



NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE FOR WALES

Good Practice Guide

to accompany

**The Adoption Agencies (Wales)
(Amendment) Regulations 2020**

Introduction

This practice guide has been devised by AFA Cymru on behalf of the National Adoption Service for Wales, and with the assistance of the NAS policy and procedure subgroup.

The guide is to be used when applying the Adoption Agencies (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. These regulations come into force on 1 April 2020 and amend the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005.

The guide is neither statutory guidance nor a code of practice and therefore adoption agencies and local authorities do not have a legal duty to follow it. However, the timescales set out in the guide will be used as performance measures within the National Adoption Service.

The guide has been created with the aim of disseminating and developing consistent good practice across Wales, providing all those involved in the adoption process with a service that meets the highest standards across the country. All five regions and the two voluntary adoption agencies in Wales have played an active part in its collation.

The guide does not prevent the development of good practice that is unique to a particular region or agency; it sets out a framework within which every region or agency can look to meet its own particular needs.

The guide restricts itself to the areas of practice affected by the regulations that is Part 4: Duties of Adoption Agency in Respect of a Prospective Adopter.

The guide sets out, in chronological order, the regulatory framework for each part of the assessment process. Not all of the regulations have been reproduced, but the regulations relating to the good practice set out have been replicated. It then outlines the good practice framework.

The guide also sets out, in the appendices, a set of pro forma documents which should be adopted, and developed if appropriate, by each agency.

The CoramBAAF PAR form for Wales has been updated and is available for use, along with a number of accompanying documents. These documents are referred to in appendices 8, 10, 11, 21 and 29.

Note: in this guidance reference is made the 'the agency'. For the purposes of this document this refers to the five regional collaboratives, which act, through the Adoption and Children Act (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015, on behalf of the 22 local authority adoption agencies and the two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales.

The applicants in the process are referred to as:

- 'potential prospective adopters' from initial enquiry to the beginning of Stage 1
- 'Prospective adopters' from the beginning of Stage 1 until agency decision maker (ADM) decision;
- 'Approved adopters' from ADM decision to date of adoption order.

References to the above are made in the singular, as in the regulations, but the terms apply equally to couples seeking to become adoptive parents. Of course, any couple seeking to adopt should be assessed jointly, taking into account the 'suitability' regulation 30(2)(e): **in determining the suitability of a couple to adopt a child the agency must have proper regard to the need for stability and permanence in their relationship.**

Initial Enquiries

There is no reference in the regulations to the process by which interested people make their initial enquiries and the agency responds.

Good Practice

Agencies are referred to the NAS Best Practice Guide for Initial Enquiries for Adoption.

Agencies at this very initial stage should provide impartial and factual advice to potential prospective adopters. If it is clear from an early stage that, although appearing to be eligible, the agency contacted does not have the capacity to recruit or has no need to recruit these particular potential prospective adopters, then they should be signposted to other regions or VAA's.

1. When a potential prospective adopter seeks general advice or information, then that general information, in the form of an information pack, should be provided within **5 working days**. For details of what should be contained in an information pack, see Appendix 1, and for the accompanying letter, see Appendix 2. The letter should ask them to contact the agency if they have decided to take the next step and wants further information. It should be remembered that it is right and proper for potential prospective adopters to take their time to consider their situation and respond.
2. Following the provision of the information pack, with accompanying letter, if the potential adopter seeks further detailed information or shows an interest in pursuing the process, then the agency should respond to this request **within 15 working days** with a letter (Appendix 3) containing details of how the more detailed information may be provided:
 - An invitation to the next information event; evening and any information meetings taking place in a geographically close agency if those meetings are taking place at an earlier date;
 - A prearranged meeting, either at the potential prospective adopter's home or the agency's office; or
 - A prearranged telephone call.

The decision on which of the above is offered will depend on circumstances and geography.

If the only subsequent contact is through an information evening where there has been no opportunity for a private discussion, then at the least there should be a planned telephone call in order to establish that the potential prospective adopter has enough information on which to base a decision to submit their ROI.

3. Following an information evening, planned visit or telephone call, the potential prospective adopter will be supplied with one of three letters (Appendices 4,5,6):

Appendix 4: A letter enclosing the Registration of Interest Form (ROI), asking potential prospective adopters to complete the form and return it to the agency, providing the dates for the next preparation training and informing the potential prospective adopter that the agency will accept their ROI within 10 days working days of receipt (see below). The letter should also contain the dates for the next tranche of pre-approval training, in case the potential prospective adopter cannot attend the first course;

Appendix 5: a letter expressing the wish that the potential prospective adopter returns to the agency after a period of time (generally no longer than 6 months) in which the potential prospective adopter will have altered an element of their life necessary for the commencement of an assessment (e.g. cessation of smoking / house alteration or move). The letter should say that the agency will contact the potential prospective adopters again after the agreed length of time if they themselves are not contacted.

Appendix 6: a letter explaining that the potential prospective adopter is not eligible, providing clear reasons.

A potential prospective adopter should only be excluded, at the pre assessment stage, on the strict appliance of the eligibility criteria, as set out in ss 49 - 50 Adoption and Children Act 2002 and Regulation 25. These criteria are:

- Domicile or habitual residence in the British Islands.

There have been many enquiries in recent times as to the relationship between domicile, habitual residence and immigration status. The actual or potential breach of immigration laws do not prevent a person from acquiring a domicile of choice or being habitually resident. However, agencies should be cautious in assessing and approving a person who has little prospect of obtaining settled immigration status, as that may have an impact on their ability to offer stability to a child in the long term.

- Age (must be 21 or over)
- Has not been convicted of a 'specified offence'.

Any other considerations should be considered in the Stage 1 'pre-assessment' process.

A decision to refuse to consider a potential prospective adopter for the pre – assessment process should only be made under exceptional circumstances and where there is clear evidence already that no reasonable adoption agency would consider them suitable to adopt. It is not acceptable to undertake any checks before the pre-assessment / Stage 1 process has commenced without the explicit consent of the potential prospective adopter (see point 2 below).

Where there are safeguarding or other concerns

Where the adoption agency believes that there may be some doubt as to the authenticity of an initial enquiry, or has concerns as to a member of staff's safety in making a home visit, the following actions provide a proportionate response to the concerns:

1. Undertake the provision of further information either by telephone or by inviting the potential prospective adopter for a meeting at the agency's office.
2. If the concern continues after the call or meeting, send out the Appendix 4 letter, which will seek consent for local authority and police (DBS and PNC) checks to be carried out. These checks are then carried out at the beginning of Stage 1, before any other business is conducted. If information comes to light as a result of these checks that leads the adoption agency to conclude that the potential prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child, then Stage 1 may be concluded at that point, as set out below.

Where there has been a delay in the enquirer making contact

The letter found in Appendix 7 should be sent if a period of time has elapsed since the information event, meeting or telephone call and the enquirer has not responded to an invitation to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI). The letter should be a reminder to be in touch if still interested and the agency is happy to discuss anything further.

Registration of Interest

Part 4: Duties of Adoption Agency in Respect of a Prospective Adopter

Stage 1 – the pre-assessment process

Registration of interest in adoption

21. Regulations 22 to 27 apply when a person has notified an adoption agency that they want to adopt a child and the agency has notified that person that it has decided to proceed with the pre-assessment process in respect of that person

Good Practice

The Registration of Interest form (ROI) (Appendix 8) is found in the CoramBAAF documents.

