

Adoption

Approved Adopters' Handbook



Congratulations on becoming prospective adoptive parents for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This booklet is about what happens next: the services available during the matching process, post-placement and post-adoption support. It has been written in accordance with the Adoption & Children Act 2002 (Adoption Statutory Guidance July 2014), The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (updated 2011 and 2013) and the Pan-London Procedures.

The Adoption Service

The main function of the Adoption Service is to provide a high-quality adoption and permanence service for children. This involves enabling children who are looked after by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council who can no longer return to live with their birth families to move to permanent substitute families. As part of the family finding process we recruit, prepare and assess suitable prospective adoptive families. We hope to be able to place children who are waiting in the borough with families that are approved by our service.

The Permanency and Adoption Support Team

The Permanency and Adoption Support Team's remit is to find families for children who can no longer live with their birth families. These children are referred to the team through the Looked After Children, Family Support and Protection and the Hospital Social Work teams within the borough. If we don't have a suitable family approved by the borough, we circulate the children's details, in the first instance to our consortium and then through specialist organisations and locate families who are approved by different adoption agencies.

Post-Approval: how the matching process works

During the assessment process you provided a lot of information which formed the foundation of the CoramBAAF Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). This was presented to the Adoption Panel. We will now use this information to inform the family finding process. The advice from the panel about your approval will be taken into account when family finding. At this stage your supporting social worker will have completed a post approval support plan with you to identify any ongoing training and support needs.

The First Stage

Once approved, it is usually your assessing social worker who will continue to support you during the family finding and matching processes. They will also support you once a child has moved to live with you (post-placement) through to the granting of an Adoption Order.

We will refer you to the National Adoption Register no later than three months from approval if we have not identified a particular child whom we are considering to place with you. We will explore various routes to promote you as prospective adopters and to get you matched with the right child for you.

The Second Stage

Where there are no children waiting within Tower Hamlets who could be considered a suitable match for you, the social worker supporting you will begin the process of looking for children outside of the borough. This may take several routes:

The East London Adoption Consortium

The East London Adoption Consortium is the group of East London boroughs that have joined resources to provide an exchange system to facilitate the matching of waiting families and children within these boroughs.

The consortium members include the London boroughs of Redbridge, Havering, Barking and Dagenham, Newham and Waltham Forest. The charity, Barnardo's is also a member. The system includes mailing out details of families and children,

discussing the details of families at the quarterly consortium management meetings, and holding Adoption Exchange and profiling events where approved families can attend and meet other agencies who have children waiting.

The social worker supporting you will work with you on a profile (A4 size) for the purposes of circulating your details within the consortium based on your approval range and the children you are interested in adopting.

The Adoption Register for England and Wales

The Adoption Register for England and Wales is a computer-based system called Adoption Match designed to assist in the matching of children and approved families on a national scale. Adoption agencies refer children who need adoptive families and families who are approved for adoption to this database.

The social worker supporting you will complete the required documentation which outlines your approval range and the children you are interested in adopting. This will be recorded and logged on the register. We would usually do this after three months of exploring matches with children within the borough; however, you are free to refer yourself to the register at any time.

The Adoption Register works in conjunction with many Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to organise large National events and attend agency run events called 'Adoption Exchange Days'.

You will need to be invited to an Exchange Day because of the sensitive nature of the information about the children. You should discuss the possibility of attending these days with your social worker if you think it is an option you'd like to explore.

Exchange Days can be exhilarating - you might find information about your future son or daughter on the day – but they can also feel a bit overwhelming. There is a lot of information about children needing families. You are likely to be given a time slot to help manage the flow of people so that you have the best chance to review all the information about the children.

Link Maker

Link Maker is a matching system which is currently being used by many adopters and social workers from many different authorities and voluntary adoption agencies across the UK.

The live system allows users to share profiles and search directly; helping children find new parents who can best meet their needs and help them thrive, without delay.

