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Information for Prospective Adopters (Leaflet AIW2)

Introduction

Wiltshire County Council is an approved adoption agency, which arranges adoptions for children; approves adoptive families; matches children needing adoption with suitable adoptive families, who can meet their needs, and provides support service to adoptive families.

Adoption services are provided by the Department for Children and Education, which works within the framework of the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and the accompanying Regulations and Statutory Guidance (2005).

Enquiries are welcomed from people of any ethnic, cultural or religious background with an interest in being considered for assessment as adoptive parents. Where an enquirer's first language is not English, a translation/interpreter service is available, on request.

Enquiries are welcomed from couples whether married or not, gay or lesbian, and single people.

Enquiries are welcomed from people with physical, sensory or learning impairments and communication difficulties. Consideration will be given to the effect of the impairment or difficulty on their ability to parent, during the preparation/assessment process.

Some applicants may choose to apply to adopt a child from overseas (inter-country adoption), rather than a local child (domestic adoption). This information leaflet applies to domestic adoption. See leaflet AIW3: Inter-Country Adoption: The Approval Process for more information.

Legislation allows for the partner of a parent, who is not the child's biological parent, to adopt the child. This is known as Step-Parent Adoption and is not covered in this leaflet.

You might find it useful to look up information about adoption on the Dept. for Education and Skills website: www.dfes.gov.uk/adoption

We also have our own website which gives information about the adoption service in Wiltshire:
www.wiltshire.gov.uk

What are the important principles about children and adoption?

- In all matters relating to adoption, the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be respected, valued and promoted. Every attempt will be made to match children with adopters who can meet these needs.

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- There are very few babies given up for adoption; most of the children who need adoptive families are older (3-10) children, in the Care system, sometimes in sibling groups and with complex needs.
- Adoption is now a much more open process and it will usually be considered to be in the best interests of children who are adopted to retain some form of contact with their birth families, either direct or indirect.

What are the important principles about adopters?

People who are going to care on a permanent basis for other people's children need to be carefully selected and prepared for the task.

- Applications are welcomed from people living in Wiltshire, who are already parents or who are childless, and the Department is committed to ensuring that all applicants receive a fair and equal service.
- Applicants who already have a child need to be aware that any child placed for adoption would be at least two years younger than their own child, in order to achieve a successful placement.
- Applicants will need to be aware of the life-long commitment of adoption and the financial implications of taking on the full-time care of a child.
- Applicants will be expected to have a commitment to maintaining any contact between the child and birth family that is considered to be in the child's best interests and keeping alive the child's cultural heritage.
- Applicants who are in a partnership will be required to demonstrate that they have a stable relationship, to which they are fully committed, in the best interests of the child.
- Applicants currently undergoing fertility treatment will normally not be prioritised and their application will not be proceeded with until they have completed this treatment, in the interests of any child to be placed.
- A health assessment will be undertaken when considering ability to look after children and when matching children. Applicants will be required to declare any medical conditions, at an early stage in the process. This may require us seeking the advice/opinion of our Medical Adviser.

What are the important principles about the Department?

- The Department is responsible for the recruitment, preparation, approval and support of adoptive parents.
- The Department is responsible for making permanence plans for children who cannot live with their birth families and for ensuring that

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children needing adoption are placed with approved adopters who can best meet their needs.

- The Department recognises the complexity of the adoption task and provides adoption support services to adoptive families, including financial support, where assessed as appropriate.
- The Department considers the effects of smoking and passive smoking on the health and welfare of children and has adopted a policy with regard to smoking.
- The Department is responsible for ensuring the safety of all children placed for adoption. Where allegations of abuse occur, the Department is responsible for investigating the allegations. The adopters' FPO will advise them about the process and their rights during an investigation.
- The Department encourages the use of its Complaints procedure and values feedback from service users and carers about the services provided.
- The Department undertakes to keep confidential and secure any records held on you. Under the Data Protection Act you have the right to access your records at any time. If you wish to do this, you should discuss it with your social worker.

What are the legal requirements for prospective adopters?

