

SECTION ONE

Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Adoptive Parents

Information, Initial Enquiries, Registration of Interest; Pre-assessment, Assessment and Approval

Overview

This Section provides an overview of Adoption Tees Valley's (ATV) arrangements to provide information about adoption to prospective adopters and outlines the procedures ATV follows regarding the following:-

- Response to initial enquiries and Registrations of Interest;
- Stage One pre-assessment activity;
- Stage Two assessment of prospective adopters;
- Process for approval.

Related procedures regarding [Assessment of Foster Carers for Adoption](#); [Early Permanence](#); [Partner Adoption Assessments](#) and [Inter Country Adoption](#) are held in separate sections .

Relevant Statutory Requirements and Guidance

- **Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005)**
- **Adoption and Children Act (2002)**
- **Statutory Guidance on Adoption (2013)**
- **Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014)**

Criteria

Adoption Tees Valley aims to offer a loving and permanent home through adoption to the children in the care of the Tees Valley Local Authorities (Darlington, Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland, Hartlepool).

Children's welfare is paramount throughout the adoption process. Prospective adopters are welcomed who can meet the diverse needs of children for whom adoption is the plan. ATV will seek to recruit and prepare applicants to meet the range of needs for the children requiring permanence through adoption in Tees Valley. ATV will focus on "Families for Children" and will help to prepare applicants to meet the needs of children, exploring prospective adopters' skills, motivation, family circumstances and support needs, through a strengths based assessment.

ATV will treat prospective adopters with respect and without discrimination throughout the adoption process. Adoption Tees Valley will consider the full range of prospective

adopters aged from 21 years old including, couples or single applicants, heterosexual and same sex couples, transgender people, people with disabilities, and people from a range of racial and cultural backgrounds. ATV welcomes people who already have children, including applicants where a child may live with another parent, or shared care.

The criteria Adoption Tees Valley work to when assessing and approving prospective adopters is detailed in **Appendix One**

Provision of Information about Adoption

Adoption Tees Valley provides general information about adoption to prospective adopters through its website www.adoptionteesvalley.org.uk. The website includes the Agency's Statement of Purpose and an information pack for members of the public to download which details the legal implications of adoption; the eligibility criteria for adopters; the characteristics of local children waiting for adoption and the approval process. Prospective adopters may also approach **First4Adoption** for general information about adoption.

Information Events

Adoption Tees Valley hold 2x monthly information sessions for people interested in finding out more about adoption, including virtual meetings, and from their office based on Oxbridge Avenue, Stockton-On-Tees, TS18 4LE. The dates for the information sessions are published in advance on Adoption Tees Valley's website. Prospective adopters are encouraged to register their attendance with Adoption Tees Valley in advance of the sessions, however this is not a requirement for participation. The information sessions provide general information about the Agency, the process of adoption and an overview of the needs of the children currently waiting for adoption through the Agency.

Adoption Tees Valley seek to offer an opportunity to find out more about adoption through attendance at the Information Events, where enquirers can meet with staff, and adoptive parents, and can ask questions, and find out more about the process. However, ATV recognises that some prospective adopters do not wish to attend a group session, or may have sufficient information, and wish to proceed to a discussion about their enquiry. Attendance at information Events is not a mandatory requirement, and enquirers may seek an individual call with a social worker to discuss their interest.

Prospective adopters may also approach Adoption Tees Valley for more detailed information about adoption by telephone on 01642 526400. Telephone enquiries are handled by Adoption Tees Valley's Enquiry Hub, which is available 9.00-5.00 Monday to Thursday, and 9.00-4.30 on Friday, with the exception of bank holidays.

From the point of initial contact by an enquirer Adoption Tees Valley will open a case record for the enquirer. Consent will be sought via the on line form, or duty call.

Where an enquiry does not proceed further the case record will be closed.

All information is held within ATV data protection policy, and the policy for retention of records (see website).

Initial Enquiries

Where a potential applicant decides they would like to pursue their interest in adoption with Adoption Tees Valley further, they may make enquiries through completing a “Request a Call back” form which is available on the Adoption Tees Valley website in the adoption pack or by making a telephone call to the Adoption Tees Valley on 01642 526400 to have an initial conversation with a member of the duty team.

All enquiries, whether online or by telephone call, will receive an Initial Conversation call within two hours of receipt from the Duty Service. If enquirers prefer to make an arrangement about when a discussion is convenient this can be requested on the request a call back form, or via contact with the duty service. The Initial Conversation will provide the opportunity for discussion and information sharing between the enquirer and the Duty Service to answer questions. The Duty Service will offer, and arrange an Initial Visit with the enquirer within 7 working days of the Initial Conversation, unless it is clear at this stage there are reasons not to proceed at this time.

Initial Visit

The initial visit should include both applicants where the enquiry is from a couple wishing to adopt, and will take place within the enquirers home at a time mutually convenient. The initial visit is the opportunity to formally provide information about adoption to enquirers, following which they may seek to register interest in adoption with ATV. The Initial Visit provides an opportunity for enquirers to discuss aspects of their circumstances, or interest, and to get more information from an experienced adoption social worker.

