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ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PROCEDURES

1. Approval and Authorisation

Completion of the following section signifies the review and approval of this process:-

Name	Job Title	Date
Authored by: Gwen Roe	Adoption Manager	June 2007
Approved by: Gwen Roe	Adoption Manager	June 2007
Authorised by: Gwen Roe	Adoption Manager	June 2007

2. Change History

Version	Date	Reason	Name
Version 1.0	June 2007	New Policy	Gwen Roe
Version 2.0	June 2010	Major Re-write	Gwen Roe

3. Summary and Contents

This document should be read in conjunction with the Addendum to the Adoption and Permanence Procedures which incorporates changes to meet the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.

These procedures describe the process to be followed when the care plan for the child is adoption or some other form of permanent care (e.g. Special Guardianship). The process includes children whose parents are consenting to the adoption and those who are not. The Adoption Support and Special Guardianship Procedures are also included.

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1 Introduction

Derbyshire County Council has a policy that children are best cared for in families. Children are usually best cared for in their own families or in their extended families. Where this is not possible it is the policy of Derbyshire County Council that children should experience family life in a substitute family.

The primary role of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to find and support adoptive families for children who are, or have been, in the care of Derbyshire County Council. The service provides ongoing support to adoptive families and to adopted adults and their families. Derbyshire Adoption and Permanence Service aims to provide a range of services to meet the needs of adopted children/adults and children needing an adoptive family. To this end the service will work with other agencies as well as with children's social work team. The service also provides support to those seeking to care for a child through special guardianship.

Principles and Standards of Adoption Practice

- 1.1 Adoption practice in Derbyshire is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002; the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005; the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983; the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; the National Care Standards Commission Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption (Care Standards Act 2000).

These are reflected in the Statement of Purpose and the Adoption Procedures.

Values Underpinning the Service

- 1.2 Adoption practice in Derbyshire is based on the following key principles:
- A child's need for permanence must be met in order to provide stability and security and give them the opportunity to make attachments.
 - The child's welfare is paramount. All actions should take account of their wishes and feelings.
 - Delay and drift in the care system must be avoided.
 - All permanence plans for children will come under the scrutiny of the independent adoption and permanence panel. The exception to this is children over the age of 10 years for whom the plan is to stay with their current carers on a permanent basis.

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- All parties to an adoption or permanence plan (the child, their siblings, the birth parents, relatives and significant others) will receive advice, support and counselling.
- Contact with the birth family will be considered whenever a child is placed permanently with a family other than their own. Such contact must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.
- All efforts will be made to ensure that children will be placed with adoptive parents/permanent carers of appropriate ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background having given first consideration to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.
- Children under the age of 5 years, or those with an ear, nose, throat or lung condition will not be placed in a household where anyone smokes.
- Children needing a permanent placement will be carefully matched with adoptive parents/permanent carers able to meet their assessed needs.
- Careful consideration will be given to identifying a child's needs particularly those relating to contact and/or placement with siblings.
- Prospective adopters/permanent families will be well prepared to ensure that they understand the implications of parenting by adoption/other permanence options.
- Children placed for adoption/permanence will be provided with background information, in the form of a life story book and a later life letter in order that they may have a greater understanding of why they were placed for adoption/permanence as they grow up.
- Children placed for adoption will be offered ongoing support for any needs they might have arising from having been adopted.

Overall Aims for the Service

Meeting the Needs of Derbyshire Children

- 1.3 Derbyshire County Council's CAYA works in partnership with other child care agencies in Derbyshire to develop and deliver a comprehensive range of services aimed at ensuring that children do not enter care, or remain in care except where this is consistent with their assessed needs. If there is no plan for a child to return to their birth family by the second Child in Care Review (the 4 month review) then planning must commence to place a child in a substitute family.
- 1.4 For most children especially those under the age of 10 years, an adoptive family will be the most appropriate permanence option as this provides the child with a new legal family. Other permanence options include Special Guardianship; Residence Orders or Permanent Fostering. Special Guardianship and Residence Orders confer parental responsibility on the carers. In the case of Residence Orders parental responsibility is shared

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equally with the birth parents. Special Guardians hold a greater amount of parental authority than the birth parents but do still share it. Permanent foster carers do not hold parental responsibility which is shared between the Local Authority and the birth parents. Children with any of these permanence plans should follow the same process as the same careful planning should be applied in order that the child's needs are met appropriately.

- 1.5 Children over the age of 10 years who will be permanently fostered by their current carer are not subject to the same rigorous process. This is because they are of an age where they can influence their own care planning.

Supporting Adoptive Parents

- 1.6 Each adoptive parent in Derbyshire will have an assessing social worker who will advise and support them up to the time an adoption order is made. This is seen as a crucial relationship which provides the adoptive parents and, where applicable, their children the opportunity to consider the implications of adoption for them and their family as well as assessing their potential for meeting the needs of children for whom an adoptive family is sought.
- 1.7 All adoptive families are offered the opportunity of ongoing support through training events, social events, a telephone help line, 'surgery' appointments and through contact over the Letterbox Scheme.

Supporting Birth Families

- 1.8 All parents, or relatives who have had the care of a child being placed for adoption will be supported by a Family Resource Worker (FRW) from the Birth Family Support Team (BFST) if they so wish. Support by the BFST will be offered at key points in the adoption process. The FRWs also offer ongoing support in writing Letterbox letters to the adopted child and provide an ongoing birth parent support group.

Supporting Adopted Adults and their Relatives

- 1.9 The Adoption Support Team, within the Adoption and Permanence Team, provides support to adopted adults and their birth families. The support includes birth records counselling and intermediary services as well as advice and counselling about all aspects of adoption. Contact is generally made through the adoption advice line and people are generally offered appointments at the Adoption Surgeries which operate throughout the county.

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The Organisation of the Service

- 1.10 Derbyshire is a large shire county, made up of seven different districts. There is also a disabled children's service that covers the county with a North and South team. The districts are: South Derbyshire and South Derbyshire Dales; High Peak and North Derbyshire Dales; Chesterfield; Bolsover; North East Derbyshire; Erewash and Amber Valley. It is generally the Children in Care Team or the Children and Families Team that works with children being placed for adoption.
- 1.11 The Adoption and Permanence Service covers the whole of the county and comprises of:
- The Assessment and Placement Team. This team assesses any adoptive parents or permanent foster carers who are not applying to adopt or care for a child previously known to them. Once applicants are approved their worker will assist them in identifying an appropriate child and will support them up to the point of an adoption order or the first reviews if permanent foster carers.
 - A Family Finder who is based within the assessment and placement team. Their job is to maintain an overview of children needing adoptive/permanent placements and to assist in identifying the most appropriate family for children.
 - The Adoption Support Team who provide support to adoptive families; adopted adults; birth relatives of adopted people.
 - The Birth Family Support Team who support birth parents, or birth relatives who have had care of a child, where the child has an adoption plan.

Quality Assurance

- 1.12 The adoption service is subject to a three yearly inspection from Ofsted. Adoption and Permanence Panels are chaired by independent people who will comment on the service if they think it is inadequate.
- 1.13 Evaluation forms are used for every step of the adoption process, including after the Adoption Order when adoptive parents feel under no pressure to oblige. Ongoing contact through adoption support events and the Letterbox scheme allows for informal, continuous feedback and appraisal.

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2 Derbyshire Adoption and Permanence Panel

All permanence plans for children will be considered by the Adoption and Permanence Panel. This is in order to ensure independent scrutiny and conformity of practice.

All prospective adoptive parents and permanent foster carers will be approved (or not) by Derbyshire's Adoption and Permanence Panel. All plans for Children in Care that provide for the permanent placement of the child will be agreed (or not) by the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

- 2.1 Derbyshire Children and Younger Adult's Department will operate as many Adoption and Permanence Panels as necessary to ensure timely progression of permanence plans for Children in Care. Each panel will meet the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, in order that it may make recommendations regarding plans for both adoption and permanent fostering.
- 2.2 Emergency meetings may be called if this is in the best interest of the child. They will be not called to accommodate the inability of the social workers to produce reports on time for Panel.
- 2.3 The Adoption and Permanence Panel of Derbyshire CAYA will make recommendations on:
 - Whether or not a child should be placed for adoption, or some other form of permanence such as special guardianship, permanent fostering or under a residence order.
 - Approvals of prospective adoptive parents and permanent foster carers.
 - Whether or not a particular child should be placed with particular prospective adopters, permanent foster carers, special guardians or Residence Order holders.
 - Whether or not Derbyshire CAYA should apply for a placement order.
 - Under what legal status a child should be placed with specific carers.
- 2.4 Panel Members may also offer advice on:
 - arrangements for contact between the child and any other person;
 - the appropriate number of children, age range, gender etc that prospective adopters may be suitable to adopt;
 - the provision of support services to adoptive parents, special guardians, foster carers or residence order holders; and
 - the extent of parental responsibility of adoptive parents.

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- 2.5 In all discussions panel members will make reference to the Welfare Checklist (See Appendix 1) as detailed in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and the Values Statement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption (See Appendix 2).
- 2.6 Panel Members will conduct their discussions in a respectful and courteous manner, being mindful not to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of ethnic origin; age; gender; class; ability or gender orientation. All panel members will have the opportunity to express their views and be listened to by their colleagues.
- 2.7 People attending panel will be given the opportunity to express their views, which will be carefully considered by all panel members.
- 2.8 Panel members will also consider:
- reviews of children placed for adoption;
 - disruption Reports where a child's placement with prospective adopters has disrupted prior to the Adoption Order; and
 - quarterly reports on Panel activity and children waiting for placements.
- 2.9 Adoption Panel only makes recommendations, which go to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision. The Agency Decision Maker will meet with the Professional Advisor to the Panel within 7 days of each adoption panel. The Agency Decision Maker will receive the same paperwork as Panel Members, and the draft minutes of panel before reaching a decision about any case.
- 2.10 All service users whose cases are presented to Panel will be informed in writing of the recommendations of the Adoption Panel and the decision of the Agency Decision Maker within seven days of that decision. They will be informed orally, by their social worker within two days of the decision.
- 2.11 Each Panel will consist of:
- an Independent Chair;
 - a Vice Chair, who is a Senior Manager of Derbyshire CAYA;
 - a County Councillor;
 - three social workers each having at least three years experience in childcare social work including, between them, experience of direct childcare, adoption and fostering work;
 - a Medical Advisor; and
 - three Independent Members.

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The three Independent Members will include a foster carer from another Agency and lay people with direct experience of adoption (e.g. a birth relative; adopted adult or adult who has been fostered, adoptive parent. Independent members may also be sought from other disciplines such as education, psychology, etc

2.12 The independent panel chair will have:

- the authority and competence to chair a panel;
- the ability to analyse and explain complex information;
- the ability to identify key issues, problems and solutions; and
- effective interpersonal, oral and written communication skills.

In addition the panel chair should have a sound understanding of the adoption process. Panel chairs without this at the time of appointment will be provided with training about adoption prior to them taking up appointment.

2.13 Each panel will have a vice chair who will chair panels in the absence of the Panel chair.

The vice chair will have:

- the authority and competence to chair panel;
- the ability to analyse and explain complex information;
- the ability to identify key issues, problems and solutions; and
- effective interpersonal, oral and written communication skills.

2.14 Independent panel members will not have been an employee of CAYA for at least one year. Neither will they be related to such an employee who are currently employed or have been employed within the previous year.

Independent members will not have been a service user of the Department in the last year.

A senior manager serves on the panels. The purpose of this is to ensure consistency across both panels and to maintain an awareness of adoption practice across the Department.

The Medical Adviser to the panel is a voting member but also should be consulted, as appropriate, where health reports are being sought on children, their families and prospective adopters. S/he will advise panel members of the health of children and prospective adopters/permanent carers and any implications. S/he will prepare reports on children for the prospective adopters/permanent carers.

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2.15 Each Panel will be served by a professional adviser, an educational adviser and a legal adviser. The professional adviser will be the Adoption Manager or the Service Manager for the Adoption and Placement Team. The legal adviser will be from Children and Younger Adults' Department Legal Section. The educational adviser may or may not be a voting member.

2.16 The criteria for the professional adviser to the panel is stipulated in the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

Their role is to:

- Assist with the appointment, termination and review of panel members.
- Be responsible for the induction and training of panel members.
- Be responsible for liaison between the department and the panel, monitoring the performance of panel members and the administration of the panel.
- Advise panel generally or in relation to specific cases.
- Maintain an overview of the quality of the agency's reports to panel and liaise with managers as appropriate about reports for panel.

2.17 Independent members will be paid a fee for their attendance at Panel and their attendance at Panel training. There is an assumption that Agency members, including those from another agency will be paid for their time by that Agency.

2.18 Panel quoracy is five members, including: chair or vice chair; one social worker and one independent member.

2.19 Panel members will be recruited by seeking expressions of interest or by advertising. They will have an interview with the Professional Advisor to Panel and the Chair, two personal references will be sought and an enhanced CRB check will be completed.

2.20 In seeking Panel members, efforts will be made to ensure that there is an age/gender balance and that there is a representative from a minority group.

2.21 Panel members will be appointed for a term of three years. They may serve a period of no more than three terms. The exception to this is the Medical Adviser to panel who may serve on the same panel for as long as they are the Medical Adviser to the agency.

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- 2.22 All Panel members will have an induction by observing two Panels, meeting with the Professional Advisor to the Panel and reading appropriate literature.
- 2.23 To ensure good practice and consistency of practice all Panel members will have joint training at least twice a year. Once a year the training event will include departmental social workers.
- 2.24 Panel members will receive Panel reports in advance of the Panel in order for Panel Members to have time to read them. There is an expectation that all Panel members will have read all the papers available to them.
- 2.25 Agendas for Panels will arrange adequate time for discussion of each case, although recognition is given to the fact that there are times when cases will overrun due to particular complexities or new information.
- 2.26 The Panel Chair will be clear about Panel's recommendations and the reasons for making them. All panel members will contribute to the Panel's recommendations and any serious reservations by any panel member will be clearly recorded in the panel minutes.
- 2.27 Reports will be presented to panel by the social worker responsible for the case. Panel members expect social workers to have knowledge of the case. It is expected that Service Managers will accompany inexperienced social workers or will attend Panel if cases are particularly complex. Social workers and Service Managers if in attendance will hear the recommendation of the Panel.
- 2.28 Prospective adopters are offered the opportunity to attend Panel but will not be party to the making of the recommendation by Panel. The Professional Adviser will let them know the outcome of the Panel recommendation.
- 2.29 Detailed minutes are recorded at each Panel. The Panel Chair will check the minutes for clarity and accuracy and the minutes are then confirmed or amended at the following Panel. The final Minutes will be signed by the Chair and the Agency Decision Maker.
- 2.30 Panel Members receive feedback on individual cases as "matters arising" when they are correcting the minutes. Panel Members will also receive copies of the first review after placement as feedback.

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- 2.31 Panel Members will declare an interest if they know a case that is coming to Panel. If the relationship is personal then the Panel Member is expected to give advance warning (so that quoracy can be assured); not read the papers and withdraw from Panel.
- 2.32 If the relationship between the Panel member and the person to be discussed at Panel is less personal or professional then the Panel Member will speak to the Professional Adviser, Chair or Vice Chair of the Panel to ascertain whether or not to participate in Panel. Decisions will be made dependent on whether or not the previous knowledge could be seen to affect the Panel Member's ability to make an objective recommendation.
- 2.33 Where Panel Members are disruptive to Panel e.g. not participating in Panel discussions, making derogatory comments, being abusive, presenting aggressively, or dominating discussion and not listening to others, it is expected that all Panel Members will take responsibility for challenging them. The Professional Adviser and/or Chair will follow this up with the individual Panel Member after Panel.
- 2.34 If disruptive behaviour continues then the Professional Adviser to the Panel and the Chair of Panel will meet with the Panel Member to try to achieve a satisfactory outcome.
- 2.35 If the Panel Member continues to affect the functioning of the Panel they will be asked to step down and will be replaced.
- 2.36 Similarly, if it is thought that a Panel Member is not performing to the required standards the professional adviser and/or the panel chair will discuss it with the panel member with a view to considering any need for advice, training etc. However, if performance does not improve and the professional adviser and panel chair consider that the panel member should no longer serve on Panel they will be asked to leave and will be replaced.
- 2.37 Each Panel Member will have an annual performance review with the Professional Adviser and the Chair of Panel to consider issues of Panel attendance and performance at Panel. The Panel Member will have the opportunity to talk about their views of the functioning of Panel and make recommendations regarding processes. The Panel Chair's performance review will be with the Agency Decision Maker and the professional adviser to the panel.

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- 2.38 If Panel Members are dissatisfied with the work of the social worker, the Professional Adviser will follow this up with the Manager of the Worker concerned. If there is no clear resolution to this or if the Panel feels it is more appropriate, the Panel Chair will write to the Manager concerned.
- 2.39 There will be a quarterly meeting of the Panel Chairs, the Vice Chair of the Panel, the Professional Adviser and the Legal Adviser. This gives the opportunity for the Agency to feedback to the Panel Chair and for the Panel Chairs to feedback to the Agency about their views of the functioning both of the Panel and of the Agency.

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3 Adoption at the Request of Birth Parents

Although the legal process is almost the same for both very young babies and older children the needs of the older child will be more complex, hence this procedure is divided between pre-birth/newborn and older children.

Pre-birth and Newborn

3.1 The primary social work task on receipt of a request by an expectant mother to place her unborn child for adoption is to offer counselling to ensure all alternative options to adoption have been considered.

Alternatives are:

- keeping the child with support as necessary;
- short term foster care with the intention of returning the child to the parent with support as necessary;
- long term placement within the child's wider family; or
- placement for adoption.

It is useful to provide the alternatives in writing as well as verbally. The BAAF leaflet "If your Child is Being Adopted and You Agree" should be provided to the expectant mother, and discussed with her.

The social worker will discuss any family members as potential carers and establish the views of the birth father. Implications of adoption, discussion of the process and areas where birth parents can be involved must be explained. Detailed logs of counselling interviews will be maintained and times when family members refuse counselling will be recorded. Parents' views on who should care for the child and social worker enquiries into their views will be recorded. Every effort should be made to ascertain who the birth father is and his views on the proposed adoption. This is important under Human Rights legislation. In addition a birth father, even if he does not hold parental responsibility may challenge the adoption of his child right up to the making of the adoption order. Thus it is important for him to know as early as possible so that he can make a response if he so wishes.

3.2 An adoption case file should be opened and all adoption documents and case records should be saved onto Frameworki. This means logging all case notes where adoption is referred to an 'adoption case note' and all documents pertaining to adoption as 'Adoption and Permanence Documents. (See Appendix 8) Recording for Adoption Files.

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3.3 The parent requesting adoption for their child must be given explanations about:

- the procedure for adoption.
- the legal implications of:
 - giving consent to placement;
 - giving consent to the future making of an adoption order;
 - a placement order; and
 - an adoption order.

The parent's views should be sought about the child; the desired placement; any wishes and feelings relating to the child's religious and cultural upbringing and any views relating to contact with the child.

3.4 The booklet "[A Guide to Adoption Information for Birth Parents of Adopted Children](#)" should be given at an initial counselling interview and the contents fully discussed. The social worker must record on the file that the booklet has been provided. The birth parents must be offered support from a family resource worker in the Adoption Support Team. [A leaflet about their services is available from that team.](#)

3.5 If at any time the social worker feels that the parent is not capable of understanding the giving of consent then consideration must be given to initiating care proceedings. Further information about the parent(s) understanding, including whether or not they understand the meaning of adoption, should be sought from another professional person, preferably one who knows the parent(s) e.g. adult learning disabilities worker; approved mental health worker; midwife; health visitor; general practitioner.

3.6 A child can be placed for adoption soon after birth if the social worker is absolutely sure that the mother will not change her mind. However, careful consideration needs to be given to the value of waiting until after the 6 week medical has been completed and giving time to the birth mother and birth family to reflect on their decision following the birth and to visit the child. If there is any possibility that the parent(s) may change their mind and want the child home then the child must be placed with foster carers. The grief of adoptive parents from whom a child has been removed cannot be underestimated. In most situations, certainly where pregnancy has been concealed or the birth parents need more time to consider, a foster placement should always be made to give the opportunity for further reflection.

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- 3.7 Social worker for the child must write to the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) office that is nearest the parent's home giving advanced notice that the parent is wanting to place their child for adoption. (See Appendix 3) for a draft letter which should be amended as appropriate. It is essential that advance notice be given in order that informed consent can be witnessed at the earliest opportunity. The notice should detail whether the birth parent is giving consent to placement for adoption (Section 19) only or advance consent to an adoption order (Section 20).
- 3.8 The social worker for the child should counsel the parent(s) about their understanding of: adoption and its implications; the possible alternatives to adoption; the views of the father and both extended families. (See Appendix 4) for a Counselling Checklist.
- 3.9 If, after counselling the social worker is **as sure as is possible** that the birth parents are not going to change their decision then a direct placement with prospective adopters can be considered. Discussion with an adoption manager must take place re the advisability of such a placement. The adoptive parents will need plenty of notice about such a placement so discussions should start early. If there has been time for counselling during the pregnancy and the birth mother remains adamant that she wants the child to be adopted the social worker will share with her up to three anonymised profiles of prospective adopters for her to choose parents for her child.
- 3.10 If the social worker believes adoption is in the best interests of the child and that the birth parents are unlikely to change their minds then s/he should complete the Child's Permanence Report (CPR) for panel and arrange for a panel to be ready to consider the case as soon as possible after the child is born. This panel could meet within a day or two of the birth and the Agency decision could be made the same day. ([See Procedures 3.21-3.26 and the Child's Permanence Report \(BAAF\) – pro forma & guidance](#)). The Child's Permanence Report should be sent to the Adoption Panel Clerk through the Permanence Start Planning episode on Frameworki.
- 3.11 The birth parent(s) cannot legally give consent to adoption until the child is 6 weeks old. This must be made clear to the birth parent(s) orally and in writing.
- 3.12 Notify the family placement team of the need for a fostering placement or liaise with the adoption and placement team if seeking a placement with prospective adopters. A placement request form must be completed in detail so an appropriate carer can be sought. If placement with

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prospective adopters is to be considered then they may be approved as foster carers for the placement to be made under fostering regulations. It is preferable for an adoption and permanence panel to be arranged within a day or two of the child's birth to agree that the child should be placed for adoption and linked with particular adoptive parents. Midwifery services should be informed that a placement has been made and the social worker should alert the midwife concerned if the adopters are inexperienced parents.

