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**Adoption – Voluntarily Relinquished Babies**

**Referral**

* Referrals will come via the contact centre- received by the Assessment team. An Initial assessment will be completed. The case will be transferred to the LAC team at an early stage and a full discussion should be had with a permanency planning manager.
* A referral should be made to Adoption South-East (duty) who will arrange for an adoption social worker to accompany the area social worker to meet the birth parents to discuss their options
* The Child’s social worker will liaise with the hospital staff to enable suitable care to be put in place for the mother during and after delivery.
* Consideration should be given to placement choice from birth. Early Permanence via a placement with approved adopters (fostering regulations 25a) or a fostering placement. (discussion to take place with permanency planning managers- if EP is the first choice this will be taken forward with Adoption South East)
* Referral should be made to Gateway to ensure that an appropriate foster placement is available after the baby’s birth if the child requires accommodation. ( this should be in place even if the first placement choice would be early permanence as it may not prove possible to source this type of placement)

# **Birth parents**

* The allocated social worker (or duty worker in emergency situations) would expect to liaise with the birth mother, father and any other relevant parties.
* Whenever possible, both parents should be involved in the adoption process. Both legal and putative fathers will be consulted in accordance with Adoption Guidance (2011). Full discussion should be had with the parents about the possibility of family members caring for the baby and the duty of the local authority to consider this option if the child is relinquished by the birth parents.
* Adoption should be fully discussed along with any alternatives to adoption. The birth mother should be made aware that she will be given ample time (at least 6 weeks) to consider her options over the weeks after the baby is born.
* If therapeutic counselling is required, this can be offered through an independent counsellor signposted via Adoption South East.
* The child’s social worker should signpost other available sources of help or support.
* The legal process should be fully explained, including the access to birth records for the adopted person in the future.
* The child’s social worker should ensure that all looked after forms are completed with the birth parents including consents to medical treatment at an early stage. Parental health history (BAAF form PH) should be obtained from both birth parents if possible.
* As much family background and other information should be gathered as soon as possible by the child’s social worker in case it becomes difficult to contact/engage the birth parents in the future. A photograph of the birth parents and other family members should be gained at this early stage, this is required for the child’s permanence report.
* The child’s social worker should ensure that early photographs are taken of the baby and that early information relating to the circumstances of his or her birth are carefully recorded. The hospital should be asked to provide BAAF forms M & B (neonatal and obstetric reports)
* The birth parents should be encouraged to have contact with the baby after birth, and full explanation of the reasons for this should be given to the birth parents
* The birth parents should be fully informed of the linking, matching and placement process, including their legal rights at each stage.
* The birth parents should be encouraged to register the child as soon as possible (and definitely before the child is 6 weeks old) and the child’s social worker should obtain two copies of the child’s birth certificate

# **Placement in foster care**

* The baby should be placed with foster carers who are able to offer regular direct contact to the birth parents if they wish it. The birth parents should be welcomed to phone and visit the baby in foster care and be involved in child care reviews etc.
* An initial planning meeting should be held in the foster carers home and referral made to the independent review unit for a first review after four weeks.
* It is anticipated that foster carers will not be booked to go on holiday or need respite care breaks if fostering a voluntarily relinquished baby.
* If the baby has to remain in hospital, arrangements should be made for the foster carer to visit the baby in hospital pending discharge.
* The child’s social worker should liaise with hospital staff and foster carer re discharge of the baby to the foster carers home.
* The child’s social worker should visit with baby at the foster home within a week of placement.
* The child’s social worker should remain in regular contact with the birth parents and encourage them to be involved as far as they wish in the plans for their child.

# **Planning for Permanence**

* The child’s social worker should open the LCS pathway for adoption.
* The child’s social worker should complete the initial permanence planning meeting referral form on LCS and book to attend an initial Permanency Planning Meeting as soon as possible after the child becomes looked after (within 4 weeks maximum)
* The child’s social worker should refer the child to CAFCASS who will visit the birth parents to gain formal consent under section 19 (consent to placement for adoption) or section 19 and section 20 (consent to adoption) of the Adoption and Children Act. This cannot be sought until the child is 6 weeks of age.
* The child’s social worker will prepare a full Child’s Permanence Report, this should be seen and signed by the birth parents and their wishes and feelings (or reasons that these are not known) clearly recorded.
* Child’s social worker will arrange for the child to have a full initial health assessment with a paediatrician, medical paperwork is then passed to the adoption panel medical advisor for a medical advisor’s summary to be completed
* The 2011 national minimum standards for adoption state that placement of voluntarily relinquished babies should take place within 4 months of the child’s birth. The adoption panel will monitor performance against this standard.
* The child’s social worker should liase with the permanency planning manager and meet for an adoption planning meeting.
* Referral to Adoption South East via the permanency planning manager in order to source a suitable adoptive family if the child is not already placed in a regulation 25(a) placement (early permanence)
* The birth parents should be encouraged to have input into the choice of family for the child but must be advised that confidentiality of adopters will be maintained.
* Book an adoption panel meeting. All paperwork should be submitted to the adoption panel 2 weeks prior to the panel date
* Once a family is identified the procedure for linking and matching should be followed (see the procedures re children placed for adoption). The prospective adopters should have access to full information about the child, a meeting with the foster carers and an opportunity to catch sight of the child. A post adoption support planning meeting should be held. An adoption placement report should be compiled by the child’s social worker and the social worker for the chosen family. The prospective family given the opportunity to see and comment on the report prior to the panel for a maximum of 10 working days
* The adoption panel will be asked to consider if the child ‘should be placed for adoption’ *and if the prospective family has been identified* a ‘match’ can be considered at the same panel in order to avoid delays.
* The child’s foster carers should be invited to attend the adoption panel to give a picture of life with the child
* The prospective adopters should attend the adoption panel if matching is taking place on the same date as the ‘should be placed for adoption recommendation’
* Recommendations of the adoption panel will be considered by the adoption agency decision maker and a final decision made. This should be conveyed verbally to the adopters within 24 hours and in writing to the birth parents and prospective adoptive parents within 7 working days of the adoption panel meeting.

**Risk Analysis**

* This applies to voluntary baby placements where professional experience or judgement suggests that there is a significant risk that a birth parent may change their mind once a placement has been made. If there would be significant risks to the child if the birth parent were to ask for the baby to be returned to their care It is important that the birth parents are made aware that the local authority would consider applying to the court for an emergency protection order or interim care order and that they are encouraged to seek legal advice..
* Where there is any risk that the birth parents might change their minds at any stage, the prospective families need to be fully aware of these risks and the implications for themselves and the child at the earliest stage.
* If the birth parents request that the child returns to their care ( and there are no grounds for the local authority to issue care proceedings) then the child must return to their care within 1 week / 2 weeks if placed for adoption An immediate meeting of all parties should be convened to share information and decide on a plan, whether this would be to initiate proceedings or to plan a rehabilitation.

# **Introduction and placement**

* Please see procedures regarding [Children Referred for Adoption](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/surreycs/doc-library/#collapse5_3)other than voluntarily relinquished babies

# **The legal situation**

* The adoptive parents share parental responsibility with the birth parents and the local authority until the making of the Adoption Order. Section 19 consent to placement will be taken by the court to mean consent to adoption at the time of the adoption application being lodged, unless the birth parents inform the court to the contrary. If consent has been signed under section 20, the birth parents can also sign a request that so that the court does not have a duty to notify the birth parents of the adoption application and no further contact will then be made with the birth parents.

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