The adoption social worker will, through this visit, gather information upon which to base advice to enquirers about registering their interest in adoption; the timing of any application, and areas which they may wish to think about which would strengthen their application.

The social worker will explain the two-stage assessment process and timescales. The adoption social worker will request the enquirer to inform Adoption Tees Valley if there are likely to be any concerns in relation to health or other checks without delay.

The checks to be discussed will be:

- DBS
- Health reports from GP
- Health reports from private medical providers

- Personal references- 3 from the outset and up to a further 3 by request
- Previous partner checks
- Employment checks
- Checks with all previous employers or voluntary work involving children or vulnerable adults
- Home Local Authority check, and any LA I which the applicant has lived in the previous 10 years
- Schools for children within the family
- Social media checks

The social worker will also discuss the opportunity for early permanence with the enquirer and whether they may be interested in fostering a child for whom the plan is likely to become adoption, but where other options for the child have not yet been ruled out. Basic information about Early Permanence will be made available in the general information pack provided to enquirers. This information will outline:

- The objectives of Early Permanence.
- In what circumstances it might apply.
- The process is for becoming a dually approved carer, who may foster a child, prior to adopting.
- The benefits and uncertainties.

At the conclusion of the initial visit the adoption social worker will explain next steps, and the registration of interest process.

Where the adoption social worker has any questions or reservations regarding the information provided by the enquirer, she/he will share these with them during the visit. The adoption social worker will provide clear information with the enquirer about their advice on registration of interest. Enquirers will be informed about the process for Registration of Interest, and applicants' right to do so, even where agency advice at this stage is that adopting would not appear the right plan at this time. Where the social worker is clear that the enquirers would be suitable, she/he may indicate that a registration of interest is welcomed, and make arrangements to provide the ROI form.

The initial visit will be recorded on the CHARMS system and will include a summary which will inform future decision making on acceptance of registration of interest.

The adoption social worker will send the initial visit report to the Adoption Team Manager within 3 days of the visit for decision. The Adoption Team Manager, in conjunction with the social worker will consider the information gathered through the initial visit and make a decision on advice to the enquirer about registration of interest, and commencement of stage 1. The social worker will provide advice to applicants on whether Adoption Tees Valley would be likely to accept a registration of interest,

however, applicants must be offered the opportunity to submit a Registration of Interest if they wish to do so.

Where the information gathered suggest that the ATV would be unlikely to accept a registration of interest at this time, the Team Manager will provide advice to the enquirer about any steps they could take to meet the criteria to adopt or of how they might pursue their interest elsewhere and details of the **First4Adoption** website. However, ATV cannot prohibit an enquirer from registering their interest.

Where the decision is to proceed the social worker will notify the applicants and arrange for a Registration of Interest Form to be sent electronically to them, within 1 working day of the decision.

Where an enquirer has been advised against applying, they may still request a ROI form, and this will be provided by Business Support to them.

Registration of Interest in Adoption

Registration of Interest (ROI) is a formal process and triggers the start of the assessment. The enquirer will be known as Prospective Adopter (PA) from this stage onwards.

The PA will be asked to send this form within 10 days and any queries can be directed to the social worker, or Business Support team.

The form requests the potential adopters to confirm the following information: -

- Name and address.
- Agreement for Adoption Tees Valley to commence Stage One checks.
- Confirmation that the potential adopters have not registered their interest with another Adoption Agency.
- That the potential adopters are contactable in the week following their registration of interest and a request for times for contact during that period.
- Responses to specific questions to demonstrate the potential adopters meet the eligibility criteria.
- An up to date photograph of each member of the household.

Within 1 working day of receipt of a ROI form, the Team Manager will make a decision whether to accept it.

The Agency will notify applicants in writing of the decision. ATV will only decline a Registration of Interest if the enquirer does not meet the eligibility criteria for adoption or where information provided at the IV stage indicates now is not the right time. Where the Team Manager declines to accept a Registration of Interest, they will write to the

prospective adopter to provide an explanation of the reasons for their decision and offer them the choice of approaching another Adoption Agency or First4Adoption for signposting to another Agency.

Stage One – Pre-Assessment Process

The Stage One, pre-assessment stage starts begins once Adoption Tees Valley accepts the Registration of Interest in adoption. Stage One should normally take no more than **eight weeks** to complete. The activity which will be completed during Stage One includes the prospective adopter's initial training and preparation and completion of prescribed checks and references to confirm there is no adverse reason why the assessment should not proceed further. Stage One ends when all of the checks have been completed.

Stage One Agreement

A social worker will be allocated to undertake the assessment.

The social worker will explain the expectations of the Stage One assessment process to the prospective adopter and will draw up the Prospective Adopter Stage One Agreement with the prospective adopter which will set out the responsibilities and expectations of both the prospective adopter and the Agency during Stage One.

This Stage One Agreement will include:-

- Information about the counselling, information and preparation for adoption to be provided to the prospective adopter;
- The procedure for undertaking DBS and Medical checks
- Details of the training that the prospective adopter will undertake, which may be started within stage 1, but may be within stage 2, where there is no Training group availability within the timescale of stage 1.
- Information about the role of the prospective adopter during the Stage One process, including a requirement to inform of any relevant new circumstances, and to follow up with referees where these have not been provided in a timely way.
- Timescales;
- Information about the process for making representations to the Agency (including a complaint).

