

Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

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Becoming an adopter

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Purpose of this report

1. The Corporate Parenting Panel has asked for a report to be provided updating the Panel regarding the pathway for becoming an adopter

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report
2. Comment on the report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. This item is not planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as the report is for the Corporate Parenting Panel only

Issues

1. Adoption is a way of providing the security and permanency of a new family when it is not possible for a child to be raised by his/her birth parents or within the birth family.
2. Adoption is a legal process which transfers parental responsibility from the child's birth parents to their adoptive parents. The Adoption Order is granted by a court when the child(ren) have been living with the prospective adopters and all concerned, including the child, are in agreement that an adoption order is appropriate. Once an Adoption Order is made it cannot be revoked
3. Becoming an adopter involves several stages to assess applicants' suitability as prospective adopters alongside preparing applicants as adoptive parents.
4. There are many myths regarding adoption but anyone over the age of 21 can be considered as a potential adopter, regardless of marital status, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income or have parenting experience or not.
5. The main elements Central Bedfordshire and the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 consider are that applicants:
 - are 21 years and over
 - have both physical and mental ability to care for children
 - have not been convicted of or cautioned for specified criminal offence
 - have physical space in their life and home for a child
 - are financially stable
 - have good and robust network of support; and that
 - are willing to gain childcare experience

Expressing an interest to adopt a child

6. Firstly, it is important to find out as much as possible about what it's like to adopt by making an initial enquiry and attending an Information Evening. This can be either a local authority agency (in England, Scotland or Wales) or a health and social care trust (in Northern Ireland), or a "voluntary" adoption agency (VAA). The difference is that local authorities or health and social care trusts will have children in their care whom they will want to place, whereas

voluntary adoption agencies are asked to provide families for children cared for by local authorities.

7. The Information Evening is often the first-time applicants have begun to think about adoption from a child's perspective and beyond their own.
8. During the period January 2016 to January 2017, in CBC we received 131 expressions of interest from people who considered becoming an adopter.

Initial screening

9. After an initial interview the agency will invite the applicant to complete a Registration of Interest Form (ROI), if appropriate. If the application is unlikely to be accepted the agency provides reasons and advice and guidance about how the matters can be addressed or other agencies they can consider.
10. During the period January 2016 to January 2017 in CBC we received 22 ROI and all were accepted due to the initial screening process.
11. Upon receipt of the ROI the agency makes a decision whether to accept the application within 5 days
12. If accepted the applicant is then known as a '*prospective adopter*'. If the ROI is not accepted the agency will provide reasons and advice to the applicants.

The Assessment:

13. The prospective adopter assessment is completed in two stages, Stage 1 and Stage 2. Stage 1 is 'adopter led' requiring the applicant to provide information and start preparation training/self directed learning. Required checks and references are also completed including:
 - Local Authority checks
 - Adult Health Medical
 - Personal references
 - Employer references
 - Enhanced Police check
 - School Reference (for any child living in the household)
 - Ex-partner reference

14. During the stage 1, applicants are required to assist with completion of the following:

- Chronology (significant life events from birth to present)
- Genogram (Family tree- back to grandparents)
- Eco-Map of identified support network
- Financial Statement with evidence
- Health and Safety check of the home
- Pet assessment
- Preparation, First Aid, E-Learning and Voluntary Training

15. The guided timeframe for completion of Stage 1 is two months and applicants with Central Bedfordshire Council are supported by a Social Work Assistant during this stage.

16. At the end of Stage 1 a brief assessment is conducted in a formal interview to consider the applicants progress and the information obtained from checks and references to ascertain their suitability to adopt. This interview determines the completion of Stage 1 and progression to Stage 2. (Following completion of Stage 1 applicants can progress directly to Stage 2 or take a break of up to 6 months before progressing to Stage 2.)

17. Stage 2 is more commonly known as the 'home study' assessment when a Social Worker is allocated to complete the 'Prospective Adopter Report' (PAR) and is the 'Social Work' led part of the assessment process. The guided timeframe for completion of Stage 2 is four months.

18. Four months begins when the applicant notifies the agency that they wish to proceed to Stage 2 and ends when the Agency Decision Maker ratifies the suitability as prospective adopters.