- 3.13 If a birth mother is married the husband is presumed to be the "legal" father and his consent must be obtained or dispensed with. If he has doubts about the adoption request, he must be advised to seek legal advice.
- 3.14 If the birth father is not married to the mother his views will be sought and if he wishes to be involved with the child he should be advised to seek legal guidance. Social worker will ascertain whether or not he holds parental responsibility; if he does not whether or not he wishes to apply for parental responsibility and whether or not he wishes to apply for any other order (e.g. a Residence Order, Contact Order, etc). Every effort should be made to contact the birth father such as advertisements in newspapers, search of the electoral roll, contacting his family etc. This should be done sensitively and in consultation with legal services. Details of efforts made must be noted for inclusion in the child's permanence report.
- 3.15 If the birth mother will only disclose non-identifiable information pertaining to the birth father or is unable or unwilling to name the birth father, legal advice must be obtained from the adoption and permanence panel legal adviser as to whether to seek court directions on the need to try to find the birth father. The social worker will explain to the birth mother the department's obligations in respect of the Human Rights Act to counsel and seek the views of the father of the child.
- 3.16 All discussions will be fully recorded and reasons given for any refusal by either parent to be involved in the process.
- 3.17 If, after counselling it is clear that adoption is the wish of those with parental responsibility for the child, the social worker will obtain consent to seeking information for the child's history. [BAAF form PH](#) should be completed for each birth parent. Parents should also be asked to complete the [BAAF Parental Consent Form](#) which enables the medical adviser to seek relevant medical history for the child. The parent(s) should be supplied with the leaflet "[A Guide to Adoption Information for Birth Parents](#)" unless they have already received it and the social worker must record on the file that this leaflet has been provided.

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- 3.18 Around the time of the birth the social worker will ensure that hospital staff (including the hospital social worker) are aware of their involvement. This should include discussion of the mother's wishes regarding seeing and handling the baby, and discharge arrangements. The hospital social worker to be asked to inform the area office as soon as possible after the birth.
- 3.19 Social worker will liaise with family placement team social worker re placement arrangements and continue to liaise throughout placement.

After the Birth

- 3.20 The social worker will visit birth mother as soon as possible but not the same day unless the mother is discharging herself and contact needs to be established. Discussion will take place around the adoption plan and arrangements for the placement including any contact arrangements. Choice of name should be made and gifts and retaining of mementos for the child and the mother should be encouraged. Photographs should be taken if possible with family members. Birth mother must be reminded that she cannot give formal consent to adoption until the child is 6 weeks old. Liaison will take place between social worker and hospital staff to agree an appropriate discharge date as soon as possible after the birth.
- 3.21 If it is possible to hold a panel to agree a possible placement very shortly after birth hospital staff will be asked to defer the discharge until after the Panel has met and a decision made. The child may then be discharged directly to the adoptive parents, after appropriate introductions.
- 3.22 If the Panel have recommended placement and the Agency decision maker has confirmed it the birth parent(s) should be asked to sign [Form AP](#) this gives permission for their child to be placed for adoption. It does not constitute "formal consent" which can only be given after the child is 6 weeks old.

They should again be given a detailed explanation of what an adoption placement is and what the signing of [Form AP](#) means. This should be followed up in writing. Although a standard letter is available (See Appendix 5) this should be amended as appropriate to suit each individual case. Birth parents to be asked for permission for the child to be known by the adoptive parents' family name. The adoptive parents will be advised as to the status of the placement by the Adoption Panel Clerk. The Adoption Panel Clerk will also write formally to the birth parent(s) but this should be seen as a supplement to the letter from the social worker, not a replacement.

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- 3.23 Social worker will again ask the parents if they wish to have contact with an adoption support family resource worker and they will be given details about the scheme ([“Support Through the Adoption Process – Sometimes Loving Someone Means Letting Them Go”](#)).
- 3.24 Social worker must provide [BAAF Form MB](#) for completion by medical staff. [Form GC1](#) must be left for claiming of fees. This can be done through the named liaison social worker at the hospital. Every effort should be made to have the [BAAF Form MB](#) completed and returned to the social worker prior to the child leaving the hospital, as it is an essential part of the information needed for a full medical when the child is aged 6 weeks.
- 3.25 Social worker should try to ensure that the birth is registered by mother at the hospital, or if this is not feasible, as soon after discharge as possible. A full certificate will be needed by the social worker for court proceedings. It is advisable to obtain two long birth certificates for use in court proceedings and child benefit claims later in the process.
- 3.26 Children in Care procedures are to be followed by the social worker and appropriate forms to be completed requesting the child is. Placement planning meeting and first Childcare review to be scheduled. The plan for adoption should be agreed at a review if there is any likelihood of the birth parents changing their mind about the child being placed for adoption.
- 3.27 Social worker to ensure head of community nursing is aware of the situation and that the Health Visitor and midwife are informed.

Within 6 Weeks Following the Birth

- 3.28 Social worker to formally notify CAFCASS to appoint an officer to witness the parent(s)' informed consent using the standard letter (See Appendix 6). The social worker will also include the information detailed in Schedule 2 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, Reg 20. That is: a copy of the child's birth certificate; details of the parents; chronology of actions by the Agency; details of the written information the parents have had; signed letter from the birth parents to say they have received the written information plus any other relevant information.
- 3.29 Counselling of the birth parents is to continue alongside discussion, if appropriate, with other relevant people, to confirm the plan.
- 3.30 Social Worker to visit in line with Children in Care procedures.

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- 3.31 Social worker to book adoption panel with the Adoption Panel Clerk for discussion about the child being placed for adoption unless a Panel has already been held ([See 3.10 above](#)).
- 3.32 Continue to gather information, mementos, photos and relevant material for the child's life story book.
- 3.33 As early as possible the social worker must arrange an adoption medical with the paediatrician for when the child is 6 weeks old. Completed forms: [Form M; Form B; Form PH; Form IHA-C; Form CR-C/CR-YP and Derbyshire Form A to be taken with Form GC1](#) for claiming payment. The medical is to be attended by the child, foster carer (or adopter) and social worker. The adoption medical should be arranged through the paediatrician at the hospital of birth ([See BAAF Forms PH, M, B, IHAC, CR-C, Derbyshire Form A](#)).
- 3.34 Continue counselling and involvement of birth parents in the process as much as is possible. If it appears that the parents may make the making of an adoption order difficult e.g. by moving away before all the formalities are complete consideration should be given to applying for a Placement Order. A CHILD CAN ONLY BE PLACED FOR ADOPTION WITH THE INFORMED CONSENT OF THE BIRTH PARENT(S) OR BY BEING THE SUBJECT OF A PLACEMENT ORDER.
- 3.35 Social Worker to make a referral for an adoption placement to the assessment and placement team if a referral has not already been made.
- 3.36 When the child reaches the age of 6 weeks the social worker should ascertain from the birth parents whether or not they still wish the child to be placed for adoption. A letter should be sent to them confirming that they can now formally consent to either placement for adoption or placement for adoption and the making of an adoption order. (See Appendix 7 - standard template Letter to Birth Parents, which should be amended as appropriate.)
- 3.37 If the child has not yet been placed with prospective adopters, social worker to complete a [Child's Permanence Report](#) giving as much detail as possible. This is important as the report will be used by the Adoption Panel in recommending a placement. It is also the information that the adoptive parents will receive and that the child, when they become an adult, may want to see. The Child's Permanence Report should be sent to the Adoption Panel Clerk through the Permanence Start Planning episode on Frameworki.
- 3.38 Check the medical adviser to the panel has had the completed adoption medical for consideration prior to panel. Social worker's Service Manager

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to quality assure the Child's Permanence Report and sign it before it comes to panel. The birth parents should see the parts of the Permanence Report, that relate to them. If they are working with a member of the Birth Family Support Team (BFST) then that worker will go through the report with them. If the birth parent does not have a worker from the BFST then the child's social worker must ensure they have seen the report. They must be asked to sign it and, if they refuse to do so the social worker must note this, and their comments in the final report to Adoption and Permanence Panel. If the parents do not wish to read the CPR a memo should be sent to the Professional Adviser to the Panel to explain this.

- 3.39 At least 10 days before panel the social worker will send the completed permanence report, the child's health report, any specialist reports and any information about the health of the birth parents to the Adoption Panel Clerk. It is expected that where the social worker is inexperienced or the case is particularly complex (e.g. legal issues), that the service manager will accompany the social worker to panel.
- 3.40 Social worker and their manager (where appropriate) to attend Adoption Panel for recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption.
- 3.41 When the agency decision maker has agreed the recommendation, follow the Placement of Children procedures.
- 3.42 Once the child has been placed for adoption, information about the Adoption Support Service must again be given to the birth parents. Information is provided in a leaflet about the [Birth Parent Support Team](#).
- 3.43 Adoption Panel Clerk will inform all parties in writing as necessary. This will include the birth father even if he does not have parental responsibility.
- 3.44 The CAFCASS officer will visit the birth parent(s) or guardian and will ascertain that they fully understand the consequences of adoption and that they are giving consent unconditionally.
- 3.45 The CAFCASS officer will write to the social worker including the consent form that has been signed by them and the birth parent(s) or guardian.
- 3.46 The original of the signed consent form should be given to the prospective adoptive parents to accompany their adoption application. A copy should be kept on the child's adoption file, along with any notice from the birth parents regarding whether or not they wish to be kept informed of any application for an adoption order.

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3.47 If the CAFCASS officer does not feel that the parents wish to give full consent, or that they do not understand the implications of adoption s/he will notify the social worker. In such cases counselling must continue until such time as the birth parent does understand the implications of adoption and does willingly give consent OR until the child is returned to the birth parent(s) with whatever support is necessary, OR a placement order is sought.

Older Babies and Children

3.48 Children will generally be accommodated in the first instance. Children in care procedures will be followed and the plan for adoption should be agreed at a review.

3.49 The social worker will offer counselling to birth parents to ensure all alternative options to adoption have been considered. Any family members must be considered as potential carers, and the views of the birth father and his family established. It is important that the birth father's views are sought whether he has parental responsibility or not. This is because he can challenge the plan to place for adoption right up to the time of the Adoption Order. Therefore, the sooner he is aware of this and has reached a decision the better it is for the child. Complete any assessments if required. Implications of adoption, discussion of the process and areas where birth parents can be involved must be explained.

The parent requesting adoption for their child must be given explanations about:

- the procedure for adoption.
- the legal implications of:
 - giving consent to placement;
 - giving consent to the future making of an adoption order;
 - a placement order; and
 - an adoption order.

The parent's views should be sought about: the child; the desired placement; any wishes or feelings relating to the child's religious and cultural upbringing and any views relating to contact with the child.

3.50 An adoption file should be opened in the child's name and a separate record held to the care file. All adoption documents and case records pertaining to adoption should be on that file. In Frameworki this means logging all case notes where adoption is discussed as an "Adoption Case Record" and all documents pertaining to adoption as "Adoption and Permanence" documents. (See Appendix 8) Recording for Adoption Files.

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- 3.51 Social worker to keep detailed logs of counselling interviews and record when family members refuse counselling. Birth parents' views on who should care for the child and any enquiries into their views to be recorded on the child's file. It is necessary to ascertain who the birth father is and his views on the proposed adoption. If there are any doubts as to the appropriateness of this the social worker should consult with Legal Section.
- 3.52 The explanatory leaflet ["A Guide to Adoption Information for Birth Parents"](#) should be given to birth parents at an initial counselling interview and the contents fully discussed. The social worker must record that the leaflet has been given to the parents and ask them to sign for receipt of it. The birth parents should be asked to complete [BAAF Form PH](#) and the [Parental Consent Form](#). This gives the Medical Adviser permission to access the parents' medical records to ascertain whether or not there are any implications for the child. Birth parents will be offered a meeting with a Family Resource Worker in the Adoption Birth Family Support Team. Social Worker will start to gather information on the birth family for the child's life story book. Guidance about life story work can be found at (Appendix 11).
- 3.53 [BAAF Form MB](#) must be sent to the hospital where the child was born at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.54 Counselling and preparation of the child is essential having regard for their age and level of understanding. A life story book must be in process to make a record for the child. This will include all family and care history. The older relinquished child needs to be involved at all times, with regard to their age/stage and understanding, to enable them to feel a part of the process and to retain a sense of involvement and commitment to the process. (See Appendix 11) Notes of Life Story Books and [\(Appendix 10\) Counselling and Informing the Child](#).
- 3.55 The child must be given a leaflet about adoption and the social worker should read it with them in order to ensure that they have some understanding about adoption. There are guides for younger children and older children "Information for Adopted Children" and "Ask About Adoption".
- 3.56 An adoption medical will be arranged with the social worker, child and foster carer attending. The social worker will complete the first part of the [BAAF Form IHA-C](#) or [IHA-YP](#) depending on the age of the child and take these, along with [BAAF Forms M and B, PH](#) and the [Parental Consent Form](#) the [Carer's Report](#) and [Derbyshire Form A](#) to the paediatrician conducting the adoption medical.

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- 3.57 A referral for an adoption placement may be made to the adoption and assessment team in advance of discussion at Panel if appropriate.
- 3.58 Social worker to book an Adoption Panel slot with the adoption panel clerk for discussion about placing the child for adoption.
- 3.59 Social worker to complete a [Child's Permanence Report](#) giving as much detail as possible, remembering this is the matching tool and it will be given as written information on the child to the prospective adopters. The Child's Permanence Report should be as detailed as possible following the guidelines given with the form. Information about the birth family and reasons for placing the child for adoption are essential, both in assisting the Panel to agree a recommendation and giving the child (at a later date) a full explanation.
- 3.60 Once the Child's Permanence Report is written, the service manager will quality assure and sign it before it goes to panel. The birth parents will be provided with a copy of the parts of the Child's Permanence Report that relate to them to sign. If they refuse to do so the social worker must note this, and their comments, in the final report to panel. If the birth parents are engaged with an adoption support Family Resource Worker then it might be more appropriate for them to discuss the Child's Permanence Report and their response to it, with the birth parents.
- 3.61 **At least** 10 days before Panel the social worker will send the completed Child's Permanence Report to the Adoption Panel Clerk. It is expected that, where the social worker is inexperienced or the case is particularly complex (e.g. legal issues) that the service manager will accompany the social worker to Panel.
- 3.62 Social worker and their manager (where appropriate) to attend Adoption Panel for recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption. It may be appropriate for the fostering support team worker to attend the Panel if they have knowledge of the child in placement and there have been a number of changes of social worker.
- 3.63 The Agency decision maker will agree, or not agree the recommendation of the Panel within 7 working days of the panel meeting. S/he should consider the papers available to the panel and the minutes of the panel before reaching a decision. If s/he is minded not to agree the recommendation of the panel s/he should discuss it with another senior member of the Department who is not a member of the panel. Any decision and reasons for the decision must be recorded on the child's adoption file.

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- 3.64 When the agency decision maker has agreed the recommendation, follow the “Placement of Children” procedures.
- 3.65 Adoption Panel Clerk will inform all parties in writing as necessary.
- 3.66 Continue to work with the child to prepare them for adoption and complete life story work.
- 3.67 Social worker for the child to make application for a Placement Order if appropriate and after discussion with legal services. Having a Placement Order enables the Local Authority to place a child for adoption. A CHILD CAN ONLY BE PLACED FOR ADOPTION WITH THE INFORMED CONSENT OF THE BIRTH PARENT(S) OR BY BEING THE SUBJECT OF A PLACEMENT ORDER. Once a child is the subject of a Placement Order it remains in force until the child reaches 18, the Placement Order is revoked or an Adoption Order is made. The Local Authority continues to share parental responsibility with the birth parents but can determine restrictions on the application of that parental responsibility. Likewise, when a child on a Placement Order is placed with prospective adopters the Local Authority can decide how much parental responsibility to share with the prospective adopters. (See Appendix 12) for guidance about parental responsibility.
- 3.68 Ensure counselling is available to the birth parents by liaising with the Adoption Birth Parent Support Team, unless the birth parents are already engaged with that service.
- 3.69 Write to the nearest CAFCASS office asking that an officer be appointed to witness the consent of the parent(s). A standard letter is available for this (See Appendix 6) but should be amended as appropriate.
- 3.70 The CAFCASS officer will write to the social worker including the consent form that has been signed by them and the birth parent(s) or guardian.
- 3.71 The original of the signed consent form should be given to the prospective adoptive parents to accompany their adoption application. A copy should be kept on the child's adoption file, along with any notice from the birth parents regarding whether or not they wish to be kept informed of any application for an adoption order.
- 3.72 If the CAFCASS officer does not feel that the parents wish to give full consent, or that they do not understand the implications of adoption s/he will notify the social worker.

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In such cases counselling must continue until such time as the birth parent does understand the implications of adoption and does willingly give consent OR until the child is returned to the birth parent(s) with whatever support is necessary, OR a placement order is sought.

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4 Adoption for Children In Care where Parents do not Consent

- 4.1 Consideration must be given as to how to best achieve permanence for a child. Permanence options are: return to parents with support as necessary; long term placement within the wider family; permanent placement with foster carers; residential placement until independence; placement for adoption. The decision whether rehabilitation is an option or not will be made by the social workers and their managers in consultation with other professionals, including legal services, at a planning meeting called by the Service Manager with responsibility for the legal proceedings. The Protocol for Judicial Case Management in Public Law Children Act Cases applies in all Care applications. The decision and subsequent planning will be monitored through the reviewing process.
- 4.2 At the four month review, a decision regarding permanence should be made, having regard to the welfare check list from the Adoption Children Act 2002 (See Appendix 1). This can be rehabilitation to birth family, adoption, any of the other permanence options listed above or "twin tracking". Twin tracking is the making of two possible plans for the child's future, i.e. a plan to rehabilitate to the birth family and a plan for the adoption, and working towards both ends simultaneously to avoid delay. Following the assessments, the plan which best meets the child's needs should be agreed at a review. Guidance on the protocol for twin tracking (also known as parallel planning) can be found at (Appendix 9). The social worker for the child should ascertain and record the views of the child; the child's parents; anyone else with parental responsibility for the child and any other relevant person (e.g. relative, carer, children's guardian etc). If the decision is adoption or twin tracking, then arrangements need to be made for a Children in Care Team social worker to be appointed to work with the child through the adoption process. A planning meeting will be held between the children and families' social worker, Children in Care social worker and their managers to clarify roles, expectations and timescales. A separate adoption file will be created. (See Appendix 8) Recording for Adoption Files. This should include all documents and case notes pertaining to adoption on Frameworki. This means that any case records where adoption is mentioned must be noted as an 'adoption case record' and any documents must be categorised under 'Adoption and Permanence' (See Appendix 8) Recording for Adoption Files. The children and families team social worker continues to work with the birth family.
- 4.3 When the decision is made for some other form of permanence that results in the child leaving care (i.e. residence order or special guardianship) then the match with the carers should be presented to the adoption and permanence panel. If the child is under ten years the plan should also be presented to the adoption panel in order that the plan receives sufficient

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independent scrutiny. (See Appendix 17) for details of paperwork other than adoption

- 4.4 The plan for adoption should be discussed at an Adoption Panel within two months of the review that identified adoption as the appropriate permanence plan. This means that all the necessary paperwork will need to be with the adoption panel clerk within 6 weeks of that review.
- 4.5 The social worker for the family will inform the birth family if they are not present at the review and all those with parental responsibility will be offered counselling by the social worker. The counselling will include details about the adoption process and the legal implications of adoption as well as the reasons why it is considered appropriate to place the child for adoption. The social worker should explain the legal implications of giving consent to placement for adoption; giving consent to the making of an adoption order; placement orders and adoption orders. This may be done by the family resource worker of the birth family support team if one becomes involved ([See 4.8](#)). Initial discussions regarding contact before and after adoption placement need to be undertaken. A [BAAF Form PH](#) must be completed with each birth parent if possible and [BAAF Form MB](#) sent for completion to the hospital where the child was born. Parents must also be asked to consent to the seeking of medical information about them as this could be vital for the child's future health needs. Use [BAAF Parental Consent Form](#) for this purpose.
- 4.6 At the review where adoption is considered to be the most appropriate permanence plan for the child the parents of the child should be told about the independent support offered by the adoption support team. If the parents are not at the review they should be advised of this at the earliest opportunity. An explanatory leaflet about the role of the birth parents' support worker must be given to the birth parents. ([See "Support Through the Adoption Process – We can't bring back your child but we can help you put some of the pieces back together again"](#)), leaflet about the Birth Parents' Support Team. The birth parents should also be supplied with the booklet ["Guide to Adoption Information for Birth Parents of Adopted Children"](#).

NB The birth father should be provided with the same service as the birth mother whether or not he has parental responsibility. In addition the social worker should, if birth father does not have parental responsibility, ascertain whether or not he intends to apply for it and whether or not he intends to apply for any other order (e.g. Residence Order, Contact Order, etc). Where the birth father (or his whereabouts) are unknown every effort should be made to ascertain his details and establish his views about the future care of his child. Efforts to contact him should be made through

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advertisements in the newspaper, search of the electoral roll, contacting his family. This should be done sensitively and in consultation with legal services.

