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Service



A FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTICE

Welsh Early Permanence



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Cover illustration: Jess Coldrick

WELSH EARLY PERMANENCE: A FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTICE

The importance of close, loving and predictable relationships for the healthy development of children has long been recognised. We know that pre-birth and early experiences influence a child's brain development and attachment patterns, their beliefs about themselves, others around them and the world they live in.

If these experiences are positive ones, the child learns to trust that their caregiver will keep them safe and respond when they need them, and this in turn produces a profile of neurotypical development. The child starts to learn how to regulate and take pleasure in social interaction; they can start to explore the world knowing they are safe and cared for.

Pre-birth stress and poor early experience for a child can mean that the child can develop a completely different experience of the world and a different pattern of learning as trauma interrupts and affects their brain development. This trauma is inevitably exacerbated by repeated moves to new caregivers, necessitating the child to learn new survival techniques, and assimilate the loss they experience along with each move.

What is Early Permanence?

Early Permanence provides a child with a secure base as early as possible, when weeks and months really do matter; it enables healthy brain development and attachment through safe, predictable relationships with sensitive adults, and minimises the distressing moves that cause further trauma.

It is the umbrella term given to the practice of placing children, usually at the commencement of care proceedings when an interim care order is granted, or when a child is relinquished, with foster carers who are also approved as prospective adoptive parents. The early permanence carer works with the care plan as any mainstream foster carer, undertaking all fostering tasks, including facilitating contact. It is only if the care plan becomes for adoption and there is authority to place for adoption that the foster carer become that child's prospective adoptive parent.

The fact that the carers may become the child's adoptive parents does not affect either the status of, or priorities for, the foster placement; neither does it affect the course of the care proceedings and the court's decision on the child's care plan at the end of the care proceedings. Parents should be reassured that their child is being well cared for, that contact is being well organised and that reunification, or placement with the wider family, will be facilitated in a professional and child centred way if that is the court's decision.

Though parents do not have the right to object to a WEP placement, as it is a properly regulated foster placement, every effort is made to inform both parents, their legal advisers, Cafcass Cymru and the court, if necessary, of the benefits for the child, and also the parents, of the placement.

Early permanence carers are, first and foremost, prospective adoptive parents. Their drive is to become adoptive parents. However, we know from English practice that a growing number of prospective adopters are prepared to become foster carers for a child, so enabling that child to have as few changes of placement as possible, whatever the care plan. The success of the placement is measured by what is right for the child.

"I was struck by how much it kept the child at the centre of everything. It was the right thing to do. It is important for people to hear that there are people who can bear the uncertainty and can cope"
EP carer (England)

(first child placed through EP was reunited with family, and then went on to adopt a child through EP)

Please remember: All WEP documents should have an adoption alert attached

A history

The use of early permanence has been growing in England since the late 1990's, firstly through concurrency, that is the dual approval of carers as foster carers and prospective adopters, where the child is usually a baby or very young child, and secondly (and more commonly now) through fostering for adoption, where the placing local authority, through the decision maker, approves the prospective adopters as temporary foster carers for that particular child.

The English fostering for adoption route is not available in Wales. The provision 'foster to adopt' set out in s81 SSWB(W)A 2014 does not allow for a placement at the start of care proceedings as it requires both a 'should be placed for adoption' decision and a matching decision before the child may be placed with foster carers who are also approved prospective adopters.

The only mechanism for early permanence in Wales is, therefore, through concurrency (dual approval).

There is limited research available at present. In 2011, Coram conducted a longitudinal study of 57 children placed in concurrent placements and found that in the sample taken, there were no disruptions. However, despite very early placement, one third of the children still needed significant support as they grew up. (Ponomarenko et al 2018).

Their extension study in 2017/18 with 12 families highlighted key policy messages that are relevant to us in Wales as we start to develop our practice of Welsh Early Permanence. Opportunities to develop attachments with their children as early as possible as well as opportunities to meet and get to know the child's birth parents were highly valued. Positive reporting from both children and parents were evident in the study despite some considerable challenges and need for ongoing adoption support services.

Early placement is not a panacea but offers the opportunity to build secure attachments from the earliest age. This has created stability of placements despite the difficulties presented. Services need to be designed and resourced on the basis that the majority of children will need support, including into and through adolescence.
(Ponomarenko et al 2018)

The 'WEP' framework

Our Welsh specific framework is designed to use this concurrency model in a way which meets the needs of a greater range of children to include:

- 1) Babies and young children where there may be some or may be little prospect of reunification; it is accepted by the carers that there is still a commitment to reunification or placement within the wider family if the care plan dictates:
- 2) Older children, where the care plan changes unexpectedly and is now likely to be a plan for adoption (for example with the breakdown of a connected persons / kinship placement or the breakdown of a reunification plan). This use of Welsh Early Permanence here will be invaluable, particularly when the child would otherwise have to move to a new short term foster placement before being matched with prospective adopters.

Other particular features of the framework, incorporated as a result of research and lessons learned in Wales are:

- The development of a consistent framework across Wales, enabling a critical number of WEP carers to undertake remote training together and develop a support network
- A very clear understanding, on the WEP carer's part, of the inherent risks in becoming a WEP carer
- A clear understanding in relation to support needed from the agency for the WEP carer – who, what, when etc
- Support for parents during the course of the foster placement and into either reunification or adoptive placement
- A focus on developing a connection between the WEP carer and parent, through meetings and handovers at contact.

The All-Wales framework has been developed and presented in clear sections reflecting the sequential practice implications for agencies and practitioners. Each section provides an overview of that stage with what needs to happen and the relevant WEP framework documents that have been developed.