Pre-Assessment Information

Adoption Tees Valley will gather the following information during Stage One:-

Information about the prospective adopter

- Name, sex, date and place of birth and address including the local authority area;
- If the prospective adopter is married or is in a civil partnership and applying as a sole adopter, the reasons for this decision.
- Names and addresses of a minimum of 3 and up to 6 referees who will give personal references regarding the prospective adopter, not more than two of whom may be a relative;
- Name and address of the prospective adopter's registered medical practitioner;
- If the prospective adopter:
 - Is married, the date and place of the marriage;
 - Has formed a civil partnership, the date and place of registration of that partnership; or
 - Has a partner, details of that relationship.
 - Details of any previous marriage, civil partnership or relationship;
 - Names and contact details of previous partners for the purpose of obtaining a previous partner reference.
 - Whether the prospective adopter is domiciled or habitually resident in part of the British Islands and if habitually resident for how long they have been habitually resident;
 - Checks with the local authorities where the prospective adopter has lived for the within the last ten years to determine whether records held by Children's Services or Education hold relevant information about the prospective adopter and their household. This information must be confirmed by a written report from that local authority within fifteen working days of the request.
 - Details of other members of the prospective adopter's household (including any Children of the prospective adopter whether or not resident in the household).

Police Checks

Adoption Tees Valley will conduct criminal record checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service regarding the prospective adopter and any members of their household aged 18 years and over.

Prospective adopters will not be able to proceed to Stage Two where criminal record checks identify them or an adult member of their household as having been convicted of a specified offence or having received a police caution for a specified offence.

A 'specified offence' includes:

- An offence against a child/ any offence involving bodily injury to a child, other than an offence of common assault or battery;
- An offence relating to indecent images of children under the age of 16;
- Sexual offences of rape; assault by penetration; causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent; sexual activity/causing or inciting sexual activity/inducement, threat or deception to procure sexual activity with a person with a mental disorder impeding choice.

Where the prospective adopter's full history cannot be confirmed by conducting a criminal record check and other background checks (for example, a reference of good conduct where they have lived abroad for an extended period), the Team Manager will make the decision whether further checks or references should be obtained. In cases where Adoption Tees Valley decides not to proceed as it has insufficient information about the prospective adopter or their household, the Team Manager will write to the prospective adopter with its decision and explanation.

Information obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) will not be retained on the prospective adopter's case record, it will be the outcome that is recorded.

Where the criminal record checks disclose previous convictions or cautions for non-specified offences, the adoption social worker will make further enquiries about the circumstances of the offence and will discuss with the team manager in a case discussion, which will be recorded on the case record. The adoption social worker will provide a risk assessment regarding the offences to the Team Manager who will make a decision about the continuation of the prospective adopter's Stage One assessment. Where the Team Manager decides not to proceed with Stage One due to concerns about the prospective adopter's offences, they will write to the prospective adopter with their decision and reasons.

For joint applications, and where criminal records are the reason for ending an assessment, Adoption Tees Valley will only inform the prospective adopter with the convictions or cautions of the specific reason for terminating Stage One. Adoption Tees Valley will not inform the other prospective adopter of the detail regarding the conviction or caution but will inform them that because of information obtained from the checks the joint application cannot proceed.

Likewise, where the checks reveal adverse information about an adult member of the household which indicates that the Agency must terminate Stage One, Adoption Tees Valley will not disclose information about that conviction or caution other than to the individual concerned. In these circumstances, Adoption Tees Valley will counsel the prospective adopter that checks indicate that the Agency cannot continue with Stage One and their application to adopt.

Health Checks

The adoption social worker will request the prospective adopter to arrange an adoption medical examination with their G.P. ATV will send the AH1 form and Functionality Questionnaire to the applicants' GP, for completion when the adult health assessment is undertaken. The G.P. will be asked to complete this health check and report and return to the Agency Medical Adviser.

Adoption Tees Valley will select one of their appointed Medical Advisers, based on where the applicants live to complete the Agency's Adoption Medical Report

The Medical Adviser will take into account health information from the prospective adopter, their GP, and consultants to provide a medical summary and opinion to inform the prospective adopter's assessment of suitability to adopt. The Medical Adviser will advise the Agency whether additional specialist opinion is required.

In considering the medical information and advice from the Medical Adviser, Adoption Tees Valley must be satisfied that prospective adopters have a reasonable expectation of continuing to enjoy good health to care for a child throughout the child's childhood.

Health checks will be updated prior to approval panel subject to the original date of the GP medical. Medicals are expected to be completed within 6 months of approval panel. PA will be required to complete a health self-declaration prior to panel.

