

SECTION 2

PANEL POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Agency Adviser to Panel

- 1.1 Adoption Tees Valley (referred to as the 'agency' hereafter) will appoint a dedicated Panel Manager & Agency Adviser. This role will meet the requirements of Regulation 8 of the Adoption Regulations 2005.
- 1.2 The role of Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will be covered by a suitably qualified team manager from the ATV service if so required due to the absence of the dedicated individual.
- 1.3 The role of the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser is to:
 - (a) assist the agency with the appointment (including re-appointment), termination and review of members of the Adoption Tees Valley Panel.
 - (b) be responsible for the induction and training of members of the Panel
 - (c) be responsible for liaison between the agency and the Panel, monitoring the performance of Panel members and the administration of the Panel.
 - (d) give such advice to the Panel as it may request in relation to any case or generally.
 - (e) Liaise with social workers and team managers and provide them with advice on matters relating to the Panel.
 - (f) Carry out a quality assurance check of the final draft of each report which is due to be presented to Panel and provide feedback on the report to the relevant social worker and team manager.
- 1.4 The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will attend each Panel meeting in order to provide Panel members with advice as and when necessary and to maintain an overview of the work of the Panel.
- 1.5 The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will quality assure the draft Panel minutes of each meeting and amend as needed before they are issued to the Panel members for review, and review and approval by the Chair of Panel.

2. Chairs of Adoption Panel

- 2.1 The two Chairs of Adoption Tees Valley Panel will be independent and will be appointed by means of an open recruitment process.

- 2.2 The duties and responsibilities of the Chairs are set out in a Job Specification (attached as Appendix 1) and the qualities required for performing the role are set out in a Person Specification (attached as Appendix 2).
- 2.3 The Chairs of Panel will engage in an annual review facilitated by the ATV Service Manager and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.

3. Members of the Adoption Tees Valley Panel

- 3.1 Adoption Tees Valley Panel will consist of a maximum of 10 members, including the Chair; they will be drawn from the central list held by Adoption Tees Valley. The members will be appointed in a way that ensures that the composition of the Panel meets the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary to effectively discharge the functions of the Panel. Please refer to section 8.5 for details regarding Panel quorum.
- 3.2 The duties and responsibilities of a Panel member are set out in a Job Specification (attached as Appendix 3 & 4) and the qualities required for performing the role are set out in a Person Specification (attached as Appendix 3 & 4).
- 3.3 Panel members will engage in an annual review.
- 3.4 All Panel members will be required to sign the Panel Membership Agreement which sets out what Adoption Tees Valley expects of Panel members and what Panel members can expect of Adoption Tees Valley. A copy of this document is attached as Appendix 5.
- 3.5 If there are any concerns about a Panel member (for instance if they are missing Panels they are scheduled to attend, attending meetings without having read the papers, or behaving in a disruptive way during Panel) these concerns should be discussed with the Panel member at their annual review if there is one due within an appropriate timescale. If the review is not due, then the Chair and the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser should agree a course of action for raising the concerns with the Panel member. This will normally mean arranging a private discussion with the Panel member to try to resolve any difficulties that may be contributing to the Panel member's situation. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to suggest that the Panel member ends their role on Panel. This will be done by removing the person's name from the central list and giving one month's notice in writing.
- 3.6 All Panel members will be required to sign the Panel Membership Agreement which sets out what Adoption Tees Valley expects of Panel members and

what Panel members can expect of Adoption Tees Valley. A copy of this document is attached as Appendix 5.

- 3.7 All Panel members will have an electronic personnel file, which will be kept by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.

4. Vice Chair of Adoption Tees Valley Panel

- 4.1 Two members of the Adoption Tees Valley Panel will be appointed as Vice Chairs, and will act as the Panel Chair when the Chair is unavailable, absent or the role is vacant.
- 4.2 Both Vice Chairs will be independent of the agency.
- 4.3 The appointed Vice Chair will have the same skills and experience as the Chairs, and will be provided with appropriate training and support as needed to help them act in this role. The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser and ATV Service Manager will identify appropriate Vice Chairs based on their skills, experience and willingness to act in this role as needed. The Panel Membership Agreement will be updated to reflect their role.