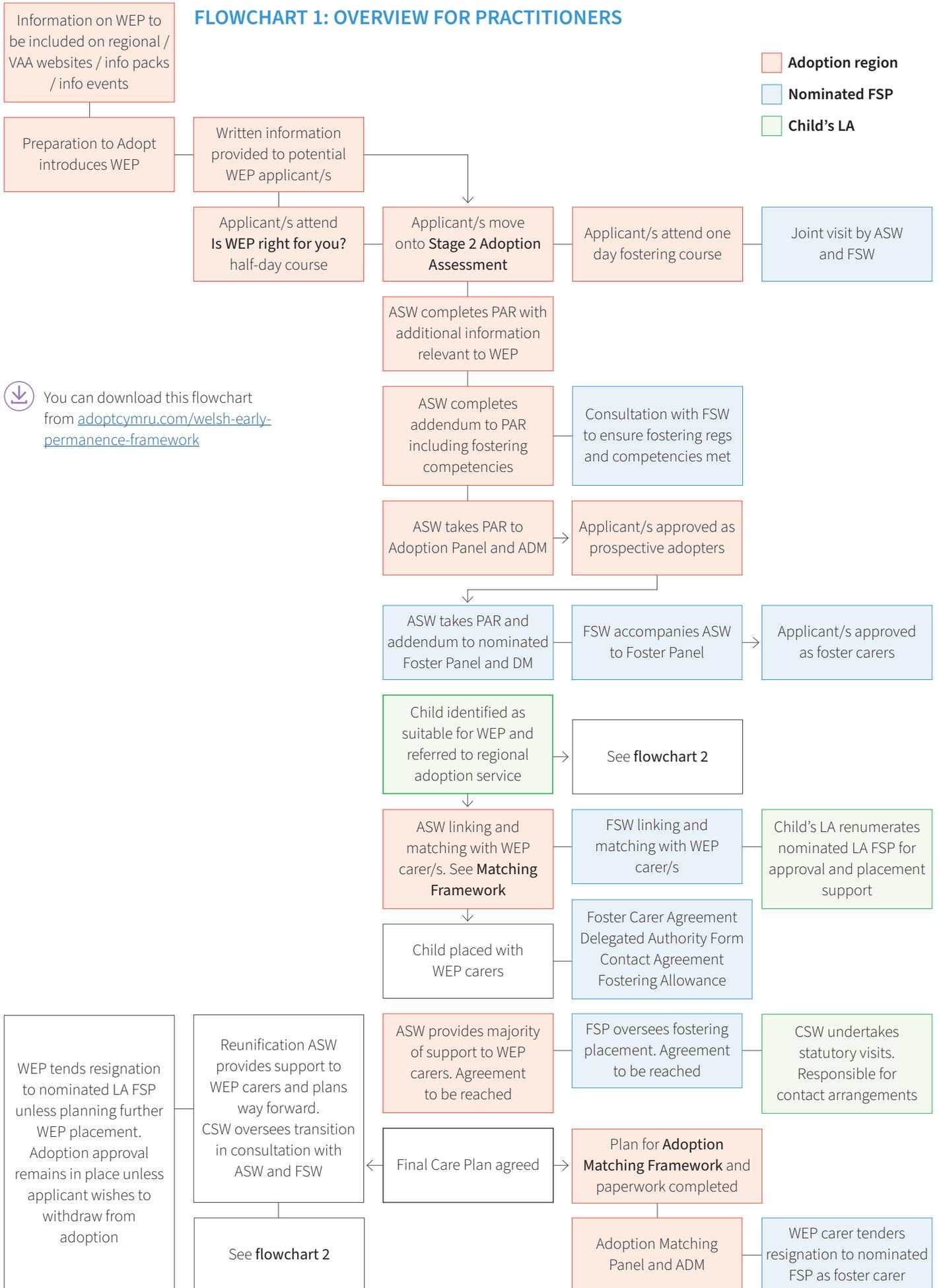
The framework will be reviewed, developed further as necessary, and amended as appropriate as Welsh Early Permanence progresses across Wales to incorporate lessons learnt. Therefore, practitioners should always access documents and templates from the National Adoption Service website and via the NAS APP to ensure they are current.

For ease of reference, throughout the framework:

- The adoption social worker will be referred to as ASW; for the purpose of WEP child referral, matching and placement. This will be the Family Finding adoption social worker in the region.
- The allocated fostering social worker will be referred to as FSW.
- The child's social worker will be referred to as CSW.

FLOWCHART 1: OVERVIEW FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Adoption region
- Nominated FSP
- Child's LA



You can download this flowchart from adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Welsh Early Permanence is a specific way of ensuring that a child has as few transitions in placement as possible before their care plan for permanence can be realised.

Clarification on the WEP framework

WEP is not the same as an English 'fostering for adoption' placement where the prospective adopter may have a temporary approval granted by the local authority adoption agency decision maker to be a temporary foster carer for a particular child.

WEP is not the same as the Welsh 'foster to adopt' provision, under s81(10) and (11) SSWB(W)A 2014 where both a 'should be placed for adoption' decision and a matching decision need to be made before the child may be placed.

What WEP is

WEP requires dual approval as both a prospective adoptive parent and a foster carer:

1) Approval as an adoptive parent

The prospective WEP carer is firstly approved as a prospective adoptive parent under the Adoption Agencies (Wales) regulations 2005, as amended. Though the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) will make a number of references to the possibility of this prospective adopter becoming a WEP carer, the approval is the same as any other adopter – i.e. that they are 'suitable to adopt a child' – reg 30A(1) (panel recommendation) and 30B (Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision). Reference may be made to the suitability of the prospective adopter to become a WEP carer under reg 30A(4), where the adoption panel may give advice on a number of issues.

The advice would be that the applicant/s should be considered as a WEP carer (this recommendation and decision will be made by the Fostering Service Provider (FSP) – see below) in the same way that advice is given on, for example, ages, placement of siblings etc which is then subject to linking and matching considerations. This advice would be noted on the documents the panel chair completes and ratified by the ADM in the same way as any other case.

2) Approval as a foster carer

The approved prospective adopter now needs to be approved as a foster carer. Within each regional adoption collaborative, the local authorities concerned have nominated one or two to be responsible for the fostering assessment, approval and support on their behalf in collaboration with the ASW (Clarification of roles and responsibilities of ASW, FSW and CSW are set out in Allocation of Roles document (see page 12)). As an example, a SEWAS prospective adopter will, therefore, go to the Blaenau-Gwent fostering service (the SEWAS nominated FSP) for approval and support, even though they may live in Torfaen and have a child placed from Newport. In this scenario Newport would remunerate Blaenau-Gwent for the placement (approval and support of the WEP carer).

The fostering approval is a straightforward approval under regulations 5 (recommendation by panel) and 8 (decision maker approval) of the Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018. The panel recommends and Decision Maker (DM) decides whether the applicant is suitable to act as a foster parent.

The prospective WEP carer is recommended for approval as a foster carer for short term placements (specifically Welsh Early Permanence placements) and the terms of approval will reflect the Adoption Panel advice with regard to numbers and ages of children (reg 5(1)(b)).

When may a WEP placement be used?

The majority of WEP placements will be made during care proceedings, though they may sometimes be used following the making of a care order and upon the disruption of a placement where the contingency plan is for adoption.

There may be some situations where a relinquished child is suitable for a WEP placement; here it is very important to follow the [Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption](#). An additional document (**WEP specific considerations for relinquished children document**) has been developed as part of the WEP framework materials and should be read in conjunction with above (see page 11).

Upon foster placement

When a child is placed in a WEP placement it is a foster placement only. The fact that the carer is also an approved prospective adopter plays no part in the placement and the carer performs all fostering tasks in the same way as any mainstream foster carer.

The foster placement will last until either:

- 1) the child is reunified with parents or placed with wider family members. The WEP foster carer will help facilitate that transition, or
- 2) a placement order is made by the court, followed by a matching recommendation and decision by the relevant regional adoption collaborative panel and ADM

In the event of reunification or placement with family and the WEP carer decides to go ahead with a further WEP placement, then they will remain foster carers. If they decide to opt for a mainstream adoptive placement, they tender their resignation by letter to the appropriate FSP.

Upon adoptive placement

As soon as the matching decision is made, the foster placement transforms into an adoptive placement, the WEP carer ceases to be a foster carer for the child and becomes a prospective adoptive parent. The prospective adopter then tenders their resignation by letter to the appropriate FSP.

This change in status does not preclude required actions taking place as appropriate, including Farewell contact, any adjustments to support and contact arrangements, and direct work with the child.

