

Adopt Berkshire

Adoption Information



Working Together...
...Creating Families

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Please note: While children for adoption are referred to in the male tense throughout this document and social workers are referred to in the female tense, this is not meant to denote gender. Similarly while prospective and approved adopters are referred to in the plural the agency welcomes applications from single applicants on an equal basis to applications from couples.

AN INTRODUCTION

What is adoption?

Adoption is a legal way of providing permanent new families for children who cannot be brought up by their own birth parents. Usually it is only considered when every other possible alternative has been explored. An Adoption Order makes the adopted child a full member of the new family and once granted it cannot be reversed. The making of an adoption order should not be seen as an 'end' or a 'beginning', but as part of a life cycle for some children, which will include birth and adoptive parents.

Who arranges adoptions?

In England and Wales, local authorities and some voluntary organisations are authorised to make arrangements for children to be placed for adoption. When children living in the Berkshire area need to be placed for adoption this is usually managed by one of the local authorities – Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest, and West Berkshire share a dedicated adoption service 'Adopt Berkshire', while Reading and Slough each have their own adoption teams which are part of their Children's Services.

In addition to arranging the placement of children for adoption the adoption teams also work with potential adopters who are seeking information about or to be approved to adopt. Most of these applicants will, in the longer-term, adopt a child(ren) who originates from outside of their own local authority area.

'Adopt Berkshire', Reading Borough Council and Slough Borough Council work closely together in a consortium arrangement and whilst maintaining individual responsibility for many aspects of the preparation, assessment and approval of the prospective adopters whose applications they progress, they co-operate in running information sessions about adoption and preparation groups for potential adopters which are open to applicants engaged with any of the agencies. The three agencies also share two adoption panels..

There are also two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Berkshire: 'Parents and Children Together' (PACT) is based in Reading and, in addition to recruiting domestic adopters specialises in dealing with inter-country adoptions. The other agency is the 'Cabrini Children's Society' which is based in Winchester. The contact details for these agencies are included at the end of this information pack.

'Adopt Berkshire' welcomes enquiries from applicants who live outside of the Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham, Bracknell and West Berkshire geographical areas. The contact details for all three of the Berkshire local authority adoption teams are included at the end of this information pack.

What children are available for adoption?

In Berkshire, our greatest need is to recruit adopters able to offer placement to children aged under eight years. Around three quarters of the children currently being placed for adoption by the six Berkshire local authorities are of pre-school age and around half of them are aged under two years when their plan for adoption is agreed; however the younger children who are available for adoption will almost always have been exposed to drugs and/or alcohol in-utero which may have long-term implications for their later development. Some children who need adoptive families need to be placed alone, some in families with their brother(s) and/or sister(s). Some children have health or medical problems and/or developmental delay while others have physical differences and/or learning disabilities. Virtually all children who are available for adoption will have complex family backgrounds and will have been removed from the care of their birth families against the wishes of their birth parent/s. When this is the case this will have involved Court proceedings.

The children available for adoption both from within Berkshire and nationally will reflect the racial, cultural and religious backgrounds of the populations within the areas from which they originate. When placing Children in Care for adoption local authorities will try firstly to identify appropriate prospective adopters for each child who reflect the child's culture and religion of heritage and who speak the child's first language, however placing authorities are mindful of the damage that can be caused to children by a prolonged delay in achieving a permanent placement and children will generally not be kept waiting in order to achieve an exact match where a family can be identified who is able to meet most if not all of the child's identified placement needs.

WHY ARE CHILDREN ADOPTED?

Almost always a child is placed for adoption because of difficulties within his own family which cannot be resolved in a time-scale appropriate to the child.

The birth parents of children placed for adoption have often had difficult lives themselves and the backgrounds of children available for adoption often include:

Alcohol +/- drug
abuse

Parental mental ill
health

Domestic violence

Inappropriate
behaviour/abuse

Hereditary health
factors

A history of offending
/ Imprisonment

Homelessness

Prostitution

Rape

Incest

HIV or Hepatitis

The child may have witnessed or experienced:

Being neglected

Inconsistent
parenting

Emotional abuse

Being abandoned

Violence between
adults

Physical abuse

Sexual activity
between adults

Sexual abuse

The death of a
parent

Many changes of
carer

Adults under the
influence of alcohol
or drugs

A chaotic lifestyle

CHILDREN NEEDING PLACEMENT

The majority of the children who require adoption, both within Berkshire and nationally, are:

- Of pre-school age.

They usually have:

- Complex and/or difficult family backgrounds.

They have usually:

- Experienced inconsistent care in their earlier lives and/or neglect and/or abuse.

Both locally and nationally adopters are particularly needed for:

- Single children aged four years and over.
- Sibling groups of two or more children where one or more of the children are already of school age.
- Children of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage.
- Children from Muslim backgrounds.
- Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of on-going health/medical care.
- Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may always require a higher level of support than other children of similar age (including in some cases a level of special education provision).
- Children who have an identified learning disability.
- Children who have significant emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (including children with attachment difficulties).
- Children whose backgrounds include having a parent(s) diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties.

When placing black, Asian and mixed-heritage children for adoption, adoption agencies will, wherever possible, seek to place each child with prospective adopters who provide a good 'match', in terms of the child's culture and religion of heritage and the child's first language. However, where this is unlikely to be achievable within a timescale appropriate to the needs of an individual child, the placing authority concerned will usually give consideration to placing the child with prospective adopters who do not share the child's culture and/or religion and/or language of heritage but who can demonstrate a willingness and ability to help the child to develop a positive understanding of and connection with his culture of birth as he is growing up.

British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering* and Adoption UK* are both agencies that are involved in facilitating the placement of children for adoption on a national basis. Both agencies produce a regular Newsletter that features the profiles of many of the children within the UK for whom adoptive placements are being sought. Anyone considering adoption is able to become a member of these two organisations and to receive their newsletters, thus informing themselves of children who are available for placement.

* The addresses of both British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF) and Adoption UK, are given on page 51.

WHO CAN ADOPT?

All prospective adopters **must** meet three basic criteria to be considered to adopt

- Applicants must be **at least 21** years of age
- At least one applicant if a couple or the sole applicant must be domiciled in the British Isles or **both** of the couple or the single applicant must have been habitually resident in the British Isles for **at least** one year (see information sheet on domicile and habitual residence included in this pack)
- No applicant, nor any member of their household, can have been convicted **or cautioned** in respect of a specified offence.

We are keen to attract a wide range of prospective adopters and welcome expressions of interest from all interested parties.

While we are not always able to accept applications we will give careful consideration to the qualities and experiences being offered by all of the potential adoptive applicants who contacts us. We welcome applications from:

- Single applicants and couples of all ages
- Childless applicants and those who already have a child or children
- Applicants from different cultural and religious backgrounds
- Applicants who are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered

SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Do I need to be wealthy or to own my own home in order to adopt?

No. All prospective applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that if approved to adopt they will be able to provide a stable and secure family upbringing for a child, good physical and emotional care and age-appropriate opportunities. However, adopters come from all walks of life and provided that applicants are able to manage their income in a way that enables them to meet their family's needs, and can provide a stable home base and child-centred and age appropriate child care arrangements, specific issues around working arrangements, household income and accommodation are in themselves unlikely to preclude applicants from being approved to adopt.

While prospective adopters should generally assume that they will need to be able to meet the day-to-day costs associated with bringing up any child placed in their care, they will as the child's legal parents be able to claim any state benefits to which they would have been entitled had the child been born to them. They may also, if considering adopting a child who has particular needs as the result of a disability, developmental delay or health or emotional difficulties, or if considering the placement of a group of two or more brothers or sisters, be eligible to receive a level of financial assistance from the child's placing authority, particularly in the pre-school years.

Will I be seen as being too old to be able to adopt?

No. There is no upper age limit for applicants who wish to adopt, however all applicants need to be fit and healthy enough to be able to appropriately meet the care and parenting needs of a child who is within the age range that they are considering, through-out the child's dependent years. In general older applicants will need to consider the possibility of adopting an older child(ren) in order to maximize the likelihood of them achieving a placement.

If I have a health problem will this stop me being able to adopt?

Not necessarily. All applicants need to be fit and healthy enough to be able to appropriately meet the care and parenting needs of any child who is placed with them for adoption.

As part of the adoption process all applicants are required to have an in depth medical with their own G.P.

Potential adopters are expected to disclose **all** relevant information relating to their personal medical histories. This would include any prognosis of life threatening illnesses occurring or reoccurring, any known genetic condition(s) or psychological and/or psychiatric referral or treatment, concerning the applicant, a member of the household, or an immediate family member. Where an applicant is undergoing, or anticipating, a significant medical procedure (including major surgery) local authorities will not usually accept an application until the procedure is concluded and sufficient time has elapsed to enable the applicant to make a good physical recovery and, depending on the nature of the surgery, to psychologically adjust to their new situation, and 'Adopt Berkshire' subscribes to this approach.

If I am overweight will this be a problem?

This is likely to depend on just how overweight you are. As stated above all applicants must be fit and healthy enough to be able to meet the full range of care and parenting needs of any child placed with them for adoption and Adoption Agency Medical Advisors will consider each applicant's BMI (Body Mass Index) when making a recommendation on his/her suitability to adopt from a medical perspective.

Are there any restrictions on un-married couples adopting?

No. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 was fully implemented in December 2005 and enables unmarried couples to jointly adopt children regardless of whether the partners are of the same or opposite gender. It will usually be expected that in the case of any couple, both partners will jointly adopt any child(ren) placed.

Do couples need to have been together for a particular length of time before they can adopt?

No. Most adoption agencies consider that the quality and strength of a relationship is more relevant to a couple's capacity to jointly provide appropriate parenting to a child than is the duration of their relationship. However where couples apply to an adoption agency to be approved to jointly adopt, the duration of their relationship will be one factor that is taken into account when assessing whether the relationship is likely to provide the long term stability and commitment that an adopted child is likely to need. 'Adopt Berkshire' subscribes to this approach.

Are couples who already have birth children able to adopt?

Yes. Applications are welcomed from applicants who already have one or more biological or adopted children, however, where there is already a child(ren) in the family, it is generally considered advisable for any future adopted child to be **at least** 12 months younger than the existing child(ren). 'Adopt Berkshire' will however consider each family individually and where there are specific reasons to suggest that the placement of an older child may be appropriate we will be open to discussing this.

Am I able to pursue an adoption application whilst undergoing fertility investigations or treatment?