5. Recruitment of Panel members

- 5.1 There is no requirement to have an Elected Member included on the central list. However, having a Corporate Parent representative on Panel will make a valuable contribution to the central list and Panel functioning, and is welcomed.
- 5.2 The Medical Advisers to Panel will be appointed by liaison with the Primary Care Trust and Integrated Care Board who will nominate suitably qualified individuals. ATV is responsible for discharging the adoption function and duties for five local authorities (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton). As such, each local authority will appoint a Medical Adviser who will engage in Panels on a rota basis.
- 5.3 The social work representatives on Panel will be recruited from ATV and the five local authorities. Independent social work representatives will be recruited using the same process for other independent Panel members. All social work Panel members, including independent social work Panel members will engage in the same recruitment, induction, training and review processes as all other Panel members. Evidence of the social worker's registration with Social Work England will be sought by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.

- 5.4 The independent Panel members will be recruited by means of external publicity, targeted publicity, word of mouth, and recommendations.
- 5.5 The central list could include Panel members who are specialists in education, child and adolescent mental health, and those who have personal experience of adoption. The central list should aim to have a considerable number of Panel members who are independent of the agency. The central list should also aim to reflect the diversity within the Tees Valley and will benefit from having Panel members who reflect diversity in their ethnicity and culture, gender and sexuality.
- 5.6 Individuals expressing an interest in joining the central list will be required to engage in the following screening and recruitment process:
- An initial and informal discussion with the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser prior to an application form being issued.
 - Should there be agreement between both parties following the initial discussion, an application form will be sent to the individual for their completion (Appendix 6). Other information will also be provided for information (Appendices 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8)
 - Once the application form has been received, the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will issue two written personal reference requests for the applicant. Once received, verbal confirmation will be sought from the referees by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser for all applicants not in the employment of one of the five local authorities; discretion will be used for those applicants employed by one of the local authorities and the audit trail able to be evidenced via e-mail.
 - All applicants will then be required to engage in a formal interview facilitated by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser and a Panel Chair.
 - Dependent on the outcome of the interview, an enhanced DBS check for every applicant will be progressed.
 - Once all steps above have been progressed satisfactorily, the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will confirm with the applicant that they are able to progress to the next stage. A signed Panel Membership agreement (Appendix 5) will be required. A Panel member profile will also be required. If the applicant is to receive a payment, a payroll form will also be required (Appendix 9).

6. Induction and training of panel members

- 6.1 Each new Panel member will be provided with induction training which is to be completed within the first 10 weeks of being included on the central list.

- 6.2 Following completion of the above recruitment steps and as part of the induction training, the applicant will be expected to observe a minimum of one Panel dependent upon their level of experience and background. There is no upper limit in place but the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will monitor and support the applicant to move to a Panel member role when it is appropriate to do so.
- 6.3 The induction of Panel members will involve their observation of a Panel or Panels. Each new Panel member will be expected to remain after each observed Panel to meet with the Panel Chair and the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser to provide the opportunity to reflect on the Panel and to ask questions. The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will also maintain contact with new Panel members and provide support as required.
- 6.4 New panel members will also be provided with information regarding Panel training that is scheduled, previous copies of the quarterly Panel newsletters which include relevant information and links to Panel reports, and supporting documents for previous Panel training already held. The induction training will comprise a mixture of direct support, training and self-directed learning and background reading.
- 6.5 There will be several Panel training sessions organised by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser throughout the year; each training session will be repeated, one session will be held in person, the other will be held virtually. Those social work Panel members employed by ATV are also included in the training provided. It is acknowledged that an annual training day for Panel members and members of ATV is to be held. Wherever possible this is facilitated, however, the high number of attendees involved means this can be challenging to achieve in practice, and therefore the provision of shorter training opportunities throughout the year is a direct response to this challenge to ensure all relevant individuals are provided with the opportunity to engage in Panel training.
- 6.6 In addition, Panel members will be offered the chance to attend other training courses run by Adoption Tees Valley or by an external body when these are relevant to their role as a member of Panel.
- 6.7 Panel members will be kept informed of relevant local and national developments in adoption and fostering. This will be achieved by:
- Quarterly Panel newsletters
 - Six month Panel Chair and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser reports
 - Six month Panel business meetings

