

**SLOUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES
TRUST
ADOPTION AGENCY POLICY**

2017

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January 2017

Reviewed and amended in line with current Legislation,
Regulations and Associated Statutory and Practice Guidance

- The Adoption & Children Act 2002
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The Independent Review of Determination (Adoption)
Regulations 2004
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments)
Regulations 2012
- Children and Families Act 2014
The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations
2013
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering
Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

This Policy should be read in conjunction with Slough Children's
Services Trust (SCST) Agency

- Children and Young People's Plan
- Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose
- Adoption Policies and Procedures
- Special Guardianship Policy and Procedures
- Sufficiency Strategy
- Adopter's Recruitment Strategy

SCST ADOPTION AGENCY POLICY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

SCST undertakes to provide a comprehensive adoption service in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Children Act 1989 and associated Regulations and Statutory and Practice Guidance.

The adoption service is part of a range of services Agency which seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989. Where this is not possible the Adoption Agency undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure and stable environment, taking into account the child's specific needs and circumstances. Adoption is one of a range of permanency options and should be considered in all cases where a child cannot be appropriately cared for within his/her birth family.

SCST Adoption Agency supports the following values and principles, which underpin its Adoption Policy and Practice:

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet his/her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children wherever possible to be brought up by their own birth families.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs must be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings must be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in Adoption can have a negative impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language must be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children must 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 his birth family must be valued and respected.
- Adoption has life-long implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services of those affected by adoption.

2.0 THE ADOPTION AGENCY

2.1 *Management of Adoption Agency Work*

The day to day management of the work of the Adoption Agency will be undertaken by the Adoption Practice Managers in consultation with the Head of Placements & Resources, and the Practice Managers of the Children's Teams.

The responsibility for adoption decisions rests with the SCST Chief Executive as the Adoption Agency's Decision Maker.

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is vested in the Practice Manager for Adoption Support, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the post adoption worker within the Adoption Team. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level will be raised by the ASSA to the Head of Service, Placements & Resources.

SCST Board Members will receive regular information on the management and outcomes of the service in order to inform them in carrying out their responsibilities as corporate parents.

2.2 *The role of the Berkshire Consortium Adoption Advisory Service*

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by SCST and the five other Berkshire Unitary Authorities (The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (the host Agency), Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Wokingham District Council, Reading Borough Council, and West Berkshire District Council).

The Roles and Responsibilities of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service are as follows:

- The management, training recruitment and co-ordination of the Berkshire joint Adoption Panels
- The management of the Berkshire Letterbox service between adoptive families and birth families (known as the Information Exchange Service), including undertaking relevant administrative and professional tasks
- The provision of telephone advice on enquiries covering all aspects of adoption
- The provision of quality practice and procedural advice to staff and managers within the Berkshire Consortium of Adoption Agencies, and to

adoption panel members on complex adoption issues, including the dissemination of information

- The management of the Berkshire database of closed children in care and adopted children's files pre-1992, supported by a social work service
- Providing assistance with staff, adopter and panel members' training needs
- Providing assistance with complaints relating to adoption
- Chairing adoption disruption meetings
- The co-ordination of information regarding waiting adopters and children needing families
- The management of The Birth Relative Service, including undertaking relevant administrative and professional tasks in providing support to birth family members where the plan for the child is adoption
- The management of post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local Agency involvement
- The provision of support and financial assistance to specific pan-Berkshire adoption support initiatives, where each of the Consortium unitary agencies takes the lead on one shared aspect of adoption support
- Funding and organising the following:
 - 2 years' membership of Adoption UK for all prospective adopters approved by the Berkshire Consortium of Adoption Agencies
 - The annual adopters' conference or equivalent
- Managing the 'Berkshire Adoption Exchange' – twice yearly events that bring together social workers from across the region and further afield in an effort to achieve the matching of children with approved adopters
- Facilitating 'Life Appreciation' meetings for children being placed by the Berkshire Unitary Authorities (N.B. SCST facilitates its own Life Appreciation Days for the children that we place for adoption and permanent foster care)it

This arrangement will be reviewed in 2017.

2.3 The Work of the Adoption Agency

The work of the Adoption Agency will be carried out in accordance with all current legislation, regulations and statutory guidance. Assessment of prospective adoptive families, the linking and matching of children with families, work with birth parents and the support of children and families post placement, will be undertaken by qualified social workers with at least three years post qualifying experience in child care including direct experience of adoption work and staff involved in such work will receive appropriate training, supervision and support. Where qualified workers or student social workers who do not have the required experience are asked to undertake any of these tasks, they will be supervised by someone who has the required level of experience, and the level of supervision will be adjusted to acknowledge the complexity of this work and the level of experience required.

2.4 The Priorities of the Adoption Agency

The Agency's first priority is to identify the children in the care of SCST who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with appropriate prospective adoptive families within timescales appropriate to the needs of each child, and in line with those identified within statutory guidance.

Prospective adoptive applicants have the right to be considered, but there is no automatic right to attend a preparation course or to be assessed, and potential applicants will also be made aware of the First 4 Adoption Service that they can contact for information about other agencies. Applicants will be treated with courtesy and respect and if their application is not to be progressed they will receive notification of this in writing. The Agency will prioritise the recruitment of prospective adopters who are likely to be able to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.

Applications will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:

- Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- children from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may always require a higher level of support than other children of similar age (including in some cases a level of special education provision).
- children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/ medical care.

- children who have an identified physical or learning disability.
- children whose background histories include having a parent/s diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties.
- single children aged 4 years and over.
- sibling groups of two or more children where one or more of the children is already of school age.

All applicants will be expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there is not complete background and/ or health information.

The Agency is committed to providing Adoption Support Services in line with its responsibilities under the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Support Services Regulations 200 in order to minimise the risks of disruption.

SCST will make a range of Adoption Support Services available to meet the needs of people affected by adoption (except in situations where the adopted child is the birth child of one of the adoptive parents, in which case services will be limited to counselling, advice and information only).

Services provided may in different circumstances include:

- Financial support from either the agency or following a successful application to the Adoption Support Fund
- Services to enable groups of adopted children, adoptive parents and birth parents or former guardians of an adopted child to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adopted child and a birth parent, birth sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adopted child
- Therapeutic services for adopted children
- Restorative parenting courses and mentoring via The Cornerstone Partnership
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adopted child and his/her adoptive parent(s), including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the child; and respite care
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of

mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions

- Counselling, advice and information

The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (Regulation 4) prescribe the persons to whom the Local Agency must extend Adoption Support Services. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. where there is a significant risk of disruption) the Agency may provide services to other parties.

In most cases an assessment of need for Adoption Support Services will be undertaken in order to decide what services are to be provided. Where appropriate the Agency will liaise with the responsible health and/ or education agencies (See Section 12 below).

The Agency is also committed to providing a counselling and support service to:

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support
- Adopted persons requiring access to their birth records
- Persons requiring information about using the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adoptees, birth parents and other relatives
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service

2.5 Adoption Agency Procedures and Guidelines

The Adoption Agency will have procedures and guidelines in place for:

- The recruitment and preparation/ assessment of adoptive parents
- The identification of children suitable for adoption
- Matching children with adoptive families
- The conduct of placements (including inter-agency placements)
- The assessment of need for, and the provision of Post Placement Support Services
- Managing placement disruptions
- The payment of adoption allowances in accordance with the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The storage of Adoption Records

- The authorising of access to adoption case records and the disclosure of adoption information
- Quality assurance and monitoring
- Managing complaints

2.6 Medical Adviser

The Adoption Agency has a joint Agency Medical Adviser shared with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Bracknell Forest Borough Council and has arrangements with the East Berkshire Primary Care Trust to appoint a medical adviser who carries out all the functions as set out in the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011.

3.0 ADOPTION PANELS

3.1 Composition of Panels

The SCST Adoption Agency shares a joint Adoption Panel with the five other Berkshire authorities in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011 and the 2011 Adoption Guidance.

A central list of panel members is maintained and the composition of each panel is drawn from the central list, in line with the requirements of the 2011 regulations and guidance. The Independent Panel Chair is appointed by agreement with all the agencies and is suitably qualified in accordance with regulations. The social workers have at least 3 years post qualifying experience including direct experience of adoption work. The agency medical adviser is appointed in line with regulations and sits as a member of the Panel.

Where possible, Independent members are appointed who have direct personal experience of adoption and membership of the Adoption Panel includes representation from ethnic and cultural minority groups living in the area served by the panel.

The Panel is additionally supported by:-

- The Professional Adviser (Manager, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service)

- A Legal Adviser (Joint Legal Services)
- A minute taker.

One of the Panel members is appointed as Vice-Chair in agreement with the agencies. The Panel is only quorate when at least six of its members are present and this must include the Chair or Vice-Chair, a Social Worker and one independent member.

3.2 Terms of Appointment and Attendance Requirements

Organisation

The Panels are held twice monthly usually on the second and fourth Thursday of the month. Additional Panels are arranged if needed, and there is a separate protocol to support this. Cases from SCST can be heard at either of these panels.

Attendance Requirements

Before prospective panel members can be appointed to the central list, they are informed in writing of their performance objectives; the expectations of attendance, the need to participate in induction and training and the need to safeguard confidential information and records. Each panel member is required to sign their agreement to these objectives.

A satisfactory enhanced DBS check and satisfactory references are required before a panel member can be appointed, and each panel member's performance is reviewed annually against their agreed performance objectives. All panel members are required to undergo induction training within 10 weeks of becoming a panel member.

When any panel member leaves the panel, either on completion of or part-way through their agreed term, a replacement panel member will be appointed in line with the Regulations.

3.3 Conduct and Procedures of the Panel

The Panel considers the case of every prospective adopter and proposed placement for a child referred to it by the Adoption Agency, in accordance with Regulations.

It makes recommendations as to:

- a) Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child.
- b) Whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child.
- c) Whether a child should be placed for adoption if the child's parents have consented to the child being placed for adoption.

Where the Panel recommends that an applicant is suitable to adopt a child, the Panel may give advice to the agency about:

- The number of children that the prospective adopter(s) may be suitable to adopt
- The age range, sex, needs and background for any child(ren) to be placed

Where the Panel recommends a proposed match, i.e. that a particular child should be placed for adoption with particular adopter(s), the Panel may at the same time give advice to the agency about:

- Adoption Support Services
- Contact arrangements
- The exercising of parental responsibility -i.e. The extent to which the parental responsibility of the prospective adopter(s) (also the birth parent(s) and any others holding Parental Responsibility for the child) should be restricted following the child's placement for adoption.

Where the panel recommends that the child should be placed for adoption (in the case of parent's consent), it can give advice to the agency on:

- The arrangements which the agency proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child

The Agency will provide the Panel with all the necessary documentation in order to ensure that all relevant information is included to assist in making a recommendation.

All Panel meetings are properly minuted with particular attention paid to the reasons for Panel recommendations. In situations where there is insufficient information to enable the Panel to reach a recommendation the Panel may request the agency to obtain other relevant information and may defer the recommendation while this is done. Where there is an evenly divided Panel, or a serious difference of opinion among Panel members, the Chair may ask for more information to be made available to the Panel before a recommendation is made. Where the Panel is not unanimous, dissent from the majority view and serious reservations expressed by individual Panel members about a particular recommendation will be recorded in the Panel

Minutes for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. Where adoptive applicants attend and make verbal representations to the Panel these should also be noted.

The presence of non-Panel members at Panel meetings can pose limitations which may inhibit the proper working of an Adoption Panel. The Agency recognises however that it is a requirement for new prospective Panel members to observe panel before taking up their role, and it can be helpful for new Social Workers joining the Agency who may in the future be bringing cases to Panel to attend a Panel meeting as an observer. Similarly there may be other professional workers for whom attending a Panel might be a valuable training opportunity. The Professional Adviser to the Panel will agree when observers can attend Panel and for which items. No more than two observers will be permitted to attend any Panel meeting.

In deciding which workers will present any particular item(s) to the Panel, the Agency will likewise restrict attendance to those who are likely to be able to assist the Panel in its deliberations.

Any Panel member, who has knowledge, either in a personal or a professional capacity, of a case under consideration, should declare an interest and inform the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Panel accordingly. It may be considered inappropriate for him/ her to be present during discussion of the case.

Any person who is otherwise a member of the Panel, but who is presenting a case, shall not be a voting member of the Panel throughout the discussion of that case.

3.4 Recommendation of the Panel and Agency Decision Maker

The Recommendation

The Adoption Agency's Decision Maker will be supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the Panel on each Agenda item, prior to the Panel meeting.

The recommendation of the Adoption Panel will be conveyed to the Adoption Agency Decision Maker by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service within 24 working hours. The agreed panel minutes will be forwarded within four working days.

The Decision

The Adoption Panel Adviser will also be available to the Agency Decision Maker for consultation if required. Where the panel has provided the agency with advice, the Decision Maker may express a view on this advice and, in relation to prospective adopters; this may be taken into account during the matching process together with other factors relating to the further

development of the prospective adopters. This is separate from any decision on the prospective adopters' suitability to adopt.

The Agency Decision Maker will take into account the recommendations of the adoption panel in reaching a decision on each agenda item, and the final decision in relation to any application will be made within 7 working days of their receipt of the final panel minutes, in line with NMS 17.11. No panel member will take part in any decision of the agency.

The Agency Decision Maker's decision will be recorded on the child's adoption case record in the case of the proposed placement, or the prospective adopter's case record, and should also include any view the Decision Maker has on the panel's advice. The Agency Decision Maker's decision will be conveyed verbally within 2 working days and in writing within 5 working days of the decision being made (NMS 17.12). If the Decision Maker is minded not to accept the adoption panel's recommendation (s)he will discuss this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of the panel. The outcome of this discussion will be recorded on the child's case record.

The Agency Decision Maker will convey her decision in writing (by e-mail or memo) to the Agency worker who presented the case to the Adoption Panel for consideration, the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and to the Team Manager of the Family Placement Service.

The Practice Manager of the Adoption Service will ensure:-

- Letters confirming the Agency's decision are sent out to adoptive applicants.
- Prospective adopters are sent a formal proposal of any allowances payable.

Where the proposal is not to approve

Where the Agency Decision Maker makes a qualifying determination that the Agency proposes not to approve the prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child:

- A formal letter will be sent to the prospective adopters advising them that the agency proposes not to approve them as suitable to adopt (this is a "qualifying determination")
- A copy of the recommendation of the adoption panel will be sent with the letter, if the panel's recommendation was different
- The letter will advise the prospective adopters that they have 40 working days, starting with the date on which the notification is sent, to:
 - accept the determination (or pre-empt the outcome by withdrawing their application)

- make written representation to the agency
- apply for a review of the determination by an Independent Review Panel by writing to the Independent Review Panel Administrator

If the prospective adopters do not make any representations to the agency or apply for an Independent Review within 40 working days the agency will proceed with its decision and notify the prospective adopters of that decision in writing together with the reasons.

If representation is received within the 40 working days the agency may decide to refer the case back to the adoption panel, but is not obliged to do so. If the agency does refer the case back to the adoption panel the prospective adopters will be invited to attend the panel and the panel will make a fresh recommendation on whether the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt.

If the prospective adopters decide to apply for an Independent Review of the determination the Team Manager of the Family Placement Service will be responsible for liaising with the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism) Panel Administrator in respect of any application to that panel.

The agency will supply the information required by the IRM Panel in a timely manner and will send one or more representatives to the Review Panel, and ensure that those attending are in a position to assist the panel.

The Agency will meet the costs incurred by the IRM in undertaking the review.

The Agency Decision Maker will reach a final decision in relation to the application within seven working days of receiving the recommendation of either:

- the Agency's Adoption Panel
- the IRM Independent Review Panel

In making a final decision the Agency Decision Maker will take into account the recommendations of the Agency's Adoption Panel and the IRM Panel (if it has reviewed the determination). The IRM Panel does not have the power to overturn the agency decision.

As soon as possible after making the decision, the agency will notify the prospective adopters of the decision regarding their application. If it is considered that the prospective adopters are not suitable to adopt the reasons for this will be confirmed to them in writing. If the panel's recommendation is different from the agency's decision, the agency will also provide the prospective adopters with a copy of the panel's recommendation.

