
ADOPTION POLICY

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1. THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 1.1 Knowsley Borough Council seeks to promote the upbringing of children within their birth family, or extended family, in accordance with the spirit and provisions of the Children Act 1989.
- 1.2 Where this is not possible the Knowsley Adoption Agency, based within the Adoption Service, undertakes to find a permanent alternative family in which the child is given the opportunity of a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.
- 1.3 All looked after children will have a plan for permanence considered at their second statutory review. Adoption is one way in which children can be provided with a stable and permanent family life. This will be considered as an option in cases where a child cannot return to the care of their birth family members.
- 1.4 The Local Authority has a duty to maintain an adoption service designed to consistently meet the needs of adopted children, their adoptive and birth parents.
- 1.5 The Adoption Agency recognises the lifelong impact of adoption on adoptees, birth relatives, including birth siblings, and adopters. The Agency seeks to offer a service which is responsive and sensitive to these needs.

2. DEFINITION

Adoption is:

The total severing of any legal relationship, rights or responsibilities between a child and her/his parents, and the legal assumption of these rights and responsibilities by the adoptive family.

Adoption Order – is an order made by the court. The order extinguishes parental responsibility (PR) of the parent(s) and anyone else who has PR for the child, and any order under the 1989 Act, such as a contact order, or a Residence Order. The Adoption Order gives full parental responsibility for the child to the adopter(s).

The ACA 2002 – means the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The “1989 Act” – means the Children Act 1989.

Civil partner – each member of a same sex couple who have registered a civil partnership.

Couple - a married couple, or two people (whether of different sexes or the same sex) living as partners in an enduring family relationship.

Parental responsibility (PR) – all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and their property

Partner – is a person who is the partner of a child's parent if the person and the parent are a couple but the person is not the child's parent. This includes civil partners.

Residence Order - an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom a child is to live.

Special Guardianship – an order to meet the needs of those children who cannot live with their birth parents and for whom adoption is not appropriate but who could benefit from a legally secure placement.

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Step-parent – for the purposes of this policy, a step-parent means the partner/ spouse/ civil partner of the birth parent of the child who is the subject of the application.

3. INTRODUCTION

Adoption is a serious and irrevocable step and it is appropriate where:

- Parent(s) decide they cannot care for a child on a permanent basis and request adoption. This is known as a child **relinquished for adoption**.
- A child has suffered significant harm within their own family, and it is assessed that parent(s) or other family members cannot provide a good enough level of care and/or protection, causing the child to need a legally secure and permanent substitute family.

In both these circumstances the child will be treated as 'looked after' by the Council. The child may be the subject of Care Proceedings. Any decision about adoption will be made with the child's best interest as the paramount consideration and in conjunction with the 'Welfare Checklist' (ACA 2002 S1 (4)) contained in the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

There are also non agency adoptions, for example **step parent adoption**, where a child's step parent acquires parental responsibility for them along with a birth parent.

The severity and irrevocability of adoption makes it essential that strenuous efforts are made to retain the child in, or restore the child to, the care of their parents or wider family.

Adoption is a legal process and the final decision a judicial one. Legislation, regulations and guidance strictly prescribe the processes of adoption. The decision-making process must be precise, thorough and made by people with a depth of relevant knowledge and experience.

The Adoption service is required to meet the needs of all those involved, the child, the birth family and the adoptive family.

4. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Adoption is a relatively modern process, which was introduced legally in 1926. The current legislative and regulatory framework is contained in the Adoption and Children Act 2002, which received Royal Assent in November 2002 and was implemented in December 2005. The Act represents a comprehensive overhaul of adoption legislation and replaces much of the now out-dated Adoption Act 1976.

This policy is written in accordance with the:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 2000
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011)
- The Children Act 2004
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Restriction on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Access to Information and Intermediary Services 2005
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 2013

4.2 **The adoption legislation and the Human Rights Act** places a significant emphasis on the lifelong importance of an individual's identity and heritage. Therefore, within the Adoption process it is vital to address a child's life long racial, cultural, religious and identity needs, as well as their physical and emotional needs.

5. THE UNDERPINNING PHILOSOPHY VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 The work of Knowsley Council's Adoption Service will be underpinned by the following philosophies and principles as evidenced within the Knowsley Safeguarding Strategy.
- **The life long needs of the child are paramount.** All work within the Adoption Service is guided by the priority of determining and acting upon what is in the best interests of the child. The child's wellbeing and lifelong needs will be at the centre of the adoption process with their wishes and feelings being actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
 - **Adoption is a positive option** and will be considered for children whose need for permanence cannot be met within their own birth family.
 - **Delays** in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and will be avoided wherever possible.
 - **Adoption** is set in the context of services to support families looking after their children. All possible efforts to support families to safely care for their children by identifying appropriate permanent placements within the child's wider family will be made.
 - **The importance of a child's identity.** Adoption does not change a child's history, racial origin and cultural background. These will be fully recognised, valued and promoted when decisions are made. The significance of a child's given names will be recognised, valued and respected.
 - **Children with disabilities** will have their particular needs fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
 - **The role of prospective adoptive parents** will be valued and respected. All available information will be shared with prospective adoptive parents and assistance will be given to enable them to understand the life long issues relating to a particular child's background, including present and future needs.
 - **Recognising difference.** Adoption applications are treated with due regard to the needs of the individuals. The issues of race, religion, culture, language, gender, marital status, sexual orientation and disability will not prejudice assessments and outcomes within the assessment and approval process. Knowsley Council does not operate an age limit although

normally it would be expected an adopted child would be in the age range of a natural family. Adopters are expected to be fit and active enough to care for a child into adulthood.

- **Adoption has life long implications** for all those involved. The adoption service will work with other organisations and professions to meet the lifelong needs of all those affected by adoption.
- **Openness and honesty** in adoption will inform all work and activities of the Adoption Service.
- **Working in Partnership** with families and other agencies will underpin the work of the adoption service.
- **Matching children to adoptive families.** Matching children's needs to adoptive families is a complex process. Adoption resources will be sought from approved Knowsley adopters, and all relevant placement providers.
- **Meeting the needs of sibling groups.** The first priority will be for siblings to grow up together in the same adoptive family. On the occasions when this is not in the children's best interest the importance of maintaining links between adopted children and their birth siblings will be viewed as a priority.
- **Contact and adoption.** All adoption planning will include consideration of whether it will be beneficial for the child to have contact post-placement and post-adoption with birth family and if so, will consider the nature, frequency and life long implications of such arrangements.
- **Adoption Support Services.** Adoption has life long implications for all concerned. Birth families and adopted families and individuals may need support at different times in their lives. Knowsley's Adoption Services acknowledge this and are committed to the development of these services within Knowsley and with our partner agencies
- **Quality services.** Knowsley's adoption services will be governed by the statutory regulations, guidance and best practice that will inform the basis of Inspections by the Commission for Social Care Inspection

6. THE ADOPTION AGENCY

6.1 Management of Adoption Agency Work

The day to day management of the work of the Adoption Agency will be undertaken by the Adoption Service, in consultation with all the services available to children and families within Knowsley MBC.