We encourage all of our prospective adopters to include their profile online once they are approved.

CoramBAAF and Adoption UK

You will be encouraged to join CoramBAAF and Adoption UK, two of the main national agencies involved in policy making, training, research and family finding.

Adoption UK is an independent organisation and has a large network of support groups for adoptive parents. Adoption UK also publishes two papers monthly. One looks at current issues for adopters, including training and information about local support groups.

The other has children's details who are waiting for adoption which are placed by the adoption agencies. With your social worker's support and guidance there may be children featured in these papers you may consider as a possible match.

Adoption Activity Days

Adoption activity days are organised events that give approved adopters, or prospective adopters at an advanced stage of approval, the opportunity to meet a range of children who need adoptive placements and engage with them in a fun environment. These events allow the children and prospective adopters to get involved with lots of fun activities such as face painting, climbing, craft and soft play.

Children are very carefully prepared by their social workers and foster carers and the emphasis is on having fun, not finding new parents. Adopters are offered a lot of support and somewhere to have time out if the emotion of the day gets too much. The children's foster carers and social workers are also on hand for extra support.

Adoption activity days have proved successful in finding matches as they give prospective adopters and the children a chance to make a real connection. An advantage of activity days is that adopters often find that their preconceptions about the kind of child they initially feel they might want to adopt changed

once they had the opportunity to meet the children in person. This means that children who may not have been considered 'on paper' have a greater chance of being adopted. These events, which were piloted from 2011-13 and are now being more widely introduced, are organised by CoramBAAF – in partnership with some councils, including Tower Hamlets and with voluntary adoption agencies.

The Third Stage

Through any of these avenues you and the supporting social worker could identify possible children. As this process is ongoing, any one of these linking systems may identify possible children in differing local authorities at the same time.

In each case, the child's Looked After Children (LAC) social worker and family finder will have identified the needs of the child and this will inform the child's family finder whether the families who enquire are likely to match and meet the child's needs. The child's social worker will not have the task of family finding for the child.

This is the responsibility of a Permanency and Adoption Support Team social worker or 'family finder.' The social worker supporting you will make contact on your behalf to the relevant child's agency regardless of which route the potential match has come through. Your social worker will speak about you in more detail to the social worker in the child's agency who has the family finding responsibility for the child. Should the family finding social worker consider your profile a potential match for the child they will request your Prospective Adopters Report (PAR).

The child's agency may look at the range of PARs which they have received in relation to the child and identify those families who they feel most closely match the child's needs.

If the agency chooses you as a possible match, they will inform your social worker who will request the child's details from the Child's Permanency Report (CPR). You will be sent this via your social worker and have an opportunity to discuss the children's details thoroughly with them.

You may decide that the information you have read in the CPR does not match the child you feel you can parent. Your social worker will advise and support you with this. Any questions either agency may have with a view to possible matching will be discussed between the relevant social workers. Following this, potential matches are selected by the child's agency social worker and family finder and they may select you and a number of other families to visit.

The Visit from the Child's Agency

Preparing for the visit

Before a child's social worker or a family finding social worker visits, your social worker will assist in preparing you for the visit, and be present during the visit. The family finder is usually accompanied by the child's social worker. Some agencies include the child's foster carer in this visit. They may bring a DVD of the child or photographs. You will be informed of this prior to the visit.

As part of the preparation for the visit, you may wish to make enquiries at your local pre-school group, nursery or school depending on the child's age about availability and process for applications in the event of the agencies asking about local resources.

The visit

The children's social workers will talk about the child and ask you a range of questions to promote discussion about the child and yourselves. This is an opportunity to ask questions about the children and your social worker may also ask questions or offer information. For example, you may want more clarity on a child's medical history, or the long-term contact arrangements.

The visiting social workers will tell you how many other families they are hoping to visit and their time scale for making a decision.