Application to adopt

In order to apply for an adoption order, the child must have lived with the applicant/s for a minimum of 10 weeks preceding the application (s.42(2) Adoption and Children Act 2002).

For WEP carers, this timeframe is determined from the start date of the WEP placement and therefore, applicants/s are eligible to apply for an adoption order once the placement formally becomes an adoptive placement so long as the timeframe of 10 weeks has been satisfied.

Although in some cases the applicant/s might chose to submit their application prior to the first adoption review (not more than four weeks after the date of adoption placement, no more than three months, thereafter no more than six months (reg 37(4) AA(W)R 2005), this would normally be discussed and agreed at this point.

Again, this would not preclude any required actions taking place as appropriate.

Social workers visiting and Reviews

There are specific regulations which apply with regard to social work visiting and the reviewing regime for a WEP placement; good practice principles apply and will be dependant on the needs of the child and family. These are set out in the “WEP Placement: What needs to happen” and “Following Placement Order: What needs to happen” sections as appropriate.



WEP carers and finances

Carers who are dually approved as prospective adoptive parents and foster carers are eligible for statutory adoption leave and pay from the date the child has been placed with them as foster carers. Note: self-employed carers are not eligible for statutory pay.

The Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2016, regulations 53-54 and 143-148, bring Wales into line with the provisions available in England.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2016 (“the 2016 Regulations”) made amendments to the Social Security Act 1989 the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and the Employment Rights Act 1996.

The 2016 Regulations made the following amendments:

Social Security Act

Schedule 5, paragraph 5A – unfair paternity leave provisions

Schedule 5, paragraph 5B – unfair adoption leave provisions

Schedule 5, paragraph 5C – unfair shared parental leave provisions

Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act

Section 171ZB – Statutory Paternity Pay – Entitlement: adoption

Section 171ZE – Statutory Paternity Pay – Entitlement: adoption

Section 171ZL – Statutory Adoption Pay Entitlement

Section 171ZN – Statutory Shared Parental Pay – Rate and period of pay

Section 171ZV – Statutory Shared Parental Pay – Entitlement: adoption

Employment Rights Act

Section 57ZS – Placement of looked after children with prospective adopters

Section 75A – Ordinary adoption leave

Section 75G – Entitlement to shared parental leave: adoption

Section 80G – Employer’s duties in relation to application under section 80F

For more details, please see the **WEP carers and finances** document in Section 6: Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Approval, on p32.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

The principles and practice of Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) should be embedded in care planning and decision making from an early stage, and routinely considered alongside other options for permanence.

The whole premise of WEP is to minimise the disruption of multiple moves and the associated trauma and long-term developmental impact for the child whilst decisions about their future are being made by the court. These are children who, in utero and post birth are likely to have experienced considerable stress; WEP offers these vulnerable children, from the earliest possible moment, a consistent and stable experience of care with the opportunity of developing a secure attachment that may not need to be broken. This inevitably provides positive development outcomes for the children, whether they return to their family or go on to be adopted by their WEP carers.

It must be borne in mind at all times that there is nothing in the Welsh Early Permanence framework that mitigates against parents resuming the care of their child, a family member assuming care or, if adoption is the preferred care plan, keeping in touch arrangements that meet the needs of the child.

What is critical in decision making is that evidence is properly gathered, analysed, tested and agreed which clearly establishes the benefits of WEP for the particular child or children in question. This evidence should also clearly identify a realistic analysis of the risk of reunification with parents or with extended family and ensure that this is manageable.

[Flowchart 2](#) identifies possible options where the decision to place a child/ren in an WEP placement may be appropriate and the referral and care planning considerations for the potential options pre-birth, during proceedings and post proceedings. The child's parents should be kept fully informed about what is happening at each stage by the child's social worker; the flowchart identifies key points where specific information about WEP is to be provided to parents and their solicitors, with notification to CAF/CASS as appropriate.

Relinquished children. WEP should also be considered when parents have indicated that their child/ren should be placed for adoption and where the parent/s have consistently expressed their consent to accommodation, and where it is clear they have the capacity to do so.

Please refer to **WEP specific considerations for relinquished children** (see page 11) where a child is being relinquished and formal consent to adoption given under ss 19 and 20 Adoption and Children Act 2002. This should be read in conjunction with the [Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption](#), and adhered to.

Welsh Early Permanence planning for children must take place in the context of proactive care planning and court proceedings where birth parents are fully represented.

The following principles underpin the Welsh Early Permanence framework:

- Complete honesty and transparency with all concerned on the status of a WEP placement. Further information and resources regarding this have been developed and are contained in subsequent sections of the framework as appropriate.
- Early intervention (for example, Family Group Meetings) in order to ascertain what support parents can receive from the wider family and who may be able to care for the child long term if parents are unable to
- A full pre-proceedings assessment (including information that will need to be shared with WEP carers when considering a match as foster carers and the possibility of the placement becoming an adoptive placement). See **Child Referral** (Section 3, p14) and **WEP Matching** (Section 4, p16)
- Early discussion with birth parents and the provision of information on WEP. See **Information for, and work with, parents** (Section 8, p37)
- Early information sharing with parents' legal representatives. See **Information for, and work with, parents** (Section 8, p37)
- Early information sharing with Cafcass and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) – see below for further details
- Adherence to the guidance if a relinquished child guidance as above. Also see **Child Referral** (Section 3, p14) for further information.
- A focus on the development of a relationship, if possible, between parent and WEP carer, through contact See **WEP Placement** (Section 5, p19).

Recorded modules for practitioners and panel

- A Welsh Early Permanence **recorded module for practitioners** has been developed; it is advised that all childcare, adoption and fostering practitioners access this. This is also suitable and should be made available to Cafcass and IROs.
- A Welsh Early Permanence **recorded module for panels members / ADM / DM** has also been developed and should be accessed by them at the earliest opportunity (alongside other information as specified in relevant section below) and before any WEP cases are considered at adoption and the nominated fostering panel.

Please refer to Section 6: **Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Approval of Prospective Adopters**, and Section 7: **Preparation, Assessment and Approval of WEP carers** sections for further information.

Guidance for CAF/CASS and IROs

Cafcass Cymru and the IRO need to be fully conversant with what WEP is, the legal framework, information sharing at early stages with parents and prospective WEP applicants as well as the additional elements that have been included and considered in the preparation and assessment of prospective WEP carers.