There is no timescale for the prospective adopter to return their ROI form. However, once the agency has received the ROI, it should decide whether to proceed to Stage 1 within **10 working days of receipt**. As stated above, a refusal to accept an ROI should not be made on the basis of any consideration other than eligibility, unless there is clear evidence that no reasonable agency would consider them suitable to adopt a child. A letter should be sent giving clear reasons why that decision has been made (Appendix 6).

Once the ROI has been accepted, within the 10 working-day period mentioned above, the two-month period for Stage 1 commences. The ROI process for acceptance should be undertaken by a team manager, who should then write an acceptance letter (Appendix 9) to the now prospective adopter. The letter should contain:

- The date of the acceptance of the ROI and, therefore, the date for the completion of Stage 1, unless particular issues are raised that prevent that timescale being adhered to;
- The name of the prospective adopter's allocated social worker, who will be contacting the prospective adopter within the next two weeks;
- A copy of the draft Stage 1 plan / agreement (found in Appendix 10), which will be completed at the first meeting;
- A 'Stage 1 pack', which provides information on what is required in Stage 1 (a list of the contents of the pack is contained in Appendix 11);
- The dates of the preparation training the prospective adopter will attend.

Stage 1 (Pre-assessment)

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER STAGE 1 PLAN

22. The adoption agency must prepare a written plan in consultation with the prospective adopter (the “prospective adopter stage 1 plan”) which includes the following matters:

- a) information about the counselling, information and preparation for adoption to be provided under regulation 24;**
- b) the procedure for carrying out police checks under regulation 25;**
- c) details of any training that the prospective adopter has agreed to undertake;**
- d) any applicable timescales;**
- e) information about the process for making a representation or complaint;**
- f) any other information the agency considers relevant**

Good Practice

The meeting to discuss and prepare the Stage 1 plan should take place no later than two weeks of the acceptance of the ROI.

It is important for the allocated social worker to have some contact with the prospective adopter during the Stage 1 process. The Stage 2 timescale of four months leaves less than three months within which to complete the PAR. The agency will, therefore, need to start to get to know the prospective adopter in Stage 1. There should, at the very least, be a face to face meeting / visit, at the beginning and at the end of Stage 1.

A Stage 1 checklist is contained in Appendix 12. This is a monitoring tool for agencies to ensure that all elements of Stage 1 are completed.

Stage 1 (Information)

Regulations 25, 26 and Schedule 4, Part 1

Although not contained in the regulations, prospective adoptive parents could be asked to start gathering ‘open supportive statements’, separate from the personal references, from people who know their involvement with children (family members / friends / voluntary work). This will help those who need to evidence some experience with children to start to organize some voluntary work.

Police Checks

Requirement to carry out police checks

25. – (1). In respect of the prospective adopter and any other member of the prospective adopter’s household who is aged 18 or over, the adoption agency must obtain an enhanced criminal record certificate...

Good Practice

At the pre-assessment stage potential prospective adopters will have been told, both through written information and through discussion, that a police check will be needed in order to proceed to Stage 2. They will also have been told that there are certain offences, committed by either themselves or a member of their household, that render a person ineligible to adopt (**regulation 25(2) – (5)**). However, there are many offences that are shown on a DBS check that are not a bar to becoming an adoptive parent but may need some exploration. Potential prospective adopters and prospective adopters should be encouraged to discuss anything that will come up on the check at an early stage, including cautions, which many people believe will not be included.

Should an offence or caution be disclosed the agency will have a process in place to ensure the decision on whether to proceed is made by a senior manager.

The adoption agency also has the authority to ask for a PNC (Police National Computer) check. PNC checks are useful where there may be safeguarding concerns or knowledge of the prospective adopter which leads to particular concerns. As highlighted above, if there are such concerns, a PNC and DBS check may be obtained before commencing any other Stage 1 information, but this should only be done having commenced Stage 1. If those checks disclose information that leads the adoption agency to conclude that the prospective adopter is unsuitable to adopt a child, then that decision should be communicated in writing as soon as possible, giving clear reasons (see Appendix 14).

An adoption agency may not share information from a DBS check with any other person, including spouse, partner or member of the household. If an adoption agency concludes that a prospective adopter is either ineligible or unsuitable as a result of the DBS check, it can only give the other person or people involved the information that the decision has been made as a result of the check, not the contents of the check.

Overseas checks

Where a prospective adopter has lived overseas for an extended period (usually six months or over), when aged 18 or over, overseas checks should be sought. These can be difficult to obtain from certain countries and if unavailable the adoption agency should try to triangulate evidence about the prospective adopter's time abroad, for example with employer references or through personal references. Adoption agencies should be proportionate in their response and not cause undue delay unless they have reasonable concerns about the gap in a chronology. Where, however, it is considered that an overseas check is necessary, the agency will need to discuss the length of time this will take with the prospective adopter and explore the possibility that Stage 1 may need to be extended.

Health Assessments

(Stage 1)

26. The adoption agency must –

(b) obtain a written report from a registered medical practitioner about the health of the prospective adopter following a full examination which must include the matters specified in Part 2 of Schedule 4

(Stage 2)

30(2) The adoption agency must prepare a written report, which includes –

(b) a summary, written by the agency's registered health practitioner, of the state of health of the prospective adopter;

Good Practice

The health assessment is firmly based within Stage 1 and it is essential that the medical check undertaken by the prospective adopter's GP takes place as soon as possible within the two-month period, in order for it to be considered by the agency's medical adviser. Although the regulations make reference to the summary of the agency's medical adviser in Stage 2 (regulation 30), that is only with reference to what the PAR should contain, not when it should be written. The social worker within the agency is not able to make a clinical analysis of the assessment by the prospective adopter's GP and therefore the medical adviser will have to write their report on the assessment in Stage 1.

In relation to a Stage 1 decision there will, on occasion, be information provided that leads the adoption agency to conclude that the prospective adopter's health is such that they are not suitable to adopt. Alternatively, following advice from the medical adviser the impact of such issues as weight, smoking etc. may be more appropriately addressed during Stage 2, or consideration could be given for the prospective adopter to take time out between Stages 1 and 2 to address any concerns. If this is the case the agency should make provision to keep in touch with the prospective adopter to see how they are progressing.

Personal References

Schedule 4 Part 1

Information to be provided during Stage 1

4. Names and addresses of three referees who will give personal references on the prospective adopter, not more than one of whom may be a relative

26. The adoption agency must –

(c) obtain a written report of each of the interviews with the persons nominated by the prospective adopter to provide personal references for the prospective adopter.

Good Practice

The gathering of the three referees, obtaining their written reports, interviewing them and writing the report of that interview, is all to be concluded in Stage 1. However, adoption agencies know that interviewing referees in Stage 2 is often very useful, when they have gone further into the assessment and may want to explore particular areas with those referees.

It is not specified in regulation 26(c) that the interview has to be face to face. It would, therefore, be possible to undertake a telephone interview in Stage 1, so meeting the regulatory requirement, followed by a face to face meeting with the referees in Stage 2 where a more in-depth discussion could take place. Equally a visit could take place within Stage 1 with a follow up telephone call in Stage 2 to verify or explore a particular matter with the referee, if thought necessary.