Many applicants seeking to be approved to adopt will have been unable to have a birth child(ren) and some will have undergone fertility treatment. It is not a requirement that couples who have experienced difficulties in having a birth child(ren) have had fertility investigations or that any investigations or treatment have concluded, however it is widely recognised in adoption that it is preferable for applicants not to begin the process of being assessed as prospective adopters until any fertility tests/treatment that they have decided to pursue are completed, and, if unsuccessful, until they have had time to come to terms with this. 'Adopt Berkshire' will consider each situation on an individual basis and will offer the opportunity to attend an Adoption Information Session to potential adopters who are still undergoing fertility investigations/treatment. However when deciding whether to accept a Registration of Interest the Agency may prioritise applications from applicants who are no longer pursuing fertility options.

If I am working will I be expected to take adoption leave following a child being placed with me?

Yes. Where both applicants are, or the only applicant is, in full or part-time employment, one applicant will be expected to take adoption leave at the beginning of the placement. Many placing authorities require one or other prospective adopter to be available as a full-time parent for at least 12 months following a placement if the child is of pre-school age, however this may depend on the child and the family's individual circumstances.

Will it be a problem if we will need to use child-care arrangements after the first six or twelve months of a child being placed with us?

Not necessarily. Placing authorities recognise that many families need both parents to be in employment in order to financially provide for themselves and their families. However, given the history and life experiences of the children generally placed for adoption both locally and nationally, consistency of care is essential if each child is going to have the best chance to develop secure attachment and to overcome

any difficulties that he may have as a result of difficult early life experiences. Given this, all prospective adopters who will need to use substitute child care arrangements, will need to be able to identify a stable and consistent child-care arrangement that is appropriate to the age of the child and to be able to evidence the appropriateness of this arrangement to the placing authority.

I am likely to be changing job or moving house, will this prevent me being approved to adopt?

Not necessarily. All applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that their lifestyle and family situation is sufficiently stable and harmonious to provide an appropriate family environment for a child from an In Care background. 'Adopt Berkshire' will consider each situation on an individual basis, however, careful consideration will be given to the appropriateness of the Agency accepting an application where applicants are anticipating a significant change to their circumstances or where the composition of the family household is unsettled.

Is it true that you cannot be approved to adopt if you smoke?

No, but if you smoke it will affect the age of child who you will be considered for. BAAF guidance states that:

'Babies and young children up to the age of five years and all children with respiratory problems are at risk from smoking. It is therefore not in their best interests to be placed in households with smokers when equally suitable non-smokers are available, unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so, for example when the prospective Carer is a member of a child's extended family'.

Given this prospective adopters who smoke are unlikely to be matched to a young child. It is important to note that the BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) guidance also relates to applicants who use or who have in the recent past (12 months) used **any** nicotine related devices, including e-cigarettes and vaporisers. If you have been a smoker, in the past or if you are currently a smoker please discuss this with us at an early stage or your enquiry/application.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS?

Most of the children requiring adoption both locally and nationally have had difficult early life experiences and/or have complex family backgrounds. In addition many will have particular health or educational needs. As a result most of the children available for adoption have care needs over and above the norm for children of their ages. In order to ensure that prospective adopters are able to meet the care and parenting needs of these potentially vulnerable children we undertake a thorough preparation and assessment of all applicants who wish to adopt. This will include all first time applicants attending three days of Group Preparation and a series of home visits by a social worker (this is called the homestudy assessment). A number of statutory checks are undertaken on all applicants, including a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and an employment reference. All adoptive applicants are also required to undergo a thorough medical examination, usually with their own G.P.

Applicants are asked to provide details of relatives and friends willing to provide personal references as to their suitability to adopt.

If applicants are already parents and any child(ren) that they have are of pre-school or school age, they will be involved at an appropriate level in any homestudy undertaken (this will include any child(ren) who do not live in the household, if there is on-going contact between them and the applicants). If the child(ren) live in the household and are attending a nursery or are of school age a reference will be sought from the relevant nursery/school as appropriate. If applicants have child(ren) who are already adults they will generally be interviewed as additional 'referees' and, if they still live in the household, also involved in one or more family interview.

If an applicant has been involved in a previous partnership that involved the shared upbringing of a child(ren) (whether their own child or someone else's) a reference will usually be sought from the previous partner.

If an applicant is employed or has previously been employed in a setting/s where he/she is/was directly involved in the care or education of a child(ren), whether in a paid or a voluntary capacity, a reference will be sought from his/her employer/s. Unlike a standard employment reference this reference will specifically ask if the individual or organisation concerned has any knowledge that suggests that it would be inappropriate for the applicant to be entrusted with the care of a child(ren).

If an applicant has previously progressed an application to be approved to adopt with another adoption agency (whether a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency) a reference will usually be sought from the agency irrespective of the outcome of the application.

THE 'ADOPTION CIRCLE'

The placement of a child for adoption is usually the beginning of a lifelong relationship not just between the child and his adoptive family, but also between the adoptive parents and the child's immediate and sometimes wider birth family members. While the significance of the child's birth parent(s), brother(s) and/or sister(s) and/or grand-parent(s) may vary over time as the child moves through different stages of his development, adopted children will usually have an interest in and think about their various birth relatives at different times, and they need their adoptive parents to be able to acknowledge this, to encourage them to express their concerns and to be willing to answer their questions.

It is usual practice these days for a child's prospective adopters and birth parent(s) (and sometimes grand-parents) to have the opportunity to meet each other at around the time that the child is placed for adoption. These meetings are supervised by social workers who are experienced in adoption work and the confidentiality of the prospective adopters is preserved. While such a meeting may not be easy for either party, both the prospective adopters and the birth relatives usually later report that they are glad to have had the opportunity to see and talk directly to each other.

Many adopted children will have some form of on-going contact with different members of their birth families throughout their childhoods. This is usually only on a face-to-face basis with birth brothers and/or sisters who are placed in other permanent families although, in some cases, direct but carefully planned and supervised contact may be on-going with a birth parent(s) and/or grandparent(s) and/or a sibling(s) who remains living in the birth family. More often contact with birth family members, other than siblings, is maintained by an exchange of letters (sometimes including photographs), through an intermediary service. The six Berkshire local authorities have a shared 'Information Exchange Service' that facilitates and manages any arrangements set up.

Every child placed for adoption should have a "Life Book" to take with him to his new family, which provides an account of his early life and photographs of his birth parents and extended family members. Each child should also be provided with a Later Life Letter which provides a more detailed explanation of the child's birth family background, his early life experiences, the situations of his most significant birth family members and an explanation about why the decision was made for the child to be adopted. Both the Life Book and the Later Life Letter are 'tools' to assist adoptive parents in supporting their child to develop an age-appropriate understanding of his situation as he grows-up.

Adoption is a lifelong commitment which involves not only the adoptive parents and the child but also the adopters' whole family and social network.

A FEW POINTS TO CONSIDER

Be realistic:

Think carefully about the changes that you will need to make to accommodate a child or children in your family. How much experience do you have of caring for children? Think carefully about whether a single child or a group of two or three children would be most appropriate for you. Do not over commit yourself. It is better to adopt fewer children than to risk difficulties later on. If the placement breaks down, this could be tragic for the child or children and for yourselves.

Think ahead:

You can adopt one or two children now, with a view to then extending your family at some point in the future when your child/ren have settled in, however, be aware that you may later find that the time is never quite right to adopt a further child/ren.

Consider what needs a child might have:

Each child is unique and will have specific needs of his own. Some will have special needs linked to emotional, social or behavioural difficulties, to developmental delay or learning difficulties or to health or medical problems or physical disabilities. Some children benefit from being placed as the only child in the family, while others need to be placed with a brother(s) or sister(s) or are best suited to being placed in families where there are already other children.

It is generally not appropriate to place a child who has had difficult early life experiences in a family where there is already an existing younger child(ren), both because of issues of completion/rivalry that can arise and because of the influence that the child's behaviours and needs may have on the younger child(ren).

Look at your own family relationships:

As a child, what did it mean to you to have brothers or sisters, or not to have them? What does it mean now?

Involve the rest of your family:

If you already have a child(ren), consider and discuss the likely impact on them.

If you are in regular contact with your extended family members discuss your interest in adopting with them. They are the potential grandparents, aunts, uncles and/or cousins of any child who you might adopt and their views/attitudes could make your future family life either easier or more difficult.

Involve your close friends:

Your friends are also a potential source of support. If they have reservations about you adopting you need to know them and understand the reason for their concerns.

Get information, training and support:

Find out as much as you can about adoption from different sources and also about general parenting issues. Talk to the parents that you know who have children of different ages, about what they find challenging/rewarding and how they may have dealt with difficulties that have arisen for their children at

different ages or in different situations. Talk to other families who have adopted, and to children and adults who were themselves adopted ('Adopt Berkshire' can put you in touch with other adoptive families).

Think about what steps you can take to best prepare yourself for 'instant parenthood':

The more direct experience you can get of caring for children who are of similar age to the child who you hope to adopt the more confident and capable you will be in managing the demand of caring for a child in the early weeks of placement. If you are not already a parent, think about what you can do to increase your level of childcare experience: can you care for your relatives' or friends' children on an occasional or regular basis or can you volunteer as a helper at a local nursery or infant school or at a local playgroup or children's club or activity group e.g. Beavers / Cub Scouts / Rainbows / Brownies / Boy's Brigade / Girls' Brigade / Sunday School, Toddler Group etc.? If you are already a parent are there opportunities that you could pursue to gain experience of caring for children who are not related to you and who perhaps are different to your own child(ren) in terms of their personalities, abilities, interests and care needs ?

Realistically it often takes some time to arrange to undertake voluntary work with nurseries or children's clubs or activity groups because of the need for volunteers to be DBS checked. Given this the earlier that you can approach any appropriate organisations and get the wheels in motion the better your chances of gaining relevant experience.

Be honest and flexible about possible future contact arrangements:

Different children will have different needs in terms of future direct or indirect contact with members of their birth families. Be realistic about what you can offer in both the short and the long-term. It is important that you are able to honour any agreement made. It is better to negotiate a lower level of contact and to then positively facilitate and support it in the longer-term, than to agree a high level of contact but then let other parties to the agreement down.

As an adopted child grows up and moves through different developmental stages his interest in/commitment to/wish for information about and/or contact with different members of his birth family will change and as an adoptive parent you may at times need to balance the child's current needs and/or stated wishes with his likely best interests in the longer term.

Ask for help from the outset:

When a placement is confirmed there may be financial support available for purchasing some of the initial equipment that you may need for the child. Additionally an adoption allowance may be payable on an on-going basis if the child has particular needs as the result of a disability, developmental delay or health or emotional difficulties or if he is to be placed with a brother or sister.

Consider therapy:

Some children may need extra support to come to terms with difficult experiences. Some will benefit from either time limited or longer term therapeutic support either at around the time of placement in their adoptive families or at later stages in their childhoods.

