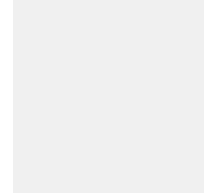


Foster Carers Wishing to Adopt



SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

Local Authority Foster carers who wish to adopt the child they are fostering and who has lived with them for more than one year must notify the Local Authority of their intention to apply to adopt that child (sect 42 and 44 Adoption and Children Act 2002).

This is the guidance and procedures which address the issue of foster carers wishing to adopt.

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1. Expressions of Interest From Foster Carers

When a foster carer expresses an interest in adopting the child in their care the situation requires careful assessment and each case needs to be considered on its own merits.

Foster carers will frequently have a range of skills and experiences that they can bring to the placement of a child on an adoption basis. They will also have an established relationship with the child and the child will have formed attachments to the foster carers and their family members.

In making the decision about whether the foster carers should be considered as adopters there are three important principles which underlie the decision making process.

- i. That the child's planned permanency requirements should not be compromised for example by the foster carer offering permanence either by a Child Arrangements Order, special guardianship or permanent foster care when the agreed plan for the child is adoption.
- ii. Foster carers as prospective adopters must receive the same standard of preparation and assessment as provided to all adoptive parents. The only difference being, in line with the National Adoption Standards, the assessment process will be concluded within the shorter timescale of four months.

iii. The foster carers will only be considered where they have a significant and established relationship with the child. This will be judged by the following.

- a. Duration and length of time the child has been in placement.
- b. Evidence of an emotional and reciprocal attachment between the child and the foster carers.
- c. The foster carer having demonstrated a commitment to the child's overall welfare and development during placement.
- d. The foster carer having an understanding of the key differences between adoption and fostering.
- e. The foster carers having a willingness and ability to accept the full range of responsibilities for the child.

Depending on the child's age and level of understanding, the child's wishes and views will be an important consideration in deciding whether the foster carer's interest in adoption should be progressed.

The supervising social worker and the child's social worker should visit the foster carers who wish to be considered as adopters for a specific child and discuss with them, the implications arising from the request for both themselves and the child. Where the conclusion of this assessment is that the foster carers could potentially meet the requirements of adoption and offer an adoption placement for the child, and where the contra-indications are assessed as manageable and would not make the proposed placement vulnerable in the short or longer term, a request should be made in writing by the child's social worker to the Adoption Team manager for a pre-matching meeting.

The pre-matching meeting will include the child's social worker, his or her team manager and the foster carers' supervising social worker (with his or her manager where appropriate). The chair of the meeting will be a senior practitioner from the Adoption Team or the Adoption Team Manager. If the outcome of the meeting is that the foster carers appear able to meet the child's essential needs, an assessment of the foster carers as adopters will proceed, including their attendance at preparation and training groups. The adoption assessment will be undertaken by a social worker from the Adoption Team

If they are approved as adopters, the requirements as to the approval of the match and to the provision of information and notification of the placement must be followed.

If evidence shows that the foster carers are not able to meet the child's essential needs, then the carers will be notified in person by the assessing social worker and this is confirmed in writing by the Adoption Team manager. (Copy on the carers and child's file). The foster carers' supervising social worker will provide support and counselling to the foster carers as appropriate.

If the foster carers decide to proceed with an application to adopt the child without the agreement of the agency, the procedures regarding non-agency adoptions will apply.

2. Good Practice Guidelines

Listed below are good practice guidelines which should be used to inform social work practice when considering foster carers who express an interest in adoption.

The issue of permanency should be addressed as part of the statutory review process; at the four month review

Following the four month statutory review; the supervising social worker should discuss with the foster carers in their next available supervision their view of the child's care plan. If adoption is likely to be the overall plan for the child; the supervising social worker should advise the foster carer that should they wish to be considered they should do so now. Factors to be considered include; age of the child and the carer, ethnicity of the child and carer, motivation to adopt, future fostering plans, bedroom space, location issues, finance if adoption is pursued, their support networks and the need for them to attend adoption training.

If an adoption assessment is commenced; it is generally accepted by all agencies that no other children should be placed in the foster home. However, in some circumstances this is unavoidable for example if there is a shortage of other available placements. This would also not apply if the child in question has been with the foster family from birth and therefore knew of no other care other than what they have experienced whilst with their foster family. It is also likely they will be used to the arrival and departure of other children.

Towards the end of the assessment, a joint assessment visit should be undertaken by the assessing social worker, the child's social worker and the supervising social worker. The focus of this session will be to explore their future fostering plans. Under Walsall's permanence financial support strategy, the household fee they receive can be paid for up to 2 years (from the date they are matched with the child at adoption panel), without the carers having to take foster placements. It is in effect "protected" and was introduced into the adoption support regulations to enable foster carers who adopt and the children they adopt to be afforded time to adjust and settle into the new family arrangements.

If however they wish to continue to foster, it is at this time that a re-assessment of them as new family unit needs to be undertaken to include the needs of the child they are hoping to adopt. The issues to be looked at include, should they have some time when they do not foster, what ages, numbers gender should they be approved for, what are the needs of the children who could be placed with them in other words all the matching issues which are part of a fostering assessment. The supervising social worker would be responsible for writing a report summarising this part of the assessment and it would be included as an addendum to the prospective adopters' report which is presented to adoption panel. The supervising social worker would not be expected to attend the Adoption Panel.

It is not within the remit of adoption panel to make recommendations about the carers' future fostering career. However they will take into account how the carers understand and take account of this child's needs in relation to their intentions with regard to fostering when making a recommendation about their suitability to adopt this child. The carers need to be aware of this.

If the carers are matched with the child at Adoption Panel, a foster carer review will be held straight away. It is at this review that the conclusions reached within the adoption assessment in relation to their future fostering are formalised through the review and fostering panel processes.

If their terms of approval change in terms of numbers - i.e. a reduction or they decide to have a break from fostering, the supervising social worker must complete a WSS 695 in order to adjust or protect their fee payment.

It is the responsibility of the assessing social worker from the adoption team to draw up the adoption support plan including the financial support.