Therefore, they should be provided with:

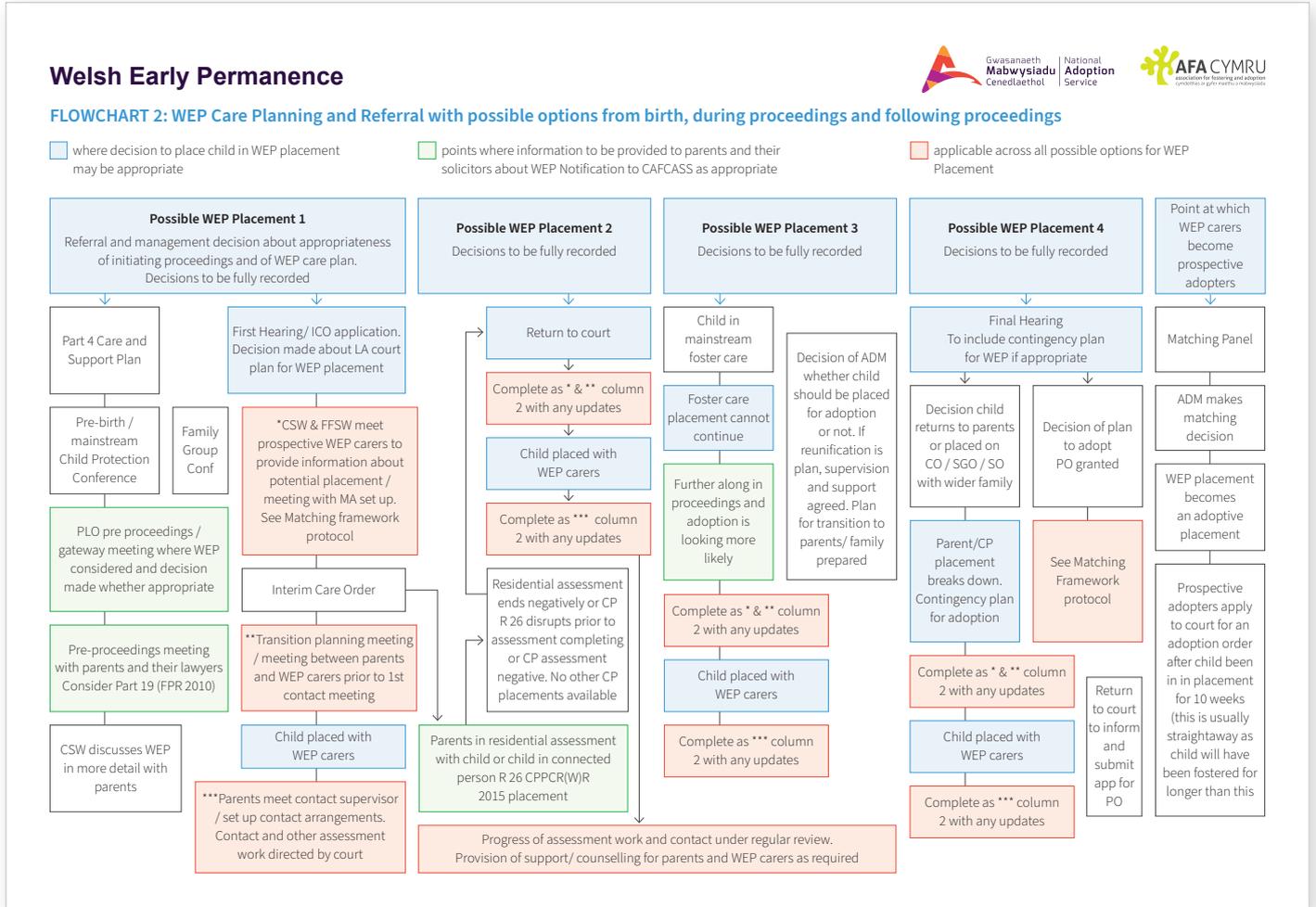
1. Introduction to WEP and [WEP flowchart 1](#) which provides an overview of the process for practitioners (see p3 – 5)
2. Legal framework of WEP (see p6)
3. Written information provided to parents [leaflet 1](#), [leaflet 2](#) and [leaflet 3](#).
4. Written information provided to [parents' legal representatives](#)
5. Information to [introduce WEP](#) on websites and Preparation training (see page 23), and [WEP Information pack for prospective applicants](#)
6. WEP Guide for Adoption Social Workers: Prospective Adopter's Report (see page 28).
7. WEP Guide for social workers: completing the [WEP All-Wales Addendum report for Fostering Panel](#)



The recorded modules are available to download from the NAS website from September 2022
www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



FLOWCHART 2: WEP Care Planning and Referral with possible options from birth, during proceedings and following proceedings



You can download this flowchart from adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

Please remember: All WEP documents should have an adoption alert attached

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLACEMENTS WHERE THE CHILD IS RELINQUISHED

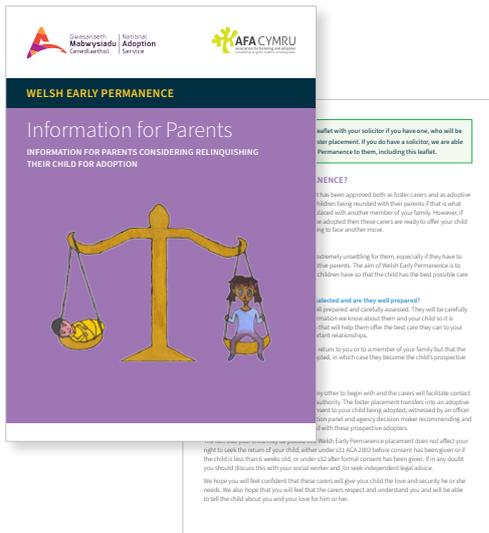
This advice should be considered where consideration is being given to a WEP placement where the child is being relinquished and formal consent to adoption given under ss 19 and 20 Adoption and Children Act 2002.

[Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption](#) should be adhered to.

In addition, the following needs to be considered:

- As with all WEP placements, an early referral should be made to the appropriate adoption collaborative
- Parents should be informed at the earliest stage possible that, should they decide to relinquish their child for adoption, then the local authority/adoption agency will consider placing the child in a WEP placement. Information on the nature of WEP should be provided to parents, along with clear advice that the nature of this placement does not affect any of their rights to seek the return of their child, either under s31 ACA 2002 before consent has been given or when the child is less than 6 weeks old, or under s32, after formal consent has been given (see [Leaflet 3: Information for parents considering relinquishing their child for adoption](#)).

- It should be made absolutely clear to prospective WEP carers of their legal position and responsibilities as foster carers and that they do not acquire parental responsibility until such time as consent is given formally under s19. If the plan becomes one for reunification with parents then, as with other WEP placements, carers will need to facilitate that plan. There may also be uncertainty as to the child's paternity and there may be a duty to seek information about the father and wider family members in terms of their willingness to take the child, possibly resulting in the child being placed within the family
- It should also be made clear to WEP carers that, even once there is authority to place the child with prospective adoptive parents as consent has been given formally under s19, there is still the possibility of parents withdrawing their consent and seeking the return of the child from the adoption agency. If the local authority/adoption agency did not agree with the child returning to their parent/s, then the local authority/adoption agency would have to seek a placement order, if they felt they could prove that the threshold criteria were met, in order for the child to be able to remain in the adoptive placement. WEP carers should be very clear on the inherent risks in a relinquished placement, even when consent has been given, and be able facilitate a return home (sometimes within a very short timeframe (7 days)) for the child if that becomes the care plan.