References

Personal references

The adoption social worker will request the prospective adopters for the names of at least three, and up to six personal referees. Referees should

- Be adults.
- Have known the applicant for at least two years in a personal capacity.
- If a joint application, should know both prospective adopters well.
- A maximum of two of the referees can be relatives, or one where only 3 references are provided.
- Preferably have experience of caring for children either in a personal or professional capacity

Employment references

The adoption social worker must obtain a written reference from each prospective adopter's last or current employer and all employment where they work or have worked with children or vulnerable adults. Depending on the prospective adopters' work history, the adoption social worker may consider that further references from previous employers may need to be considered. If the adopter is self-employed, the adoption social worker will consider a reference from an accountant or customer reference. Adoption Tees Valley will seek references where a prospective adopter

has worked with children or other vulnerable groups throughout their career, or in a volunteering capacity.

Previous partners

Previous partner references form part of safeguarding checks in relation to prospective adopter's relationship, and parenting history, where applicable. It is expected that previous partner references will be obtained, and efforts made to contact them, even when contact has been lost. It is understandable that this may cause some discomfort in some cases, however most people recognise that their ex-partner will want to move on in life, and will support this. Where there have been children to that relationship or step-parenting which resulted in co-parenting, the adoption social worker must request an ex-partner reference. If the prospective adopter was married, or in a relationship for more than five years, or was living together within the last ten years, the adoption social worker should contact and interview the previous partner. Exceptions will only be made where there is a clear risk of harm, such as previous violence or coercive behaviour, for example (but not limited to these). The reason for not contacting a previous partner will be detailed in the PAR and other referees should be used to validate relationship history.

Children

The adoption social worker must always contact and interview adult children and children who were cared for jointly. The adoption social worker will arrange to interview adult children face-to-face wherever practicable. Children of the prospective adopter living away from home will also be contacted, and references sought from them.

Adult children will not have a right of veto of the application to become an adopter, but their views should be understood and evaluated.

Grandparents

If grandparents are likely to act as a major support to the adoptive family or there are concerns about the extended family, the adoption social worker must interview them.

School/Nursery/Health Visitor

Where the applicant has pre-school, nursery, or statutory school age children, whether birth children, or adopted children, the adoption social worker will obtain consent from the prospective adopter to contact the children's nursery or school, or health visitor for a child under five years, for a reference regarding the prospective adopter's ability to promote the child's education health and development. On receipt of the reference the adoption social worker will interview the nursery or school to confirm the detail of the reference.

If a child has a disability or special needs then the adoption social worker should ask for information from the professionals involved with that child which may include educational psychologist, paediatrician, CAMHS or GP.

Armed Forces

Checks will be undertaken with the armed forces only if the prospective adopter's employment is current.

Overseas checks

Where an applicant has lived overseas in the past 10 years the adoption social worker will obtain a reference from an employer during that time. If that is not possible a personal reference will be sought from an individual who knew them that time. If neither option is possible, the Agency will consider an overseas police check.

Previous Adoption and Fostering Agencies

Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the adoption social worker will request the relevant agency to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference. The adoption social worker will contact the Agency access and view the prospective adopter's case record. Consent will have been obtained via the Registration of Interest form.

Testamentary Guardian

The adoption social worker will discuss with the prospective adopter the requirement for a Testamentary Guardian to be identified within their support network. The nominated person(s) will be interviewed as part of the assessment process. Where the adopter progresses to stage 2, the interview with the Testamentary Guardian should be detailed within the PAR, which could be as one of the referee interviews.

Preparation for Adoption

All prospective adopters will be requested to participate in three day mandatory adoption preparation groups held at Adoption Tees Valley. Preparation for Adoption groups are designed to help prospective adopters make an informed decision about pursuing adoption based on an understanding of the qualities they have to offer a child.

Those undertaking a Fast Track assessment (see below) may proceed without attending a preparation Training Group, where it is felt previous adoption preparation training was recent and continues to be relevant. Applicants who have not adopted through ATV previously, but have adopted elsewhere will be expected to undertake at least 2 days preparation to adopt training, in order to fully engage with the ATV expectations and Post Adoption Support offer.

Those PA's planning to offer Early Permanence will be expected to undertake the 2 day EP preparation training.

Stage One - Pre-Assessment Decision

Adoption Tees Valley will gather Stage One information and make a Pre-Assessment Decision regarding suitability to adopt within eight weeks of the date on which the prospective adopter registered their interest in adopting a child (unless there are good reasons to extend that time period). If the time period is extended, the Team Manager must record the reasons for delay on the prospective adopter's case record, along with supporting evidence.

The social worker will gather and review the information obtained through Stage One and make a recommendation to the Team Manager about the next step.

When the Pre-Assessment Decision is that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child, the Team Manager will write to the prospective adopter with an explanation of the reasons why they will not be able to proceed to Stage Two and provide details of the national advice line. The letter will include a complaints leaflet. The Independent Review Mechanism is not available to applicants for decisions made during Stage One.

Where the Pre-Assessment Decision is that the prospective adopter might be suitable to adopt a child, the Team Manager will write to the prospective adopter to advise them of the decision and that they have six months in which to notify the agency if they wish to proceed to Stage Two – the Assessment.

