

INFORMATION MEETING

This guidance sets out the role of the adoption social worker at Information Meetings.

The Information Meeting is held early evening, usually on the third Wednesday of the month, at the Unit. Approximately 3 Adoption social workers attend to provide information about adoption. Fostering social workers also attend, thus offering the opportunity to explore different options with relevant social workers. A Team Manager is available for consultation and will brief workers on the current needs of the service.

If it is necessary, extra information will be given out during the Information Meeting explaining what resources are currently needed, current timescales and the reasons for making priority decisions regarding applications.

The adoption social worker will talk to the enquirers individually, using an interpreter/signer as appropriate, answer their questions and briefly complete the 'Information Meeting Interview' Form. This Form lists the principal eligibility criteria so that any potential complexities or concerns can be highlighted. The Form gives the worker an opportunity to record what resource the enquirers are likely to offer, such as interested in siblings, a child with special needs, of mixed ethnicity, and to record some initial information and impressions. The social worker will establish and record whether there are any access or communication needs. Information will be provided that a signer can be used at any stage of the process for an enquirer/applicant who has a hearing impairment.

The following points will be highlighted during the information giving:

- The significance of a healthy lifestyle. This will include an explanation of the reasons for not placing children under two, or with respiratory problems, with any applicant who smokes; and the implications of weight issues;
- The need to obtain information from former partners (where relevant), and the children of such former relationships;

Enquirers are often at an early stage of thinking about whether adoption is the right course for them and may not yet have formulated all their questions or may be talking to a number of agencies. It is appropriate for the worker to indicate they will be welcome to contact the Admin Officer (Recruitment) with further questions, and that any s/he cannot answer can be followed up by an adoption worker.

At the end of a discussion with an enquirer, the adoption social worker will make a decision about whether or not to give the enquirer a 'Registration of Interest in Adoption' Form. A decision not to give the form will be based on an enquirer clearly demonstrating they do not meet the eligibility criteria, and the reason for this will be explained to the enquirer. In other situations,

where a concern/complexity has been raised, the worker can indicate that a 'Registration of Interest in Adoption' Form is being given but there will need to be further exploration during subsequent stages of the application process.

The enquirers are given a Feedback Form to invite their comments on the process of the Information Meeting.

HOME VISIT

This guidance sets out for adoption social workers the process of conducting a Home Visit and the ensuing decision making process.

1 Process

Bradford standard: A Home Visit will be arranged within 28 days of a Registration of Interest.

An adoption social worker will be allocated to conduct the Home Visit.

Guidance notes and form to complete are stored on K drive.

Prior to visit:

- Check if interpreter/signer needed
- Check if any implications re disability/communication needs
- If visit to be made out of hours or where there may be added risks, complete risk assessment with manager
- Be aware of overall picture of resource needs/adopters waiting (local, Consortium, Register)
- The enquirers will have received a letter advising them of the Home Visit; this letter contains an indication of the topics to be considered
- Take:
 - ❖ pro forma on which notes may be made
 - ❖ 'Eligibility Criteria' from Information Pack
 - ❖ Disclaimer, provided by Admin Officer (Recruitment)

Possible outcomes:

- Enquirers may proceed to next stage, and are offering a needed resource, therefore will be sent an Application Form, Medical Forms and the form to take up a CRB check. Their statutory checks will be taken up immediately.
- Enquirers may proceed to next stage, but are offering a resource less needed at present, therefore will be sent an Application Form when it is possible to progress their application.
- Enquirers are unsuitable to proceed: i.e. do not meet the statutory criteria for adoption.
- Issues have arisen which may need following up by an Adoption Team worker or an Adoption Team Manager. Follow up may involve seeking out further information (e.g. medical) and further contact/discussion with the enquirers by:
 - phone
 - letter
 - further visit
 - office interview

At conclusion of the Home Visit, if appropriate, an indication may be given of the likely outcome. The enquirers will receive a formal decision in writing from an Adoption Team Manager within 21 days, following discussion with the social worker and the Team where appropriate.

The letter will indicate that help, if needed, will be available to complete the Application Form.

Following Home Visit:

Record Visit and Email completed report to Adoption Team Manager within 10 days of the visit. All paperwork, including report of Home Visit and outcome, to be returned to Admin Officer (Recruitment).

Recording should include:

- Communication abilities, between enquirers (where relevant) and with worker
- Views on whether they are a priority resource
- Home environment
- Worker's recommendation

The format of the Home Visit will be:

Enquirers' questions/issues;

Enquirers' understanding of implications of adoption ('parenting plus', including understanding of openness and contact issues);

Enquirers' motivation – infertility issues if relevant (refer to policy re contraception if relevant);

What resource is being offered? Is it one that is currently needed? Is this realistic?

What is their experience of children? Give brief information about the needs of children requiring adoption, stressing: 'uncertainty', complex health needs, effects of separation/attachment difficulties;

Brief family background, including contact now with significant relatives. Support networks from family and friends;

Check against Eligibility Criteria – statutory, practice guidance and Bradford's policies, especially:

- a) Statutory checks
- b) Medical Issues
- c) Financial management, including any Individual Voluntary Arrangements, County Court judgements or voluntary Bankruptcy.

Implications of who is currently in household (significance of age of other children, birth or adopted);

Home circumstances, work issues, are enquirers in a settled phase of life?
Accommodation and safety issues – see round house;

Attitude to equality and diversity issues;

Ensure following topics are explained:

- a) consideration is given to a healthy lifestyle. This has implications for smokers as they cannot usually be considered for a child under 2. The health implications of weight issues will be considered
- b) former partners and children will be interviewed
- c) verification will be sought of all information provided during the process.

This will include:

- (i) providing the names of at least 4 referees
- (ii) interviewing family members
- (iii) verification from work/study/volunteering place
- (iv) contact with nursery/school any child attends;

If no apparent contra-indications to continuing, explain decision-making process and possible outcomes. For enquirers who appear likely to proceed, reference can be made to the 'Adoption Process' sheet in the Information Pack.

If clear indications of not meeting criteria, explain these and method of making representation.

2 Decision making process

National Minimum Standard 3.3:

'The Adoption Agency has systems in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive parents.'

Bradford Standard:

Within 21 days, a written decision will be sent to the enquirers.

(i) The Adoption social worker will write up the Home Visit and Email to an Adoption Team Manager within 10 days. The worker, Team Manager and Team, if appropriate, will discuss any issues which have arisen during Home Visits. A decision will be made as to the suitability of the enquirers and the priority of the resource they are offering.