- Panel training as appropriate including reflective group discussions

7. Annual reviews of Panel members

- 7.1 All Panel members, including the Chairs, will have an annual review of their performance. The main aim of this review is to establish that the performance objectives contained in the Panel Membership agreement, job and person specifications are being met. In addition the review will also provide the opportunity for a discussion about the Panel member's strengths, areas for development, any training and development needs and how these needs will be met.
- 7.2 The annual reviews are carried out as follows:
- All Chairs must engage in a one to one annual review facilitated by the ATV Service Manager and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.
 - All Vice Chairs must engage in a one to one annual review facilitated by a Panel Chair and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.
 - All Panel members who request a one to one annual review will be provided with a one to one annual review facilitated by a Panel Chair and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.
 - All Panel members identified as having performance issues will be required to engage in a one to one annual review facilitated by a Panel Chair and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser.
 - All Panel members will also be expected to engage in an annual group review facilitated by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser unless they have identified they would prefer a one to one annual review only.
- 7.3 All Panel members will be provided with an annual review document (Appendix 10). The document comprises 3 parts:
- Part 1: Self-evaluation
 - Part 2: Group review
 - Part 3: Individual review/reflections from Panel Manager & Agency Adviser and Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs
- 7.4 Prior to the group review / one to one review taking place, all Panel members will be expected to complete Part 1. The information provided through all Panel members returned Part 1 self-evaluations will comprise the content of the group review (Part 2). The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will be responsible for collating feedback and producing a PowerPoint presentation to use in the group review. The group review will:
- Identify priorities for Panel training.

- Identify areas of Panel functioning that would benefit from strengthening.
- Understand how other Panel members view their Panel member colleagues. In advance of the group review, all Panel members will be asked to provide a strength for at least 5 Panel members. Feedback provided to be included in Part 3 of the review.

The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will provide a written summary of the group review for inclusion in all Panel members' annual reviews.

7.5 Part 3 of the annual review will be either:

- A one to one review if required or requested
- Or, a review of the Part 1, the group review, and a group discussion between the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser, the Chairs of Panel and the Vice Chairs on the Panel member's performance over the past 12 months. The review will include the strengths identified in the group review.

7.6 Once the 3 part annual review has been completed, a copy of the completed review form will be sent to the Panel member for their signature or agreement via e-mail, and this will be placed on the Panel member's electronic personnel file and a final copy will be given to the Panel member.

7.7 If there are any disagreements which cannot be resolved by discussion at the review meeting, the matter should be referred to the ATV Agency Decision Maker.

8. Planning and organisation of Panel meetings

8.1 Adoption Tees Valley Panel will meet weekly throughout the year, on a Wednesday morning. An additional Panel will be scheduled as required on a Tuesday morning. The Panel Administrator and Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will draw up an annual schedule of Panel dates in September each year for the start of the new year in January. The Panel Administrator will organise Chairs, Panel members and Medical Advisers for each Panel.

8.2 If an additional meeting is necessary to deal with urgent business which cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting, the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will arrange for an urgent Panel to be held.

8.3 No Panel will hear more than 3 Panel matters in any one Panel.

8.4 Once every 6 months, a Panel slot will be utilised to enable the 6 monthly Panel Business meeting to take place.

- 8.5 Quorum - No business may be conducted by the Adoption Panel unless at least the following meet as a Panel, these are:
- The person appointed to Chair the Panel or one of the Vice Chairs (independent).
 - A social worker with at least 3 years' relevant post-qualifying experience.
 - 3 other Panel members.
- 8.6 Panel members will be asked to give as much notice as possible of any subsequent changes to their attendance.
- 8.7 The Panel Manager & Agency Adviser will check in advance whether each meeting is going to be quorate and will seek a further relevant Panel member if Panel will not be quorate.
- 8.8 All Panel paperwork will be quality assured by the social worker's line manager. Once the paperwork has been quality assured, it will progress through a second quality assurance process by the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser. (Please refer to the Panel Quality Assurance Framework for the quality assurance tool).
- 8.9 The paperwork must be uploaded to the relevant electronic Panel folder.
- 8.10 All Panel paperwork must be in a position to be circulated to Panel members 2 calendar weeks (10 working days) prior to the Panel. In exceptional circumstances, Panel paperwork may need to be circulated after this time, however, Panel paperwork must be circulated no later than 5 working days before the Panel is due to be held. If it cannot be circulated within this timescale the matter will be stood down from Panel.
- 8.11 Panel paperwork will be sent to Panel members via a link in the Teams App.
- 8.12 Panel members must treat all information confidentially and securely.
- 8.13 Panel members are expected to read the Panel papers carefully before the meeting and come prepared to take an active part in the discussion.
- 8.14 Panel members are expected to complete a pre-Panel comments form which is to be sent to the Panel inbox at least 2 days before the Panel is due to be held.