All local authorities are required to appoint an Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA). The appointed adviser for Knowsley is the Social Care Manager of the Adoption Service within the organisation. The ASSA can delegate some duties to suitably qualified staff.

The key roles of the ASSA are to:

- Give advice and information to people affected by adoption
- Give advice and information to other staff in the local authority
- Give advice on good practice
- Liaise with other authorities.
- Councillors will receive regular information on the management and outcomes of the service in order to inform them in carrying out their responsibilities as corporate parents.

6.2 The Work of the Adoption Agency

The work of the Adoption Agency will be carried out in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations and accompanying guidance.

Assessment of prospective adoptive families, the linking of children with families, work with birth parents and the support of children and families post placement, will be undertaken by qualified social workers who have a minimum of three years post qualification experience in child care. This will include direct experience of adoption work and they will receive appropriate training, supervision and support. Qualified workers and student social workers who do not have the required experience will be supervised by someone who has.

6.3 Registration

The Agency is registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection under Part II of the Care Standards Act 2000. No conditions are in force in respect of this registration.

6.4 The Priorities of the Adoption Agency

The Agency's first priority is to identify the children being Looked After by Knowsley Borough Council who would benefit from adoption and to achieve the placement of these children with prospective adoptive families within the time-scales prescribed by the statutory guidance and appropriate to the needs of each child.

Prospective adopters have the right to be considered but there is no automatic right to preparation and/or assessment. However all applicants will be treated with courtesy and respect and if their application is not considered they will receive a written explanation.

The Agency will prioritise the recruitment of prospective adopters who are likely to be able to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally. Applications will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:

- 1.1 Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- 1.2 Children from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 1.3 Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support.
- 1.4 Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care.
- 1.5 Children who have an identified physical or learning disability.
- 1.6 Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties.
- 1.7 Single children aged four years and over.
- 1.8 Sibling groups of two or more children where the eldest child is aged 4 and over.

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

Medical Advisers

The Adoption Agency Panel has made arrangements with the Knowsley Primary Trust to appoint a medical adviser who carries out all the function as set out in the Adoption Agency Regulations 15, Part 2 and 4 of Schedule 1,17,25,31 and 36.



7. THE ADOPTION PANEL

7.1 Knowsley's Adoption Agency is required to have an Adoption Panel, the make up of which is determined by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011. The panel will meet regularly, generally monthly, but in exceptional circumstances a special panel will be arranged to prevent delay for specific children.

Sufficient Adoption Panels will be arranged to meet the approval needs of adopters and matching with children to meet the necessary time scales.

Panel members are from a range of different professional and personal backgrounds and include people who have personal experience of adoption. An independent person with knowledge of the needs of Looked After children will chair the panel. All panel members will be recruited, inducted and appraised in line with the regulations, all members will sign a panel membership agreement and the Agency will maintain an up to date record of all panel members.

The Panel will be supported by a professional adviser who is a manager from the adoption service, a legal adviser from the Borough's Legal Services, a health advisor from the Area Health Authority, who is also a voting member, and an administrator/minute taker.

7.2 Conduct and Procedures of the Panel

All Panel meetings are fully recorded with particular attention paid to the reasons for Panel Recommendations. In situations where there is insufficient information to enable the panel to make a recommendation the panel may request the agency to obtain other relevant information and may defer the item while this is undertaken.

Where there is an evenly divided Panel or a serious difference of opinion amongst Panel members the Chair may ask for more information to be made available to the Panel before a recommendation is made. Where the Panel is not unanimous, dissent from the majority view and serious reservations expressed by individual Panel members about a particular recommendation will be recorded in the Panel Minutes for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. Where adoptive applicants attend and make verbal representations to the Panel these will also be noted.

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

Any Panel member who has knowledge, either in a personal or a professional capacity, of a case under consideration should declare an interest and inform the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Panel accordingly. It may be considered inappropriate for him/her to be present during discussion of the case. Any person who is otherwise a member of the Panel, but who is presenting a case shall not be a voting member of the Panel throughout the discussion of that case.

7.3 Training for Panel Members

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

7.4 The functions of the adoption panel are to consider:-

1. Whether a prospective adopter is suitable to be an adoptive parent.

- It may also consider and give advice regarding the number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, gender, likely needs and background.

2. Whether a prospective adopter would be a suitable adoptive parent for a particular child.

It must also consider and may give advice to the agency about:

- the authority's proposal for the provision of adoption support services for the adoptive family;
- the arrangements the adoption agency proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child;

7.5 Recommendation of the Panel

7:5:1 Timescale and Procedure

The Adoption Agency Decision Maker will be supplied with copies of all the reports considered by the Panel on each Agenda item. Panel Minutes will be forwarded within four working days.

The Professional Adviser will also be available to the Decision Maker for consultation if required. Where the panel has provided the agency with advice, the Decision Maker may express a view on this advice and in relation to

prospective adopters; this may be taken into account during the matching process.

The final decision in relation to any application will be made within 7 working days of the Panel meeting.

The decision reached by the Adoption Agency Decision Maker will be recorded on the child's case record and the adopter's case record. This will also include any view the Decision Maker has on the panel's advice. If the Decision Maker is minded not to accept the adoption panel's recommendation they will discuss this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of the panel. The outcome of this discussion will be recorded on the child's case record. Letters confirming the Agency's decision will be sent out as required to adoptive applicants, and a child's parent /Guardians by the agency as appropriate. Letters to parents and guardians will be hand delivered by the child's social worker.

7.5.2 Where the Agency Decision Maker proposes not to approve

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

A formal letter will be sent to the prospective adopter advising them that the agency proposes not to approve them as suitable to adopt a child (this is a "qualifying determination")

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A copy of the recommendation of the adoption panel will be sent with the letter if the panel's recommendation is different

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The letter will advise the prospective adopters that they have 40 working days starting with the date on which the notification is sent to: - Accept the determination (or pre-empt the outcome by withdrawing their application), make written representation to the agency or apply for a review of the determination by an independent review panel by writing to the Independent Review Panel Administrator

If the prospective adopter does not make any representations to the agency or apply for an independent review within the 40 working day time limit, the agency will proceed with its decision and notify the prospective adopters of that decision in writing together with the reasons.

