

S U F F O L K A D O P T I O N A G E N C Y
**Procedures for involving Birth Parents in Permanence Panel
recommendations**

These procedures advise children's social workers as to how best to arrange the participation of birth parents in the permanence panel process when the panel is considering whether their child should be placed for adoption. This includes arranging for the parent(s) to attend panel themselves to put their view about the adoption plan.

**Procedures for involving birth parents in Permanence Panel
recommendations.**

- 1. The social worker should seek to maximise the involvement of both birth parents in the adoption process. What follows below applies therefore not just to parents with parental responsibility but also for those who are recognised as birth parents without parental responsibility.*
- 2. To enable the birth parent to participate in the adoption process, the social worker is required to offer them the counselling mentioned in the Adoption Agency Regulations (see elsewhere) and show them Child's Permanence Report, which will be presented to the panel.*
- 3. Without these preliminaries, the parent will not be empowered to contribute to express a view about the adoption plan let alone contribute to the panel discussion.*
- 4. The social worker should then discuss with the birth parent how they would wish to make their wishes and feelings known to the Permanence Panel about the adoption plan for their child.*
- 5. The parent may decide to complete the form for parent's wishes and feelings which is attached to the Guidance to Social Workers on completing the Child's Permanence Report.*
- 6. Alternatively, the birth parent may decide to write a letter of their own to the panel or ask their advocate or solicitor to write on their behalf. The social worker should inform them that anything they do write will be included in the panel papers and will receive the panel's careful consideration.*
- 7. They may, however, wish to make direct representations about the adoption plan to the Permanence Panel. The social worker should enable this to happen whether or not the parent is in agreement with the adoption plan so long as the parent's involvement is in the interests of the child. The assumption of the Adoption Agency is that parents expressing their views fully and directly is usually in the interests of their children.*
- 8. Exceptionally, there will be circumstances in which the parent's attendance at panel is contraindicated. If, in the opinion of the social worker, the parent is unlikely to be able to manage the experience constructively or is likely to be violent or disruptive, then the social worker should make these reasons known to the Professional Adviser*

- (Permanence) and the chair of the panel and the reasons for turning down the parent's request to attend should be recorded in the panel minutes. A letter should be written by the Professional Adviser (Permanence) to the birth parent. The letter should explain why it had been decided not to invite them to attend panel and how else they could express their wishes and feelings about the adoption plan.*
- 9. If the birth parent wishes to express their views directly to the panel, they can do so either by meeting the chair just prior to the consideration of whether adoption is in the child's best interests or by meeting the panel as well.*
 - 10. Having met the chair of the panel, who will describe the panel process and to clarify with the birth parent what they wish to say in how they wish to say it, the birth parent will be invited into the meeting to explore their wishes and feelings.*
 - 11. The birth parent may opt to talk directly to the panel or the points they wish to make to be drawn out by the chair, the social worker or someone of their own choice.*
 - 12. Prior to the birth parents attending the meeting, the chair will discuss with the panel whether it is appropriate or not for panel members to question or discuss issues with the birth parent. The normal procedure would be for issues that questions to be put through the chair of the meeting.*
 - 13. Birth parents will be enabled to bring with them someone to act as an advocate.*
 - 14. Birth parents will only be present in the panel to express their views about the plan. Birth parents will not be present for the rest of the discussion.*
 - 15. Following the expression of their wishes and feelings, the chair will invite the birth parent to withdraw to the waiting area. The chair will advise the birth parent of arrangements to let them know the outcome of the meeting. Normally, the chair will leave the meeting at the end of the item to advise the birth parent of the outcome.*
 - 16. The social worker when booking the item asking panel to recommend that the child should be placed for adoption should discuss with the Professional Adviser (Permanence) the best way in which the parent's involvement is likely to be enabled. Professional Adviser (Permanence) will allocate sufficient time accordingly.*

Practice for involving birth parents in Permanence Panel recommendations.