If you are selected

After visiting the families the child's agency will hold a matching meeting where the families visited will be matched against the child's identified needs. If you most closely match those needs you will be selected to go forward to the child's agency Adoption Panel.

Before presenting a match between a child and a family, the placing agency prepares an Adoption Support Plan which sets out how each statutory agency intends to support you, post-placement and post-adoption. If you do not live in Tower Hamlets, your support worker will investigate what services are provided by your own local authority to be included in the plan for the long term. You will be given a copy of this report and can discuss it with your supporting social worker. You will be asked to sign it to confirm you are happy with the content before it joins the other paperwork to be presented to panel to support the match. In addition to this you will be offered the opportunity to meet with the borough's medical advisor, foster carer and any other significant figures in the child's life to ensure you have a full picture of the child's needs before making a final decision about whether you wish to pursue the match.

Under the Adoption and Care Planning Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2014, we have a duty to assess your support needs – including emotional, practical and financial needs. These matters will be discussed with you prior to a child being placed to identify their needs, and a support plan is drawn up outlining how each of these needs will be met.

Finances

The financial implications of adopting a child are explored at the onset of the discussions using an assessment tool to look at an applicant's financial situation. The council has a statutory duty to provide financial support where necessary, and recognises finances are an important part of family life.

Any allowances paid will be dependent on the child's needs and the adopters' financial circumstances and will be means tested on a yearly basis. Allowances will also be considered for sibling groups and children with special needs in recognition

of the additional commitments of parenting for these particular groups of children.

The outcome of this assessment will be presented to a resource panel which finalises the financial support packages to be provided. This will include a payment towards equipment. This approved support package will accompany the matching papers to be presented to the Adoption Panel.

People who adopt are entitled to the same state benefits available to all families with children from the government provided through the Department of Social Security. This includes child benefit and possibly adoption pay and child tax credit depending on individual circumstances.

When social workers are planning for children post-adoption, Adoption Support plans take into consideration the state benefits families are entitled to. All financial support is reviewed annually.

The Adoption Panel

Prior to the match being presented to the panel, you will need to consider preparing for the child moving to live in your home. At this stage we cannot pre-empt the panel's decision, but mentioning the possibility of going on adoption leave to your employer, looking at equipment you will need, preparing existing children in your family and relatives could be some of the things you start thinking about. Your supporting social worker can help you. Being selected for a child from a different local authority from Tower Hamlets will involve attending the panel in the child's agency. If you have been selected for a child who lives a longer distance away, you will need to prepare for travelling and possibly staying overnight. Adoption support packages will also be discussed with you and should any financial package be payable, it will be the child's agency who will be responsible for assessing and providing it.

Placement Planning Meetings

In cases where the Adoption Panel agrees the match, the placing agency will arrange a placement planning meeting. This will be a few days or even a week later, as the panel's recommendation needs to be ratified by a senior manager in the agency called the Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

Placement planning meetings take place prior to the child being placed. You will be invited to attend together with your supporting social worker, child's social worker and foster carer(s). This meeting is chaired by a manager in the Permanency and Adoption Support Team.

At this meeting the plan for introducing the child to you and preparing the child to move to your home will be drawn up. It's a good idea to clear your diary, as you will need to be as flexible as possible.

If the child's agency is a longer distance away, the agency may consider supporting you with hotel accommodation throughout the introductions. We will ask you to prepare a 'welcome book' which is a child friendly book introducing yourself to your future son or daughter. Your supporting social worker will assist you with ideas on how to prepare this book and ensure it is appropriate to the child's age, needs and comprehension.

Introductions are drawn up solely based on the needs of the child, their age and understanding. For children under three years, introductions generally span no more than two weeks from the day of introductions. You first meet the child in the foster carer's home and get to know about the child through interaction with them and from the foster carer. The introductions for children involves daily visiting, and after a few days (including opportunities to take the child out) the visits switch to occurring in your home so that the child can get a sense of where they are moving to.