Ex-partner References

26. The adoption agency must –

(d) where the adoption agency considers it necessary, obtain a personal reference from the prospective adopter's former spouse, civil partner or partner;

Ex-partner references should be obtained in Stage 1 if the prospective adopter has parented or cared for children and / or where there has been a significant relationship (usually where there has been co-habitation). A decision not to take up an ex-partner reference should only be made where there is good reason, for example where there is a history of domestic abuse. Where a reference isn't taken up then triangulation of evidence of that relationship / period of time in the prospective adopter's life should be sought from referees or other sources. A face to face discussion could be taken up in Stage 1 if the information provided in the written reference requires an earlier exploration, or in Stage 2 if appropriate.

Appendix 13 contains the letter to ex-partners, seeking a reference.

Local Authority Checks

26. The adoption agency must –

(e) where it is not the local authority in whose area the prospective adopter has their home, ascertain whether the local authority in whose area the local authority has their home has any information about the prospective adopter which may be relevant to the assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt and if so obtain from that authority a written report setting out that information; and

(f) where the prospective adopter has their home in the local authority area for less than twelve months, also ascertain whether the local authority in whose area the prospective adopter previously had their home has any information about the prospective adopter which may be relevant to an assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt and if so obtain from that authority a written report setting out that information.

Good Practice

Local authority checks should be made for the previous ten years, whether that is under **26(e)** – the authority where the prospective adopter has their home or under **26(f)**, any previous local authority where they have had their home.

Additional Stage One Checks

ADULT CHILDREN

25. – (1) In respect of and any other member of the prospective adopter's household who is aged 18 or over, the adoption agency must obtain an enhanced criminal record certificate....

(2) An adoption agency may not consider a person suitable to adopt a child if that person or any member of that person's household aged 18 or over (if convicted of or cautioned in respect of the list of specified offences).

Good Practice

A DBS check should be sought in respect of any adult, including adult children, who live in the prospective adopter's household.

Pre-Assessment Decision / Stage 1 Decision

DELAY IN MAKING THE STAGE 1 DECISION

27(3) The adoption agency may delay making the decision under paragraph (1) - (Stage One decision)

- a) where it is satisfied there are good reasons because, for example, there has been a delay in obtaining information about the prospective adopter; or**
- b) upon the request of the prospective adopter.**

Good Practice

Stage 1 should only take longer than two months where there have been difficulties in obtaining information that is required, for example overseas checks. Agencies should do everything possible to prevent such a delay and if it does occur, note it on the prospective adopter's record. Prospective adopters should be notified of the delay verbally with confirmation in writing and with clear reasons provided. Appendix 16 may be used for this purpose. Stage 1 should not be extended by a term any longer than 2 months.

If the prospective adopter requests a delay, then the reason for that should be discussed and accurately recorded on the prospective adopter's case record, with an agreed time for resumption. It should be made clear to the prospective adopter that there is an opportunity for 'pause and reflect' in between Stages 1 and 2. If possible, Stage 1 should be completed before a planned delay. See Appendix 15.

If the adoption agency requires additional time, because a particular reference or check has not been returned, then the letter in Appendix 16 should be used.

Decision that Prospective Adopter may be Suitable to Adopt

PRE-ASSESSMENT DECISION

27. – (1) The adoption agency must, taking into account the information obtained under regulations 25 (police checks) and 26 (other pre – assessment information), decide –

- a) that the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt a child; or**
- b) see below**

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), the agency must make its decision under paragraph (1) within a period of two months from the date upon which the adoption agency notified the prospective adopter that it had decided to proceed with the pre – assessment process in accordance with regulation 21.

(3) see below

(4) Where the adoption agency decides that the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt a child, the agency must –

- a) as soon as practicable, notify in writing the prospective of its decision, and**
- b) explain to the prospective adopter that they must notify the adoption agency that they wish to continue with the assessment process within six months of the date on which notification is given.**

Good Practice

Regulation 27(1) makes it clear that a Stage 1 decision must be based on the information contained in regulation 25 (police checks), regulation 26 (other pre -assessment information) and the information specified in Part 1 of Schedule 4.

It may be difficult to distinguish what is Stage 1 and what is Stage 2 information – for example information provided by a referee about a previous relationship, or medical information about a health condition. If there is doubt, then the prospective adopter should be invited onto Stage 2, after having received realistic and honest feedback that they may not be approved. It should be remembered that the decision at the end of Stage 1 is that the prospective adopter ‘may be’ or ‘is not’ suitable to adopt. Decisions at the end of Stage 1 which prevent the prospective adopter moving onto Stage 2 should only be made if the evidence is clear that they are ‘not’ suitable. There is always the opportunity to take the matter to panel with a brief report if the concern taken onto Stage 2 gathers in weight once more information is gleaned.

A Stage 1 review meeting should take place with the prospective adopter. They should be asked to fill in their own feedback sheet on Stage 1 (Appendix 17), prior to the meeting, which will feed into the review itself. The review should be conducted using the Stage 1 review meeting template (Appendix 18). The purpose of the review is to check that all the Stage 1 information has been completed and to obtain feedback from the prospective adopters on their pre – assessment process.

The team manager/line manager for the social worker who has overseen Stage 1 should make the decision as to whether a prospective adopter may be suitable or is not suitable to adopt and whether or not they are to be invited onto Stage 2.

Once a 'May Be Suitable to Adopt' decision is made

Following the decision that the prospective adopter 'may be suitable to adopt a child', a letter should be sent, as set out in regulation 27(4)(a) (Appendix 19) to the prospective adopter which makes clear that it is the prospective adopter's responsibility to 'trigger' Stage 2 and they need to inform the agency, in writing, of their wish to proceed, under **regulation 27(4)(b)**.

The letter should also contain a reference to the possibility, found in regulation 27(4)(b), of a 'pause and reflect' period in between Stages 1 and 2. The letter should request that the prospective adopter informs the agency of their intention to use this period, so that dates can be made for meeting, catching up and planning. Prospective adopters should also be made aware of the fact that, should the period exceed 6 months, the expectation is that Stage 1 will, in large part, need to be repeated, depending on the particular timing and circumstances surrounding the delay.

Agencies should make a record of when the six-month period expires on the prospective adopter's case record and ensure that prospective adopters have the opportunity to trigger Stage 2 before the expiry of the six months.

When a decision is made that the adopter is not suitable to adopt a child (27(5))

27. – (1) The adoption agency must, taking into account the information obtained under regulations 25 (police checks) and 26 (other pre-assessment information), decide –

b) that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child

(5) Where the adoption agency decides that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child the agency as soon as practicable after making the decision notify the prospective adopter in writing of its decision together with reasons for its decision.

Good Practice

As the ethos within which adoption practitioners work is one of openness, candour and honesty, the prospective adopters will have been told during the course of the Stage 1 process and at the Stage 1 review meeting, that there are serious problems with the Stage 1 information, leading the agency to conclude that they are not suitable to adopt.

The decision needs to be provided in writing to the prospective adopter **within 5 working days** of making the decision. The decision itself should be made within the two-month period from the date of acceptance of the Registration of Interest.