If the prospective adopters provide notification of their wish to proceed outside this six months' time limit, they will need to restart Stage One. The Agency will contact the prospective adopter within five working days of their notification and offer a re-entry interview. In such a case, the Stage One Agreement should take into account activities the prospective adopters have undertaken previously.

Stage 2 – Assessment Process

Adoption Tees Valley will commence Stage 2 only with applicants who have completed stage 1 with ATV, or who are eligible for a Fast Track process.

Stage 2 is focused on understanding the applicants, their family and history, and matters relevant to the adoption of a child who has been removed from birth parents, and in LA care. It is also a time of preparing people to adopt, by providing information, and access to further means of understanding the needs of children who require permanence via adoption. This extends to family and friends who will become part of the child's life, and part of the future support network.

Stage 2 will also help prospective adopters to consider the needs of children they may wish to adopt, and what supports or additional training they need to broaden and strengthen their readiness for children's wider needs. The assessment will explore whether the PA's may consider adoption of siblings, or be willing to adopt a single child, and consider further siblings if they are born at a later stage. ATV will not

ordinarily limit consideration to a specific gender of child and will encourage prospective adopters to think about how they can meet a child's needs, rather than determining what they can/cant accept from the outset. This will help with preparing for the needs of a child at the time of placement, but also for future emerging needs as the child grows and develops.

Stage Two starts when Adoption Tees Valley receives notification from the prospective adopter that they wish to proceed with the assessment process (within six months of the Agency's decision at Stage One). Stage Two must be completed within four months unless there are exceptional circumstances which prevent ATV from making the decision within that timescale which must be recorded on the Prospective Adopter's case record. Stage Two will end with the Agency Decision Maker's decision about the suitability of the prospective adopter to adopt a child, following Panel recommendation.

On receipt of the notification, the adoption social worker will meet with the prospective adopter to explain the Stage Two procedure including:-

- Assessment activity and reference interviews to be undertaken
- Preparation Training, including dates where this has not already commenced.
- Where Early Permanence is to be considered, the additional requirements for preparation and training.
- Dates for family and Friends training
- Planning for a Family Network Meeting
- Any additional information to be made available to the adopter, such as registration with Catch.
- Expectations of the prospective adopter(s) in respect of contribution to the assessment
- Decision making process
- Adoption Panel
- The Agency Decision Maker
- Role of the Independent Review mechanism

The Agency will prepare with the prospective adopter a Stage Two Prospective Adopter Plan detailing the assessment process, dates for meetings/visits, agreed training and any further information that may be required, the preparation of the PAR and a Panel date.

The Team Manager and adoption social worker will supervise the assessment at least once in stage 2 and review progress and address any likely delays.

The Stage Two assessment will comprise a series of interviews, the majority of which will take place in the prospective adopters' home. Prospective adopters should be

interviewed at least once both individually and with their partner, and all other members of the household will also be interviewed, including the children.

The areas covered in interviews will include the following the subject areas:

- Individual profiles of all members of the household, including a photograph and physical description, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, religious persuasion, personality and interests, relationship (if any) to the child;
- Information about the home, the local community and the neighbourhood;
- Details of education and employment - past and present;
- Income and expenditure, and details of any outstanding debts, including duration of repayments;
- Details of past and present relationships;
- Motivation to adopt/childlessness;
- Parenting capacity, experience of being parented and experience with children;
- Support network, including wider family network;
- Identity of the prospective adopter including through the lenses of the Adoption England AFDiT framework; practitioners should seek to understand the prospective adopter's ability to understand the child's individual identity and needs, cultural experiences, heritage, important relationships, celebrations, language and community connections.
- Views and feelings about adoption and its significance, attitudes to birth families and approach to openness in adoption and contact;
- Views about parental responsibility and what it means;
- Views about a suitable home environment for the child;
- Views about the importance and value of education;
- Views and feelings about the importance of a child's religious and cultural upbringing;
- Any other information which indicates how the prospective adopter and anybody else living in the household is likely to relate to a child placed for adoption;
- Any other relevant information which might assist the adoption panel or the adoption agency.

As part of the assessment:

- A family tree and Chronology of key events in the prospective adopter's life from birth must be compiled, showing his or her educational, employment, marital and/or relationship history and addresses for the previous 10 years; any gaps and/or unusual patterns should be explored;
- All information provided by the prospective adopter must be independently verified where possible, by checking it against other sources such as referees;

- Where an applicant has been divorced or separated, factors contributing to the breakdown of the relationship should be verified. This applies equally to significant relationships between couples who are not married;
- The adequacy and safety of the prospective adoptive home and transport
Where the prospective adopters have pets, a pet questionnaire will be conducted and any associated risks should be taken into account both in relation to the pet itself and where the pet is kept. Where necessary, an independent assessment may be requested and should be provided by the prospective adopters.

Family and Support Network, and Family and Friends Training:

- All support network members will be encouraged to attend the ATV Family and Friends training session, which is offered to provide a further opportunity to find out more about the needs of an adopted child, and how to support the PA's.
- A flexible approach can be considered such as the online Family and Friends training or a bespoke session.

These Family network evaluations should be included in the Prospective Adopter Report, see below.