Older children generally require longer to adjust to a new family and the idea of moving. Introductions for older children are sometimes during school time and can span up to three or even four weeks, with days in between where there is only telephone or written contact from the new family and the child.

At the placement planning meeting, there will be discussion between the agencies about finance, contact, your opportunity to meet the birth family during this time and a date will be set to review the introductions. Any current or future therapeutic needs of the child will be discussed and the facilitation of these will be clarified along

with a tentative date for the child to officially move in with you.

The review of introductions will look at how the adults feel the child has adjusted to the idea of moving. If all is going well, a moving date is finalised. The child's social worker will set a date with you to visit within five days of placement, and a review of the placement date will be organised within a month of the moving date.

The child's agency will notify your local authority and the health services that the child has moved to live with you. In cases where the child is over three, there will have been negotiations between the child's local authority, you and the identified nursery or school to secure a place for them. The school start date will also be discussed at the review introductions meeting.

Any expenses incurred, such as travel, will need to be supported by receipts and travel tickets. Payment of these will be the responsibility of the child's agency. If you are matched with a child from Tower Hamlets you will be entitled to a 'settling in' grant which can be used to purchase items you may need in order to care for the child. Receipts will be required for proof of purchase.

In rare situations, families or agencies decide during the introduction period that the match is not suitable. This can be very sad and difficult and your supporting social worker will offer counselling through the Post-Adoption Centre or through other appropriate avenues. You will need time to recover from such a disappointing experience before you consider any future family finding.

Post-Placement

The first day that a child moves to their prospective adoptive family can be exciting and sad at the same time. Even small children get a sense of the mixed feelings that adults have on that day. It is important for you, as the prospective adopter, to be attuned to this.

Do not plan too much in the first few months. Although many of your extended family may be keen to meet your new children, it is advisable to think about doing this gradually. The children need

time to accommodate to the move, both emotionally and practically. You can discuss with your supporting social worker ways in which you can support your child settling and making new attachments.

On a practical level, you will need to register the children at your doctor's surgery and they will refer the child to a health visitor. Where the child is of nursery or school age, they will need time to establish their attachment with you and we may ask that they are not fully integrated into nursery or school until they are settled into the placement with you for a short time.

The child's social worker will visit within five days of placement and a statutory review will take place a month into placement. The social worker will be there to support you assisting the child in their adjustment to living with you.

The statutory review will be held in your home and an Independent Reviewing Officer will chair this meeting. The child's social worker, your supporting social worker and sometimes the health visitor or the new class teacher attends. The purpose of the review is to discuss how the placement is going and any issues that are outstanding from the introductory period.

Statutory reviews are then held after three months and then every six months until the granting of the Adoption Order.

Making an Application to Adopt your Child

At the three month statutory review meeting, you will be asked to consider lodging your application to adopt. In these cases you may need to seek advice from a solicitor who specialises in childcare cases. Your social worker will be able to advise and support you if this is necessary. In most cases, children have been placed for adoption subject to a Placement Order and usually this smooths the way through the court system. However, where there are birth families that have consistently resisted the adoption plans for their child, the legal process can be lengthy, as the court will want to ensure the parents' rights and views are considered as part of the process. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets will reimburse the cost of making

an application to court for the Adoption Order.

Both your supporting social worker and the child's social worker will be requested by the court to write a joint report on behalf of the local authorities they represent. This information is about the child, the child's birth family and yourselves. This report will set out why the child has been placed for adoption, planned contact arrangements and the local authorities' recommendation and is called a Rule 14 report. The reports are used by the judge in the proceedings to inform them of the court's decision about making an Adoption Order.

Contact Arrangements

Any indirect or direct contact arrangements will have been agreed before placement and before the case is heard in court. This may involve signing contact agreement forms through to the first direct contact meeting which will be part of the ongoing arrangement. It is an opportunity, while the social worker for the child is still supporting you, for any issues in relation to contact that arise to be ironed out prior to the Adoption Order being granted. This will enable you, the child and their birth family to be clear about the expectations of each other and any necessary arrangements.