As an adoptive parent you may also need additional support if the child placed with you is experiencing or presenting on-going emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Consider Post Adoption Support:

All local authorities that are responsible for placing children are required to support and supervise each child's placement until the legal adoption process is complete. Depending on the circumstances of a

placement the placing authority will in some instances withdraw at the point of the child's legal adoption, however where the child and/or other members of the adoptive family continue to have on-going support needs the placing authority may continue to provide support until three years after the child's legal adoption. 'Adopt Berkshire' provides support to all of the adoptive families with whom the Agency works, up to the point of the legal adoption of any child/ren placed. Thereafter each child's placing authorities will hold responsibility for any ongoing support required until three years after the granting of the adoption order. Where necessary the agency will seek to negotiate a longer-term support package with the relevant placing authority, before the adoption order is granted. The fact that you or a child who is placed with you may experience difficulties does **not** mean that you have failed.

INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

Given that few very young infants without some health problems or disabilities are available for adoption in the UK, some people who are considering adoption decide to adopt from abroad, particularly if one or both partners either originates from, or has strong connections with, a possible donor country.

The six Berkshire local authorities are committed to ensuring that prospective adopters who wish to consider adopting from abroad are able to access appropriate services. All the authorities have a formal agreement in place with Parents and Children Together (PACT), a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, which provides counselling and information to applicants enquiring about adoption from abroad. PACT also undertakes the preparation and homestudy assessments of applicants who decide to pursue a formal inter-country adoption application and on completion applicants are considered by the PACT adoption panel.

Information on inter-country adoption can be obtained directly from the Inter-Country Adoption Manager at PACT. (Please see the Useful Information section at the end of this brochure for contact details).

THE STAGES TO BECOMING AN ADOPTIVE PARENT

Initial Enquiry and Registration of Interest

- At the point of an Initial Enquiry from a potential adopter, general information will be provided by an adoption worker and/or an Information Pack sent out.
- If an Information Pack is sent out without an initial telephone conversation this will be followed up by a telephone contact within 3 working days.
- All potential adopters will be offered the opportunity to attend an Information Session about adoption (held monthly).

Note: attendance at an Information Session is not compulsory but is strongly recommended as it enables potential adopters to meet other prospective applicants, who are in a similar position to themselves, and also approved adopters able to share their experiences.

- Potential adopters will also be offered the opportunity to meet with an adoption worker in their own home or at the 'Adopt Berkshire' office, to discuss their interest and their individual situation. The purpose of this meeting is two-fold. It will enable the adoption worker to answer any questions that the potential adopters may have about the adoption preparation, approval and matching process, the children requiring placement (both locally and nationally) and/or other adoption issues. Secondly the potential adopters' individual situations will be discussed in order for the Agency to ascertain if there is any reason to suggest that it would not be appropriate for the potential adopters to progress an application within the timescales that they are considering. Advice will be provided about what other options may be available to the potential adopters if either they or the Agency should decide not to progress their interest further at this stage. (This may include referral to First4Adoption).
- When there is nothing to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed a Registration of Interest Form will be provided to the potential adopters.
- On receipt of a completed Registration of Interest Form the Agency will usually decide within 5 working days if it is able to accept the application, however a further meeting or a pre-planned phone call may be required prior to a decision being reached.

The Stage One Process

- Stage One begins when the Adoption Agency accepts the potential adopters' Registration of Interest.
- The Agency will write to all potential adopters to inform them whether their application is to be progressed and if not to advise them of the alternative options available to them.
- On accepting an application the Agency will:
 - Identify an adoption worker to support the prospective adopters through the Stage One process.
 - Set up an Adoption Record.

Note: Any information supplied in respect of an application to adopt may be held and/or processed in an electronic form and will be subject to the relevant provisions in the Data Protection Act 1998 and other relevant statutes.

- The Stage One process will usually take no more than two months to complete.

- Stage One will include the following:

The Agency will request a range of personal and statutory references in respect of **each** applicant including :

- DBS disclosure
- Adoption medical
- Statutory references (including OFSTED, NSPCC and Probation)
- Previous local authority checks (if the applicant has lived in another local authority area in the previous 10 years)
- Employer's reference – current employer and any previous employer where the employment involved the applicant in caring for a child(ren). (The timing of this reference will be discussed with you)
- Personal references (a minimum of two unrelated referees and one family member)
- Reference(s) from previous partner(s) (if applicable). (The timing of this reference will be discussed with you)
- Foreign Police Check (if an applicant has lived abroad for 12 months or more since attaining the age of 18 years)
- Health Visitor or School Nurse reference (in respect of any dependent child(ren) in the household)
- Reference(s) from any childcare placement where one or both of the applicants is undertaking or has previously undertaken voluntary work.

Note: applicants are responsible for obtaining any foreign police checks required and for any costs incurred – see separate information sheet.

- The allocated adoption worker will meet with the applicants at the start of Stage One in order to:
 - Provide the opportunity to discuss their information/training needs and to agree how support will be provided through Stage One
 - Complete a Stage One Plan.
- The applicants attending a two day Adoption Preparation Group.
- The applicants completing any additional preparation and training agreed, including on-line learning.

- The allocated adoption worker will meet with the applicants towards the end of the two month period to review the prospective adopters' progress and their readiness to progress to Stage Two of the adoption process.

Note: If prospective adopters wish to take a break between completing Stage One and progressing to Stage Two, regulations require that this does not exceed six months. If it does exceed six months the Agency must consider it a new application.

- Once prospective adopters have completed Stage One satisfactorily (as agreed in the Stage One Plan), if they wish to progress their application further, they are required to notify the Agency that they wish to proceed to Stage Two of the adoption process. The letter of notification **must** be

accompanied by various documents required for the completion of the homestudy assessment process:

- An individual chronology for each applicant
- A family tree for each applicant
- An eco-map
- A financial statement
- An Experian Statement for each applicant (detailing financial history and County Court Judgements – if any).

Templates and Guidance for completing these documents will be provided during Stage One.

The Stage Two Process

- Prospective adopters cannot start Stage Two until they have successfully completed Stage One and notified the Agency in writing that they wish to proceed to Stage Two (unless they are second time adopters or approved foster-carers, for whom different expectations apply).
- On receipt of the formal notification from the prospective adopters the Agency will :
 - Identify an adoption worker to complete the homestudy assessment.
 - Identify the proposed date for the Adoption Panel to consider the application (usually around 14 weeks after the start of Stage Two).
 - Seek an employment reference from current employer. Where applicants have previously worked with children and/or vulnerable adults additional employment references will also be sought.
 - The prospective adopters will attend a further one day Adoption Preparation Group
- The allocated adoption worker will:
 - Complete a Stage Two Plan.
 - Complete the homestudy assessment (see section 'What to expect from a Homestudy').
 - Agree whether or not a 'Second Opinion' will be required when the application is considered by the Adoption Panel (see section 'The Second Opinion Report').
 - Interview personal referees.

Note: The regulations require that a minimum of two unrelated referees are interviewed for each application. Usual practice is that at least one family referee is also interviewed and in the case of couples a family member for each applicant is usually contacted.

- Interview previous partner(s) (if applicable).
- Make contact with the nursery or school/s of any child/ren already in the family (if applicable).
- Write up the homestudy report and share both a first draft and the final report (minus references) with the applicants.

- Prospective adopters will be required to sign the final version of their homestudy report (The Prospective adopters' Report – PAR) and will have the opportunity to add their comments to it prior to it being submitted to the Adoption Panel for consideration.
- When the decision is made that a 'Second Opinion' should be provided to the Adoption Panel a separate visit will usually be made by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager with a view to completing the required report. The Second Opinion Report, once completed, will again be provided to the prospective adopters for them to add any comments that they wish to make. They will be required to sign the report before it is submitted to the Adoption Panel.
- All prospective adopters will be invited to attend the Adoption Panel when their application to be approved to adopt is considered. However attendance is not compulsory.
- The adoption worker who completed the homestudy assessment will usually be responsible for presenting the application to the Adoption Panel which will make a recommendation as to whether the application should be approved. The Panel can recommend that the application be :
 - approved
 - deferred (for further work or for further information to be obtained)
 - refused.
- Where the Panel recommends approval it can also give advice as to the number and age range of children for whom placement may be appropriate.
- The final decision in respect of all applications to be approved to adopt ultimately rests with the Agency Decision Maker who will consider each application on the basis of the reports available and the minutes of the Adoption Panel discussion, and will make the final decision on the outcome of the application.

Second or Subsequent Applications or Applications from Approved Foster Carers

Adoptive applicants who have already previously adopted or who at the point of applying to the Agency are already approved as foster carers are not required to complete the Stage One process and will be subject to a tailored homestudy assessment that takes account of their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of any child(ren) already in their family. Where the applicants were previously approved to adopt but a substantial period of time has elapsed since their previous approval, applicants may be asked to undertake further training.

Note: Prospective adopters and foster carers who are interested in adopting a specific child will be assessed as to their general suitability to adopt and, if they are approved, their suitability to adopt the specific child in question will be considered within the child's matching process.

WHAT IF THE AGENCY IS NOT ABLE TO TAKE UP AN APPLICATION?

If an enquiry is received from a potential adopters at a time when the Agency is not recruiting the Agency will direct the potential adopters to one or both of the other Berkshire local authority adoption teams if they are known to be recruiting at the time and also provide details of First4Adoption who will also be able to provide advice on other agencies.

If on receipt of a completed Registration of Interest the Agency makes the decision not to accept the application the potential adopters will be informed of the reasons for this in writing. If this is a capacity issue the potential adopters will be directed to either one of the other Berkshire local authority adoption teams who is known to be recruiting and also given information about First4Adoption.

ADOPTION INFORMATION SESSIONS

'Adopt Berkshire' works in co-operation with the Reading Borough and Slough Borough adoption teams to run a rolling programme of regular Information Sessions about adoption throughout the year. A list of the dates for the coming year can be found at the front of this information pack. While it is useful for the group leaders to have some idea in advance of the numbers of potential adopters who may be attending a session, it is **not** a requirement that potential adopters notify the host authority of their attendance in advance, attendees are welcome to simply turn up unannounced. Attendees will however be asked to sign an attendance sheet on arrival, giving their name, address, home local authority and a means of contacting them (phone number or email address).

Current adoption regulations require adoption agencies to separate the provision of information about adoption to potential adopters from the process of providing specific preparation and training for the adoption task. Given this, Information Sessions concentrate on providing a basic introduction to adoption, including:

- The task of adoption.
- The adoption preparation and approval process.
- The types of children needing placement.
- The legal adoption process.
- Post adoption support.

It is **not** compulsory for potential adopters to attend an Information Session. However all prospective applicants are encouraged to attend as it will provide the opportunity to:

- Learn more about adoption.
- Meet experienced adoptive parents.
- Meet other individuals/couples who are considering adoption.

Information Sessions do not provide attendees with any information about specific children requiring adoption, as at this stage Disclosure and Barring Service checks will not have been taken up on those attending.