- 8.15 Panel members are expected to complete a post-Panel feedback questionnaire after each Panel they have sat on.
- 8.16 If, after receiving the papers, a Panel member becomes aware that they have some prior personal knowledge or involvement in an item due to be discussed at Panel, they should contact the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser as soon as possible to declare an interest in that item. A decision will be made between the Chair of Panel and the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser whether the Panel member may be required to stand down from the Panel or not. Panel members need to declare any conflict of interests quickly to ensure a replacement can be identified if this means Panel will not be quorate.
- 8.17 Where a Panel member has significant concerns about missing information, or the quality of accuracy of information, to the extent they feel they may not be able to make a recommendation, they should contact the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser and the Chair in sufficient time before the Panel to enable gaps in information to be sought to avoid the matter needing to be withdrawn from Panel.

9. Items considered at Panel meetings

- 9.1 Adoption Tees Valley Panel meets the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. The items considered at Panel meetings are:
- (a) Applications from prospective adopters
 - (b) Children's adoption matches
 - (c) Brief reports
 - (d) Consensual adoption plans for children
 - (e) Referrals to Panel to propose to terminate approval
 - (f) Any other such matters the Agency wishes to put before Panel
- 9.2 Each item on the agenda will identify the relevant regulations which apply to that particular Panel item, so that Panel members are clear about what they are required to consider.

10. The attendance of observers at Panel

- 10.1 Adoption Tees Valley Panel recognises that there are situations in which it is appropriate for people to attend Panel meetings as observers, for instance as part of the induction process for new or prospective Panel members; as part of the learning process for new social workers and Medical Advisers;

Agency Decision Makers from the local authorities and ATV as part of their quality assurance function.

- 10.2 In view of the sensitive nature of the Panel's work, the attendance of observers will be kept to a minimum and there will normally only be one observer at any particular meeting.
- 10.3 All requests to attend Panel as an observer must be submitted in advance to the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser who will determine if this is appropriate or not. Before giving agreement to the request, the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser must:
- (a) Be satisfied the observer has a valid reason for attending
 - (b) Be satisfied there are no items on the agenda for the particular meeting which are so sensitive that observers are inappropriate
 - (c) Discuss and agree whether the observer should have access to the Panel papers for the particular meeting
 - (d) Discuss and agree whether the observer needs to complete a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix 11)
- 10.4 If it has been agreed that the observer should sign a Confidentiality Agreement, this should be completed prior to receiving the Panel papers or prior to attending the meeting.
- 10.5 These procedures do not apply to people who attend the Panel as part of an inspection or other regulatory requirement.

11. The attendance of applicants at Panel meetings

- 11.1 All applicants and prospective adopters who are being considered for a match with a child will be invited to attend Panel meetings. Invitations will be sent but attendance is not compulsory. When Panel is considering matters, people who do not attend the meeting will not be treated less favourably than people who do attend.
- 11.2 Applicants and prospective adopters who accept an invitation to attend a Panel meeting will be prepared and supported by their social workers. They will be given information on Panel membership and the format and processes of Panel meetings.
- 11.3 Single applicants and prospective adopters who choose to attend a Panel meeting will have the option to be accompanied by a person of their choice.

- 11.4 People who have attended Panel will be asked to complete a feedback questionnaire to provide their views of their experience. Information from these evaluation forms will ensure continuous service improvement.

12. Discussion and processes at Panel meetings

- 12.1 The Panel will follow the agenda attached at Appendix 12.
- 12.2 When asking questions of social workers, Panel members will be expected to frame questions and explore issues in a positive way and to seek confirmation and clarification. It will not be appropriate to begin to re-assess the application or proposed match, or to engage in prolonged or insistent questioning.
- 12.3 When asking the pre-agreed questions for applicants or prospective adopters, Panel members must not ask further questions.
- 12.4 Questions for applicants and prospective adopters will be formed from Panel members' comments sheets, agreed by the Chair in advance of Panel, and will be no more than 5 in number. The questions will be provided to applicants and prospective adopters at least an hour in advance of the Panel meeting.
- 12.5 Panel must make:
- A positive recommendation; or
 - A negative recommendation; or
 - Defer making a recommendation until they have further specific information to enable them to do so.
- 12.6 Whenever possible, the Chair will enable members to reach a consensus of opinion regarding each item of business. The Chair will begin this process by asking Panel members whether they feel they have enough information to enable them to make a recommendation. If Panel members feel they do not have enough information, Panel may defer making a recommendation until they have further specific information to enable them to do so.
- 12.7 If Panel members feel they do not have enough information, then each Panel member will be asked whether he/she supports a proposed recommendation. If the recommendation is supported by a majority of Panel members, the views of the dissenting Panel members will be made explicit in the minutes, although the specific Panel members will not be named. If

the Panel is evenly split, it is not in a position to make a positive recommendation and this will also be clearly reflected in the minutes. The Chair, in these circumstances, has a “casting vote” equivalent to a second vote. This should only be used when all efforts have been made to arrive at a consensus, or a clear majority view.