- 4.7 There is a leaflet available for the birth relatives of a child who is being adopted if there are any such relatives for whom it would be beneficial.
- 4.8 A referral about the birth parent must be made to the Birth Parent Support Team, based within the adoption service. The workers from that team will provide independent support to all birth parents whose children have an adoption plan. The role is that of support, not advocacy and includes: explaining the adoption process; advising of the implications of adoption; assisting birth parents in reading and responding to reports written about them and their children; assisting birth parents in preparing information for their children's Life Story books; assisting birth parents in writing letters to their children, either for their file or for their Letterbox arrangement; accompanying birth parents to see solicitors, attend court, last contact and meeting with the adoptive parents. The family resource workers (birth parent support) will contact the birth parents to make an appointment unless there are issues of personal safety or unless the birth parents have made it very clear that they do not wish to see the family resource worker.
- 4.9 The social worker for the child must explain, discuss and counsel the child about this decision to proceed to adoption. Direct work with the child to ascertain their wishes and feelings commensurate with their age/stage of development will be ongoing. It is necessary to explain to the child what decisions have been made and why, especially if they are not in line with the child's wishes. Life story work should be in process and work to prepare them for adoption should have begun. If specialist work is necessary this should have been identified and put in place.

A Guide to Life Story Work is available (See Appendix 11), although all social workers should attend training on this subject.

- 4.10 It is important that the child understands:
- Why they are in care and what has happened to them prior to this point.
 - Why they cannot return to their birth family or remain with their current carer.
 - That all alternatives have been explored and this is the best option for them.
 - If they are not with their siblings, why not, and where their siblings are.
 - That they have a voice and how to express their feelings and wishes and to whom.

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- That the decision is shared by all those involved with the child's welfare
- what adoption means and what the process is.
- The contact proposals for the future.

Information on Counselling and Informing the Child can be found at (Appendix 10).

This work should be recorded in case records, life story books, the [Child's Permanence Report](#) and later life letters (See Appendix 14). The child must be given the leaflet "A Guide to Adoption – Information for Children" or "Ask About Adoption" and a record made that it has been provided.

- 4.11 Social workers and family placement social workers should liaise closely to support the child. The foster carer needs to be kept informed and helped to support the child in placement.
- 4.12 Information for the Child's Permanence Report will be collated bearing in mind the purposes of the document in decision making at adoption panel and in matching. The Child's Permanence Report must be completed in as much detail as possible, following the guidelines given with the form. It is essential that information about the birth family and reasons for placing the child for adoption are included, both in assisting the panel in reaching a recommendation and in giving the child (at a later date) a full explanation. Written evidence of the child's wishes and feelings and understanding of the situation must be presented. It is important that the child feels that their views have been heard but they should not feel that they are making the decision about their future. Consideration must also be given to whether agreement to an adoption allowance may be sought. Adoption allowances are payable where a child: needs special care which requires greater expenditure of resources (due to illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the continuing consequences of past abuse or neglect); should be placed with siblings, or a child with whom they have previously shared a home; where it is necessary to facilitate the placement/adoption (e.g. older children, children from ethnic minorities). Allowances may also be paid where necessary to ensure the adoptive parent can look after the child. See the "Financial Support Scheme for Adopters and Holders of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders" for details of financial support to adoptive parents and other permanent carers.
- 4.13 During the process of gathering information for the Child's Permanence Report the social worker must ascertain, and record the wishes and feelings of the birth parents, guardian, or anyone else who is important to the child. The social worker should also seek their views on the placement of the child for adoption, including any wishes and feelings about the

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child's religious and cultural upbringing and any future contact with the child if placed for adoption. The family resource worker from the birth family support team may assist in this.

- 4.14 If the birth parent refuses to have counselling about adoption from the child's social worker or the birth parent support team, the social worker should offer them counselling by another Agency. If the birth parents want this contact should be made with the adoption service to liaise with another Agency. Social worker to record if offers of counselling are refused on both the child's file and in the Child's Permanence Report
- 4.15 The wishes and feelings of the birth parents and relevant others should be recorded on the child's case file.
- 4.16 The birth parents, and anyone else relevant to the child, should be asked if they want to leave information to be passed on to the child should they ask for it as an adult. If the birth parents do want to provide such information it should be sent to the Adoption Service for inclusion on the Contact File. The Contact File is a file maintained for anyone involved in an adoption who wishes to be contacted by another involved party.
- 4.17 As soon as possible and no later than 10 weeks before the panel date, an adoption medical must be arranged with the relevant paediatrician that covers that area. The social worker for the child, the child and the foster carer should attend. Prior to this, [Form MB](#) will have been sent to the hospital where the child was born. The social worker will complete the first part of [Form IHA-C](#) or [IHA-YP](#) whichever is appropriate [Forms PH; Form M and Form B; "Consent to Information Form"; Form IHA-C or IHA-YP; Derbyshire Form A and Form CRC-C will all be given to the paediatrician conducting the medical.](#)
- 4.18 The paediatrician who completes the [BAAF IHA Form](#) will return it to the child's social worker who sends it on to the medical adviser at least 4 weeks prior to the adoption and permanence panel meeting.
- 4.19 On receipt of the medical report the medical adviser to the panel will write a report for Panel Clerk so the medical report can be seen by panel members along with all the other papers for Panel.

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- 4.20 Social worker for the child to book adoption panel with the Adoption and Permanence Panel Clerk at Matlock. It is advisable to book a Panel slot as they get booked up well in advance. However, if, for any reason, the case has to be withdrawn from Panel the social worker **must** inform the Panel Clerk at the earliest opportunity. The social worker must also inform the medical adviser to the Panel in order that they do not waste time collating information that will not be needed.
- 4.21 Medical adviser to the panel should have the completed adoption medical for consideration prior to panel. Once the child's permanence report is written, the service manager will quality assure and sign it before it comes to panel. The service manager to decide whether or not to accompany the social worker to panel, liaising with the adoption manager if necessary. At least 10 days before panel the completed Child's Permanence Report will be sent to the Adoption Panel Clerk.
- 4.22 Social worker to ensure that the Birth Family Support Team Family Resource Worker has a copy of the completed Child's Permanence Report to share with the birth parents so that they can make their comments. The FRW will go through the parts of the report that are relevant to each parent and assist them in making a response. The birth parent's views will be forwarded to the Adoption Panel Clerk who will ensure that Panel Members have a copy. If the birth parents do not wish to see the Child's Permanence Report and/or refuse to sign it this should be noted on the report or on a separate memo to the Panel.
- 4.23 It is expected that where the social worker for the child is inexperienced or the case is particularly complex, that the Service Manager will accompany the social worker to panel. If the birth parents want the Family Resource Worker from the birth family support team to attend panel to present their point of view s/he will do so. The FRW will maintain the confidentiality of the Panel if s/he does attend and not discuss it with the birth parents.
- 4.24 Social worker and their manager (if necessary) to attend Adoption and Permanence Panel for a recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption.
- 4.25 The Adoption and Permanence Panel, as well as receiving legal advice may wish to take advice from social workers with particular expertise or from specialists in education or child and adolescent mental health.
- 4.26 Adoption and Permanence Panel will make a recommendation whether or not the child should be placed for adoption and may give advice about contact arrangements, support needs and whether an application should

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be made for a placement order. Panel members may also give advice about contact arrangements and/or support needs.

- 4.27 The agency decision maker will agree, or not agree, the recommendation of the panel within 7 working days of the panel meeting. The agency decision maker should consider the papers available to the panel and the minutes of the panel before reaching the decision. If s/he is minded not to agree the recommendation of the panel s/he should discuss it with another senior member of the department who is not a member of the panel. Any decision, and reasons for the decision must be recorded on the child's adoption file. Once agreed, the matching process should follow as soon as possible following the Matching Procedures.
- 4.28 The social worker working with the family will inform the birth parents in person of the decision and counselling should continue. The Adoption panel clerk will inform all parties in writing as necessary.
- 4.29 A final care plan can now be submitted to court. The parents may now decide they wish to give consent to their child being placed for adoption. If they do careful consideration should be given as to whether to continue the application for a Placement Order or place for adoption with consent. Legal advice should be sought. If it is decided to place for adoption with the consent of the birth parents follow the Procedures for placing an older child for adoption with consent.
- 4.30 The social worker for the child will, after liaising with legal section, make an application for a placement order. Often an application for a Care Order is made at the same time as an application for a Care Order. Having a Placement Order enables the Local Authority to place a child for adoption. A CHILD CAN ONLY BE PLACED FOR ADOPTION WITH THE INFORMED CONSENT OF THE BIRTH PARENT(S) OR BY BEING THE SUBJECT OF A PLACEMENT ORDER. Once a child is the subject of a Placement Order it remains in force until the child reaches 18, the Placement Order is revoked or an Adoption Order is made. The Local Authority continues to share parental responsibility with the birth parents but can determine restrictions on the application of that parental responsibility. Likewise, when a child on a Placement Order is placed with prospective adopters the Local Authority can decide how much parental responsibility to share with the prospective adopters. See [Report to Court for Application for Placement Order](#) and (See Appendix12) for guidance about parental responsibility.

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- 4.31 After a Care Order and Placement Order have been granted then the Children in Care social worker will assume sole responsibility for the case. They will begin seeking an adoptive family for the child. [\(See Section 6\)](#) for procedures on family finding and matching.

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5 Finding a Family and Matching

Although these procedures refer to adoption throughout they should be followed for any permanent placement of a Child in Care, including permanent fostering, residence order or special guardianship. Although Special Guardianship and Residence Orders are private law applications where they are part of a permanence plan for a child in care, the arrangements should be subject to the same scrutiny as adoption in order to ensure that the plan is appropriate for the child. In addition children with permanence plans other than adoption are entitled to the same careful planning and full information as children being placed for adoption. Children under the age of 10 years for whom a plan of permanent fostering is agreed should also go through this process. This is in order to ensure independent scrutiny of the plan and avoidance of drift. See guidance on what paperwork should go to Panel for different legal orders.

- 5.1 The guidance to the Adoption & Children Act 2002 says “A proposed placement with a suitable adopter should be identified and approved by the adoption panel within **6 months** of the decision that the child should be placed for adoption. If a child under the age of 6 months is being placed for adoption at the parent’s request the Guidance says that suitable prospective adopters should be identified and proposed within **3 months** of the decision that the child should be placed for adoption. It is therefore essential that the child’s social worker focuses on that task.
- 5.2 Where the time scales referred to in [4.1.and 4.2](#) are not complied with the reasons must be recorded on the child’s case record.
- 5.3 If there are more children than adopters waiting in a particular category then adopter’s workers will be sent profiles of children who meet their matching criteria. If any of the children seem to be a good match for the adopters then their social worker will contact the child’s social worker to discuss the child in detail. The Child’s Permanence Report and the adopter’s assessment report can then be exchanged.
- 5.4 A referral should be made to the family finder based in the Adoption and Permanence Team as soon as it becomes clear that adoption or permanent fostering (for a child under 10) is the plan for the child.
- 5.5 The family finder, in liaison with the child’s social worker will complete a [Children’s Matching Matrix](#) that identifies the child’s needs in order that any prospective adoptive family can be considered in relation to those needs.

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- 5.6 The Family Finder will consider all possible prospective adopters for a child. This may involve matching children with prospective adopters based on the assessment reports of Derbyshire adopters, profiles of adopters from other Agencies, the East Midlands Consortium, the National Adoption Register and adverts in specialist publications. It is preferable to use Derbyshire adopters or families from the Consortium than to use families from further field as it is easier to support children and families who live closer to the social worker's office.
- 5.7 If a child has been waiting for a placement for 6 months or more then the [Update for Family Finding](#) form should be completed. The form should be completed every 6 months while the child is awaiting placement in order that the family finder is clear about the needs of the child and the sort of family that will best meet those needs.
- 5.8 Adopters' assessment reports (including references and second opinion reports) will be sent to the child's social worker for consideration. Wherever possible the child's social worker will be given a selection of appropriate prospective adopters to consider. The child's social worker will also be sent the completed [Children's Matching Matrix](#) which identifies how the prospective adopters meet the child's needs. The adopter's social worker will be notified that the forms have been sent out. No photographs of adopters should be sent out at this stage.
- 5.9 The social worker and their manager, assisted by the supervising social worker for the foster carers with whom the child is placed, should give careful consideration to the prospective adopters and how they might best meet the needs of the child. It is advisable to use the [Children's Matching Matrix](#) to identify what the child's needs are and which prospective adopters might best meet them.
- 5.10 The child's social worker and their manager should NOT attempt to reassess the prospective adopters. If they have any concern about them the social worker should ring the adopters' social worker to clarify matters. Any concerns they have are likely to have been addressed in the assessment and at the Panel where the prospective adopters were approved and their social worker will be able to advise on what was said etc.
- 5.11 The child's social worker will have discussion with the adopters' social worker to aid matching and to clarify any changes that may have occurred for either the child or the prospective adopters since adoption panel approval.

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- 5.12 If, after discussion with the prospective adopter's social worker, the adopters prove to be unsuitable then the child's social worker should complete the [Family Finding Feedback sheet](#) and return it to the adoption family finder. This is in order that the adopter's social worker can pick up on any issues that might be affecting their consideration as a suitable family.
- 5.13 When an adoptive family appears to be suitable a matching meeting will be convened. This meeting may consider one or two possible families and will consider how best the prospective adopters meet the child's needs. The meeting will also identify any further work that needs completing prior to proceeding. The [Children's Matching Matrix](#) will be updated and placed on the child's record.
- 5.14 When a prospective match is identified, the social workers concerned will continue to exchange information, including written information, via the Child's Permanence Report and the prospective adopter's assessment report. Discussion and exchange of information with several adopters' social workers may take place if necessary but only one prospective adopter should be approached.
- 5.15 If a child under the age of 10 is being matched with a carer under a different legal status to adoption the paperwork required at panel may be different. (See Appendix 17) Paperwork Needed for Panel required. Children over the age of 10 for whom the legal status is changing or if they are moving to new foster carers should also be presented to panel for a discussion about a match. Paperwork Needed for Panel required.
- 5.16 Where the prospective adopters come from another Agency the child's social worker must ensure that a case record for the adopters is opened and place on that record all information and documents received from the other agency about the adopters. Case records pertaining to the adoption should also be noted on the prospective adopter's case records.
- 5.17 The Child's Permanence Report and minutes from the Adoption panel relating to the decision that the child be placed for adoption should be sent to the Adopter's worker for them to discuss with the prospective adopters. The prospective adopters should not be shown the minutes of the panel but it is import that their worker is aware of the discussion that took place at panel.
- 5.18 The adopter's social worker should make the first approach to the prospective adopters and discuss the information on the child fully. It is important that the worker picks up on any potential areas of difficulty for the adopters. Adopters can often become over enthusiastic about the idea

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of having a child placed, and not see the difficulties so it is essential that their worker ensures that all aspects of the child are looked at in detail. Any medical issues must be fully discussed and arrangements made for the adopters to meet with any relevant medical professionals if appropriate.

- 5.19 The adopter's social worker will give a copy of the Child's Permanence Report and the [Confidentiality Statement](#) to the prospective adopters. The Child's Permanence Report must be returned if the match does not proceed. If the prospective adopters were not approved by Derbyshire then the child's social worker must ensure that **all** information about the child that has been provided is retrieved.
- 5.20 If, after all information being shared the match does not proceed then the next choice family can be approached.
- 5.21 If the prospective adopters wish to proceed a meeting should be arranged between them, their worker, the worker for the child and the foster carer's supervising social worker as soon as possible to enable there to be a full discussion. A photograph of the child may be shown at the end of this discussion if it is felt to be appropriate. Careful consideration should be given to the sharing of photographs and, if the child's social worker has any doubts at all, photographs should not be shared. This is because prospective adopters will start to attach to a child once they have seen a photograph and will find it harder to disengage from the process than if they have not seen a photograph.
- 5.22 It is vital that adopters and their workers are given as much information as possible on which to base their decision before matching panel. A meeting should be arranged with the child's current carer in order that the prospective adopters get a real picture of what living with the child is like. Meetings with nursery/family centre staff, school; medical professionals etc should be facilitated where appropriate. Prospective adopters must be shown the medical report on the child, school reports and anything else, which might assist them in reaching a decision.
- 5.23 If, after the exchange of full information, including details about any proposed contact and full consideration of all the implications of the match, all parties agree that it is appropriate to proceed then the child's social worker will book a place at the Adoption & Permanence panel. A Child's [Adoption Placement Report](#) (also known as the Matching Report) will be completed by the child's social worker in conjunction with the adopter's social worker. If the plan is to place the child in some other form of permanence the adoption placement report should be amended to reflect that.

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5.24 The Plan **must** detail: the needs of the child, the abilities of the prospective adopters to meet those needs and the support that will be supplied to assist them in meeting those needs. It should also detail why these particular adopters were chosen for the child and the level of parental responsibility they will exercise prior to the adoption order. [The Children's Matching Matrix](#) is a useful starting point for considering how the prospective adopters meet the child's needs.

5.25 [The Adoption Placement Report must detail the support that will be offered to the prospective adopters.](#) This may be practical, financial or advisory and may be provided by people and organisations other than the child's social worker, (e.g. the prospective adopters' family and friends, education or health professionals.) The assessment of support needs should also take into consideration any other members of the adoptive family who may need support in order for the placement to be a success. Their needs and how they will be met should be included in the child's permanence plan. Financial support to prospective adopters may be single payments (e.g. for a larger car, to make a garden safe etc) or ongoing allowances. Adoption allowances may be paid where the child meets the criteria for an allowance and where the prospective adopters meet the financial criteria. The criteria for the child is: the child needs special care which requires greater expenditure through illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect; where special arrangements might be necessary to facilitate a placement (e.g. where it has been difficult to find a family for a child or foster carers who could not adopt without financial support) to keep siblings or children who have shared a home together.

It is useful to use the Matrix from the [Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan](#) as a basis for a support plan that can be provided for panel. Two examples are given at (Appendix 18) as a basis for a support plan that can be provided for panel.

5.26 Financial support will be given in all cases where there is direct contact of any sort and to cover introductory expenses. A settling in grant is payable to all adopters of children over the age of four, sibling groups, disabled children or children from ethnic minority groups. Adopters of young children who are on a low income and would meet the financial criteria for an adoption allowance if taking a harder to place child are also eligible for a settling in grant. The settling in grant is to cover essential equipment (e.g. furniture, bedding etc). It is not payable for toys or clothing although an exception may be made for school uniform. It is only payable on the production of receipts. See the "Financial Support Scheme for Adopters and Holders of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders" for a leaflet about financial support to adoptive parents and other permanent carers.

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- 5.27 Adoption allowances will be paid where the child's former foster carers wish to adopt the child and ongoing payment of the fostering allowance is needed to make this possible. Any additional remuneration will be reduced over a period of two years and cease altogether at the end of those two years unless there are exceptional circumstances that suggest ongoing remuneration is needed. See the "Financial Support Scheme for Adopters and Holders of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders" for details of financial support to former foster carers.
- 5.28 When the Child's Permanence Report has been completed a copy must be sent to the prospective adopters along with an invitation to send their views, in writing, to be presented to the Panel. There is a standard form [Prospective Adopters'/Carers' Views of the Proposed Placement](#), which can be completed by prospective adopters, including those from other areas.
- 5.29 The adopter's social worker should remind the prospective adopters about the placement planning and introductions procedures and confirm whether or not they are willing to meet the birth parents. If the placement is an interagency placement the child's social worker should discuss this with the adopters' social worker. It is expected that prospective adopters will meet their child's birth parents and that there will be a life appreciation day. This is detailed in the Placement Planning Procedures.
- 5.30 The social workers for the child and the prospective adopters will attend the Adoption & Permanence Panel for a recommendation that the child should be placed for adoption with the prospective adopters. Panel members will see the child's permanence report, the adopter's assessment report, the minutes from previous panels about both the child and the adopters; the permanent placement plan; the support plan; any other relevant reports and the views of the prospective adopters before making a recommendation.
- 5.31 The Adoption & Permanence Panel will recommend or not the match and whether an adoption allowance is payable. The Panel will discuss any contact arrangements and how they are to be managed. It will also consider the support services being offered to the family and the level of parental responsibility shared with any birth parent or guardian and the prospective adopters, whether it should be restricted and, if so, to what extent. (See Appendix 12) for information about sharing parental responsibility.
- 5.32 The Adoption & Permanence Panel may make a recommendation that a child should be placed with particular adopters at the same meeting as the adopters are approved or at the same panel that recommends that the

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child should be placed for adoption. The recommendation about the placement should be made after the other two recommendations.