Where the Independent Review Panel has made a recommendation the agency will, in line with regulations, send the Review Panel Administrator a copy of the decision on the prospective adopters' suitability to adopt.

3.5 Training for Panel Members

The Adoption Agency undertakes via the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service to provide a minimum of one annual training session for Panel members. Panel members will be consulted on the content and format of the training day. There is a clear expectation that Panel members will attend.

The Adoption Advisory Service, on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Agency Adoption Agencies, will also provide additional training opportunities and material for Panel members (including Coram BAAF literature for Panel members) to keep them updated as to changes in Adoption Legislation, Regulations and good practice guidance, as well as helping them to be aware of current trends and practice issues.

3.6 Adoption Recommendations for Children

From September 2012 Adoption Panels have no longer been involved in the process of deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption when the *Court is involved in making the decision*. Panel will still be required to consider cases and make recommendations where the child's parents consent to the child being placed for adoption. Where the child's parents are not prepared to consent, where care proceedings are ongoing or where the child has no parents, the case will be referred directly to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision as to whether a child should be placed for adoption following consideration of the reports presented, the medical and legal advice and any other information provided. The Agency Medical Advisor will clarify any queries in respect of medical or legal advice with those advisors if necessary in order to assist in the decision making. In making the decision the ADM will consider the welfare checklist in s1 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and will list all of the material that they have taken into account in reaching the decision (including discussions with the professional advisers), identify the key arguments in the case and set out their reasons for making the decision. The agency decision will be made within seven working days of receiving the reports from the agency adviser at the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service. The agency adviser to the Panel will be responsible for monitoring the quality of the CPR and deciding whether the report is adequate for submission to the ADM.

4. LINKS WITH OTHER AGENCIES

4.1 *The Other Consortium Agencies & Local Voluntary Agencies*

The Agency has established relationships with other members of the Berkshire Local Authorities' Adoption Consortium, and has worked in close co-operation with them Agency to facilitate SCST provision of a range of Adoption Support Services, hosted by different Authorities but open to participants from any of the six Unitary Authorities.

SCST Adoption Agency has also established positive working relationships with a number of other agencies and will continue to develop these to ensure that we maintain the best possible outcomes for children needing adoptive placements to include a wide range of adoptive families available and the appropriate support that those families made need.

The Agency will contribute to joint initiatives, relating to the recruitment of families and the placement of children, with the other Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies within the area.

The Agency participates in adoption exchanges held across the country which brings together representatives from Local Agency and Voluntary Adoption Agencies in an attempt to achieve links for children awaiting placement.

The Agency by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad

Where there is a need for any specific piece of work relating to the recruitment of applicants or the placing of a children to be carried out by staff independent of the Agency, the Agency will seek to make arrangements for this to be undertaken by a neighbouring Local Agency Adoption Agency or by an Independent Adoption Agency, Cabrini (Reading) or PACT (Reading) on a contractual basis, without undue delay.

4.2 *Use of Other Agencies and the National Register*

When seeking to identify prospective adopters for children requiring adoptive placements the Agency will give first consideration to prospective adopters already approved by this agency. If there are no immediate placement opportunities available, the child's details will be referred to the National Adoption Register. In addition, specific advertising may be arranged (subject to the necessary agreements) and other Agencies approached.

The Agency will always seek to avoid undue delay in identifying suitable prospective adopters for children requiring placement. The Agency will

ensure that the resources are available to pay inter-agency fees in cases where not to do so is likely to jeopardise the chances of achieving a successful placement for a child.

In cases where the Agency proposes to feature a child in local or national publications, or via radio or television, the following safeguards must be in place.

- (i) Where a child is of an appropriate age and understanding, s(he) will be consulted about the type of advertising and will be encouraged to contribute to the wording of any article to be featured in the press and to assist in compiling their profile that will be shared with potential adopters.
- (ii) Where possible, the child's birth parent(s) will be made aware of and consulted about the decision to advertise and the nature of the advertisement, and asked to give signed permission for the child to be featured in this way.

Where the birth parent(s) will not or cannot consent to this, the permission of the Court will be sought where the Agency does not share Parental Responsibility for the child.

- (iii) Where the birth parent(s) refuses permission, but the Agency already holds PR for the child: the Agency will exercise this; however the court will be informed.

5.0 CHILDREN REQUIRING PLACEMENT

SCST supports the basic principles that:-

- Every child is entitled to grow up as part of a safe, nurturing and loving family, which can meet his/ her needs during childhood, and beyond
- It is best for children whenever possible to be brought up by their own birth families
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a safe secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them as one of a range of permanency options
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- Children's views should be listened to, recorded and given due consideration when decisions are made about their placement needs

5.1 Planning for Permanence

All children in Care will have a Plan for Permanence considered at the four-month review.

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. A spectrum of options exists, and the planning process will identify which option is most likely to meet the child's individual needs and take account of his/her views and feelings. The options include:-

- Returning home to birth parents
- Care with wider family or friends
- Long Term (Permanent) Fostering
- Special Guardianship
- Adoption
- Residential Care

The Agency, while making all reasonable efforts to rehabilitate children in Care with their families (unless this is clearly inappropriate for the child), will be mindful of the need to balance the benefits of rehabilitation against a recognition of the importance of timescales in a child's life. The Agency will be careful to balance the benefits of rehabilitation against a recognition of the importance of the child's developmental needs and the need for security within a permanent family, within an appropriate time frame for the child.

Clear timescales will be set for achieving the permanency plan for the child and monitoring systems will ensure that planning is well managed to prevent drift.

5.2 When Adoption is the Plan

The Child*

Every child will have a named Social Worker who will be responsible for him/her throughout the adoption process.

The Agency will as far as is reasonably practicable:

- Provide a counselling service for the child. Counselling will be provided in a way that is sensitive to the child's individual situation, needs and understanding including his/her ethnicity, religious beliefs and/or disability
- Explain to the child in an appropriate manner the procedures for and the legal implications of adoption

- Undertake work with the child to help him/ her to understand:
 - why adoption is the preferred option
 - what adoption would mean both in the short and longer term
 - the implications that placement for adoption would have for future contact with his/her birth relatives
- 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/ her adoption
 - his/ her religious and cultural upbringing
 - contact with his/ her parents or guardian(s), with other relatives or any other person the agency considers relevant

(The child's views should be recorded – where they are not acted upon, the reasons for this should be explained to the child and recorded).

First consideration will be given to placing siblings with the same family, where this is likely to be in the best interests of each child. Where this is assessed not to be appropriate or the lack of availability of a suitable placement precludes it, the reasons will be clearly identified and recorded.

Where a child requiring placement has older birth sibling(s) who have already been placed with adopters, consideration will be given to placing the child within the same adoptive family as the elder sibling(s) before other possible placement options are considered.

Children will be appropriately prepared before being placed with new families. This will include work aimed at equipping them with an understanding of their own life experiences to date, as well as sharing information about the prospective adoptive family. It will also, when appropriate, include direct work aimed at preparing the child for family life. DVS's are routinely made of the child's foster family so that this can go with the child and offer them reassurance that their foster family is wishing them well and supporting the move.

Where the child is of an appropriate age and understanding he/she will be involved in drawing up a profile that can be used in family finding.

Every child will have a 'Life Book' provided following placement within the adoptive family. The content will be finalised in consultation with the adoptive parents, and provided within 10 working days of the Adoption Celebration hearing, along with the child's Later Life Letter.

Information provided for children by their birth families will be kept safe both by the Agency and the adopters, and provided to the child at an appropriate time, considering his/her age and understanding as well as the nature of the information concerned.

All children will be the subject of a comprehensive Health Assessment (unless of sufficient age and understanding to withhold consent). Their health needs will be given due consideration when decisions regarding placement are made.

The child's current and likely future educational needs will also be assessed/ considered and addressed when placement decisions made, and the SCST Virtual School Head will be consulted when any consideration of a change of school is being made. The Virtual School Head will also offer adopted children the opportunity for a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to help identify and secure appropriate assistance if needed, and adopters can also access Pupil Premium for their adopted child via the child's school post order; before the adoption order is granted, Pupil Premium is accessed via the Virtual School.

Additionally, the child's needs for contact, after placement, with birth parent(s), sibling(s) or other relatives will be assessed/ considered and addressed when placement decisions are made.

The Birth Parents and Significant Others**

The Agency will seek to work with birth parents and significant birth family members to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their children. The Agency will be clear about why the children cannot be returned to their care and explanation will be given both orally and in writing.

The Agency will explain the legal pathways involved in placing a child for adoption i.e. by consent or by virtue of a Placement Order, and the agency will encourage the birth parent(s) or guardian(s) to consult their own solicitor as soon as possible, particularly where they are not prepared to accept that adoption is the preferred option for their child.

Birth parents will be kept informed at all stages of the Agency's plan for their child, and every effort will be made to ensure that birth parents (and significant family members) have a full understanding of the adoption process, the legal implications and their rights.

They will be given written information about:

- The procedures for placement for adoption and adoption
- The legal implications of:
 - adoption
 - giving consent to placement for adoption under section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002

- giving consent to the making of a future adoption order under section 20 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002
- the condition and procedure for dispensing with their consent (to placement for adoption and/ or the making of a future adoption order)
- a placement order

The Agency will also explain how contact arrangements will change if permission is gained to place the child for adoption and the rights that the birth parent(s) or guardian(s) have to apply for a contact order.

Birth parents will be offered counselling and support by a worker independent of the planning process relating to their child. (This is currently offered via the Birth Parent Project based at the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service). Where counselling is refused the agency will record this on the child's case record, and will write to the birth parent's solicitor and the Birth Parent Project worker/ any other independent counsellor to ensure that they are aware of the situation, and that the parent is able to receive essential information about the legal implications of adoption and their rights.

Birth parents will be asked to contribute information about their own and their child's background and life experiences, both for the Agency Decision Maker's and Adoption Panel's information and to contribute to information for the child in later life. They will have the opportunity to give their account of events and to see what is written about them in reports prepared for the Agency Decision. They will be provided with a copy of their child's Permanence Report or the parts of the report that the Agency considers appropriate.

Birth parents' views will be sought as to their child's future placement including their views in relation to race, culture, religion and language, the placement of siblings and the child's needs for contact after placement.

Where it is in the child's best interests for there to be ongoing links, including contact, with birth parent(s) and/ or other relatives (including siblings separated by adoption), reasonable attempts will be made to involve significant relatives in discussions about how best to achieve this, and they will be helped to fulfil agreed plans through practical and/or financial support.

Birth Parents will be informed of their right to apply for a Contact Order under Section 26 (2) and 26 (3) of the Children Act 1989.

Birth parents will be notified of how information may be disclosed under the Disclosure of Adoption Information (Post Commencement Adoptions) Regulations 2005 and they will be asked if they wish to deposit information with the agency for their adopted child to access on request as an adult.

The Agency will provide birth parents with written information about the Adoption Contact Register and advise them about support options at different stages in the process and in later life.

In accordance with Regulations birth parents will be formally notified in writing of the Adoption Agency's decisions in relation to the placement of their child.

Birth parents will be formally notified of the outcome of Post Placement Reviews held under the Adoption Agencies Regulations, unless they have expressed a wish not to be informed.

Consideration will be given in every case to providing birth parents with the opportunity of a single non-identifying meeting with the prospective adopters for their child at around the time of placement, provided that it is considered safe for both parties for such a meeting to occur. Whether such a meeting takes place will depend on the willingness of both parties and/ or whether such a meeting might jeopardise the longer-term confidentiality or security of the placement.

** This policy relates to children placed for adoption by the Agency. The Agency will however seek to encourage/ support other Agencies who place children for adoption with SCST approved adopters to uphold the same standards in relation to the children placed.*

*** This policy relates to the birth parents/ relatives of children placed for adoption by the Agency. The Agency will however seek to encourage and support other Agencies who place children for adoption with SCST approved adopters to uphold the same standards in relation to their work with the children's birth parents/ relatives.*

6. APPLICANTS WISHING TO ADOPT

6.1 Recruitment

The agency will have in place a Recruitment Strategy for prospective adopters.

All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice and responded to promptly and impartially. They are given/ sent clear written information about adoption in general, including details of First 4 Adoption, and the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval process and the subsequent matching and placing process.

The Agency will seek to manage enquiries and applications within the timescales laid down by Regulations. Applicants will be kept informed of the progress in relation to all stages of their case.

6.2 Criteria for Applications from Prospective Adopters

In accepting applications to be approved as prospective adopters the SCST Adoption Agency will apply the following criteria:-

- The Agency operates an equal opportunities policy and no individual or couple will be automatically refused consideration as adopters solely on the grounds of age, health, marital status, gender and sexual orientation, race, colour or nationality, religion, financial status or disability.
- Legally, adoptive applicants wishing to adopt a child who is not directly related to them must be at least 21 years of age.
- There is no legal requirement in respect of an applicant's upper age limit. However applicants will need to demonstrate that they can meet the needs of any child placed throughout the remainder of his/her childhood and into independence.
- At least one of the applicants must be domiciled in the U.K., Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.
- Applications will not be accepted from any applicant who has been convicted or cautioned for a "specified offence" in accordance with AAR 23.2, 23.4 or an offence specified in AAR part 1 schedule 3 or where any adult member of the household has been so convicted or cautioned.

(Applicants convicted or cautioned for other offences will be considered at the discretion of the agency).

- Applications will usually be considered from prospective adopters who live within or outside of the Local Agency boundary where applicants can demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of children likely to require placement or with specific placement needs.
- Applicants living together as a partnership, whether married or unmarried, will be expected to demonstrate that the relationship is stable, permanent and harmonious enough to withstand the stresses associated with parenthood/ adoption*. Whether married or unmarried, both partners will be expected to jointly apply for an adoption order.
- Childless applicants are not expected to have undergone fertility investigations/treatment. However where applicants have elected to do so, careful consideration will be given to the appropriateness of the agency accepting an application prior to any fertility investigations/treatment having been completed** .
- Applicants will not be considered where the applicants are currently accepted by, or are being considered by, another Agency. However, previous consideration or approval by another agency is not a bar to approval.

- In accordance with the recommendations made by the Coram/British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, this Agency wishes to provide a smoke free environment for children wherever possible. It is unlikely therefore, that a child of pre-school age, or a child with respiratory difficulties, would be placed with prospective adopters who smoke.
- Applicants will need to be of sound health and reasonably fit. Applicants will be expected to disclose all relevant information relating to their personal medical histories. This would include any prognosis of life threatening illnesses occurring or re-occurring; any known genetic condition; psychological and/or psychiatric referral or treatment concerning the applicant, a member of the household, or an immediate family member. Where an applicant is undergoing, or anticipating a significant medical procedure (including major surgery) the Agency will not usually accept an application until the procedure is concluded and sufficient time has elapsed to enable the applicant to make a good physical recovery and, depending on the nature of the surgery, to psychologically adjust to their new situation.
- Where applicants have already had a child placed with them for adoption the Agency will not usually accept an application to adopt a second or subsequent child until any previous adoption(s) are legally concluded.
- Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that their income (from all sources) is sufficient to enable them to meet the family's needs, including the needs of any child(ren) who might be placed with them for adoption (accepting that for certain children an adoption allowance and/ or benefits may be payable from the point of placement).
- Where both applicants are, or the only applicant is in full or part-time employment, one applicant will be expected to take adoption leave at the beginning of the placement. Given the history and life experiences of the children generally placed through the Agency, consistency of care is essential and applicants will be expected to demonstrate an ability to provide this in any proposed childcare arrangements
- Applicants will be required to demonstrate that their home and garden will provide a safe environment for a child.
- Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that their lifestyle and family situation is sufficiently stable and harmonious to provide an appropriate family environment for a child from a background of Local Agency care. The Agency will consider each situation on an individual basis, however careful consideration will be given to the appropriateness of the Agency accepting an application where applicants are anticipating a significant change to their circumstances within two years of the

application or where the composition of the family household is unsettled.