Any person who is considering adopting through 'Adopt Berkshire' or Reading or Slough Borough Council is able to attend an Information Session, however where an individual or couple do not meet the minimum criteria for applicants, or where applicants are aware that there is a particular issue that may impact on their application to adopt, it is strongly advised that contact is made, in advance, with the Team Manager of the adoption team to which they intend to apply, in order to discuss the appropriateness of them attending.

Attendance at an Information Session **does not** in any way commit either the individual/couple concerned, or the agency/authority, to progress their interest further after the session.

How is the Session structured?

Given that the purpose of the session is purely about giving information, it mainly consists of presentations around different topics and related discussions and there is no expectation that those attending participate in either small or large group exercises and no personal information will need to be shared at this stage.

The Session will include presentations by some experienced adoptive parents and the opportunity to talk informally with them.

Following each Information Session, all of those who have attended will be offered a follow up meeting to discuss their individual circumstances and to explore any issues arising for them from the Information Session, if they have not already had a meeting with an adoption worker.

Note: Registration of Interest Forms and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Forms will not be made available at Information Sessions. These will be provided to potential adopters when an individual meeting takes place (whether before or after attendance at an Information Session). Likewise potential adopters should not bring completed forms to an Information Session – these should be returned directly to the Team Manager of the adoption team through which the application is to be progressed.

ADOPTION PREPARATION GROUPS

All first time prospective adopters are required to attend Adoption Preparation Groups unless they are already approved local authority foster carers who are seeking to adopt a child who is already in their care. (While not required to attend preparation groups foster carers will still be encouraged to attend Preparation Groups if this is likely to be helpful to them in their future care of the child concerned).

Preparation Groups are held over three full days. Prospective adopters will be asked to attend the first two days during Stage One of the adoption process and then day three during Stage Two of the adoption process. There will usually be between 16 – 24 people on a course.

'Adopt Berkshire' works in co-operation with Reading Borough Council and Slough Borough Council to run a rolling programme of Preparation Groups throughout the year and these will be hosted at different venues according to who is the host authority. A list of forthcoming dates and the host authorities for the different groups to be held in the coming year can be found at the front of this Information Pack. Prospective adopters will only be able to enrol to attend Preparation Groups once they have submitted a completed Registration of Interest to 'Adopt Berkshire' or to Reading or Slough Borough Council, **and** their application has been accepted. Prospective adopters will then be asked to confirm which Preparation Groups they plan to attend during Stage One and to commit to attending **both** days of the course. In the case of couples applying to adopt it will usually be expected that both partners attend the same course, although where this is not possible arrangements can be made for partners to attend consecutive courses.

How is the group structured?

Informality is the essence of the course. The aim is to build on the information given in Information Sessions, enabling applicants to develop a more in-depth understanding around different aspects of adoption and about the needs of children requiring placement, both locally and nationally. This is achieved by a combination of presentations and small and large group discussions and exercises and there will be the opportunity to discuss various adoption related issues and anonymised case-studies in as relaxed a way as possible.

Note: Our aim is to make our Preparation Groups as inclusive an experience as possible. They are always run in English, however where applicants' first language is not English, or where applicants have literacy difficulties, additional support can be provided both in terms of ensuring a full understanding of the course materials, and the issues presented, and in terms of seeking applicants' feed-back.

What do the groups cover?

The content of the groups is planned with a view to providing applicants with the opportunity to further develop their understanding of what adoption is about, in order to enable them to be able to make an informed decision as to whether this is an appropriate way for them to achieve or extend their family. Subjects include child development, interrupted development, attachment, loss, the potential impact of abuse on children* (physical, emotional and sexual) the effects of neglect, the implications of different background factors that may be relevant to different children needing placement (e.g. alcohol and/or drug abuse, domestic violence, parental mental ill-health, incest etc.*) attitudes to sex and sexuality, the legal context of adoption, the legal adoption process, cultural issues, anti-discriminatory practice, contact

* The agency recognises that amongst any group of applicants there may be individuals who themselves experienced abuse, neglect or other difficult issues during their own childhoods – applicants will not be expected to share any such experiences in the group setting, however if they make their situation known to the group leaders, individual or couple support will be offered should the content of any group session raise or resurrect particular issues for an applicant.

with birth families, helping a child to understand his life story and the functions of the Adoption Panel. Guest speakers may include a representative from the Adoption Panel and the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and a local authority Post-Adoption Worker. Applicants may also have another opportunity to meet with an adoptive parent/couple who have adopted via 'Adopt Berkshire' or via Reading or Slough Borough Council.

Are the groups part of the assessment?

It is recognised that how an applicant presents when attending Preparation Groups may bear little resemblance to how they present within their own home or with relatives and friends, or how they relate to children. However the adoption assessment process requires that the Preparation Groups feed in to any later homestudy assessment process. Given this all prospective adopters are asked to provide written feedback at the end of each full-day session and following the completion of each series of Preparation Groups the group leaders will complete a brief written report on each attendee, highlighting if any particular strengths or vulnerabilities were identified within the sessions which should be developed / addressed in any future homestudy assessment.

Accepting this requirement, the primary focus of Preparation Groups is about providing information and opportunities for discussion and exploration of a wide range of adoption related issues so that prospective adopters can develop their understanding of and thinking around a wide range of different issues. The group's role in the overall assessment of applicants is very much secondary to this.

The report completed by the group leaders, including a summary of the prospective adopters' views on their principal areas of learning from the course and any areas that they identify themselves as requiring further information about, will feed into the prospective adopters' later homestudy assessment and will be included in the final Prospective Adopters' Report presented to the Adoption Panel when the application for approval to adopt is considered.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A 'HOMESTUDY'

The homestudy assessment is the main part of Stage Two of the adoption preparation and assessment process and will continue to build on the preparation of the applicants for the adoption task that started during Stage One of the process.

Each applicant or couple will have a social worker allocated to them who specialises in adoption. The homestudy will consist of this worker undertaking a series of planned interviews with the applicants. Some of these interviews will take place in the applicants' home, however others may take place at a local authority office. The allocated worker will need to obtain a great deal of information about each applicant's own background and life experiences and their current lifestyle and future life plans. Any child(ren) of either applicant and any other adults living in the household will normally also need to be seen or interviewed (depending on their individual circumstances).

The purpose of the homestudy is to fully explore with the applicants what the experience of a child(ren) is likely to be growing up in the family/household and the type of child(ren) who might be best placed. It should also enable the prospective adopters to fully consider what they can provide for a child(ren) and to identify the full range of children who they may be able to parent.

What sort of characteristics are social workers looking for?

Prospective adoptive parents generally need to be:

- Child centred.
- Able to offer a safe, secure and consistent experience of family life to a child.
- Able to provide a good standard of physical care to a child.
- Able to meet the emotional, intellectual and social needs of an appropriately matched child.
- Able to adapt their style of parenting to meet the changing needs of a growing child and to recognise and accept that an adopted child from an In Care background may require a different style of parenting to their relatives and friends' children or their own birth child(ren).
- Able to accept and feel comfortable with an adopted child's origins and earlier life experiences and to maintain a non-judgmental approach towards a child's birth family members.
- Able to accept a child for who he is and to help him to understand his own life story.
- Able to support a child into independence and beyond.
- Able to work well with professionals and open to accepting advice and support.

How intrusive is the homestudy process?

This is complicated to answer. Adoption agencies have to be satisfied that prospective adoptive parents are genuine, honest, trustworthy, and likely to be able to meet the needs of any child(ren) who might be placed with them. Most importantly agencies must be satisfied for each applicant that there is no reason to believe that a child might be harmed if placed in his/her permanent care. It is important to establish that there are no factors within an applicant's personal or family history that might cause significant difficulties for the applicant in their future parenting of a child.

Homestudy interviews are always conducted with courtesy and respect, and all personal details are maintained on a confidential file. The interviews should not feel like an inquisition, but depending on the life experiences of the applicants they may need to include discussion of difficult or painful issues.

What sort of questions might be asked?

Applicants will be asked about:

- Their own upbringings and personal histories – how these have contributed to who they have become and how they might influence them as parents to an adopted child.
- Their experience of education and employment and future career plans.
- Their personalities, interests and recreational/leisure activities and how the placement of a child might impact on these.
- Significant relationships in their lives to date, including if a couple, the development of their relationship and how it functions.
- Their support network, including contact with family members, friends, neighbours etc. and how this might change/develop if a child is placed.
- Their day to day lifestyle and how the placement of a child might impact upon it.
- Their financial situation and how they propose to meet the additional costs inherent in bringing up an adopted child(ren).
- The reasons why they have pursued adoption (including previous experiences of infertility if this is an issue).
- Their experience (if any) of caring for children.
- The type of parenting that they might offer a child.
- The type of child who they might be able to most appropriately parent.
- Their understanding about the care and parenting needs of children who have an In-Care background.
- Their learning during the preparation and homestudy process.
- The impact of their culture and/or religion on their lives.

Note: The homestudy should be a two-way process and the prospective adopters have responsibility for considering how in an interview situation they can best enable their allocated adoption worker to get to know them and to develop an accurate impression of what they will be able to offer a child.

What is the Homestudy Report?

British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) has produced a standard format for homestudy reports which has been adopted by virtually all the local authority and voluntary adoption agencies within the U.K. This is called the BAAF Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR).

'Adopt Berkshire' uses this format for all prospective adopters' assessment reports. The format will be shared with you if you progress an application, however the main sections of the report are as follows:

- Summary pen picture of the applicants and their plan to adopt

-
- Family background and early experiences including education
 - Adult life – work, health and other issues
 - Relationships and support networks
 - The home, financial circumstances and lifestyle
 - Motivation to adopt, including any previous experience of infertility and/or fertility treatment
 - Parenting or childcare experience
 - Becoming adopters – an assessment of adoptive parenting capacity
 - Understanding of the needs of adopted children.

At the end of the homestudy period the assessment report (PAR) will be written by the allocated adoption worker and will be shared with the applicants who will have the opportunity to comment on it, and the issues covered within it, before the report is submitted to the Adoption Panel. The only information that is submitted to the Adoption Panel that will not be shared with applicants by the Agency is the confidential references, including their personal references and their Adoption Medical Reports. It needs to be remembered that the Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR) serves two different purposes: it is the report that a decision will be made on as to the applicants' suitability to adopt, but in many ways more importantly it is also the document that will be considered by any social worker who is later considering the prospective adopters as potential adopters for a specific child(ren). It must therefore contain all the specific details that a social worker will need, in order to be able to appropriately decide whether or not the couple concerned may provide an appropriate placement for a specific child(ren).

THE SECOND OPINION REPORT

Second Opinion reports are not required in respect of all applications, however a report will be completed in respect of any application where the information available suggests that there are factors within the application about which the Adoption Panel may require a 'second opinion'.

