



Allegations
Against an
Adopter policy

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Allegations Against an Adopter

About this document

Title: Allegations Against an Adopter Policy

Purpose: Safeguarding all children who have been Looked After or are Looked After.

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Introduction

All children are entitled to the same level and standard of protection from harm including those receiving services from statutory or other agencies. For this reason, enquiries and investigations relating to children in receipt of such services must be dealt with under the principles, policies and procedures of the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Allegations or suspicions that a prospective adopter has caused harm to a child or that a child placed for adoption has suffered harm will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively under those procedures and will involve open and honest communication with and support to all those affected.

Historical allegations by children placed for adoption or already adopted and in receipt of adoption support services should be responded to in the same way as contemporary concerns but the child who is placed for adoption will be dealt with by the team with case responsibility for him or her, together with the LADO, whereas the child who is already adopted will be dealt with by Children's Social Care where they reside, the same as if an allegation was made against any parent in the local authority area. It will be important to ascertain if the person about whom the allegation is made is currently working with children or Vulnerable Adults and if that is the case, to consider whether the current employer should be informed and invited to any meetings.

Clear timescales will be integral to the procedure and those involved must avoid delay unless there is good reason. There will be clarity regarding access to reports and documents relating to the investigation and/or Section 47 Enquiry.

Where allegations are made in relation to prospective adopters, the welfare and safety of all children in the prospective adopters' household, and children with whom the prospective adopters may have contact, must also be considered during any investigation and/or Section 47 Enquiry.

In relation to any allegations made, it is important to note that, although there may be insufficient evidence to support a Police prosecution, this does not mean that action cannot be taken to protect a child nor, for example, that the termination of a prospective adopter's approval cannot be considered

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

This procedure applies where allegations are made or suspicions are raised that approved prospective adopters have caused Significant Harm to a child.

They should be read in conjunction with [Knowsley Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures, Allegations Against Staff, Carers and Volunteers Procedure](#).

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1. Policy

All children are entitled to the same level and standard of protection from harm including those receiving services from statutory or other agencies. For this reason, enquiries and investigations relating to children in receipt of such services must be dealt with under the principles, policies and procedures laid down by the Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board Procedures or, in relation to children placed outside Knowsley, in accordance with the principles, policies and procedures of the relevant Safeguarding Children Board.

Allegations or suspicions that a prospective foster carer or approved foster carer has caused Significant Harm to a child will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively under those procedures and will involve open and honest communication with and support to all those affected.

Clear timescales will be integral to the procedure and those involved must avoid delay unless there is good reason. There will be clarity regarding access to reports and documents relating to the investigation.

It is important to note that, although there may be insufficient evidence to support a police prosecution, this does not mean that action cannot be taken to protect a child nor that the termination of a prospective adopter's approval cannot be considered.

The welfare and safety of all children in the prospective adopters' household, and children with whom the prospective adopters may have contact, must also be considered during any Section 47 Enquiry.

2. Introduction

The expectation is that:

- a. At the time of a child's placement, foster carers will be provided with detailed information as to the child's background and in particular the context of any abusive experiences of and/or previous allegations made by the child;
- b. All foster carers and/or prospective adopters will receive preparation and guidance to help them provide a safe environment for the child and all members of the adoptive family;
- c. All prospective and approved foster carers and adopters will have received information about this procedure.

3. Procedure

3.1 Initial Action

Any person who receives information or suspects that a child has suffered or is suffering Significant Harm in a foster or adoptive placement or during an introduction to an adoptive placement must immediately inform the child's social worker.

On receipt of any such information, the child's social worker must immediately:

- Inform his or her line manager;
- Inform the prospective adopter's social worker and his or her manager;

- Having consulted the Children's Social Care Manager (CSCM) and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer if considered necessary, the child's social worker must make a decision with his or her manager as to whether the matter should be treated as a child protection children matter and referred for a Strategy Discussion/Meeting (see below) or a concern about standards of care, in which case the convening of an urgent Placement Planning Review Meeting - see Placement for Adoption Procedure - or an urgent review of the adoptive placement should be considered - see Adoption Reviews Procedure;
- Managers and social workers should also consult the LADO and request any support and or advice with respect to allegations to ensure there is a clear record being kept on the foster carers file and within the Quality Assurance Unit.

N.B. If there are serious and/or multiple referrals about standards of care, it may still be appropriate to refer the matter for a Strategy Meeting for a full investigation.

The foster carer and/or prospective adopter's social worker will:

- Inform the social workers for any other child in the placement;
- Inform any other local authority with an interest in the adoptive placement;
- Provide support to the prospective adopter.

Where it is appropriate to treat the allegation/suspicion as a child protection concern, the child's social worker will be responsible for initiating the Child Protection Procedures in relation to the allegation/suspicion, unless the foster carer and/or prospective adopter lives outside the borough, in which case the child's social worker will make a referral to the relevant local authority and that local authority will be responsible for implementing their own local Child Protection Procedures and inviting the child's social worker and adopters' social worker to the Strategy Discussion/Meeting.

In relation to a prospective adopter resident in the borough where there are any allegations or suspicions of Significant Harm, a Strategy Meeting will be convened in accordance with the Child Protection Procedures as soon as possible after concerns have been identified and within a maximum of 2 working days of the referral.

Any action to protect the child in question or any other children in need of protection should not be delayed because of the Strategy Meeting.