- Applicants who currently own a dog subject to regulation under The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) will be precluded from assessment and approval as adopters. Caution will also be exercised when considering applications from people with whose households contain some of the guarding breeds e.g. an Alsatian (German Shepherd), Rottweiler, Doberman, or a 'pack' of dogs – i.e. two or more.
- Applicants who keep animals which have to be registered under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 will be precluded from assessment and approval as adopters.
- Given the profile of children needing adoption both locally and nationally, all applicants are expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there is not complete background and /or health information.
- Where an applicant works for SCST an application will only be accepted from him/ her if permission is granted by the SCST Chief Executive for the application to proceed. Where permission is not granted he/ she will be offered an initial counseling interview but then referred to another Agency, upon request. (Applicants can alternatively apply directly to another Agency).

** The agency considers that the quality and strength of a relationship is more relevant to a couple's capacity to jointly provide appropriate parenting to a child than is the duration of the relationship. However where couples apply to the agency to be approved to jointly adopt, the duration of their relationship will be one factor that is taken into account when assessing whether the relationship is likely to provide the long term stability and commitment that an adopted child is likely to need. The agency is therefore unlikely to accept applications from couples whose relationship is of less than three years duration.*

*** It is widely recognised in adoption that it is preferable for applicants not to begin the process of being assessed as prospective adopters until any fertility tests/ treatment that they have decided to pursue are complete, and if unsuccessful they have had time to come to terms with this. While the agency will consider each situation on an individual basis and will offer the opportunity to attend preparation groups to prospective applicants who are still undergoing fertility investigations/ treatment, when deciding whether to accept applications, the agency will usually prioritise applications from couples who are no longer pursuing fertility options*

6.3 The Processing of Applications

All enquiries from prospective adopters will be welcomed without prejudice and responded to promptly and impartially. They will be given/ sent clear

written information about adoption, children who need adoptive families, the Agency's expectations of adopters and how/ where to obtain further information from the agency or other agencies. The initial enquiry should always be responded to within 48 hours of the initial contact.

If the enquirer subsequently approaches the agency and expresses an interest in becoming a prospective adopter, the agency will offer them the opportunity to attend an Information Meeting. The Information Meetings, and the Preparation Group meetings, are currently shared and hosted on a rota basis by the 6 Berkshire Unitary Authorities. However SCST will review this arrangement during 2017 to ensure that it meets the needs of our prospective adopters.

The purpose of the Information Meeting is to provide information assist the prospective applicant(s) to understand and consider:

- the requirements of the adoption process
- the parenting needs of the children placed and the likely profiles of children who need adoption
- The assessment, preparation and approval process, and timescales
- the matching and placing processes
- adoption support
- habitual residence and domicile requirements
- their expectations of adoption
- the possible consequences for them and their family of caring for and adopting a child who is likely to have a range of complex needs
- how to apply to the agency for consideration as prospective adopters

It is not compulsory that potential adopters attend Information Meetings, however all those enquiring about adoption should be encouraged to attend as it provides an opportunity for them to meet with other potential adopters and also approved agency adopters able to share their experiences.

Following the Information Meeting, the hosting agency will confirm the prospective applicant's attendance to the relevant agency, and those attending will be reminded to confirm their wish to proceed to their agency.

Where a potential adopter decides, after receiving the Information Pack, that he/she would like to pursue his/her interest in adoption further, he/she should complete and return the Expression of Interest Form.

The Agency will respond within 10 working days of receiving either a completed Expression of Interest Form **or** a request for further information (however received).

Potential adopters are able to attend an Information Session without prior arrangement but those who return a completed Expression of Interest Form without having previously attended an Information Session will still be encouraged to attend a session.

Regardless of whether the potential adopter/s have attended an Information Session they will be offered the opportunity to meet with a social worker in their own home to discuss their interest in adoption and their individual situation. This visit should take place within 10 working days of the potential adopter/s returning the completed Expression of Interest Form or otherwise requesting further information.

Where there is nothing to suggest that it would be inappropriate for an application to be progressed a Registration of Interest Form will be provided to the potential adopter/s.

On receipt of the Registration of Interest Form the Agency will decide within 5 working days whether or not to accept it. This can be extended in exceptional circumstances. A letter will be sent in either circumstance.

In regard to the decision:

- a further visit, an office interview or a pre-planned telephone call may be required.
- the Agency will take into account the national need for adopters not just local need.
- prospective adopters may only be excluded if they fail to meet the eligibility criteria detailed above.

All prospective adoptive applicants are required to attend an Adopters' Preparation Group, which provides information about the adoption process, about the potential issues involved in bringing up adopted children and about the children locally and nationally who need adoptive families. The purpose of this group is to provide prospective applicants with the information that they will need about adoption in general, the Adoption Agency, and the profile and needs of children requiring placement, in order to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether or not they would wish to continue with the process and to prepare applicants for the home study process and the adoption task. However, previous adopters and approved foster carers may be able to proceed straight to Stage Two and receive a tailored assessment to

take account of such factors as their previous experience of adopting or fostering and the needs of the child they have previously adopted/fostered.

Agency

Enquiries from Foster Carers about adopting a child in their care will be welcomed in the same way as any other enquiry. Foster Carers who make an application to adopt children in their care will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other prospective adopters.

Where an application is accepted by the agency the applicant(s) will be supplied with information both orally and in writing, about the agency's procedures relating to and/ or the reasons for:

- checks and references and the collection of information
- preparation
- assessment
- the Prospective Adopters' Report
- consideration of the application by the Adoption Panel and the Agency Decision Maker
- the role of the Independent Review Panel, when and how representations may be made to it through the IRM
- approval review
- the matching process and the role of the Adoption Register
- the placement process
- adoption support
- placement reviews
- the legal adoption process
- safeguarding information and possible disclosure of information where the adopted person is an adult
- the agency's complaints process

The assessment and approval process that applicants are required to undergo will be comprehensive, thorough and fair. It will balance the need to give applicants time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change whilst avoiding unnecessary delays. Applicants will be considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their developmental needs and in terms of their ability to meet the additional needs that adopted children have by virtue of their adopted status.

Applicants will be kept informed of the progress of their application throughout. If the timescale as identified in the statutory guidance are not met, or unlikely to be met this will be recorded within the assessing social worker's supervision file and on the adopter's file clearly detailing the reasons. This information will also be included within the Prospective Adopter's Report.

All social workers undertaking adopter assessments will attend an assessment training course. The assessment will be robust and thorough and all of the information gathered will be critically analysed and the information will be verified. Any additional checks that are required to verify information and a second opinion visit will always be undertaken by a manager from within the Family Placement Service.

All applicants will be offered the opportunity to meet with existing adopters.

If the Agency deems an application as being unlikely to succeed, this will be acknowledged to the applicants at an early stage and the reasons for this explained.

A copy of the completed Prospective Adopters' Report will be provided to the applicants, and they will be notified of the date that their application will be considered by the Adoption Panel. The applicants will have a minimum of ten working days to consider the report prior to it being submitted to the Adoption Panel, and they will be invited to send their views on the report in writing to the agency. At the end of the ten working days the prospective adopters' report will be submitted to the adoption panel along with the applicants' written comments. Applicants will be invited to attend the adoption panel when their case is considered.

Prospective adopters will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

Applicants will be advised verbally of the Adoption Panel's recommendation immediately after the panel meeting, and of the Agency Decision Maker's decision verbally within 2 working days and in writing within 5 working days of the decision being made. Where the Agency Decision Maker is not disposed to approve an application, the prospective adopters will have the right to make representation and to ask for their application to be further considered in the light of this representation by either the original Adoption Panel or by an Independent Review Panel through the IRM process. (See Section 3.4 above).

Note: The IRM is **not** available for decisions made during Stage One, however, the prospective adopter(s) should be offered access to the Agency's complaints procedure and can raise any concerns with First 4 Adoption.

6.4 Approval Period and Reviews

Prospective adopters are normally approved for 3 years, unless specific circumstances suggest a shorter approval period to be appropriate.

Approval relates only to the placement of children from within the United Kingdom and does not cover placement of children from abroad.

If a suitable placement is not identified within the first three months of applicants being approved their details will, subject to their agreement, be made available for consideration by other placing agencies via the National Adoption Register.

Prospective adopters who appear unlikely to be 'matched' locally within the first three months of their approval will be referred to the Register at an early stage to enable their early consideration by other Placing Agencies.

The agency will review the approval of all the prospective adopters with whom it is engaged in line with Regulations.

Reviews of prospective adopters' approval will take place:

- whenever the agency considers it necessary
- not more than one year following approval and afterwards at intervals of not more than one year
- until a child is placed with the prospective adopters or the period of time for which approval was originally given expires, or they formally withdraw from the adoption process

Reviews will be carried out by a manager from the adoption team s, and the agency will make enquiries and seek to obtain any additional information it considers necessary in order to determine whether the prospective adopters continue to be suitable to adopt. Reviews will usually involve a meeting with the prospective adopters and their views will be taken into account.

If the prospective adopters wish to continue to be approved to adopt, a review report will be compiled which they will be asked to comment on and sign.

If the agency considers that the prospective adopters remain suitable to adopt they will be informed in writing and provided with a copy of the review report. They will also have the opportunity to comment in writing on the report. The decision will be recorded on the case file.

If the agency considers that the prospective adopters may no longer be suitable to adopt the reasons for this will be detailed in the review report, and the agency will notify the prospective adopters that their case is to be referred to the adoption panel. The prospective adopters will be sent a copy of the report and will have 10 working days to comment on the report before it is submitted to the adoption panel.

6.4 Fostering for Adoption

There are circumstances where it is legal to place children with carers for a period of temporary care who are dual approved (adoption and fostering) until a court makes a decision. There are children for whom the likelihood of them returning to birth family is so small that the advantages of placing them with

approved foster cares who could go on to adopt them would be in the best interests of the child.

Fostering for Adoption may apply, typically in one of the following circumstances:

- Where parents have had one or more previous children removed and the evidence strongly suggests that their circumstances have not changed and the same risks are posed to the child and the local Agency does not have a plan to rehabilitate.
- Where this is a first child and the risks are such that there is no proactive plan to return the child to the birth family
- Where parents have indicated that they want their child adopted but have not formally consented

From 1st July 2013 the introduction of regulation 25A in the care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 enables approved adopters to be temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child by the local Agency without that being referred to the Fostering panel. There is a Fostering for Adoption policy in place.

7.0 LINKING/ MATCHING/ PLACING

7.1 *The Child****

The Agency's first principle in matching children with adoptive families is to secure the best possible developmental outcomes for children over the course of their childhood and into adulthood.

In addressing questions of matching, the Agency will look at the child's needs holistically. No one set of needs will take precedence over another where this would result in unwarranted delay or no placement at all.

The Agency will proactively seek to identify prospective adopters for children who offer a positive match in terms of the child's ethnic origin, culture, language and religion. However no child will be denied the benefits of adoption on the grounds that prospective adopters who share the same racial and cultural background cannot be identified.

Where at all possible and if consistent with their future needs, siblings will be placed together. However the individual needs of different children within sibling pairs/ groups will be given due consideration in order to reach a

decision about whether they should be placed together or separately for adoption.

In every case an assessment will be made of the child's likely need for Adoption Support Services and a plan drawn up detailing the child's perceived needs and the support services to be provided. This will be an outline plan at the stage when the adoption plan for the child is considered. The Adoption Support Plan will be reviewed and drawn up in detail when prospective adopters are identified for a child, taking into account the assessed capabilities of the prospective adopters. The plan will be made available to the Adoption Panel when considering the proposed placement.

Once prospective adopters are identified, full written information on the child will be shared with them including:

- the Adoption Placement Report
- the Adoption Support Plan

Every child will be offered support by a named social worker in preparing to move into his/her prospective adoptive family and in managing the impact of changes, which might include termination of previous direct contact with birth parents, siblings and/or other family members as well as loss of previous carers.

The Adoption Support Plan will identify arrangements for maintaining links with birth parents, wider birth family members and other people who are likely to remain significant to the child post-placement. It will also make clear the process by which the Plan will be reviewed.

The child's needs, welfare, wishes and safety will be the most important concerns when considering the possibility of maintaining links by indirect or direct contact, post placement.

Where information on a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people (professionals, other adopters, foster carers) who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision about whether to proceed. A meeting with the Agency's Medical Adviser and also the child's foster carer will be arranged prior to any proposed match being presented to the Adoption Panel.

When placing children for adoption, the Agency will in each case give consideration to holding a Life Appreciation Day, and this will be facilitated by a manager or Consultant Practitioner from within the adoption service.

In line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, the Agency will provide adoptive parents with full written information about the child. The Agency will advise the adoptive parents that this information should be made available to the child at a time they consider appropriate, but by the time the child reaches

18. The Agency will encourage an open and ongoing sharing of information at an age appropriate level.

A review of the adoption support arrangements will be included in the child's post placement reviews.

7.2 The Adopters****

Approved and waiting adopters will be given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.

All prospective adopters will have a named social worker (link worker) who will provide regular support throughout the post approval period and assist applicants in considering the specific placement needs and issues relevant to children awaiting placement and to objectively evaluate whether they should pursue possible matches.

All prospective adopters will be offered the opportunity to become members of Adoption UK. (They will be offered two years' free membership following the date of their approval).

Before a match is agreed, prospective adopters will be given as much written information as is available to help them to understand the needs and background of the child and will have the opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family. Where information about a child is shared either verbally or in writing prospective adopters will be informed of the need to keep all information confidential and not to share details with anyone outside of their immediate family, unless they are ultimately matched to the child, and even then only after the placing agency's adoption Decision Maker has confirmed the proposed match. Where prospective adopters are identified as the family of choice, the child's Permanence Report and all other significant information will be shared. The Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan will be discussed, and the views of the prospective adopters obtained (their views should be taken into account prior to the reports being finalised for presentation to panel). They will be provided with the Adoption Placement Report 10 days prior to the papers being submitted to the Panel for consideration of the proposed match, and invited to give their views on it in writing.

Prospective adoptive parents will be involved in discussions as to how they can best maintain any links, both indirect and direct, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.

Prospective adoptive parents will be asked to notify the placing agency if an adopted child develops any significant health or medical conditions that may have implications for other members of their birth families, or if the child dies during childhood or soon afterwards. They will be asked to agree to this

information being passed on to the birth relatives of the child, provided that they are traceable.

Where information on a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. A meeting with the placing agency's medical advisor will be requested if appropriate.

The Agency will assess the risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these. The possibility of the placing agency hosting a Life Appreciation day will be explored.

**** This policy relates to children placed for adoption by the Agency. The Agency will however seek to encourage/support other agencies that place children for adoption with SCST approved adopters to uphold the same standards in relation to children placed.*

***** This policy relates to work with prospective adoptive parents approved by the Agency. The Agency will however, when placing children via inter-agency arrangements, seek to encourage and support the agency responsible for the approval of the prospective adopters to uphold the same standards in their preparation of the adopters for the placement and their subsequent support of them.*

Pre-placement Preparation

The Agency will encourage and support prospective adoptive parents to meet the birth parent(s) and/or other relatives of the child, if appropriate, as this may be of direct benefit to the child. Prospective adopters will be supported in this by their own social worker.

The Agency will assist prospective adoptive parents to develop strategies to meet the needs of the child and to protect themselves and others from allegations of abuse or harm.

The Agency will advise and support prospective adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption.

Where prospective adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Agency will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to foster the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, and to provide knowledge about and connection to their origins. The Agency will seek to help prospective adopters to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.

The Agency will ensure that prior to any placement being effected, the prospective adoptive parents have a copy of the child's individual Adoption Support Plan and are informed about support services that are available within the area, should they or the child require specialist support (either before or after the adoption order has been made), how they might be assessed for these services and how/ when the support plan will be reviewed.

The Agency will ensure that prospective adopters are aware of their rights to statutory adoption pay and leave and where appropriate to statutory paternity pay and leave, of what (if any) financial support/ adoption allowance may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of any allowance will be reviewed. The Agency will also ensure that prospective adopters are aware of any state benefits to which they or the child might be entitled, and how they might claim them.

The Agency will assist the prospective adopters to prepare a short non-identifying profile of themselves and their family to share with the birth parent(s) and significant identified birth family members of the child as part of the introductions process.