The decision as to whether a 'Second Opinion' is required will be made by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager of the Adoption Service at a 'Midway Review Meeting' held between the allocated adoption worker and the respective Manager, around eight weeks into the homestudy period.

A decision to complete a Second Opinion should not be in any way seen as a criticism of the applicants or of the allocated homestudy worker. Usually a Second Opinion will be completed where there are particular issues within an applicant's own life or current lifestyle that the Adoption Panel may want a manager's perspective on. These may be to do with complex relationship issues, lifestyle choices or a particular issue that is likely to significantly affect the likelihood of a placement being achieved. Sometimes a Second Opinion will be completed if the applicants and their allocated adoption worker are not in agreement around the profile of placements that it would be appropriate for the applicants to be considered for. The applicants will be made aware of the reasons why it has been decided that a Second Opinion will be provided to the Adoption Panel.

Where it is decided that a Second Opinion Report will be completed it will be completed by the Team Manager or Assistant Team Manager of the Adoption Service. The completion of the report will nearly always entail an additional meeting between the report writer and the applicants. This meeting will provide the applicants with the opportunity to express their views on the issues under consideration. Once the report is written it will be shared with the applicants and they will have the opportunity to comment on it and the issues covered within it before the report is submitted to the Adoption Panel.

ADOPTION PANEL

The six Berkshire local authorities share two Adoption Panels which both sit at least monthly. Additional Panels are held when the volume of cases needing consideration by a Panel requires it.

Who is on the Panel?

The Panel consists of a Chair who is very experienced in all matters relating to adoption, independent members such as adoptive parents, education professionals, adopted adults, social workers with experience of adoption, medical professionals and local councillors. The Panel also has a Panel Adviser and a Panel Administrator, there is also a Legal Adviser who does not regularly attend Panel but who is available should it be needed.

Panel will consist of a minimum of six Panel members (plus the Panel Adviser and the Panel Administrator).

What is the Purpose of the Panel?

The two Adoption Panels both have the same two main functions; they provide independent recommendations to the Adoption Agency Decision Makers for each of the local authorities as to:

- Whether adoptive applicants should be approved as being suitable to adopt (taking into account the profile of children needing placement for adoption both locally and nationally).
- Whether proposed 'matches' between Children in Care and prospective adopters appear to be appropriate (taking into account the potential needs/ strengths and vulnerabilities of both parties).
- Whether a child, whose case will not be heard by a Court, should be placed for adoption.

Where either of the Panels recommends that adoptive applicants should be approved to adopt a child(ren) the Panel may also give advice to the relevant agency about:

- The number of children to be placed.
- The age range, gender, needs and backgrounds of any child(ren) to be placed.

The Panels also have a role in monitoring the work of the adoption agencies that they serve.

Adoption Panels are required to focus on the interests of children needing placement. People from all walks of life may be considered as prospective adopters but no one has the right to be an adoptive parent.

Will we have the opportunity to attend the Panel?

The Adoption Panel places considerable importance on giving all prospective adopters the opportunity to be as fully involved as possible in the adoption process and welcomes the opportunity to meet applicants at the point when their application to be approved to adopt is being considered. All applicants are invited to attend the Panel meeting where their application is to be considered, but attendance is not compulsory and a decision not to attend will **not** adversely affect the outcome of the application.

What happens at the Panel?

On arrival applicants and their social worker are shown to a private waiting area. When the Panel is ready to hear the application the Panel Chair will come out to meet the applicants and they and their social worker will usually go into the Panel together. (The Panel is able to ask to meet with the social worker on

her own, prior to meeting the applicants, but this is unusual). The basis for the Panel discussion is the homestudy report and Panel members' questions are put to the applicants' social worker as the author of the Prospective Adopters' Report, however applicants are invited to contribute their views or any additional information relevant to their application in order to aid discussion. After full discussion of any issues raised by the Panel, applicants have the opportunity to address the Panel and to ask any questions that they may have. The applicants and their social worker then leave the Panel together and wait in the waiting area while the Panel reaches its recommendation. The Panel Chair then comes out of the Panel to inform the applicants, and their adoption worker, of what the Panel's recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker will be.

In the vast majority of cases the reports presented to the Adoption Panel will recommend that applicants are suitable to adopt, however the Panel can defer a recommendation whilst additional work is undertaken or information provided. Where this is the case the reasons will be clearly identified and in most cases the application will be re-considered by the Adoption Panel at a later date. The Panel can also recommend that an application is refused, however it is very unlikely that an application would progress to this stage if this were likely to be the case.

Any Panel recommendation will be sent to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker for the final decision.

After Panel

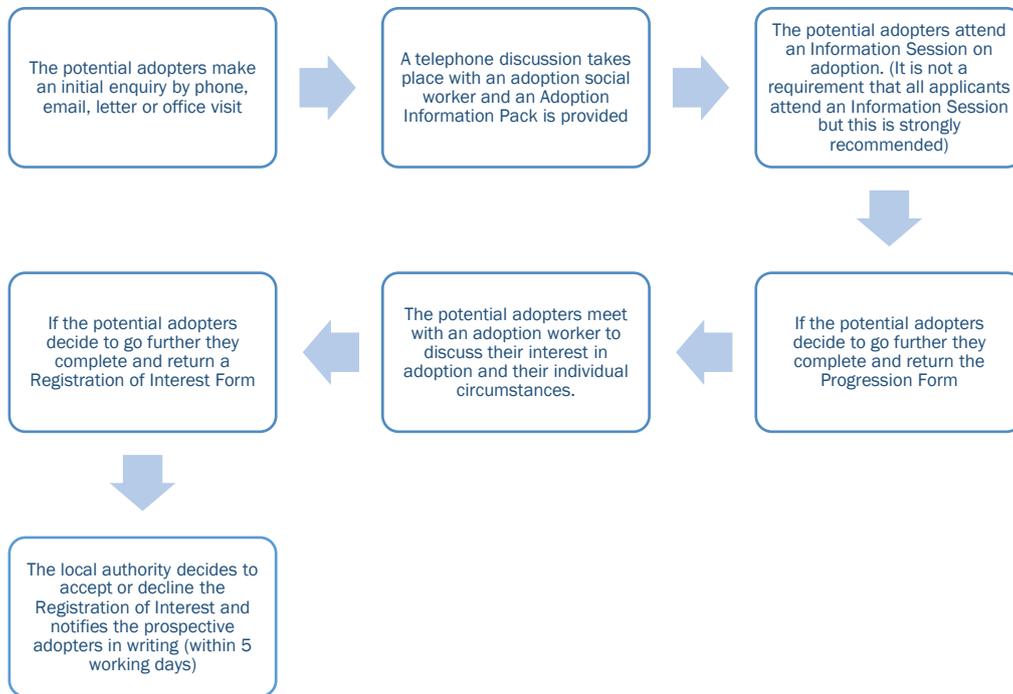
The final decision in respect of all matters considered by the Adoption Panel rests with the Adoption Agency Decision Maker for the appropriate Authority. The Agency Decision Makers for the four local authorities that are part of 'Adopt Berkshire' share the decision-making responsibilities for the four authorities between them. Decisions about the outcome of applications from prospective adopters will be reached within five working days of the Adoption Agency Decision Maker receiving the minutes of the Panel meeting and will initially be conveyed to the applicants by telephone or visit and later confirmed in writing.

In the vast majority of cases the Agency Decision Maker will support a recommendation for approval made by the Adoption Panel. However, in certain situations the Decision Maker may decide to defer or propose not to approve an application.

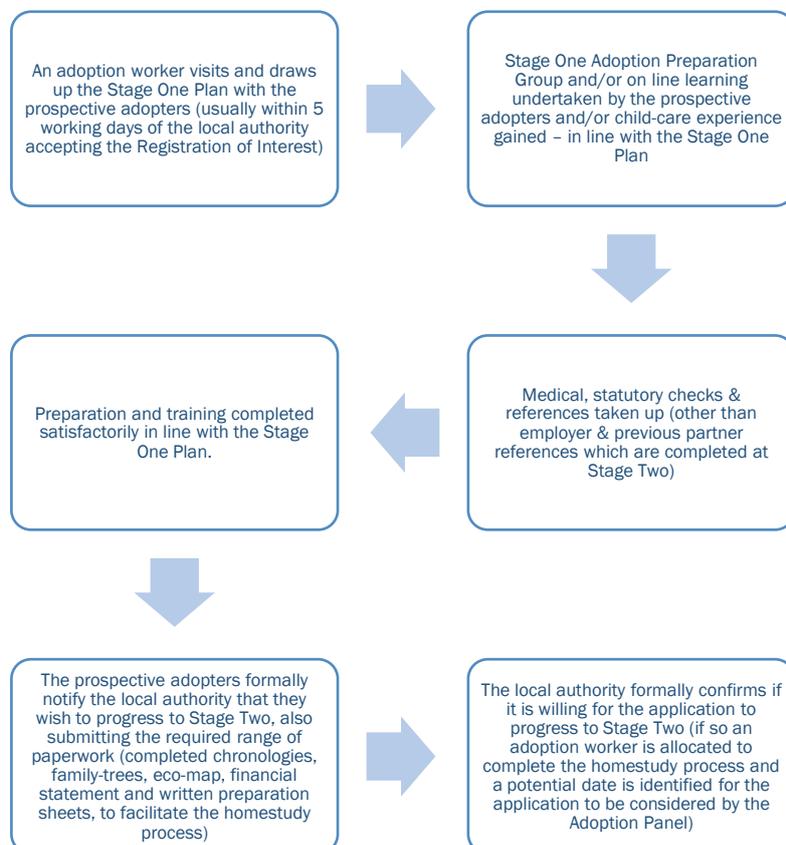
Should the outcome of an application be that the Agency Decision Maker is not minded to give approval to adopt there is a formal appeal process that applicants can opt to pursue and the application can be re-considered by a Regional Review Panel which is independent of the Agency. Written information is available detailing this process and will be provided to all applicants during Stage One of the adoption process; however it is extremely unusual for an application that progresses to the point of being considered by the Adoption Agency's Panel and the Agency Decision Maker to not be approved.

