

Fostering for Adoption (FfA)

Fostering for Adoption, along with concurrent planning, is an early permanence scheme for the placement of children where adoption may be a suitable plan.

Fostering for Adoption places a child during the period of temporary local authority care with foster carers who are also approved as adopters. If the court agrees that the child should be adopted and the adoption agency approves the 'match' between the carers as adopters and the child, the placement becomes an adoption placement.

A child centred approach:

If you are thinking about or are being assessed as adopters, there is a good chance you will have already started thinking about the needs of babies and young children who are unable to live with their parents or other family members. You may have heard about concerns regarding delays in the care and court system which means that children wait to be placed with permanent families. Royal Greenwich is committed to planning for children to minimise delay in being placed with a permanent family. Considering placing a child in a fostering for adoption or early permanence placement is part of this planning.

What is FfA?

Children needing adoptive families are generally placed with foster carers whilst the court makes a decision about their future. They then move to adopters. Clearly, this is disruptive for a child and will have implications for how they are able to form attachments with their carers. This scheme allows for children to be placed with carers who are approved as both foster carers and adopters whilst the court is considering plans for the child. If the court then agrees that adoption should be the plan, and the match is agreed at an Adoption Panel, the placement can become an adoptive one.

Advantages for children:

- The child is placed with foster carers who may become their adopters
- Avoids the emotional distress and disruption caused by removal from foster carer(s) who the child has experienced as their parental figure(s).
- Allows a child's early life experiences to be what most children need and expect.

Advantages for adopters:

Adopters will be able to parent their child from a younger age. The child will not have experienced as many potentially damaging moves.

Advantages for Birth parents:

It may be that some birth parents will understand these advantages for their child, even if they are aiming to prove to the court that they are able to take care of the child themselves. It must be remembered that the court's decision cannot be pre-empted. They will have an opportunity to

build a relationship with the foster to adopt carers for their child if a risk assessment concludes this is appropriate.

Can children be placed directly for adoption?

A child can be placed for adoption if birth parents give their legally authorised consent and no other family members put themselves forward to care for the child. In most situations, consent is not given and it is for the court to make a decision about adoption. Until that decision is made, every local authority is required to place the child with foster carers.

Why does the process take a long time?

Although it is widely recognised that delay may harm children, it is important that their futures are considered in a transparent and just way. Adoption is a profound and life long decision with legal and many emotional implications for all concerned. Local authorities have a duty to work with birth families to help them resume the care of their child(ren) if at all possible. It may be that other family members will want to offer the child a permanent home. During the period of time when evidence is gathered and solutions explored, children are most often placed with temporary foster carers. Sometimes children experience one or more moves between foster carers. Children will often be too young to have awareness that their situation is temporary. Older children may become unsettled as a result of this knowledge.

In what circumstances will children be placed in a Fostering for Adoption or early permanence placement?

This kind of placement is not suitable in every case. Royal Greenwich will only use these placements where we believe it is highly likely the court will agree an adoption plan. This is usually when:

- Other children born to the birth parents have recently been placed for adoption, and there is no evidence of subsequent change in the birth parents. There is a serious on-going risk to the child if they are not removed.
- Where this is a first child, birth parents and the birth family have been fully assessed and there are serious risks of significant harm to the child whereby the Local Authority has no plans to rehabilitate the child.
- Parents have indicated that they may want their child adopted but have not formally consented (S52 (3) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)

Is Fostering for Adoption right for me?

There will be a number of things that you will need to think about as a Fostering for Adoption carer. Initially, as a foster carer you are caring for the child under the direct supervision of the local authority, like any other type of foster carer, so you'd need to consider whether this is something you'd be comfortable with. It is highly likely that you would go on to adopt the child

but you would have to deal with the uncertainty of this outcome. You would need to think about the possibility of the court not agreeing the adoption plan and the child leaving your care.