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

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), which came into operation on 30 April 2004, gives prospective adopters the right to apply to an independent body for a review of their case if their adoption agency does not propose to approve them as suitable to be adoptive parents. This is known as a "qualifying determination". The Independent Review Panel has the power to

only consider qualifying determinations. Other complaints regarding the adoption agency should be dealt with through the normal complaint procedure.

If the prospective adopters decide to apply for an Independent Review of the determination the manager responsible for the Adoption Service will liaise with the Independent Review Panel Administrator in respect of any application to that panel. The agency will supply the information required by the IRM Panel in a timely manner and will send one or more representatives to the IRM Panel and ensure that those attending are in a position to assist the panel. The Agency will meet the costs incurred by the IRM in undertaking the review

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

- The Agency adoption panel
- The IRM Panel

In making a final decision the Agency Decision Maker will take into account the recommendations of the IRM panel and the adoption panel. The IRM panel does not have the power to overturn the agency decision.

As soon as possible after making the decision the Agency will notify the prospective adopters of the decision stating the reasons if it is considered that the adopters are not suitable to adopt. If the panel's recommendation is different from the Agency's decision, the Agency will also provide the prospective adopters with a copy of the panel's recommendation.

Where the IRM panel has made a recommendation the agency will, according to regulation AAR 27.10 send the IRM Review Panel Administrator a copy of the decision on the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt.

7.6 Quality Assurance

The Panel has a role in monitoring adoption work in the Agency, which will contribute to the development of adoption practice in the Agency. The Panel will keep abreast of the trends and initiatives locally and nationally and extend its experience and knowledge. The Agency will provide Panel training at least annually jointly with the adoption team.

The activities of the Panel will be scrutinised internally by means of an annual report to Senior Managers and Elected Members of Knowsley and externally by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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8. PLANNING FOR ADOPTION

- 8.1 Knowsley MBC is committed to providing a high quality adoption service for the small but significant number of looked after children who cannot return to their birth family.

The Adoption Service is an integral part of the services available to children who are looked after.

All children benefit from living in a stable, loving family, where their needs can be met and they can belong. This is likely to be the best foundation for them to develop into happy well-adjusted adults.

- 8.2 For some children adoption becomes appropriate following a period of care with foster carers, or with relatives. Adoption can offer security and a lifelong commitment with carers to whom the child has become attached. In these circumstances a formal application from foster carers will be assessed and they will be entitled to the same information, preparation and post adoption support as other adopters.

- 8.3 A parent or parents may decide for a wide variety of reasons that they are unable to care for their child and request adoption for that child. Adoption should only be considered, as a realistic option after parents have been assisted in exploring all other possible options to meet their children's needs. It is vital parents clearly understand the lifelong implications of adoption for themselves and for their child.

- 8.4 All children will have a named social worker who will be responsible for them throughout the adoption process. The child's needs in an adoptive placement will be collated in the Child Permanence Report (CPR). Parents and present carers are encouraged to contribute to the report. The child should have an understanding of the plans for their future, according to their age and stage of development. Where appropriate this will take the form of direct work with the child where their wishes and feelings can be ascertained.

It is vital that the child's wishes and feelings are ascertained in respect of any plan for adoption and are taken into account and recorded. Where they are not acted upon, the reasons for not doing so will be explained to the child and recorded.

- 8.5 The birth parent will be given full information at all stages of the process and independent support will be offered to birth family members through the Agency service level agreement with After Adoption, a voluntary adoption support agency.

- 8.6 In situations where there has been proven significant harm to previous children in a family, consideration will be given to pre-birth planning for subsequent children. Planning for these children will be commenced within Knowsley's Safeguarding Procedures as it may be clear that adoption is likely to become the plan for the child from birth.

Where concerns are such as above, the adoption planning process must be commenced pre-birth. Priority must be given to ensure the minimum disruption for the child. Therefore a potential placement will be discussed at a Planning meeting subsequent to the pre-birth conference.

- 8.7 When a child becomes looked after and assessments indicate that the prognosis for the birth parents meeting the child's need is poor, then **twin track planning** should commence in order to prevent drift and unnecessary delay, including consideration of Fostering for Adoption and concurrency options. Assessments relating to the child's return to the family will be pursued, at the same time as plans for permanency through adoption and other appropriate orders. In the event that assessments conclude that the final care plan will be adoption this plan will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for advice regarding whether a child should be considered for adoption, and the subsequent documentation for obtaining a Placement Order should be filed in Court.

A match for adoption cannot be made until a Placement Order is granted however every effort will be made to identify a suitable adoptive family within 4 months of the Order.

- 8.8 Where a parent requests that a child aged less than 6 weeks be placed for adoption, a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 3 months of the Agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption.
- 8.9 First consideration will be given to placing siblings with the same family, where this is likely to be in the best interests of each child. Where this is assessed not to be appropriate or the lack of availability of a suitable sibling placement precludes it, the reasons will be clearly identified and recorded.

Where a child becomes available for placement whose older birth sibling(s) have already been placed with adopters, consideration will be given to placing the child within the same adoptive family as her/his elder sibling(s) before other possible placement options are considered.

The Child

- 8.10 Children will be appropriately prepared before being placed with new families. This will include work with each child aimed at equipping her/him with an understanding of her/his own experiences to date as well as sharing with her/him information about the prospective adopters and their family. It will also, when necessary, include direct work aimed at preparing her/him for family life and adoption.

All children will have a 'Family History Book' and Memory Book and Boxes from their previous foster placements. Information provided for children by their birth families will be kept safe both by the Agency and the adopters and provided to the child, at a time and in a manner that reflects their age and understanding as well as the nature of the information concerned.

All children will be the subject of a comprehensive Health Assessment. Their health needs will be given full consideration when decisions regarding placement are made.

The child's current and likely future educational needs will be assessed/considered and addressed when decisions about placement are made.

The child's needs for contact after placement with birth parents, siblings or other relatives will be assessed/considered and addressed when decisions regarding placement are made.

8.11 The Birth Parents and Significant Birth Family Members

The Agency will seek to work with birth parents and significant birth family members to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their child(ren).

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

Birth parents will be asked to contribute information on their own and the child's history. Information about background and life experiences is important both for the Adoption Panel's attention and to assist with the compilation of information for the child to have in later life. They will have the opportunity to give their account of events and to see what is written about them in reports for the Adoption Panel and will be supplied with a copy of the child's permanence report or the parts of the report that the agency considers appropriate

Birth parents' views will be sought as to their child's future placement, including their view in relation to race, culture, religion and language, the

placement of brothers and sisters and the child's needs for contact after placement.