(ii) A letter stating the decision will be sent by an Adoption Team Manager within 21 days of the Home Visit. The 4 alternatives will be:

a) If the enquirers are suitable and are offering a resource currently needed, the letter will explain this and include an Application Form, medical form and form for CRB check. The letter will suggest sources of help in completing the forms if needed.

b) a statement that the enquirers appear to be suitable but are not offering a resource currently needed. The letter will inform them that they will be sent an Application Form when the Unit is in a position to take forward their application.

c) a statement that further exploration is needed of certain issues that arose during the Home Visit. Follow up may involve seeking out further information (e.g. medical) and further contact/discussion with the enquirers by:

- phone
- letter
- further visit
- office interview

d) a statement that the enquirers are not suitable and the reasons for this. This letter will include information about the representation and redress options.

This letter or a subsequent letter of rejection should be sensitively worded and:

- clearly state the criteria that have not been met.
- recognise any strengths in the application and acknowledge the generosity of the applicants in putting themselves forward.
- remind applicant/s of the agency's representations and complaints procedure.

where appropriate to do so, invite the applicants to consider re-applying when and if their circumstances change or to refer themselves to another agency or service.

PREPARATION GROUPS AND FURTHER TRAINING

This guidance sets out for adoption and adoption support social workers information about the running of Preparation Groups and further training for prospective adopters under the following headings:

- **Statutory guidance underpinning Preparation Groups,**
- **Organisation of Groups**
- **Content of Group**
- **Purpose of Group**
- **Concerns**
- **Recording**
- **Post Preparation Group Training**

1 Preparation Groups

Legislation requires the agency to make arrangements for the prospective adopter to be given adoption preparation and stipulates that preparation includes the provision of information to the prospective adopter about:

- the age range, sex, likely needs and background of children who may be placed for adoption by the agency
- the significance of adoption for a child and his family
- contact between a child and his parent or guardian or other relatives where a child is authorised to be placed for adoption or is adopted
- the skills which are necessary for an adoptive parent
- the agency's procedures in relation to the assessment of a prospective adopter and the placement of a child for adoption, and
- the procedure in relation to placement for adoption and adoption.

All prospective adopters will need some form of adoption preparation. The agency will need to decide its form and substance, using the standard curriculum set out in the Practice Guidance on the Assessment of Prospective Adopters (DfES 2006) as a guide and arranging preparation that takes into account the prospective adopter's circumstances. While group preparation should be the standard method there may need to be some form of individual preparation for some prospective adopters and the duty does not apply if the agency is satisfied that another agency has fulfilled these requirements.

Some prospective adopters may already have recent experience of caring for a child, as parents, foster carers or child minders. Some may be applying to adopt for a second time. This regulation provides for the agency to decide the nature of the preparation that is most appropriate for the prospective adopter. Adoption preparation may be provided by the agency itself or by arrangement with another agency or adoption support agency.

Bradford's policy is to run 6 English language Preparation Groups each year, and to share responsibility with Adoption Agencies in the region for 3 or 4 Urdu/Punjabi language groups. Applicants may choose when to attend a Group according to their availability, language and cultural preference. At times, priority decisions about resources will be taken about which applicants are invited to the next available Group.

Organisation of Groups

Preparation Groups for English speaking applicants are run approximately every two months, at the Unit. There are alternatives to the standard process for minority ethnic applicants and/or those whose first language is not English. These Preparation Groups are conducted in Urdu and Punjabi three or four times a year and are run jointly with neighbouring Local Authorities and Voluntary Agencies. Organisation of the Groups is undertaken by the Co-ordinator of the 'Yorkshire Consortium of Adoption Agencies' which is based in Leeds at N.C.H. These Groups may take place in any of the participating agencies and are staffed by workers from these agencies who have the appropriate languages. Asian and mixed-heritage partnership applicants are offered the choice of attending a 'mainstream' group which is conducted in English or one conducted in an Asian language and delivered in a culturally appropriate way, e.g. more discussions take place in separate gender groups.

There may be an extra social worker involved if the group is particularly large; no more than 14 applicants is usually regarded as the optimum size for learning and participation. If a group is particularly oversubscribed, priority for attendance should be given to those applicants offering a needed resource. In order to minimise delay for applicants, places may be found on groups run by other agencies if there are particular indications for doing so.

The time format of the group varies in order to facilitate attendance by applicants. There will be a minimum of 8 sessions which usually take place in a combination of evening and full days.

By having a range of time formats, if applicants cannot attend on the dates offered, they should be assured of finding a group which suits their employment, child care or other commitments. It is an expectation that applicants are able to attend all sessions. If, once the group has started, an applicant is unable to attend one or more sessions, the group leaders, in consultation with an Adoption Team Manager if necessary, will advise the applicant whether the content of the missed session can be made up in another way (e.g. during the home assessment, or by reading) or whether it will be necessary to complete another Group. If missing one or more sessions raises concerns about the applicant's motivation, this should be discussed with an Adoption Team Manager and raised with the applicant at the appropriate time.

There is input from adoption support social workers, foster carers, adopters, birth parents and adoptees, each of whom contribute to at least one particular session. It can be helpful to have foster carers present for the whole group as they will have particular experience and knowledge to add to most topics, and applicants often find they learn a great deal from informal discussions with them.

Guest speakers are paid by the 2-3 hour session. A couple (e.g. foster or adoptive partners) are paid one fee. Current (2007) fee is £35. Foster carers may claim their mileage in the usual way. Travelling costs for other speakers may be paid at public transport rate or the same mileage as foster carers. A receipt should be obtained for a cash payment. Names and contact details of speakers who are able to contribute helpfully on their particular topic should be recorded with shared team information.

Content of Group

The content of the Preparation Group has been devised jointly with Barnardo's New Families, West Yorkshire. There is a Handbook for Leaders and another, containing the course content and relevant reading, to be given to each participant at the first session. There is a periodic review of the Group content.

Purpose of Group

(i) Information

The main purpose of Preparation Groups is to provide applicants with sufficient information to enable them to evaluate whether or not it is right to continue with their interest in becoming adoptive parents. The Groups are based on:

- an understanding of adult learning theories,
- a valuing of what participants are able to contribute,
- maximum opportunity for the sessions to be experiential,
- enabling applicants to look at their own lives and experiences and what they have learnt from the process so far.

Some applicants will find participation in group work difficult and should be supported by the leaders to participate as far as possible. As they will, if approved, need to take part in reviews and other meetings, learning to be able to contribute in a group setting is an important element of their training.

