the child’s Social Worker provides information that will assist the Family Finding Service in making an appropriate match; at this stage, there is unlikely to be a Child Permanence Report to reply upon for the necessarily details.

The Family Finding Support Worker will also provide the Social Worker the following forms;

1. Information for birth parents leaflet
2. Fostering for Adoption Checklist for Social Workers

**Relinquished Babies**

Where planning is underway for relinquished babies, early consultation with Adoption@Heart is strongly recommended to plan the response jointly. This is because the Adoption Act Regulations sets out a duty to provide adoption counselling to each birth parent, at all stages of the process, to ensure the immediate and life-long implications of adoption are understood and the capacity to give consent is assessed, particularly where decisions are being made immediately following

the birth. In addition, the rights of the father and the paternal family in cases where the mother has concealed and or relinquished without the consent, can be extremely complex and the legal implications need particular consideration.

A pre-birth meeting (wherever possible) with the birth parent(s) and or birth family must be set up by the child’s Social Worker. The Family Finding Support Worker should also attend to give the necessary advice and guidance on adoption matters. It may be necessary to offer further meetings to assist the birth parent(s) to understand the ramifications of the decision and test the possibilities of the child remaining in the birth family further.

If it is confirmed that the child will be relinquished for adoption, there being no alternative options, the child’s Social Worker must follow their own policies and procedures relating to adoption planning for relinquished children as well as referring to the Family Finding Service to consider a Fostering for Adoption placement if appropriate.

**Children with Adopted Siblings**

Where planning is underway for children with siblings who have been adopted, it is vitally important that the Local Authority/Trust identify an early need for an FFA placement with a sibling to enable time to contact those adopters to consider whether they are able to put themselves forward as FfA carers and for an assessment to be completed before the placement is needed.

Where this is not possible it will be important to consider whether Fostering for Adoption should be privileged over a possible sibling adoption placement. In other words, a decision should be made as to whether it is more important to settle the child into an Early Permanence family than have the child enter short term foster care and await the outcomes of sibling adopter enquiries or a sibling adopter assessment.

**Tracking** - The Adoption@Heart monthly tracking system will track all FFA children where a Notification form has been completed. This process will enable the service to review plans for all children and consider whether early permanence opportunities are being considered at all future points on their journey as appropriate.

**FF/SuW** **Role**;

Following allocation the Family Finding Support Worker role is;

* To co-ordinate the Early Permanence Care planning and ensure the child’s needs are critically analysed and formulated clearly from the outset.
* Responsibility for tracking and monitoring of the case and to ensure there is no unnecessary delay.

Within 5 days of allocation, the Family Finding Support Worker will;

a). contact the child’s Social Worker to notify of the allocation, complete the notification form (if not already completed), send the FFA checklist for Social Workers (appendix 3) make enquiries of the professional views held about the child, the child’s needs, the family circumstances and any other relevant matters and clarify on the Fostering to Adopt Process.

b). Review the referral documents and the child’s electronic file to gather information relevant to an assessment of placement needs.

c). Set out any relevant dates and deadlines such as court hearings, statutory reviews and other professional meetings to timetable any plan of action.

 d). Visit or book a date to visit the child’s current foster carer (if already in foster care) to discuss the child’s journey since being placed, their routine, strengths and vulnerabilities

At this stage the role of the Family Finding Team is to gather, triangulate and analyse information and begin to define the child’s current and long-term placement needs.

During the period of family finding, the Family Finding Support Worker will attend relevant professional meetings relating to plans for the child. Attendance at key care planning meetings will enable the Support Worker to review and update the formulation of the child’s permanency needs.

**Child’s Social Worker role**;

The Social worker should complete the following tasks and obtain the necessary agreements;

* Ensure that it is clearly recorded why the Fostering for Adoption placement is in the child's best interests and this has been agreed by the Service Manager. This should be recorded as a key decision, informed by the views of the Independent Reviewing Officer and Children's Guardian, (where appointed);
* Social Worker (with guidance from Family Finding Team) will also ensure that all other key professionals have been informed including the Court service, Lawyers, and relevant Health Professionals.
* Include the plan and rationale in the child's care plan;
* Ensure that the child’s wishes and feelings are recorded

Regardless of whether or not the child is subject to court proceedings the child's birth parent(s) and any other adult(s) who hold parental responsibility for the child, must be consulted and kept fully informed of the local authority's intentions and it must be fully explained to them why Fostering for Adoption is perceived to be a positive option for the child. Birth parents should be encouraged to seek legal advice. The Family Finding Support Worker will have a key role in driving best practice in consulting with other agencies and birth parents, working alongside the Child’s Social worker.