Where it is in the child's best interest for there to be ongoing links, including contact, with birth parents and/or other relatives, birth parents and significant birth family members will be involved in discussions about how best to achieve this and helped to fulfil agreed plans through practical and/or financial support.

The birth parents will be informed of their right to apply for a contact order under section 26 (2) and 26(3) of the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

Birth parents will be offered counselling and support by a worker independent of the planning process relating to their child by referral to an independent voluntary adoption support agency. All reasonable steps will be taken to provide the parent with the opportunity to receive counselling.

Where counselling is refused the agency will record this with a record of actions on the Child's record.

Birth parents will be notified of how information may be disclosed under the Access to Records and Intermediary Services 2005 legislation.

Birth parents and significant birth family members will be provided at an appropriate time with written information about adoption and the Adoption Contact Register and advised of avenues by which they might obtain support at different stages in the process.

Birth parents will be formally notified in writing of the Adoption Agency's decisions in relation to their child within 5 days of the decision being made.

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

Parents and children will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

9. THE RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- 9.1 The Agency will develop plans to attract and recruit adoptive families able to meet the needs of children of Knowsley for whom the plan is adoption. People who are interested in becoming adopters will be responded to promptly and given clear information about the assessment and approval process. Applications will be considered from all sections of the community and people will be treated fairly, openly and with respect, throughout the adoption process.

Applicants will be considered in terms of their ability to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the developmental needs of the child. People will not be automatically excluded on the grounds of age, health or other factors except in the case of certain criminal convictions. The Department's equal opportunities policy will apply in all matters in relation to adoption.

9.2 Criteria for Applications from Prospective Adopters

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

- The Agency operates an equal opportunities policy and no individual or couple will be automatically refused consideration as adopters solely on the grounds of marital status, health, age, gender and sexual orientation, race, colour or nationality, religion, financial status or disability (subject to legislation)
- Legally adoptive applicants wishing to adopt a child not directly related to them must be at least 21 years of age.

- There is no legal requirement in respect of an applicant's upper age limit. However applicants will need to demonstrate that they can meet the needs of any child placed throughout the remainder of his/her childhood and into independence.
- At least one of the applicants must be domiciled in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.
- Applications will not be accepted from any applicant who has been convicted or cautioned for a "specified offence" in accordance with AAR 23.2, 23.4 or an offence specified in AAR part 1 schedule 3 or any adult member of the household has been so convicted or cautioned.
- Applicants convicted or cautioned for other offences will be considered at the discretion of the agency.
- Applications will usually be considered from prospective adopters who live within a 35 mile radius of Knowsley.
- Applicants living together as a partnership will be expected to demonstrate a stable relationship and will normally have been together for at least three years. In the event of a co-habiting partnership both applicants would be expected to jointly apply for an Adoption Order.
- Childless applicants are not expected to have undergone fertility investigations/treatment. However, applicants who have elected to do so will be expected to have completed this to their own satisfaction.
- Applicants will not be considered where they are currently accepted by another Agency. However, previous consideration or approval by another agency is not a bar to consideration.
- In accordance with the recommendations made by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, this Agency wishes to provide a smoke free environment for children.
- Applicants will need to be of sound health and reasonably fit. Applicants will be expected to disclose all relevant information relating to their personal medical histories. This would include any prognosis of life threatening illnesses occurring or reoccurring; any known genetic condition; psychological and psychiatric referral or treatment concerning the applicants, a member of the household or immediate family.
- Applicants who smoke will be advised of the significant health risks to children who are exposed to tobacco smoke. If they wish to stop smoking they will be advised to contact their GP and given information about the support available.

Every effort will be made to place Knowsley children with adopters who do not smoke and children aged 5 years and under will not be placed in smoking households.

In respect of older children and those with established links with prospective adopters, at match for adoption will be considered on an individual basis.

Knowsley's policy in respect of smoking will continue to be reviewed in the light of latest research and good practice.
- Where applicants have already had a child(ren) placed with them for adoption the Agency will not usually accept an application to adopt a second or subsequent child until any previous adoption(s) are concluded.

- Applicants will be required to demonstrate that their home and garden will provide a safe environment for a child.
- Where both, or the only adopter(s) are working, one applicant will be expected to take adoption leave at the beginning of the placement. Given the history and life experiences of the children generally placed through the Agency, consistency of care is essential and applicants will be expected to demonstrate an ability to provide this in any proposed childcare arrangements.
- Applicants who currently own a dog subject to regulation under The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) will be precluded from assessment and approval as adopters. Applicants with other pets would be assessed at the discretion of the Agency
- Applicants who are involved with governance of the Counsel or its major partners will be advised to approach another Adoption Agency.
- Knowsley has a collaborative arrangement with two other local authorities, Halton and Cheshire West and Chester, under Together4adoption. If enquiries are unable to be processed within Knowsley due to capacity issues, enquiries will be forwarded to the Together4adoption collaboration for allocation. In the event that the Together4adoption collaboration is unable to allocate enquiries, prospective adopters will be forwarded to the regional collaboration of adoption agencies, Adopt North West. This is to ensure prospective adopters do not have to wait to be assessed if they are ready for the process to commence.

9.3 The Processing of Applications

- 9.3.1 All enquiries from prospective adopters will be responded to promptly and impartially. General written information will be sent out to them at the first opportunity. Counselling and a follow up interview will be provided to those people who indicate they wish to proceed. This interview will enable the agency to provide the applicant with information about the approval process and allows them to assess their own suitability to adopt and reflect on the implications for themselves and their family.
- 9.3.2 All prospective applicants will be required to attend preparation training for adoption. The purpose of this is to provide prospective applicants with sufficient information and understand to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with an application and to prepare them for the home study process and the adoption task.
- 9.3.3 Enquiries from foster carers about adopting a child in their care will be considered in the same way as any other enquiry. They will be entitled to the same preparation and information as other adopters and they will be given advice around the procedures that apply in their case.
- 9.3.5 Enquiries from those who have already adopted will be welcomed. The necessity to attend preparation training will be decided on an individual basis according to the individual adopters experience and length since their first approval.
- 9.3.6 Applicants will be kept informed about the progress of their application throughout and, have the opportunity to contribute towards the home study assessment. The home study assessment will be compiled using the British Association for Adoption and Fostering [BAAF] Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)

The applicants will have opportunity to read the completed report which will be presented to the Adoption Panel. Applicants will be given the choice of giving their comments in writing or attending the panel according to their preference.