(ii) Evaluation

Whilst the main focus of the Groups is imparting information, there is also a significant element of assessment during the Groups as it would be impossible for leaders not to make some evaluation of the contributions of the applicants. This element of assessment should be made explicit at the

outset of the Group sessions, with an opportunity for participants to reflect on the implications. Applicants will then be aware that issues raised during training will be taken forward for exploration during the Home Study. In order to encourage this acceptance of evaluation, and to enable participants to consider their further learning needs, a form is completed by them at the end of each session so that they can record their impressions, what they have learnt and their continuing learning needs. This 'Feedback Form' includes a summary of the content of the session, the recommended reading for the session, and the questions: 'What has been your learning from the session?' 'What would you like to learn more about?' and invites comments on the session. At the end of the last session of the Group, one leader discusses with each applicant/household:

- their views of the helpfulness of the sessions and, if relevant, how they might be made more helpful;
- how they are currently feeling about their application and what resource they are now considering offering;
- any further learning needs;
- availability for the home-study sessions;
- the Group leaders observations of these applicants.

This discussion with the applicants is recorded on the form 'Adopters' Preparation Groups: Evaluation Form' and signed by the leader and applicants.

The comments on the Evaluation Form are incorporated into a 'Group Leader's Summary' which is completed as soon as possible after the Groups have ended. This summary covers:

- dates and times of Group sessions,
- number and details of Group participants,
- Group facilitators and guest speakers,
- distinctive features of the Group,
- leaders' comments on each applicant/household.

Concerns

If concerns about a particular applicant arise during the course of the Groups, leaders should consider (after consultation with an Adoption Team Manager if necessary) whether to:

- have a private discussion with the participant at the first appropriate opportunity;
- discuss during the individual evaluation at the end of the Groups;

- arrange a meeting for a Manager to discuss the concern directly with the applicants, with a letter of invitation to this meeting setting out the concern. Representation and redress options are set out in the Procedures.

Recording

The leaders of the Group are responsible for putting on to the prospective adopters' Adoption Case Record:

- a summary of the material covered,
- 'Group Leaders' Summary'
- The participants' 'Feedback Forms'

The Group leader must inform the Admin Officer (Recruitment) of the attendance of the applicants.

2 Post Preparation Group Training

It is recognised that the Preparation Groups can only be an introduction to the tasks and implications of adopting, and that learning will continue throughout the assessment process and beyond. Other topics which are not covered in detail in the Groups and which lend themselves to a more didactic and therefore less experiential approach are:

- The implications of parental substance abuse
- The legal framework to adoption
- Contact issues and Letterbox Contact
- Explaining adoption, including the use of Life Story books and Later Life letters
- Child development and attachment

Each of these topics may be offered as 'stand-alone' sessions two or three times a year for English speaking applicants and twice a year for Asian language speaking applicants. The training may be led by a member of the adoption team, an adoption support worker or a specialist in the particular field, for example, a paediatrician for the topic of parental substance abuse.

An adoption team/adoption support team member of the adoption team will

- lead the session or book the presenter of the topic;
- prepare list of who is to be invited, in consultation with the team and managers;
- prepare a letter of invitation for an Admin Officer to send out;
- prepare Certificates of attendance;
- facilitate the session;
- ensure the attendance of the prospective adopters is recorded on their Adoption Case Record. Attendance at training will be included on the

Prospective Adopter's Report along with the information about the Preparation Group.

HOME STUDY/ASSESSMENT

This guidance sets out for adoption social workers the process of conducting the home study element of the assessment of adoption applicants under the following headings:

- Allocation
- Preparation for Home Study
- The key criteria for assessment
- First visit
- Assessment topics to be covered
- Chronology
- Financial Statement Form
- Information and Analysis
- Health issues
- Health and safety issues for child
- Relatives and friends
- Information from former partners and/or the children of former relationships
- Information from employers/training/voluntary work
- Information from school/nursery attended by applicant's children
- Matching Considerations
- Change of circumstances

1 Allocation

Bradford Standard: Within 4 weeks of the ending of the Preparation Group, a social worker will be allocated to undertake the Home Study.

The home assessment of applicants may start before the CRB checks are completed or before they have undertaken or finished the Preparation Groups.

2 Preparation for Home Study

Recommended reading on assessment issues for the social worker includes:

- Practice Guidance on Assessing Prospective Adopters' DfES 2006
- 'Making Good Assessments' BAAF 1999
- BAAF Practice Note 44 'Assessing lesbian and gay foster carers and adopters'

- 'Recruiting, Assessing and Supporting Lesbian and Gay Carers and Adopters: A good practice guide for social workers' Gerald Mallon and Bridget Betts, BAAF
- 'Report of the Part 8 Review for Brighton and Hove APC of the care and protection of JAS who died 24.12.1999.'
- BAAF Practice Note 30 'Children and Smoking'

At the final session of the Preparation Group, the leader will outline the next stages of the assessment process, referring to the 'Adoption Process' leaflet provided. The leaders will focus particularly on the next stage, the Home Study.

During this final session, the applicants will be given a copy of a Prospective Adopter's Report, a Self-Description Form and any other relevant literature about the assessment process, such as (2007) the BAAF Booklets 'Understanding the assessment process' and 'Key issues in assessment'. They will also have been informed of the value of the BAAF books 'Talking about adoption to your adopted child' and 'Children exposed to parental substance abuse'. They will be encouraged to make use of these over the assessment period, and to prepare themselves specifically for the Home Study by looking at the Prospective Adopter's Report and the booklet on assessment, and beginning to complete the 'Self-Description Form'.

It is the aim of the Adoption service that all applicants will be contacted by their allocated adoption social worker within 4 weeks of the ending of the Preparation Group. This contact may be to arrange a first visit within the 4 weeks, or to indicate when a first visit may take place. If it is not possible to allocate a Social worker to an applicant within the 4 weeks, an Adoption Team Manager will write and inform them of this and indicate the likely time-scales.

Applicants will receive further letters explaining the delay approximately every 4 weeks until a Social worker can be allocated. Occasionally, to minimise delay, a sessional worker or a worker from another adoption agency may be employed. If this is the case, an Adoption Team social worker will be allocated as soon as possible, and will make at least one joint visit with the assessing social worker before presentation to Panel for a recommendation. Both workers will attend Panel, from which point the Adoption Team social worker becomes the responsible worker. However, it may be helpful for the assessing social worker to be consulted at a later stage about an appropriate match for the applicants.

A Home Study is usually undertaken by one Adoption social worker. An assessment may be conducted jointly if complex issues have been indicated at an earlier stage of the process or for the practice development needs of a worker. The reason for a joint assessment will be fully explained to the applicants and their co-operation requested.