THE ADOPTION PROCESS AT A GLANCE

Enquiry Stage

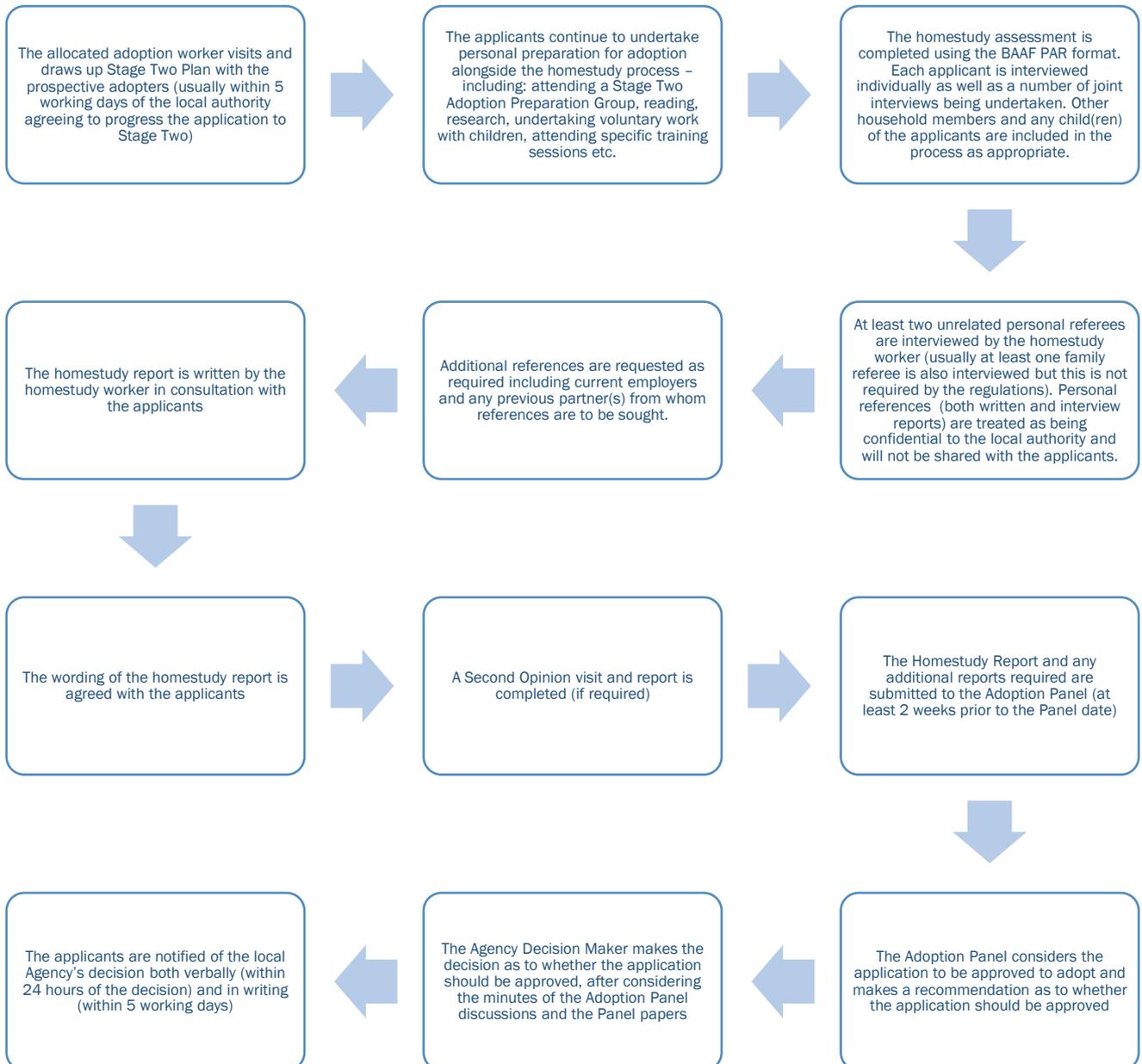


Stage One



Stage Two

There are only four months from this point to complete Stage Two of the adoption process and this concludes with the Agency Decision Maker’s formal decision, not when the homestudy is completed.



FOSTERING FOR ADOPTION

Fostering for Adoption is an arrangement that may be considered for some young children in order to enable them to move into their potential adoptive placement at the youngest possible age. In these cases, while the child's placing authority expects adoption to be the likely outcome for the child all other placement options will not have been ruled out, and it may take some months for this to be achieved.

During the period of time that other placement options are being explored the child will be placed with his prospective adopter(s) on a fostering basis and contact between the child and his birth parent(s) and/or other wider family members is likely to be on-going.

If the court later agrees that the child should be adopted the placing authority will then approve the 'match' between the prospective adopter(s) and the child and the placement will then become an adoption placement. However, if the plan for the child changes to one of rehabilitation to one or both of his birth parent(s), or to a member of the wider birth family, then the child will be removed from the care of the prospective adopter(s) and returned to the care of the birth family.

Different placing authorities have slightly different Fostering for Adoption schemes and may have different expectations of a child's carers in terms of how much involvement they are required to have with the child's birth family members during the period when the child is placed with them on a fostering basis. Concurrent planning is a version of Fostering for Adoption.

What are the advantages of Fostering for Adoption?

- The child is placed with carers who may become his future adopters, achieving permanence at an early stage.
- The child does not experience the stress and upheaval that is involved in moving from a foster home to a new adoptive family.
- The bonding between the child and his adoptive parent(s) can begin sooner.
- The adoptive parent(s) will in some cases have the opportunity to get to know their child's birth parent(s) and will be in a good position to understand their background and struggles, which may be helpful for them and their adopted child in the future.

Is Fostering for Adoption right for me?

There are a number of things that you will need to think about in making a decision as to whether you could manage the additional demands of a Fostering for Adoption placement. Initially, as a Fostering for Adoption carer you will be caring for the child as if you were his foster carer(s) and will not therefore hold any level of parental responsibility for him; you will need to consider whether this is a position that you would be comfortable with. It is likely that if adoption then becomes the plan for the child you would go on to adopt him, but during the early stages of the placement you would have to deal with the uncertainty around the outcome as there will be a possibility of the court not agreeing the adoption plan and the child then having to leave your care.

If you have a child placed with you on a Fostering for Adoption basis you will need to be resourceful and emotionally mature and able to put the needs of the child first, and respect and work with the child's birth family in the early months (which if successful may lead to the child returning to their care).

If you are considering this type of placement you will need to think carefully about how you cope with difficult and stressful situations and who will support you. There will be specific issues to be thought about in Fostering for Adoption placements and you should try to identify what this might mean for you

and your family and then discuss this with your immediate family members. While you will need to do this anyway if you are planning to adopt a child, with Fostering for Adoption there are specific issues about preparing your family for the period of uncertainty in the fostering phase that you will have to consider.

Want to know more?

If you think this may be an option for you, please discuss it with us as you move through the adoption process. A PDF, 'Fostering for Adoption – Becoming a Carer', can be downloaded from the First4Adoption web site or provided to you by our adoption team.

AFTER APPROVAL*

The process leading up to approval is quite structured, with clear time constraints, but the period between approval and being matched to a child(ren) is in most cases quite different, with no known end in sight. For many approved and waiting adopters this may last for only a few weeks or months, but for others it can last for much longer. Moreover, while the vast majority of applicants who are approved to adopt, go on to achieve a successful 'match' to a child(ren) approval does not in itself guarantee that a placement will be achieved.

On-going Support

All prospective adopters who are approved to adopt through 'Adopt Berkshire' are, after approval, allocated a link worker employed within the service. This worker will support them through the waiting period prior to a placement and will assist them to identify children for whom they might be appropriately considered. Link workers are supported in this by our Placements Officer who takes a key role in liaising with other local authorities about children requiring placement and with waiting adopters about which children they are able to consider.

Many prospective adopters also elect to remain in contact with other prospective adopters who they meet through attending Adoption Preparation Groups and find this peer support particularly helpful in the post approval/pre-placement period.

The Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium

The four local authorities that subscribe to 'Adopt Berkshire' also work in co-operation with Reading and Slough Borough Council's adoption services to facilitate the placement of children from the Berkshire area. It is not usually appropriate for children to be placed for adoption within the same geographical area from which they originate. The shared arrangement ('Adopt Berkshire') along with the consortium arrangement enables many of the children who originate from within the Berkshire area and who require adoptive placements, to be placed at an appropriate geographical distance from their originating area whilst remaining near enough to their placing authority for appropriate support to be provided by social workers who know their case and who are already familiar to the child.

Given the complexity of children's needs some children will be placed further afield.

These arrangements mean that many prospective adopters who are approved to adopt through 'Adopt Berkshire' will ultimately achieve the placement of a child(ren) via an arrangement with one of the Berkshire local authorities but some will be matched to children who originate from further afield.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a specific service set up as part of the Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium arrangement and based at Windsor. The service provides specialist advice to the six local authorities on adoption issues and takes a key role in managing the Berkshire Adoption Panels through a consortium arrangement in order to facilitate good adoption practice. As part of its role the Advisory Service offers specific post-approval training to prospective adopters and runs the Berkshire local authorities' 'Information Exchange Service' (please see below). It also facilitates an annual conference for adoptive parents from across Berkshire.

* This section attempts to provide a brief overview of the matching and placement process, however fuller details will be provided to all applicants who progress an application through the Agency, both during Stage One and Stage Two of the preparation, assessment and approval process.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and 'Adopt Berkshire' are both managed by the same Service Leader.

The National Adoption Register

The National Adoption Register was established in the summer of 2001 to facilitate the placement of children nationally who are unable to be placed within their placing authority's resources or via any consortium arrangement of which their placing authority is a member. The Register is operated by BAAF and all approved adopters who are not linked to a child(ren) within the first three months of their approval are required to at that stage be made available for consideration by other placing authorities via the Register (subject to their consent). 'Adopt Berkshire' seeks to be proactive in achieving appropriate placements for children needing placement for adoption and while all approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of a child(ren) originating from within the Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium, applicants who are approved as prospective adopters by the agency, but whose approval range suggests that they are unlikely to be 'matched' to a child(ren) via the Consortium within the first three months of their approval, will, with their consent, be referred to the Register at an earlier stage to enable early consideration of them by other placing authorities.

THE MATCHING PROCESS

Where a local authority decides that a child should be placed for adoption, the responsible social services department is required to identify prospective adopters who are likely to be able to meet the child's placement needs and to make appropriate arrangements to place the child with them.

- All placing authorities will firstly consider the appropriateness of placing children within their own resources or via any Consortium arrangement of which the agency is a member. However, where this is unlikely to achieve suitable placements within timescale appropriate for each individual child, placing authorities will seek to identify placements with prospective adoptive families living further afield through a number of other avenues including:
 - By making direct contact with other adoption agencies.
 - By referral to the National Adoption Register.
 - By featuring a profile of the child in National Newspapers or adoption related journals (BAAF 'Be My Parent' or Adoption UK 'Children Who Wait').
 - By featuring the child on a Child Placement related website.
 - By featuring the child at an Adoption Activity Day.

When applicants are approved as prospective adopters by 'Adopt Berkshire' their details are automatically available for consideration for any children who originate from the four subscribing local authorities and will also be shared with the other two local authority adoption agencies within the Berkshire Adoption Agencies' Consortium. Each prospective adoptive family will have an identified link worker who will work with our Placements Officer in seeking to identify children for whom the prospective adopters might be appropriately considered.