It must also be made clear to the birth parent(s) and significant wider family members that the placement of the child on a Fostering for Adoption basis does not pre-empt the outcome of any Court Proceedings or, in the case of a relinquished child, alter their right to make a decision to reclaim their child at any point prior to them signing consent to placement It should be explained to them that while the local authority believes that adoption is the right plan for the child, or that it will be the right plan for the child if rehabilitation is not successful, this does not interfere with the parent(s) right to have their evidence presented and heard before the Court if that is what they decide that they want to do. (Birth Parents to be provided with Early Permanence Leaflet for Birth parents Appendix 4).

On those occasions where the child is voluntarily Accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act, the birth parents should be informed of their right to remove the child from the local authority's care and should provide advice on access to legal advice and appropriate advisory bodies. At this point, the Local Authority may wish to consider commencing care proceedings.

In all cases Birth parents should be offered a referral to Adoption@Heart Birth parent counselling service (for many parents this may not be the right time for them, thus this must be kept under review and continue to be offered at later stages of the process).

The permission of the Court is not required (where Proceedings have been initiated) in order for the local authority to be able to place the child with Fostering for Adoption carer(s), however, within the proceedings the Court should be informed that the child is or is to be placed with potential adopter(s) on a Fostering for Adoption basis: this should be included in the social worker's statement and standard directions should be sought that the child and birth parent/s' information can be shared with prospective adopters and that an adoption medical assessment can be undertaken.

6. Placement matching and post placement monitoring and support

To minimise delay the matching process must run in parallel with the process of approving the Fostering for Adoption plan for the child:

Planning with a view to identifying suitable Fostering for Adoption carers will be undertaken by the Family Finder prior to the child being accommodated (where this is known in advance) or prior to the estimated delivery date for unborn babies.

The Family Finding Support Worker to complete a profile for the child and send to all Adoption Support Workers to identify any potential matches with Fostering for Adoption families.

The Family Finding Support Worker will discuss the child’s needs with the Adoption Support Social Worker and request the Prospective Adopter Report and Panel Minutes to review.

The Family Finding Support Worker will ensure that the Adoption Support Social Worker has received the relevant reports about the child in order that they can assess the prospective Fostering for Adoption Carers capacities to meet the child’s needs and share information with them if this is considered appropriate. Note that in cases where Early Permanence is being considered, a Child Permanence Report may not yet be completed. Family assessments, court chronologies, medical assessments etc may need to be used by the Adoption Support and Family Finding Social Workers to gather a sense of the child’s needs.

When one or more possible Early Permanence Placements have been identified, the Family Finding Support Worker will review and compare the information provided about each family and assess their capacities against the needs of the child.

If there are no Fostering for Adoption placement options available internally, the Family Finding Service will consider Early Permanence Carers approved by partner agencies within the region. If there are no families are available within our region, a referral to be made to feature the child on Adoption Link. Prior to further search work commencing, permission to move to an external provider will be sought from the Adoption@Heart Head of Service.

NB. When placing a child with Early Permanence Carers approved by an external agency, the Family Finding Service will take into consideration the standard of the fostering provisions as well as the standard of adoption support given pre- Adoption Order and post. In addition, the Family Finding Service will consider factors such as location, to ensure that contact arrangements can be maintained.

The matching process must take into account the fact that there may be much that is unknown about the child at the stage of linking and more information may be discovered about the child and/or his/her birth parent(s) and/or his/her birth family background that could have implications for the child and his/her future parenting needs. The matching process must also consider:

* + The potential carer(s)' ability to manage the demands of short-term fostering including any planned contact arrangements;
	+ Their likely ability to understand the plan for the child and to work with the local authority and other agencies as required;

The geographical location of any proposed placement will also need to be considered as during the fostering phase it is likely to be necessary to facilitate regular contact between the child and one or more of his/her birth relative/s. During the fostering phase the location of the proposed carer(s) should ideally be such that contact can be reasonably facilitated without subjecting the child to the unnecessary stress caused by long journeys, however this needs to be weighed up against the potential need to maintain the anonymity of the placement and to protect the identity and location of the carer(s) should the placement become an adoptive placement, particularly if the child is to be placed with a birth sibling(s) who is/are already adopted;