The letter (Appendix 20) should contain very clear reasons as to why the Stage 1 information leads to this decision. The letter should also point out that the only recourse to challenge this decision is through the agency's representations and complaints procedure. A copy of the relevant complaints procedure should be provided with the letter. A decision at the end of Stage 1 is not a qualifying determination.

Stage Two (Assessment)

27(4) Where the adoption agency decides that the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt a child, the agency must –

(a) as soon as practicable, notify in writing the prospective of its decision, and

(b) explain to the prospective adopter that they must notify the adoption agency that they wish to continue with the assessment process within six months of the date on which notification is given.

Stage 2 – the assessment decision

Stage 2 Assessment

28. – (1) Regulations 28 – 30G apply where the prospective adopter notifies the adoption agency that they wish to continue with the assessment process within six months from the date on which the agency notified the prospective adopter that they may be suitable to adopt under regulation 27(4).

(2) This paragraph applies where the prospective adopter notifies the adoption agency that they wish to continue with the assessment process more than six months after being notified in accordance with regulation 27(4).

(3) Where paragraph (2) applies, the adoption agency must notify the prospective adopter that the prospective adopter may not proceed with the assessment unless the pre-assessment process is repeated to the extent the adoption agency considers necessary to determine whether it continues to be satisfied that the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt a child.

Good Practice

The adoption agency will have informed the prospective adopter, in the letter written at the end of Stage 1 (Appendix 19) that it is for the prospective adopter to trigger Stage 2 and that they have six months in which to do this.

Once the adoption agency is notified then there should be a meeting between the allocated social worker and the prospective adopter to discuss the making of the assessment plan:

Prospective Adopter Assessment Plan

29. The adoption agency must prepare a written plan in consultation with the prospective adopter (“the prospective adopter assessment plan”) which includes the following matters–

- a) the procedure for assessing the prospective adopter’s suitability to adopt a child;**
- b) any applicable timescales;**
- c) the arrangements for the prospective adopter to receive any additional counselling or preparation for adoption;**
- d) details of any training that the prospective adopter has agreed to undertake;**
- e) information about the role of the prospective adopter in the assessment process;**
- f) information about the process for submitting representations or applying to the Welsh Minister for a review under 30B(5)(c); and**
- g) any other matters which the agency considers relevant.**

Good Practice

As the period for completing Stage 2 is only four months from the adoption agency receiving notification by the prospective adopter that they wish to proceed to the date of the agency maker decision, the assessment plan needs to be compiled and agreed at an early stage and no later than two weeks of receipt of notification.

The prospective adopter assessment plan pro forma is found in Appendix 21 along with the accompanying letter (Appendix 22) which acknowledges the notification of a wish to proceed and provides the prospective adopter with the pro forma for the prospective adopter assessment plan.

The plan will contain the dates of future meetings, the date of the expected panel, and any plans for further training. It should also provide details of contingency plans should, for example, the named social worker be unable to complete the assessment.

The letter should also set out the decision-making process, including information on the composition and role of the panel and the role of the ADM.

There should be a reference to the possibility, in exceptional circumstances, of the Stage 2 process taking longer than four months. If a delay does occur, the adoption agency should send a letter (Appendix 23) to the prospective adopters, outlining the reason for the delay, who requested it and plans for overcoming any problems.

The Assessment

30.- (1) The adoption agency must obtain the information about the prospective adopter which is specified in Part 3 of Schedule 4

Schedule 4, Part 3

Information to be provided during Stage 2

Information about the prospective adopter

- 1. A photograph and physical description**
- 2. Racial origin and cultural and linguistic background**
- 3. Religious persuasion**
- 4. Relationship (if any) to the child**
- 5. A description of the prospective adopter's personality and interests**
- 6. A family tree with details of the prospective adopter, the prospective adopter's siblings and any children of the prospective adopter, with their ages (or ages at death)**
- 7. A chronology of the prospective adopter from birth**
- 8. The observations of the prospective adopter about their experience of being parented and how this has influenced them**
- 9. Details of any experience the prospective adopter has had of caring for children (including as a parent, step-parent, foster parent, child minder or prospective adopter) and an assessment of the prospective adopter's ability in this respect**
- 10. Any other information which indicates how the prospective adopter and anyone else living in the prospective adopter's household is likely to relate to a child placed for adoption with the prospective adopter**

Wider family

- 11. A description of the wider family of the prospective adopter and their role and importance to the prospective adopter and their likely role and importance to a child placed for adoption with the prospective adopter**

Information about the home etc. of the prospective adopter

- 12. Information about the prospective adopter's home and the neighbourhood in which the prospective adopter lives**
- 13. Information about the local community of the prospective adopter, including the degree of the family's integration with its peer group, friendships and social network**

Education and employment

- 14. Details of the prospective adopter's educational history and attainments, and the prospective adopter's views about how this has influenced them**
- 15. Details of the prospective adopter's employment history and the observations of the prospective adopter about how this has influenced them**
- 16. The current employment of the prospective adopter and the prospective adopter's views about achieving a balance between employment and child care**

Income

17. Details of the prospective adopter's income and expenditure

Other information

18. Information about the prospective adopter's capacity to –

- a) Provide for a child's needs, particularly emotional and behavioural developmental needs;**
- b) Share a child's history and associated emotional issues; and**
- c) Understand and support a child through possible feelings of loss and trauma**

19. The prospective adopter's

- a) Reasons for wishing to adopt a child;**
- b) Views and feelings about adoption and its significance;**
- c) Views about their parenting capacity;**
- d) Views about parental responsibility and what that means;**
- e) Views about a suitable home environment for the child;**
- f) Views about the importance and value of education;**
- g) Views and feelings about the importance of a child's religious and cultural upbringing; and**
- h) Views and feelings about contact between a child and his birth parents and other relatives;**

20. The views of other members of the prospective adopter's household and wider family in relation to adoption.

21. Any other relevant information which might assist the adoption panel or the adoption agency.

30(2) The adoption agency must prepare a written report ("the prospective adopter's report") which includes –

- a) The information about the prospective adopter and the prospective adopter's family which is specified in Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 (see above – Stage 1 and Stage 2 information);**
- b) A summary, written by the agency's registered health practitioner, of the state of health of the prospective adopter;**
- c) Any relevant information obtained by the agency under regulation 26(e) (local authority checks)**
- d) Any observations of the agency on the matters referred to in regulation 24 (requirements to provide counselling, information and preparation for adoption) and 25 (requirement to carry out police checks);**
- e) The agency's assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child, and in determining the suitability of a couple to adopt a child the agency must have proper regard to the need for stability and permanence in their relationship; and**
- f) Any other information which the agency considers relevant.**

Good Practice

At the start of Stage 2 the expectation on the part of both the adoption agency and prospective adopter should be that the prospective adopters are in a very good position to complete the process and become adoptive parents. If there are concerns going into Stage 2, then these will have been discussed with candour and recorded.

The adoption agency should also make clear to the prospective adopter that they are intending that Stage 2 will be completed, with ADM decision, within four months. However, the robustness of the report must not be sacrificed to timescales.

Social Media Discussions / Checks

These checks are not contained in the regulations but are considered as necessary with the present-day use of social media.