The social worker's preparation for the Home Study, and, in particular, for the first visit will include:

- Reading all the documentation on the applicant's Adoption Case Record;
- checking whether any issues were identified during the adoption preparation of the prospective adopter that may need further exploration;
- Ensuring that there is nothing missing and that all outstanding checks and issues have been followed up and completed;
- Requesting Admin Officer (Recruitment) to obtain Personal References;
- Checking communication needs and booking an interpreter or signer if necessary;
- Ensuring that due regard has been given to any special religious, language or cultural needs of the applicants. This may, for example, involve in ensuring the appropriateness of a particular worker for a single, female, Moslem applicant.
- All contacts with applicants will be recorded. The recording will include: date, name of applicant, purpose of session, key topics covered, areas for further action, social worker's signature. Handwritten notes will be kept on file until the outcome of the assessment is concluded.
- Third party information:

As part of the gathering of information, and its analysis, the assessing social worker must look at all relevant documentation which is of use in assessing and/or corroborating information about the applicants and their backgrounds. This may cover a wide variety of documentation.

Where the agency has information regarding a third party who may have some connection to the applicant, consideration needs to be given to accessing information/case records within a Child Protection perspective, in the light of legal and managerial advice.

3 The key criteria for assessment:

- For couples, the quality, stability and permanence of their relationship;
- The ability to make and sustain close relationships;
- The capacity for emotional openness;

- The capacity for reflectiveness or 'psychological mindedness';
- The successful resolution of earlier losses or traumatic experiences;
- For couples, the quality, stability and permanence of their relationship;
- Support networks;
- Tolerant social attitudes

4 First Visit

This is an initial visit covering the following:

- an open explanation of the objectives of the Home Study,
- a commitment to equality/anti-discriminatory practice,
- the boundaries of confidentiality,
- the purpose for which the information is being gathered, including a commitment to be able to explain the purpose and relevance of each question,
- a reminder that information is being given and analysed in the light of an assessment of the applicant's 'capacities', strengths and vulnerabilities,
- a reminder of the needs of the service (e.g. siblings, older children) and the implications for the applicants,
- the opportunity for the applicants to raise any questions or concerns,
- any obvious concerns that arise during the process of the assessment will be addressed without delay; other concerns may emerge only gradually and may not be addressed until towards the conclusion of the assessment,
- the choices the applicants have if the worker is not able to make a positive recommendation
- the time-scales of the visits. It is in the best interests of applicants and social worker for the assessment visits to be carried out during day-time rather than evenings wherever possible. Most applicants will, given sufficient time to plan, arrange to be available for at least some of the visits during the day, perhaps at the beginning of the morning or the end of the afternoon,
- a provisional time-scale for presentation to Panel,

- the worker at the end of each session, or group of sessions, will indicate the next topics to be explored, so that the applicants can prepare themselves,
- an explanation of the Panel process and the applicants' attendance,
- if a partnership is being assessed, each partner will be seen individually at least once. This is to enable a full discussion focussing on the individual of their motivation, their feelings re childlessness (if relevant), their relationship with the other applicant, and any issues which have arisen out of their description of their background and previous experiences,
- how and when any children of the applicants, or other significant people (e.g. former partner), will be interviewed,
- a reminder for the Personal Referees to submit written references if they have not already done so, and planning how and when they will be seen,
- an outline of the verification of information which will be required. This will include verifying information given about current employment, training or voluntary work, or contacting the schools attended by children of the applicants
- the possibility of offering an 'extended family' session – not currently a legal requirement but an important and useful forum to answer questions relatives may have, and for the worker to become familiar with some of the significant people in the applicant's support network. This could apply to close friends also,
- that the sessions will be recorded and the hand-written notes kept on the applicant's file until the outcome of the assessment is decided,
- guidance on the purpose of Self-description forms and a reminder to complete as soon as possible. The assessing social worker must ensure that the applicants are given a photo-copy of their Self-description Form, unless they have their own Computer copy. When any other than very brief phrases from the Self-description Form are quoted by the assessing social worker in the Prospective Adopter's Report, the remarks should be put in quotation marks, indented and italicised.

5 Assessment topics to be covered include:

Individual profiles of all members of the household, including ethnic origin, religious persuasion, sexual orientation, family history, attachment history

Information about the home, the local community and the neighbourhood

The implications of health or disability issues in the household for the plan to adopt

Profile of any other members of the household

Family life-style

Details of education and employment - past and present

Any anticipated employment arrangements for the prospective adopter who will be the main carer of the child; and any child care arrangements which may be involved

Income and expenditure, management of financial affairs

Details of past and present relationships; stability and permanence of present relationship for joint applicants

Motivation to adopt/childlessness

Parenting capacity, experience of being parented and experience with children

Support network, including wider family and friendship networks

Expectations of the placement, including understanding of issues from the Preparation Groups and further training

Attitudes to birth families and approach to openness in adoption (including issues of contact and of explaining background)

Willingness to request Adoption Support where this becomes necessary

6 Chronology

Chronology of key events in the applicant's life must be compiled, showing his or her educational, employment, marital and/or relationship history and addresses; any gaps and/or unusual patterns should be explored.

7 Financial Statement Form

(i) Applicants are asked to complete a Financial Statement Form as part of their Self-Description Form. The assessing social worker will use this in exploring with the applicants aspects of their financial situation. This will include:

- verifying information given regarding income (earned, benefits, other sources) and expenditure (mortgage or rent, council tax);
- how finances are managed by the applicants, how money is allocated, who makes the decisions, what is given priority;
- whether the applicants think they manage their money well, what they would like to do better;
- whether there are any current financial problems, outstanding major bills or debts;
- discussing what effect the financial situation has on the family now and may have as a result of the placement of a child.

(ii) Applicants will be given outline information about **Adoption Support**, including **Financial Support**. They will be given information about the elements of Financial Support to which all prospective adopters are entitled. They will also be informed of the duty of the Agency to undertake an assessment of financial means as part of the assessment of Adoption Support, if such a request for support is made.

8 Information and Analysis

A considerable amount of information will be gained during this core part of the assessment process. The worker must evaluate and record on the Prospective Adopter's Report the information deemed necessary, using the applicant's words where appropriate. The Report must also contain the worker's analysis of the information presented.

(i) Underlying principles

The underlying principles of the analysis will be the applicant's capacities, strengths and vulnerabilities:

- to build and sustain close relationships. This will involve an assessment of the applicant's own history of attachment in childhood;
- to have communicative openness; ('the creation of an open, honest, non-defensive, and emotionally attuned family dialogue, not only about adoption related issues' and a willingness of individuals 'to consider the meaning of adoption in their lives, to share that meaning with others, to explore adoption related issues in the context of family life, to acknowledge and support the child's dual connection to two families, and perhaps to facilitate contact between these two family systems in one form or another'. Brodzinsky 2005)

- for empathy – to understand the effects of early loss and separation and the need to regress;
- to be in touch with sad/angry feelings, those of the child and the applicant;
- how past losses and traumas have been resolved. How have these (including infertility, if relevant) been dealt with? Is the applicant still pre-occupied/stuck/ bitter? Is the child needed to 'repair' any wounds?
- to use support. Has the applicant built 'confiding' relationships?
- to offer nurturing;
- to negotiate change;
- to manage conflict;
- to respond in a 'thinking', not automatic, way;
- to be reliable and consistent;
- to accept own limitations;
- to have a realistic understanding of children, and to enjoy them;
- to work in partnership with professional agencies;
- to have a 'generosity of spirit' which results in an open attitude towards the child's adoptive status and background;
- to have a 'generosity of spirit' which leads to being non-judgemental towards the birth family;
- to have the capacity to accept the child's history without using it to explain all behaviours;
- to respect and value diversity;
- parenting capacity, including:
 - what are the conscious reasons for wishing to adopt?
 - what more underlying reasons may there be?
 - how will the conscious and unconscious motivation be expressed?
 - will this expression lead to a positive parenting experience for the child?