ALLOCATION OF PRACTITIONER ROLES IN WELSH EARLY PERMANENCE

Region (Adoption)	Nominated LA (Fostering)	Child's LA
Regional website and Preparation to Adopt training introduces WEP. Information pack given to interested parties.		
Half-day "Is WEP right for you?" Delivered on a Wales wide basis 6 x year. (For initial 12 months, this will be delivered centrally by AFA Cymru)		
One day WEP fostering course Delivered on a Wales wide basis 5 x year (For initial 12 months, this will be delivered centrally by AFA Cymru)		
Joint visit with FSW during assessment	Joint visit with ASW during assessment to discuss fostering role and expectations	
ASW completes WEP Addendum report for foster panel in consultation with FSW	FSW assists ASW to ensure fostering regs and competencies met. Complete checklist	
ASW takes PAR to Adoption Panel and ADM ASW to complete WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW – to be updated as case progresses	ASW to complete WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW	
ASW takes PAR and WEP Addendum report to foster panel and DM	FSW accompanies ASW to foster panel WEP carer approved Foster Carer for nominated LA	Care Planning identifies WEP as possible option for child WEP Information sharing with parents and their legal representative WEP Information sharing with Cafcass Cymru and IRO
WEP Referral Planning meeting held with ASW, CSW & FSW. Chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding Team	WEP Referral Planning meeting held with ASW, CSW & FSW. Chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding Team	WEP Child Referral form completed and sent to adoption region (identified senior point of contact) WEP Referral Planning meeting held with ASW, CSW & FSW. Chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding Team Referral to Reflect service if agreed with parents (referral criteria and timing differs across Wales / Reflect services)
ASW linking and matching with WEP carer. WEP Matching framework completed in consultation with FSW and CSW (includes Medical Advisor input) WEP Matching meeting / discussion held with ASW, FSW & CSW. To be chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding team. ASW to compile TNTL (UTCD as appropriate) ASW to facilitate meeting with parent/s if appropriate to do so and possible at this stage – in consultation with FSW and CSW ASW to update WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW and CSW	Linking and matching with WEP carer WEP Matching framework completed in consultation with FSW and CSW (includes Medical Advisor input) WEP Matching meeting / discussion held with ASW, FSW & CSW. To be chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding team. FSW identifies experienced foster carer to "buddy" WEP Carer particularly for very young children with high needs	Linking and matching with WEP carer. WEP Matching framework completed in consultation with FSW and CSW (includes Medical Advisor input) WEP Matching meeting / discussion held with ASW, FSW & CSW. To be chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding team. Head of Service/DM for the child's LA is responsible for agreement and signing off of the match between the identified child and prospective WEP carers. CSW undertakes Direct work with child Child's LA remunerates nominated LA FSP for approval and support of WEP placement

Region (Adoption)	Nominated LA (Fostering)	Child's LA
<p>Child placed with WEP carer ASW provides majority of emotional support to WEP carers ASW to facilitate meeting with parent/s if appropriate to do so and has not happened at earlier stage – in consultation with FSW and CSW Additional specific support may need to be provided for young children with identified health / development needs Interagency fees paid as appropriate Visits may be shared with FSW Agreement reached over allocation of fostering tasks (agreement on keeping in touch / visits). See guidance. ASW to update WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW and CSW WEP Matching Framework to be updated as appropriate</p>	<p>Child placed with WEP carer FSW completes WEP foster care agreement WEP Placement Plan completed by CSW and shared with WEP carer CSW completes WEP Delegated Authority Agreement with WEP carers in conjunction with FSW and ASW FSW oversees fostering placement in respect of fostering tasks eg daily recording, contact etc FSW monitors “buddying” with experienced foster carer WEP carer receives fostering allowance Visits may be shared with ASW Agreement reached over fostering tasks (agreement on keeping in touch/visits) and sharing of recordings. See guidance</p>	<p>Child placed with WEP carer CSW completes WEP Placement Plan and shares with WEP carer (alongside FSW & ASW). This includes Parental Consent to Medical Treatment / Interventions and Health Assessments CSW completes WEP Delegated Authority Agreement with WEP carers in conjunction with FSW and ASW Direct work with child Additional specific support may need to be provided for young children with identified health / development needs CSW responsible for statutory visits and contact arrangements. See guidance.</p>
<p>If care plan for reunification/ placement with family, ASW provides support to WEP carers; WEP carers support transition to parents ASW to discuss WEP carers contribution to child's LJW in consultation with CSW ASW supports and plans with carers their way forward re adoption; formal WEP Review (Review document 1) completed when appropriate ASW to update WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW and CSW</p>	<p>FSW supports placement transition. Some support may be provided by “buddy” foster carer as appropriate. WEP carer tends resignation as foster carer unless planning on a further WEP placement</p>	<p>CSW oversees transition plan in consultation with ASW and FSW Direct work with child including involvement of WEP carers in child's LJW CSW support parent/s or wider family members</p>
<p>If plan for adoption, Placement Order granted. ASW completes formal WEP review (Review document 2); this accompanies adoption matching paperwork. WEP Matching Framework to be updated as appropriate for Matching meeting/ Panel. Planning/ arrangements for Farewell contact, updates to contact/ support plan, direct work with child agreed Matching decision made at Matching Panel / ADM WEP carer becomes prospective adopter ASW to discuss prospective adopters contribution to child's LJW in consultation with CSW ASW to update Monitoring tool for Approval and Support in consultation with FSW and CSW</p>	<p>WEP carer tenders resignation to LA FSP as foster carer</p>	<p>CSW statutory visiting in line with placement status. See guidance. Direct work with child Direct work with the child including involvement of prospective adopter in LJW</p>

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

The local authority with responsibility for the child has a duty to the child and to the WEP carers to ensure there is full disclosure of relevant background information relating to the child.

Reg 10(1)(a)(i) Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 states that the placement plan must set out how the placement will contribute to meeting the child's needs. In order to meet this duty, the foster carers must have all relevant information. This duty is owed to all foster carers and so is owed to WEP carers.

In addition, as there is a possibility of this placement becoming an adoptive placement there is the duty to provide relevant information relating to the child's future development, health and well-being. This could include access to court documents with leave of the court. This will inevitably involve some information relating to birth parents and, sometimes, wider family members. S135 Data Protection Act 1998 provides an exemption from the requirement for confidentiality in respect of personal information if the disclosure is:

'required by or under any enactment, by order of a Court, or by rule of law, or if it is necessary for the purpose of, or in connection with, any legal proceedings, including prospective legal proceedings'

Local authorities may, therefore, provide information, having determined that the information is necessary and relevant for the purposes of providing the WEP carers with short term information relating to the foster placement and more long-term information relating to the possible adoptive placement.

- Parents should be told of the information that is to be shared with the WEP carers and the reasons why the WEP carers need the information. Consent from parents is not required.
- WEP carers should be clearly advised that the information shared is confidential. The [WEP Foster Care Agreement](#) should reflect their undertaking not to share any birth family information with wider family or friends.

PLO pre proceedings/ Relinquished Children

- If the decision has been made that WEP is being considered and adoption might be part of the childcare plan, the child's social worker should complete the [WEP Child Referral form](#) at the earliest opportunity. Early communication with the adoption team for advice and support is strongly advised.
- The completed form should be sent to a senior point of contact (usually Family Finding team or as agreed) in the regional Adoption collaborative.