All applicants will be informed of their right to make representations and complaints

9.4 Approval Reviews

The agency will review the prospective adopter's approval periodically until a child is placed with the prospective adopters.

Reviews of adopter's approval will take place:-

- Whenever the agency considers it necessary
- Not more than one year following approval and afterwards at intervals of not more than one year

Reviews will be carried out by the adopters' social worker, in consultation with the adoption manager, and the agency will make enquiries and obtain information it considers necessary in order to review whether the prospective adopters continue to be suitable to adopt. The views of the prospective adopters will be taken into account.

If the agency considers that the prospective adopters remain suitable to adopt the adopters will be informed in writing and this will be recorded on the case file.

If the agency considers that the prospective adopters may no longer be suitable to adopt they will prepare a prospective adopter's review report including the agency's reasons and will notify the prospective adopters that the case is to be referred to the adoption panel.

The prospective adopters will be sent a copy of the report and will have an opportunity to comment on the report before it is presented to the Adoption panel.

All approved adopters are firstly considered for the placement of Knowsley children. However if a suitable match is not identified their details will, subject to their agreement, be made available on the CHARMS database (formerly Adoption 22 database) After 3 months their details will be made available for consideration by other Agencies through the National Adoption Register.

10. LINKING AND MATCHING

The matching process between the child and prospective adopters is crucial for the future success of the adoptive placement and the quality of the child's and adopter's life together.

Matching is a critical part of adoption work and all those involved will work in partnership to clarify and profile children's needs. When placing children through interagency agreements the Agency will endeavour to ensure all best practice standards are upheld.

10.1 The Child

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

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

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

- 10.1.3. Where at all possible, and if consistent with their individual assessed needs and welfare, siblings will be placed together. However, the needs of individual children within sibling groups will be assessed and given due consideration in reaching decisions whether they should be placed together or separately for adoption.

- 10.1.4 Every child will be offered support by a named Social Worker in preparing to move into her/his prospective adoptive family and in managing the impact of the changes that placement will necessitate, which might also include termination of previous direct contact with birth parents, sibling and/or other family members as well as loss of previous carers.

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

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

- 10.1.6 Where information on a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate its the implications, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people (professionals, other adopters, foster carers) who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed.
- 10.1.7 In line with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2011, the Agency will provide adoptive parents with information about the child. The Agency will advise the adoptive parents that this information should be made available to the child at a time they consider appropriate, but at least when the child becomes 18. However the Agency will also encourage an open and ongoing sharing of information at an age appropriate level.

10.2 The Adopters

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

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

- 10.2.2 Before a match is agreed, adopters will be given as much written information as is available to help them to understand the needs and background of the child and will have opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family. This will include the Child Permanence Report.
- 10.2.3 Adoptive parents will be involved in discussions as to how they can best maintain any links, both indirect and direct, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.
- 10.2.4 Where information on a child(ren) is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications of it, the Agency will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to people who can help them to clarify and explore the implications of the information and thus to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. Where there are significant medical issues, a meeting with the Agency's Medical Adviser will be arranged which adopters will be encouraged to attend.
- 10.2.5 The Agency will assess the risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing any identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these.

10.2.6 A social worker, preferably the child's social worker, will prepare a letter for the child that explains the child's history from birth to how he or she came to be placed for adoption. The letter will be sufficiently detailed so that in the future the adolescent child, or young adult, will know about his or her natural family and be able to understand why he or she could not live with them and why he or she was adopted. The child's natural family will be asked by the agency to write either their own letters to the child or contributions for the agency's letter, if the agency considers either of these methods appropriate.

10.3 The Match

10.3.1 Knowsley Adoption Panel will formally recommend a match for individual children and adopters to the Agency Decision Maker.

10.3.2 Prior to this a matching meeting will be convened, chaired by a Manager from the Adoption Service. From this meeting the matching report, the Adoption Support plan and the Adoption Placement Report (APR) will be prepared.

The prospective adoptive families' details are available in the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). The child's details are available in the CPR which contains the child's assessed needs. The child's own wishes and feelings and a description of the type of family they require must be included in the matching considerations. The social worker for the child will complete the matching considerations in consultation with relevant parties e.g. the child (where appropriate), the parent and current carer(s).

The CPR and PAR together with matching reports, the adoption support plan and the adoption placement report (APR) will be prepared and will be placed before the Adoption Panel. At this stage consideration must be given to the need for financial support.

11. THE PLACEMENT

11.1 Pre-placement Preparation

- 11.1.1 The Agency will encourage and support prospective adoptive parents to meet the birth parent(s) of the child, if appropriate, as this may be of direct benefit to the child. Prospective Adopters will be supported in this by their supervising social worker.
- 11.1.2 The Agency will assist adoptive parents to develop strategies to meet the needs of the child and to protect themselves and others from allegations of abuse or harm.
- 11.1.3 The Agency will advise and support prospective adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption.
- 11.1.4 Where prospective adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, the Agency will provide advice, training and support. This is aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to foster the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, knowledge about and connection to their origins. The Agency will seek to help adopters to understand the need for, and to develop, strategies to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination.
- 11.1.5 The Agency will ensure that, prior to placement, the prospective adoptive parents have a copy of the child's Adoption Support Plan and are fully informed about support services that are available within the area, should they or the child require specialist support either before or after the adoption order has been made and how they might be assessed for these services, access these services and how and when the adoption support plan will be reviewed
- 11.1.6 The Agency will ensure that prospective adopters are aware of their rights to statutory adoption leave and pay, statutory paternity leave and pay where appropriate and what, if any, adoption allowances may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. The Agency will also ensure that adopters are aware of any government administered benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.

11.1.7 Adopters will be informed that under no circumstances may they change the name of a child placed with them for adoption without the express permission of all those with parental responsibility or the court until the making of the Adoption Order. The child's forename is an important link to the birth family and is part of the child's identity and therefore all prospective adopters will be encouraged to retain the birth forename as part of the subsequent adoptive name

11.1.9 Detailed planning is required concerning the process of introducing the child to the prospective adoptive family under the guidance of the Adoption Team. The Placement Plan will take into account the specific needs of the child, the needs of the prospective adopters and of any children in the adoptive family. Introductions will be part of a clearly defined plan agreed by all parties.