Prospective adopters should be informed of the need for a discussion about social media during the information giving stage. This social media 'discussion' should then be undertaken in Stage 2. This could be done by sitting alongside the prospective adopter and together using a search engine to see what information is held on the prospective adopter in the public domain. This exercise could then lead to a discussion on the issues relating to social media for adoptive families. At the end of Stage 2 the prospective adopter should be asked to sign a declaration that they understand the inappropriateness of using social media to share information / photographs in respect of any child placed or in exploring the birth family through social media. The declaration (Appendix 24) will be kept on their case record.

Brief Reports

30 (4) Where the adoption agency receives information under paragraph (1) (Part 3, Schedule 4) or other information in relation to the assessment of the prospective adopter and is of the opinion that the prospective adopter is unlikely to be considered suitable to adopt a child, it may prepare the prospective adopter's report under paragraph (2) notwithstanding that the agency may not have received all the information about the prospective adopter which may be required by this regulation.

(5) The adoption agency must-

- a) notify the prospective adopter's application is to be referred to the adoption panel;**
- b) give the prospective adopter a copy of the prospective adopter's report;**
- c) invite the prospective adopter to send any observations in writing to the agency within 10 working days, beginning with the date on which the notification is received; and**
- d) explain to the prospective adopter that the adoption agency may, in exceptional circumstances, extend the timescale referred to in paragraph (c) above**

(6) At the end of the 10 working days referred to in paragraph (5)(c) (or, where that timescale is extended by the adoption agency, as soon as possible after the prospective adopter's observations are received) the adoption agency must send-

- a) the prospective adopter's report and the prospective adopter's observations;**
- b) the written reports and references referred to in regulation 26(b) to (e) (Stage One information) but in the case of reports obtained in accordance with regulation 26(b),**

(medical report) only if the agency's registered health practitioner advises it to do so; and

c) any other information obtained by the agency, to the adoption panel.

(7) The adoption agency must obtain, so far as is reasonable practicable, any other relevant information which may be required by the adoption panel and send that information to the panel.

Functions of the adoption panel (in relation to a brief report)

30A (3) In relation to the case of a prospective adopter in respect of whom a report has been prepared in accordance with regulation 30(2), the adoption panel must either –

- a) request the adoption agency to prepare a further prospective adopter's report, covering all the matters set out in regulation 30(2); or
- b) recommend that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child.

Good Practice

Regulation 30A(3) provides for cases where the adoption agency's assessment is still incomplete (that is not all elements of the Stage 2 process have been covered), but information has come to light, during the Stage 2 process, that leads the adoption agency to believe that the prospective adopter may not be suitable to adopt.

It is a significant step to take a prospective adopter to panel with a brief report, rather than complete Stage 2 and take a full report to panel. The adoption agency will need to be clear that the Stage 2 information causing concern is robust enough evidentially for a recommendation that the adopter is not suitable to adopt a child. Appendix 25 provides the pro forma for the letter to the prospective adopters providing information on why their assessment is going for a brief report and the arrangements for that.

There is no separate pro forma for a brief report. The adoption agency should use the usual format / PAR form, providing the information gathered already and making a clear analysis of the information leading to bringing a brief report. Some agencies may wish to use the competency framework when preparing a brief report

The role of panel in respect of a brief report is set out above in regulation 30A(3). Panel has two options: to request that a full prospective adopter's report is brought back to panel or to recommend to the agency decision maker that the prospective adopter is not suitable to adopt a child.

During this process the allocated social worker will have discussed in an open and candid manner the concerns relating to the prospective adopter's suitability. Depending on the information coming to light, the prospective adopter themselves may decide, after counselling and advice, to withdraw from the process. If they do not, then all the provisions in respect of full reports apply: giving the prospective adopter 10 days to comment on the form, attend panel and, if the qualifying determination is that they are not suitable to adopt, the opportunity to make fresh representations to panel or apply to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism.

The only difference, procedurally, is that the medical report does not automatically go to panel and ADM with a brief report. If the medical information provided is not relevant to the reasons for taking the brief report to panel, then the medical adviser may advise that it is not necessary to file the medical report (regulation 30(6)(b)).

The letter (Appendix 26) which goes from the ADM to the prospective adopter should be clear on the reasons why a brief report was taken to panel and ADM, the reasons why they have made the qualifying determination that they are not suitable to adopt a child, and provide details of their right to return to panel or apply to the IRM. Appendix 27 provides the letter explaining that the adoption agency has decided to complete the assessment, stating that the agency will be in touch within the next **two weeks** to plan for resuming the assessment.

Second Opinion Visits and Mid-term Reviews

Where there is an issue of significant concern, following the drafting of the PAR, then a second opinion visit may be thought appropriate. This should be conducted by a team manager or senior member of the team, with their report written, signed, dated and appended to the PAR.

Prospective adopters should be clear about the reason for the visit and the grounds for the concern.

Second opinion visits should not be routinely carried out. If there is a routine visit made by a social worker other than the worker allocated to the prospective adopter, then that needs to be undertaken and explained as a 'quality assurance' or 'mid review' visit, which does not set out to address particular concerns but is a review of the whole process so far. Any mid-term review visit would need to take place within 2.5 months of the beginning of Stage 2. See Appendix 28 for a pro forma for a second opinion letter.

Foster Carers / Previous Adopters (fast track process):

Application of Part 4 with modifications to specified persons

30F - (1) This paragraph applies where the adoption agency is satisfied that the prospective adopter –

- (a) is an approved foster parent; or**
- (b) has, at any time, adopted a child-**
 - (i) in England and Wales, after having been assessed as suitable to adopt in accordance with these Regulations or the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (English regulations); or**
 - (ii) after having been assessed as suitable to adopt in accordance with the Adoption with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005.**

(2) Where paragraph (1) applies Part 4 has effect subject to the modifications set out in Schedule 4A.

SCHEDULE 4A Regulations

Modifications to Part 4

- 1. Regulation 22 (prospective adopter stage 1 plan) does not apply**
- 2. Regulations 24 (Requirements to provide counselling, information and preparation for adoption), 25 (Requirements to carry out police checks) and 26 (Other pre-assessment information) only apply where an adoption agency considers it necessary**
- 3. Regulations 27 (Pre – assessment decision) and 28 (possible pause and reflect between Stages 1 and 2) do not apply**
- 4. Regulation 30 (Prospective adopter's report) applies as if –**
 - (a) paragraphs (1) (duty to obtain information in Schedule 4) and (4) (reference to a brief report) were omitted**
 - (b) For paragraph (2) (what should be contained in the PAR) there were substituted –**
 - “(2) The adoption agency must prepare a written report (the “prospective adopter's report”) which includes –**
 - (a) where applicable, a summary, written by the agency's registered health practitioner, of the state of health of the prospective adopter;**
 - (b) where applicable, any observations of the agency on the matters referred to in regulation 25 (requirement to carry out police checks, if considered necessary);**
 - (c) where applicable, any relevant information obtained by the agency under regulation 26 (other pre-assessment information, if considered necessary);**
 - (d) the agency's assessment of the prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child: and in determining the suitability of a couple to adopt a child the agency must have proper regard to the need for stability and permanence in their relationship; and**
 - (e) any other information which the agency considers relevant,” and**
 - (c) Regulation 30(A) does not apply.**

**5. Regulation 30B applies as if for paragraph (1) there were substituted –
“(1) The adoption agency must decide whether the prospective adopter is suitable to adopt a child within four months of the date on which the agency received the prospective adopter’s notification that they wish to proceed with the pre-assessment process.**

(3) Where the prospective adopter is an approved foster parent and consents, the adoption agency may request access to any relevant records compiled in relation to that approval by the fostering services provider.