Information storing and recording

There needs to be a clear agreement about where information is recorded and stored on a system that can be accessible to the relevant practitioners whilst also ensuring that the security and confidentiality of WEP carers are protected. Practitioners with primary responsibility for updating records should be identified. It is suggested that records are held on the adoption system with access to relevant practitioners as appropriate.

- A WEP Referral Planning meeting will be held with ASW, CSW & FSW; this will be chaired by a senior member of staff from the Adoption Family Finding Team.

There is likely to be some gaps in known information at this point regarding development and legal uncertainty for the child. This meeting is an opportunity to explore any grey areas as robustly as possible. This will ensure that the information sharing with prospective WEP carers about the child and the principles of WEP are robust and sufficient to enable them to make an informed decision.

The Coram study (Ponomarenko et al 2018) highlighted the importance of prospective carers having the opportunity to discuss information with specialists such as Medical Advisors before making a commitment to accept a placement. Therefore, the ASW should explore whether this is at all possible at this stage should the process progress to Matching.

- The regional Family Finding social worker (adoption) will anonymise the Child Referral form to create a profile that can be shared with potential WEP carers.
- There should be effective communication between childcare, adoption and fostering teams to ensure that all parties are aware of any decisions to progress to WEP Matching stage. See **WEP Matching** (Section 4, p16) for further information about what needs to happen at that stage.
- The Family Finding social worker will take responsibility for sharing a copy of the WEP Child Referral form with an agreed point of contact in the nominated Fostering Service Provider (FSP) within the region. The nominated FSP will be the fostering service that has been nominated to undertake approval and support of WEP carers for that particular adoption region.
- If appropriate, the allocated fostering social worker will identify an experienced foster carer as buddy for the prospective WEP carer.

- The [WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers](#) (see Section 7: Preparation, Assessment and Approval of WEP carers section) to be updated by adoption social worker in consultation/ agreement with child's social worker and fostering social worker as work progresses on each case.

During Proceedings

In circumstances where a child hasn't already been referred for a WEP placement and either a residential assessment placement with parents or a Regulation 26 kinship placement is unlikely to be successful:

- A WEP Child Referral form should be completed by the child's social worker at the earliest opportunity in anticipation that a WEP placement may be required and in order to prevent the need for a short-term foster placement. Early communication with the adoption team for advice and support is strongly advised.
- The completed form to be submitted to regional adoption collaborative and actions taken as above.

Following proceedings

When a child is subject to a Care Order and placed either with parents or in a kinship placement and the contingency plan is adoption, WEP should be considered.

- A WEP Child Referral form should be completed by the child's social worker at the earliest opportunity when the child's current placement is at risk of disrupting. Early communication with the adoption team for advice and support is strongly advised.
- The completed form to be submitted to regional adoption collaborative and actions taken as above.

Additional Support for children, especially very young children, who have additional/specific needs.

Some children may have specific needs that require additional support for both them and the WEP carers looking after them. For example, a premature baby; a baby who has been identified as suffering from alcohol/ drug withdrawal; or a baby who has (as yet) unidentified medical needs. These children are likely to require frequent monitoring and health appointments as well as specialist understanding of how they can be cared for.

Caring for these children can be extremely challenging and daunting for WEP carers especially if they have limited experience with young babies. Therefore, it is advised that they are buddied with experienced foster carers who will be able to provide day to day informal support alongside support from the professionals involved.

Should the child being referred have additional/specific needs, this should be clearly highlighted in the Child Referral in order for the fostering service to identify a buddy.

The WEP carers and the foster carer should have an opportunity to meet, or at least have some contact, prior to the child's placement so they can start to develop a relationship and trust.

Talking to Children

Regardless of the plan for the child, it is important for them to know, dependant on age and level of understanding, about what is happening. Even very young pre-verbal babies and children are sensitive to change and loss and need empathic adults around them to support them with this – through their actions, talking to them/ with them and (for older children) explaining what is happening in an age-appropriate way. They need to be given time to build trust with their new carers and be able to see that the adults around them are acting in a way that holds them at the centre of their thinking.

Talking about Welsh Early Permanence with children in a way that helps them understand the role it plays in their journey needs to happen as early as possible and be incorporated into their Life Journey work materials.

Please refer to [NAS Life Journey work Good Practice Guide](#) and [NAS Transitions and Early Support Good Practice Guide](#) for further information and resources.

Existing children in the household

It is also essential to support any existing children in the WEP carers household and help them understand what is happening and the WEP carer role in age appropriate ways. This might include supporting older adopted siblings of the child being placed on a WEP basis.

Experience from early permanence practice in England shows that children take the lead from adults and so WEP carers need good support from practitioners around them to enable them to be confident in talking to their children in a way that doesn't cause undue anxiety or distress.

The impact on any existing children will always be carefully considered in decision making regarding WEP placements.

WEP Child Referral Form

You can download a useable Word version of this form, at: www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

The image shows a thumbnail of the 'Welsh Early Permanence: Child Referral Form'. The form is titled 'WEP Child Referral Form' and includes sections for 'Child's details' and 'Child's proposed Care Plan'. It contains various fields for personal information, medical history, and care arrangements. A download icon is visible below the thumbnail.

Linking and matching children with prospective adopters, or with prospective adopters who are approved as foster carers, is one of the most significant professional/ service responsibilities for those working in the sector. It will fundamentally determine the course of the child's life as well as those of the foster carer/adopters.

(Simmonds. 2019)

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Due to the very nature of WEP, the timing and pace at which some WEP placements could be made can often be at a time when decision making needs to happen swiftly, when there might be limited information available about the child and their parents, and when it might be difficult to predict with any accuracy the child's future needs. There might be a limited pool of WEP carers available, especially as the practice initially develops in Wales, as well as a need to develop practitioner confidence and experience.

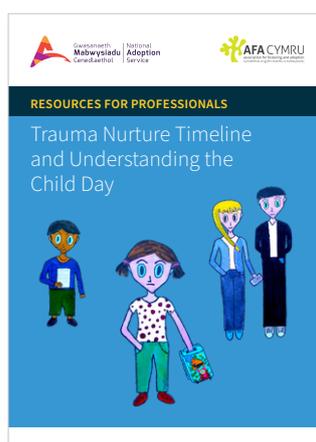
However, WEP does not reduce the significance that good matching plays, matching that is specific to the individual needs and circumstances of every child and which relies on effective care planning, robust information gathering and analysis, and active collaboration across child care disciplines from an early stage.

We always need to balance the significant importance of matching with avoiding delay for the child which we know can have a serious detrimental impact on their development. For all children it is advised that sufficient time be set aside for the child's social worker, relevant adoption and fostering social workers to consider/start to compile the child's Trauma Nurture Timeline and to consider, alongside the prospective WEP carers, how the child's experiences might have impacted them. What do we know about their history, identity, development, needs and circumstances from pre-birth to present and how can this help us predict their future needs and what we need to provide to help them recover and thrive? Does the prospective WEP carer have realistic expectations of the child, themselves and the future placement? This will be essential in considering the match with the prospective WEP carer and in identifying what support will be needed.

Please refer to [Trauma Nurture timeline/ Understanding the Child](#) resources on the NAS website.