Prospective adopters will be informed that they may not change the name(s) of any child placed with them for adoption without the express written permission of those with parental responsibility or the court, until the making of the Adoption Order.

8.0 CROSS BOUNDARY PLACEMENTS AND MOVES

Where the Agency is considering placing a child for adoption with prospective adopters living outside of the Slough area, contact will always be made at an early stage with the Local Agency in whose area the applicants reside, regardless of who is the approving Agency/ Agency. The purpose of this contact will be to obtain information on the services available locally that could potentially assist in the support of the child and the adoptive family, should the placement be effected. The information received will assist the Agency in deciding what support services should be made available to the family should an assessment identify a need for Adoption Support Services.

Where a child is to be placed with SCST approved adopters by another Agency, SCST will co-operate with the placing Agency in developing and implementing the adoption support plan for the child.

Where a child is placed by another Local Agency with prospective adopters living in the Slough area but not approved by SCST, the Agency will, where possible, assist the placing agency, and where appropriate the prospective adopters, to access local avenues of support. However the Agency may, depending on the services required, exercise a charging policy when this makes a demand on the Agency's Children's Services and/ or Adoption

Service if the child placed has been in placement for less than three years and/ or legally adopted for less than 3 years.

In situations where SCST is the placing Agency, the Agency will honour its responsibility to fund the social care element of any adoption support plan in place during the first three years following the granting of an adoption order. However, the Agency will only be responsible for the funding of services that it has decided to provide.

Where prior to the making of an Adoption Order, the Agency decides to provide ongoing financial support, the Agency will continue to be responsible for the payment of this support until it is terminated in accordance with the Adoption Support Regulations 2005.

The Agency will also retain responsibility for maintaining the case record (Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005).

The Agency will retain responsibility for managing and supporting any contact arrangements, whether direct or indirect, agreed prior to the making of an adoption order, including any changes over time.

Should a request for Adoption Support Services (including financial support) be received more than three years after the granting of the adoption order, the Agency will usually refer the family to the Local Agency in whose area they are then residing, who will be responsible for carrying out any assessment of need for adoption support and funding any services they decide to provide. However, as the original placing Agency, the Agency will retain discretion to provide assessments and services if the individual circumstances of the case make it appropriate to do so.

Where a child is placed with prospective adopters approved by SCST via an inter-agency arrangement, the Agency may charge the placing Agency for the provision of adoption support services if provided to the child (as opposed to the adopters). The detail of this will in most instances be agreed prior to placement and kept under review.

Where a child is placed within the Slough area with prospective adopters not approved by the Agency and where the placing Agency negotiates for SCST to provide adoption support services in accordance with the Adoption Support Plan, the Agency will seek to recover the costs of providing services (other than advice or information) from the placing Agency, until three years after the granting of the adoption order. At this point responsibility for the provision of any support, other than any previously agreed adoption allowance and/ or contact arrangements, will transfer to the Agency and SCST will carry out a new assessment of need for Adoption Support Services (See Section 12).

8.1 Moves

Where a child for whom SCST holds responsibility for the provision of Adoption Support Services (by virtue of the fact that the Agency was the

placing Agency for the child and the child is either not yet legally adopted or has been adopted for less than three years) and for whom there is an active Adoption Support Plan, moves home with his adoptive family and as a result changes Local Agency area, the Agency will at an early stage make contact with the new Local Agency to whose area the family are moving/ have moved. This is in order to obtain information on the services available locally that could potentially assist in the support of the child and the adoptive family. However the Agency will continue to hold responsibility for the provision of support services, in accordance with the Adoption Support Plan until the child has been legally adopted for 3 years.

Where a child for whom SCST holds responsibility for the provision of Adoption Support Services (by virtue of the fact that the Agency was the receiving Agency) and for whom there is an active Adoption Support Plan, moves home with his adoptive family and as a result moves out of the Slough area into a new Local Agency area, the Agency will liaise with the new Local Agency, and where appropriate with the original placing agency, in order to facilitate a smooth transfer of responsibilities and to put in place transitional support arrangements where necessary.

Where an adoptive family has previously moved into the SCST area after the placement and/ or legal adoption of a child and subsequently moves out of the SCST area, the Agency will likewise liaise with the new Local Agency about the provision of Adoption Support Services, if at the time that the family move out of the SCST area there is an Adoption Support Plan in place and the Agency has had responsibility for providing a level of support services (whether to the child or to other members of the adoptive family).

In cases where the Agency has held responsibility for providing Adoption Support Services (whether to the child or to other members of the adoptive family) prior to the family's move, the Agency will exercise its discretion as to whether to continue to provide some or all of the services previously in place for up to the first six months after the family leaves the area. (This is to allow time for the new Local Agency to complete an assessment, if required, and decide what, if any, services to provide). The Agency will, where it is geographically feasible, seek to ensure that the family is appropriately supported through a period that is inevitably disruptive.

Where an adoptive family moves into or away from the Slough area and there are no adoption support services currently in place, the Agency will take no action unless requested to do so by the adoptive family. However the Agency will continue to hold responsibility for the provision of support services, in accordance with the Adoption Support Plan, until the child has been legally adopted for three years. The agency will welcome the contact details of any adoptive family which resides within the area in order to inform them of services and events that could be available to them.

Where, as the placing Agency, the Agency continues to pay a level of ongoing financial support but provides no other adoption support, following notification by the adopters of a change of address indicating a change of Local Agency,

the Agency will not notify the new Local Agency that the family has moved into their area unless requested to do so by the adoptive parents.

9. BIRTH PARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES

Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They should be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Birth parents and birth families (including siblings) will have access to a range of support services, particularly in relation to information and contact, both before and after adoption, including information about local and national support groups and services.

Where adoptive parents have agreed to inform the Agency of the serious illness or death of the adopted child or the breakdown of the adoption, birth parents or the 'next of kin' at the time of the adoption, will if they wish, be informed by the Agency.

With regard to requests from birth relatives for provision of intermediary services in relation to an adopted child/ adult see section 12. If the request relates to an adopted child, this request will be dealt with under the Adoption Support Regulations 2005, the needs the child being paramount.

9.1 *Adoptees and their Birth Siblings*

The Agency recognises that siblings who have been separated by the making of an Adoption Order, either recently or in the past, may need assistance or support to help them to resolve issues or deal with problems that arise due to the separation from/ loss of their brother(s) and/ or sister(s).

In placing children for adoption, the Agency will always seek to consider the issues inherent in separating siblings and give due consideration to future contact issues (See Section 5.2 and Section 9).

When children have in the past been separated by adoption and the children remain under the age of 18:

- The Agency will seek to provide focused support to any children and their adoptive parents if requested to do so (in line with the Adoption Support Regulations 2005).
- In appropriate circumstances where the birth sibling(s) have been adopted and are traceable by the Agency and the Agency is requested to do so, the Agency will, on behalf of the child and/or the adopter(s),

approach the adoptive parent(s) of any brothers and/or sisters from whom the child has been separated by adoption, in order to try to obtain updated information for the child, and to explore the possibility of establishing or resurrecting a level of direct and/or indirect contact between the siblings (either managed directly by themselves or via the Agency's Adoption Information Exchange Service).

- In appropriate circumstances where birth siblings remain living with a birth parent, with extended family members or with long term foster carers, the Agency will, if requested to do so, approach the parent(s)/relative(s)/foster carer(s) of any brothers and/or sisters, on behalf of the child and/or the adopter(s), to obtain updated information for the child and to explore the possibility of establishing or resurrecting a level of indirect contact via the Agency's Adoption Information Exchange Service.

When siblings have in the past been separated by adoption and they have each achieved the age of 18, see Section 12.13 – Adult Adoptees and 12.14 – Birth Relative Initiated Contact.

10. CONTACT

Adoption is unique as a legal process, in that it involves the irrevocable and unambiguous transfer of parental rights and responsibilities, providing the child with an alternative family to which (s)he and in turn his/her children will legally belong. Experience confirms, and the Adoption Agency recognises however, the continuing importance of past relationships for many children and therefore that continued contact with the child's birth family might be of positive benefit to the child. It is at the same time also recognised that any on-going contact, whether direct or indirect, needs to be managed in a way, and limited to a level, that does not undermine the security of the child's adoptive placement. At all times the child's welfare and best interests must drive any arrangements for contact. There will therefore be no presumption for or against contact after adoption and all contact plans will be made as a result of a full assessment.

The purpose of contact after a child is placed for adoption and subsequently legally adopted, is to maintain links between the child and his/her birth family, to enable him/her to better:

- grieve his/her loss
- develop a realistic understanding of the circumstances leading up to the separation
- move on and develop new attachments with the blessing of his/ her birth parents

An exchange of information, whether as a result of direct or indirect contact, should serve to:

- reassure the child that the birth parents or other relatives continue to care about him/ her, thus possibly enhancing self-esteem
- reassure the child about the wellbeing of birth relatives
- provide an opportunity for the adopted child to have up-to-date knowledge of the circumstances of his/ her birth family members over the years, in order to assist the making of an informed decision in adulthood about whether or not to establish a greater level of contact with birth relatives
- inform the child about the existence of any biological siblings born after his/her placement for adoption

Proposed arrangements for contact after adoption should be considered as part of the placement planning process, and the child's need for contact should be reassessed in the light of the plan to place for adoption. The reviewing of any proposed contact arrangements should be an ongoing process from this point.

All contact arrangements should centre on the benefits for the child, whilst acknowledging the wishes and feelings of the child's birth family members and adopters and meeting these as far as is consistent with promoting the child's welfare.

Contact can be considered between the child and any person who is significant to the child i.e., birth parents, siblings, birth grandparents, foster carers etc. However, all arrangements need to be considered as part of the overall 'package' of contact proposed, and the viability of this being managed by both the child and the adoptive family within the context of their family life and alongside other commitments must be discussed with the adopters.

The question of whether contact should be indirect or direct is a complex one and each case must be approached individually with reference to the purpose of contact and the age of the child at placement and with regard to the type and depth of the relationship that the child had with the birth parents and other relatives prior to placement.

Direct contact should only be considered in cases where evidence suggests that the person with whom the contact is envisaged, is accepting of the adoption plan and is unlikely to seek to undermine the stability/ security of the child's placement.

Indirect Letterbox contact (Information Exchange) with one or more birth family members should be considered in all cases. Indirect contact should be a reciprocal arrangement, involving an exchange of written information between the adoptive parents (on behalf of the child) and the birth relative. While in some circumstances cards may be forwarded to mark special occasions, the exchange will only forward gifts (including tokens) in exceptional circumstances. In cases where it is considered that an Information Exchange would be beneficial for the child but the birth parent(s) is unable or unwilling to agree to participate in an active arrangement as of the start of the placement, consideration should be given to setting up an

'inactive' Information Exchange, which can then be activated in the future should the birth parent(s)' position change. In respect of any photographs to be included in a letterbox arrangement, a risk assessment should be considered and completed if there are any identified concerns raised regarding this proposal.

Where the decision is made that it is either not in the child's best interests for an Information Exchange to be established with significant birth relatives or that it is not possible to establish an arrangement, the reasons for this should be recorded.

Every effort will be made to agree the nature and frequency of proposed contact arrangements with the birth relatives of the child and the prospective adopters prior to the Adoption Panel considering the proposed match. If siblings are to be placed in different adoptive or long-term foster families and contact is proposed between them, this will necessitate negotiations with all the carers involved. The detail of the proposed arrangements should then be included in the Adoption Support Plan and the Adoption Placement Report, and presented to the Panel for consideration at the time of 'matching'. These arrangements should be reviewed at the pre-placement planning meeting and the initial post placement review held in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

Contact arrangements cannot be set in stone and may need to change according to the child's age, needs, wishes and feelings or changes in the situation of any party to the agreement.

Where direct contact is envisaged, all parties should receive a written contact plan.

Where indirect Letterbox contact (Information Exchange) is planned, both parties should sign an agreement form and receive written details as to the nature and frequency of the contact. (First names only are used as signatures on these agreements). Such arrangements are not legally binding.

In all cases where either direct or indirect contact is envisaged, all parties should be given details in writing as to the process by which the contact will or can be reviewed, and details as to who they should contact if they wish the arrangement to be reviewed or amended. (If an 'inactive' Information Exchange is to be set-up, all parties must likewise have written details of the arrangement and who they should contact should they wish to activate the Exchange). Post-Adoption the opportunity to review any agreed contact arrangements will be offered routinely on an annual basis.

Note: Both direct and indirect contact services are currently provided on behalf of SCST Adoption Agency by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service who are also responsible for reviewing all agreed contact arrangements after an adoption order has been granted. This arrangement will be reviewed during 2017.

11. INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

In seeking to provide an Inter-country Adoption Service, SCST upholds a number of principles that are enshrined in a number of international agreements, declarations, resolutions and Conventions that the United Kingdom is party to:

- Children who cannot live with their birth parents should be either found a placement with a family member or given the opportunity to live with a family within their State of Origin
- Inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family for a child who cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in his or her own country
- Inter-country adoption should only take place where it is in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights
- Safeguards and standards equivalent to those which apply in domestic adoption should be applied in Inter-country adoption to protect the welfare of the child
- Profit should not be made from the process

11.1 Fulfilling the Legal Obligations of the Council

The Agency will fulfil its duty under The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005 to provide, or arrange to provide, an Inter-country Adoption Service that meets the requirements of all current legislation and regulations:

- the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999
- the Adoption & Children Act 2002
- the Inter-country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- the Adoption (Bringing Child(ren) into the United Kingdom) Regulations 2003
- the Registration of Foreign Adoptions Regulations 2003
- the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- the Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- the suitability of Adopters Regulations 2005
- the Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005

The Agency by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption delegates to that Agency the work of providing counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad.

The Agency will, in delegating this work to the Agency, ensure that their processes meet the requirements placed on Councils and on Voluntary Adoption Agencies (which agree to deal with such applications) in England when they receive an application for Inter-country Adoption.

The Agency has a written contract in place with the agency (IAC) which is reviewed on a two yearly basis and details how the agency will carry out its work on behalf of the Agency.

The Agency will also in line with its responsibilities:

- Monitor placements for adoption once it has been notified of a prospective adopter(s)' intention to adopt a child placed under an intercountry adoption arrangement and provide appropriate support to such children and their prospective adopters until full legal adoption is achieved in the UK.
- Treat as a private foster child any child adopted on an interim adoption order and provide appropriate monitoring and support to such children and their prospective adopters prior to full adoption being achieved within the UK.
- Prepare reports for Courts considering applications for adoption when asked to do so.
- Fulfil its duties in relation to child protection and family support as they relate to children placed under an Inter-country Adoption arrangement.
- Report any breach, or suspected breach, of the legal requirements relating to the placement of children from abroad to the police for investigation as soon as possible.
- Have in place written procedures detailing how the Agency will fulfil its responsibilities in term of the welfare supervision, review and support of placements of children from abroad.

While the SCST will seek to ensure that following the placement of a child with Inter-country adopters living within the area covered by the Agency the welfare of the child is appropriately monitored and supported, the Council may, depending on the total demand for services, undertake to provide the required supervision, monitoring and support through its own resources or may alternatively make arrangements with IAC to undertake the work required on behalf of the Agency.

11.2 Convention Adoptions

There are three ways by which children from Convention countries are placed with Intercountry Adopters:

- a) Prospective adopters are entrusted with the child to bring the child back to the UK for the purpose of obtaining a Convention Adoption Order in a UK Court.
- b) Prospective adopters complete adoption procedures in the child's State of Origin and obtain a Convention Adoption, which will have automatic recognition in all Convention countries including the UK.
- c) Prospective adopters obtain an Interim Adoption Order made in the State of Origin which becomes a full Convention Adoption (with automatic recognition in the UK) if conditions are met.

There are three ways by which children from Convention countries are placed with Inter-country adopters:

- a) Entrusted to the prospective adopter(s) and brought back to the UK for the purpose of obtaining a Convention Adoption Order in a UK Court.
- b) Entrusted to the prospective adopter(s) and an Interim Adoption Order made in the State of Origin (this will usually become a full Convention Adoption with automatic recognition in the UK).
- c) Adopted in the State of Origin under a Convention Adoption, which will have automatic recognition in all Convention countries including the UK.