(4) In this regulation “approved foster parent” means a person who is approved as a foster parent in accordance with the Fostering Services (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2019 but does not include a person with whom a child is placed under regulation 26 (temporary approval of a relative, friend or other person connected with C) or 28 (temporary approval of a particular prospective adopter as a foster parent) of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015.

Good Practice

Previous adopters and currently approved foster carers bypass Stage 1 and enter the process at Stage 2. However, adoption agencies may undertake Stage 1 (police checks or other pre-assessment) checks ‘if applicable’. Adoption agencies should consider what is relevant and proportionate to undertake in the circumstances. DBS and medical checks should be considered if there has been a lapse of three years since last undertaken.

Although this ‘fast track’ process should take only four months, there should be no lack of robustness in the report itself. If the applicants are foster carers, they will need time to explore and reflect upon the implications of becoming adoptive parents, either for a looked after child in their care or a child yet to be identified. When assessing second, or even third, time adopters, the assessment will need to take into account the child or children already in placement; how has the prospective adopter adapted to being a parent first time around; how has the original placement progressed; what are the prospective adopter and child’s views, wishes and feelings on having a new family member; does the prospective adopter have the capacity to meet the needs of a second, or subsequent, child? Do they understand that they will not only be looking after two children but also helping both children to integrate into a newly composed family structure? If the child is not siblings, are they ready for contact arrangements and life journey work with two sets of birth families?

Any assessment of a second or third time adopter should elaborate on the attachment and trauma history of the child(ren) in placement and an analysis of the possible impact of another child being placed, on both the child(ren) and prospective adopter.

These are some of the issues that need to be considered with the ‘fast track’ process. There may well be others that are specific to the family in question. They are complex matters for assessment and need time and resource to ensure that the prospective adopters are suitable to adopt any additional child.

See Appendix 29 for a pro forma for a letter commencing a fast track process.

Appendices

	Page
1 What should be contained in an information pack	24
2 Letter accompanying general information	25
3 Letter following request for detailed information	26
4 Letter to invite a registration of interest	27
5 Letter to suggest a delay in registration of interest	28
6 Letter where not inviting registration of interest	29
7 Letter following delay in enquirer being in touch	30
8 Registration of Interest form	31
9 Letter accepting Registration of Interest	32
10 Stage 1 Plan / Agreement	33
11 Contents of Stage 1 pack	34
12 Stage 1 checklist	35
13 Request for an ex-partner reference	36
14 Letter following DBS / PNC information	37
15 Letter following PA's request to delay Stage 1	38
16 Letter informing PA that AA requires more time in Stage 1	39
17 PA's feedback sheet on Stage 1	40
18 Stage 1 Review Meeting template	41
19 Letter at end of Stage 1 – You may be suitable to adopt	43
20 Letter at end of Stage 1 – You are not suitable to adopt	44
21 PA Stage 2 Assessment Plan/Agreement	45
22 Acknowledge notification of wish to go to Stage 2	46
23 Confirming delay within Stage 2	47
24 Declaration in respect of social media use	48
25 Why assessment is being taken to panel (Brief Report)	49
26 QD – Not suitable following brief report	50
27 ADM – Decision to complete PAR following Brief Report	51
28 Second opinion letter	52
29 Fast track letter	53

Appendix 1

What should be contained in an information pack

- Welcome to and details of the agency
- The children who need adoption (brief explanation)
- Who we are looking for to be adoptive parents (myth dispelling)?
- Are you ready to be an adoptive parent (current circumstances / accommodation / birth children / experience of caring for children / smoking / recent IVF or fertility treatment / significant medical issues)? There are very few absolute barriers:
- Eligibility criteria (when we cannot accept you)
- The process after you have received this information (you seek further information and we will provide an information event or pre-arranged meeting)
- Brief explanation of the process (ROI / Stage 1 / prep training and what that entails / Stage 2 / Panel/ ADM/ family finding / matching / placement / order / support)
- Explanation of what is required in Stage 1 (references / checks etc)
- Next steps

Appendix 2

Letter accompanying general information

Thank you for enquiring about adoption with (Agency).

We attach an information pack for you to read and think a bit more about what is involved in the adoption process and creating or completing your family in this way. You will see that it is a complicated process but (agency) is always happy to discuss any queries or concerns.

If, after reading the information pack, you decide that you want to take the next step, please contact us (details) and we will arrange for you to be provided with more detailed information, through an event, meeting or telephone call.

Appendix 3

Letter following request for detailed information

Thank you for expressing an interest in more detailed information on adoption. We are pleased that you have decided to take this step.

We would like to invite you to:

- a) Attend our next information event (details).*
- b) Attend an information evening at (another collaborative) as their next event is taking place before ours and you will receive the same information at that event as you would at ours (details).*
- c) Contact us (details) and we will arrange to visit you to discuss further.*
- d) Contact us and we will arrange a time for you to visit us at our offices (details).*
- e) Contact us and we will arrange to have a telephone discussion with you*

At this event / meeting / discussion we will be able to get to know you and your own circumstances a little more and advise you as to whether it this the right time for you to lodge your 'Register of Interest' with us to start the pre assessment process.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix 4

Letter following information event / meeting to invite a registration of interest

Thank you for attending the recent information event / meeting with us / telephone call.

As we understand that you would like to be assessed as adoptive parents / an adoptive parent we would like to invite you to complete your 'Registration of Interest' form, which is attached. If you would prefer to fill this in electronically, please let us know.

We will formally accept your 'ROI' ten days after receiving it from you. The two-month timescale for Stage 1 of the assessment process will start on that date.

Our next preparation training takes place on (details). We hope that you can make those dates. However, if you are unable to, then the next training is on (dates).

We look forward to receiving your ROI and confirmation that you can attend the training.

Appendix 5

Letter following information event/meeting suggesting a delay in ROI

Thank you for attending the recent information event / meeting with us / telephone call.

We understand that you would like to be assessed as adoptive parents / an adoptive parent, and as an agency we are interested in you being assessed as adoptive parents. However, in our discussions we identified that:

- *Need time following IVF / fertility treatment*
- *Very soon after bereavement / illness*
- *In middle of moving/ major renovations*
- *Relationship very new*
- *Children young*

We are suggesting, therefore, that you Register your Interest with us (once something achieved / time has passed). You should then be in a better position to be ready for your assessment.

Please be assured that you are important to us as potential prospective adopters and we will contact you in (time) to see how things are going, with a view to you lodging your Registration of Interest with us then.

Appendix 6

Letter following information event / meeting / where not inviting to put in ROI

Thank you for attending the recent information event / meeting with us / telephone call.

(As we explained at the time,)

- a) based on the information you have provided, under the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005, people are not allowed to adopt a child if (details of reg 25).*
or
- b) based on the information you have provided, there is clear evidence of exceptional circumstances (details) that leads us to believe that no panel or agency decision maker would recommend approval or approve you as adoptive parents.*

We are, therefore, sorry that we are unable to accept a Registration of Interest from you.