11.2 Statutory Visits following Placement

11.2.1 Under the provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 an increased level of visits is required to safeguard the welfare of children placed for adoption. Research evidence indicates that adoption placements are most at risk of disruption during the first few weeks,

In accordance with the regulations, the agency will:

- ensure that the child and the prospective adopter are visited within one week of the placement and at least once a week until after the first review.
- The frequency of following visits is then to be decided by the agency at the first and each subsequent placement review,
- ensure that written reports are made of these visits,
- provide advice and assistance to the prospective adopter.

11.2.2 Visits should be shared wherever possible between the child's social worker and the prospective adopter's social worker and there should be clarity from the outset about which social worker will conduct each visit. Both social workers should write reports of their visits and share these with the other social worker.

As part of a visit, the visiting social worker should see the child without the prospective adopter being present, if appropriate, unless the child is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to see the social worker alone.

12. ADOPTION SUPPORT

The agency is committed to providing adoption support services in line with the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Support Regulations 2005.

12.1 Following Placement

Knowsley will provide supervision and support to the child and the adoptive parents up to the making of the Adoption Order. The level and types of support will depend on the individual circumstances and will be determined through regular Care Planning and Reviews. High-risk placements will be a priority for multidisciplinary approach.

12.1.1 The Agency will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters on progressing the application to adopt to the appropriate Court at the appropriate time.

12.1.2 The Agency will encourage adopters to formally agree the plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family a member that was agreed at the time of placement and will support them in facilitating these arrangements.

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

12.2 Following the Making of an Adoption Order

12.2.1 Any adoptive parents contacting the Agency for support at any stage following the granting of an Adoption Order, will be made aware of support services available, both locally and nationally and how they might access these.

12.2.2 Where an adopted child and/or adoptive parents living in the Knowsley area contact the Agency seeking help due to difficulties with an adoptive placement, they will be offered a full assessment of their support needs, in which they will be encouraged to fully participate if more than 3 years has elapsed since the Adoption Order was made. In those cases where a period of less than 3 years has elapsed, the Agency will contact and liaise with the Agency that placed the child.

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

- Any person directly affected by adoption who requires counselling or support.

- Adopted persons requiring access to birth records.
- Persons requiring information as to the use of the Adoption Contact Register, in particular adopted persons, birth parents and other relatives.
- Adults seeking to establish contact with birth family members separated via adoption and requesting an Intermediary Service.
- Post placement and adoption support services. The majority of the above services will be provided through Knowsley's service level agreement with After Adoption.

12.3 Financial Support

The Agency will arrange for the provision of financial support under Regulation 10 of the Adoption Support Services Regulations to those children who have been looked after by Knowsley prior to adoption and who meet the criteria.

Financial support may be paid periodically as a regular allowance, if it is provided to meet a need which is likely to give rise to recurring expenditure; otherwise it may be paid as a single payment, or, if the local authority and adoptive parent agree, in instalments.

12.4 Disruption

The Agency recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid breakdowns in adoptive families. However, it has to be acknowledged that the some children's pre adoption experiences can have longstanding impact which may threaten the stability of their placement. The Council will utilise its available services to support placements which have become unstable.

12.4.1 Should a placement experience difficulties the Agency will seek to ensure that:

- Separate support available to the prospective adopters and the child.
- The child's welfare remains the first consideration.
- The review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child.
- The possibility of placement breakdown is acknowledged and planned appropriately.

12.4 Disruptions because of allegations of abuse/harm

- 12.5.1 Any allegation of abuse in relation to a child placed for adoption or adopted will be dealt with in accordance with the Knowsley Safeguarding Procedures.

Allegations will be investigated fairly, quickly and consistently, in a way that provides effective protection for the child and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

- 12.5.2 Where the child is known to the Knowsley Adoption Service through involvement in adoption placement or adoption support services, adoption staff should be informed and involved in strategy discussions to provide information and consider the implications for past, current and future placements.

12.6 Disruption Meetings

Following a disruption for a Knowsley adoption placement, the agency will arrange for a disruption meeting, which will be chaired by an independent person with knowledge of adoption.

The overall purpose of disruption meetings is to try and achieve a better understanding of the factors which led to the breakdown of the placement and how best to plan for the future.

The meetings are very valuable in helping all the parties come to terms with what has happened and for the service to learn lessons from what has happened. The adopters or prospective adopters will always be encouraged to attend where appropriate the child s will contribute or attend the meeting.

It is important to note that the purpose of a disruption meeting is to clarify what factors contributed to the break-down of the placement and to help inform future planning and support for the child, not to apportion blame for the breakdown.

12.7 Information to Birth Parents

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

If a placement breaks down after the Adoption Order has been made, the Agency will consider informing the birth parent(s) of the situation, particularly if a Contact Order is in place.

12.8 Death of a Child placed with Adopters

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

In addition the Department for Education and Skills, and the Commission for Social Care Inspection must also be notified of the death of a child.

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

The birth parent(s) and any other individuals who hold parental responsibility are informed in a timely and appropriate manner.

13. Contact & Openness

Modern adoption is an open process, the implications of which remain significant for all parties throughout their lives. Over the years the experiences of people involved in adoption, particularly adult adoptees and birth parents, have been instrumental in changing attitudes. It is detrimental to deny a child their history and all children have a right to this knowledge.

13.1 The Agency recognises the continuing importance of past relationships for many children and therefore that continued contact with the child's birth family may be of positive benefit to the child.

It is at the same time also recognised that any on-going contact whether direct or indirect needs to be:

- managed in a way and limited to a level that does not undermine the security of the child's adoptive placement,
- at all times the child's welfare and best interests must be the uppermost consideration in any arrangements for contact.

There will therefore be no presumption for or against contact after adoption and all contact plans will be as a result of a full assessment.

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

- Develop a realistic understanding of the circumstances leading up to the separation from their birth family
- Move on and develop an attachment to new carers with the permission of her/his birth parents.

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

- Reassure the child that the birth parents or other relatives continue to care for her/him, thus possibly enhancing self-esteem.
- Reassure the child about the wellbeing of birth relatives.
- Provide an opportunity for the adopted child to have an up-to-date knowledge of the circumstances of her/his birth family members over the years, in order

for her/him to be able to as an adult make an informed decision as to whether or not she/he wishes to establish a greater level of contact with birth relatives.

- Inform the child about the existence of any biological siblings born after her/his placement for adoption.
- 13.4 Contact arrangements must be flexible and may need to change according to the child's age, needs and wishes and/or changes in the situation or any party to the agreement.
- 13.5 All arrangements for post adoption contact will be made by agreement and detailed in the Adoption Placement Report, Adoption Support Plan and the final report to the court. The arrangements will be detailed in written contact agreements.
- 13.6 All contact arrangements should centre on the benefits for the child, whilst acknowledging the wishes and feelings of the child's birth family members and adopters and meeting these as far as is consistent with promoting the child's welfare.
- 13.7 Contact can be considered between the child and any person who is significant to the child i.e., birth parents, siblings, birth grandparents, foster carers etc. However, all arrangements need to be considered as part of the overall plan of contact proposed and the viability of this being managed by both the child and the adoptive family within the context of their family lives and alongside other commitments must be considered with the adopters.