- 5.33 The Agency decision maker will agree, or not agree, the match within **7 days** of the panel making a recommendation. If this is not possible the reason why should be recorded on both the child's and the prospective adopter's case records. The Agency decision maker should consider the papers available to the panel and the minutes of the Panel before reaching a decision. If the agency decision maker is minded not to accept the recommendation the adoption and permanence panel s/he should discuss the matter with another senior member of the department who is not a member of the panel.
- 5.34 Within **2 working days** of the decision being made the child's social worker must advise the birth parents that a placement has been found. The adopter's social worker must ensure that the adopters are informed that the match has been agreed within the same timescale.
- 5.35 The Adoption & Permanence Panel Clerk will inform the adoptive parents in writing that a match has been agreed and include a copy of the child's permanence report, the health report and a matching certificate. The adopters must confirm their agreement to the placement in writing. The panel clerk will also write to the birth parents or guardian informing them that an adoptive placement has been found for the child. Both these notifications will be sent, in writing, within 5 working days of the decision being made.
- 5.36 The social worker for the child must explain the decision to the child, giving them time to talk about their views on the prospective adoptive family, express any doubts etc.
- 5.37 A meeting between the prospective adopters and the birth parents should be arranged if appropriate. Prospective adoptive parents will be strongly advised to attend such a meeting and there is an expectation that it will take place unless there are good reasons why it should not. Having such a meeting facilitates the adopters telling their child about adoption, and having discussions with them. It also generally dispels preconceptions on the part of all participants. If there are questions of security, risk or related issues that make a meeting inadvisable this should be discussed by all the workers involved. The meeting should be held at a neutral venue and last around 30 minutes or less. The adoptive parents' social worker should be present and a worker for the birth parent. It may not be advisable for the latter to be the child's social worker, as the birth parent may not feel supported by them. A family resource worker who has been working with the birth parent is probably the most appropriate person. Adoptive parents'

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first names only should be given and no identifying information should be given. Generalities such as the adoptive parents live in a village/work in the building trade/have two other children etc could be used.

- 5.38 Workers should discuss the content of the meeting between themselves and both parties prior to it taking place so that everyone knows what to expect. The child (depending on their age) should also be aware of the meeting is taking place so their views can be heard and taken into consideration. Birth parents and prospective adoptive parents should be helped to prepare for the meeting, planning questions to ask each other, information to share etc.
- 5.39 A life appreciation day will be held prior to the prospective adopters meeting the child and introductions starting. (See Appendix 13) for guidance on holding Life Appreciation days.

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6 Matching to Placement

6.1 Once a child has been matched with prospective adopters plans should be made to ensure a timely and smooth transition from the foster carers' home to the prospective adoptive family. Although no time should be wasted it is important that the process is not so rushed that good preparation is not completed. At all times the process should be at the child's pace.

Generally, the older a child is the longer the process should be.

6.2 After the Adoption & Permanence Panel recommends a match and the Agency Decision Maker confirms it plans should be made for the prospective adopters to meet with the birth parent(s) and for a life appreciation day.

6.3 A meeting between the prospective adopters and the birth parents should be arranged if appropriate. Prospective adoptive parents will be strongly advised to attend such a meeting and there is an expectation that it will take place unless there are good reasons why it should not. Having such a meeting facilitates the adopters telling their child about adoption, and having discussions with them. It also generally dispels preconceptions on the part of all participants. If there are questions of security, risk or related issues that make a meeting inadvisable this should be discussed by all the workers involved. The meeting should be held at a neutral venue and last around 30 minutes or less. The adoptive parents' social worker should be present and a worker for the birth parent. It may not be advisable for the latter to be the child's social worker, as the birth parent may not feel supported by them. A family resource worker who has been working with the birth parent is probably the most appropriate person. Adoptive parents' first names only should be given and no identifying information should be given. Generalities such as the adoptive parents live in a village/work in the building trade/have two other children could be used.

6.4 Workers should discuss the content of the meeting between themselves and both parties prior to it taking place so that everyone knows what to expect. The child should also be aware the meeting is taking place so their views can be heard and taken into consideration. Birth parents and prospective adoptive parents should be helped to prepare for the meeting, planning questions to ask each other, information to share etc.

6.5 A life appreciation day will be held prior to the prospective adopters meeting the child and introductions starting. (See Appendix 13) for guidance on holding Life Appreciation days.

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- 6.6 The purpose of the life appreciation day is to give prospective adopters full information about their child, including information that may not get into the written reports. The day should be as relaxed as possible, in a comfortable room with refreshments supplied and time allowed for regular breaks. Anyone who has known the child and/or their parents and can offer some insight into their personalities and their history should be invited. A minute taker should be appointed and the day should be chaired by someone who is not involved. It is not appropriate for the child's social worker to chair the meeting.
- 6.7 The planning of the introductions should be taking place alongside the planning of the life appreciation day and the meeting with the birth parents.
- 6.8 If the placement is an interagency placement a meeting should be arranged between a manager, the child's social worker, the adopter's social worker and their manager to agree the financial arrangements as soon as possible. The manager should chair the meeting using [BAAF Form H1](#) as a guide. [A completed example of a BAAF Form H1 is available on Dnet.](#)
- 6.9 If the legal situation is favourable and the child ready for placement a placement planning meeting should be held. This meeting will include the child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their worker, the child's foster carer(s) and their social worker and a childcare manager as appropriate. The form [Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan](#) should be completed at this meeting. In order to keep the meeting focused it is advisable for the child's social worker to complete as much of this form in advance of the meeting as possible. A district service manager with an overview of the situation and an understanding of all aspects of the child's, foster carers' and adopters' concerns will chair the meeting.
- 6.10 A large part of the placement planning meeting will be planning the introductions of the child to the adoptive parents. The meeting must also consider: arrangements for preparing the child and the prospective adopters for the placement; the level of parental responsibility that will be given to the prospective adopters; what adoption support will be provided and by whom; any arrangements for contact and the dates on which the child's life story book and later life letter are to be passed to the adoptive parents.

NB A child cannot be placed with adoptive parents unless the birth parent(s) have given their consent or a Placement Order is in force. If the child is under 6 weeks old the parents must have given their agreement in writing even though they cannot yet give formal consent.

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- 6.11 The Placement Planning meeting should not be used as the occasion at which the prospective adopters first meet the child.
- 6.12 The child's foster carer should be given The [Child's Portrait](#) form to complete. If they have difficulty with this it can be useful to give it to the adoptive parents and ask them to complete it through discussion with the foster carers during introductions. When completed this form should be given to the prospective adopters as a guide to understanding their child's needs in the early days of placement.
- 6.13 The child's social worker will bring to the placement planning meeting: two copies of the child's full birth certificate; copies of the current legal orders in the child; and a letter signed by the area manager giving the adoptive parents authority to give medical consent ([See Medical Consent Form – Adoption](#)).
- 6.14 The primary focus of the meeting must be the child and all plans for the introductions should be made with their welfare as the paramount consideration. The introductions should begin at the foster carers' home where the child feels most confident. The first meeting should be brief in order not to overwhelm the child. The length of meetings should gradually increase giving the child the opportunity to spend more time with the prospective adopters, and to spend time alone with them. The prospective adopters should participate in all parts of the child's routine in the foster home in order that the child develops a confidence in them as substitute carers. Approximately half way through the introductions the focus should move to the home of the prospective adopters, although the foster carer should attend with the child initially, until they develop more confidence. At least one overnight stay should be included for children over the age of four and more for children who are older.
- 6.15 The completed [Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan](#) will be given to the prospective adopters and all other participants immediately after the placement planning meeting, in order to ensure that all participants are aware of the plan.
- 6.16 The prospective adopters and other participants will be informed in writing if there are any changes to the adoption placement plan.
- 6.17 It is essential that the child is counselled by their social worker during the introductions to ascertain their wishes, fears and feelings about the placement. The child should not be allowed to think that they have control over the introductions, but their views may affect the pace of introductions and/or what is included in them.

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- 6.18 The social worker for the child will complete all the relevant paperwork for any Letterbox contact and ensure it is sent to the Letterbox administrator before the child is placed. ([See Letterbox Contact Plan, L1 Letterbox Arrangements, "Guidance to Adoption: The Letterbox Scheme" and "Letterbox Guidance for Social Workers"](#)).
- 6.19 It is good practice for the foster carer to visit at least once and within 6 weeks of placement. This serves to reassure the child that their previous carer is safe, knows where they are and supports the adoption plan and placement. However such contact is only beneficial if the foster carer can actively support the adoption placement and encourage the child to settle in to it. If the foster carer cannot be supportive of the child and the adoptive placement then careful consideration should be given as to whether or not such a visit would be in the best interests of the child. Both the foster carer and the child should be prepared for the visit. It should be arranged, or plans made to arrange it at a meeting to review the introductions.
- 6.20 A meeting to review the progress of the introductions and make any alterations will be arranged to take place about half way through the introductions. The same people will attend this meeting and agree any changes in the timetable, activities, venues etc as may be necessary to benefit the child. The meeting should consider the views of the foster carers, the prospective adopters and all social workers' views on how the introductions have been going; the meeting should also consider effects of the introductions on the child, any siblings and any other children in the foster home should be considered. It should also be confirmed at this meeting that the prospective adopters have all the necessary paperwork (birth certificates, copies, legal orders, passport, life story book, health records, medical consent letter etc). The views of all participants should be sought regarding whether or not to proceed with the introductions and at what pace. If the introductions need to cease this can be agreed at this meeting. If the introductions are going well then a moving date can be agreed. It is not usually in the child's best interests to bring the placement date forward. Plans should also be made about how the child will move from the foster home to the prospective adoptive family, being mindful of the needs of the child and the foster carers in this. It is expected that a social worker will be present when the child moves. It is generally best to avoid weekends as a moving date as there should be social workers available to support the new family. The review meeting must be minuted and placed on both the child's and the adopter's records. [See Review of Adoption Introductions](#) for an Agenda for the review of introductions.

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6.21 The child's social worker will inform the Adoption Panel Clerk and Finance Section when the placement has been made. Records should be amended to affirm that the child has moved.

NB The child's record should continue in their birth name even when the court has given permission to change their name. The adoptive parent's address should not be noted on the child's file, although it is appropriate to note that the child has been placed for adoption. Generally the address used on the records is MI55 1NG.

6.22 The Adoption & Permanence Panel Clerk will notify the Area Health Authority, the prospective adopter's GP, the Education Authority and (where a placement has been made out of county) the Children's Social Care Service in the area in which the placement has been made.

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7 Post Placement Procedures

- 7.1 The child's social worker must visit the child in their adoptive home during the first week of placement and record details of that visit. The record should include whether or not the child was seen alone; any issues raised by the adoptive parents and advice given; social worker's observations on the family and the development (or not) of attachments and any action to be taken following the visit. A record should be placed on both the child's case record and the adoptive parents' case record.
- 7.2 Further visits during the first month of placement will be at least weekly alternating between the child's social worker and the adopters' social worker. It is expected that the adopter's social worker will get to know the child so that they too might notice if the child is upset, angry, acting out etc. If they do become aware of this they should contact the child's social worker immediately.
- 7.3 Visits thereafter will be at least monthly and the social worker will work directly with the child to make sure that all their needs are being met as fully as possible – including ongoing contact with significant attachment figures. e.g. their former foster carer. It is good practice for the foster carer to visit at least once and within 6 weeks of placement. This serves to reassure the child that their previous carer is safe, knows where they are and supports the adoption plan and placement. However such contact is only beneficial if the foster carer can actively support the adoption placement and encourage the child to settle in to it. Both the foster carer and the child should be prepared for the visit.
- 7.4 The child continues to be subject to CIC procedures and will be reviewed within 4 weeks of the date of placement, within a further 3 months and thereafter within 6 months of each preceding review. The focus of the reviews will be different to that of CIC reviews and should ensure the child understands the legal and permanent nature of the placement as well as giving consideration to issues such as: the child's needs, welfare and development; whether any changes need to be made to meet those needs; whether the contact arrangements are appropriate or if they should be amended; the arrangements for the exercise of parental responsibility and whether they should be altered; the provision of support services and whether or not there should be a reassessment of those support needs; the arrangements for assessing and meeting the child's health care and educational needs and whether adoption is still considered appropriate for the child.

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- 7.5 The decision to proceed to an adoption application should be made at a review, the most appropriate being the four month review when it should be clear how the placement is developing. Prospective adopters cannot lodge their application until the child has lived with them for ten weeks.
- 7.6 In the event of a birth parent who has previously given consent to an adoption placement withdrawing that consent then consideration should be given to making an application for a Placement Order. The application for a Placement Order prevents the child being moved from the adoptive home until the court has heard the application for a Placement Order. This should only be if there are concerns about returning the child to the parent's care and discussions should be held with Legal Section as to how appropriate this is. If it is not appropriate then careful consideration needs to be given to how to effect the move of the child from the prospective adopter(s) to the birth parent(s). [See Section 3, Adoption at the Request of Birth Parents](#) for more details.
- 7.7 When a decision to lodge an application has been made the child's social workers will complete the [Report to the Court for Application for an Adoption Order \(Annex A\)](#), except for Part 4, and send it to the adopter's social worker. The adopters' social worker will complete Part4 and any other relevant part of the report and assist the prospective adopters in making their application. The [Report to the Court for Application for Placement Order \(Annex B\)](#) report used in the application for a Placement Order may be used but must be updated and the adoption issues addressed. The template found at [Annex A](#) must be used to ensure that both social workers completing the report use the same format.
- 7.8 The adopter's social worker will ensure that all the appropriate papers are lodged with the court. The relevant papers are: three copies of the application form; the Annex A; any relevant court orders; the child's birth certificate and, where appropriate, the adopters' marriage certificate. The marriage and birth certificates must be originals and the court will return them. **NB:** the court will not set a date for the adoption hearing before receiving a completed Annex A Report.
- 7.9 The child's social worker will complete a "Later Life" letter for the child and give it to the adoptive parent(s) at the point of the Adoption order being made, or earlier. The later life letter is a letter for the child to have when they are older and want further explanation about what is written in their life storybook. It should be written by the child's social worker as the person who knows the child best and is in the best position to explain the actions of the Agency. (See Appendix 14) for guidance on writing later life letters.

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- 7.10 Care should be taken in deciding in which court the adoption application will be made. The birth parents are informed of their right to attend the hearing (although their attendance is kept separate to that of the adoptive family) and using a court near to the adopters' home could lead to a breach of the confidentiality of the placement.
- 7.11 The court will appoint a worker from the Children & Families Court Advisory support Services to consider whether the adoption is in the child's best interests of the child.
- 7.12 The child's social worker, the adopters' social worker, the adopters and the child attend the court hearing with other members of the adoptive family if appropriate.
- 7.13 The social worker for the child must inform the Adoption & Permanence Panel Clerk that an adoption order has been made and record this on the child's file.

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8 Adoption Support

- 8.1 When an adoption placement is being considered for a child, consideration must also be given to the support arrangements.
- 8.2 Support should be made available to ensure that the prospective adopters can meet the child's assessed needs.
- 8.3 Not all the support for adoptive families should come from Social Care. Other agencies will also need to be involved (e.g. Health, Education, and Specialist Services).
- 8.4 Consideration should be given to what support is necessary to assist the prospective adopters in meeting the child's needs in all areas, including identity, health, contact arrangements, education, social skills, activities, therapy, etc.
- 8.5 An Adoption Support Plan forms part of the [Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan](#) and can be presented separately to the Adoption and Permanence Match at the time the placement is agreed at panel. For examples (See Appendix 18) Adoption Support Plan.
- 8.6 The Adoption Support Plan should be presented to the Adoption and Permanence Panel at the same time as the match between the child and the prospective adopters.
- 8.7 People who are adopting children eligible for an adoption allowance (i.e. sibling groups, disabled children, children with additional needs, children from an African-Caribbean, African or Asian ethnic group or children over the age of four) will be eligible for a settling-in grant per child. This is to pay for any essential equipment (e.g. furniture and bedding) needed for the child. It is not for the provision of toys or clothes, although an exception may be made for school uniform. It is only payable on the production of receipts.

Financial support may be considered for essential one-off purchases, e.g. a larger car for adopters taking a sibling group; specialist play equipment for a disabled child, etc.

- 8.8 An adoption allowance may be paid if the child is:
- part of a sibling group;
 - disabled;
 - has additional needs;
 - is from an African-Caribbean, African or Asian ethnic group; or
 - is over four years of age.

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Prospective adopters wishing to receive an adoption allowance are subject to a means test.

- 8.9 The Adoption and Permanence Panel will make a recommendation as to whether or not an adoption allowance should be paid. The Agency Decision Maker will decide as to whether this recommendation is ratified.
- 8.10 The Adoption Support Plan must be reviewed at the Placement Planning Meeting and at each review up to the making of an Adoption Order. The needs of children and adoptive parents may change as the placement develops and it is important to recognise this.
- 8.11 Any adoption allowance is reviewed annually and will be subject to change depending on the needs and resources of the adoptive family.
- 8.12 An adoption allowance will cease if adoptive parents do not complete the annual financial review forms.
- 8.13 An adoption allowance will cease when a child attains independence (through employment or the claiming of benefits in their own right). It will continue whilst the young person continues in full-time education.
- 8.14 All adoptive families are entitled to ongoing adoption support from the time of placement. Generally, it is accessed through support 'events' such as family days or training, as provided by the Adoption Support Team. See leaflet ["Adoption Support Services in Derbyshire"](#).
- 8.15 Derbyshire Adoption Service operates a Duty helpline for anyone affected by adoption, including adoptive families. This can be accessed through 01629 532280, between 9.30 to 1.00pm.
- 8.16 If an adoptive family (the child or the parents separately) feel they need more support they can approach the Adoption Support Team for an assessment of support needs.
- 8.17 Generally, an approach for adoption support is managed through the Adoption Surgery system. Surgeries are held regularly at different venues across the county.
- 8.18 Where the adoptive family already has an Adoption Support Plan, the Adoption Support social worker will review the plan, assess the current need and will plan services accordingly.

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- 8.19 Where the adoptive family do not have a Support Plan or the one they do have has ceased to be useful, the Adoption Support social worker will make a new assessment of their needs and will plan services accordingly.
- 8.20 The Adoption Support social worker will liaise with other agencies in order to meet the child's/family's assessed needs.
- 8.21 The different services involved will have their own review system.
- 8.22 Any support provided by the Adoption Service will be reviewed as agreed by one of the Adoption Service Managers.

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9 Concerns About Adoption Placements

These procedures refer to children who are **placed for adoption**. Once an adoption order has been made the family should be treated in the same way as any other family where there are safeguarding concerns. **When a child is in placement the adoptive parent remains a prospective adopter until an adoption order is made.**

Death of a Child in Adoption Placement

- 9.1 When a child in an adoption placement dies the District Manager responsible for the child and the Assistant Director Safeguarding and Specialist services will be informed immediately. They will decide which further reviews or enquiries are necessary.
- 9.2 The Assistant Director will notify OFSTED on the same day if at all possible, or the following working day.
- 9.3 The District Manager responsible for the child will co-ordinate and direct the appropriate action plan. If the circumstances of the death suggest that a serious case review may be needed s/he will follow the Safeguarding Children Procedures Section M4. The case will be considered by the Child Death Overview Panel, whatever the circumstances.
- 9.4 The District Manager will send a report of the circumstances of the death to the Adoption Panel for information.

Allegation against a Prospective Adopter or a Member of their Household

- 9.5 When there is an allegation that a prospective adopter has:
 - behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
 - possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
 - behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with the children; then
 - refer immediately to Section 11 of the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Procedures.
- 9.6 When an allegation is received the Local Authority Designated Officer (Operations Manager Children's Safeguarding) must be contacted (Tel: 01629 532178) and discussions held about how to proceed.

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The safeguarding procedures will be followed so that the child is kept safe and enabled to talk about their concerns, what has happened to them etc.

- 9.7 The District Manager responsible for the child and the adoption manager must be informed.
- 9.8 The District Manager will:
- Take the lead responsibility in directing and overseeing the subsequent action, incorporating the Safeguarding Procedures Section 11. For investigative purposes prospective adopters are treated as staff. The principles of timely, good quality, impartial investigation should be applied.
 - Consider the immediate welfare of all children living in the household.
- 9.9 Where a child from another Local Authority is placed for adoption within Derbyshire the worker receiving the referral should urgently liaise with the placing Authority and agree the appropriate course of action. Whilst the child remains in Derbyshire the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Procedures apply.
- 9.10 The first available Adoption Panel should be informed that an allegation has been made and the nature of the allegation.
- 9.11 When the investigation is complete the matter will be presented to the Adoption Panel, giving details of the outcome.
- 9.12 Any allegation is a distressing experience. DCC has purchased a counselling service and prospective adopters or their family members should be offered a referral to this service if appropriate. The child who made the allegation will be supported and counselled by their social worker.

Complaint against a Prospective Adopter or Member of their Household

- 9.13 A complaint is a registered dissatisfaction with the structures or performance of the service which requires redress.

E.g. a suggestion that:

- Methods of assessment are discriminatory.
- The Authority has failed in a duty towards a child.
- A member of staff has been disrespectful towards a service user.
- Proper services have not been provided, or have been provided in a way that was inadequate or untimely.

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- Procedures have not been followed adequately.
- Relevant legislation has not been considered/ followed.

- 9.14 The nature of the complaint must be formally recorded either by the person making the complaint or by the manager receiving the complaint.
- 9.15 Where the complaint relates to services offered to the prospective adopters the adoption manager will direct and manage the investigation of the complaint.
- 9.16 The District Manager (Safeguarding and Specialist Services) will direct and manage the investigation of a complaint relating to services offered to a child.
- 9.17 The Adoption Manager will consider any implications for the welfare of the child/children in placement or children of the prospective adopters in liaison with the District Manager responsible for the child.
- 9.18 When a complaint is made by a child, consideration of the young person's needs and the appropriate involvement of the Children's Rights Officer or advocate should be considered by the manager of the child's social worker.
- 9.19 The relevant manager will ensure that the complainant is informed of the outcome. Where the complainant is a child consideration will be given to who is the most appropriate person to advise them of the outcome.

Serious Events and Notifications Procedure

- 9.20 Any serious incident involving the health and wellbeing of a child placed for adoption must be referred to the Adoption Manager and the District Manager responsible for the child immediately.
- 9.21 Serious incidents are described in Schedule 4 of the Adoption Regulations 2003 shown in the table and include:
- death of a child;
 - serious illness or accident sustained by a child placed for adoption;
 - any serious complaint about a prospective adopter, whether or not a child is placed; and
 - instigation and outcome of any safeguarding enquiry involving a child placed for adoption.