(ii) Adopter's birth children

Research suggests that there are extra risks factors in placing a child for adoption with a family in which there are already birth children, especially just one birth child. In considering the strength of a particular application, it is helpful to consider the following issues:

- what is the applicants' motivation? Do they want to adopt primarily to provide a companion to their birth child? If the child they are hoping to adopt is at the higher end of the age range of children available for adoption, this carries a greater number of risks in itself.
- How much time will the applicants have to give to two (or more) children?
- Is the older child 'over-protected' or especially 'precious'? e.g. born as the result of IVF?
- What network of support does the birth child have?

(iii) Capacity to meet needs of child of different ethnicity

As well as the need to explore with applicants their general attitude to equality and diversity issues, it is also important to assess the potential resource an applicant may have to offer a child of a different ethnic background. Whilst the placement of first choice for a child should always be that which matches as closely as possible the child's own ethnicity, this is not always possible to achieve for a variety of reasons. These may include a very limited number of adopters of a particular ethnicity, a combination of ethnicities, and the need to place the child with half-siblings of different ethnicity.

When assessing applicants who belong to the majority ethnic community, the social worker should consider whether they will have the capacity to:

- acknowledge and value child as they are and will be
- challenge racism, and exclusion from the relevant minority ethnic grouping
- surround the child with the relevant minority ethnic and mixed parentage families
- enable child to value and be embedded in lifestyles appropriate to both (all) traditions including religion and language
- enable child to feel comfortable with all their heritage emphasising most inclusive models within all
- enable child to remain connected with their birth family (if possible and while buffering from racism and abuse)
- provide space and support for child to develop their way of being of a different ethnicity from one or both of their parents
- live in an area with high numbers of minority ethnic families who reflect the child's ethnicity.

(Adapted from a paper by Beverley Prevatt Goldstein).

When considering ethnic minority families, who are often considered for a child of dual or multiple heritage, it is important to explore with them their links to communities of different ethnicity from themselves. For some, especially African Caribbean applicants, it is often apparent when there are strong links with the white community, for example, mixed partnerships within the extended family. Where this is not so, families will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity in other ways to meet the needs of a dual or multiple heritage child.

It is essential applicants provide evidence of any resource they consider will assist them in meeting the needs of a child of a different ethnic background. Such evidence may emerge from the interview with referees or during a session when the social worker meets members of the extended family and friends.

(iv) Contact

During the Preparation Groups, applicants will have considered the importance and role of direct and indirect, statutory and voluntary contact on the maintenance of the child's significant relationships, development of his or her identity and understanding of adoptive status. As part of the home assessment, the social worker will explore the applicant's understanding of the crucial role of contact, and their willingness and ability to develop and maintain a range of forms of contact.

Studies of the recent increase in a range of types of contact suggest that a minimum level of contact between the adoptive family and birth relatives or other persons who have been of significance to the child is almost always beneficial to the child. The contact may range from an annual exchange of information via the Adoption and Fostering Unit, to a more frequent, or direct form.

Applicants will therefore be asked to indicate their commitment to:

- Maintaining an annual indirect exchange of written information on behalf of the child with anyone with whom it is considered beneficial for the child;
- Having one 'face-to-face' meeting with a birth parent, or other relative, or other person of significance to the child, if this is seen to be in the best interests of the child;
- Maintaining any other form of contact which is seen to be in the interest of the child with whom they wish to be matched;
- Agreeing to inform the birth parents, via the Unit, of any genetically linked condition which was unknown at the time of placement
- Agreeing to inform the Adoption Unit if the adoption disrupts or the child they adopt becomes seriously ill or dies in childhood or soon after. In discussion with a social worker, agreement will be reached as to the appropriateness of passing on any such information to a birth parent/relative;
- Being contacted by the Adoption Unit for the purpose of:
 - being informed of the birth of a sibling of the child they have adopted (if this information becomes known to Social Services),
 - indicating if they wish to be considered to adopt such a sibling if this is the plan for the child,
 - agreeing to whatever form of contact is in the best interest of their child and any future sibling of the child,
 - providing information about the health and development of their adopted child for any subsequent siblings for whom adoption is the plan,
 - being informed by the Unit of a specific request (where reasonable) by a birth parent or relative,
 - being informed of any genetically linked conditions present in the birth family which were unknown at the time of placement

- being notified of the death of a birth parent or full or half sibling of the child they have adopted

(v) Parental Responsibility

During the assessment, the social worker will discuss with the applicants the issues underlying the exercise of Parental Responsibility from the time at which the child is placed with them, until the making of an adoption order. The applicants will need to indicate their willingness to undertake any tasks requested by the local authority to enable the birth parents to fulfil their Parental Responsibility duties. They must also be willing to undertake any Parental Responsibilities to which they have agreed in the Adoption Placement Report, and to accept the local authority's discretion in apportioning Parental Responsibility.

9 Health issues

(i) The implications of a medical condition or disability of the applicant or immediate member of the family must be considered during the assessment. Factors to be taken into account include:

- The implications of the condition on the applicant's ability to meet the short and long-term needs of the child;
- If the condition relates to a member of the household, how will the placement of a child affect the applicant's ability to care for that person, at the same time as meeting the needs of the adoptive child.

It is essential for the Adoption social worker to maintain a dialogue with the Agency Medical Adviser for guidance and any necessary follow-up.

(ii) Mental/psychological ill-health: An opinion as to the implications of any current or past mental or psychological ill-health should be obtained at an earlier stage of the process, e.g. an opinion from a Consultant may be requested on receipt of the information on the Medical Form. In the light of opinion from the Consultant and/or Medical Adviser, the implications of the illness on the applicant's ability to care for a child should be fully discussed with the applicant. Issues to consider include how the applicant might cope with any stress arising from adopting, and what the applicant considers they have learnt from the experience of mental ill-health.