19. The allocated social worker will meet with applicants on a weekly basis to collate information required for the assessment. Information to be discussed and collated for the assessment include:

- each applicant's childhood history and parenting experience
- the quality of their support network
- lifestyle including any health-related issues
- parenting capacity and childcare experience

- current relationship and experience of previous relationships
 - motivation to adopt
 - understanding of the needs of children requiring adoption
 - matching considerations
 - The Social Worker also interviews referees to validate information provided by the applicants and assess support available
20. Once the information is collated the social worker completes the prospective adopters report providing all the information collated in Stage 1 and 2 with an analysis of each section and recommendations.
21. Applicants must read the report to add their comments and ensure factual information is accurate. This report is then Quality Assured by both the manager and Adoption Panel Advisor prior to presentation to Adoption Panel.
22. During the period January 2016 to January 2017 CBC completed 18 positive assessments were completed, 1 negative and 1 withdrew.

Bedfordshire Joint Adoption Panel:

23. Panel is made up of several independent members who have an interest and/or personal experience of adoption
24. Panel members read the Prospective Adopters report and supporting documents prior to Panel meeting
25. Members will ask relevant questions to both the applicants and social worker in considering a recommendation for approval
26. The three recommendations Panel can make are:
- Recommend approval as prospective adopters
 - Not recommend approval as prospective adopters
 - Defer approval as prospective adopters
27. Panels recommendation and the Prospective Adopters Report are provided to Central Bedfordshire's Agency Decision Maker (Children's Services' Deputy Director) to consider for a final decision regarding the applicants' approval as prospective adopters. This is called a final determination.
28. Once approved the family finding process begins to identify a 'match' with a child.

29. During the period January 2016 to January 2017, the Adoption Panel recommended approval for 19 prospective adopters

Family Finding Process

30. Approved adopters will be considered for children from the agency, Regional Agencies and national register (LinkMaker/Adoption Match).

31. There are no time scales for how long family finding should take for prospective adopters. This can vary on their location, experience and range of children they wish to be considered for.

32. During the period January 2017 to January 2018 21 prospective adopter households, approved by Central Bedfordshire Council, have been matched for adoption. This includes being matched with children from Central Bedfordshire and other authorities.

33. An Annual Review of prospective adopters is required to be completed if a match/link has yet to be identified. 3 annual Reviews have been completed during the period January 2017 to January 2018 providing the indicator that the majority are matched within the first year of approval.

After a potential match is identified:

34. Prospective adopters will be provided with the Child's Permanence report and adoption medical and will meet with the child's social worker, foster carer and other professionals, significant to the child's life to consider all available information

35. They would also receive advice from the Agency medical advisor, if health needs are identified

36. A matching report and Adoption Support Plan are prepared and agreed

37. Prospective adopters would again attend panel for consideration with the match. The match will then be ratified by the ADM

38. Once ADM has ratified the decision, a planning meeting outlining the plan for introductions will take place

39. For a small number of children and adopters, Foster for Adoption is a possibility but this has to be considered on merits and needs of the applicants

and the child. For these adopters, temporary approval as Foster Carers is obtained for a match with a specific child.

40. After the Adoption Order is granted the adopted child will, in most situations, have a contact plan with the birth family, including parents, siblings and significant extended family members. Contact can be:

- a. Direct - Face to face
- b. Indirect - Letterbox contact via the exchange of letters

41. A contact Co-ordinator manages and supports the plans for contact until a child reaches 18 years

42. In addition, following the granting of the Adoption order, the Local Authority continue to provide post adoption support based on the needs of the adopters and the child. The child and/or adoptive parents can request an assessment of adoption support needs until a child is 18yrs after which the adopted adult can access support directly.

43. Central Bedfordshire have a Post Adoption support guide that can be downloaded from the council website which explains the support, advice and guidance available.

Options for consideration

44. None

Reason/s for decision

45. Not applicable

Reason for urgency

46. Not applicable

Council Priorities

47. Protecting the Vulnerable; Improving Wellbeing - Adoption ensures permanency for our children is achieved matching them with the right adopters

Corporate Implications

48. None

Legal Implications

49. None

Financial and Risk Implications

50. None

Equalities Implications

51. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Adoption process promotes equality whilst matching the needs of the children with the right adopters

Implications for Work Programming

52. Not applicable

Conclusion and next Steps

Appendices

53. None

Background Papers

54. None