For ease of reference:

- The adoption social worker will be referred to as ASW; for the purpose of WEP child referral, matching and placement, this will be the Family Finding adoption social worker in the region.
- The allocated fostering social worker will be referred to as FSW.
- The child's social worker will be referred to as CSW.



Once a Child Referral has been completed

- Once the completed WEP Child Referral form has been received by the Adoption Team and a WEP Referral Planning meeting has been held, the allocated Family Finding social worker (ASW) will create an anonymised profile, deleting identifying information from the WEP Child Referral form.
- After considering potential WEP carers available, the ASW (in consultation with the FSW) will share the completed PAR and WEP Addendum report of suitable candidates with the CSW. Effective collaboration and decisions to proceed should be prioritised at this stage.
- If all parties are in agreement to proceed to next stage, the ASW will share the anonymised WEP Child Referral form with the prospective WEP carers.
- If appropriate, ASW will arrange a meeting between the CSW and prospective WEP carers to share further information about the child and their experiences, and the expectations of the placement. This will include the allocated fostering social worker (FSW).
- Often there is limited information about children for whom WEP is being considered, and social workers and prospective WEP carers need to make a quick decision. However limited, all information is important and the social workers role in both these meetings is to help the prospective WEP carer think about this information and what it might be telling them, and what more information they might need to know before coming to a decision to move forward.
- As stated in the WEP Child Referral section, the local authority with responsibility for the child has a duty to the child and to the WEP carers to ensure there is full disclosure of relevant background information relating to the child.
- Parents should be told of the information that is to be shared with the WEP carers and the reasons why the WEP carers need the information. Consent from parents is not required.
- WEP carers need to understand and appreciate that unknowns and uncertainties about the child will remain, but they also need to be assured that information gathering and sharing of that information in a trauma informed way will be a continuing process.
- WEP carers should be clearly advised that the information shared is confidential. The WEP Foster Care Agreement (see **WEP Placement** section 5, p19) should reflect their undertaking not to share any birth family information with wider family or friends.
- As soon as practically possible, it is advised that the ASW starts to compile a [Trauma Nurture Timeline for the child](#).
- If it is possible to convene an Understanding the Child Day, this should be done. Due to limited timescales, it might not be possible to do this prior to placement with the WEP carer; however, it will still be beneficial to do this at a later stage and would be valuable whether or not a Placement Order is granted. The information and understanding that is gained from this event can be used to identify and plan support for the WEP carer, and subsequently the parent or prospective adopter depending on the court outcome.

Should all parties wish to proceed:

- ASW, in consultation with the CSW and FSW, will complete the [WEP Matching framework](#) document.

This should be done as soon as practically possible following the decision to proceed; and can be added to/ amended in the WEP Matching meeting.

The WEP Matching framework takes account of the fact that it will facilitate a short-term foster placement. However, it also acknowledges that the placement may become an adoptive placement. Therefore, the matching framework should afford as much time as possible for all the practitioners involved and the proposed WEP carers to make the WEP placement matching decision.

Practitioners must focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks from their respective positions and responsibilities in exploring and developing the Matching framework.

- ASW to explore the possibility of the prospective WEP carers meeting the Medical Advisor if at all possible. If this is not possible at this stage, ASW to ensure that prospective WEP carers have the opportunity to discuss any medical information with medical professionals involved with the child eg the community paediatrician who will be doing the child's IHA.
- A WEP Matching meeting / discussion will be held with ASW, FSW & CSW; this will be chaired by senior member of staff from Adoption Family Finding team.

Due to the short timeframe likely to be available, this should be held as soon as practically possible and prior to placement.

- Following the Matching meeting, ASW to share the WEP Matching framework document and any other relevant information with the prospective WEP carer/s before Head of Service/ DM agreement to match.
- The WEP Matching framework will be updated regularly and as information becomes available; opportunities to do so as set within [Flowchart 2](#)
- The FSW will identify an experienced foster carer to buddy the WEP carers if appropriate.
- The [WEP Monitoring tool](#) for Approvals and Support of WEP carers (See **Preparation, Assessment and Approval of WEP carers**) to be updated by ASW in consultation/ agreement with CSW and FSW as work progresses on each case.

Head of Service/ Decision Maker agrees to WEP Matching

- The Head of Service/DM for the child's LA is responsible for the agreement of the match between the identified child and prospective WEP carers.

Therefore, they will need to have access to the completed WEP Child Referral form and the WEP Matching Framework, as well as the fostering and adoption panel minutes for expediency. The PAR with Addendum Report should also be made available on request.

- Due to the nature of WEP placements and for avoidance of any delay or unnecessary short term placements, the recorded decision of the Head of Service/ DM need to be made as quickly as possible on receipt of information.

WEP Matching Certificate

- The [WEP Matching Certificate](#) will need to be completed and signed off by regional Adoption Family Finding Team Manager or equivalent and Head of Service/ DM.
- Please refer to the **Legal framework** (Section1, p6) for further information about access to statutory adoption pay and leave. A separate [WEP Carers and Finances](#) document has also been produced for applicants .

Meeting between WEP carers and parents

- Consideration needs to be given at this stage to a meeting between the parents and WEP carers and should be considered as normative practice in all cases unless there are specific reasons why it cannot occur. This is likely to be anxiety provoking for all parties and therefore careful thought should be given to what support might be needed and the planning of the event. It should be acknowledged that all parties might need to be offered more than one opportunity to meet at a time they are comfortable in doing so.

In many cases, WEP carers and parents could both be attending statutory reviews and meeting at contact sessions. Therefore, enabling a meeting between parties as early as possible can be helpful.

In the Coram study (Ponomarenko et al. 2018) (adoptive) parents spoke about the advantages associated with meeting and getting to know their child's birth family at the start of the process, including being able to talk about birth parents in a meaningful way and to answer their child's questions. The study also highlighted that despite clear advantages, relationships with birth parents were often very complex with inconsistencies in ongoing contact. Therefore, good post adoption support is always necessary to enable and ensure continuity of relationships that are meaningful.

- Please refer to [NAS Contact and Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guides](#).



WEP Matching Framework and Certificate

You can download a useable Word version of these two forms, at: www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



WEP Matching Framework

Child's details

Child's name	
Child's date of birth	
Child's gender	
Child's ethnicity	
Child's religion	
Child's language	
Child's special needs	
Child's health	
Child's education	
Child's social history	
Child's family history	
Child's other details	

WEP Matching Certificate

Agency Details

Agency name	
Agency address	
Agency telephone	
Agency email	
Agency website	
Agency registration number	
Agency registration date	
Agency registration expiry date	
Agency registration authority	
Agency registration number	
Agency registration date	
Agency registration expiry date	
Agency registration authority	

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Throughout the WEP framework, there is a strong emphasis on good communication and collaboration between the social workers involved and this is essential to ensure that the WEP placement is properly and robustly supported and monitored.

Specific WEP documents have been developed that will be used instead of (not in addition to) usual Child Looked After documents to ensure the right information is collated for a WEP referral, matching and placement, and to ensure a consistent approach across Wales.