(iii) Smoking: If an applicant smokes, this will have been discussed during the Home Visit. (See BAAF Practice Note 30 'Children and Smoking'.) During the Home Study, the assessing social worker should consider this issue from the basis of Department of Health information about the dangers of passive smoking. In the light of that information, the policy of the Adoption and Fostering Unit is only to consider matching an applicant who smokes with a child who is over the age of two, and does not suffer from chest problems. Within that policy, there is flexibility around individual circumstances in order

not to deny a slightly younger child the opportunity of the most appropriate match – the full reasons for pursuing such a placement would be very carefully considered by the Adoption Panel. At all stages of preparation and assessment, applicants should be given clear information about, and reasons for, the policy so that they have opportunity to cease smoking if they wish. Independent verification (e.g. from their G.P.) of their cessation of smoking can be helpful information for Panel when considering their approval or a Match.

(iv) Weight: During the Home Visit discussion will have taken place about the need during the assessment process to consider the implications of weight issues. The Adoption Medical will indicate the Body Mass Index (BMI) of an applicant, and the Agency Medical Adviser will comment if there is any ground for concern which will need to be followed up by the allocated Adoption social worker. It is essential for the worker to maintain a dialogue with the Agency Medical Adviser for guidance and any necessary follow-up. It is valuable for these discussions to take place by Email, so that they are recorded for the applicant's file. At all stages, the applicant should be given full information about the medical reasons for the concern and advised to discuss with the G.P. Independent verification of how medical advice is being followed to address the problem should be provided by the applicant.

Normal BMI is classified as 20 -25

Overweight BMI is classified as 25 -29.9

Obesity BMI is classified as >30

Morbid Obesity BMI is classified as >40

(NB Muscular persons may be misclassified as obese using BMI alone)

'Doctors for children in public care BAAF, 2000' have advised that an obese person who is a smoker or who has complications such as hypertension, diabetes or gallstones will have a greater morbidity and reduced life expectancy. They also state that among morbidly obese persons:

- o psychopathology and low self-esteem are common,
- o they may be stigmatised and discriminated against,
- o they may suffer negative attitudes from public and health professionals,
- o their children risk being affected by social stigma and social opinion.

In making an assessment about weight issues and their implications, the following must be considered:

- The National Adoption Standards state that people will not be automatically excluded on the grounds of age, health or other factors, except in the case of certain criminal convictions;
- There is a need to make at least an initial assessment of implications of any health issue;

- The opportunity for an applicant to have a **Limited Report** presented to Adoption Panel;
- Conditions leading to infertility (such as Poly-cystic Ovary Syndrome) are associated with high BMI;
- The applicant may feel 'doubly punished', having been unsuccessful in infertility treatment and then in trying to adopt.

On seeing the GP Medical Report, the Medical Adviser to Panel will:

- Classify the obesity (Obesity if BMI >30, Morbid Obesity if BMI >40);
- Seek information regarding associated risk factors (Smoking, BP, Diabetes, Ischemic heart disease and family history);
- Ascertain if the applicant is attending a specialist clinic, and contact the specialist.

The allocated social worker will:

- Explore with the applicant attempts to address weight;
- Consider the life-style issues of exercise and diet;
- Consider support networks – partner to care as single parent and/or extended family to offer alternative care.

10 Health and Safety Issues for child

(i) Accommodation: During the Home Visits the worker will have seen round the house and garden in order to assess the adequacy and safety of the accommodation and the applicant's knowledge of health and safety issues. It is not a requirement that an applicant should have a separate bedroom for a child but an assessment must be made of the implications of sharing.

Issues to be considered include:

- Cultural aspects (e.g. a tradition of a young child sharing a room with a parent);
- Whether a child already of the family may find it more difficult to accept the presence of the new child if having to share 'personal space';
- Any risks, such as physical or sexual, a child might pose as a result of previous experiences.

The necessity to share a bedroom might therefore limit the age range and type of child applicants are able to consider.

(ii) Pets: The implications of any pets in the household, and their significance to the applicants, should be discussed during the Home Study,

and a Pet questionnaire completed in respect of dogs. There can be significant benefits to a child of enjoying the companionship and learning to consider the needs of a pet. Issues to consider will include:

- Hygiene;
- The amount of care needed;
- The temperament of the pet; is, for example, a dog likely to be jealous of the presence of a young child?
- A reminder that applicants should not be the owner of an dangerous pet or dog listed as dangerous under legislation;
- What is the significance of the level of the applicant's emotional attachment to the pet? What would the applicant's choice be, for example, in considering a placement with a child with an allergy to, or fear of, a pet? What would the applicant do if a child developed an allergy to the pet subsequent to placement?

11 Relatives and Friends

It is an essential aspect of the assessment process to identify and evaluate the significance and role that will be played by relatives and friends in the support of the applicants. It is not currently national or local policy that a particularly significant relative (for example, one who might provide regular baby-sitting) must be interviewed. However, to help assess and verify historical and background issues in the family, which may have a current and future impact on the applicants' abilities to be adoptive parents, it may be of great value to visit a key relative. This visit will take a similar form to the personal references sought from non-family members.

Whether or not a reference is obtained from a key relative, a meeting with the wider family and friends can be an opportunity to verify the information given by the applicants, especially about the nature of the support they expect to receive. Giving information during the session can also help to prepare relatives and friends for the arrival in the family of an adopted child. The session is a valuable opportunity:

- to assess how much the applicants have been able to share and explain their own learning about adoption,
- to discuss the differences between parenting a birth and an adopted child and thus help the relatives and friends understand the task being contemplated by the applicants. The Adoption UK leaflet 'Why Adoption is Different' could be useful here.
- to correct some of the common misunderstandings about adoption and to allay some fears,
- to verify information given by the applicants, for example, about their support network.

12 Information from former partners and/or the children of former relationships:

Many applicants will have had former partnerships and may have children as a result of these relationships. If these children are living with the applicant, they will be interviewed as part of the assessment.

The assessing social worker must ascertain if the applicant has been involved in any Family Court proceedings, and follow up this information.

Key information about the parenting capacity of the applicant, and information about any risk of domestic violence, may come from a former partner who has jointly parented or cared for a child with the applicant, and any such former partners should be contacted and interviewed. Where the former partner has not jointly parented with the applicant, he or she should also be contacted in order to corroborate information given by the applicant about the nature of the relationship and the reasons for its ending. A judgement should then be made about the desirability of directly interviewing the former partner. A standard letter is available for the purpose of contacting the former partner.

Occasionally, there may be significant difficulties in pursuing this task, for example, the previous partner cannot be found, or there are inherent risks to the applicant or any children. If this is so, discussion must take place as to alternative ways of verifying the information given. This may be obtained from one or more of the referees already nominated by the applicant; or they may put forward another referee who has particular knowledge of the applicant at the relevant stage of their life. Corroboration of the reason for the ending of the relationship may also be sought from a guardian or lawyer who had been involved.