Prior to the Strategy Meeting, the prospective adopter's social worker should notify the Regulatory Authority of the allegation/suspicion and invite them to be represented at the Strategy Meeting.

3.2 Strategy Meeting

The purpose of the meeting will be to plan the investigation of the allegation/suspicion.

The following people will be invited:

- a. The child's social worker and his or her manager;
- b. The manager of the social work team undertaking the investigation, if different;
- c. The prospective adopter's social worker;
- d. The Police Child Abuse Investigation Team;

- e. Any other agency involved with the child or adoptive family;
- f. A representative of the Regulatory Authority;
- g. A minute taker;
- h. The child's Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Strategy Meeting must consider:

- The current allegation and how it is to be investigated;
- Whether there should be a concurrent police investigation;
- Any previous allegations or concerns about the prospective adopters and the outcome of previous investigations;
- Any previous allegations made by the child in question and the outcome of previous investigations;
- The suspension of introductions or whether the child should remain in placement whilst the investigation is carried out;
- The need to call an urgent placement planning review meeting;
- The safety and well-being of other children living with, or having contact with the prospective adopters;
- Support to be offered to the children in the family during the investigation;
- Who will inform the prospective adopters of this meeting;
- Who will support the prospective adopters through the investigation process;
- Contact and information to be given to the parents of the children concerned; how and when this should be done.

Whether or not the Strategy Discussion/Meeting considers that the allegation or suspicion has any foundation, the matter should be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances, and the Regulatory Authority must always be kept informed.

The Chair should complete a decision sheet at the end of the meeting summarising the actions to be taken and the date of the next meeting. This should also clearly state who is responsible for what actions, record timescales for completion of any agreed actions and reporting/information sharing systems.

Copies of the decision sheet and the minutes should be held on the child's file and foster carer and/or prospective adopters ICS file.

3.3 Investigation and Action

The actions agreed at the Strategy Discussion/Meeting should be implemented by those responsible within the agreed timescales.

If the person raising suspicions or making the allegation wishes to remain anonymous, these wishes should be respected.

Unless there are circumstances when the details or nature of the allegation cannot be shared immediately, the foster carers or adopters should be advised of the allegation as agreed at the Strategy Meeting and of the process to be followed in the investigation, including the possibility that an Initial Child Protection Conference may be convened in relation to their own children, subject to the outcome of the investigation.

Depending on the level and nature of any concerns and whether they are immediate, the prospective adopters may be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations before any final decision is made about necessary action to protect the child and other children in the household. Such protective action may include asking the person against whom the allegation has been made to leave the household while the investigation is conducted.

Any decision to suspend the approval of the foster carers or prospective adopter while the investigation is being conducted should be communicated in writing to the foster carers or prospective adopter by the Children's Service Manager.

Those supporting the prospective adopters or foster carers must contact them as soon as practicable after they are made aware of the allegation, and explain their role. They must make clear their responsibility to report to the local authority, the Police and in some circumstances to the Court if any information relevant to the investigation comes to their attention.

They must provide to the prospective adopters:

- a. A copy of this procedure and the relevant part of the Knowsley Child Protection Procedures (Chapter 5.1) or those of the relevant area;
- b. Advice about consulting a solicitor;
- c. Advice about insurance arrangements for legal expenses.

Where the foster carers or prospective adopters are in receipt of financial support, they should be informed of any implications for the payment of such support, where placements have been suspended.

If an Initial Child Protection Conference is convened, the Conference Chair must be consulted in advance to discuss whether the prospective adopters should be invited to attend. In any event, the prospective adopters' views must be obtained for and communicated to the Conference.

3.4 Concluding the Investigation

Where the foster carers or prospective adopters live in the borough, the Strategy Meeting will usually be reconvened once an investigation has been completed, particularly where no child protection conference is then held. The same people will be invited and the same person will chair the meeting.

The purpose of the reconvened Strategy Meeting is to agree on the outcome of the investigation and responsibilities for any further action, including the need to call an urgent review of the adoptive placement - see Adoption Reviews Procedure and reporting on the matter to the Adoption Panel.

The meeting should determine who will write to the prospective adopters, informing them of the outcome of the investigation.

The child, the parents, other relevant agencies and the Regulatory Authority (if not in attendance) will also be informed of the decisions made at the meeting. The Chair and the child's social worker will agree the most appropriate way of informing the child and parents, and also who will notify the other agencies and Regulatory Authority.

A report should be presented to the next available Adoption Panel. As well as the investigation, the report should address the ability of the approved adopters to help come to terms with past events and to handle future behaviour, and whether the proposed placement or placement continues to be suitable. The procedure to be followed will be the same as for reviews of approval.

The social worker preparing the report should consult with the Panel Adviser to the relevant Panel and the Chair of the Panel who will advise on who should attend the Panel meeting (usually the child's social worker and the prospective adopter's social worker) and whether or not a special Panel meeting should be convened.

Any allegation made against a foster carer or prospective adopter or a member of the household, how it was dealt with and decisions made, and all relevant documents are recorded on the child's file and the foster carer or prospective adopter's file, and any respective Adoption Case Records. If an Adoption Order is made, this information must be retained for 100 years after the Adoption Order.

Consideration should be given to holding a debriefing meeting for all involved as to the impact of the allegations and the investigation, whatever the outcome, and any necessary assistance should be made available as necessary.