The Adoption Order

On the day of the Adoption pronouncement hearing you will attend court with the child. This is at the end of the legal process and tends to be quite informal. The social worker for the child, your supporting social worker and the children's guardian (if required) also attend.

Apart from some general questions you will be asked to give details of the child's new name: this refers to your surname and any middle name you have chosen with or for the child. We encourage families in the majority of cases to retain the child's first name as recognition of the identity given to the child at birth and by which they know themselves.

Support After Adoption

We recognise that having good adoption support in place can make a difference to adoptive families.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets has a dedicated team of social workers providing an adoption support service. Once you have obtained the adoption order you will be contacted by a support worker who will arrange to meet with you and provide you with information about the support available from Tower Hamlets and our independent partners.

We will provide you with support for as long as you live in Tower Hamlets. If you live in another borough we will support you for three years.

After this time your support needs will become the responsibility of the area in which you live. You can ask for an assessment of your adoption support needs at any time. Support can take many forms; it can be the provision of counselling or advice, help with educational matters, managing difficult behaviours or financial and therapeutic support.

There are a range of ongoing learning courses provided for adopters by Tower Hamlets. Our training brochure is made available to adopters each year.

We also provide support with any direct or letterbox contact that may be part of your adoption. The use of social networking sites in adoption has become an issue for some families. We can provide support, advice and information to families where this is a concern.

Social events for adopters and children are provided by our support service. It enables adopted children to meet each other in a relaxed and fun setting and for parents to make useful and supportive connections.

Advice and information on the Adoption Passport and the Pupil Premium is available from our Adoption Support Service.

For adopters who may prefer an independent support service, a referral can be made to the Post Adoption Centre who offer advice and counselling to individuals or families.

We also have an independent registered therapist available to provide individual counselling to families.

Disruption

Across the UK, there are a small percentage of placements that have difficulties either post-placement or post-adoption each year.

Therefore it is very important that families recognise signs of stress or when children are struggling with their past difficulties which may manifest themselves in challenging behaviour. During the post-placement period, talking this over with the child's agency and your supporting social worker will help you manage the situation, and alert them to any therapeutic support that may be needed.

When situations get difficult post-adoption, you can access support according to the Adoption Support Regulations (2005). You can request an Adoption Support Assessment from either the child's agency or your own local authority where you can ask for assistance with a situation in the family.

Other Information:

Highs and Lows

Having gone through the lengthy assessment and preparation process, some families find the post-approval stage of 'waiting' quite difficult. Services are in place to assist with the process but in some situations families can wait for up to a year before they are matched with a child or children. Your social worker will be able to support you through this process which can be one of anticipation and perhaps disappointment.

At any point in the process prior to the matching panel, you, your social worker or the child's agency may decide not to proceed with a possible match.

If it is the agency or your social worker who makes this decision you will be given feedback on why this decision has been made. In the early stages, where there may have been a lot of interest in a child who you have identified, the feedback may be limited. If it is following a visit, there is likely to be more information about why you were not selected.

If you are not matched within a year of approval you will be asked to attend an

annual review meeting to explore how you have experienced your adoption journey so far and to look at whether adoption is still the right choice for you.

The post-approval stage is an opportunity to gain further experience of working or caring for children and reading up on issues you learned about during the preparation time. We offer both e-learning and training opportunities within the borough.

Useful Contacts

The Post-Adoption Centre

5 Torriano Mews
Torriano Avenue
London, NW5 2RZ
Tel:
www.pac.org.uk

CoramBAAF

41 Brunswick Square
London WC1N 1AF
Tel: 020 7421 2600
www.corambaaf.org.uk

Adoption UK

Adoption UK
Units 11 and 12, Vantage Business Park
Bloxham Road, Banbury, OX16 9UX
Tel: 01295 752240
www.adoptionuk.org