- There is a legal requirement that a couple wishing to adopt a child together, whether an opposite or same sex couple, must both be at least 21 years of age (section 50(1) Adoption and Children Act 2002).
- Single people wishing to adopt must also have attained the age of 21 years (section 51(1) Adoption and Children Act 2002).
- Legally, one applicant must be domiciled in the British Isles or a couple must have been habitually resident in the British Isles for at least a year. (section 49 Adoption and Children Act 2002).
- Applicants are required to consent to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, Child Protection Register and other agencies' checks. (Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, Regulation 23(1)).
- CRB checks will also be taken up on all members of the household aged 16 or over and any relatives and friends who are likely to baby-sit or care for an adopted child, as support to adoptive parents.
- Applicants would be expected to disclose any criminal convictions or cautions, civilian or military, whether committed as a youth or an adult, and the opinion of the Adoption Panel may be sought with regard to the significance of these offences to the adoption application.

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- Applicants would be expected to disclose any known child protection issues within their extended family.
- Applicants or members of their household who have been convicted or cautioned for offences against children, including sexual offences, indecent photographs, etc, violence against the person, prostitution, abduction and some other 'specified offences' will not be accepted as suitable to adopt a child. (Adoption Agency Regulations, Regulation 23 (2)-(5).
- Applicants will be asked to provide the names of three personal referees, one of whom may be a relative, who have known them well for a minimum of 5 years and can comment on the applicants' potential ability as adoptive parents. These referees will be asked to complete a written reference and will also be interviewed. (Adoption Agency Regulations, Regulation 25 (3) (b)).
- Applicants will be asked to provide bank statements, mortgage or rent statements, as a check on their financial security.

What is the process for preparing, assessing and approving adopters?

- All initial enquirers will sent an information pack about adoption, within 5 working days of their enquiry and be invited to an information session, within 2 months of their enquiry, before deciding whether they wish to proceed to the preparation stage.
- Where applicants meet our priority criteria, they will be visited at home for an assessment/counselling session and may then be invited to attend a preparation course, which will:
 - give more detailed information on adoption
 - enable them to share knowledge and experience
 - help applicants decide whether adoption is right for them
 - begin to assess the applicants' potential suitability.
- Following the preparation course, a Family Placement Officer will be allocated to work with the applicants on a Home Study assessment, by a series of interviews, usually in the applicants' home. This is in order for an assessment to be made of their ability to care safely and securely for adopted children.
- References will usually be taken up with the applicants' current employer and will always be taken up with present and past employers if the job(s) involved working with children.
- Other references will be taken up, as appropriate e.g. with school(s) attended by applicants' birth and/or adopted child(ren); previous partner (where they have parented together); adult birth children; other family members.
- As part of the assessment, applicants will be asked to demonstrate/provide evidence of competence in a number of areas

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e.g. “providing a safe and caring environment”. This will be explained in detail during the preparation course.

- Applicants will be expected to demonstrate a commitment to respecting and positively promoting the child’s sense of identity (e.g. ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language).
- If the personal circumstances of the applicants change significantly during the assessment process (e.g. relationship breakdown, major bereavement, onset of serious illness) their application may be delayed, discontinued or the advice of Adoption Panel may be sought.
- Applicants can withdraw or choose to put their application on hold at any time during the process and the Family Placement Officer will advise the applicants if any issues arise which may affect their suitability.
- Where information is received which leads the Agency to consider that the applicants may not be suitable to adopt, a brief report may be prepared for consultation with Adoption Panel. Depending on the outcome, the applicants may choose to seek an independent review of the decision.
- When an assessment is completed, the applicants will receive a copy of their assessment report and will have 10 working days in which to send in their views on the report, unless they are satisfied with the contents and waive this right.
- Applicants will be invited to attend Adoption Panel when their approval is being considered. This should be within 8 months from receipt of their formal application.
- The Adoption Panel is responsible for making a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker on whether the applicants are suitable to adopt a child.
- The Panel Chair will inform applicants of the Panel’s recommendation, immediately after the recommendation has been made. They will receive formal written notification, within 5 working days of the Agency Decision.
- If the Agency decides not to approve the applicants, they have 40 days in which to make representations to the Agency or can choose to have their case reviewed by an Independent Review Panel.
- It may be necessary for adopters to be approved to foster a child for a period prior to adoption, whilst a legal situation is resolved.
- Following approval, the approved adopters will have regular phone contact and periodic visits from the Family Placement Officer.
- The process for being matched with a child, the introductions and placement of the child, the process for applying for an adoption order

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and the support available for adopters will all be explained during the preparation period.

Copies of this leaflet can be provided in other formats or languages, upon request.