*The resolution of these potentially conflicting demands will require careful thought and decision making within limited timescales.*

Once a family of choice is identified, at the earliest possible point (ideally prior to the child being born or accommodated), a Family Finding Social Worker will be allocated and a home visit will take place with the prospective Fostering for Adoption carer’s by the child’s Social Worker, Adoption Social Worker and Family Finder. (NB to avoid unnecessary delay it may be sufficient for the Adoption Social Worker to be present at the visit, after consultation with the child’s Social Worker to ensure their views are represented). During this visit as much verbal and written information as is available must be shared with them. This should include the draft CPR (if available) or other written information about the child's birth family background and earlier life experiences, medical information, any psychological assessment(s) (with permission of the court) and any other information that the local authority considers relevant. However, the birth family's right to confidentiality must be respected unless the court has given agreement to the disclosure of personal and background information. (See Appendix 6 [CoramBAAF Practice Note 59 - The provision of information to Fostering for Adoption carers](https://corambaaf.org.uk/sites/default/files/Members%20Area/Resources/Practice%20Notes/PN59.pdf)).

During this initial visit the financial arrangements, comprising of provision of the Fostering Allowance, will be discussed, alongside the requirements of the Foster Care Agreement. **Note**: It is not usual policy to share legal advice.

The proposed contact arrangements for the child must be fully discussed and agreement reached as to how the child's contact arrangements with his/her significant birth relatives will be arranged and what if any contact the carer(s) are required to have with the child's birth family members. (See Appendix 5 [Consideration of contact arrangements](file:///M%3A%5CChildrens%5CAdoption%40Heart%5CManagers%5CTara%20Price%5CEarly%20Permenence%5CAppendices%5CAppendix%205.%20contact%20arrangementsdocx.docx)) Planning such arrangements can be very challenging but any arrangements agreed must:

* Acknowledge the rights of the birth relative(s) concerned;
* Recognise the current legal nature of the placement, i.e. short-term fostering;
* Protect the child and minimise the child's exposure to undue stress;
* Ensure that appropriate support is available to the carer(s) to enable them to best manage the demands that facilitating any contact arrangements will inevitably make on them.
* Be subject a contact risk assessment (Appendix 5 to be developed)

Following the visit, the social workers (for child, Adopters and Family Finder) will then report back to their respective managers for a decision about whether the Fostering for Adoption placement should proceed. The final decision to proceed rests with the Team Manager for the child.

All parties should be informed of their decision to proceed and provide reasons if not proceeding within 48 hours; a longer period for reflection can be agreed as required.

At the same time the prospective Fostering for Adoption Carers should have time to reflect with support from their Adoption Support Social Worker before confirming a wish to proceed. The Family Finding Social Worker and Child’s Social Worker should be updated by the Adoption Support Social Worker of the decision.

Careful consideration does need to be given to the matching decision taking account of a range of factors relevant to the fostering placement as well as the potential adoption match at a later stage. However, it is important to note that this is not an adoption placement and so cannot be treated as one. It is not appropriate to follow the usual shortlisting and matching procedure and the relevant information regarding the child or family may not be available at this stage. Decisions should be made speedily to minimise any delay for the child or any unnecessary moves between placements.

Following Managers agreement to proceed, a further meeting is then to take place with the prospective Fostering for Adoption carers at which information required for the CoramBAAF Approval of Reg. 22C Placement and Temporary Approval as Foster Carer Form will be gathered by Child’s Social Worker with the family finder and the Adopter’s social worker. This is child specific and addresses how these carers can meet the child’s identified needs and covers more of the role and expectations about being a temporary foster carer.

**Temporary approval of Approved Prospective Adopters as Foster Carers**

The Report for Temporary Approval as A Foster Carer (Regulation 25A Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations) will be completed jointly by the Child’s Social Worker and the Adoption Support Social Worker (please see Appendix 7).

The final report alongside the associated documents below should be submitted to the Family Finding Manager for Quality Assurance. A review of the documents will be necessary to ensure that all relevant information is contained and for them to provide any necessary advice to the Agency Decision Maker to make their decision.