Entrusted Children

Where the adopters notify the Agency on return to live in the Slough area with a child, that the child is placed with them and that it is their intention to adopt the child, the Agency will treat the child as a protected child and the placement will be monitored by the Agency until a Convention Adoption Order has been made.

The Supervising Social Worker will provide any update reports required by the overseas Agency prior to the Adoption Order being finalised.

Once the prospective adopters have made an application to the Court for an Adoption Order (which cannot be until at least six months after the child was placed in the care of the applicants) the supervising social worker will produce the Annex A Report for the Court within the required timescale in order to inform the Court when it is making a decision as to the making of an Adoption Order.

Where the adopters notify the Agency on returning to live in the Slough area with a child, that the child is placed with them but that it is not their intention to give the child a home, the Agency will contact the Department for Education so that the Central Agency in the State of Origin can be informed. The Agency will undertake an assessment of the child's immediate care needs, whether these can be provided by the adopters or whether the child should be removed from their care and placed with short term foster carers while plans are agreed with the State of Origin in terms of the child's longer term care. (Where necessary the Agency will invoke Child Protection Procedures).

The Agency will co-operate with the Placing Agency in the child's State of Origin in determining the plan for the child's longer term care, including where appropriate the return of the child to his/ her country of origin.

Interim Adoptions

Where an Interim Adoption Order has been made overseas and the adopters notify the Agency on returning to live in the Slough area with a child that a child is placed, the Agency will treat the child as a Privately Fostered Child and carry out, or arrange to be carried out, regular welfare visits until the full Adoption Order has been made.

The Supervising Social Worker will provide any update reports required by the overseas Agency prior to the Adoption Order being finalised.

Once the Interim Adoption becomes a full adoption, the Agency will withdraw its involvement with the child and/ or the adoptive parents, as convention adoptions are automatically recognised under UK law, unless the child or any other member of the adoptive family requests provision of Adoption Support Services (see Section 12).

Full Convention Adoptions

Convention adoptions are automatically recognised under UK law. Therefore where the child is the subject of a full convention adoption prior to being brought to the UK, the Agency will take no action unless the child or any other member of the adoptive family request provision of Adoption Support Services (see Section 12).

11.3 Adoption of children from Designated Countries

There are three ways by which children from designate countries are placed with Inter-country Adopters:

- a) Prospective adopters are entrusted with the child to bring the child to the UK for the purpose of obtaining an Adoption Order in a UK Court.
- b) Prospective adopters complete adoption procedures in the State of Origin and obtain an overseas adoption.

- c) Prospective adopters obtain an Interim Adoption in the child's State of Origin which will become a full overseas adoption if conditions are met.

Adoption Orders made in countries on the 'designated list' i.e., listed in the Adoption (Designation of Overseas Adoptions) Order 1973 as amended, are automatically recognised under UK law.

Where no Interim or Full Adoption Order is in place

Where the prospective adopters notify the Agency on return to live in the Slough area with a child, that the child is placed with them and that it is their intention to adopt the child, the Agency will treat the child as a protected child and the placement will be monitored by the Agency until an Adoption Order has been made in a UK Court.

The Supervising Social Worker will provide any update reports required by the overseas Agency prior to the Adoption Order being finalised.

Once the prospective adopters have made an application to the High Court for an Adoption Order, the supervising social worker will produce the Annex A Report for the Court within the required timescale in order to inform the Court when it is making a decision as to the making of an Adoption Order.

Where the prospective adopters notify the Local Agency on returning to live in the Slough area with a child, that the child is placed with them but that it is not their intention to give the child a home, the Agency will contact the Department for Education so that the Central Agency in the State of Origin can be informed. The Agency will undertake an assessment of the child's immediate care needs, whether these can be provided by the prospective adopters or whether the child should be removed from their care and placed with short term foster carers while plans are agreed with the State of Origin in terms of the child's longer term care. (Where necessary the Agency will invoke Child Protection Procedures).

The Agency will co-operate with the Placing Agency in the child's State of Origin in determining the plan for the child's longer term care, including where appropriate the return of the child to his/her country of origin.

Interim Adoptions

Where an Interim Adoption Order has been made overseas and the adopters notify the Local Agency on return to live in the Slough area with a child that a child is placed, the Agency will treat the child as a Privately Fostered Child and carry out, or arrange to be carried out, regular welfare visits until the full Adoption Order has been made.

The Supervising Social Worker will provide any update reports required by the overseas Agency prior to the Adoption Order being finalised.

Once the Interim Adoption becomes a full adoption, the Agency will withdraw its involvement with the child and/or the adoptive parents as convention adoptions are automatically recognised under UK law, unless the child or any other member of the adoptive family requests provision of Adoption Support Services (see Section 12).

Adoptions made in Designated Countries

An Adoption Order made in any country on the designated list is automatically recognised under UK law. Where the child is made the subject of such an Order prior to being brought to the UK, the Agency will take no further action unless the child or any other member of the adoptive family requests provision of Adoption Support Services (see Section 12).

11.4 Adoption of Children from non-Convention and non-Designated Countries

Where the adopters notify the Local Agency on returning to live in the Slough area with a child that the child is placed with them and of their intention to adopt the child under United Kingdom law, the Agency will either directly or via a contractual agreement with IAC monitor the placement and carry out its duties to investigate in particular whether the child was placed in accordance with regulations.

Once the child has been placed in the care of the applicants for approaching six months, they will be encouraged to make preparation to submit a formal application to the Court for an Adoption Order as soon as possible after the required six months of residency with the applicants has elapsed.

Once the prospective adopters have made an application to the Court for an Adoption Order, the supervising social worker will produce an Annex A Report for the Court, within the required timescale, in order to inform the Court when it is making a decision as to the making of an Adoption Order.

In cases where the child did not receive entry clearance, SCST, or if acting on the Agency's behalf, IAC will notify the Home Office of the application for an Adoption Order so that the Home Secretary can consider whether to ask to be made a party to the proceedings.

SCST or, if acting on the Agency's behalf, IAC, will keep the Home Office informed of the application as the child will be subject to immigration control until an Adoption Order has been granted.

The supervising social worker will provide any update reports required by the overseas Agency prior to the Adoption Order being finalised.

Where on their return to live in the Slough area with the child the adopters notify the Agency that it is their intention not to offer the child a home, the Agency will contact the Department of Education so that the Central Agency in the State of Origin can be informed. The Agency will undertake an assessment of the child's immediate care needs, whether these can be provided by the adopters or whether the child should be removed from their care and placed with short term foster carers while plans are agreed with the State of Origin in terms of the child's longer term care. (Where necessary the Agency will invoke Child Protection Procedures).

SCST will co-operate with the Placing Agency in the child's State of Origin in determining the plan for the child's longer term care, including where appropriate the return of the child to his/her country of origin.

11.5 Adoption Support

Should the placing country require ongoing post placement reports to be provided on the progress of an Inter-country adopted child after the legal adoption has been finalised, it is the duty of the adopters to make arrangements for this. The adopters will be advised to contact IAC and to make arrangements for these reports to be provided by that Agency (it is expected that IAC will levy a charge to the applicants for providing this service).

Inter-country adopters and children/young people adopted from abroad via an Inter-country arrangement, are eligible to apply to the Agency for Adoption Support in the same way as any other adopters or adoptees living in the Agency's area and will be treated on an equal basis. (See Section 12).

11.6 Placing Children via Inter-country Adoption Arrangements

The Agency recognises that on ratification of the Hague Convention on 1st June 2003, the United Kingdom became a State of Origin as well as a receiving country for Inter-country Adoption.

The Agency anticipates continuing to place the children referred to it for adoption via domestic arrangements. However, it will be mindful of the option of placing children with applicants from another country in cases where a family placement within the United Kingdom cannot be identified and/or in cases where a child's race, culture, religion and/or first language suggest this to be an appropriate option for the child.

11.7 Reporting any suspected breach of the Regulations

It is an offence for anyone habitually resident in the British Isles to bring a child into the United Kingdom for the purpose of adoption (including adoption by a parent, guardian, step-parent or other relatives) unless they meet the requirements prescribed in the Regulations. If prospective adopters from England and Wales do not go through the proper assessment and approval procedures and have their suitability confirmed by a certificate issued by the Secretary of State before bringing a child into the United Kingdom with the intention of adoption, they will be guilty of an offence (Adoption and Children Act 2002). An offence will also be committed if the prospective adopters do not, within 14 days of entering the United Kingdom with the child, give notice to their Local Agency or organisation undertaking the work such as SCST, either of their intention to adopt or of their intention not to give the child a home.

In any situation where the Agency becomes aware of a breach, or suspected breach of the Regulations, it will act in accordance with its responsibility to report the matter to the police for investigations as soon as possible.

12.0 ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

The Agency recognises that the Adoption & Children Act 2002 places a duty on every Local Agency or organisation undertaking the work such as SCST to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs, in relation to adoption of:

- Children who have been or may be adopted
- The birth relatives of such children (i.e. relatives within the meaning of Section 14.4 (1) of the Children Act 1989 and general interpretation of the Adoption & Children Act 2002)
- Any person with whom the adopted child has a relationship which appears to the Agency to be beneficial to the welfare of the child
- Persons who have adopted or may adopt a child
- Any children of such persons (whether by birth or adoption)

In addition, the Adoption Support Services require Adoption Agencies to make arrangements for the provision of a range of Adoption Support Services and places duties on Agencies to carry out assessments of need for Adoption Support Services and having carried out an assessment to decide whether to provide any services. Moreover, Agencies must act reasonably in deciding whether to provide Adoption Support Services following an assessment, although there is a presumption that an assessment of need for a service will not automatically result in the provision of that service.

SCST is committed to providing services for all those whose lives have been affected by adoption, recognising the life long implications of adoption for adopters, adoptees and birth relatives. However in reaching any decision as to what services to provide, the Agency will take into account the circumstances of each individual case and the resources that are available locally.

SCST is committed to providing Adoption Support Services as part of an overall integrated service for all children and families who are engaged with the Children and Families' Service and in the context of the local Children and Young People's Plan, recognising that while there are some services that are specific to adoption, it is essential that adopted children and their families also have access to mainstream services available to children and families with particular needs.

12.1 The Role of Adoption Support Services Adviser

The Agency will appoint an Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA).

The role of the ASSA is to:

- Give advice and information to people affected by adoption – a single point of contact to provide information, signpost appropriate services and to advise on how those services may be accessed; such services should include mainstream and specialised Adoption focussed services
- Give advice, information and assistance to other staff in the Agency on assessments of need for Adoption Support Services, the availability of services locally and effective planning for service delivery – in particular, supporting and facilitating intra- and inter-agency joint working where needed
- Make applications where appropriate to the Adoption Support Fund following an assessment of need
- Give advice on good practice in adoption where needed
- Consult with, and give advice, information and assistance to other Agencies as appropriate, for example, liaising between Agencies where a family moves between areas to try to ensure a smooth transition in the provision of support services

The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is vested in the Practice Manager for Adoption Support, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the post adoption worker within the Adoption Team.. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level will be raised by the ASSA to the Head of Service, Placements & Resources.

The Agency's information contains contact details of the ASSA, to facilitate ease of contact for those seeking help or advice.

The ASSA will ensure that appropriate delegation arrangements are put in place and that any requests for assessment for Adoption Support needs received are promptly allocated to an appropriate worker if responsibility lies with the Agency.

While the role of the ASSA is an operational one, overall responsibility for adoption issues rests with the Head of Service, Placements & Resources, who is the Responsible Individual for adoption. This will, where necessary, include securing strong inter and intra-agency working in the local area and ensuring the strategic development and provision of Adoption Support Services.

12.2 Support Services

SCST is committed to providing the full range of Adoption Support Services that Adoption Agencies are required by Regulations to provide. Details of post adoption services are available via the adoption passport that is provided to all potential applicants.

These services are:

- Financial support , Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.a)
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians or an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption, Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.b)
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.c)
- Therapeutic services for adoptive children Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.d)
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including training for adoptive parents to meet any special needs of the

child; and respite care Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.e)

- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement or adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order has occurred, or is in danger of occurring, making arrangements for the provision of mediation services and organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 (3.1.f)

- Counselling, advice and information

While SCST will seek to ensure provision of the full range of services, the Agency may make arrangements for the services to be provided by others, either other Local Authorities within the Berkshire Consortium, voluntary adoption agencies or independent providers of adoption services.

The Agency's Adoption Support Services are not available to those involved in adoptions by:

- a birth parent
- a step-parent

In these cases services provided are limited to counselling, advice and information.

Adoptive families which are created when children have been adopted by a relative (other than a parent or step-parent) and/or from overseas, are able to access services on an equal basis to those families created by the adoption of a child from care (within the UK).

12.3 Those eligible to be assessed for provision of Adoption Support Services:

See Table overleaf.

Person being assessed	Services for which they are entitled to be assessed								
	Services to enable discussion of matters relating to adoption	Assistance in relation to arrangements for contact	Therapeutic services	Services to ensure the continuation of adoptive relationship	Services to assist in cases of disruption	Counselling, advice and information	Financial support	Agency responsible for completing assessment prior to 3 years after the granting of the Adoption Order	Agency responsible for completing assessment 3 or more years after the granting of the Adoption Order
Agency adoptive child	•	•	•	•	•	•		PA	LA PA *
Adoptive parent of an agency adoptive child	•	•		•	•	•	•	PA	LA PA **
Child of adoptive parents				•	•	•		PA	LA
Natural parents or guardians of an agency adoptive child	•	•				•		LA	LA
A relative (or someone with whom the local Agency consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of agency adoptive child		•				•		LA	LA
Inter-country adoptive child			•	•	•	•		LA	LA

Inter-country adoptive parent				•	•	•		LA	LA
Natural sibling of an adoptive child		•				•		LA	LA
Non-agency adoptive children, their parents (birth and adoptive) and their guardians						•		LA	LA
Prospective adopters						•			
Birth parents and former guardians of adopted adults						•		LA	LA
Adopted adults and their adoptive parents						•		LA (1) or AAA	LA or AAA
A relative (or someone with whom the local Agency consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of a non-agency adoptive child						•			

* contact arrangements

** financial support agreed prior to adoption

LA = Local Agency (in the case of Slough adopters, SCST)

PA = Placing Agency

AAA = Appropriate Adoption Agency (1) or if within 3 years of the Legal Adoption the PA

12.4 The Agency's responsibilities for carrying out assessments for Adoption Support Services

Children in Care

- All children placed for adoption by SCST and living within the Agency's Agency boundaries – irrespective of the length of time in placement or whether an adoption order has been granted.
- All children placed for adoption by the Agency, but residing outside of the Agency's boundaries – until three years after the granting of an Adoption Order (responsibility for the payment and review of any financial support agreed prior to the making of an Adoption Order and for the management and support of any agreed contact arrangements, including any change to these over time, will remain with SCST as the placing Agency until the child reaches the age of 18, or 21 if the child's needs are such that financial support is payable until he/she reaches the age of 21 years).
- All adopted children (except those adopted by a parent or step-parent) living within the Agency's boundaries, but placed by another Local Agency or Voluntary Adoption Agency – after the child has been legally adopted for three years.
- All children living within the Agency's boundaries and placed for adoption via an Inter-country arrangement (except those adopted by a parent or step-parent) – irrespective of the length of time in placement or whether an Adoption Order has been granted.

Adopters

- Adopters recruited and approved by SCST and living within the Agency's boundaries - irrespective of the length of time that a child has been placed or whether an adoption order has been granted.
- Adopters recruited and approved by SCST and living outside of the Agency's boundaries - until such time as the adoption of any child placed is legally concluded (see note below).
- Adopters living within the Agency's boundaries but approved by another Local Agency or Voluntary Adoption Agency and with a child placed who was not previously in SCST's Care – after the adoption is legally concluded (see note below).
- Adopters living within the Agency's boundaries but approved by another Local Agency or Voluntary Adoption Agency and with a child placed who was previously in the care of SCST (or previously Slough Borough Council) – after the adoption is legally concluded (see note below).