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- 9.22 The incident must be investigated and consideration given to whether or not the illness/injury is a result of abuse or neglect or whether the incident was accidental. If there is any suspicion that the child has not been appropriately cared for then the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding procedures must be followed.
- 9.23 Where the child is placed with a prospective adopter not approved by Derbyshire CAYA, the matter must be reported to the “registered person” (Manager or Head of Service) of that adoption agency.
- 9.24 Where a serious incident is reported about a child placed for adoption in Derbyshire but not placed by Derbyshire County Council then the placing Authority must be informed immediately. In the event of a prospective adopter approved by Derbyshire County Council but not living within Derbyshire then the Local Authority in which they reside must be informed immediately.
- 9.25 The Adoption Manager will record the details of the event.
- 9.26 The Adoption Manager will immediately inform:
- the Assistant Director, Safeguarding & Specialist Services;
 - the Head of Quality Assurance;
 - the local office of Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED); and
 - other agencies as appropriate.
- (See Appendix 19) for details of who should be informed about the event.
- 9.27 In all circumstances, the pro-forma headed [Schedule 4/ Regulation 19\(1\) Event to be Notified](#) must be completed, signed by the Adoption Manager and sent, *wherever possible*, to OFSTED *on the same working day and no later than the following working day*.
- 9.28 The same information must be sent to other agencies and persons required to be notified as shown in **column 2** of the table (See Appendix 19). The boxes that are **not** shaded indicate those persons/agencies that must be notified.
- 9.29 In any situation, it may be appropriate to make additional notifications to other Agencies.
- 9.30 If an adoption application has been made Legal Section should be consulted to establish which other parties need to be informed of the incident.

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These might include:

- birth parents;
- the Court;
- CAFCASS; and
- the Police.

- 9.31 The copies of the notification sent to the Assistant Director and Quality Assurance Section should also include details about any action being taken or planned.
- 9.32 Where the event is complex, further progress reports may need to be provided – this will be determined in consultation with the Assistant Director.
- 9.33 On completion of the process, a [Notification and Follow up Action – Tracking Pro-Forma](#) confirming that the matter is now concluded should be sent to the Assistant Director, District Child Care Manager, OFSTED and Quality Assurance Manager and a copy placed on the prospective adopter's file.
- 9.34 The Adoption Manager will maintain a register of all notifications for the purpose of monitoring and the production of reports as required.
- 9.35 Adoption Panels will receive reports for their consideration concerning any incidents of any matter that affects the approval status of the adopter(s).

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10 Rescinding a Recommendation to be Placed for Adoption

10.1 There are occasions when it is appropriate to rescind the decision that adoption is in a child's best interests.

Possible reasons are:

- The child is no longer willing to consider adoption.
- Foster carers wish to offer a child a permanent home but feel unable to do so via adoption.
- It has not been possible to find an adoptive home and permanent fostering or an alternative order seems more appropriate. Every effort should be made to secure an adoptive placement for a child as adoption provides a lifelong legal relationship that no other placement can offer.

If foster carers wish to offer a child permanence but cannot adopt, then consideration should be given to how they be assisted to adopt and clarity sought as to why they cannot. Sometimes an expressed desire to provide permanence but not adopt can mean that foster carers are not as totally committed as it appears. However, there are other alternatives such as a Residence Order or a Special Guardianship Order that might be more appropriate. The social worker for the child should consider all the options discussing them with the Adoption & Placement Team and Legal Section as appropriate. The process for placing a child under a Special Guardianship or Residence Order should be the same as when placing a child for adoption. Children placed under these Orders are just as likely to need full information, careful planning etc as those placed for adoption. They should also have the same level of independent scrutiny. However the legal process is different. (See Section 13) Special Guardianship Procedures for more information.

10.2 A child in care statutory review is the first meeting at which an agreement to ask for the rescinding of a decision to place a child for adoption should be made.

10.3 Following agreement by the statutory child care review, the social worker for the child should contact the adoption panel clerk to book a date at the adoption and permanence panel.

10.4 The social worker should provide the Panel clerk with an update to the Child's Permanence Report and a report recommending that the decision to place for adoption be rescinded. If the plan is for the child to remain with the current foster carers then the social worker should also send the Panel clerk the assessment report on the foster carers, their most recent

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review form, minutes of the fostering panel at which the review was discussed and a copy of the incident sheet. The Panel administrator must receive all paperwork at least 10 days before the Panel date. [See Report for Rescind of Placement for Adoption](#) for a pro forma for a report rescinding the decision that a child should be placed for adoption.

- 10.5 Should the Panel recommend that the decision to place for adoption be rescinded (and they may not) then the agency decision maker will confirm, or not, that recommendation.
- 10.6 If a decision is made not to rescind the placement for adoption decision then the child's social worker must continue the search for a permanent placement, and work with the child so they can clearly understand what the plan is.
- 10.7 If the child is moving to a permanent foster home, or staying permanently in their current one, then a life appreciation day should be held. (See Appendix 13) for guidance on holding a Life Appreciation Day.
- 10.8 If a child remains with foster carers on a permanent basis then each subsequent statutory child care review should consider whether adoption is an appropriate option for the child concerned and their carers.

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11 Disruption of an Adoption Placement

- 11.1 The possibility of an adoption placement breaking down and ways of dealing with it will have been explored in the preparation of every family and with each child appropriate to their age/stage prior to placement.
- 11.2 Disruption usually takes place over a period of time and the child's social worker will have time to balance the merits of increasing support to try to save the placement against the effects of a disruption. All placements are subject to review so it is expected that issues relating to potential disruption will be identified at and planned for during such a review.
- 11.3 As soon as the placement is in difficulties a meeting should be held between social worker, adopter's worker and both line managers to discuss the situation, identify problems, attempt solutions and offer greater support.
- Support could include:
- Practical matters such as finance, babysitting, respite periods, support groups or contact with other adoptive parents, resolving non placement problems etc.
 - Emotional – family counselling, CAMHS, direct work on modifying behaviours, work on attachment etc.
- 11.4 From this consultation a meeting with the family (including the child if appropriate) should be arranged and the options, including what support could be utilised discussed. The adoptive parents may well have their views regarding what support they need and this should be heard and acknowledged.
- 11.5 The adoption manager must be informed that the placement is in difficulty.
- 11.6 If it appears the placement may be terminated, the object is to do so with the minimum damage first to the child and second to the family.
- 11.7 The decision to terminate the placement must be made in consultation between the social worker, adopter's social worker, their line managers and the adoption manager.
- 11.8 The roles of the child's social worker and adopter's social worker are to help the child and family separate with an understanding of the reasons and to help in grief work.

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- 11.9 Do not remove the child from the family immediately unless there is a child protection issue. The move should be carefully planned and explained to all parties, taking into consideration their views and feelings.
- 11.10 The family and child must be told what action is planned and when it is to take place. While the child is the first consideration the needs and feelings of the adoptive family must be listened to and taken into account. The child's social worker must ensure that any treasured possessions belonging to the child are not left behind. It is advantageous if the social worker assists in the packing of the child's belongings as this both ensures nothing is left behind and can be a part of the grief/separation work.
- 11.11 The child will be subject to a statutory child care review within four weeks of moving placement. However, a formal disruption meeting must be held 4-6 weeks after the disruption to help all concerned to work through the events, plan for the child's future and improve practice.
- 11.12 Consideration must be given to: whether or not adoption continues to be the most appropriate plan for the child; any changes that might be needed to meet the child's needs and/or assist their development; whether or not the contact arrangements are appropriate and whether or not they should continue or be altered. In consultation with the appropriate agencies the child's health care and educational needs should also be assessed and arrangements made to meet those needs. The disruption meeting is a good forum for considering these issues.
- 11.13 The social worker must consult with Legal Section as to whether the birth parents should be informed of the disruption.
- 11.14 The social worker for the child is responsible for setting up the disruption meeting and will discuss with the adoption manager who should be invited to attend. Formal invitations should be sent to all parties and details about the purpose of the meeting (See Appendices 15 and 16) for details and a draft agenda for a disruption meeting). Those invited to the meeting should include: the social worker for the child; the social worker for the prospective adoptive parents; the line managers of both social workers; the prospective adoptive parents; any family centre workers or contact supervisors involved with the child prior to, or after placement; the present carer and their support worker; the previous carer (at the time of placement) and their support worker; previous social worker, if appropriate; other professionals if appropriate (E.g. teacher, therapist, family resource worker etc) anyone else who the chair, the social worker or their manager considers may make a useful contribution.

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- 11.15 An independent person identified by an adoption manager will chair the disruption meeting. Documents available to the chair prior to the meeting will include: the [Child's Permanence Report](#); the [Adoptive Parents' Assessment Report](#); the [Matching Report \(Child's Permanence Plan\)](#) related minutes from the Adoption & Permanence Panel: [Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan](#), or equivalent report; minutes from the review meeting(s), minutes of any reviews while the child has been in placement, and any other material the chair, the social worker or their manager consider to be appropriate. The child's social worker should take an up to date chronology of the child's life to the meeting. A whole day, or two half days should be set aside for the meeting in order to ensure full coverage of events leading up to the disruption and a complete analysis.
- 11.16 If the adoptive family do not feel able to attend then they should be seen by the chair of the meeting to gain a view of their perspective about the disruption.
- 11.17 A minute taker who is not one of the participants of the meeting should be appointed. Minutes will be circulated within 4 weeks of the meeting.
- 11.18 When a disruption occurs, the professional adviser to the adoption panel must be informed. The child's social worker will arrange a date with the panel administrator for the disruption report to be presented at panel. This must be within 4 months of the date of the child's move from the placement. The report should be presented to both the adoption and permanence panels in order that panel members might learn from the experience.
- 11.19 The adopters must have the opportunity to discuss the disruption fully and work done with them to assist in dealing with a very traumatic event.
- 11.20 A review report should be submitted to adoption panel for consideration when the adopters, in consultation with their worker, have decided whether or not they wish to carry on as prospective adopters. If the adopters do not wish to continue then the adoption worker need not attend adoption panel. If the adopters wish to continue, then the adopter's worker will attend adoption panel, who will give a recommendation based on the details of the disruption and the worker's report.
- 11.21 The agency decision maker will confirm, or not, the adoption and permanence panel's recommendation as in all other cases.
- 11.22 The adoption panel administrator will inform the prospective adopters of the agency's decision.

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12 Letterbox

The Derbyshire Letterbox service provides for the confidential exchange of correspondence between adopted children and people of significance to them prior to the adoption. This is normally birth family members but it could include the previous carer/s.

- 12.1 The Letterbox Service is managed by the Adoption Support Service and has a dedicated Letterbox Administrator.
- 12.2 The benefits, or otherwise, of a Letterbox exchange should be considered for all children with a Permanence Plan. The consideration of maintaining contact between a child placed for adoption and their birth family should be based only on what is in the best interests of the child. The arrangement is not for the benefit of any member of the birth family (except possibly siblings under the age of 16) and the child's needs must take priority over the possible benefits of a Letterbox exchange to birth family members.
- 12.3 The Adoption Support Team offers advice and support to social workers when setting up a Letterbox exchange. There are also written guidelines for social workers involved in setting up a Letterbox exchange. See "Letterbox Guidance for Social Workers".
- 12.4 Birth family members and adoptive parents included in a Letterbox arrangement should be given a ["Letterbox Scheme Booklet"](#).
- 12.5 When setting up a Contact Plan social workers should be clear with ALL participants about what the expectations on them are. It is generally best not to include photographs unless birth family members can be relied on to use them appropriately and not share them with others, post them on the internet etc.
- 12.6 The social worker for the child would, having liaised with all parties to the plan complete a [Letterbox Contact Plan](#). The plan should be signed by the social worker and their Manager and sent to all participants.
- 12.7 The social worker for the child will also complete the form [Letterbox Arrangements \(L1\)](#) and send it to the Adoption Letterbox Administrator along with a copy of the Letterbox Plan.
- 12.8 On receipt of the Contact Plan and the Form [Letterbox Arrangements \(L1\)](#) the Letterbox Administrator will send all participants in the arrangement a "welcome" pack, which will include details of the plan.

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- 12.9 If any participant is in disagreement with the plan as received from the Letterbox Administrator then the child's social worker will be informed and must achieve a resolution in liaison with the adopter's social worker if appropriate.
- 12.10 All correspondence that is sent through the Letterbox Scheme will be checked by workers from the adoption support team to ensure there is nothing in the correspondence that is inappropriate or could compromise confidentiality. Adoptive parents will be consulted if there are any queries or concerns over the contact.
- 12.11 Copies will be made of all correspondence and retained on file. These may be given to the participants if originals are lost or destroyed. These and any original letters that it has not been possible to forward to the adopters will also be shared with the adopted person if they access their adoption records as an adult.
- 12.12 Advice and support is available to all Letterbox users through the Adoption Support Team. In addition there is a duty "Help Line" available Monday – Friday 9.30 – 1.00 (except bank holidays). The number is 01629 532280.
- 12.13 Prospective adoptive parents are required to attend a half-day training session on Contact and Letterbox as part of their preparation.
- 12.14 Birth Family Support Workers are available to assist birth relatives to fully participate in the Letterbox exchange.
- 12.15 The Letterbox exchange normally comes to an end when the adopted person reaches 18 years or when the youngest adopted sibling with whom there is contact reaches 18 years old.
- 12.16 Derbyshire Adoption Service will continue to offer a correspondence forwarding service for adopted people aged 18-21 years but the correspondence will not be checked and reminder letters will not be sent. Adopted adults are sent information "Options for Adopted Adults" when the Letterbox exchange comes to an end.

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13 Special Guardianship

Special Guardianship is a legal status created by The Adoption and Children Act 2002, but as an amendment to the Children Act 1989. It is private law and only the person(s) wishing to be a Special Guardian(s) can make the application. However, where CAYA is involved in the planning for the child arrangements may be made to support that application.

A Special Guardianship Order confers parental responsibility for a child which can be exercised to the exclusion of all others.

This means:

- The Local Authority does not have any parental responsibility.
- Birth parents do **not** lose parental responsibility but their right to exercise it is limited.
- Special Guardians cannot consent to either an Adoption order or a Special Guardianship Order.
- Special Guardians can only change a child's surname with the permission of the court or with the consent of everyone who holds parental responsibility.
- Special Guardians cannot take the child go abroad for more than three months without the permission of the court or with the consent of everyone who has parental responsibility.
- A Special Guardianship Order lasts until the age of 18.
- A Special Guardianship Order can be discharged but they are more difficult to discharge than Residence Orders.
- Couples and single people over the age of 18 can be applicants.
- It is likely that a child subject to a Special Guardianship Order will have higher levels of contact with his/her birth family than is the case for adopted children.
- A Contact Order can be made.
- Help with contact arrangements may be agreed as part of a support package.
- When young people, who were in care prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order reach 16 they can ask for advice and assistance from the leaving care services.

It is the policy of Derbyshire County Council that all children should have a permanence plan. Special Guardianship is one way of meeting a child's need for permanence and Derbyshire County Council is committed to promoting and supporting Special Guardianship where this is the most appropriate course of action for a child.

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Special Guardianship where CAYA is Involved.

- 13.1 If the relative or friend of a Child in Need or a Child in Care wishes to care for a child who cannot live with their parents the child's social worker will discuss with them under which legal basis the child could be placed with them. This may include a Residence Order, private fostering, a Care Order, with the relative or friend becoming a foster carer or a Special Guardianship Order. Careful consideration should be given to which of these arrangements is most appropriate for the child concerned. Matters such as contact with birth relatives, the security of the placement etc will affect the recommendation of the social worker.
- 13.2 People who may apply for a Special Guardianship Order are:
- Any guardian of the child.
 - Anyone who holds a Residence Order in respect of the child.
 - Anyone who has the consent of all those who hold a Residence Order.
 - Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
 - Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child.
 - In addition a Local Authority foster carer with whom a child has lived for one year can apply for a Special Guardianship Order, as can anyone who has the consent of the Local Authority if the child is in the care of the local Authority.
- 13.3 If the child is in care to Derbyshire County Council the social worker for the child must prepare a report (if there is no Child's Permanence Report the format of the [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#) can be used) for the adoption and permanence panel. The report should be similar to that which will be presented to court and should be very detailed in order that the panel can make a fully informed decision. If the child has previously been the subject of an adoption plan and there is a Child's Permanence Report available then this should be presented to the Panel, as should any assessment report completed on the applicants.
- 13.4 If the child's foster carers wish to apply for a Special Guardianship Order then their supervising social worker will complete the [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#) jointly with the child's social worker.

Foster carers may receive a Special Guardian's allowance if this is considered to be beneficial to the child. Additional fees cannot normally be paid to a Special Guardian and, if the foster carer has previously received an additional remuneration for the child this will cease to be paid two years

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after the Special Guardianship Order is made. These two years should be seen as a transitional period during which time adjustments to the new financial arrangements can be made. In exceptional circumstances, where the child needs additional expenditure the payments can continue for longer than this period if that is agreed by the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Specialist Services.

- 13.5 The applicants should give the Local Authority three months notice of their intention to apply for the Special Guardianship Order.
- 13.6 The allocated social worker(s) will work with the child and family to enable them to understand the implications of Special Guardianship.

That will include the following information:

- The Special Guardian will hold parental responsibility but the parents of the child still maintain a degree of Parental Responsibility. Thus, although the Special Guardian can exercise Parental Responsibility to the exclusion of anyone other than another Special Guardian s/he cannot apply to adopt the child nor place the child for adoption without the parents' agreement.
 - The Special Guardian must take reasonable steps to inform a birth parent of the death of a child.
 - The Special Guardian may not change the child's name without the agreement of the birth parent or the court.
 - The Special Guardian cannot take the child out of the country for more than three months without the agreement of the birth parent or the court.
 - They will also be advised that Special Guardianship Orders can be revoked and the birth parents could apply for the leave of the court to revoke the Special Guardianship Order. The birth parents would need to demonstrate a significant change of circumstances before a court is likely to grant them leave to apply for revocation.
- 13.7 A CRB check will be completed on the applicant(s) and on any other adult who shares their home. In addition Local Authority checks (from both Derbyshire and any previous Local Authority in which the applicants have lived in the previous 10 years) should be made to ascertain whether or not the family are known to the Local Authority and whether or not there are any concerns about the care of children within the family.
- 13.8 The applicants will provide the social worker with the names of three people who will act as referees for them, one of whom should be a relative. The social worker will visit the referees as part of their assessment. The

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social worker will also take a reference from the school if the applicants have children of school age.

- 13.9 The allocated social worker will prepare the [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#). It is essential that the social worker ascertains the wishes and feelings of the child during their assessment.
- 13.10 The applicants will have a medical for which CAYA Department will pay, unless they are in receipt of Legal Aid in which case the Legal Services commission may pay for it. Their solicitor will advise them on this. The child will also need to have a medical.
- 13.11 The social worker will ascertain the views of the prospective Special Guardian about the child's birth family, their willingness to promote contact and how they might work with the child's family in sharing parental responsibility. They may also need to discuss with the prospective Special Guardian how they will protect the child from the birth parents if necessary. They will also discuss the child's religion and the applicants' willingness, or not, to continue to promote that religion.
- 13.12 In preparing the report for the court the social worker should use the framework for an assessment of a child in need.

They must consider:

- The development needs of the child.
 - The family and environmental factors which have shaped the child's life.
 - The parenting capacity of the prospective Special Guardian.
 - What the child's life might be like with prospective Special Guardian.
 - The needs of the Special Guardian and their family.
 - Any previous assessment undertaken in respect of the child or the prospective Special Guardian.
 - The impact of making a Special Guardianship Order on any pre-existing relationship between the prospective Special Guardian and the child's parent and the impact this might have on the relationship between the child and their parents.
- 13.13 Consideration will need to be given to what support the Special Guardian(s) may need in order to care for the child. Financial support may be available in order to meet the needs of the child and this should be discussed at the Adoption and Permanence panel where the placement is discussed. The Special Guardian can be referred to the Derbyshire Welfare Rights team if they wish. It is essential that they have a benefits check before any allowance is agreed. See the "Financial Support Scheme

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for Adopters and Holders of Residence or Special Guardianship Orders” for further information about payments to Special Guardians.

13.14 If the Special Guardian does not live in Derbyshire (or moves out of Derbyshire) but the child has been in the care of by Derbyshire County Council then CAYA will continue to provide support services as appropriate for the first three years after the Special Guardianship Order is made. The exception to this is any financial support that has been agreed when the placement was made and supported by CAYA. Financial support and support for contact that is arranged by CAYA department at the time of the Special Guardianship Order will continue until such time as the child is no longer in need of it ([See 13.18 below](#)).

13.15 Special Guardianship allowances are subject to annual review and, if a Special Guardian is assessed as needing an ongoing allowance s/he must undertake to provide an annual statement about their financial circumstances and whether or not the child continues to live with them.

13.16 The Special Guardian in receipt of an allowance must also undertake to inform the department if:

- s/he changes address;
- the child is no longer eligible for an allowance ([See 13.18 below](#));
- there is a change in their financial circumstances; or
- the child dies.

13.17 A young person who was in care immediately prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order may be eligible for advice and assistance from the leaving care services when they reach the appropriate age.

Section 24 (1A) of the Children Act 1989 provides that the child must:

- have reached the age of 16, but not the age of 21;
- if less than eighteen years old, have a special guardianship order in force;
- if eighteen years old or above, have had a special guardianship order in force when they reached that age; and
- have been in the care of a Local Authority immediately before the making of the special guardianship order.

13.18 Derbyshire is responsible for the leaving care advice and assistance but if the young person has moved away from the area Derbyshire Adoption Support Service will liaise with the Local Authority in which they reside in order that the services provided are appropriate.

