

A Safe Return to Home Visit Appointments

Policy, Guidance and Risk Assessment

Introductions:

Adoption assessments involve the completion of a holistic and wide-reaching Prospective Adopters Report (PAR). A key component when undertaking this task is the formation of a robust and at times, challenging working relationship between applicant and social worker. Practically, completing PAR's requires many appointments between both parties in order to discuss and examine the applicant's suitability to adopt. For a number of very logical reasons this results in many of assessment sessions often being conducted within the applicant's own home. This is not only due to the practicalities of arranging such appointments but also the applicant is generally more relaxed within their home environment to fully engage in what are often sensitive and challenging discussions.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching impact upon our ability to conduct our everyday business. Since mid-March 2020, Public Health Wales advice has been adhered to and no non-essential home visits have been conducted. This has meant no physical face to face assessment sessions have taken place.

With the goal of preventing a complete halt to our work, a temporary approach to managing assessments was implemented (appendix 1 '*Suggested Assessment Schedule during Covid-19 working*'). This fundamentally identified the broad key topics and themes explored within assessment sessions and suggested what, in principle, could be conducted via remote video appointments. This was a relatively simple and temporary suggested approach which would be used alongside professional judgements. It also needed to be adapted to reflect the inevitable unique circumstances of each assessment.

On the whole, feedback from applicants and social workers to date has been positive and this approach seems to have worked well in the face of a very challenging set of circumstances.

We knew from the outset that the suggested video appointments would only progress matters so far and that there will come a point during every assessment that the need for face to face discussions would be necessary. It is simply not appropriate to

complete an assessment determining a person's suitability to adopt a child without physically meeting an applicant and visiting their home.

With this backdrop in mind it is our policy to work towards conducting appointments face to face with our service users once again where the need to do so is required.

Overarching principles and guidance:

- ***The health of our staff, their families, service users and the wider public is our paramount consideration.*** All decisions taken in respect of moving service delivery forward during this time will adhere to the latest Welsh Government and Public Health Wales advice. Therefore, our approach to conducting our work will be kept under regular review. For those staff and service users 'shielding', the most up to date Welsh Government and Public Health Wales advice must be followed.
- ***Retain the good practice that has emerged from the global pandemic.*** The past few months has forced us to review the functioning of every element of our work. In relation specifically to assessments, we have for the first time embraced remote video sessions. It is therefore important for us not to abandon the good practice that has come as a consequence of COVID-19. Therefore the "new normal" approach to conducting assessment should include continuing to embrace secure and authorised forms of video appointments where appropriate.
- ***Asking yourself – does this appointment need to be held at a service user's home?*** With the above in mind, if a video appointment is not appropriate, identify what alternative options are available. Is hosting the appointment at one of the Council's offices safer and appropriate? Is a socially distanced walking appointment suitable etc? Be creative whilst respecting the need to maintain confidentiality and remembering always to consult and seek the consent of the other parties.
- ***Don't be complacent.*** The longer COVID-19 is present within our society the higher the risk that some will become desensitised by its pervasive impact. With this in mind the short risk assessment that accompanies this guidance must be completed 24 working hours before every scheduled appointment to a service users' home. After this is completed for the first time, the assessment is merely updated prior to each subsequent appointment and unless circumstances have changed this will not be a burden upon anyone's time. Your team manager will need to authorise the visit plan on the first occasion it is completed. This will not be required when the risk assessment is being updated unless there are significant changes.
- ***When conducting home appointments adhere to Public Health Wales' latest advice.*** If you believe you or anyone you live with present with having COVID-19 symptoms, appointments outside your home cannot take place. You should make arrangements to be tested were appropriate. If symptom free,

ensuring thorough handwashing and maintaining social distancing is maintained is mandatory. In a practical sense when conducting appointments it will require you to have an open discussion with service users when updating the risk assessment. Matters to cover include where the appointment can and will be held achieving a minimum 2 metre distance. Reminding service users that you will respectfully decline any offer of food or drink and there can be no handshaking etc. You should also request that doors are already opened so you can move through the home without touching door handles. You should ensure a cautious common sense approach to conducting your work. Referring service users to the letter you will be asked to email (appendix 2) will remind applicant(s) of the key measures.