Note – Adoption Support Services should be extended to children placed for adoption and their prospective adoptive families/ adoptive families, by the placing Agency until three years after making of any Adoption Order. Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Local Agency Adoption Agencies approving prospective adopters, who live outside their geographical area, should also provide support to the prospective adopters up to the legal adoption (and may do so beyond the adoption depending on the Independent Agency's practice). Three years after the granting of any Adoption Order legal responsibility for placement support transfers to the Local Agency in whose area the family resides, except for:

- the provision and review of financial support that was agreed by the placing Agency before the Adoption Order(s) was granted
- the management and support of any contact arrangements agreed prior to the granting of the Adoption Order (including any changes agreed to those arrangements over time). Both areas remain the responsibility of the placing Agency
- Where SCST does not hold responsibility for providing post placement or post-adoption support services the Agency may still provide some services, if approached by the adopters and/or the placing/ approving Agency, particularly if geographical considerations make this appropriate. (A charge may be made to the placing Agency/ approving Agency for these services).

Children of adoptive parents

- Any child, whether birth or adopted, of an adoptive parent who is eligible to be assessed by the Agency.

Birth parents or relatives of an adoptive child

- Any birth parent or relative of a child who is being/ has been placed for adoption by the Agency and any other person with whom the adoptive child has/ had an important relationship.

Note

While the Agency is only required to assess a person in relation to the type(s) of service(s) that have to be extended to that person (see 12.3 above), where there is a significant risk of an adoptive placement disrupting the Agency will seek to be flexible in providing support and services to try to ensure the continuation of adoptive relationships (whilst being mindful of resource and financial constraints).

SCST retains discretion in deciding whether to provide assessments to other groups of people/ individuals whose lives may have been affected by adoption taking into account the full circumstances of any individual case. Where the

Agency decides to provide an assessment, the same processes will be followed as apply to those entitled under the Regulations.

In the case of non-agency placements, SCST will only consider requests from adopters, adoptees and/ or birth parents living within the Agency's boundaries.

12.5 Planning Adoption Support for Children in Care

When planning adoption for a child in care, SCST will carry out an assessment of what Adoption Support Services will be needed to support the child post-placement, drawing on information held on the Integrated Children's System, including information available from any assessments, the Adoption Placement Plan and associated plans and reviews. The Agency will then prepare a written Adoption Support Plan.

The assessment will consider the interventions and services that are already in place for the child and will review whether these services should continue after placement for adoption. (This will necessitate consultation with the providers on any such services).

The assessment will include consideration of whether the child's circumstances are such that some form of financial support may be appropriate as part of the total package of Adoption Support Services. It will also specifically address what supports may be necessary or desirable to support any planned future contact arrangements.

Once a placement is identified for a child the Agency will assess the support needs of the prospective adopters and of any children already in the family and revise the Adoption Support Plan, taking account of their likely support needs.

When the child is placed for adoption, the Adoption Support Plan will be updated and reviewed to meet regulatory requirements, and revised where necessary to take into account any change of circumstances in respect of the needs of the child and/or any family members. SCST as the placing Agency will retain responsibility for the Adoption Support Plan and any services connected to the plan until three years post adoption order.

Post Placement Support

The Agency will accept referrals for assessments of needs for Adoption Support Services whichever team or worker these have been directed to.

When undertaking any assessment of needs for Adoption Support Services the Agency will consider (as far as is relevant to the particular assessment)

- The needs of the person being assessed and how these might be met
- The needs of the adoptive family and how these might be met

- The needs, including developmental needs, of the adoptive child and how these might be met
- The parenting capacity of the adoptive parent
- Wider family and environmental factors
- In the case of a child who is, or was, placed for adoption or matched for adoption, the circumstances that led to the child being so placed or matched
- Any previous assessment of needs for Adoption Support Services undertaken in relation to the person in question

The Agency recognises that adoptive families seeking help will have differing levels of need. Many will simply need a level of advice, practical services or short term intervention but a small proportion will have problems of such complexity and seriousness that they require detailed assessment, involving contributions from other agencies, before appropriate plans and interventions can be put in place.

Where an individual or family is clear about their problems, immediate counselling, advice and information will be provided in order to enable them to take appropriate action.

When an assessment of need for Adoption Support Services is to be carried out post-placement at the request of the child or another member of the adoptive family, the Agency will usually undertake an assessment based on the Assessment Framework (The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families) and bearing in mind the Practice Guidance on assessing the support needs of adoptive families. However, in some circumstances a limited assessment may be undertaken if the request is in reference to a particular service.

When assessing persons other than the immediate adoptive family, the Agency will seek to use whichever existing assessment tool appears most appropriate to the particular case, taking proper account of the adoption context in undertaking the assessment.

The Agency will ensure that staff involved in undertaking assessments for adoption support are familiar with the Assessment Framework and are up-to-date in terms of their knowledge of relevant research and practice issues.

Where the assessment indicates that an individual or family will be best helped by an agency/agencies other than SCST, support will be offered to them in gaining access to relevant agencies and services.

In most circumstances the Agency will interview the individual being assessed for the provision of services and if an initial assessment (assessment framework) is to be followed up by a Core Assessment the child will always be

seen. However, advice and information may be provided without the need for formal assessment and where assessment is purely in relation to financial support this may be conducted by correspondence.

Where an assessment has been undertaken a written report will be prepared by the Agency so that the assessment process is transparent and clear. This report will be provided to the person being assessed (unless a child whose age and understanding would make this inappropriate). In the case of an adopted child or a birth child of the adoptive parents a copy of the report will be provided to the adoptive parents.

12.6 Proposal to provide Adoption Support Services

Where an assessment has been carried out in order to assess the need for Adoption Support Services, the Agency will, on conclusion of the assessment, give written notice to the person who requested the assessment, as to whether Adoption Support Services will be provided and if so the detail of which services will be provided.

This notice will contain:

- A statement as to the person's need for Adoption Support Services
- Where the assessment relates to a need for financial support, the basis upon which financial support is determined
- Whether the Agency proposes to provide Adoption Support Services
- The services (if any) that the Agency is proposing to provide
- If financial support is to be paid, the proposed amount that would be payable; and
- Any conditions attached to the payment

In cases where the Agency proposes to provide Adoption Support Services and is required to prepare a plan (i.e. where the Agency proposes to provide a service(s) on more than one occasion and the services are not limited to the provision of advice and information) the notice will also be accompanied by a draft Adoption Support Plan.

The referrer will be given 28 days to consider the Agency's proposals; in order to make sure that the Agency has taken all the relevant circumstances into account and to make any representation to the Agency. The referrer will also be given details of the Agency's Complaints Process. In order to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in the provision of services, the Agency will not wait until the end of the 28 day period before making a decision if the person tells the Agency that they are satisfied with the proposal or makes representation before the end of the period.

12.7 Decision as to Adoption Support Services

After considering any representations received during the 28-day notice period and having regard to the assessment, the Agency will decide:

- whether the person has needs for Adoption Support Services.
- whether the Agency will provide a service(s) to him.

The Agency will then give written notice of that decision, including the reasons for it.

Where the Agency is required to prepare an Adoption Support Plan the notice will include a copy of the plan and the name of the person nominated to monitor the provision of services.

Where the person is an adult, notice will be given to that person.

Where the person is a child and it appears to the Agency that he/she is of sufficient age and understanding for it to be appropriate to give him/her notice and the prevailing circumstances do not make it inappropriate to give him/her notice, then notice will be given to:

- the child
- except where it appears inappropriate to do so, to the adoptive parents

Where the person is a child but he/ she is either of an age and/ or understanding that makes it inappropriate to give him/ her notice, or the prevailing circumstances make it inappropriate to give him/her notice, then notice will be given to the adoptive parents.

12.8 The Adoption Support Plan

Once a person has had their needs for Adoption Support Services assessed and the Agency has decided to provide services, the Agency will prepare a plan of the services to be provided – except where the services are to be provided on a single occasion or are limited to the provision of advice and information.

Where the plan relates to a child in Care, the Adoption Support Plan will be developed from the child's developmental needs, the carers' capacities and environmental factors identified in the child's adoption plan. The Plan will therefore build on the information already known to the Agency.

In determining who should be consulted during the preparation of the Plan, the Agency will take an inclusive approach, whilst always being mindful of the welfare of the child and follow the consultation routes as followed when giving formal notifications.

Where in the course of the assessment it becomes apparent that it is necessary for services to be provided by the Primary Care Trust, Local Health

Board or Local Education Agency, these Agencies will be consulted in the preparation of any plan.

The Plan will be set out in writing in a way that everybody affected can understand and a person will be nominated to monitor the provision of services in accordance with the plan.

The Plan will set out clearly:

- The services to be provided
- The objectives and criteria for evaluating success
- Time-scales for provision
- Procedures for review
- The name of the person nominated to monitor the provision of services in accordance with the plan. This will be one of the workers already involved in delivering services in the Plan – he/she will be the first point of contact for the service recipient – he/she may be the child’s social worker, the adoptive parents’ link worker, the birth parents’ independent support worker or any other worker who is involved in delivering services in the Plan and who is also in a position to be able to fulfil the co-ordination and monitoring roles. (Where assessment for or provision of financial support becomes part of the plan – see also section 12.9).

At the point that an Adoption Support Plan is drawn up, the arrangements (if any) to be put in place to review the provision of Adoption Support Services, will be discussed/agreed with the recipient or the appropriate adult.

Once a plan for the provision of Adoption Support Services has been agreed, if the intended recipient of services is a child, a copy of the Plan will be given to the adoptive parents and if the child is of an appropriate age and understanding, and it does not appear to the Agency to be inappropriate to do so, to the child. If the intended recipient of services is an adult he will be provided with a copy of the plan. A copy of the plan will also be sent to all parties who have a role or responsibility in implementing the plan (including where appropriate the Primary Care Trust and/or local Education Agency).

12.9 Review of the Provision of Adoption Support Services

The Agency recognises the importance of having a robust system in place to review the provision of Adoption Support Services (including those to support contact arrangements) in order to both monitor the effectiveness of services provided and to reassure both adopters and adopted children that, should their needs change, the services provided can change to reflect this.

The details of the review process will reflect whether services are to be provided on a short term or an ongoing basis. Where the provision of

services is time limited, a review will always be held at the end of the agreed period. Where the provision of services is long term, a review will usually be held every six months and as a minimum the provision of services will be reviewed annually. Where the support service provided is purely financial by means of a regular allowance, this will be reviewed on a 12 monthly basis. (See Section 12.10 below).

Regardless as to the nature of the service(s) provided, a review will also be triggered if the Agency becomes aware of a change in the recipient's circumstances which may affect the provision of Adoption Support Services (such a review will normally take place within four weeks of the change of circumstances coming to the attention of the Agency).

The Agency will be flexible in terms of the format and content of any review, taking into account the circumstances in each individual case.

Where a range of services is provided but the change of circumstances is relevant only to one service, the review may be carried out with reference only to that service.

Where the change of circumstances is relatively minor, the review might be limited to an exchange of correspondence. However, where the change of circumstances is substantial, it may be deemed appropriate to conduct a new assessment of needs for Adoption Support Services.

Reviews in relation to the provision of services (other than financial allowances) to support the placement of any child from the Care system, not yet adopted and/ or members of the prospective adoptive family, will be conducted by the Post Adoption Worker or ASSA , in conjunction with the appropriate fieldwork team/ manager, depending on where line management responsibility rests.

Reviews in relation to the provision of services (other than financial allowances) to support children who have been legally adopted and/ or members of their adoptive families will be conducted by the Post Adoption Worker or ASSA , in conjunction with the appropriate fieldwork team/ manager, depending on the circumstances of the case. Such reviews may not necessitate a visit to meet with the adopters, however by agreement with the adopters, a visit will be made to them if circumstances suggest that this may be beneficial (e.g., where a complex package of Adoption Support Services is being provided). If adopters specifically request a face-to-face meeting, every attempt will be made to accommodate this.

In all cases, reviews will be conducted in a way that enables the full participation of the Adoption Support Services user and will seek to involve any other person who was involved in the original assessment and any other agencies that are involved in the provision of the services being reviewed. In carrying out any review of Adoption Support Services, the Agency will:

- Take into consideration all the issues considered at the time of the original assessment
- Have regard to available information about the current and likely future needs of the service user and his/ her family

On completion of a review, the Agency will decide whether to vary the provision of Adoption Support Services to that person.

In reaching any decision to vary the level of service, the Agency will seek to act reasonably. Having reached a decision, the Agency will notify the service user or the appropriate adult(s) in the same way as when the original assessment was completed and resulting decision made about provision of services at that stage. This includes an initial notice of services to be provided, allowing a 28 day period for representations to be received and considered, before notification of the Agency's final decision.

Where the decision is to reduce the level of support services previously provided, the adopters will be advised of their right to access the Agency's complaints process.

If the review of the Adoption Support Services to be provided results in a decision to vary the services provided, the Adoption Support Plan will be amended in the light of any decisions made.

12.10 Financial Support

All financial support for adoptive families will be considered, assessed and paid in accordance with Regulations 8 and 15 of The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005. No financial support payable by the Agency shall include any element of remuneration for the care of the child by the adoptive parents, except in the specific circumstances allowed under the regulations where a child is to be adopted by his/her previous foster carers.

Under the 2005 Regulations, an assessment for payment of financial support can be activated at any time before or after an order has been granted by any adopters who are eligible to be assessed for provision of adoption support (section 11 above) or in the case of non agency placements such as inter-country or relative adoption (excluding step-parent adoption) following notification of intention to adopt. The need for support will be assessed in respect of current and future needs, payments in retrospect will not be considered.

All adopters will need to have in place and maintain appropriate household and vehicle cover when a child is placed.

Any request for a single or periodic payment to fund or assist in funding a therapeutic service for the child and their adoptive family will be considered following an assessment of need and in consideration of supporting them through any difficulties in order to maintain the stability of the placement. This may include an application to the Adoption Support Fund. This assessment

for adoption support services will also need to evidence that local mainstream services will be unable or unlikely to meet the identified needs.

If a boarding school placement is assessed as the most appropriate option to meet the child's needs, then the agency would expect any arrangement made to be in conjunction with and subject to the usual joint funding arrangement by the education department.

SCST

Financial Support to Agency Adoptions

Financial support to an adoptive family can be agreed at any time while the adopted child is under the age of 18 years. However, the stage of placement at which the support is agreed will determine which Agency is responsible for payment.

Where the child is:

- to be placed with prospective adopters
- placed with prospective adopters, but not yet legally adopted

or the child:

- has been legally adopted for less than three years

the placing agency will be responsible for the provision of financial support to the placement. Moreover if the placing agency agrees to pay an ongoing allowance, whether regularly or periodically, during this period it then retains responsibility for as long as the adopters are eligible to receive it.

Where the need for financial support arises three or more years after the granting of an Adoption Order the responsibility for completing an assessment for financial support in most instances rests with the Local Agency in whose area the adoptive family resides and that agency is then responsible for the payment of any financial support agreed and the review of any ongoing or periodic allowances to be paid. The exception to this is where the need for financial support has been triggered by a change in the adopters' financial circumstances and an adoption allowance was agreed in principal by the placing agency at the time of placement, but not payable due to the then financial means of the adopters. Where this is the case, payment of an adoption allowance by the placing Agency may be able to be triggered.

Financial support may be provided through the payment of a single lump sum or through payment of a periodic or regular allowance.

Single lump sums

Payment of a single lump sum will usually be associated with the setting-up of a placement or to assist the prospective or legal adopters with the cost of major one-off expenditure. Financial support provided is to help ensure the

best possible outcomes for the child placed for adoption and meet their assessed needs.

In order to facilitate the placement for adoption of children with significant physical disabilities or sibling groups of two or more children, the Agency may also consider:

- a) Payment towards the costs of providing a car/vehicle suitable to the needs of the children.
- b) Providing grants, interest free, or low interest loans, to enable adopters to extend their accommodation or move to a larger property. (However in such situations this would be legally contracted and the Agency may have a tie on the property).