Prospective adopters are offered 12 months free membership of Adoption UK via the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and therefore have the opportunity to receive the 'Children Who Wait' magazine themselves. They are also able to take out individual membership with BAAF and through this to receive the 'Be My Parent' journal and access children's profiles on-line. All approved and waiting adopters should consider membership of both agencies and be willing to be proactive in enquiring about different children who are requiring placement, working with our Placements Officer and their link worker to identify whether they might be well matched to them.

Regardless as to whether a child is to be placed via a local arrangement or at a distance from the placing authority, the linking and matching process is essentially a child-led process. Every child requiring placement will have his own identified social worker and in most cases a separate adoption social worker will undertake the role of 'family finder' for him.

The child's social worker and family finder will consider the details of the families available to provide a placement for the child and prepare a short-list of families who appear to have the potential to meet the child's specific placement needs, taking into account his individual background, life experiences, personality, health, development and care and parenting needs. The family finder will then convene a linking meeting to consider the available families and to reach a decision as to which, if any, is likely to offer the most appropriate placement/upbringing to the particular child. In some cases, depending on the child's specific placement needs, short-listed families may be visited in advance of a linking meeting. However, regardless as to whether this has happened, following the meeting it is usual for the child's social worker and family finder to meet with the family or families who appear most appropriate for the child to discuss issues relating to the child with them directly before reaching a firm decision. The link worker(s) for the family or families selected will be present at any such meeting(s) and will usually also

have separate discussions with the prospective adopters to assist them to decide whether they would want to be matched to the particular child in question.

When prospective adopters are identified as being the 'family of choice' for a child they will be provided with a range of information and will have the opportunity to talk to a number of key professionals prior to having to confirm whether or not they want to proceed further with the proposed placement. They will be provided with detailed information about the child, including details of his background, earlier life experiences, personality, health, development, and identified care and parenting needs, however, it must be borne in mind that for some children the placing authority will not have complete information. Prospective adopters will also have the opportunity to talk to the placing authority's Medical Adviser (to discuss the child's health history and any particular health or developmental issues that he may have) and with the child's current carer(s) (usually foster carers) to discuss the child and any issues that the carer has faced in caring for him. If the child is already of school age the prospective adopters may also be given the opportunity to speak to the child's teacher or Head teacher. Prospective adopters do not usually have the opportunity to actually see or meet the child until after a proposed match has been formally agreed, however photographs and usually a DVD of the child are shared if the prospective adopters wish to see them (some applicants prefer not to see a DVD until they know that the child is definitely to be matched to them).

When the decision is made to progress a 'match', reports will be prepared for the Adoption Panel in the child's placing authority. This will include a plan for adoption support which the prospective adopters will be required to contribute to and agree. The link worker for the selected family and the child's social worker then attend the Adoption Panel to present the reports and to answer any questions that the Panel Members might have about the child's placement needs and the proposed link. Many placing authorities (including the six Berkshire authorities) invite prospective adopters to attend the Adoption Panel when a proposed 'match' is to be considered, however this is not universal. Having considered all the information available about the child, the prospective adopters and the reasons why the 'match' is being proposed, the Adoption Panel will make a recommendation to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker for the placing authority as to whether the proposed 'match' should be agreed. The Agency Decision Maker will then reach a final decision as to whether the 'match' can proceed.

THE INTRODUCTION PROCESS

Once the Adoption Panel process is completed and the Agency Decision- Maker for the child's placing authority has agreed the proposed 'match' between the child and his prospective adopters, the process to plan and manage the transfer of the child from his current placement (usually with foster carers) to his new family begins. Immediately following the decision there will be the opportunity for the prospective adopters to have recent photographs and often a DVD of the child if these have not already been provided.

If the prospective adopters still wish to proceed, the next stage is usually a one-off meeting with the child in his foster-home. If the prospective adopters already have a child(ren) in their family, consideration will be given to whether he/she/they should be part of this meeting, however it is usually more appropriate for just the adults to be involved. If the prospective adopters still wish to continue having met the child, a formal placement planning meeting is usually held at this stage to make detailed plans as to how the child should be introduced to his new family and to ensure that all the necessary practical arrangements to support and supervise the future adoptive placement are in place prior to the child moving in (this will include liaison around the child transferring schools if he is already of school age).

The length of the introductory period will vary depending on the age and needs of the child and the needs of any other child(ren) already in the family. Introductions will be largely based in and around the child's foster-home but may, as introductions proceed, involve one or more visits to his new home during the latter stages of the introductory period. With an older child consideration will be given to whether an over-night is likely to assist the proposed move. One of the purposes of this period is to enable the child to become as familiar as possible with his proposed new parents (and possibly brother(s) and/ or sister(s)) prior to him having to cope with a complete change of home environment.

In many cases prospective adopters will be invited to attend a Life-Appreciation Day where they may learn more about the child's life experiences to date and meet many of the people who have played a part in the child's life. This will usually be held during the introductory period.

The introductory period is almost always an emotional and potentially exciting time for the prospective adopters, but it can also be physically exhausting. From the child's perspective, even when he is well prepared and supported through the process, it is inevitably a time of anxiety and uncertainty. It is in recognition of this that the introductory period is usually planned to be as intense but short as possible.

During the introductory period arrangements will usually be made for the prospective adopters to meet with the child's birth parent(s) or other significant birth relatives if this is deemed appropriate (any such meeting will be carefully managed and arranged in such a way as to ensure that the prospective adopters' surname(s) and location remain confidential).

POST PLACEMENT

Prospective adopters legally gain parental responsibility for a child as of the point that he is placed in their care. However, depending on the legal situation, this will usually be shared with the local authority who placed the child and with the birth parent(s). If the local authority holds parental responsibility for the child it will have the power to determine to what extent the birth parent(s) and/or the prospective adopters are able to exercise parental responsibility.

In most cases the placing authority will delegate most of the day-to-day responsibilities and decision making in respect of the child to his prospective adopters as of the date of placement, but retain responsibility for some key decisions.

The child's social worker and the prospective adopters' link worker will visit the child in his new family and provide support to the child, the prospective adopters and any other child(ren) already in the family, to help them to establish a new life together and to find a solution to, or a way around, any problems that occur. Regular reviews will be held to monitor the situation for the child and the prospective adopters and to ensure that all appropriate supports are in place.

Many adoptive placements experience some early difficulties as all the parties adjust to their new family dynamics, however, these are not usually of a level to threaten the future of the placement. Sadly some placements do not progress well and the prospective adopters and/or the placing authority decide that the child should be removed from the family. However, if prospective adopters are open in sharing information about themselves as fully as possible during all stages of the adoption preparation, assessment and approval process, and if they are realistic about their own capabilities and parenting needs and open to seeking and following support and advice/guidance, the risks of disruption can be kept to a minimum.

THE LEGAL ADOPTION PROCESS

The post placement review process will identify when it is appropriate for the prospective adopters to initiate the legal process which will lead to them becoming the child's legal parents by adoption.

How long a child is in placement with his prospective adoptive family before the adoption application is made will depend on many factors; in some cases the decision will be made that an adoption application should be progressed within a few months of the child being placed, while in other cases a period of two or more years may elapse before all parties consider it appropriate to move forward with an application.

Factors that may influence the timing of an application include:

- The age and number of children placed.
- The preparation of the child(ren) for placement.
- The preparation of the prospective adopters for placement.
- The needs of any other child(ren) already in the family.
- How easily the child(ren) adjust to the changes that he/they experience on placement.
- How easily the prospective adopters adjust to their new family structure and the demands inherent in caring for and parenting the child(ren).
- Any special needs that the child(ren) may have in terms of his/their health, or education.
- The child(ren)'s ability to form attachments.
- The prospective adopters' ability to emotionally bond with the child(ren).
- The prospective adopters' expectations of the child(ren) and of parenthood.
- The response of the prospective adopters' relatives and friends to the placement.
- External factors e.g. financial pressures, unexpected redundancy, illness, etc.

When the application is progressed it is the prospective adopters who make the application to the Court for an adoption order, not the placing authority.

Once the adoption application is lodged with the Court the legal adoption process is usually straight-forward and completed within a matter of months. Where the process is straight forward the applicant/s do not usually need to be legally represented. However complications can arise and when they do occur the legal adoption process can take much longer. In these cases the applicant/s may need to be legally represented; where this is the case their legal costs will usually be met by the child's placing authority.

The granting of an adoption order vests full parental responsibility in the adoptive parents. The placing authority and the child's birth parent(s) and anyone else who previously held parental responsibility for the child lose their parental responsibility at the point that the adoption order is granted. However, the placing authority may continue to have a legal responsibility to provide post-adoption support services for the child and other members of his adoptive family up until three years after the granting of the order. Where this is the case this will be provided in line with any commitments made within the Adoption Support Plan. If additional support over and above that agreed in the Support Plan is required, the services offered will usually be dependent on the outcome of an Assessment of Need for Adoption Support Services.

POST ADOPTION SUPPORT

In recent years the nature of adoption has changed considerably with many more older children with quite complex needs now being placed. Given this, and in recognition of the fact that many of these children and their adoptive families are likely to need a level of periodic or on-going support post adoption, placing authorities are now required to agree an Adoption Support Plan for each child who is placed for adoption, detailing the child's individual care and parenting needs and how these will need to be addressed in both the short and long term. The Support Plan will detail what supports will be provided to the child and to the adoptive parents by the placing authority and by the prospective adopters' approving agency and their local authority (if different from their approving agency).

The four local authorities that make up 'Adopt Berkshire' are each committed to providing broad ranging support services for both the children placed for adoption by the authority and for adopted children and their adoptive families who live within their local authority area, after the adoption order has been granted. However where individual support services are required during the first three years after the legal adoption of a child, responsibility for the funding for specific child or family focussed work currently rests with the placing authority. The authorities recognise that the nature of the support that different children and their families need will vary depending on many factors and, wherever possible, they will try to tailor the support available to fit the need. 'Adopt Berkshire' works in co-operation with placing authorities, with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and with other organisations offering adoption support services both locally and nationally, in order that the widest possible range of supports are available to individuals and families involved in adoption.

Adoption Support Worker

As detailed elsewhere in this information pack, prospective and approved adopters receive on-going support from an identified link worker and/or our Placements Officer at all stages of the preparation/assessment/approval/post approval/matching and placement process. Once a child is placed the child's social worker and the prospective adopters' link worker will provide on-going support and supervision to the placement until the legal adoption is concluded. At the point that a child is adopted the adoptive parents become the legal parents of the child and at this stage both the social worker for the child and the adopters' previous link worker will usually cease visiting. While many adopters maintain a low level of contact with their previous adoption workers after the legal adoption is concluded and contact them as the first port of call if they or their children later experience difficulties (that are likely to be related to the adoptive situation or the children's earlier experiences), after the adoption order is granted primary responsibility for providing any support or additional resources required will rest with each child's placing authority until three years after the child's legal adoption is concluded. In the longer term, if additional support continues to be required, responsibility for providing support to the child and/or his adoptive parents, will transfer to the local authority in whose area they reside.