The assessment will consider the likely need for adoption support services for prospective adopters and any member of their family.

The assessment will also cover the prospective adopter's views on post-placement and post-adoption contact and their willingness to share information with birth parents about the progress of the adopted child. These issues should be specifically reported on to the Adoption Panel.

The Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR)

Adoption Tees Valley uses the Coram BAAF format for PAR, and will use the most recently published format.

The information gathered during Stage One (the pre-assessment stage) and Stage Two (the assessment stage), including the checks and personal references, will form the basis of the Prospective Adopter's Report, together with any other relevant information.

The Medical Advisor's summary will be included within the PAR.

Interviews (summary and evaluation) with referees will be included in the PAR, however, these sections will not be provided to the applicants. This is a safeguarding provision, in order that referees may provide their opinion on the applicant's suitability to adopt a child, or any concerns they may have.

The adoption social worker who assesses the prospective adopter will draft the Prospective Adopter's Report highlighting any issues of concern and submit it to their Team Manager for quality assurance. Where there are any issues of significant concern or where clarification is needed, the Team Manager may arrange for a second opinion visit by another adoption social worker to visit the prospective adopter to discuss these but must remain mindful of the time frame for Stage Two. The second social worker could be a Team Manager or another adoption social worker.

Once the report is quality assured and authorised by the Team Manager, the Team Manager and the adoption social worker will both sign and date the report.

Where information received during the assessment leads Adoption Tees Valley to consider that the prospective adopter is unlikely to be considered suitable to adopt a child, a Brief Report will be prepared regardless of whether or not all the required assessment information has been obtained and will include information gathered to date. A decision not to complete the full assessment must be authorised by the Recruitment Team Manager, and the Service Manager notified. Depending on the nature of the information, advice may also need to be sought from the Agency's Medical Adviser or legal adviser, or both. The concerns should be explained to the prospective adopter and they should be offered counselling, involving other professionals as appropriate. As a result of the counselling and advice, the prospective adopter may decide to withdraw their application. If they decide not to withdraw their application, the Brief Report should be prepared by the adoption social worker, and presented to the Adoption Panel. The applicants have the right to attend Panel, and submit their own views in writing, 7 days prior to the date of Panel, as any other prospective adopter.

Where the Adoption Tees Valley social worker is progressing with a positive recommendation the Prospective Adopter's Report will include an assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt together and recommendation regarding approval with an opinion regarding the most suitable criteria for placement for the prospective adopter.

Quality Assurance (QA)

The social worker completing the report will provide the team manager/supervisor with a final copy, which is proposed to be the final report. The team manager provides QA on the copy, and where applicable amendments will be made by the social worker, before sending to PA's (see below). The final version, signed by the PA's will be provided to the Panel Manager and Agency Advisor to Panel, who will provide final QA before circulation to panel.

Prospective Adopter Views on Report and Providing Report to Panel

When the Prospective Adopter's Report is completed, a redacted copy (without referees' interviews) should be sent to the prospective adopters and they must be notified that the application is to be referred to the Adoption Panel and the date of the

Adoption Panel. The applicants should be invited to send any observations in writing within five working days, beginning with the date on which the notification was sent. (This timescale may be extended in exceptional circumstances.) At the end of the five working days (or, where that timescale is extended by ATV, as soon as possible after the prospective adopter's observations are received) the following must be sent to the Adoption Panel:

- The signed Prospective Adopter's Report and the prospective adopter's observations.
- The PAR will include details of the health of the adopter, and Medical Advisor summary.
- The PAR will include a summary of the references and interviews with referees.
- Any other relevant information obtained by the agency
- Where adopters have previously been approved to adopt, the minutes of the Adoption panel and the Agency Decision Makers Decision document should be submitted to Panel, alongside the current PAR.

It is ATV practice to provide Panel with all reports 5 working days in advance of the Panel meeting at which the case will be presented.

The Adoption Panel administrator will send prospective adopter an invitation to attend the Adoption Panel who will consider the Prospective Adoption Report and its recommendations.

Fast Track Assessments

A Fast Track assessment is available for any applicants who meet specified criteria, meaning the length of assessment time should be reduced, and unnecessary duplication avoided.

The following are eligible:

- Adopters who have previously adopted under Adoption Agencies 2005.
- Approved foster carers at the time of application, or who have been approved under Fostering Services Regulations (2011).
- Inter country adopters who have been approved under Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations (2005)

The fast track timescale is 4 months from Registration of Interest to ADM.

The applicants progress immediately to stage 2 of the assessment process, with a tailored assessment plan being put in place.

For Second time adopters, the Initial Visit will include exploration of the health and wellbeing of the adoptive parents; the circumstances of the child/ren adopted, and why now is the right time to adopt again; the suitability of the home for further children; confirmation that checks will be made with the home Local Authority, any school or nursery of the child, and that a minimum further 2 references would be required. A

view should be gathered from the enquirers about the previous adoption preparation training and availability to update this. The social worker will provide the recommendation following initial visit to the Recruitment Team manager for a decision on whether to proceed, and agreement about what further checks will be needed, given the circumstances of the case.