13. Decision making process

- 13.1 The role of Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for Panel decisions for:
- Applicants to be approved as adoptive parents will be undertaken by the Service Manager of Adoption Tees Valley.
 - Decisions regarding brief reports will be undertaken by the Service Manager of Adoption Tees Valley.
- 13.2 In the event the ADM is unavailable, an ADM from one of the 5 local authorities will act in this role.
- 13.3 The role of Agency Decision Maker for Panel recommendations for:
- A child’s match will be made by the agreed Agency Decision Maker in the child’s respective local authority.
 - A child’s consensual adoption plan will be made by the agreed Agency Decision Maker in the child’s respective local authority.
- 13.4 The Agency Decision Makers will receive a copy of all reports presented to Panel and the relevant Panel minutes.
- 13.5 The Panel minutes will be finalised no later than one week following the Panel being held.
- 13.6 The Agency Decision Maker will receive a copy of the Panel minutes as soon as they are finalised. The ADM must make their decision within seven working days of receipt of the Panel minutes. If the issue is complex i.e. if Panel have not recommended approval or if Panel members were not in agreement in respect of the recommendation, the Agency Decision Maker can discuss the matter with the Panel Manager & Agency Adviser but must not have any discussions with members of the Panel on the issue. The ADM will take account of the Panel recommendation, and reasons for its recommendation, but may come to a different decision, in some circumstances.

- 13.7 Written confirmation of the decision will be forwarded to the Adoption Tees Valley Panel administrator who will ensure that it is copied to the relevant files and forwarded to the social worker with responsibility for notifying the applicants or prospective adopters.
- 13.8 If, after the Panel's recommendation, the ADM proposes not to approve the applicants (whether or not this accords with the Panel's recommendation), they must notify the applicants in writing, giving reasons. This is known as the "qualifying determination." The applicants then have 40 working days in which to decide what to do. They can:
- **Accept the proposed decision.** A decision will be made at the end of 40 days or earlier if the applicants confirm in writing that they are withdrawing.
Or
 - **Make representation to the ADM.** The ADM will probably be in receipt of written information from the applicant(s) and may meet with the applicant(s). The ADM can decide whether or not to re-present the case back to Panel. If it is presented back to Panel, the Panel must make fresh consideration and make a recommendation, and the ADM must take this recommendation into account when making the decision. Following this representation the decision will be final.
Or
 - **Apply to the Independent Review Mechanism Adoption and Fostering (IRM).** Prospective (applicants) or approved adopters can apply to the IRM following a qualifying determination made on the basis of a full, or in the case of adopters a brief report. This is an independent review process, conducted by a Panel. Applicants may apply to the IRM following a "Qualifying Determination" made. The applicant will be invited to attend an independent Panel set up in a similar way to the agency's Panel. The agency will send representatives to the IRM Panel, and all paperwork will also be forwarded. However, it will not have a copy of the Panel minutes. The IRM's Panel recommendation and minutes will be sent to the ADM for the agency who will make a **final** decision.
The ADM will take account of the IRM recommendation, and Panel minutes but is not obliged to follow the IRM recommendation.

Further information on the IRM can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIR’S JOB SPECIFICATION

APPENDIX 2 – CHAIR’S PERSON SPECIFICATION

APPENDIX 3 – PANEL MEMBER’S JOB SPECIFICATION

APPENDIX 4 – PANEL MEMBER’S PERSON SPECIFICATION

APPENDIX 5 – PANEL MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT

APPENDIX 6 – PANEL MEMBER’S APPLICATION FORM

APPENDIX 7 – PANEL MEMBER’S CODE OF CONDUCT

APPENDIX 8 – NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS 21

APPENDIX 9 – PANEL MEMBER’S PAYROLL FORM

APPENDIX 10 – PANEL MEMBER’S ANNUAL REVIEW FORM

APPENDIX 11 – OBSERVER’S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

APPENDIX 12 – PANELS CHAIR’S AGENDA