Where the prospective adopter who will be the child's main carer does not qualify for Statutory Adoption Pay, the Agency will in some instances consider making payments equivalent to adoption allowance throughout the first 26 weeks of placement, provided that he/she is remaining at home full time to care for the child (see section 12.10 below). Similarly, where the financial resources of the adopter(s) are such that their adoption pay is insufficient to enable the adopter to remain at home with the child for the length of time the agency feels is necessary, consideration may be given to making up the adoption payments to equal the adopter's usual salary, up to a maximum duration of the Adoption leave period.

Periodic Allowances

Payment of a periodic allowance will be considered where the adoptive parents are expected to incur significant but periodic additional expenditure e.g., to finance travel for the purpose of maintaining a level of direct contact with birth family members.

Note

The Agency will consider payment of single lump sum or periodic payments to fund, or assist in the funding of, recognised courses of therapeutic treatment to support placements in difficulties and thus enable children to remain in their adoptive families, if an assessment for Adoption Support Services suggests that the needs of the child and/ or the adopters are such that local mainstream services will be unlikely to meet the needs identified. If appropriate an application will be made to the Adoption Support Fund.

The Agency will, when planning the placement of a child, address the issue of possible future costs relating to damage in the home (where the child is to be placed) where such costs are likely to arise from the special behavioural difficulties of the child. This may result in the

payment of a single lump sum or periodic allowance, or payment of an enhanced regular allowance.

The Agency will, where possible, provide financial support in situations where payment of either a one-off sum or a regular allowance will either enable a suitable placement for adoption to go ahead (which otherwise could not do so) or support a placement that would otherwise be likely to disrupt.

Financial support may however only be paid to an adoptive parent for the purpose of supporting the placement of the adoptive child or the continuation of the adoption arrangements after an adoption order is made where one or more of the following circumstances exist:

- a) where it is necessary to ensure that the adoptive parent can look after the child;
- b) where the child needs special care which requires greater expenditure of resources by reason of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the continuing consequences of past abuse or neglect;
- c) where it is necessary for the Agency to make any special arrangements to facilitate the placement or the adoption by reason of:
 - i. the age or ethnic origin of the child; or
 - ii. the desirability of the child being placed with the same adoptive parent as his brother or sister (whether of full or half-blood) or with a child with whom he previously shared a home;
- d) where such support is to meet recurring costs in respect of travel for the purpose of visits between the child and a related person;
- e) where the agency consider it appropriate to make a contribution to meet the following kinds of expenditure –
 - i. expenditure on legal costs, including fees payable to a court in relation to an adoption;
 - ii. expenditure for the purpose of introducing an adoptive child to his adoptive parent;
 - iii. expenditure necessary for the purpose of accommodating and maintaining the child, including the provisions 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 purpose of looking after the child.

All financial support, whether of a one-off nature or ongoing, will take into account the child's needs and resources and the circumstances and financial means of the adopters. The Agency will assist adoptive families to make themselves aware of and take advantage of any grants, allowances, benefits or resources available to them as parents and/or the child and these will be taken into account in determining the amount of financial support available through the Agency. All adoptive parents will be expected to claim Child Benefit for each child in the family.

All adopters will be required to supply SCST with a statement of their financial services if they are requesting an assessment for financial support.

In assessing the amount of financial support to be provided, the aim is to facilitate a successful placement and enhance the child's well being in the adoptive home. The Agency has to at all times operate within the budgetary constraints prevailing at the time. However, depending on the assessed support needs of the family, the Agency will in all cases at the time of placement, consider payment of:

- a) Settling in grant – to assist with the initial expenditure necessary to set up a placement – provision of baby equipment, clothes, toys, furniture etc.
- b) Reimbursement of reasonable travel costs and/or cost of accommodation incurred by the adopters during the introductory period.
- c) Costs of equipment for the purpose of meeting any special needs of the child.
- d) Costs of adaptations required to the home for the purpose of meeting any special needs of the child.

The Agency will also address the issue of possible future costs relating to damage in the home (where the child is to be placed) where such costs arise from the special behavioural difficulties of the child.

Where the adopter does not qualify for Statutory Adoption Pay, the Agency will in some instances consider making payments equivalent to maternity allowance throughout the first 26 weeks of placement, provided that the main carer is remaining at home full time to care for the child (see section 12.11 below).

From April 2015, mothers, fathers and adopters can opt to share parental leave around their child's birth or placement. This gives families more choice over taking leave in the first year – father's and mothers' partners can take up to a year, or parents can take several months at the same time

In order to facilitate the placement or adoption of children with significant physical disabilities or sibling groups of three or more children, the Agency may consider:

- a) Payment of costs of provision of a car/vehicle suitable to the needs of the child(ren).

- b) Providing interest free or low interest loans, to enable adopters to extend their accommodation or move to a larger property. (However in such situations this would be legally contracted and the Agency would have a tie on the property).

Subject to the child placed meeting one or more of the criteria for payment of an adoption allowance, the Agency will, when placing a child, consider payment of either a periodic or regular ongoing allowance.

Payment of a regular ongoing allowance will be considered where the child has ongoing emotional or behavioural difficulties, a physical or learning disability or special health or medical needs which result in the adoptive parents having additional expenditure over and above the norm for parents of other children of comparable ages. Likewise a regular ongoing allowance will be considered where placement of two or more children together result in increased costs for the adopters.

Payment of a periodic allowance will be considered where the adoptive parents are expected to incur significant but periodic additional expenditure e.g., to finance travel for the purpose of maintaining a level of direct contact with birth family members.

The Agency will have in place a scheme by which adoptive parents can receive payment of regular or periodic financial support at a rate that is equitable and fair and recognises the diverse costs that can be faced by adopters parenting children with physical or learning disabilities of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The Agency is mindful of the fact that in determining the amount of any ongoing financial support to adopters, Agencies have to consider the amount of the fostering allowance which would have been payable if the child was fostered by the adopters, although any payments must exclude any element of remuneration which may have been payable to foster carers as part of a fostering allowance.

Where it is deemed to be in a child's best interests to be adopted by his/her previous foster carers, the Agency will seek to make such financial arrangements as support this outcome and exercise discretion in paying a level of enhanced allowance for a period to ease the transition for the adopters where the fostering allowance previously paid included any 'reward element', as the Adoption Allowance will inevitably be paid at a lower rate.

Under the 2005 Regulations, an assessment for payment of financial support can be triggered at any point pre or post adoption by any adopters who are eligible to be assessed for provision of Adoption Support (please see Section 11.3.2. above) or in the case of non-agency placements (e.g., inter country adoption or relative adoption, excluding adoption by a parent or step-parent) after notification of intention to adopt. However, the need for support will be assessed in relation to current and future needs and retrospective payments will not be considered.

All adopters will be expected to have in place and maintain appropriate insurance cover on their homes (building and contents) and on any vehicle(s) in which a child is transported.

The Agency will consider payment of single or periodic payments to fund or assist in the funding of recognised courses of therapeutic treatment to support placements in difficulties and thus enable children to remain in their adoptive families if assessment for Adoption Support Services suggests that the needs of the child and/or the adopters are such that local mainstream services will be unlikely to meet the needs identified.

Where the special needs of the child suggest placement in a boarding school to be the most appropriate option, the Agency would expect any such arrangement agreed to be subject to the usual joint funding arrangements between Social Services and Education Services.

When the Agency decides to provide financial support, the details of this will be given in writing, including:

- the method by which the financial support has been determined.
- the amount of financial support to be paid to the adopters.
- the date on which the first, or where applicable, only payment will be made.
- the frequency of payments and the period of payments, where appropriate.
- any conditions attached to financial support and the consequences of failing to meet those conditions.
- the arrangements and procedure for review, variation and termination of the financial support and the responsibilities of the Agency with regard to these arrangements.
- the responsibilities of the adopters to notify the Agency immediately if:
 - (i) they change their address.
 - (ii) the child no longer has his/her home with them (or either of them) or dies, or
 - (iii) there is any significant change in their financial circumstances or the financial needs or resources of the child

(Where this information is given orally, it must be confirmed in writing within seven days).

In undertaking its assessment as to the amount of financial support that will be provided, the Agency will take into account:

- any recommendations made by the Adoption Panel.
- the financial resources of the adopters.
- the amount needed by the adopters in respect of their reasonable outgoings and commitments.
- the financial needs and resources of the child.
- expenditure to facilitate the adoption.

Where ongoing financial support is provided, this will be reviewed annually. Where it comes to the attention of the Agency part way through the review period that there has been a change in the circumstances of the Adoption Support Service user, an additional review will take place within four weeks of the change of circumstances coming to the attention of the Agency.

The Agency will seek to be flexible in responding to changes of circumstances and to be sensitive and fair in determining how far changes in financial circumstances or needs should affect the provision of financial support. However, personnel within the Agency will need to be mindful of budgetary and staffing constraints and demands in other service areas.

Reviews in relation to the provision of financial support will be overseen by the Practice Manager of the Adoption Service.

When reviewing the provision of financial support, the Agency will require the adopters to submit a statement giving information about their financial circumstances, the child's needs and resources, their address and whether the child still has his/her home with them.

A written request will be issued to prompt this and where this does not result in a statement being provided within 28 days, a reminder will be sent.

If a statement is not then received within a further 28 days, the adopters will be formally notified in writing that the Agency will suspend payment of financial support in 28 days if a statement is not received in that time (i.e., within 12 weeks of the first request being issued).

If no statement is received, payments will be suspended without further notice until such time as a financial statement is provided.

Payment of an adoption allowance will terminate when:

- the child ceases to have his/her permanent home with the adopters. (Payment is not affected by temporary absences away from the

adoptive home in connection with education, respite care, hospitalisation or similar).

- where the child reaches the age of 18, unless an agreement has been made to continue with the allowance until the child ceases full time education or training and commences employment.
- where the child qualifies for Income Support of Job Seeker's Allowance in his/her own right.

Non-Agency Placements

An assessment for payment of financial support for non agency placements can only be instigated after the prospective adopters have notified the local Agency of their intention to adopt. The need for support will be assessed in respect of the child's current and future needs and will not be retrospective.

Parents and step-parents that are adopting or who have adopted a birth or step child are not eligible for financial support.

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12.11 Statutory Adoption Pay and Leave, Statutory Paternity Pay and Leave

The Agency will support all adopters to exercise their rights to take time off work to spend time with their child(ren) following placement under the provisions of Statutory Adoption Pay and Leave and of Statutory Paternity Pay and Leave. When placing children the Agency will provide the prospective adopters with a 'Matching Certificate' to enable them to apply to take Statutory Adoption Leave and to receive Statutory Adoption Pay. This certificate will be provided at the point that the prospective adopters are notified in writing of the approval of the proposed match.

Where the adoptive parent who will be the main carer for the child is not eligible to receive Statutory Adoption Pay by reason of low earnings, the Agency will, when placing a child, consider paying an allowance equivalent to Statutory Maternity Pay for a maximum of 26 weeks, if the adoptive parent is to be caring for the child on a full time basis and the applicant otherwise satisfies the relevant criteria for Maternity Allowance.

Where the other member of the couple or the partner of an individual adopting is not eligible to take Statutory Paternity Leave nor to receive Statutory Paternity Pay, the Agency will likewise when placing a child, consider paying an allowance equivalent to Statutory Paternity pay for either one or two weeks if the individual concerned elects to take unpaid leave for one or two weeks during the first eight weeks in which the child is placed for adoption.

Note

Statutory Adoption Pay and Adoption Leave and Statutory Paternity Pay and Adoption Leave are not normally available to foster parents or step parents who go on to adopt the child, so no equivalent allowance can be considered in such situations.

12.12 Court Fees and Costs

The Agency expects in normal circumstances to pay the Court fee when a child placed by the Agency is the subject of an adoption application, which is being supported by the Agency

The Agency likewise expects to meet the legal costs of the adopters in situations where the application is to adopt a child placed by the Agency and the Agency has agreed to the application proceeding but the birth parent(s) and/or others with parental responsibility for the child are likely to either withhold their consent to the application or to actively seek to contest the application.

In consented cases, the Agency will exercise its discretion and decide on a case by case basis whether to provide help with legal costs if the adopters wish to seek legal advice.

Where the Agency does not support an application to adopt a child in its care, the prospective adopters' legal fees will not be met by the Agency unless the Agency is directed by the Court to do so. The prospective adopters may be able to obtain help with legal costs from the Legal Services Commission, provided the means and merits tests are met.

12.13 Birth Relatives

Please see Section 8 and Section 12 above.

Where an adult adoptee seeks to resurrect contact with his/her birth family, support will be provided to the birth relatives if they live within the Slough area and if they request it.

12.14 Adult Adoptees

The Local Agency is responsible for providing an adoption service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records. In the case of persons adopted before 12th November 1975, the Agency will provide counselling in line with the legal requirements before sharing any information available.

Counselling will also be provided for adult adoptees adopted after that date if this is requested.

Adoptees will be provided with the Agency's information pack and will be helped to consider what actions they might take in terms of obtaining information and/or tracing and the possible implications of their actions for both themselves and others. Where requested to do so the Agency will seek to locate the adoptee's adoption records. This record may be shared with the adoptees either by this Agency or the Agency holding the records, whichever is more appropriate.

If an adoptee is seeking to trace a birth relative(s) he/she will be informed that the Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, however if he/she is able to provide the name and address of the person who he/she wishes to contact the agency will, where staffing permits, provide an intermediary service. Alternatively the Agency will provide the details of other Agencies and organisations that provide tracing and/or intermediary services or that might be able to offer additional support appropriate to the individual's needs.

All adoptees will be provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it.

Where an adult adoptee who does not live in the Slough area is seeking information from his/her adoption records and SCST is the appropriate Adoption Agency, advice and counselling about the process will be provided and the Agency will co-operate in providing information from its records to any Adoption Support Agency involved or to the Local Agency in whose area the adoptee lives, in order to facilitate him/her accessing his/her adoption records. Any information provided from the case record will usually be supplied in the form of a file summary.

When the Agency is approached by another Adoption Agency seeking information from the adoption case records for an adoptee who remains under the age of 18 the Agency will only release information if there are clear reasons to suggest that this would be in keeping with the best interests of the young person and with the consent of the adoptive parent(s). Where information is released it will be supplied in the form of a file summary and will not include any identifying information in respect of birth family members.

12.15 Birth Relative Initiated Contact

Where a birth parent or sibling of an adopted adult is wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling, he/she will be offered a counselling interview.

The Agency is not in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted him/herself. Birth relatives will be encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contact Register operated by the Registrar

General (which provides a safe and confidential way for birth relatives to assure an adopted person that contact would be welcome).

The Agency will only routinely provide intermediary services where the following criteria are met:

- The birth relative lives within the Slough area
- The birth relative is able to provide the name and address of the person who they wish to make contact with
- The birth relative is able to provide evidence of their relationship to the adoptee
- The adopted person was originally placed for adoption by SCST (or previously Slough Borough Council).

If the birth relative is unable to provide a current address for the adopted person he/she is seeking to trace, but the Agency holds a previous contact address for him/her and/or for his/her adoptive parent(s) the Agency will, if the birth relative requests it, consider making contact with the adoptee or in some instances with his/her adoptive parent(s) via the last known address to inform him/her/them of the birth relative's wish to establish contact.

If the adopted person is aged over 18 but under 25 and the Agency has a previous address for him/her, the Agency will, if the birth relative requests it, consider making contact with the adoptive parents via the last known address and inform them of the birth relative's wish to initiate contact.

If the adopted person has reached the age of 25 years or older, the counsellor will seek to make contact with him/her directly via the last known address if this appears appropriate.

If contact with the adopted person is established and he/she wishes to establish contact with his/her birth relative(s), all parties will be offered support prior to and following the reunion.

13.0 DISRUPTION OF PLACEMENTS *****

The Agency will have clear procedures relating to when a placement disrupts.

Prior to the making of an adoption order, if it becomes clear that there are significant difficulties within the placement and the sustainability is under threat, then a review meeting will be arranged and at that meeting, consideration to the holding of a pre-disruption meeting will be given.

If it is not deemed in the best interests of the child to remain with the adoptive family then the pre-disruption meeting will draw up a plan to manage the arrangements for the child and adoptive family.

If the adoption application has been lodged, then permission from the court will be obtained to remove the child unless the prospective adopters withdraw the application or there are safeguarding concerns.