Once the Report for Temporary Approval as A Foster Carer has been signed off by the Family Finding Manager, the Family Finding Social Worker will submit the following paperwork to the Designated Officer for the relevant Local Authority for the child.

* The Report for Temporary Approval as A Foster Carer;
* The Prospective Adopters’ Report;
* The Suitability to Adopt Panel Minutes and ADM Decision;
* A recent assessment of the child’s needs (i.e. Pre-birth assessment; CPR; Interim Care Plan);
* Outcomes for connected person’s assessments / other family assessments.
* Any associated Legal Advice

The Designated Officer must be satisfied that:

* The placement is the most appropriate available for the child and will safeguard and promote his/her welfare; and
* The child’s wishes and feelings have been ascertained and given due consideration; and the IRO has been informed; and If their whereabouts are known, the child’s parent(s) /guardian(s) have been notified.

The decision, with reasons, will be recorded by the Designated Officer on the Approval of Reg. 22C Form, which should be uploaded on the child's and prospective adopter's electronic case record (it is important to ensure that no confidential information regarding the prospective adopter is uploaded on to a child's electronic case record).

Following the Designated Officer’s decision, the Child’s Social Worker with support from the Family Finder, must ensure that the following written notifications are undertaken;

* Birth parent/s (including fathers without parental responsibility)
* Prospective adopter(s)
* The decision must also be explained to the child in the appropriate manner, having regard to the child’s age and understanding.

Prior to confirming whether they wish to progress with the proposed placement on the basis of Fostering for Adoption; If the child has already been subject to an adoption medical examination the potential carer(s) should be given the opportunity to meet with the Agency's Adoption Medical Adviser, if not they should be given the opportunity to speak with the Looked After Children's Nurse to discuss any health or developmental issues known to have relevance to the child;

If the child is already placed with foster carer(s) the potential carer(s) should be given the opportunity to meet the child's current foster carer(s)

In discussion with the Fostering for Adoption carer(s), a brief introduction plan will be produced by the Family Finder in conjunction with the family, children social worker and adopter’s social worker. For a new-born baby this will involve visiting the child in hospital from the earliest possible point and for a child already in foster care, visiting him / her in placement. The duration of introductions of this will vary according to the child’s age and circumstances and will be agreed by the relevant managers.

The child will then be placed as a foster child and placement support will be provided by the Adopters social worker and child’s social worker in the placing authority.

On Placement there will be a one-off visit by the Fostering worker from the relevant LA/CT to the Fostering for Adoption carer to complete the Foster Carer agreement and any other relevant agency paper work regarding the foster carer role with such as supervision agreements, Foster Carer agreement, safe care policy, recording policy, delegated authority, and expectations about training.

From this point the adoption social worker fulfils the role of fostering social worker and will undertake all duties assigned to this role. The Fostering SW will be available to advise/consult with when required.

The prospective adopters will receive fostering allowances under the fostering to adopt arrangement but are not eligible for any additional fostering fee, as their primary approval is as adopters. (Appendix 10 - Supervision of Early Permanence Carers whilst they are foster carers)

As such they will therefore not be entitled to any transitional payment once the placement becomes an adoptive arrangement.

The child's social worker is to complete all notifications in accordance with the Care Planning Regulations, taking care to ensure that placement details are confidential.

The child's care plan will be progressed under the Looked After Children, Care Planning and Placement regulation. Statutory visits will be required within the first week of placement and weekly thereafter until the first LAC review. The adoption social worker and the child's social worker will usually coordinate their visits within the first month of placement. These visits will be reviewed at the LAC review within 28 days of placement.

Arrangements for the involvement of the birth parents within the review process will reflect the child's legal status and the need to maintain appropriate confidentiality. Independent Reviewing Officers may undertake each review in two parts to enable birth parents and prospective adopters to attend separately.

Where there are indications that the placement order is likely to be, or is, refused by the court, or where further family assessments are directed by the Court. The relevant LA/Trust to notify the

Adopters Social Worker immediately, and a statutory review /Professional meeting will be convened urgently to consider changes to the plan and actions required.

The review should include Legal Services, Health Visitor and the Social Workers for both the child and the prospective adopters. NB A separate meeting will be required to develop a detailed reunification plan, to include details of preparation and support for birth parents and FFA carers, and to identify a detailed timetable of introductions and clear identification of roles and responsibilities of all involved.