It is important for you to consider what support you might need, what access you have to support and how you typically deal with stressful, upsetting or painful situations. There will be specific issues to be thought about in Fostering for Adoption placements and you should try to identify what this might mean for you and your family and then discuss this with family members and close friends. You would do this if you were planning to adopt a child anyway, but there are specific issues about preparing a child for that period of uncertainty in the fostering phase. They may have questions and views themselves but they should also be an important source of support.

This scheme has definite advantages for the child and foster carer/adopter in terms of being able to establish loving family relationships at an early stage. It does of course mean that carers will be living with a level of uncertainty until the court makes a decision. Occasionally, a child may need to move back to birth family and this is very distressing for carers. Some carers are able to think about such an eventuality in terms of having been able to offer the child a positive and secure start in life, even if they do not go on to parent him or her throughout childhood.

How many children are suitable for this scheme?

The Office for National Statistics has just produced the first national figure of the number of children in fostering to adopt or concurrent planning placements of 530 on 31st March 2015. This represents under 4 % of 13,830 child aged 4 years or under in foster care on 31st March 2015. Royal Greenwich, working with their consortium partners in the South London Adoption Consortium, may identify a handful of children each year who may be suitable for FfA placements. The government has put in place various measures to support and encourage local authorities to consider early permanent placements.

How will I know if Fostering to Adopt is right for me?

Given that a FfA placement requires extra tasks of prospective adopters, this is reflected in the training, assessment and support of those people who choose to take this route:

- You will attend an extra two days training where you will have the opportunity to meet experienced foster to adopt carers.

Your assessment will help you think about all the issues involved. This includes:

- Your motivation for choosing the scheme together with how your learning and understanding has developed.
- Your ability to manage uncertainty and loss. This will be important as you will need to be able to manage uncertainty related to the court process and consider how you would cope with the potential loss of the child (it will be necessary to look at previous coping strategies and your support networks). We will also need to think about your family and friend's understanding of concurrency and the effects of uncertainty.

- Integral to this will be an assessment of any relevant health issues including emotional wellbeing. How do you recognise and manage stress?
- Your assessing social worker will help you to think about how you will cope with providing a fostering/adoption placement i.e. the need to provide a secure attachment for a child whilst working within a framework that may allow for the child to return to birth family.
- Preparation for the fostering task:
 - What experience do you have of caring for very young children? Royal Greenwich's children may have specific health needs e.g. withdrawal from drugs/prematurity. We will link you with an experienced baby foster carer.
 - You will need to develop a basic understanding the legal process; how long care proceedings will take and professional's roles in relation to making assessments and presenting evidence.
- You will need to be clear about the fostering task and think about how to make use of support and supervision and the requirements for working with professionals. You will need to understand the limitations of your own decision making regarding the child and to be able to cope with a lack of privacy and intrusion in your life.
- Contact: Regular contact between children and birth family members is maintained until courts make a decision about where a child should live permanently.
- You will need to have the capacity to manage a relationship with birth parents. During court proceedings there will be an expectation that foster carers/adopters facilitate contact. Depending on the risk assessment of the birth parents, Foster/adopters will transport the child to the contact centre and you will need to hand the child over to the birth parents and provide written information about the child's care.
- Other children in the family: Your social worker will help you to think about the potential impact on other children in the family. How have they been prepared? What will be the impact of uncertainty be on them? How will you help them throughout the process?
- Finances and leave from work: You will receive a fostering allowance while you are the child's foster carer. You need to consider your capacity to take time off work, potentially at short notice and the impact of time off on future employment.
- From April 2015 the law changed and you are now able to take adoption leave from the start of a foster to adopt placement. You will need to be able to take at least a year off.

What do we expect from you?

- That you will be motivated to work closely with Royal Greenwich staff in order to maintain the interests of the child at all times.
- A robust support network.
- Flexibility, including with work.
- To facilitate contact between the child and birth family as directed by the court.

We hope you have found this information useful. If you would like to discuss further please contact

Royal Greenwich adoption team

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