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13.19 Other support needs such as mediation with the birth family, therapy, contact arrangements etc must also be considered and agreed with the service manager responsible for the child. Financial support may also be paid to ensure ongoing contact with the birth family and to assist the Special Guardian in making their application.

Other financial support that may be payable to Special Guardians are:

- a one off payment to cover the initial cost of accommodating a child;
- recurring costs in respect of maintaining contact with a person who has a significant relationship with the child; and
- any special care needs.

13.20 Any financial support will cease if the child:

- ceases to have a home with the Special Guardian;
- commences employment;
- qualifies for income support or job seeker's allowance or attains the age of 18; or
- if the child continues full time education or training - an allowance may be payable until the end of that course or training.

13.21 If the child is in care and CAYA is supporting the application for a Special Guardianship Order the Department will be responsible for the legal costs of the Special Guardian, including paying for the application.

13.22 If the relative or friend wishes to proceed with an application and this continues to seem an appropriate plan the social worker for the child will assist them in making their application and will prepare a report for the court. The report will be in the format of the schedule of [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#).

13.23 Special Guardians may be offered the same level of support as adoptive parents and the child's social worker may refer them to the adoption support team. The social worker completing the report for court should ascertain whether or not the Special Guardians would like this. If they do, the social worker should advise the adoption support service of their details in order that they are included in invitations to social events, training etc. Should the Special Guardians require more support than this the district that supported the application for the Special Guardianship Order should make arrangements for the provision of such support for a [Special Guardianship Support Services Plan](#) format.

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Special Guardianship where CAYA is Not Involved with the Child

[\(See also Special Guardianship Procedures – Children known to CAYA for details for an introduction to Special Guardianship\).](#)

13.24 Where the child is not known to CAYA the person wishing to apply for a Special Guardianship Order must give notification in writing to the Department of their intention to apply for the Special Guardianship Order. The notification must be made at least three months prior to making any application to the court.

13.25 A social worker from the adoption and permanence team will make an initial visit to the applicant(s) to establish whether or not the Department would support the application. If the applicant(s) have not already seen a solicitor they should be advised to do so as a Special Guardianship Order may not be appropriate for their needs.

People who may apply for a Special Guardianship Order are:

- Any guardian of the child.
- Anyone who holds a Residence Order in respect of the child.
- Anyone who has the consent of all those who hold a Residence Order.
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child.

If the applicants do not meet any of these requirements they may apply to the court for leave to apply for a Special Guardianship Order.

The social worker will also discuss other possible legal orders with the applicant(s).

This may include:

- a Residence Order;
- a Parental Responsibility Agreement or Order;
- Private Fostering; or
- a Special Guardianship Order.

Careful consideration should be given to which of these arrangements is most appropriate for the child concerned. Matters such as contact with birth relatives, the security of the placement etc will affect the recommendation of the social worker.

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13.26 The applicant(s) must be advised that anyone who holds parental responsibility in respect of the child will be interviewed as to their views about the proposed Special Guardianship Order. They will also be advised that Special Guardianship Orders can be revoked and the birth parents could apply for the leave of the court to revoke the Special Guardianship Order. The birth parents would need to demonstrate a significant change of circumstances before a court is likely to grant them leave to apply for revocation.

13.27 The social worker that completed the initial visit will discuss the application with the manager of the Assessment and Placement team and a decision will be made as to whether or not to support the application. The social worker will work with the child and family to enable them to understand the implications of Special Guardianship.

These are that:

- The Special Guardian will hold parental responsibility but the parents of the child still maintain a degree of PR.
- The Special Guardian can exercise PR to the exclusion of anyone other than another Special Guardian but s/he cannot apply to adopt the child nor place the child for adoption without the parents' agreement.
- The Special Guardian must take reasonable steps to inform a birth parent of the death of a child.
- The Special Guardian may not change the child's name without the agreement of the birth parent or the court.
- The Special Guardian may not take the child out of the country for more than three months without the agreement of the birth parent or the court.

13.28 Special Guardianship applications will be treated the same as non-agency adoptions. The service manager (Adoption and Placement team) will write to the applicants explaining the process and the time scales for preparing the report for court. They will also include information about the support services on offer and how to request an assessment of need. Generally Special Guardians may be included in the adoption services that are provided by the adoption support team if they wish.

These include:

- training events;
- access to appropriate departmental training;
- social events;
- the adoption newsletter; and
- telephone support line.

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13.29 A CRB check will be completed on the applicant(s) and on any other adult who shares their home. In addition Local Authority checks should be made to ascertain whether or not the family are known to CAYA Department and whether or not there are any concerns about the care of children within the family.

13.30 The applicants will provide the social worker with the names of three people who will act as referees for them, one of whom should be a relative. The social worker will visit the referees as part of their assessment. The social worker will also take a reference from the school if the applicants have children of school age.

13.31 The allocated social worker will need to be sure that Special Guardianship is the most appropriate legal status for the child concerned. S/he will need to consider contact between the child and their birth family and the safety and well being of the child before confirming that the application should proceed.

13.32 The allocated social worker will meet with the child's birth parents to ascertain their views about the application and any future contact arrangements.

13.33 The allocated social worker will prepare the [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#). It is essential that the social worker ascertains the wishes and feelings of the child.

13.34 The applicants will have a medical for which they will pay, unless they are in receipt of legal aid. Their solicitor will advise them on this. The child will also need to have a medical.

13.35 The social worker will ascertain the views of the prospective Special Guardian about the child's birth family, their willingness to promote contact and how they might work with the child's family in sharing parental responsibility. They will also discuss the child's religion and the applicants' willingness, or not, to continue to promote that religion.

13.36 The social worker will confirm what support may be available to the Special Guardian and ascertain what support they feel they will need. ([See 13.28 above 'Support to Special Guardians' and Special Guardianship Support Services Plan](#).)

13.37 If the prospective Special Guardian does wish to be offered support as detailed above their social worker should ensure their details are passed to the adoption support team.

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If the applicant wishes to proceed with an application the social worker will assist them in making their application and will prepare a [Report to Court Application for Special Guardianship Order](#).

Support to Special Guardians

13.39 Derbyshire County Council has a responsibility to Special Guardians living within the county who need support, even where the child has never been in care. Generally Special Guardians may be included in the adoption support services that are provided by the adoption support team if they wish.

These include:

- training events;
- access to appropriate departmental training;
- social events;
- the adoption newsletter; and
- telephone support line.

13.40 Where a child has been in care immediately prior to being made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order the child, the Special Guardian and/or the child's parent must receive an assessment of their support needs if they request it.

13.41 It should be remembered that some children do not come into care simply because a relative or friend quickly assumes responsibility for a child when a parent is unable to do so. They should not be disadvantaged and so, where a child was not in care prior to the Special Guardianship Order being made the child; the Special Guardian; the child's parent; the child of a Special Guardian; or any other person thought to have a significant and ongoing relationship with the child may also be offered an assessment of support needs if they request it.

13.42 Support services that may be necessary to support a Special Guardian and the child are:

- Financial Support ([See 13.44 below](#)).
- Mediation Services between the Special Guardian and the child's birth family.
- Therapeutic Services (generally provided through the Health Authority).
- Assistance that will enable the relationship between the child and the Special Guardian to continue e.g. through training about special needs, respite care.
- Counselling, advice and information.

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13.43 All requests for support from people affected by Special Guardianship should be made to the adoption support team, unless they have not yet applied for the Special Guardianship Order and the child has a social worker from one of CAYA districts. In the first instance an appointment will be made at an adoption surgery and an assessment completed. [See procedures 8.4 – 8.22](#) reading Special Guardianship for adoptive parents etc. All support plans for Special Guardians will be agreed by the Adoption and Permanence Manager.

13.44 Special Guardians may be entitled to financial support:

- to facilitate arrangements for a person to become the Special Guardian of a child where the Local Authority consider such arrangements to be beneficial to the child's welfare; or
- to support the continuation of such arrangements after a Special Guardianship Order is made.

But such support is payable **only** in the following circumstances:

- Where the Local Authority considers it necessary to ensure that the Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian can look after the child.
- Where the Local Authority considers that the child needs special care which requires a greater expenditure of resources than would otherwise be the case because of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect.
- Where the Local Authority considers that it is appropriate to contribute to any legal costs, including court fees of a Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian, associated with:
 - i) the making of a Special Guardianship Order or any application to vary or discharge such an Special Guardianship Order;
 - ii) an application for a Special Guardianship Order under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989;
 - iii) an Order for financial provision to be made to or for the benefit of the child.
- Where the Local Authority consider that it is appropriate to contribute to the expenditure necessary for the purposes of accommodating and maintaining the child, including the provision of furniture and domestic equipment, alterations to and adaptations of the home, provision of means of transport and provision of clothing, toys and other items necessary for the purposes of looking after the child.

13.45 Where it appears that financial support may be payable, then the prospective Special Guardians should be offered a financial assessment

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which will include a benefits check. Financial assessment forms are available from the Fostering and Adoption Finance Section.

13.46 The applicants will receive a copy of [The Special Guardianships Support Services Plan](#), arrangements for reviewing the plan and details of who will review it. If there is any intention to change the support plan as a result of a review the Special Guardian will be given notice of that change.

13.47 Where a decision is made not to provide support to someone under the regulations the applicant will be notified in writing and the reasons given.

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1(Forms & Pro-Formas

The following list of forms and pro-formas referred to within this document can be viewed on the [Forms Section of Dnet](#):

- Adoption Placement Report – pro-forma & guidance
- Child’s Permanence Report (BAAF) pro-forma & guidance notes
- Child’s Portrait
- Children’s Matching Matrix
- Confidentiality Statement
- Derbyshire Adoption Placement Plan
- Derbyshire Form A – Essential Information for Doctor Completing Adoption Medical
- Family Finding Feedback Form
- Form AP – Agreement to Place a Child Under 6 Weeks Old for Adoption
- Form B – Neonatal Report on Child (BAAF)
- Form CR-C – Carer’s Report: Profile of Emotional and Behavioural Wellbeing of a Child aged 0-9 (BAAF)
- Form CR-YP – Carer’s Report: Profile of Emotional and Behavioural Wellbeing of a Child or Young Person aged 10-16 (BAAF)
- Form GC1
- Form H1 - Example of a Completed
- Form H1 – Inter-agency Placement Financial Information
- Form IHA C – Initial Health Assessment Recommended for Children from Birth to 9 years (BAAF)
- Form IHA YP – Initial Health Assessment of Young Person 10 years and over (BAAF)
- Form L1 Letterbox Arrangements
- Form M – Obstetric Report on Mother (BAAF)
- Form PH – Report on Health of Birth Parent (BAAF)
- Letterbox Contact Plan
- Medical Consent Form – Adoption
- Notification and Follow up Action – Tracking Pro Forma
- Parental Consent Form (BAAF)
- Prospective Adopters’/Carers’ Views of the Proposed Placement
- Report for Rescind of Placement for Adoption
- Report to the Court - Application for a Placement Order (Annex B)
- Report to the Court - Application for an Adoption Order (Annex A)
- Report to the Court - Application for Special Guardianship Order
- Review of Adoption Introductions
- Schedule 4/Regulation 19(1) – Event to be Notified
- Special Guardianship Support Services Plan
- Update for Family Finding

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1) Leaflets

The Adoption Service produces a series of leaflets, links to those which can be viewed on the Derbyshire County Council website appear below, hard copies of the leaflets are available from gwen.roe@derbyshire.gov.uk

- British Association for Adoption & fostering (BAAF) Leaflet: If your Child is Being Adopted and you Agree
- [Support through the Adoption Process: 'Sometimes Loving Means Letting Them Go'](#)
- [Guide to Adoption: Information for Birth Parents of Adopted Children](#)
- [Guide to Adoption: Information for Relatives of Adopted Children](#)
- Guide to Adoption: Information for Adopted Children
- [Guidance to Adoption: The Letterbox Scheme](#)
- 'Ask About Adoption'

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16 Appendices

- 1 Welfare Checklist
- 2 National Minimum Standards for Adoption – Values Statement
- 3 Letter to CAFCASS – Advanced Notification
- 4 Counselling Checklist
- 5 Pro Forma Letter to Parents giving Consent to their Child being Adopted, where Child is Placed with Adopters
- 6 Letter to CAFCASS – Notification of Relinquished Baby/Child
- 7 Letter to Birth Parents Consenting to Adoption
- 8 Recording for Adoption Files
- 9 Care Plans and the Parallel Planning Process
- 10 Counselling and Informing the Child – Adoption Agency Regulation 13
- 11 Guidance Notes on Life Story Work
- 12 Guidance Notes on Sharing Parental Responsibility with Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents
- 13 Guidance Notes on Life Appreciation Days
- 14 Guidance on Writing Later Life Letters
- 15 Disruption Meetings – A Guide for Those Attending
- 16 Matters to be Covered in Disruption Meetings
- 17 Paperwork Needed for Panel
- 18 Examples of Adoption Support Plans
- 19 Table of Events to be Notified – Schedule 4/Regulation 19(1) of Adoption Regulations 2003
- 20 Letterbox Guidance for Social Workers

Welfare Checklist

Considerations Applying to the Exercise of Powers

- 1 This section applies whenever a court or adoption agency is coming to a decision relating to the adoption of a child.
- 2 The paramount consideration of the court or adoption agency must be the child's welfare, throughout his life.
- 3 The court or adoption agency must at all times bear in mind that, in general, any delay in coming to the decision is likely to prejudice the child's welfare.
- 4 The court or adoption agency must have regard to the following matters (among others)
 - a) the child's ascertainable wishes and feelings regarding the decision (considered in the light of the child's age and understanding),
 - b) the child's particular needs,
 - c) the likely effect on the child (throughout his life) of having ceased to be a member of the original family and become an adopted person,
 - d) the child's age, sex, background and any of the child's characteristics which the court or agency considers relevant,
 - e) any harm (within the meaning of the Children Act 1989 (c41) which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering,
 - f) the relationship which the child has with relatives, and with any other person in relation to whom the court or agency considers the relationship to be relevant, including:-
 - i) the likelihood of any such relationship continuing and the value to the child of its doing so,
 - ii) the ability and willingness of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, to provide the child with a secure environment in which the child can develop, and otherwise to meet the child's needs,

- iii) the wishes and feelings of any of the child's relatives, or of any such person, regarding the child.
- 5 In placing the child for adoption, the adoption agency must give due consideration to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.
- 6 The court or adoption agency must always consider the whole range of powers available to it in the child's case (whether under this Act or the Children Act 1989); and the court must not make any order under this Act unless it considers that making the order would be better for the child than not doing so.
- 7 In this section, "coming to a decision relating to the adoption of a child", in relation to a court, includes:-
- a) coming to a decision in any proceedings where the orders that might be made by the court include an adoption order (or the revocation of such an order), a placement order (or the revocation of such an order) or an order under section 26 (or the revocation or variation of such an order),
 - b) coming to a decision about granting leave in respect of any action (other than the initiation of proceedings in any court) which may be taken by an adoption agency or individual under this Act,
- but does not include coming to a decision about granting leave in any other circumstances.
- 8 For the purposes of this section:-
- a) references to relationships are not confined to legal relationships
 - b) references to a relative, in relation to a child, include the child's mother and father.

National Minimum Standards for Adoption – Values Statement

The values statement below is included in the introduction to the National Minimum Standards for Adoption and explains the important principles which underpin them. The values complement the crucially important requirements in Section 1 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the “welfare checklist” and should be kept in mind by panel members when considering cases.

Values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child’s welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child’s wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children’s ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.

Letter to CAFCASS – Advanced Notification

LA logo & address

Service Manager
CAFCASS
Office nearest to parent

case reference no

Dear

**Re: Advanced Notification
Sections 19 & 20 Adoption & Children Act 2002**

I am writing to inform you that the following person[s] has requested their child be placed for adoption:

Name of mother :

Name of father
[if appropriate]:

Address for correspondence

Home address

Additional information relating to the child; is:

Date of birth *[including expected date]* _____

Name of child *[if known]*

Date of placement [if occurred]

The placement is made by *[delete as required]*

- an agreement as the baby is under 6 weeks of age
- accommodation: Section 20 Children Act 1989
- other *[please state]*

The parent[s] is wanting to consent to Section 19 and Section 20. *[delete if not appropriate]*

As this stage there *appears some or does not appear any* concerns *[delete as required]* about competency of giving consent.

The projected date for a completed Schedule Report and formal notice is *[insert date]*.

Yours sincerely

Name of officer

Counselling Checklist

- 1 Gain an understanding of the parent[s] specific needs i.e.:
 - communication requirements,
 - literacy skills
 - cultural issues
 - disabilities
 - immigration concerns.
- 2 Gain an understanding of the reasons for requesting the child be placed for adoption and, if not from both parents, information about the father.
- 3 Enquire if all options have been considered, identifying any support [services] that could be offered to support the child remaining with the parent[s].
- 4 Discuss the knowledge, views of the extended family i.e.: siblings, grandparents, and any consequences of them not knowing about the child's birth, especially if the father remains unknown to the LA.
- 5 Discuss the birth father, if not known or not part of the relinquishing process, in relation to his:
 - identity
 - address
 - wishes and feelings
 - whether he has parental responsibilities and his role / rights in the process
- 6 Advise the birth mother of the Department's responsibility to inform the birth father if at all possible. Explain the importance of the child having details about the birth father and gather as much information about him as possible.
- 7 Discuss the meaning of adoption:
 - life long implications
 - legally, consenting to adoption [for an under 6 weeks of age baby the agreement and then for a baby 6 weeks or more Section 19 and Section 20 of Adoption & Children Act 2002] and the finality of adoption
 - contact issues, including the possible future involvement in the child's life, possible wishes and views of the child
 - the need for information for later life for the child
 - new parents for the child
 - entitlements for the child when they become 18 years of age

- support available to the natural parents and family beyond the child's adoption
- contact details – during the child's life and after 18 years of age
- the role of CAFCASS in ensuring the understanding and unconditional giving of consent and implications of adoption
- giving the written information
- obtaining the parent[s] signature to having received the written information. [see annex 3]

8 Advise the birth mother and father, if appropriate, of the Birth Parent's Support Team and its function. Offer to make a referral so that they may have independent support.

GUIDANCE – Pro Forma letter to parents giving consent to their child being adopted, where child is placed with adopters.

NB It is expected that the letter will be amended to suit each particular case.

Dear (*Birth Parent's Name*)

I write to advise you that (*child's name*) has been placed with his/her prospective adopters (*first names of adopters if appropriate*).

When (*child's name*) is 6 weeks old you will formally be asked whether or not you consent to *him/her* being placed for adoption. In the meantime you retain parental responsibility for (*child's name*) and I will ask your permission for any major decisions that need to be made. If you wish to see (*child's name*) I will make arrangements for you to do so.

Should you wish to withdraw your agreement and have (*child's name*) returned to you please contact me so that we can make arrangements. We will then return (*child's name*) to you within seven days, ideally with a phased introduction so that you can get to know each other before *s/he* comes to you. However, if I feel, for any reason, that (*child's name*) should not be returned to you I may apply for a Court order to prevent *his/her* return. I would only do this if I felt that (*child's name*) would be at risk if *s/he* was returned to you. Obviously we would discuss this with you and the reasons would be explained to you. If this were to happen you would be advised to consult a solicitor.

I will continue to meet with you to discuss (*child's name*)'s future and you can, of course, consult with the birth parents' support team if you want to. I enclose a leaflet about their role in case you have not already made contact with them.

Yours sincerely

SOCIAL WORKER

Letter to CAFCASS – Notification of Relinquished Baby/Child

LA logo & address

Service Manager
CAFCASS
Office nearest to parent

case reference no

Dear

Re: Notification of Relinquished Baby/Child

(With reference to my previous correspondence of *[insert date of advanced notice]* *(delete if appropriate)*)

I have completed the Schedule 2 Information and am requesting the appointment of an officer to witness the consent of placement with adopters *and advanced agreement to the making of an adoption order:*

[delete if not appropriate]

Name of mother: _____

Name of father

[if appropriate] _____

Address for correspondence

Home address

Name of child

I have enclosed the Schedule 2 Information, which contains the following:

- copy of the child's birth certificate
- details of the parents
- chronology of actions by the agency
- signed copy of the written information
- additional information *[delete if not appropriate]*

Yours sincerely

Name of officer

Letter to Birth Parents Relating to Consent to Adoption

NB THIS IS ONLY A PRO FORMA AND SHOULD BE ADAPTED TO THE PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FAMILY INVOLVED. AN ALTERNATIVE LETTER MAY BE USED PROVIDED THAT IT CONTAINS THE SALIENT INFORMATION

Dear name of Birth Parents

Now that (*child's name*) is 6 weeks old you can formally give consent to either:-

- his/her placement for adoption

or

- his/her placement for adoption AND the making of an adoption order in the future.

As you know, the making of an adoption order transfers the legal parent role from you to the adoptive parents. I enclose again the explanatory leaflet about adoption which I hope you will read carefully. If you do not understand any of it please contact me or the birth family support worker. If you have not spoken to the birth family support team please note that you may contact them for support and/or advice at any time. I enclose a leaflet giving details about the service.

You may still withdraw your consent to (*child's name*) adoption if you wish. If so, please contact me so that we can discuss this further.

An officer from the Children and Family's Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) will be appointed to come and see you and confirm that you are still consenting to adoption.

I am happy to come and discuss (*child's name*) and the implications of adoption at any time. Please feel free to contact me if you want.

Yours sincerely

SOCIAL WORKER

Recording for Adoption Files

The Adoption Agencies Regulations (Regulation 12) stipulates that an adoption file must be established. The adoption file should be established after the review that decides that adoption is the appropriate permanence plan for the child. This can be complex using Framework i but, essentially it means all work relating to adoption should be entered in the "Type of Case Note" field as an "Adoption Case Note". Further clarity can be added freehand in the Title Box. This restricts access to records about sensitive adoption issues and means that, in the future a child's adoption record can be easily accessed if necessary.