Once a LAC review has recommended that rehabilitation is not a viable option for the child and that the child's needs are best served through adoption; the child's social worker presents the Should be Placed for Adoption plan to the ADM in the usual way in line with

adoption procedures.

Following the ADM reaching her/his decision, The Panel process and ADM process will mirror that for any proposed match of a child in care. (see family finding and matching policy).

A matching meeting will be convened by the child's family finding social worker and attended by the child's social worker and the adopters' social worker, to discuss and agree he strengths and vulnerabilities of the match and to agree a plan to present the match to the Adoption Panel. A further meeting to take place between Adopters, and Adopters Social Worker, to confirm that they want to proceed.

The Adoption Panel should be booked in advance of the placement order being granted in order to avoid any delay in the child being placed for adoption. Once the Placement Order is granted, the match will be presented to Adoption Panel and subsequently to the Agency Decision Maker. The decision letter from this panel will also formally note that the approval as foster carers has now ended.

For the placement to become an adoptive placement, a joint visit is undertaken by the adoption social worker and the child's social worker. The FFA Adoption Placement Plan will be completed during this visit. (FfA Adoption Placement Plan to be developed). From the date the placement is

agreed as an adoptive placement the care plan will be reviewed in line with the Adoption Agency Regulations. The adoption procedures are to be followed whereby the placement is confirmed in writing to the prospective adopters, the exercise of parental responsibility agreement is completed and any financial support received under the Fostering Regulations will cease. The child's social worker must notify the nominated worker in the relevant Local Authority/Childrens Trust Fostering Team of the child's change of circumstances to end the adopters' fostering status.

**Note**: Under Section 42 of the Adoption & Children Act 2005 the child must have had his home with the applicant or, in the case of an application by a couple, with one or both, at all times during the period of ten weeks preceding the application. Therefore, in a case where there has been a Fostering for Adoption placement, the adoption application can be made as soon as practicable after the Agency Decision is made (so long as the 10-week residence requirement is satisfied).

7. Adopter recruitment, preparation and assessment

*See also Practice Guidelines and policy for Enquires & pre stage 1, Stage 1 and Stage 2.*

Fostering for Adoption Carers offer a very special service to children unable to live with their families, putting themselves forward to care for children for life. They take a huge emotional risk when fostering a child with a view to adoption because it is possible that the child may be reunified with the birth family. As such, they will need to have demonstrated capacity to manage the stresses of uncertainty and to work with a change of plan whilst experiencing the symptoms of grief. Fostering for Adoption Carers will receive support and training to understand the risks inherent in these and if the child does return to the birth family, they will be given support to address their emotional needs to enable them to support the child to move to their new home.

From the outset applicants who are interested in adoption will be introduced to information about fostering for adoption from the enquiry stage of the process, through the Adoption@Heart Website and Adoption Information leaflet provided to potential adopters on enquiry.

Information evenings and initial visits are used to raise awareness of Fostering for Adoption as a possible route to adoption and to give initial information about the process and what is involved. If applicants express an interest in learning more then this should be noted in the Initial Assessment Visit report and on the Registration of Interest form.

In Stage 1, prospective adopters who are interested in Fostering for Adoption are identified and provided with detailed information both verbally and in writing. Information about Fostering for Adoption as a route to adoption is also included the Preparation Training during Stage 1.

The Foster to Adopt training will cover the following:

* Written information about fostering to adopt, the benefits for the child and potential risks for them as prospective adopters – potential issues that might arise, their implications and impact on the placement not leading to adoption;
* Preparation for placement at short notice – practical implications;
* The impact of the arrangement on other children in the household;
* Explaining the placement to other children and family members;
* Working with rehabilitation plans and managing contact.
* Legal parameters of the arrangement and differences
* Relationships with the agency – the role and responsibilities of the different workers involved; and
* Managing the risk and uncertainty – impact on parenting and bonding with the child.