Appendix 7

Letter following delay in potential prospective adopter being in touch

We wrote to you a while ago (date) inviting you to submit your Registration of Interest in being assessed as an adoptive parent / adoptive parents. We thought we would contact you to see whether you are still interested or whether there is anything you would like to discuss.

We recognize that this is an important decision to make and that you need time to make sure that it is the right decision for you.

Please do contact us if there is anything we can help with.

OPTIONAL

If we don't hear from you within the next month, we will assume that you have decided not to proceed at this point. However, you are always welcome to come back to us at a later date.

Appendix 8

Registration of Interest (ROI) Form

See the CoramBAAF form

Appendix 9

Letter of acceptance of ROI

(To be written by Team Manager)

We are very pleased to accept your Registration of Interest, as from (date – two weeks from receiving it).

The two month timescale for your Stage 1 process starts from this date and it is anticipated that Stage 1 will be completed by (date), unless particular issues arise that necessitate additional time.

Your contact (name of allocated social worker or Stage 1 worker) is (name). They will be contacting you within the next two weeks.

We enclose a draft Stage 1 plan / agreement, for you to look at. This will be completed during your first meeting with (name).

We also enclose a Stage 1 Pack, which provides information on what is required from you during Stage 1.

We confirm that you are attending the preparation training on (date).

Appendix 10

Stage 1 Plan / Agreement

See the Coram BAAF form

Appendix 11

Contents of Stage 1 pack

- Information on the Stage 1 / Stage 2 process including the role and details of panel and ADM (if not provided before)
- Information on the training undertaken in Stage 1 (if not provided before)
- Information on family and friends training
- Questionnaire for applicants to fill in (see the CoramBAAF Stage 1 self-assessment form)
- Genogram (plus guide for completing)
- Ecomap (plus guide for completing)
- Guide to choosing referees
- Information on other Stage 1 checks (medical / DBS / LA/ ex-partner / overseas)
- Information on seeking child care experience
- Reading list / list of useful sites

Appendix 12

Stage 1 checklist

This is a monitoring tool for agencies:

ACTIVITY / REFERENCE	DATE CONCLUDED/OBTAINED
Eligibility	
Preparation training	
DBS / PNC	
Medical	
LA check	
Ex-partner check	
Referees – interviewed?	
Child care experience	
Other information required in Schedule 4, Part 1 – name, DOB, address - Details of previous court proceedings - Details of any previous marriage, civil partnership or relationship	
Members of household and adult children who are not resident	
Overseas checks	

Appendix 13

Request for an ex-partner reference

Re (name of applicant)

We are writing to you as your ex-partner / spouse has applied to become an adoptive parent.

As part of this process, we have a duty to ensure that (name) is suitable to adopt and we ask for references from a wide range of people, including ex partners / spouses. (Name) has given your name in this respect.

Would you please fill in the attached form and return to us as soon as possible.

If you have any concerns or queries, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your assistance.

Applicant:

With regard to (name)'s adoption application to (name of AA)

I do / do not* have any concerns with regard to the above adoption application

*(Delete as appropriate)

Any further comments (if you have stated that you do have concerns you should outline the reasons for those concerns below)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Signed:

Dated:

Appendix 14

Letter following DBS / PNC information

As you are aware, as part of the Stage 1, pre assessment process, you gave us permission to obtain an enhanced DBS check and permission to ask for a PNC (police national computer) check.

As a result of the DBS / PNC check we are now informed that (details).

You had not informed us of this information / conviction / caution, even though we have advised honesty and openness throughout our discussions and the pre assessment process.

Consequently, (agency) does not believe that you are suitable to adopt (reasons) and we will not be proceeding on to a Stage 2 assessment with you.

Appendix 15

Letter following prospective adopter's request to delay Stage 1

We are writing to confirm that you would like to delay the Stage 1 pre assessment process. This is because (prospective adopter's reasons).

During our discussions we have informed you that you can ask for a 'pause and reflect' period of up to six months between Stages 1 and 2, once you have completed Stage 1. However, your circumstances are such that you need this pause now rather than at the end of Stage 1.

We agree to this short pause in the process and confirm that we shall recommence Stage 1 on (date).

Please keep us up to date with events / progress. If we do not hear from you, we will contact you when our agreed date for resuming Stage 1 is reached.

Appendix 16

Letter informing prospective adopter that adoption agency requires more time in Stage 1

As you are aware, the Stage 1 pre assessment process should be completed within two months. However, we have not been able to keep to this timescale due to (details of reason for delay) and we are therefore extending the Stage 1 process by a period of (time).

Appendix 17

Prospective Adopter's feedback sheet on Stage 1

NAME(S)

DATE STAGE 1 COMMENCED

- 1) How well do you think the agency handled your enquiry when you first made contact?
- 2) What are the main things you have learnt from the training and process so far?
- 3) How have you found the process of providing so much information about yourself?
- 4) Do you have any concerns or worries about the process so far or proceeding to Stage 2?
- 5) Do you feel ready to proceed to Stage 2?
- 6) Finally, can you provide us with feedback on what you think we do well and what might be improved?

Thank you.

Signature of prospective adopter

Date

Signature of prospective adopter

Date

Appendix 18

Stage 1 Review Meeting template

Stage 1 Review Meeting

Name of prospective adopter(s)

Name of allocated / social worker

Name of team manager

Date Stage 1 commenced

1. Explanation of the purpose of the review meeting and next steps
2. Seek feedback:
 - How it has gone so far generally?
 - Has Stage 1 been as anticipated?
 - What was the response to the prep training?
 - How has the written work gone?
 - How have they got on with the allocated / social worker?
 - Are there any major worries?
3. How have other elements of the process gone in terms of understanding the process:
 - Doing own research online / reading?
 - Meeting adopters?
 - Talking to family and friends?
4. Checks and references (see Stage 1 checklist)
 - Anything outstanding?
 - Anything that will require a delay in finalizing Stage 1?
5. Child care experience
 - Started already?
 - Plans for Stage 2 and after approval?
 - Assess any need for additional experience
6. Identify main strengths and challenges
7. Reasons for recommending Stage 2

Next steps:

Prospective adopters informed as to whether they can proceed to Stage 2, and letter will follow.

OR

Agency will be in touch by telephone / letter with decision

Signature of prospective adopter Date

Signature of prospective adopter Date

Signature of team manager Date

Appendix 19

Letter at end of Stage 1 – You may be suitable to adopt

We are delighted to inform you that you have successfully completed the pre assessment (Stage 1) process and (agency) has decided that you may be suitable to adopt. We therefore invite you to take part in the Stage 2 assessment.

As you will be aware by now, the process for being assessed as adoptive parents is bound by a strict regulatory process. You, as prospective adopter, must inform us, in writing (an e mail will do) that you want to proceed to Stage 2. As soon as we have your letter or e mail, the four-month timescale for completing Stage 2 commences.

You have six months in which to let us know that you want to proceed to Stage 2. From our discussions we know that:

- a) you would like to proceed as soon as possible; in which case we look forward to hearing from you shortly; or*
- b) you would like a 'pause and reflect' time of (time agreed) in which to (X,Y,Z). We would be grateful if you could let us know, in writing (an e mail will do), that this is definitely your intention and we can then timetable in catching up with you, meeting and planning Stage 2.*

You should be aware that if you take longer than six months to inform us that you want to proceed Stage 2, there is a possibility that you will have to repeat some of the Stage 1 process and this will be discussed with you at the time.