Fresh DBS checks will always be required on all adults over age 18 living in the household, unless the original check was within the last 12 months and was undertaken by ATV.

A fresh new current Local Authority check will always be required.

The following guidance is set out for decision on whether to request a new full medical, or an updated medical check:

- The Medical Advisor must always be consulted on the decision making where the Agency is planning not to update the health assessment, and should be provided with the last full medical, and any medical update, in order to make that decision.
- If within 2 years since the last health assessment (adult)- this requirement will depend on the health of the adopter. If fit, well and no new issues, Medical Advisor will likely advise no new medical.
- If any new issues, within 2 years, Medical Advisor may advise an AH2, or may request a full new medical, dependent on circumstances.
- Where the adopter's last medical is over 2 years ago, and there are no new issues, and the adopter is generally fit and well, the MA will advise AH2 update.
- Coram BAAF guidance is that an AH2 should be repeated every 2 years.
- Where the adopter's last medical is over 3 years ago, a new AH1 medical will be required.
- Coram BAAF guidance is that full medicals should be repeated every 3 years.
- Any advice provided by the Medical Advisor should be taken into account, and if a decision is to be made to go against the MA advice, the Service Manager should be consulted.
- The social work assessment will explore any issues that are raised by the Medical Advisor.

The social worker and Recruitment Team Manager will determine which former checks can be taken from previous assessments. This would be expected to include previous LA checks, former partner checks, all but 2 of the previous references.

The social worker and Recruitment Team Manager will decide whether it would be advisable, or required that prospective adopters would undertake preparation training again, and this will be related to length of time since adoption preparation was last undertaken; whether they are foster carers, or have adoption experience; familiarity

with the content of the Preparation Training delivered by Adoption Tees Valley. Foster carers will be expected to undertake 2 days of the 4 day Preparation for Adoption Course. Adopters who have not adopted through ATV will be required to undertake 2 of the 4 days course.

The Recruitment Team manager will decide on whether to invite Registration of Interest, and the Assessment will commence from receipt of ROI.

For assessment of Foster Carers who wish to adopt the child in their care, please see **Guidance for Assessment of Foster Carers for Adoption of the Child in their Care**

Panel and Post Approval

The quality assured PAR is provided to Panel, for consideration on suitability to adopt. The recommendations of the Panel will be provided to the Agency Decision Maker, along with the minutes of the meeting, and any other information presented to panel.

See [Panel procedure](#) for detail of the Panel process, and the procedure for the Agency Decision making a qualifying determination, and a proposal not to approve.

The Agency Decision Maker will make the decision on suitability to adopt and include any preferred matching criteria which are to apply. These are for guidance only, as the only permitted approval category under regulations is suitability to adopt.

The ADM will complete the Agency Decision Form within 7 working days of receipt of the Panel minutes and papers presented to panel.

The ADM will be notified to the assessing social worker, who will telephone the applicants to advise them of the decision, on the same working day.

A letter of notification of approval will be sent out from the Agency to the now approved adopters, advising them of the date on which they were approved as suitable to adopt.

The adopters will also be provided with a copy of their matching agreement, which is a working tool to be developed with the social worker, to confirm agreement about how the adopters would like to be informed about possible links and matches.

A letter detailing the next steps for matching, the "Next Steps" letter, will be sent to the prospective adopters. This letter outlines the agency practice on linking, matching and sharing information, and encouragement to continue to progress personal development, including training, for preparing for a match.

Appendix One

Criteria for Prospective Adopters

There are only 3 clear requirements for adopting in the UK.

An individual or couple cannot apply for an assessment of their suitability to adopt unless they meet, or would meet, the eligibility criteria to apply for an Adoption Order. The criteria are that:

- The prospective adopter(s) is at least 21 years old;
- At least one of the couple or the single prospective adopter is domiciled in a part of the British Islands or both of the couple or the single prospective adopter have been habitually resident in a part of the British Islands for a period of not less than one year ending with the date of the application for an adoption order; and
- Neither prospective adopter(s) nor an adult member of their household has been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence. Specified offences are as set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005) 23 (3) (a,b,c,d)

Beyond these 3 clear legal requirements, Adoption Tees Valley operates an inclusive approach to applications from people wishing to consider adoption. Children come from a range of different backgrounds and have differing needs, ages and circumstances. There is need for adopters from many diverse backgrounds to offer well matched family life for children from the region, and further across the UK. Adoption Tees Valley has in place a small number of guiding principles for applicants which are in place to safeguard the future wellbeing, health, and stability of children and of adoptive parents.

Individual and Joint applicants

Applications will be considered from married couples, civil partners, unmarried couples or single people.

In the case of joint applications, there is no minimum requirement on the length of the marriage/civil partnership/relationship, but the Agency will require assurance about the stability of the relationship. Adoption Tees Valley would expect joint applicants to have lived together for at least 2 years at the point of starting Stage 2 of the assessment process.

Where a couple live together as partners, both applicants will need to be assessed together. It is not possible to assess one applicant in a couple as an adopter.

Adoption Tees Valley will consider applications from single people of either gender.

Religion

Applications will be welcomed from people of any or no religious persuasion.