Risk assessment

Name of social worker completing this assessment?	
Name of applicant(s):	
Date of proposed appointment?	
Date risk assessment being completed/updated?	
Has the applicant(s) read the relevant guidance letter and are they in agreement to proceed with the visit?	Yes/No
Health: Has anyone in the household or wider family tested positive for COVID-19? Does anyone in the household report having symptoms, been unwell in the last four weeks either with COVID-19 or other illness? Are any members of the applicant(s) family front line or key workers or in a vulnerable group?	
Socialising: Has the applicant(s) come into contact with larger social groups beyond current Welsh Government guidance in the last 14 days or since the last appointment?	
Where is the appointment going to be held? A need to maintain a minimum a 2 meter distance	
Is the applicant(s) aware of any reason why it would not be appropriate for the appointment to proceed? Are they happy for the appointment to proceed?	
Can the visit proceed?	Yes/No
Team Manager Signature:	

Appendix 1:

Suggested Assessment Schedule During Covid-19 Working	
Session 1 Video session	• Your expectations of the assessment • How the assessment will take place • Discuss any checks the applicants must take forward i.e. overseas and medicals etc. • Timescales • Session Plan • What you felt you learnt from the training attended. Is there any further training or information you think would be a benefit. • Referee information & appointments <i>(email anonymised children's profiles in preparation for session 3)</i>
Session 2 Video session	• Motivation to adopt: • What has led you to adoption? • How many children you would like to adopt, of what age, and why? • Initial exploration of matching criteria checklist • Experience of caring for children
Session 3 Video session	• Information provided about the children who are placed for adoption • The impact a child's background can have on future development • Uncertainty in adoption and how you will manage this • Reflect upon one anonymised child profile • Life Story information – Why this is important and your views on this
Session 4 Video session	• Educational History • Employment History and current employment • Views on education and employment • Adoption Leave • Health • Reflect upon one anonymised child profile
Session 5 Video session	• Understanding the needs of adopted children and adoptive parenting. Views on the information explored in session 3. • Understanding the lifelong nature and impact of adoption. • Potential testamentary guardians.
Session 6 Face to Face	Applicant 1 • Family Background and Early Experience • Relationship History

Session 7 Face to Face	Applicant 2 • Family Background and Early Experience • Relationship History
Session 8 Face to Face	• Current Relationship • Family composition and identity • Support Networks • Neighbourhood and community
Session 9 Face to Face	• Matching criteria revisited • Reflecting upon what has been learnt and retained surrounding the needs of adopted children • Reflections upon their understanding of therapeutic parenting • Home Safety Check and if required, Pet Questionnaire • View identity and finance documents (passport, birth certificate, if relevant divorce documents, online financial statements etc.)

Appendix 2:

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dyddiad/Date: 16 June 2020

Gofynwch am/Ask for: your assigned social worker

Dear Prospective Adopter(s),

RE: staff conducting home appointments

The impact of COVID-19 around the world has been inescapable and it has inevitably had an impact upon how we conduct our work.

As we seek to reach a new way of working, I thought it appropriate to write to you regarding some basic but necessary guidance we are asking all of our staff to follow when they begin conducting appointments to your home.

As a starting point, 24 working hours prior to any appointment to your home we require your social worker to complete/update a short risk assessment. This will determine whether proceeding as arranged is both safe for you and our member of staff. A copy of the template being used is included for your reference.

When conducting their work staff must adhere to the social distancing requirements set out by Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. A minimum distance of 2 metres must be maintained. This means you and your worker will need to agree beforehand where in your home your discussions can take place whilst maintaining this minimum distance.

In the interests of reducing any risk of transference staff have been told to decline any kind offers of food and drink. We are also asking that doors are opened so staff don't need to touch door handles. We are not requiring staff to wear face coverings. However, if Public Health advice changes, this will be reviewed.

We ask that if your circumstances change in the time between completing/updating the risk assessment and the appointment taking place, that you contact your social worker to update them. I appreciate this guidance creates some additional steps, but we believe these are proportionate as we seek to strike the proper balance between stopping the spread of the virus and proceeding with our work the best we can.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Lewis
Recruitment and Assessment Team Manager