13.8 Indirect/Direct Contact

- 13.8.1 The question of whether contact should be indirect or direct is a complex one and each case will be approached individually with reference to the purpose of contact, the age of the child at placement and with regard to the type and depth of the relationship that the child had with the birth parents and other relatives prior to placement.
- 13.8.2 Direct contact should only be considered in cases where evidence suggests that the relative with whom the contact is envisaged, is accepting of the adoption plan and is unlikely to seek to undermine the stability/security of the child's placement.
- 13.8.3 In all cases where either direct or indirect contact is envisaged, all parties should be given details in writing as to the process by which the contact will or can be reviewed and details as to who they should contact if they wish the arrangement to be reviewed or amended.
- 13.8.4 Indirect contact (Letterbox) with one or more birth family members would normally be considered in most cases. Indirect contact should be a reciprocal arrangement, which in the case of an active Letterbox, will constitute an exchange of written information between the adoptive parents (on behalf of the child) and the birth relative.

All forms of contact will be managed and facilitated by the staff from the Adoption service

13.9 Support Services for Birth Relatives and Adoptees

- 13.9.1 Birth parents should be involved in decision making about contact in the adoption placement and they should have support to enable them to engage in the adoption plans.
- 13.9.2 Where at all possible birth parents should be given an opportunity to meet adoptive parents. Whatever decisions are made birth parents should be informed of their rights. Except where they are unwilling, or unavailable to discuss the issue, parents should always be given some non-identifying information concerning the family with whom their child is placed.
- 13.9.3 The Agency recognises that siblings who have been separated by the making of an Adoption Order, either recently or in the past, may need assistance or support to help them to resolve issues or deal with problems that arise due to the separation from/loss of their brother(s) and/or sister(s).
- 13.9.4 When children have in the past been separated by adoption and the children remain under the age of 18 and living in the area. The Department will seek to provide focused support to any child(ren) and/or her/his adoptive parents if requested to do so.
- 13.9.5 In appropriate circumstances where the birth sibling(s) have been adopted and are traceable by the agency and the agency is requested to do so, the agency will on behalf of the child and/or her/his adopter(s), approach the adoptive parent(s) of any brother(s) and/or sister(s) from whom the child has been separated by adoption, to obtain update information for the child and to explore the possibility of establishing or resurrecting a level of direct and/or indirect contact between the siblings.
- 13.9.6 In appropriate circumstances where the birth siblings(s) remain living with a birth parent(s) or with extended family members or with long term foster carers, the Department will, if requested to do so, approach the parent(s)/relative(s)/foster carer(s) or any brother(s) and/or sister(s), on behalf of the child and/or her/his adopter(s), to obtain update information for the child.

13.10 Adult Adoptees

Advice and Assistance will be given, on request, to adult adoptees who within the Knowsley Borough Council area.

Where an adult adoptee seeks to resurrect contact with her/his birth family, support will be provided to the birth relatives if they live within the Knowsley Borough Council area and if they request it. The Local Authority is responsible for providing an adoption service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing

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on request, advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records.

All enquiries regarding advice, assistance and access to records for adopted adults will be dealt with by the Adoption Service and/or After Adoption.

14. Access to Information and Records

14.1 People adopted before 30 December 2005

In the case of people adopted before 30 December 2005, Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act preserves the legal right of an adopted person, on reaching the age of 18, to apply to the Registrar General for information they need to obtain a certified copy of the record of their birth. Schedule 2 replaces the existing access to birth records provision in Section 51 of the 1976 Adoption Act.

The agency will continue to have the discretion under the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 to disclose identifying information to adopted adults who are seeking to find out about their family history and origins. This information may help inform any decision by the adopted person as to whether he or she wishes to apply for an intermediary service. If, however, a birth sibling has also been adopted then the agency will not be able to give out the sibling's adoptive identity without that person's consent.

14.2 People adopted after 30 December 2005

The existing rights of adopted adults under Section 51 of the 1976 Adoption Act no longer apply in respect of adoptions which take place on or after 30 December 2005.

An adopted person retains the right, on reaching the age of 18, to receive the information needed to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate. However, section 60(2)(a) of the Act requires that any person adopted on or after 30 December 2005 must apply to the appropriate adoption agency for this information rather than to the Registrar General. If the agency decides that such information should be withheld from an adopted person, it must apply to the High Court for an order denying access to this information.

14.3 Intermediary Services

14.3.1 Section 98 of the Adoption and Children Act provides adopted adults and their adult birth relatives with the right to apply for an intermediary service. All enquiries relating to the provision of intermediary services will be dealt with by the Adoption Services Support Adviser through the Adoption Service.

14.3.2 In all circumstances adoptees will be helped to consider carefully what actions they might take in terms of obtaining information and/or tracing and the possible implications of their actions for others. The Agency will provide an

intermediary service to adult adoptees who are wishing to make contact with a birth parent, sibling or grandparent through the Service Level Agreement with After Adoption who specialise in this area. The Agency is not able to provide a 'tracing' service, but will provide adoptees with details of other agencies and organisations that may assist them, provide such a service, or offer additional support.

14.3.3 All adoptees will be provided with details of the Adoption Contact Register and advised as to how they might access it. In those cases where the original contact is from a resident of Knowsley, then where a birth parent or sibling of an adopted adult is wishing to establish contact with her/his birth child/sibling, she/he will be offered service through After Adoption.

14.3.4 The Agency is not in a position to undertake tracing on behalf of birth relatives and is not able to provide any identifying information in relation to an adopted person to birth family members, even if the person seeking contact was a sibling and was also adopted her/himself. Birth relatives will be encouraged to make use of the Adoption Contract Register operated by the Registrar General (which provides a safe and confidential way for birth relatives to assure an adopted person that contact would be welcome) and refer to or give information regarding the services of After Adoption.

14.4. Storage of Adoption Records

14.4.1 The Department will have effective systems for recording, managing and keeping safe, information about children placed for adoption and adopters and information received from people affected by adoption. All case records relating to children who have been legally adopted before 30 December 2005 are stored for a minimum of 75 years from the date of the adoption. For children adopted after 30 December 2005 records must be retained for 100 years.