When undertaking statutory visits to a child placed with adopters' workers should enter the dates of visits into the Visits system (accessed through the Visits function button on the child's Personal Details screen). This is necessary to enable the Management Information Team to read off information about statutory visits. When completing the visit workers have the option to "Create Case Note" which links directly to the visit date. Workers can use the "Type of Note" heading of "Adoption Case Note" and add a title such as "Statutory visit – Adoption" freehand in the title box.

ON NO ACCOUNT SHOULD THE ADOPTIVE PARENT'S NAME BE NOTED ANYWHERE ON THE CHILD'S FILE OTHER THAN IN ADOPTION RECORDS.

ON NO ACCOUNT SHOULD A CHILD'S NEW NAME APPEAR ON THEIR CHILD CARE FILE

Documents that should be kept on the child's adoption file are:-

- The child's permanence report
- Minutes of adoption panel that recommend the child be placed for adoption, including the recommendation, reasons for the recommendation and any advice.
- The decision of the agency, and any letters pertaining to adoption sent to birth parents, guardians or prospective adopters.
- Any consent to placement for adoption, and the making of an adoption order
- Any form or notice withdrawing consent
- A copy of any Placement Order
- Any other documents that pertain to adoption, rather than the day to day Looked After Care of the child.

- Case Notes where adoption is discussed with the child, foster carer, other professionals or prospective adopters. NB where this discussion forms part of a statutory visit then 2 case notes will need to be put on Framework i. This is in order that statutory visits are noted as part of any performance management process but also in order to keep any matters pertaining to adoption, and the adopters, confidential.

Care Plans and the Parallel Planning Process

- 1 One of the Government objectives for children is to ensure that they are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood.
- 2 A critical part of the social work role is to make plans that maximise opportunities for children to receive, and benefit from, such secure, enduring and safe care, whether within birth/extended families or through permanent substitute care (planning for permanence).
- 3 The planning process will identify which option for permanence is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child. Timescales should be built in to the planning to avoid unnecessary delays in achieving security and stability for a child.
- 4 For most children the best prospect for a permanent family that meets their emotional, physical and legal needs will be with their own parents.
- 5 Under the Children Act 1989, where children cannot live with their birth parents a preferred option is to seek a permanent home for them with their extended family, where this is consistent with the child's welfare.
- 6 Adoption can offer children who are unable to return to their birth families a further option for 'belonging' in a legally permanent new family, and is therefore a key means of achieving permanency.
- 7 The route to adoption can be lengthy and complicated. Often, in Care Proceedings, the facts of the case remain in dispute and it may not be possible to be certain of the outcome. The viability of a plan for a child to remain in, or return to its birth/extended family may need to be tested against the case for a contingency plan (adoption, special guardianship, residence order). In such cases it may be difficult to firm up a long term care plan.
- 8 However, for some children adoption will be the clear first option, or the definite contingency plan, either at the start of Care Proceedings or at some point before the Final Hearing. (This may be because of past history or as a result of current assessment.)
- 9 Where adoption is envisaged as a likely option it is important that work is undertaken before the Final Hearing to minimise delay in placing a child should the plan for adoption be agreed. This means that work towards the adoption plan needs to take place alongside the assessment of the viability of returning a child to its birth family.

- 10 This work towards two possible outcomes in Care Proceedings (where one outcome is adoption) is known as *parallel planning* or *twin tracking*.
- 11 This approach is strongly endorsed in a number of DOH documents and guidance eg

Adoption – Achieving the Right Balance (LAC (98) 20)
Care Plans and Care Proceedings under the Children Act 1989
(LAC (99) 29)

Both these DOH local authority circulars call for an assault on the causes of unnecessary delay in achieving permanence and give specific attention to the dovetailing of care and adoption planning.

- 12 Birth parents need to be informed that the two plans (rehabilitation and alternative permanence) are being made to meet the child's needs and prevent unnecessary delay.

13 **Model for Effective Parallel Planning**

- 14 The following model should be used in the majority of cases where there is a possible plan for adoption. However the needs of individual children, the structure of some children's teams, and the skills of particular workers may indicate the need for flexibility in the application of the model. Whilst acknowledging that differences exist in structures and workloads this model is predicated on a belief that it is best for parallel plans to be co-worked in order to achieve timescales in securing permanence for children.

- 15 Parallel planning needs to be promoted at the Reception and Assessment stage. Early social work involvement in cases where there is a suggestion that the birth family is unable to adequately care for a child requires a good quality assessment of ability to meet the child's needs.

- 16 The planning process at this stage should maintain an awareness of the need for a contingency plan. Consideration should be given to the potential need to parallel plan for adoption (some children's backgrounds may suggest this early on) as the worker may be able to gather information, mementoes, anecdotes, etc that may have meaning for the child if adoption is the eventual outcome.

- 17 Children's Service Managers in each Area should keep each other informed about all new child protection and looked after cases. These cases should be discussed with a view to early identification of possible routes to permanence. A good practice model would be for this to happen at a monthly "transfer and caseload" meeting.

- 18 Children in Care should have a plan for permanence formulated at the 4 month childcare review. The Reviewing Officer should record the plan for permanency

(and if adoption is not being considered, why not) and should also ensure that the care plan records a contingency plan where appropriate.

- 19 Care plans should specify what options have been tried with the birth family (eg family group meeting, exploration of relatives as carers and if not why not, etc)
- 20 All care plans should be checked and tracked by Children's Service Managers and file audit processes, and by the Reviewing Officers through the review process.
- 21 Where the plan calls for Care Proceedings, the case should be allocated to a social worker in the Children and Families Team (CFT). If adoption is identified as a likely plan a worker from the Children in Care (CIC) should be allocated to progress the adoption work. (Child's Permanence Report, adoption panel, preparation of child, life story work, family finding, matching panel, life-appreciation day, good-byes, Annex A report etc). This allows the CFT worker to focus on the assessment of the birth family and prepare court reports, while the CIC worker moves the adoption work forward. Such co-working is advantageous in that it avoids unnecessary delay, promotes clarity of focus for each worker, enables the CIC worker to engage the child and family at an early stage and see the child through to permanency. The child will be prepared for the move by a worker already well acquainted with the child and his/her history, and the CIC worker will be in a better position to match a suitable family to the child.
- 22 The identification of two workers reinforces for the family that there are two potential plans. This can help them to fully realise and think about the implications early on. It is important always to be explicit with the parents about the parallel plans, and to be clear with them about the role and function of each of the workers.
- 23 Once parallel planning has been decided on, and workers have been identified, a casework meeting with both social workers and their managers should be held to determine respective responsibilities, timescales, progress of work, where joint working is appropriate etc. (For example, it would be valuable for both workers to attend adoption panel.)
- 24 There may be a need for a further meeting to chart and check progress at a later stage.
- 25 It is envisaged that the role of the CFT worker would cease at the conclusion of Care Proceedings. However it would be valuable for this worker to be involved at the life appreciation day and to take part in visits to potential adoptive families. Not only would they have a useful contribution to make to these events, but also it would afford the worker the opportunity to have a sense of outcome for the child.

Counselling and Informing the Child – Adoption Agency Regulation 13

This regulation requires the agency to:

- Provide a counselling service for the child.
- Explain to the child, in an appropriate manner, the procedures for and the legal implications of adoption.
- Provide the child with appropriate written information about the above matters as relevant.
- Ascertain the child's wishes and feelings regarding:
 - the possibility of placement for adoption with a new family and his adoption
 - his religious and cultural upbringing
 - contact with his parent, guardian, other relative, or any other person the agency considers relevant.

Counselling should help the child to understand, over time, what adoption would mean for him or her now and in the longer term. The child should be helped to understand why the agency considers they should not stay with their own family or short term carer and why adoption is the preferred option for permanence. The child also needs to know about the implications adoption may have for contact with their parent, other family members and others.

Counselling needs to be given in a way that is sensitive to the child's religious beliefs or other values and in an environment where the child is able to talk and ask questions in way that enables him or her to gain an understanding of their situation.

The agency should provide written information, ie a children's guide about the process of adoption and adoption itself. This may help the child to reflect on what he or she has been told.

The child's views should be sought but the worker must be wary of giving the child the impression that he or she is being asked to bear the weight of the decision that needs to be made about their adoption. The child should be helped to understand that their wishes and feelings will be listened to and taken into account. The child's views should be recorded. Where it is not possible to ascertain the child's views, the reason for this should be recorded on the child's case record.

It may be in the child's interests for certain members of their family to play a part in their counselling. Whatever the involvement of others, the Department remains responsible for ensuring that the counselling meets the child's needs as they develop over time and is given in a way that is sensitive and appropriate to his or her background, age and understanding.

Guidance Notes on Life Story Work

NB These are notes and not a substitute for good training.

A Life Story Book is the product of work done with a child not the sum total (unless the child is too young to participate in the work, ie under 4 years). It can help to pull together discussions about loss, separation, guilt, grief, family, fears for the future, understanding of past etc. It will be one of the main sources a child will use to help them understand their history. The book **must** include the reasons why a child was looked after, why a decision was made to place for adoption and details of the child's history prior to being looked after and while being looked after. A memory box can be used in conjunction with the Book to keep precious objects, letters and other mementoes.

Life Story work

- is skilled and needs training
- is time consuming – weekly or fortnightly sessions are needed to keep up the momentum, young children have short retention time.
- needs commitment from worker to child. Also involves commitment from departments, areas, and team managers to give workers time to do it. Commitment from foster carers or residential workers and their managers.

When you make an appointment with a child – keep it. You must be reliable.

- Needs resources – money for toys, paper, pens, work books, reading books, ring binders, photos, cameras, videos – remembering that the finished result will have to last many years – ie good quality materials.
- Needs to start early – social workers, foster carers and residential workers to see the importance of records, memories, and mementoes from the early days of a child's care career.

Life Story work is best done by the person who has shared the experiences with the child, can make the information personal, accurate, and will be the bridge for that child in a future placement. Foster carers should be involved as supporters for the child and in giving and preserving information. They do not have the information about the child's past and the actions of the Department to take responsibility for the work. If the work is difficult for the child and the worker is raising sad or hard issues for the child to consider then the child needs a "safe

haven" away from this which can be provided by a foster carer who has not been directly involved.

No child should move to adoption without Life Story work being done. Life Story books can have different functions at different times in a child's life and can be referred back to at different stages to answer different needs. This is the child's book – their story, their memories – good and bad, their contribution and co-operation is a vital part of them coming to own it as theirs.

Points to be considered by the social worker:-

- Work at the child's level, if working with them – know your child. Enlist the help and support of Foster Carers (but don't hand the job over to them, it is not their role).
- Find a good venue – child friendly, not too many distractions, confidential but not claustrophobic, where the child feels comfortable.
- Find out what interests the child – if they hate sitting down talking, drawing, cutting and sticking – don't do it. Are they more comfortable, in a quiet corner of the Foster Home or Residential Home or outside? Do they find it easier to talk while doing something else – playing, walking, in the car?
- Explain to the child what is being done and why. Explain that all parts of life are important – happy or sad (it's OK to feel these things).
- Prepare for sessions but be flexible and try to do them with a child at times when they are fresh and not when they would prefer to be watching TV – or after school if they need to wind down for a while.
- Continuing process – go into several volumes, add things after moving etc.
- Need to keep the book safe. Make a copy for retention with the file in case of loss, or destruction of all or part of the book.

Get some training:

BAAF do good courses

Read and use:-

Life Story Work – Tom Ryan and Roger Walker BAAF

Chester and Daisy Move On – Angela Lidster BAAF

Bruce – Younger children – Interactive CD

Dennis Duckling – Very young – Barbara Orritt – Children’s Society
Maybe Days – Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright – Magination
Press
Tia’s Wishes – BAAF
Tyler’s Wishes – Helen Kahn – BAAF

Many other helpful books on the market – but be aware some US books
can be very different culturally.

Guidance Notes on Sharing Parental Responsibility with Birth Parents and Adoptive Parents

At the Time of Placement Order

The making of a Placement Order confers Parental responsibility to the Local Authority who shares it with the birth parents, and, on placement, with prospective adopters. However, the Local Authority can determine the extent to which the birth parents and the adoptive parents exercise their part of parental responsibility. This needs to be made clear in the application for a Placement Order.

When applying for a Placement Order the following areas should be considered in respect of parental responsibility

Changing the name of the child - the family name legally cannot be changed without the permission of the birth parents or the Court. It is useful to ask the Court for permission to change the child's name at Court when applying for a Placement Order. Thus the child can take the family name of the adopters at the time of placement reducing embarrassment and/or conjecture when the name is changed at the time of the adoption order. (NB The new name would not have to be shared with the birth parents).

Contact – Direct contact (if it exists) is likely to continue only until such time as an adoptive family is found. Birth parents need to be made aware of this and that contact is likely to be reduced prior to stopping altogether.

Medical Treatment – Any major or planned medical treatment should be discussed with the birth parent, although the foster carer (in consultation with the child's social worker) will decide on any day-to-day medical needs.

Dental Treatment – The Department will ensure that the child has regular dental check ups, and treatment but any planned dental treatment will be discussed with the birth parents.

School Attendance – Any decision to change the child's school should be made in consultation with the birth parent. The birth parent should receive copies of the child's school reports until such time as the child is placed with the adoptive parents.

School Trips – The Birth Parents' permission should be sought.

Passport Applications – Birth parents should be asked to consent to a passport application.

Holidays – may be decided by the foster carer in conjunction with the child's social worker but the birth parents should always be informed.

Attendance at a place of worship – Birth parents may specify that they wish a child to be raised in a particular religion or denomination, and this should be complied with as far as possible. If the birth parents have not specified any religion but the foster carer attends a place of worship and would like to take the child this should be discussed with the birth parent.

Activities – Any activities that the child pursues (cycling, brownies, nursery etc) will be arranged by the foster carer, in consultation with the child's social worker.

If the birth parents will not consent to any of the matters on which they are consulted the Department may make a decision contrary to the wishes of the birth parent if that is thought to be in the best interests of the child.

At the Time of Placement for Adoption

When a child is placed for adoption the Local Authority also shares parental responsibility with the prospective adopters. It is suggested that the adoptive parents should be given parental responsibility in the general decisions of daily life: -

Activities that a child might participate in (brownies, tumbletots, bike riding etc)

Holidays in the UK

General medical treatment, including taking the child to the Doctor.

Dental check ups and minor treatment.

School – which school the child will attend and any issues arising there EXCEPT where the child is subject to a statement of special educational needs when the social worker and the adoptive parent should liaise and reach decisions together.

Day school trips.

Attendance (or not) at a place of worship.

Babysitters, childminders, etc

Discipline/sanctions – should be administered by the prospective adoptive parents but should be discussed with the child's social worker. Corporal

punishment of any description is not appropriate for a child who is placed for adoption.

Prospective adoptive parents should not have parental responsibility in the more complex areas and should always consult with the social worker for the child in the following areas: -

Any major or planned medical treatment including dental treatment.

Any invasive process such as body piercings, tattoos, circumcision etc.

Holidays abroad.

Special educational needs planning

The child's name cannot be changed at all without the permission of the court

It may be that the prospective adoptive parents do not wish to take on as much parental responsibility as suggested in the first instance. If so it may be shared between them and the child's social worker until they feel more confident about taking on more parental responsibility. Prospective adoptive parents should not be given total parental responsibility until they apply for the Adoption Order.

Birth parents still hold some parental responsibility up to the time when the Adoption Order is made. They should be informed if the child undergoes any major medical treatment, including dental treatment, or if it has been established that the child has any special needs arising from educational or health assessments.

Birth parents should also be advised if an adoptive placement disrupts unless to do so appears contrary to the best interests of the child.

Guidance Notes on Life Appreciation Days

Purpose of the Day

Getting to know a child before becoming their permanent carers is a complex process and although much information may be available, it is sometimes difficult to make the child seem “real”. The kind of information available in reports is not necessarily the best information for learning about the child as a person. In a care situation the child will have come into contact with many people and each will have some memory or experience to share.

Often, after a placement has broken down and when a Disruption Meeting is held, carers and workers have heard information not previously known. The reasons for this knowledge being lost or unavailable may have been because a worker who knew the child earlier in his or her life has moved on and information that seemed less important at the time was stored only in that worker's memory. It may be that people who had intimate knowledge of the child's personality and reactions to events were not asked to make personal recordings of their impressions. A lot of knowledge about a child may be stored in the memories of those who have known them and this is an opportunity to share and preserve that information.

Often it is that we as adults have failed to enter into the mind and feelings of the child and their lives and experiences have been recorded in adult's words and concepts.

The aim of a Life Appreciation Day is to bring the child alive for the people who will be making a relationship with him/her and who will be helping them make sense of their past. It will help the participants to understand what the child has experienced and how that has affected the child.

On a Life Appreciation Day adopters are introduced to the people who have significant personal knowledge of the child (e.g., the nursery nurse; the health visitor; the relative who might have tried to give support). These people often have important recollections to share with adopters. Clearly we cannot ask everyone to help, as limitations of time and considerations of confidentiality have to be taken into account.

When Should a Life Appreciation Day be Held?

Life Appreciation Day should be provisionally planned to take place before the introductory period so the prospective carers begin the placement with as full a picture as possible about the child who is joining

their family. Once a match between a child and family has been agreed the meeting can take place in a relaxed and positive setting with the focus being clearly on the child.

The day can also highlight information that may assist in the planning of the move into placement or the support that may be needed by the child and family following the beginning of the placement.

There may be situations where a child is already in placement and a Life Appreciation Day could be usefully held to assist carers/professionals in gaining a clearer understanding of the child's past.

Who should attend?

Prospective Adopters

Adopter's Support Worker

Present foster carers/residential workers

Family Resource Workers

Child's Social Worker

Previous Social Workers

Previous Foster Carers

Teacher and Previous teacher/s

Nursery/Family Centre Workers/Play scheme Workers

Contact Supervisors

Health Visitors

Family members/extended family members -where appropriate

Any other involved adults who may be able to contribute to a fuller understanding of the child.

Planning for the day.

The child's social worker should liaise with the chair of the meeting about the invitation list and invitations will be sent out as early as possible.

A venue will be agreed and booked, preferably in the geographical area where the child is currently placed to facilitate attendance of involved adults.

Lunch should be provided for the participants.

The social worker will need to prepare a family tree and a flow chart of significant events/moves in the child's life, with a chronology and a report detailing the child's health, physical and emotional development. These should be sent to the chair facilitating the day with the child's permanence report and any other relevant documents, preferably a week before the Life Appreciation Day.

Attendees should read up on any records about the child before the day and bring along any photos or memorabilia, which could be passed on to the new carers. It is advisable to suggest this in the letter of invitation as some attendees may never have attended a life appreciation day. The life appreciation day will usually take place over four to five hours with a break for lunch.

Ideally, the day will be run sequentially and most participants benefit from attending all day, as it is by hearing other people's contributions that thoughts and memories are activated.

However, recognising that people may have time constraints, it is possible to enable them to have a "slot" during the day.

What Happens during the Life Appreciation Day?

The leader of the Life Appreciation Day who is not the child's social worker takes participants on a conducted journey through the life of the child, particularly searching for clues about experiences that occurred when paper records were limited, and experiences that give more intimate knowledge of the child or their parents.

Personal recollections of the child by participants, which are not seen as relevant to casework records, are very valuable.

A family tree will be provided at the beginning of the day and usually a flow chart, which details the main events in a child's life. These can be added to during the day and notes of the discussions will be made to help record the events for the child and family.

The life appreciation day should be minuted and a copy be given to the adoptive parents as well as a copy being placed on the child's file. This gives the adoptive parents a record to which they can refer as necessary as well as having a record should the child want details at any time.

Guidance on Writing Later Life Letters

Introduction.

All participants in the adoption process should have been prepared to be open about the child's adoption throughout childhood. The detailed information in the letter to the child will be appropriate to show the child when they are mature enough to understand it. This will vary from child to child, depending on the child's abilities, the adopters' willingness and capabilities in terms of ongoing telling, and the complexity of the child's history. As a guideline, it is usual to aim the style, content, wording and explanations for a child around 10 – 12 years of age. Adopters should be given information about the Department's Adoption Support Service should they need help or advice when dealing with any aspects of telling their child about their background.

The letter to the child should honestly reflect the child's history and accurately reflect the birth family's circumstances. As the child's social worker you are the only one who has first hand knowledge of the child, birth family and adoptive family and you will have the personal knowledge which will make this letter a real and meaningful document. Where children have been abused this should be acknowledged, with a clear statement that the abuse was neither the fault nor responsibility of the child. There should be no need to construct a "cover story" about a child's background, which denies the facts of what actually happened. Adopted adults have access to information from their birth records so letters to children should be consistent with the information that the child may have access to in later life. It is not helpful to gloss over difficult information or to rewrite facts to try to make it easier for the child.

Occasionally with older children it has been suggested that a letter to the child is unnecessary in view of the amount of life story work and counselling the child has received. However, life storybooks can be lost or destroyed and will have been prepared at a level commensurate with the child's age and understanding at the time they were made. A letter to the child can develop the information contained in the life storybook and add significantly to the information available to the child as they grow older.

A letter to the child should be written in clear terms. The use of social work, medical or other jargon (e.g. schizophrenia, or sibling group) should be avoided. Always be aware of the person to whom you are writing and how they may understand what you write.

It is preferable to personalise the letter wherever possible, e.g. "When I first met you etc". Any anecdotes about you and the child together will help bring life to the letter and make it real. Positive personal comments help children to feel good about their life and birth families and may provide a balance to some of the more negative information that will be in the letter.