Please do keep us informed of progress; we are always happy to talk things through.

Appendix 20

Letter at end of Stage 1 – You are not suitable to adopt

Further to our discussions and to you completing the Stage 1 pre assessment process to be approved as adoptive parents, we are sorry to inform you that we have decided that you are not suitable to adopt and will, therefore, not be invited to go on to the Stage 2 assessment.

As you know we have been honest and candid with you over our concerns as to your suitability. Our decision is based on the following reasons:

FULL REASONS TO BE GIVEN

If you believe that this decision has been made wrongly or you have been treated unfairly, you have the right to access to the agency's representation and complaints procedure, a copy of which is enclosed.

Appendix 21

Prospective Adopter (Stage 2) Assessment Plan / Agreement

See the CoramBAAF form

Appendix 22

Letter acknowledging notification of wish to proceed with Stage 2

Thank you for your email / letter with your notification that you have decided to progress to an assessment / Stage 2. We are delighted with your decision and would like to meet you on (date – within two weeks of notification). Please confirm that you are available for that meeting.

We attach / enclose a copy of the Stage 2 plan / agreement. This document will form the basis of this first meeting in Stage 2 with your allocated social worker (Name).

Now that you are in Stage 2 you will be working towards your prospective adopter's report (PAR), being put before (agency's name) panel for a recommendation and the agency decision maker's (ADM) decision as to whether you are suitable to adopt a child. There is information on the construction and role of the panel and the role of the ADM in the information pack you were given at the beginning of Stage 1. You will also have the opportunity to talk about panel during the course of your assessment.

You will be aware that your assessment should be concluded and a decision as to whether you are suitable to adopt made within 4 months of your notification. In exceptional circumstance there may need to be a delay (this may be something unforeseen happening in your life or something arising during the course of the assessment that requires additional time). If a delay does occur, we will need to be clear as to the purpose of that delay and how long it will last.

Appendix 23

Letter confirming delay within Stage 2

As you know, the Stage 2 assessment process should take no more than four months, from the date of your notification that you want to proceed to Stage 2, to the ADM decision as to whether you are suitable to adopt.

However, the circumstances of your assessment have dictated that more time is needed.

(Either:)

- a) you have requested a delay of (time) as (reasons). We have agreed to this delay and will contact you a week before the agreed time has elapsed to plan for the remainder of the assessment; or*
- b) we have decided that we need a further (time) within which to explore a particular aspect of your assessment (details and reasons). This additional work will take (time) and will mean that Stage 2 should be completed within (time)*

If (a): Please keep us informed of your progress.

Appendix 24

Declaration in respect of social media use

I / we, (names) agree that, if we proceed to a Stage 2 assessment, as part of the assessment the (adoption agency) will access information on me / us, via a search engine, that is in the public domain. I/we understand that our assessor will undertake this search with us.

I /we understand that as prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents we need to exercise caution in our use of social media.

I/ we agree that I/we will not use social media to share information, including photographs. of any child placed with us. Once an adoption order is made and we have parental responsibility for the child(ren) placed, we will continue to exercise caution in order to protect our family's privacy.

Signed (Applicant One)

Dated

Signed (Applicant Two)

Dated

Appendix 25

Letter – Why assessment is being taken to panel for a brief report

As we have discussed, during your assessment we have discovered / learned (details).

This information has caused us a great deal of concern and we have therefore decided to refer your assessment to our panel and agency decision maker for a 'brief report'.

A brief report is prepared where the information obtained so far in Stage 2 is sufficiently worrying for the agency to ask panel for their view on your suitability to adopt before completing the whole assessment. Even though your assessment is incomplete we are asking panel to make one of two recommendations:

- 1) on the basis of the information provided so far you are not suitable to adopt. If this recommendation is made it will go to the agency decision maker for a decision; or*
- 2) the agency prepares a further report (that is completes the PAR and brings the completed report back to panel). If Panel recommends this course of action, we will complete your PAR and take it back to panel.*

We will be sending you a copy of your prospective adopter's report within the next (x days). We ask you to send any observations that you have on the report, in writing within 10 working days of receiving the PAR. This timescale for completing your observations may be extended in exceptional circumstances. Please let us know if you think you need longer than 10 days to respond.

Appendix 26

Letter from ADM – QD that not suitable to adopt following brief report

I am writing to inform you that, having considered the brief report which went to panel on (date) I have made the 'qualifying determination' that you are not suitable to adopt a child, for the following reasons:

REASONS

I realise that this will be disappointing news for you.

Following my making a qualifying determination, you have three options:

- 1) accept the qualifying determination. If you decide on this option, please let this office know within 40 days from the date of this letter that this is your decision;*
- 2) Make a representation to the adoption agency for panel to look at the brief report again and make a fresh recommendation which I, as ADM will consider once more. You can make written representations that the panel and I will look at when considering your brief report again. You need to let this office know within 40 days of the date of this letter whether you wish to take this option and provide any written representations within the same timescale.*
- 3) Apply to an independent review panel for a review of the qualifying determination. I attach a leaflet which explains the role of the independent review mechanism. You will need to apply for this review within 40 days of the date of this letter, with your reasons for applying. Once the independent review panel has made a fresh recommendation, they will send it to us and it is then for me, as agency decision maker, to take account of that recommendation when making a final decision.*

If we do not hear from you within 40 days of the date of this letter (provide date) the adoption agency will make a decision that you are not suitable to adopt, and you will be notified of that decision.

Appendix 27

ADM Letter – Decision to complete PAR and return to panel

As you know, a 'brief report' went to the adoption agency's panel on (date). At that panel a recommendation was made that the agency prepares a further report – that is completes your PAR and brings the full document back to panel for a fresh recommendation and my qualifying determination.

The panel was unable to make a recommendation that you were unsuitable to adopt, and we therefore need, and would like to, continue your assessment.

We will be in touch very shortly to plan for the remainder of the Stage 2 assessment process.

Appendix 28

Second opinion letter

As you know from discussions with your assessing social worker (name), during the course of your Stage 2 assessment there has been a concern raised over (details).

It is for this reason that I would like to make an arrangement to meet you to discuss this particular issue. It is called a 'second opinion visit' and we will have the opportunity to talk through the concerns that the agency has and your response. A record of my visit forms part of your prospective adopter's report (PAR).

Details of proposed visit.

I look forward to seeing you on XX

Appendix 29

Fast Track letter

As a second time adopter / approved foster carer, there are different regulations that apply to your application. There is no Stage 1 and Stage 2, but you go straight on to the assessment (Stage 2) process, with your assessor deciding which Stage 1 checks you will need to complete, depending on your personal circumstances. Any Stage 1 checks or tasks will be undertaken concurrently with the Stage 2 process.

This means that the whole assessment should be completed within four months. This requires a great deal of commitment from yourselves as well as the adoption agency. There are provisions within the regulations for there to be a 'pause and reflect' period within Stage 2 and you may want to think about using this provision at some time during the assessment, after discussions with your assessor. It may not be needed but it is there as a safeguard.

Details of next contact