14.4.2 Adoption case records, and all their contents, for the child and the adopter are kept in secure conditions at all times. The agency will ensure that it takes all appropriate measures to prevent the theft, unauthorised disclosure, loss or destruction of, or damage to, case records or their contents. Where personal information relating to adopters and adoptees is not in active use it will be stored in a lockable cabinet for 3 years. It will then be scanned to CD Rom and the paper records will be stored in a fireproof, lockable facility. The CD Rom's will be held securely in a fireproof, lockable cabinet.

14.4.3 All enquiries regarding access to adoption records will be dealt with by the Adoption Service.

14.4.4 Files relating to Children

The Department will create a separate adoption file for each child from the point when adoption is decided as the plan (Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983).

Case files for children for whom adoption is the plan, should provide an adequate account of the child's history and the decisions that inform the

management of the case, in order to provide an accurate and sufficiently detailed record to the to the child, should she/he as an adult seek information.

Following the legal adoption of the child, or the child being discharged from the care of the Local Authority via other Court processes, or reaching the age of 18, where legal adoption is not achieved, and all case files will be closed and returned to the child's care records.

14.4.5 Files relating to Adopters

A case file will be created for each prospective adopter as of the point of their initial application. If prospective adopters withdraw part-way through the preparation/assessment process, prior to approval by the Adoption Agency's panel, their case file will be closed and stored for 25 years. Should they be approved by the Adoption Agency's Panel, but subsequently withdrawn prior to the placement of a child(ren), their case file will be closed once their decision has been confirmed with them and the case file stored for 75 years in line with current legislation.

If the prospective adopters progress to placement of a child(ren) but the placement subsequently disrupts prior to legal adoption of the child(ren) and the adopters subsequently withdraw from the adoption process, the case file will be stored for 75 years.

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

14.4.6 Records relating to Adoption Allowance

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

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

14.4.7 Records relating to Adoption Support

A separate case record relating to post adoption support will be set up for each adoptive family known to the Agency following the granting of the Adoption Order (s) on any child(ren) placed. The file will remain open until such time as there has been no contact (request for information, advice or support) in the previous 3 years, or until the adopted person reaches the age of 21 if post adoption support is ongoing. On closure the file will be stored with the child's closed adoption file.

14.4.8 Files relating to Birth Family Members

A separate electronic case record relating to forms of adoption support will be set up appropriate. The file will remain open until such time as there has been no contact in the previous 3 years or until the adopted person reaches the age of 21. While birth parents/relatives have no legal right to information about the child post adoption, unless there is an arrangement for 'Letterbox' or direct contact, the Agency recognises that many birth parents continue to think about birth children who they have lost through adoption, throughout their lives and will seek to offer services that recognise their loss.

Letterbox arrangements are managed via the Adoption Service.

14.5 Access to Records

14.5.1 Adoptees

Every child will, prior to her/his legal adoption, be provided with memory books, a family history book and a later life letter. Access to their birth records will be provided to adoptees over the age of 18 who request it, in line with Regulations. Adult adoptees can additionally apply for access to their original Care File in line with Regulations.

Adoptees below the age of 18 have no legal right to access to their birth records. Specific requests for limited access, will be considered in the case of adoptees aged under 18 years, but is only likely to be agreed to in very exceptional cases.

14.5.2 Adopters

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

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

14.5.3 Birth Parents

Birth parents have no right of access to their child's adoption records.

15. Intercountry Adoption

The agency does not itself provide an Intercountry Adoption Service. This Service is highly specialised and provided on Knowsley's behalf by the Inter Country Adoption service, based in London, who uphold the principles that are enshrined in international agreements, declarations, resolutions and Conventions that the United Kingdom is party to.

All enquirers will be assisted and signposted to the Inter Country Adoption Service.

Inter-Country adopters and children/young people adopted from abroad via an Inter-Country arrangement are eligible to apply to the Local Authority for Adoption Support in the same way as any other adopters or adoptees living in the Local Authority's area.

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

16. PROVIDING A QUALITY ADOPTION SERVICE: PLANNING AND REVIEW

Knowsley is committed to providing a consistently high quality Adoption Service, aimed at meeting the needs of all service users.

- 16.1 The Adoption Service is planned and delivered from within the People's Department of Knowsley MBC. A Senior Manager, with a clear link to the Director, will ensure that adoption is an integral part of the Council's services for children. This manager will be involved in the strategic planning, delivery and monitoring of the adoption service. Plans for the Adoption Service are included in the Children's Strategic Plan.
- 16.2 Strategic Planning is based on an analysis of known and projected needs for the Adoption Service. This enables planned allocation of resources against agreed objectives and targets.
- 16.3 Detailed statistical and management information is collected in a variety of ways about the Adoption Service, in order to inform strategic and operational planning, service delivery, and resource requirements. This information will be shared with Elected Members in order that they can carry out their responsibilities as corporate parents.
- 16.4 The Department has clear structures within the People's Service for the management of staff and systems of accountability for all those undertaking adoption work. These systems include staff supervision, the Child Care Planning and Review process and the Adoption Panel.
- 16.5 The Department is committed to a standardised approach to Adoption and Permanency work in line with the Adoption and Children Act 2002, statutory guidance, regulations and good practice.
- 16.6 Staff will have the necessary skills and knowledge, or access to them to undertake adoption work and will be supervised. Managers, Elected Members and Panel Members will have access to necessary training and skills development.

The annual Training Plan for People's services will cover training needs in respect of the Adoption Service.

- 16.7 The importance of seeking user feedback on the Adoption Service by a variety of methods will be used, wherever possible, to obtain user views and levels of satisfaction with the service.

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- 16.8 The information gathered through Disruption Meetings will be analysed to identify any consistent factors, which have implications for policy, procedures or practice within Adoption Service.
- 16.9 The Department will review its arrangements for providing a comprehensive Adoption Service prior to and in the light of the inspection recommendations.

17 Complaints Process

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

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

Any person who is dissatisfied with the service that they have received from the Council's Adoption Agency should first speak to the staff who have been working with them or their manager.

However, if they feel unable to speak to them, or believe that they have not dealt with their concern satisfactorily, they should contact the Knowsley Complaints Receiving Officer.

18. CONCLUSION

Knowsley Adoption Services will treat all those involved in the adoption process with value and respect, recognising that all children require permanence in their lives and for some this will be achieved through adoption. On-going support through adoption and beyond will be available to all relevant parties.

The continued development and focus upon adoption services is currently and will continue to be a prioritised aspect of the work of Knowsley's Health and Social Care Department and The Local Children's Safeguarding Board

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