When a placement breaks down prior to the Adoption Order being made, the Agency will inform the birth parents that this has occurred, unless they have made a formal declaration that they do not want any further involvement with the child.

The planning process for all children, for whom the Agency has responsibility, will be core to meeting the child's future needs. Wherever possible, the possibility of the placement resuming or of continuing or future contact between the child and his/her adoptive family should be explored and pursued unless this is likely to be detrimental to the child.

Where an adoptive placement has irretrievably broken down, the Agency will endeavour to gather as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future. The child's case will be reviewed in line with regulations.

In every case the Agency will consider the merits of arranging an independently chaired disruption meeting, involving the adoptive parent(s), other significant family members and professionals to review the development of the placement throughout its duration and the circumstances leading to the disruption.

If a placement breaks down after the Adoption Order has been made, the Agency will consider informing the birth parent(s) of the situation, particularly if a Contact Order is in place. Where it is appropriate to do so active consideration will be given to the resumption of direct contact with, or care by the birth parents or birth family on the basis of properly assessed need and changed circumstances.

***** This policy relates to children placed for adoption by SCST Adoption Agency where the placement is of less than 3 years duration and/or the adoption order has been in place for less than 12 months. It also relates to children placed in the Slough area who have been in placement for over 3 years and for whom the adoption order has been in place for more than 12 months.

If the placement of a child previously placed for adoption by SCST breaks down more than three years after placement and more than one year after the adoption order being granted, while the Local Authority in whose area the adoptive family is living will then hold legal responsibility for supporting/planning for the child and his/her adoptive family, SCST will, as far as is reasonable, co-operate with any requests by the Local Authority to provide information appertaining to the background and placement of the child and any subsequent support issues.

SCST as the Placing Agency

Once an Adoption Order has been granted Parental Responsibility for the child rests solely with the adoptive parent(s).

The responsibility of the Placing Agency if the placement subsequently disrupt will depend on the length of time that the child has been legally adopted.

If SCST was the original Placing Agency and the child has been legally adopted for under 3 years the Agency will continue to hold some responsibility for the support of the placement. In this situation if the Agency becomes aware that disruption of the placement is likely the Agency will refer to the appropriate Children and Families Team within the Local Authority in which the family resides and will as a matter of urgency review the Adoption Support Plan with the adopter(s) and/or with their Local Authority, depending on the circumstances.

Whatever the time-scales involved the Agency will:

- Co-operate with the procedures of the Local Authority in which the adopter(s) reside
- Contribute to any disruption meeting held
- Subject to any necessary consents, provide any written information likely to assist with the future planning for the child
- In consultation with the Local Authority responsible for planning for the child, consider informing the birth parent(s) of the situation, particularly if a contact order is in place

SCST as the receiving Agency

If the placement of a child who has already been legally adopted disrupts the Local Authority in which the adoptive family resides will be primarily responsible for planning for the child and supporting the various family members.

If the Agency becomes aware that the placement of an adopted child living in the SCST area is in risk of disruption the Agency will liaise with the Placing Agency and seek to put in place a package of support aimed at preventing disruption.

If it becomes apparent that it is not in the best interests of the child to remain in placement or the adoptive parent(s) are clear that they wish the child to be removed appropriate plans will be put in place.

First consideration should be given to the child being cared for by a member(s) of his/her extended (adoptive) family.

The planning process immediately before and following the disruption of an adoptive placement will be core to meeting the child's future needs. Wherever possible, the possibility of the placement resuming or of continuing or future contact between the child and his/her adoptive family should be explored and pursued unless this is likely to be detrimental to the child.

A disruption meeting should be held and the Agency should gather as much information as possible to assist with planning for the child's future.

From when the adoptive placement disrupts the child must have an allocated Social Worker and from the point when he/she is accommodated the child's case will be reviewed in line with regulations.

14.0 DEATH OF A CHILD IN PLACEMENT

In the event of the death of a child who is in the care of the Agency whilst he/she is placed in a pre-adoption placement, the circumstances of the child's death will be investigated and reported in accordance with the Agency's Looked After Children's Procedures.

In the event of the death of a child placed by another Agency/Authority with prospective adoptive parents living in the Slough area, the Agency will co-operate with the placing Agency in its investigations into/reporting of the child's death, regardless as to whether the prospective adopters' approval is held by SCST or by another Agency/Authority.

The Agency will seek in either circumstance to work in co-operation with any other Agency/Authority involved in the child's placement to ensure:

- The full facts of the child's death are ascertained/ reported.
- The prospective adopters and their family are provided with appropriate support via their approving Agency and/or via an independent source.
- The birth parent(s) and any other individuals who hold parental responsibility are informed in a timely and appropriate manner.

15. STORAGE OF ADOPTION RECORDS

The Department will have effective systems for recording, managing and keeping safe, information about children placed for adoption and adopters and information received from people affected by adoption. These will be compliant with Regulations.

15.1 Files relating to Children to be placed by the Agency

The Department will create a separate adoption file for each child from the point when adoption is decided as the plan (Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (12)).

Case files for children for whom adoption is the plan, should provide an adequate account of the child's history and the decisions that inform the management of the case, in order to provide an accurate and sufficiently detailed record to the Court at the time of the legal adoption and to the child, should he/she as an adult seek information.

Following the legal adoption of the child, a post adoption file record will be set up and the previous adoption file and Child in Care Case Record will be closed and securely stored. Where legal adoption is not achieved, but the child is discharged from the care of the Agency via other Court processes, or reaches the age of 18, information from the child's adoption file will be transferred to the Child in Care Case Record.

All case records relating to children who have been legally adopted are stored for a minimum of 100 years from the date of the adoption. In cases where an Adoption Order is not made, records will be stored for a minimum of 100 years, from the date of the last contact with the Agency.

The child's 'In Care File' will be stored by the responsible Children's Team in accordance with the Department's policy on Retention and Destruction of Records.

15.2 Files relating to Adopters

A case file will be created for each prospective adopter as of the point of their initial application.

If prospective adopters withdraw partway through the preparation/assessment process, prior to approval by the Adoption Agency's Panel, their case file will be closed and stored for 10 years. Should they be approved by the Adoption Agency's Panel, but subsequently withdraw prior to the placement of a child(ren), their case file will be closed once their decision has been confirmed with them and the case file stored for 10 years in line with the Agency's Retention and Destruction of Records Policy.

If the prospective adopter's progress to placement of a child but the placement subsequently disrupts prior to legal adoption of the child(ren) and the adopters subsequently withdraw from the adoption process, the case file will be stored for 25 years in line with the Agency's Retention and Destruction of Records Policy.

If the prospective adopters legally adopt a child placed, their case file will be closed at the point of the adoption and linked to any information held on the child adopted by them. The file will then be stored for 100 years.

At the point that the adopter's case file is closed a post adoption file will be set up. Details of the child(ren) placed will be removed from the adopter's case file prior to closure and will form the basis of the post adoption file which will be held in the child's adoptive name.

15.3 Information relating to Children placed with SCST Approved Adopters

A separate file module will be set up to contain the information relating to any child placed with SCST approved adopters. This module will be retained with the adopters' file until such time as the Adoption Order is granted, at which stage it will be separated to create the basis of the post adoption file for the child.

15.4 Information from Birth Relatives

The Agency will have a system that enables birth parents or siblings of an adopted child to place information on the child's file after the adoption, for the adopted person to receive should he/she seek access to his/her adoption records.

15.5 Records relating to Adoption Allowances

A separate record relating to the setting up and reviewing of an adoption allowance will be established under the name of the adopters. (For administration purposes this will be stored separately from the case records relating to the adopters and child when current). The allowance record will remain open until the child/young person is 18 years of age, unless the placement permanently disrupts prior to this time).

When the adoption allowance terminates, the record will be stored with the case records relating to the adopters for 100 years from the date that the Adoption Order was granted.

15.6 Records relating to Post Adoption Support

15.6.1 Files relating to Adopted Children/Adoptive Families

A separate case record relating to post adoption support will be set up for each adoptive child known to the Agency and living in the Slough area

following the granting of the Adoption Order and for any child placed by the Agency.

The file will remain open until such time as there has been no contact (request for information, advice or support) in the previous 3 years, or until the adopted person reaches the age of 21 if post adoption support is ongoing. On closure the file will be stored with either the child's closed adoption file if the child was placed by the Agency or the child's closed Looked After Child file if the child was referred to the Agency as a Child In Need post adoption and a separate case file opened.

15.6.2 Files relating to Birth Family Members

A separate case record relating to post adoption support will be set up should any member of an adopted child's birth family request support following the child's placement or subsequent adoption. The file will remain open until such time as there has been no contact in the previous 3 years or until the adopted person reaches the age of 21.

While birth parents/relatives have no legal right to information about the child post adoption, unless there is an agreement for Information Exchange or direct contact, the Agency recognises that many birth parents continue to think about birth children who they have lost through adoption, throughout their lives and will seek to offer services that recognise their loss.*

Information Exchange arrangements are managed via the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and separate records appertaining to these arrangements are held by the Advisory Service. These arrangements will be reviewed during 2017.

* Please see Sections 5.2.,8,9,10,14

15.7 Access to Records

15.7.1 Adoptees

Every child placed for adoption will be provided with a Life Book and Later Life Letter. Access to their birth records will be provided to adoptees over the age of 18 who request it, in line with Regulations. Adult adoptees can additionally apply for access to their original Care File in line with Regulations. Adoptees below the age of 18 have no legal right to access to their birth records.

Specific requests for limited access, will be considered in the case of adoptees aged under 18 years, but is only likely to be agreed to in exceptional cases. Any decision in respect of this will rest with the SCST Chief Executive.

15.7.2 Adopters

Prospective adopters will be given a copy of their home study assessment at the time that their application is to be considered by the Adoption Agency's Panel (minus information provided by referees). The copy will clearly state that the assessment remains the property of the Agency and may not be disclosed to any other party without the written permission of the Agency.

Adoptive parents are legally entitled to see the section of the Annex A Report, provided to the Court in relation to their adoption application that relates to themselves (Adoption Court Rules).

Adoptive parents are able to access their own personal files via the Department's Access to Records Procedure. Personal, statutory and medical references and third party information will not be shared without the consent of the person who provided the reference/information.

15.7.3 Birth Parents

Birth parents have no right of access to their child's adoption records; however they are entitled to see the section of the report for the Adoption Panel that relates to themselves and the section of the Annex A Report that is prepared for the Court at the time of their child's legal adoption (Adoption Court Rules).

16.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING

The Agency seeks to provide a comprehensive Adoption Service operating within the requirements of all current legislation, regulations and guidance.

The Agency is also subject to all council systems of monitoring and review including internal audit processes.

Performance data is collected and returned to the Department for Education. Outcomes and developments in the service are scrutinised and reported through various meetings and the SCST Board.

An annual service plan is produced annually which is monitored by the senior management team.

The Agency is mindful of the requirements placed upon Agencies by the Adoption Minimum Standards to monitor and control the activities of the Adoption Agency and to ensure quality performance.

The Agency seeks to achieve this through a number of avenues:

- The Agency has a clear written statement of its aims and objectives (The Statement of Purpose) and monitors its performance to ensure that they are met

- The Agency seeks to ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of its adoption processes
- The Agency has a written recruitment strategy addressing the need to identify and recruit adopters able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption, within the Slough area, and more widely
- Plans for recruitment clearly set out the standards that the Agency expects to meet in working with prospective and approved adopters

These include:

- all enquiries will be welcomed without prejudice and given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval process
 - all enquirers and applicants will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process
 - prospective adopters will be involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive preparation, assessment and approval process
 - approved adopters will be given clear information about the matching, introduction and placement process and will be appropriately supported through the processes
- The Agency seeks to ensure that all adoptive parents with whom it is engaged who achieve the placement of a child are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the child. (National Minimum Standards 8, 10; 13; see also Section 12 'Adoption Support Services' above)
 - The Agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents, siblings and other relatives and seeks to ensure that they are able to access a range of services that recognise the lifelong implications for them of adoption and enable them to take an active part in the planning and implementation of their child's adoption. (Standards 12, 16 NMS; - see also Section 9 'Birth Relatives (including birth siblings)' above)
 - The Agency has an Adoption Panel (facilitated by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service) which has clear written policies and procedures relating to the handling of its functions and which is organised efficiently and effectively in making timely, quality and appropriate recommendations about:
 - children where adoption should be the plan if birth parents have consented to the plan
 - the suitability of prospective adopters

- the matching of children with approved adopters

The Agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. (Standards 17, 21 – National Minimum Standards – see also Section 5 'Children Requiring Placement' above.

- The Agency seeks to ensure that the social workers and support staff employed to undertake the adoption work of the Agency and the managers involved in the Service, have appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to undertake and manage the work of the Agency efficiently and effectively and are suitable people to work with children. (Standards 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, – National Minimum Standards – see also Section 2 'The Adoption Agency' above and SCST Statement of Purpose)
- The Agency has appropriate employment practices and support in place for its staff. (Standard 24, 25 – National Minimum Standards)
- The Agency is committed to providing a good quality training programme for staff undertaking the work of the Adoption Agency, aimed at keeping staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments and enhancing individual skills. (Standard 23 – National Minimum Standards)
- The Agency has a complaints process, details of which are provided to all children, birth families and prospective and approved adopters with whom the Adoption Agency is involved. (Standard 25 – National Minimum Standards – see also Section 17)
- The Agency seeks to ensure that comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the Adoption Agency is involved and that all relevant information from its case files is provided, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and Local Authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child. (Standard 27 – National Minimum Standards – see also Section 15 'Storage of Adoption Records' above)
- SCST has a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including storage and access to case files in line with regulations. (Standards 27, 28 – National Minimum Standards)
- The Agency seeks to ensure that up-to-date, comprehensive HR files are maintained for each member of staff involved in the work of the Adoption Agency and each member of the Adoption Panel (held by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service). (Standard 19– National Minimum Standards – see also relevant HR policies)
- The Agency seeks to ensure that the premises used by the Adoption Agency are appropriate for the purpose. (Standard 28 – National Minimum Standards)

- The Agency seeks to safeguard and promote the physical, mental and emotional welfare of people affected by adoption who wish to use its services. (Standard 15, 16 – National Minimum Standards)

In order to monitor its performance and the effectiveness of the Adoption Service that it provides the Agency is committed to seeking feedback from Service Users and this is used to inform future service provision. At the current time a robust system is in place to seek feedback from adoptive parents at key points in the adoption process. Systems are also in place to seek feedback from birth parents.

SCST is committed to seeking feedback from the children being placed for adoption, depending on the age of the child, either directly or indirectly through an adult that they trust.

The Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service provides annual information about the feedback received from the birth parents/relatives and adopters to whom it provides services on behalf of SCST. This is published in the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service's Annual Report. Feedback can additionally be sought in relation to a specific case and/or will be provided on specific issues arising if there appears to be reasons for concern about the nature or quality of any service offered or provided.

17. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

Children, their birth parents, adopters and other people affected by adoption should be able to make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the Council's adoption services whether this is provided directly by the Agency or by a contracted Agency.

The Department's complaints process will be accessible to all parties affected by the work of the Adoption Agency. All parties will be informed of their right to make representation and complaints and will be helped to do so if this is required.

Jackie Pape, Head of Service, Placements & Resources

References

- The Adoption Act 1976
- The Children Act 1989 (and accompanying regulations and guidance)
- The Human Rights Act 1998

- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- The Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 (and accompanying regulations and guidance).
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying Adoption National Minimum Standards
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection (Adoption Agencies) Regulations 2003 – England
- National Care Standards Commission (Registration) (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Agency Regulation 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Working together to safeguard children (and associated child protection guidance).
- The framework for the assessment of children in need and their families.
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Children and Families Act 2014

- **Promoting the Health of Looked After Children (Department of Health 2002)**

- **Looked After Children 98(20)**

- **Looked After Children 99(29) – Care Plans and Care Proceedings Under the Children Act 1989**

- **Department of Health Inter Country Adoption Guide – May 2003**

- **Department of Health Adoption Support Services Guidance – May 2003**

- **Other relevant legislation and regulations and guidance.**