- 1. In order for the involvement of birth parents in Permanence Panel Recommendations to be successful, careful preparation is needed.*
- 2. Discussion of the adoption plan should begin as early as possible given the constraints of the Court process etc.*
- 3. An Adoption Referral Meeting should be held within two weeks of the review decision that adoption is at least one of the parallel plans for the child. A member of the Adoption Team should be invited to attend.*

4. *This is an opportunity to think about how best to maximise the involvement of birth parents in the whole process of adoption planning not just whether they attend Panel or not.*
5. *There are a whole range of issues about which we must inform, consult and “counsel” parents.*
6. *The Agency now has a bundle of related papers which provide some guidance and tools for doing this. This is held by local business support managers and includes electronic documents and forms and hard copies of leaflets. It is called .The electronic papers can also be found on the adoption site on the “O” drive (O/children and families/adoption/docs4all/Whether child should be placed for adoption)*
7. *Children’s social workers may wish to involve a member of the Adoption Team in discussions with the parent. This may help deflect some of the anger about the plan from you as the child’s social worker*

Extracts from the Policies of the Suffolk Adoption Agency relating to Birth Families

2. BIRTH FAMILIES

- 2.1. *Suffolk Social Care will consider the wishes and views of birth families and will explore all alternatives to adoption with them provided that this is consistent with the duty to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare.*
- 2.2. *Parents will be informed verbally and in writing before their child becomes looked after (or as soon as possible thereafter) that Suffolk Social Care Services are committed to active permanency planning for children and will pursue the policies described in this document in relation to their child’s future. The primary focus for permanency planning will be to secure the child within his or her own family provided this is consistent with safeguarding and promoting welfare.*
- 2.3. *Birth parents must be informed and consulted at the earliest stage when the Agency has decided to pursue parallel plans for restoration or alternative permanence including adoption. They should be informed that the plans are being made to meet the child’s needs and prevent unnecessary delay. The parents’ views, wishes and feelings will be recorded and fully considered. The primacy of the restoration plan should be stressed.*
- 2.4. *Children’s social workers should make all reasonable attempts to identify and consult absent birth parents even where they do not have parental responsibility.*
- 2.5. *Birth parents will have the opportunity to give their account of events, comment on what is written about them in reports, make representations to the Permanence Panel and comment on information passed to the adopters.*
- 2.6. *Appreciating that the key issues for many birth parents of children placed for adoption are understanding the process of adoption, addressing grief and loss and maintaining links with their child, the Agency affirms the importance of independent support for birth parents before and after adoption. The Agency will offer independent support to every birth parent from the time at which adoption is proposed as a plan for their child.*
- 2.7. *Whenever consistent with the interests of the child, we will seek to maximise the involvement of birth parents and other family members in planning for adoption and to promote an inclusive approach to placement in which birth parents continue to be seen as a resource to their children.*
- 2.8. *This will include:*
 - 2.8.1. *Parents having the opportunity to attend the Permanence Panel to express their views when the Panel is considering whether adoption is in their child’s best interests.*
 - 2.8.2. *Involving birth family members in the choice of or discussions about, the adoptive family placement.*
 - 2.8.3. *Encouraging birth family members to provide information that the adopted child will need. This will include information and material about the adopted child’s birth and early life, the birth family’s views about adoption and contact and up to date information about themselves and their situation.*

- 2.8.4. *Taking into account the parent's wishes with regard to placement with respect to the child's religion, ethnicity, culture, education, interests, position in the family, placement with siblings, characteristics of adopters, etc.*
- 2.8.5. *Sharing non-identifying information about the adoptive family to allow the birth family members to develop a sense of the family's lifestyle and interests.*
- 2.8.6. *Inviting birth parents to attend the Permanence Panel to comment on a proposed match for their child when it is unnecessary to preserve the anonymity of the proposed adopters.*
- 2.8.7. *Encouraging an exchange of information between birth family members and prospective carers prior to placement.*
- 2.8.8. *Encouraging adopters and birth parents and other relatives to meet on a "one off" basis, irrespective of whether there may be a plan for contact after the placement.*
- 2.8.9. *Affirming that for many children continued contact with birth family members after placement whether direct or indirect, face-to-face, written or by telephone plays an important part in enhancing the child's sense of identity and the success of their adoptive placement. Where there is to be continuing contact of any kind, the involved birth family members should be consulted about any contact plans drawn up, invited to sign their agreement to them and assisted, where necessary, to fulfil agreed plans.*
- 2.8.10. *The Agency's acknowledgement that the child has two sets of relatives.*
- 2.8.11. *Keeping birth parents fully informed up to the point of adoption about significant developments affecting their children by providing non-identifying information unless they record their wish not to be or a clear Agency decision has been made that it would be unsafe to do so.*
- 2.8.12. *Recording a clear decision about how, following adoption, the birth parent should be kept informed if they wish and if agreed by the adopters and the adopted child.*
- 2.8.13. *Arranging the noting of updating information from one or more parties to an adoption placement on agency files. Considering brokering agreements prior to the adoption to pass on significant information (for example, relating to death or serious illness) when it is received or to be shared later if requested.*
- 2.8.14. *Parents will be given written details of available support services once an adoption order is made.*