Ethnicity

Applications will be welcomed from people of any race, faith or culture.

Age

The minimum age for adopters is 21 years. There is no specific upper age limit. Older and more experienced people may assume the care of older children, provided they will have the health and vigour to meet the child's varied demands in their growing years and to be there for them into adulthood. Age is also not necessarily linked to general health, fitness and emotional wellbeing. The agency's medical adviser will investigate and obtain relevant information about a prospective adopter's health in order to be satisfied that they are able to take on the task of adopting a child and have the expectation of caring for the child through childhood and into adulthood.

Gender

Applications will be welcomed from people of either sex.

Sexual Orientation

Applications are welcomed from heterosexual people, and those from lesbian, gay, and transgender orientation.

Income

It is expected that applicants will be able to demonstrate financial stability, for the future stability and wellbeing of caring for a child. Applicants may be in employment or not employed. Whatever the applicants' income, they will need to consider the financial implications of increasing their family. However, Adoption Tees Valley recognises that applicants who are on low income may have the qualities and parenting capacity to adopt a child, and will consider applicants where the needs of a child mean they may be eligible for an adoption allowance to help care for that child.

Health

Applicants will be required to have a full medical by their GP, and undergo any further tests/checks that may be required by the Adoption Panel's Medical Adviser. The Medical Adviser will advise on the applicants' suitability, from a health point of view, to meet the needs of a child throughout his or her childhood.

Smoking

ATV operates in accordance with Coram BAAF practice guidance on placing children for adoption with smokers. Children under the age of 5 years, or with any health needs or disabilities of any age, will not be placed with smokers. Current agency medical advice is that applicants can be considered non-smokers when they have not smoked for 12 months. Applicants who choose to vape with e-cigarettes are welcome to apply but must be free from using tobacco as above for at least 12 months. Applicants will not be considered for the above children where they smoke outside of the home environment. Any smoking is deemed to be relevant for the purposes of children's placement.

ATV encourages all applicants to give up smoking, including outside of the home, due to the well evidenced implications for the health of children who are exposed to smoking environments.

Criminal Convictions

A person who is seeking approval as an adoptive parent will not be considered if s/he or any adult member of the household has been cautioned for or convicted of an offence against a child which involves violence or bodily injury (other than common assault or battery), cruelty (to a child under 16), indecency, abduction, the supply of Class A drugs or the importation/possession of indecent photographs of a child under 16 or a sexual offence against a child unless the offence was contrary to sections 6, 12 or 13 of the Sexual offences Act 1956 and the person concerned was under 20 when the offence was committed.

Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In cases of doubt or dispute, the matter will be referred to the Adoption Service Manager who may also consult with Local Authority Agency Decision Maker in making a decision regarding an application.

Accommodation

Applicants may own their own home or live in rented accommodation. They must demonstrate that they have a secure home environment in which to bring up a child.

They will need accommodation appropriate to the number and ages of the children they are seeking to adopt.

It is not a requirement that applicants have a spare bedroom for the child, when they apply. However, the accommodation and needs of the child would be relevant to the

assessment. It would be expected that applicants can demonstrate readiness for a child to have separate bedroom accommodation as he/she grows up.

Fertility Tests/Treatment

Childless couples wishing to adopt will usually be required to have completed any fertility tests and treatment, and to have had a period of time, since completing the tests before an application can be accepted. While guidance is that this may be 6 months, it is possible that this timescale would not be the same in all cases, with some applicants requiring longer and some less time to work through feelings around infertility. This is because it is important for couples to have accepted their infertility and grieved before moving on to start the adoption process.

Applicants who have a Child or Children

Applications will be welcomed from people who already have a child, in which case any children should usually be at least two years older or younger than the age of the child an applicant is seeking to adopt.

Domicile/Habitual Residence in the British Isles

Applicants do not have to have British Citizenship, but should have their Domicile or Habitual Residence in the British Isles. Where there is a joint application, only one of the applicants need to be domiciled in the British Isles or both should be habitually resident here. In all these cases it is essential to see all relevant documents in order to fully establish nationality and immigration status.

Where there is doubt, potential applicants should be asked to seek independent advice.

Location

Applications are welcome from those who reside within the Tees Valley or 100 miles radius from our boundary area .

Applicants must be prepared to travel for group meetings, introductions etc. and be available for assessment and home visits.

Child Care Experience

It is beneficial for adopters to have some knowledge and experience of caring for children but this is not a requirement. The Agency also offers training and support for adopters to help build a trusting relationship with a child and meet their needs throughout life.

Support Network

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have accessible and established support networks of family and friends who will be in a position to provide support with parenting as well as emotional and practical support post adoption.

Pets

Applicants pets in the household will be assessed as part of the assessment. The key criteria is that a pet does not pose any risk to a child.

Post Placement/Post Adoption Contact

Prospective adopters will be expected to comply with arrangements for post placement/post adoption contact with the child's birth family, where the agency considers it is in the child's best interests for such contact to take place. The agency has introduced a digital platform called Virtual Memory Box for the exchange of in direct contact arrangements. Training, support and guidance will be offered to PA through the process.