All four of the local authorities that up 'Adopt Berkshire' have designated Adoption Support Workers employed with their Children's Services departments. At around the time of the final adoption hearing all 'Adopt Berkshire' approved adopters who live in any of the four authorities' geographical areas will be provided with details of how to access their local authority's adoption support service at any point in the future should they need to do so.

Adoption Support Groups

The four local authorities that make up 'Adopt Berkshire' all run or facilitate different support groups and social events for adoptive parents living in their area to which adopters who are approved by 'Adopt Berkshire' and who live in the Borough, are invited. These include:

- 'Drop-In' sessions for adoptive parents with pre-school children.
- Family social events.
- Other time-limited, topic-based groups which may be run according to need.

Training

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service organises an on-going programme of post approval training for adopters. Subjects covered include:

- Explaining adoption to an adopted child.
- The impact of a child's past experiences on his future development including issues of attachment, resilience and healing.
- How a prospective adopter's wider family and friends can support a placement.

Adoption Allowances

Adoption allowances are paid by some placing authorities in respect of some children. There are clear criteria for the allocation of an allowance, laid down by government regulations. Criteria include a child being placed with a brother or a sister (i.e., a sibling pair/group placed together) or a child having special needs which require extra expenditure as a result of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the continuing consequences of past abuse or neglect. An adoption allowance can be paid until the adopted child reaches the age of 18, however most placing authorities pay allowances for a defined period initially (e.g., for three years or until the child achieves school age or secondary school age) and then review whether or not an allowance will continue to be paid. All adoption allowances are means tested allowances, so while the needs of the child may qualify him for the payment of an allowance, whether and if so at what rate the allowance is in fact payable, will be dependent on the financial means of the adoptive parents. Adoption allowances can be triggered at any point in an adopted child's childhood if there is a significant change in the child's care needs, however an allowance cannot be triggered solely by a significant change in an adoptive family's financial circumstances, unless the payment criteria was previously met and an allowance agreed but not payable due to the adopters' income being above the required threshold.

Contact

When placing any child for adoption the placing authority is required to consider whether it is likely to be beneficial to the child, in either the short or the longer term, for a level of contact to be maintained with significant birth relatives.

The circumstances that lead to children being placed for adoption usually make it unusual for any level of direct contact to be maintained between the child and his birth parents, however, evidence suggests that adopted children often benefit from continuing to receive a level of information about their birth parents and/or other significant birth relatives, as they are growing up. Given this, adoptive parents are usually asked to participate in an exchange of written information (sometimes including photographs) with a child's birth parent(s) or in some situations grandparent(s) or other significant relatives, throughout the child's dependent years. This form of contact would usually take place on a once or twice a year basis and for children placed by the six Berkshire local authorities it is managed by the Adoption Advisory Service based in Windsor.

Maintaining the confidentiality of a placement is in most cases a major consideration when contact arrangements, whether direct or indirect, are being planned. It is recognised that direct contact arrangements can carry a risk of the birth family member(s), over time, receiving information (often from

the child) which would enable them to trace the adoptive family. Given this a careful assessment will be made when adoption is planned for a child and the prospective adopters' views will be taken into consideration when determining the final contact plan.

Many children who are placed for adoption will have full siblings or half-siblings who are growing up in other adoptive families or with long-term foster carers. Where this is the case it is generally considered to be in the children's best interests to be enabled to grow up with a level of knowledge about, and in some cases direct contact with, their birth brother(s) and/or sister(s) if this is not likely to jeopardise the long-term security of the different children's placements. For this reason prospective adopters are often asked to meet the adoptive parents or foster carers who are bringing-up the brother(s) and/or sister(s) of the child(ren) who are to be placed with them. They will also generally be asked to agree to maintain a level of direct or indirect contact between the children as they grow up.

Contact arrangements with birth family members, whether parent(s), grandparent(s) or brother(s) and/or sister(s) should enable an adopted child to grow up with an age appropriate awareness of the situations of his birth family members in order to be able to, in later life, make informed decisions for himself as to whether, as an adult, he wishes to re-establish or maintain a relationship in his own right. These contact arrangements should not however negatively impact on the child's relationships within his adoptive family.

It is recognised that over time, as children mature, their contact needs may change and, give this, any arrangements set up at the time of placement can be periodically reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the child's developing needs.

The Adoption Passport

In Spring 2013 a government expert working group identified adoption support as being an important area for reform and in April 2013 it introduced the 'Adoption Passport' to tell adopters about the support that they should be able to expect.

The government believes that adoptive families deserve equal treatment with birth families and with children in local authority care. Children in Care who are adopted already have the same rights to priority school admissions as children who remain in local authority care and since September 2014 children who have been adopted from local authority care are also eligible for free early education, from two years of age. From April 2015 adoptive parents will have the same rights in relation to adoption pay and leave as birth parents. This will include:

- Removing a requirement for 26 weeks service in the job to make adoption leave a day-one right.
- Enhancing the rate of adoption pay during the first six weeks after placement to make adoption pay equal to 90% of the claimant's normal salary.
- Allowing time off work for introductions to the child prior to placement.

The government is currently considering whether any additional provision is necessary for adopters who are in employment but who do not meet the qualifying requirements to receive adoption pay.

The Adoption Passport sets out the full range of national entitlements for prospective and legal adopters and will be updated as these change. A pdf version of 'The Adoption Passport: a support guide for adopters' can be downloaded from the First4Adoption website. If you should have problems downloading this, our social work team will also be happy to provide a copy to you.

ADOPTION STANDARDS

'Adopt Berkshire' is committed to providing a comprehensive adoption service to all prospective and approved adopters with whom it works up to the point of the legal adoption of their child(ren) being concluded. In order to achieve this we work in co-operation with the Children's teams and post-adoption workers with the four local authorities that we represent as well as with the Reading and Slough Borough Councils' Adoption Teams and our local voluntary adoption agencies. We aim to ensure that our service meets all of the requirements of the National Adoption Standards and current Government Regulations and Guidance. Our Service is inspected by OFSTED as part each of the subscribing authorities' wider Children's Services' inspections.

We see adoption as a positive choice for all involved and seek to ensure that the organisation of our adoption services are as efficient and effective as possible. We aim to minimise delays in the adoption process and closely monitor the time that it takes for prospective adopters to move through the different stages of the adoption process. The responsibilities of all our staff are clearly identified and our intention is to provide a sensitive and confidential service to all those involved.

If you are not happy with how your enquiry or application is dealt with at any stage of the adoption process, our team manager will make herself available to talk with you and will provide you with details of how to ask for decisions to be reconsidered; details of the agency's complaints process will also be provided to you on request.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU WANT TO PROGRESS YOUR INTEREST IN ADOPTION

If having read this information pack you want to progress your interest in adoption further, please complete the Adoption Enquiry Progression Form that is included at the end of this pack and return it to us by post or email or drop it into our office:

'Adopt Berkshire'
The Riverdale Office
Silverdale Road
Earley
Reading
RG6 7LR

Email: adopt.berkshire@rbwm.gov.uk

Tel: 0118 9746260

Our office opening hours are:

Monday – Thursday 8:45 am – 5:15 pm

Friday: 8:45 am – 4:45 pm

We aim to have a social worker available at our office during these hours and he/she will be happy to discuss your interest in adoption with you, even if you are not expecting to move forward with an application at this stage; we know that for many applicants the process of considering adoption and finding out information will be on-going for many months, or even years, before they reach a position of being ready to move forward with an application. If you prefer to call into the office please phone ahead to make sure that a worker will be available to meet with you.

IF ADOPTION IS NOT FOR YOU

If after reading this pack you decide that adoption is not right for you at this stage in your life that is perfectly okay. We would still like to thank you for taking the trouble to find out about adoption.

You may still be able to help us to find the families that we need for Children in Care by passing on this information pack to a relative or friend who may be thinking of adoption.

If you are not able to consider adoption but still think that you may have something to offer in terms of caring for a child on a shorter term basis and without the legal commitment of adoption, all local authorities are always keen to recruit both short-term and long-term Foster Carers for Children in Care and Short Breaks Carers (for children with disabilities) and your local authority's fostering service would be keen to discuss these options with you. If you live within the Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham, Bracknell or West Berkshire areas and you are interested to know more about any of these options please contact your local fostering team (see Useful Information below for Contact details)

USEFUL INFORMATION

Berkshire Authorities

Bracknell Forest Family Placement Team

Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 1JD

Email: childrens.socialcare@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Tel: 01344 352020

Reading Adoption Team

Reading Borough Council
PO Box 2943
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 9NT

or

Family Placements
2-4 Darwin Close
Reading
RG2 0TB

Email: adoption@reading.gov.uk

Tel: 0118 9373740

Windsor & Maidenhead Fostering & Respite Service

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
Ground Floor, York Stream House
c/o Town Hall
Saint Ives Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 1RF

Email: fostering@rbwm.gov.uk

Tel: 01628 683201

Slough Family Placement Team

St Martin's Place
51 Bath Road
Slough
Berkshire
SL1 3UF

Email: familyplacement@slough.gov.uk

Tel: 01753 690960
0800 0730291

West Berkshire Family Placement Team

West Street House
West Street
Newbury
West Berkshire
RG14 1BZ

Email: familyplacementduty@westberks.gov.uk

Tel: 01635 503155

Wokingham Placement Service

Brambles Area Office
Budges Gardens
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1PX

Email: familyplacement@wokingham.gov.uk

Tel: 0118 9746243

Other Relevant Organisations

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service

York House
Sheet Street
Windsor
Berkshire
SL4 1DD

Email: baas@rbwm.gov.uk

Tel: 01628 683760

Cabrini Children's Society (previously The Catholic Children's Society)

Adoption & Fostering Services
Capitol House
Lower First Floor
12/13 Bridge Street
Winchester
SO23 0HL

Email: winchester@cabrini.org.uk

Tel: 01962 842024

Parents and Children Together (PACT)

Freepost (SCE6005)
Reading
BerkshireRG1 4ZR

Email: info@pactcharity.org.uk

Tel: 0800 731 1845

First4Adoption

48 Mecklenburgh Square
London
WC1N 2QA

Email: helpdesk@first4adoption.org.uk

Tel: 0300 222 0022

Adoption UK

Linden House
55 The Green
South Bar Street
Banbury
Oxon
OX16 9AB

Email: helpdesk@adoptionuk.org.uk

Helpline: 0844 848 7900

BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering)

Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TS

Email: southern.helpline@baaf.org.uk

Tel: 020 7421 2652

Ofsted National Business Unit

OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 4WD

Email: enquires@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231