In order to learn more about the parenting capacity of the applicant, it is necessary for the assessing social worker to make contact with any children of previous relationships who are not living with the applicant. This will apply to children born of relationships whether or not the parents were living together. The nature of the contact will depend on their age and circumstances.

In any of the above situations, if the previous partner or child is not to be directly contacted, an Adoption Team Manager must give agreement to the alternative means of corroborating the evidence and the reasons for not approaching the child or previous partner must be carefully documented.

13 Information from employers/training/voluntary work

At an early stage of the home study, the social worker will discuss with the applicant the requirement to make a written approach to their workplace (or

place of study, training or voluntary work). The purpose of this contact is to obtain verification of the information supplied, such as the hours of work or nature of training. If making contact with the workplace is likely to cause difficulties, (e.g. an applicant not wishing to make known that they are in the early stages of an adoption application because of insecurity of employment), alternative ways of obtaining verification can be explored. An employer will be asked to verify the applicant's National Insurance Number.

The employer is invited to provide any information which may be relevant to the applicant's suitability to become an adoptive parent.

A standard letter is available for the purpose of contacting an employer, place of study, training or voluntary work.

14 Information from school/nursery attended by applicant's children

The assessing social worker will contact the schools or nurseries attended by any birth or adopted children of the applicants for the purpose of verification of information given by the applicants regarding their parenting ability. The purpose is not to obtain the school's opinion of these applicants' general parenting ability, but to

- verify how long the child has been at the school/nursery,
- discover if any concerns have arisen about the child's attendance, presentation or behaviour in school,
- obtain an opinion as to how the applicants engage in the education of their child.

A standard letter is available for the purpose of contacting a nursery or school.

15 'Matching Considerations'

As well as assessing the applicants' capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, the assessing social worker must assist the applicants in identifying the type of child they would like to, and feel able to, adopt.

This may be assisted by

- using concrete examples which highlight the issues,
- informing the applicants of the particular needs of the children currently awaiting placement,

The social worker should also make it clear to the applicants, and in the written report, that the 'waiting' time after approval will be used for more in-depth discussion about the types and needs of children awaiting placement. At this stage in the process, anonymised 'pen pictures' of a sample range of these children will be helpful to the prospective adopters in working out what they are able to offer and what needs they would be able to meet.

16 Change of circumstances

During the course of an assessment, and particularly at the Home Study stage, circumstances might arise which have implications for pace and timing, or for the appropriateness of adopting at all at this particular time. These circumstances may include a change of job or redundancy, illness of an applicant or close relative or a move of house. The worker will need to explore the impact of the level of adjustment the applicant may need to make to the changed circumstance. The outcome may be an agreed postponement of the assessment process with a review after an agreed period of time. If issues are complex or a consensus cannot be reached, an Adoption Team Manager should be consulted.

POST APPROVAL PERIOD AND REVIEW OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS' APPROVAL

This guidance sets out for adoption social workers the process of working with prospective adopters following their approval, of referring them to be considered for a child regionally or nationally, and for a review of their approval.

1 Post-Approval Period and Preparation for a proposed placement

Prior to Adoption Panel, the applicants' focus and energies will have been on their hopes for a positive outcome, and their approval is likely to be a major and emotional turning point for them after some difficult negative outcomes in their desire to become parents. This next stage can therefore be a valuable time in furthering and consolidating their knowledge and preparation for adoptive parenthood, free of the anxiety of whether or not they will be approved.

The adopters' social worker will visit them within 3 weeks of their approval to cover a number of topics. If the assessment has been undertaken by a sessional worker or another Agency on our behalf, the meeting will involve the Bradford social worker who will have met the adopters prior to Panel and who will now become their sole social worker.

The topics to be covered during the first meeting subsequent to approval include:

- The reaction to approval, including the emotional impact;
- Discussing any implications of the Panel minutes;
- Any matters raised by Panel, or already identified during the assessment, which point to a need for training, experience or other issues which need to be followed up prior to a Match;
- Giving information about the ongoing training that is available – see above: 'Preparation Groups and Further Training';
- Making arrangements for the adopters, if they wish, to visit an experienced foster carer who can tell them more about the needs and behaviours of children requiring adoption and about the introductions process. A visit can also be arranged to adopters who have already adopted a child/children similar in profile to that for which they are approved.
- Clarifying the paperwork which has arrived/will arrive from the Agency confirming the approval;

- Considering the practical steps the adopters will need to take to prepare themselves for a placement. These could include plans for adoption leave, consultation with employers re altered 'child-friendly' work arrangements, continuing preparation of family members, adaptations to life-style and budgeting, preparing a room for a child, ensuring practical safety e.g. a fence round the garden;
- More information about how the matching process works;
- Explanation of the purpose and process of the Adoption Register and Consortium;
- Giving more information about Adoption Support and its implications for the adopters;
- Reaching an agreement as to how much preparation time the adopters feel they need before being actively considered for a placement of a child/children. Many adopters will have felt some frustration at the pace of the assessment process and will be very keen to be matched as quickly as possible. However, in the light of the topics outlined, they may appreciate the value for themselves in having a period of 'preparation time'. How much time they need can be reviewed during subsequent visits.

Further direct contact should be maintained at 6 weekly intervals. Starting with the first visit, there should be an ongoing discussion regarding:

- The profile of the children currently awaiting adoption locally;
- A more in-depth look at what the adopters feel they have to offer. Whilst they may have been cautious during the assessment which required them to consider hypothetically what sort of child they could parent, they may be able to respond more positively when they hear about the needs of a particular child or group of children;
- How much involvement they would like in the matching process. Do they want to be involved in tentative discussions about possible placements? Do they want to know about the children they may have been considered but not chosen for?

It may be helpful and time-saving for the social worker if some of the post approval visits can take place at the Unit.

Adopters are very welcome to keep in touch with their worker by phone or e-mail in between visits. They may need some information about an aspect of the process. Also, if the adopters have to wait some time for an appropriate

match, they can become disheartened and a phone call in which they are reassured they are not being overlooked can make a considerable difference.

Adopters are asked to update their worker about changes in their circumstances which will impact on the adoption plan and to consult about decisions which may alter the assessment presented to Panel. This may include health issues, major work changes and a plan to move house.

The Social worker will be required to keep a written record of the visits and phone contacts on the adopters' file.

2 Referral to the Adoption Register and Yorkshire Adoption Consortium

2.1 The Yorkshire Adoption Consortium

This is composed of Local Authority and voluntary Adoption Agencies in the Yorkshire region and exists for regional links to be made if children and families cannot be matched in-house. Local Authority members work on the understanding that interagency matches within the consortium will be made on a no-charge basis. (Voluntary agencies will receive a fee for their families.) The Consortium Administrator monitors the families submitted and level of use by each agency.