The letter should only contain identifying information about the birth family that is already known to the child or contained in their life storybook, e.g. original surnames or previous/current addresses of birth family members.

What a letter to the child should contain

Beginning the letter: a sample of a possible first page can be found at the end of these notes.

Begin by introducing yourself. You can state the length of your involvement with the birth family and child. If previous significant social workers were involved, it is worth mentioning their names.

Description of birth family members

Explain the birth family situation at the time you became involved in the case, including where the children were living, the whereabouts and situations of the birth parents and of any siblings. Describe all known family members - first name, age (at the time the child was born), ethnic origin, place of birth if known (this can be particularly important for black children), physical description, appearance and personality. Where siblings have been placed separately from the child, include as much information as possible about their situation (whilst recognising that in some circumstances there will be a need to preserve the confidentiality of the siblings' placement). **Include in this an explanation as to why the siblings are not together.**

Include as much information as possible about birth parents' background and upbringing, schooling, work, interests and health and about their relationship. Include as much information as is available about a putative father, including the source of the information and whether or not he accepts paternity. Use the term **birth** mother/father, rather than simply mother/father, as this may be confused with the adoptive parents. Similarly the term natural mother/father implies there is something unnatural about the adoptive parent. It can be helpful to refer to a birth mother as, for example "mum Debbie" or "birth mum Debbie" to distinguish from the adoptive mum.

The Child's Birth

Record known details of the child's birth date, name of hospital, town, time, weight, height, physical condition and whether the pregnancy was planned or not.

The Department's involvement

Describe in detail the Department's involvement with the birth family and children. Include information gained about the birth family from other agencies prior to the Department's involvement, reasons for the Department becoming involved and an historical account of the events leading to the decision to place the child for adoption, including details of court proceedings.

Include all of the child's moves and changes of carers along with information about previous carers and their families which may be significant for the child eg names of children, particular holidays they may have enjoyed, names of teachers/schools etc.

Contact

Outline the contact arrangements envisaged at the time of placement for adoption, and any alterations agreed prior to the Adoption Hearing (with the reasons for change). Recognising that contact arrangements may stop or be changed after adoption, you should be cautious about describing arrangements in definite terms. It is advisable to describe them as proposed.

Ending the letter

Convey your best wishes for the child's future and comment on your own pleasure at being part of the child's life in a simple and balanced way. Terms such as "lots of love" or "have a great life" should be avoided.

(Sample later life letter opening)

Dear Jason,

I don't know if you will remember me, my name is Jane Smith and there is a picture of me in your life story book. I am a social worker and it explains there what that means. I knew you from when you were born right up to when your mum and dad adopted you. I am writing this letter in May 2002 for you to read when you are older to help you understand some of the reasons why you came to live with mum, dad and Luke, to answer some of your questions and to add some more information to what you already have in your life story book. I know mum and dad will try to help you with this and that you can ask them any questions you have. They might not be able to answer them all but will try their best to help you get information when you need it.

I will start by explaining how I first came to know your birth family and you, and what happened before you were looked after by Derbyshire Social Services. I will tell you something about your birth mum, Tracey, and other people in your birth family. I will also tell you how you can get information and help in the future if you want it. I will be as honest as I can and not keep any secrets from you so you may find some of the things make you sad or feel uncomfortable. This is OK and only natural. What is important for you to remember is that you were only a baby/young child at the time and none of the things that happened were your fault or your choices. It was the adults who made the decisions. It is also important for you to know that your birth family loved you but for many reasons were not able to take care of you even though they wanted to. So I hope this information helps to make things clearer for you and answers some of your questions.

Continue.....

Disruption Meetings – A Guide for Those Attending

When a placement ends, for whatever reasons, it is a time of uncertainty and distress, which raises many questions. A meeting about the placement can be a valuable learning exercise and while it will not provide all the answers we may want, it can help the healing process and identify future work. One of the purposes of the meeting is to examine the various elements of the placement and bring some understanding to the sequence of events that led to the disruption. This should help to:

- Meet the child's needs now and into the future
- Support the family in moving on
- Improve the way we work to achieve placements
- Show how many factors affect the progress of a placement and can lead to a disruption.

In order to look at all the elements affecting a placement it will be necessary to spend time considering issues in full, so a whole day or two half days will be set aside for the meeting. Refreshments will be provided by the Department and the venue will be as relaxed as possible.

All the workers involved with the child and the adoptive family will be invited to the meeting along with their managers. The child's past and present caretakers, with their support workers, will be invited - with any significant people from the child's past. The adoptive family should attend and their worker will be there to offer support during and after the meeting.

The child's views will be represented and in some cases the child themselves may attend and participate with sensitive support, if it is felt to be helpful for them. An independent person will chair the meeting and minutes of the meeting will be taken and circulated to those attending.

An agenda for the meeting is attached and key workers will be invited to make contributions at each stage, but the meeting is open to comment throughout. It is important that an understanding is gained of the child's history and life experiences so a good deal of time will be spent in trying to achieve this.

The purpose of the meeting is not to try to apportion blame, but to come to a better understanding of what contributed to the disruption and how we can learn and go forward from here.

To that end the chair of the meeting will summarise the main points and may include some suggestions for future planning drawn from the discussion.

Matters to be Covered in Disruption Meetings

Child's Life Prior to Reception into Care

- 1 Date and place of birth
- 2 Number of care settings the child has experienced, including hospitals, day care, nurseries, child minders, private foster parents and relatives, irrespective of length of time involved.
- 3 Type and quality of care given
- 4 Health, including minor matters or short-stay hospital admissions
- 5 Education, including details of support in school or special school
- 6 Involvement of Social Services and/or other welfare agencies

Reception into Care

- 1 Reasons for removal of the child
- 2 How the child reacted to separation from parent(s).
- 3 Where the child was placed, and why
- 4 What the plan was for the child's future.

Child's life in Care

- 1 Number of care settings the child has experienced including special schools, Children's Homes, hospitals, foster homes etc. irrespective of time involved.
- 2 Quality of care given in each setting
- 3 Significant changes of caregivers for child
- 4 Loss of other significant people in the child's life, including social workers.
- 5 Descriptions of the child's behaviour patterns in each placement
- 6 Descriptions of games the child played.
- 7 Perceptions and feelings of care givers about the child
- 8 Details of special assessments, psychiatric or psychological
- 9 Description of health development.
- 10 Description of school settings.
- 11 Basis on which the plan for family placement was made and who was involved.
- 12 Legal status of child
- 13 How the child was prepared for placement, by whom, and the child's attitude to the plan.

The Home Study Process

- 1 When and how the family came into contact with the agency.

- 2 Type of process used.
- 3 Who was involved in the process?
- 4 Description of family structure.
- 5 Description of life-style.

- 6 Description of expectations the family had of the child they hoped to have placed with them.
- 7 Description of experience with children.
- 8 Attitudes to infertility (where appropriate).
- 9 Reason why family wanted to offer their home to a child.
- 10 Descriptions of personalities of family members.
- 11 Description of adults' own childhoods.
- 12 Family's feelings about assessment process.
- 13 Social Workers' views about strengths or weaknesses or doubts.
- 14 Panel's attitude to application

Selection Process.

- 1 How the family was selected for the child
- 2 Who was involved in the decision?
- 3 With inter-agency setting, whether social work staff met in advance of the decision, whether there was a joint decision-making process, and whether the decisions were recorded.
- 4 Why the family was selected for the child.
- 5 How the agency panel was involved

Introduction Process

- 1 How the process was planned and who was involved.
- 2 What plan was devised.
- 3 Whether the child had the opportunity to get to know the family sufficiently on his or her own ground.
- 4 What feelings the child expressed between contacts with the family.
- 5 What feelings the family expressed between contacts with the child.
- 6 How the decision was made to place the child and by whom.
- 7 Whether the agreed plan worked out in practice.

Placement.

- 1 When and by whom the decision was made to place the child.
- 2 When the child was placed and how he or she reacted to the placement.
- 3 How supervision and support were planned, how the roles were designated, and whether the agreed plan operated in practice.
- 4 Description of the child's life in placement: behaviour patterns, play and health.
- 5 Description of the child's life at school.
- 6 Description of the family's attitude and behaviour .

- 7 How the difficulties developed
- 8 Description of problems and attitudes of the child and the family to the difficulties.
- 9 How the decision was made and by whom, to remove the child.
- 10 The child's reaction to the disruption.
- 11 The family's reaction to the disruption.

- 12 The subsequent placement for the child.

The Future

- 1 Description of the child in present placement.
2. The future plan.
3. Help available to the child.
4. Whether the family is still in touch with either agency and the help that is available to them.
5. It is necessary to keep the birth family informed that disruption has occurred and any planned contact will be affected.

Closing Summary

PAPERWORK NEEDED FOR MATCHES AT ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL					
	Child's Permanence Report BAAF CPR	Adopters/Carers Assessment Report BAAF-F	Placement Report	Support Plan	Annex A
Approval of Adopters/Long Term Foster Carers of Strangers		/ PLUS 4 references (3 if single) 2 nd Opinion Visit			
Adoption/Long Term Fostering Placement with Strangers	/	/	/	/	Needed for Court not Panel (but not for fostering)
Residence Order/Special Guardianship Order with Foster Carers	/ If there is one	/ If there is one	/	/	/
Residence Order/Special Guardianship Order with Relatives			/	/	/
Long Term Fostering with Current Carer	/ If there is one	/ Original assessment and incident form and last review and minutes of review panel	/	/	

Type of Service	Objectives of Service	Name of person and details of agency responsible for providing the service	Length of time service to be provided	Review arrangements	Any other details
Post adoption support	To support Mr and Mrs Windsor and Jack following the making of an adoption order	The Derbyshire Adoption Support Team Tel: 01629 532250	Post adoption support will be available until Jack is 18	N/A	Mr and Mrs Windsor and Jack to be invited to regular support groups and annual arranged activities
Social Work support	To support Mr and Mrs Windsor in the management of Jack's difficulties and maximise the benefit of ongoing therapy with Unnamed Therapist	Family's Agency Anne Miller 01159 *** ****	12 months following the making of the adoption order	To be reviewed 6 monthly	Family's Agency to negotiate continued funding as and when necessary with Derbyshire Adoption Support Team as agreed in the support planning meeting dated 13/02/09
Child and Mental Health Services	To support and provide funding for Mr and Mrs Windsor in the management of Jack's treatment for attachment disorder and behaviour difficulties.	Derbyshire Adoption support team. Name Tel CAYA Finance team Name Tel Unnamed Therapist Associates. Name Tel	For 2009 and 2010 the therapy is combined with Jack, Edwin and Mr and Mrs Windsor. 24 sessions to be used by the end of 2010 as required by the family.	Every 2 years assessment by Unnamed Therapist for treatment if necessary until the age of 18 starting in 2011.	Unnamed Therapist associates to negotiate funding as and when necessary with Derbyshire Adoption Support and CAYA Finance Teams to ensure the assessments and up to 3 therapy sessions per year or 6 sessions over 2 years are funded.

Support in School	To provide Jack with TA support at school through a statement of special educational needs.	Derbyshire County Council Education department. Downhills Primary School and future comprehensive School. Derbyshire Adoption support team.	Jack is progressing well with 25 hours per week TA support and no plans should be made to reduce this without a clear assessment up to the age of 16.	To be reviewed by teaching staff and Mr and Mrs Windsor.	The Derbyshire Adoption Support Team are to provide Mr and Mrs Windsor with the appropriate support should they require assistance to oppose any reduction in the support provided to Jack in school.
Understanding of life history and life story book.	For Jack to understand his life history	Derbyshire CIC Team – Jenny Smythe 01629 ***** Anne Miller 0115 *** ****	For as long as Jack needs it	N/A 12 months review with Family's Agency.	The Derbyshire Adoption Support team will be available if future information is required Mr and Mrs Windsor have suggested that more information and photograph's are required of past foster carers
A one off Later in life letter to be provided at the time of the adoption hearing.	For Jack to understand his life history.	Derbyshire CIC Team – Jenny Smythe Tel	N/A	At adoption hearing.	N/A
Contact with birth parents	To ensure the smooth running of letterbox communication	Derbyshire Adoption Support Team	Until Jack is 18	N/A	See letter box plan
Direct contact with Lily Wright, sister	To ensure support for contact with a birth sibling Provide travel, food and activity funding.	Derbyshire Adoption Support Team. CAYA Finance team Name Tel	For as long as Jack wishes to see Lily	Mr and Mrs Windsor and Lily's parents	Expenses for contact meeting to be funded by CAYA Finance team. Derbyshire Adoption support team to assist Mr and Mrs Windsor with any arrangements.
Adoption Allowance	To ensure that Mr and Mrs Windsor can meet the ongoing needs of Jack	Derbyshire Adoption Support Team CAYA Finance team Name Tel	Until Jack is 16 or 18 if he remains in the education system.	Annually financial assessment form to be completed each year to adjust allowance according to income, outgoings and inflation as set out in assessment forms.	

Adoption and Permanence Procedures (June 2010)

Source/Author: G.Roe

If the support is financial, please state the amount of payment, the method of payment (weekly, monthly, lump sum/s), the purpose for which financial support is being paid, and the date upon which payment will commence.

Child and Mental Health Services

Funding package agreed for 2009 as follows XXX...

Funding for bi annual reviews and therapy sessions to be negotiated between Unnamed Therapist associates and Derbyshire Adoption support and CAYA Finance teams from 2011.

Travel expenses to travel to therapy sessions

Travel food and activity expenses for direct contact with birth sibling

Adoption allowance

In accordance to the annual review paid via electronic bank transfer. Adoption allowance is for Mr and Mrs Windsor to meet the ongoing needs of Jack and began from 4th August 2007. The calculation of any deductions from the allowance will remain in accordance to the terms currently applied. The maximum allowance payable prior to reduction of 50% of disposable income and child benefit can not be less than £143.94p.

SAMPLE PLAN FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

Type of Service	Objectives of Service	Name of person and details of agency responsible for providing the service	Length of time service to be provided	Review arrangements	Any other details
Attendance at Nursery Support in School	To enable Jamie to develop appropriate social skills and begin his education. Mr & Mrs Williams have identified name of school for Julie . Funding has been agreed by new LEA for classroom assistant to continue the support she already has in school	Mr & Mrs Williams Mr & Mrs Williams. Social Worker LEA liaison person	Until Jamie starts school For first year after placement	Annually	It is hoped that Julie will not need ongoing support in school once she is settled in her new family
Health monitoring	Jamie has no specific health needs. Mr & Mrs Williams will liaise with their health visitor Julie will need follow up on her squint.	Mr & Mrs Williams. Health Visitor Mr & Mrs Williams to meet with eye consultant. Newshire Health Authority. Referral to be made to their local hospital for follow up treatment.	As long as necessary		
Contact with birth parents, siblings, grandparents etc	To ensure smooth running of letterbox communication	Derbyshire Adoption Support Team; County Hall; Matlock; Derbyshire DE4 3 AG	Until Jamie reaches 18	As appropriate	See Letterbox agreement
Understanding of life history	For Jamie and Julie to have an understanding of their history and	Jamie and Julie both have a life story book Social Worker to go through the book with	For as long as Jamie needs it		If Mr & Mrs Williams need assistance with this they can either approach Newshire After Adoption Team or the Adoption Support service Derbyshire

Adoption and Permanence Procedures (June 2010)

Source/Author: G.Roe

	heritage	Mr & Mrs Williams with children present to ensure they have a clear understanding of it. Later Life letter – to be written by social worker	One off – to be provided at the time of the adoption hearing		
Possible need for mental health services	There is mental illness in the children's background. Whilst it is not anticipated that he will need additional support Mr & Mrs Williams need to be alert to this and use appropriate services if necessary. Julie is currently receiving therapy from a CAHMS worker and this needs to continue	During childhood Jamie will be able to access CAHMS if necessary. If Mr & Mrs Williams need assistance they can approach Derbyshire adoption support service for the first three years after adoption order and Newshire After Adoption after that. CAHMS worker to liaise with Newshire CAHMS service. Social worker has approached them and they will keep an open referral for Julie and will meet with Mr & Mrs Williams if appropriate	As necessary For as long as is necessary	As appropriate	
Cost of introductions	To ensure smooth running of introductions	Gwen Roe Derbyshire adoption Service. County Hall; Matlock; DE4 3Ag	One off payment		Payable on production of receipts. To cover subsistence, excluding alcohol; accommodation to equivalent of travel lodge prices and reasonable activities
Adoption allowance	To ensure Mr and Mrs Williams can meet the ongoing needs of Jamie and Julie. Financial assessment already completed	Derbyshire County Council.	Until Mr & Mrs Williams income increases or Julie/Jamie become independent	Annually. Financial assessment form to be completed each year	

Cost of adoption application	To provide Jamie and Julie with a permanent legal family	DCC Adoption Support Team		One off payment	
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If the support is financial, please state the amount of payment, the method of payment (weekly, monthly, lump sum/s), the purpose for which financial support is being paid, and the date upon which payment will commence.

**TABLE OF EVENTS TO BE NOTIFIED
ADOPTION REGULATIONS 2003 – SCHEDULE 4/REGULATION 19 (1)**

NB The people to be notified are the clear areas, not the shaded areas

<u>EVENT</u>	STATUTORY NOTIFICATIONS						OTHER NOTIFICATIONS					
	OFSTED	Head of Service (or Responsible Authority)	Secretary of State	Area Authority	Police	Health Authority	Quality Assurance Section	Health and Safety Section	Child's Parents/ Person with PR	Youth Offending Team	Safeguarding Manager	Adoption Manager
Death of a child placed with adopters												
Referral to the Secretary Of State pursuant to section 2 (1) of the Protection of Children Act 1999(a) of an individual working for an adoption service												
Serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with adopters												
Any serious complaint about any adopter approved by the adoption agency												
Instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents												

Letterbox Guidance for Social Workers

Purpose of Letterbox

The Letterbox scheme provides for the confidential exchange of information between families of adopted children and their birth families. It is about keeping in touch and having knowledge of each other rather than maintaining an active relationship. For the child the primary benefits will be:

- Knowing they have not been forgotten by their birth family
- Having ongoing information which may answer questions about their current welfare
- Having access to historical or health information if needed
- Knowing that their adoptive parents recognise the importance of their origins.
- Dispelling myths about their birth relatives
- Helping the child form new attachments by remembering previous ones
- Helping the child develop a positive sense of identity

The above may be of value if there is a later reunion. For the birth family members the benefits are that of knowing how their child is growing and developing, although this may also be a source of anxiety.

The Birth Family Support Team is available to assist birth relatives with Letterbox arrangements. The success of the scheme depends upon a clear understanding of the process and what is expected and the goodwill and commitment of those involved. The role of the child's social worker is crucial in negotiating what information will be exchanged and the setting up of arrangements.

For an understanding of how the scheme operates please refer to the leaflet 'The Letterbox Scheme'.

Role of the social worker

- Negotiating letterbox arrangements – what (letters, photographs, cards), when (once or twice annually) and between whom (adopted child and birth parents/siblings/grandparent/significant other).
- Explaining what is involved and expected. Are the participants committed to Letterbox and willing/able to provide what is in the Letterbox Plan?
- Completing and signing the necessary paperwork
- In consultation with the Birth Family Support Team, providing relevant information (Leaflets 'What is the Letterbox Scheme?' and 'Writing for Letterbox') and explaining the contents and what this means for participants.

- Supporting the initial exchanges of correspondence up until the Adoption Order is made.

Adoption Support Workers are happy to be consulted on the setting up of Letterbox arrangements.

Documents for the social worker to complete

- Form L1 – Letterbox Arrangements
- Letterbox Plan

There should be an L1 and Letterbox Contact Plan for each exchange. These forms are available on [Forms section on Dnet](#) (Children and Younger Adults, Adoption).

The L1 provides details of the participants including any special needs (mental health/literacy/learning difficulties) and a brief summary of the circumstances of the adoption. This document provides **key** information for the child's Letterbox file. It also alerts adoption support workers of any issues, including risk factors they need to be aware of.

The Letterbox Contact Plan gives details of the nature and frequency of the letterbox exchange. **It is essential that this is fully discussed and agreed with both the birth relative/s and adoptive parent/s by the child's social worker.** Careful consideration should be given to frequency (we would normally recommend once a year) and whether the exchange of photographs poses a **real** threat to the child. The exchange of cards also needs to be considered very carefully because of the potentially strong emotions involved and the possible disappointment if these are not forthcoming. It should be clear from the completed Contact Plan whether cards and/or photographs are part of the exchange. Gifts and money cannot be included in any Letterbox arrangement and will be returned to the sender.

It is best for the adoptive parent/s to write first so that the birth relative/s has something to respond to. Occasionally the Letterbox arrangement is only one way but there should be good reasons for this. The Plan should be signed and dated by the **social worker and service manager and all participants will be sent a copy by the letterbox administrator.**

The Letterbox Contact Plan is not a binding agreement. It may change and develop over time depending on the circumstances and the needs of the child.

Without a clear Letterbox Contact Plan and L1 a successful letterbox exchange cannot be maintained.

Completed forms should be posted or emailed to:

Letterbox Administrator
Derbyshire Adoption Service
County Hall
Matlock
Derbyshire
DE4 3AG
Telephone: 01629 532280
Email: hilary.crook@derbyshire.gov.uk

The Child's Permanence Report should be available on Framework-i

The Adoption Support Team

The Adoption Support Team is responsible for co-ordinating the Letterbox scheme. The team consists of a Letterbox Administrator and the equivalent of 3 full time adoption support social workers. The workers are available to provide advice on the setting up and running of Letterbox arrangements and are happy to be contacted on the above number. Please refer to the leaflet 'What is the Letterbox Scheme?' for further details.