Key information that prospective adopters will need to be provided with regarding the fostering role:

* The availability of information on the child and the child’s family including the child’s siblings. This will be less in the fostering phase than should the placement progress to one of adoption.
* The nature and meaning of parental responsibility, what it means in relation to a looked after child, the level of parental responsibility which will be delegated and what it means on a day to-day basis.
* The role of the local authority in assessing, planning and decision-making for the child and the child’s family.
* The nature of care proceedings and the placement order application, timing and process.
* The position and role of the birth parents and their rights and responsibilities.
* The arrangements for contact between the child and the birth parents and any other significant people in the child’s life.
* The role of the child's social worker and the fostering supervising social worker.
* The significance of the care plan, the placement plan and reviews.
* The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer.
* The requirement to keep appropriate records.
* The availability of support including parenting support, health and education.
* The importance and nature of ‘safe caring’.
* Health checks and the health plan.
* Personal education plan where appropriate.
* The importance and nature of the child’s life story work and their role in gathering information and photographs for this.
* The arrangements for the payment of fostering allowances.
* Foster care competences, requirements and associated support and developmental opportunities.

In addition, adopters should be encouraged to complete the Fostering for Adoption Workbook to enable them to consider issues in detail and to facilitate discussion and provide evidence for their PAR.

During Stage 2 assessment, Fostering for Adoption should be fully explored with adopters and the assessment to include an indication of their suitability for Fostering for Adoption. This will focus on resilience and capacity to manage the uncertainty of a Fostering for Adoption placement. Where this is the case, the PAR will include specific sections evidencing this. It may be that prospective adopters can consider Fostering for Adoption placements under certain circumstances but not others; for example, where the baby has been relinquished and this should be clearly identified in the PAR. In the few cases where the prospective adopters do not currently wish to be considered for FFA the PAR must contain clear detailed analysis of what the vulnerabilities are in relation to FFA in order to assist with future decision making. The recommendation will be kept under review and all adopters who are not approved for FFA at the time of approval will be offered further post approval training and support in relation to FFA.

The adoption social worker will recommend if the prospective adopters are suitable for

fostering to adopt in the Prospective Adopters' Report.

The adoption panel when considering the approval of an adopter will give advice to the agency on their suitability to have a child placed as Fostering for Adoption. The Agency Decision Maker will also state a view on whether there are any particular reasons that may preclude the applicant from a foster to adopt placement albeit decisions about this will be made post approval in relation to specific children.

NB. Some adopters may not be considered suitable for Fostering for Adoption at the point of approval, but this may change post approval in relation to potential matches (e.g. a relinquished baby or the sibling of a child already adopted by them). Where this is the case there is no requirement for the agency to take this back to panel. Fostering for Adoption Training will be offered to these adopters and an addendum to the PAR completed.

Following their approval to adopt prospective adopters who are open to considering Fostering for Adoption will be considered for all children who become available for placement who fit within their placement criteria including any children for whom a Fostering for Adoption Placement is being sought (who they would otherwise not be considered for);

Where the prospective adopter(s) are identified as potentially providing a suitable 'match' for a child who has a 'Fostering for Adoption' plan the procedure above Section 6 will be followed

Following a match being made, other Key information that prospective adopters will need to be provided with by the adoption service:

* When the agency expects to make a decision on adoption if it has not already done so.
* The procedure following the making of a Placement Order.
* The matching report, matching panel and matching certificate.
* The continuation of life story work.
* Parental responsibility, changes to delegated parental responsibility and the adoption placement plan following the matching panel
* Assessment for adoption support, including the cessation of the fostering allowance and the application for adoption pay and leave.
* Contact and 'goodbyes' with the birth parents.
* Applying for an Adoption Order

8. Further information and related guidance

Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations (2015)

Early Permanence Placement and Approval of Prospective Adopters as Foster Parents

(July 2014), Statutory Guidance.

Fostering for Adoption Practice Guidance (CoramBAAF).

The Role of Fostering for Adoption in achieving early permanence for children Elaine Dibben

and Viv Howarth – Good practice guide (2017).

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Screening Matrix



Appendix 2 – Notification Form

Appendix 3 – Fostering for Adoption Checklist for Social Workers



Appendix 4 – Fostering for Adoption information for Birth Parents



Appendix 5 - Consideration of contact arrangements & Risk Assessment



Appendix 6 – CoramBAAF Practice Note 59 - The provision of information to Fostering for

 Adoption carers



Appendix 7 – The Report for Temporary Approval as A Foster Carer (Regulation 25A Care

 Planning, Placement and Review Regulations)



Appendix 8 - Supervision of Fostering for Adoption Carers whilst they are foster carers

Appendix 9 - Fostering for Adoption: Adopters Journey Quick Guide.



Appendix 10 - Fostering for Adoption - Childs Workflow