On a fortnightly basis, the Admin Officer (Adoption) sends a copy of the Panel agenda to the Consortium to ensure that complete and timely information is available to the co-ordinator. On a quarterly basis, the executive group monitors the range of families submitted with the aim to develop recruitment targets for the region which are responsive to the needs of children needing adoption.

Newly approved adopters should be referred within 4 weeks to the Consortium for statistical purposes, with an indication of whether or not a search for a suitable link should be immediately made or go live after 3 months. Referral can be made by:

- use of the Adoption Register Form by post or Email
- sending Part 1 of the Prospective Adopter's Report by post or Email.

The adopters' social worker must ensure the adopters' written consent to referral has been obtained (this is requested as part of their Approval Pack) and a copy held on their Adoption Case Record.

The co-ordinator will enter the details of the family on the database and will run an initial check to see if there are children who have not been linked who could be matched with this family. If there is a possible link, this will be made known to the social workers for the child and adopters.

Changes of circumstances for families and changes in terms of approval must be notified immediately to the co-ordinator, as must notification of all placements.

The adopters' social worker can request for a search for a suitable child to be activated at any time if the adopters have not been matched in-house. When a match has been achieved, either in-house or externally, the Consortium must be informed.

2.2 The Adoption Register is operated by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) from their regional office in Leeds. It consists of a computer database of details of children awaiting adoption for whom their own agency has not been able to find the right family, and details of approved adopters awaiting a placement where their agency has not been able to match them with appropriate children. There is also a staff team of experienced database operators and family placement social workers who will look at the information on the database to see whether they can suggest possible matches.

2.2 (i) Process:

The social worker may use one of the following three ways to refer a family to the Register:

- Secure Document Management Portal

This enables Adoption Team workers and Register workers to share forms electronically. The Forms may be Part 1 of the Prospective Adopter's Report for the family, or the Register's own form, AD01. The URL (user name and password) is held by an Adoption Team Manager and members of the Team. The portal site provides instructions for the transfer of the forms.

When the Register staff identify possible matches, they will file them on the portal site and the worker will receive an automatic Email alert. The suggested match report sent to the adoption social worker will be in pdf format for which Adobe Reader is required.

- Forms by post

Part 1 of the Prospective Adopter's Report can be sent by post. Also, the Register referral forms can be completed and sent by post. These are available on the Register website and as attachments to the government circular LAC (2004)27.

- Secure online forms

Form AD01 can be filled in and sent to the Register securely online. The reports will be returned via the secure document management portal unless requested otherwise.

2.2 (ii) Timing and self-referral for adopters:

Families can be referred to the Register as soon as they are approved, and this is particularly helpful if it seems unlikely that they will be matched quickly with a suitable child within Bradford or the Consortium region. This may be because of the resource they are offering, for example, being of a different religion from those most commonly practised locally. Government guidance LAC (2004) 27 suggests that statutory agencies should refer prospective adopters to the Register three months after approval if a placement with an identified child is not being actively pursued. Many prospective adopters may prefer to wait at least several months, in order to be matched with a child in the care of Bradford Council. Being matched with a local child has the advantages of:

- the workers having familiarity with local policies and procedures;
- the adopters being able to remain in their own home during Introductions;
- avoiding the risks inherent in long-distance placements.

Discussion should be on-going with such families about when they wish to be referred nationally if they have waited for some time for a local placement. All prospective adopters will have indicated in writing their consent to being referred to the Register and the Yorkshire Consortium on the Form included in their approval pack.

Once they have been approved for at least 3 months, adopters may refer themselves to the Adoption Register if their social worker has not already done so. The adopter will need to complete a self referral form (AD02) which can be supplied by their worker, or can be downloaded from the website and sent to the Register. When the Register staff receive the form, they will ask the social worker for the adopter's details.

Adopters have their own telephone help-line (0870 750 2176) on which, once their identity has been verified, they can be given general advice and information about the number of times their details have been sent out to social workers for consideration. The adopters can then ask their own social worker for the reasons a particular link has not been pursued.

3 Review of Plans/Approval

3.1 Timing of Review

The approval of prospective adopters who have not yet had a child placed with them will be reviewed:

- whenever it is considered necessary, and otherwise
- one year after approval, and afterwards
- at intervals of not more than a year.

The review will be undertaken by a social worker other than the adopters' worker, or a manager.

3.2 Content of the Review

(i) Prior to the review, the prospective adopters' social worker will prepare:

- A summary of the steps taken by the Agency and the prospective adopters to achieve a proposed placement, and the outcome;
- An outline of any significant circumstances in the prospective adopters' lives since their approval or last review.
- If it is known that there have been changes in regard to the health of one of the prospective adopters, their worker will consult with the Agency Medical Advisor if necessary, and arrange to seek further information by:
 - written updated report from the GP, or
 - request for further examination, or
 - updates from a specialist

(ii) The review will consider:

- What is the prospective adopters' view of the efforts made to achieve a proposed placement? How do they feel about the delay in matching? What impact has it made on their lives?
- Are there any indications that the prospective adopters might wish to alter their stated preferences about placements
- What is the prospective adopters' view of the time since their approval or last review?
- What changes have taken place since their approval/last review? Include:
 - family circumstances
 - economic circumstances
 - work commitments
- Are police and other statutory checks still up to date? (These should be renewed every 2 years)
- Have there been any changes in the household which would require police or other statutory checks? (e.g. a young person reaching 18 or an adult joining the household)
- Does the health of the prospective adopters remain unchanged? If this has not already happened, any changes will be discussed with the

Adoption Panel Medical Adviser and further information may be sought by:

- written updated report from the GP
- request for further examination
- updates from a specialist.

3.3 Outcome of Review:

3.3 (i) If the review indicates that the prospective adopters remain suitable, the prospective adopter will be sent a copy of the review by their social worker and a copy placed on their Case Record. It will be included with the Adoption Placement Report at the time of a presentation of a proposed placement to Panel.

3.3 (ii) If it is considered that the prospective adopters may no longer be suitable:

- a) their report setting out the reasons, must be presented to Panel;
- b) the prospective adopters will be notified and sent a copy of the review report.
- c) They will have 10 working days from the date of the provision of the report in which to make comments;
- d) The usual panel process will be followed. Panel's recommendation will be submitted to the Agency Decision Maker.
- e) If the Decision is made that the prospective adopters are still considered suitable, they will be notified in writing and a copy of the reports, minutes, decision and notification will be placed on their Adoption Case Record. The report, minutes and decision will be included with the Adoption Placement Report at the time of the presentation of a proposed placement to Panel.
- f) If the decision is made that they are no longer suitable, they will be entitled to the same representations process which operates at the time of an approval.