Information storing and recording

There needs to be a clear agreement about where information is recorded and stored on a system that can be accessible to the relevant practitioners whilst also ensuring that the security and confidentiality of WEP carers are protected. Practitioners with primary responsibility for updating records should be identified. It is suggested that records are held within the Adoption Service with access to relevant practitioners as appropriate.

Support

- ASW will provide the majority of emotional support to WEP carers in face to face, telephone and digital contact. Effective communication with FSW and CSW should be prioritised.
- FSW will support the WEP carer in understanding and undertaking their fostering role and will complete the WEP Foster Care Agreement with the WEP carers (in consultation with the ASW) on placement of the child

1. WEP Foster Care Agreement

- CSW will complete an individual WEP Placement Plan for each child on placement. This plan will include essential information required by the WEP carers, agreements for the child to be accommodated with WEP carers, and Parental Consent to Medical treatment. Some of the information in the WEP Placement Plan will be contained within the WEP Matching framework document and this can be used as a reference tool.

2. WEP Placement Plan

- CSW in conjunction with the FSW & ASW will complete a Delegated Authority Agreement with the WEP carers on placement.

3. WEP Delegated Authority Agreement

- The WEP Matching framework will be updated by the ASW as work progresses on the case.
- A copy of 1, 2 & 3 above will be given to WEP Carers and a copy held on their file. Confirmation is needed about where this file will be held, as well as the practitioner with primary responsibility for updating. It is suggested that this is held within the Adoption Service with clear agreement between adoption and fostering regarding information sharing and updating.
- WEP carers should be clearly advised that the information shared with them about the child and their parent/s is confidential. The Foster Care Agreement should reflect their undertaking not to share any family information with wider family or friends.
- The WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers to be updated by ASW in consultation/agreement with CSW and FSW as work progresses on each case.



WEP FINANCES

Fostering Allowance

- The nominated Fostering Service Provider must agree the date from which the WEP carer's fostering allowance will start. This could start prior to the date of placement, for example, when a child is still in hospital and WEP carers are regularly visiting or when a residential or foster placement is in the process of disrupting and WEP carers are involved in "getting to know" visiting. Please refer to [WEP Carers and Finances](#) document.
- As with any foster carer, WEP carers should be eligible for setting up costs and travel expenses. Should the child return to parents or wider family, any equipment purchased would move with the child.

Adoption Leave and Pay

- The WEP Matching Certificate will trigger this. Please refer to [WEP Carers and Finances](#) document.

Interagency fees

- An All-Wales protocol will need to be agreed for payment of interagency fees if relevant. It is suggested that one-third of the agreed Interagency fee be paid on placement of the child with WEP carers; the remaining two-thirds will be payable on the date of Adoption Matching Decision.

CHILD SOCIAL WORKER VISITING AND REVIEWS

There are specific legal requirements for the visiting and reviewing regime for a WEP placement into an adoptive placement depending on the stage and status of the placement. It is critical that the needs of each placement are carefully considered and good practice in terms of visiting frequency for both CSW and ASW is followed.

As an overview, these are as follows:

1. **From beginning of placement to either the end of placement or the making of the placement order / authority to place:** the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 apply:
 - **Reviews:** as a minimum within 20 days of placement, no more than three months and thereafter no more than six monthly intervals (reg 39)
 - **Visits:** within one week of the placement and thereafter at intervals of not more than six weeks (reg 31).

However, good practice in terms of minimum frequency for both ASW and CSW visiting in the early weeks of a WEP placement would be for this to mirror the post adoption placement weekly visits. This is particularly relevant for a child with additional needs and where minimal information might have been available pre-placement.

2. **From the making of the placement order** or authority to place with a relinquished child, (this is still a WEP foster placement as the child is not yet 'placed' for adoption) the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005 now apply to reviews but the CPPCR(W) R continue to apply for visiting:
 - **Reviews:** not more than three months after the date of the authority to place, not more than three months and thereafter not more than six monthly intervals (reg 37(3) AA(W)R))
 - **Visits:** These carry on under the CPPCR(W)R as above – not more than six weekly (reg 31)
3. **From the making of the adoption placement** (i.e. from date of ADM matching decision), the CPPCR(W)R cease to apply and the AA(W)R apply to both reviews and visiting:
 - **Reviews:** not more than four weeks after the date of adoption placement, no more than three months, thereafter no more than six months (reg 37(4))
 - **Visits:** within one week of adoption placement, at least every week until the first review and thereafter at such frequency as the agency decide at each review (reg 37(6))

Additional Support for children with high level/ specialist needs

Where it has been identified that a child has high level or specialist needs, FSW will confirm arrangements for buddying with an experienced foster carer particularly in the early stages of the WEP placement. This arrangement should be reviewed and additional support provided as necessary.

Meeting between WEP carers and parents

If this has not already happened, consideration needs to be given at this stage to a meeting between the parents and WEP carers and should be considered as normative practice in all cases unless there are specific reasons why it cannot occur. This is likely to be anxiety provoking for all parties and therefore careful thought should be given to what support might be needed and the planning of the event. It should be acknowledged that both parties might need to be offered more than one opportunity to meet at a time they are comfortable in doing so.

In many cases, WEP carers and parents could both be attending statutory reviews and meeting at contact sessions. Therefore, enabling a meeting between parties as early as possible can be helpful.

- Please refer to [NAS Contact and Working with Birth Parents Good Practice Guides](#).

CONTACT

Managing contact between the child and their family can be practically and emotionally complex. Meeting parents initially can be daunting and stressful but often becomes constructive and helpful as relationships develop. Should the child remain with the WEP carer and become adopted, this early development of a relationship with parents can be hugely beneficial in helping adopters talk to their child about the identity, and with ongoing contact arrangements.

“A significant proportion of parents indicated that if they could not have their child returned to them, they were pleased that they had got to know their adopters through contact, and had confidence in them” (Coram Early Permanence programme)

- The frequency and length of contact sessions will be decided by the judge; contact research has evidenced that the quality of the contact is more important than the frequency and this should be borne in mind when planning and presenting information in court. Details need to be clearly documented in the Matching framework document.
- There needs to be good information sharing, clear expectations, planning and support for all parties. ASW will be responsible for supporting WEP carers; CSW will provide support to parents and oversee Contact plan.
- If this has not already been done, a referral to Reflect for parents should be prioritised
- ASW and FSW need to support WEP carers in having a good understanding of the purpose of contact i.e. to maintain bond with parents until a final decision is made by the court. WEP carers also need support to understand their role in contact – bringing the child to and from the session; being involved in handover if possible/safe; providing updates to parents; remaining available by phone or in person during the session.

WEP carers will also need support to understand the differences in the type and frequency of contact at the different stages ie during proceedings, should a Placement Order be granted, and subsequently an Adoption Order.

Although there is evidence of continued complexity with ongoing contact and the need for support to ensure and enable this to be meaningful as possible for all parties, it is generally accepted that opportunities for WEP carers and parents to meet and develop a relationship sets a good foundation for ongoing future contact. (Ponomarenko et al. 2018; Neil, Beek and Ward. 2014)

- Contact risk analysis questions are contained within the WEP Matching framework document and should be viewed alongside the usual LA Contact risk assessment that is completed by the CSW. It is important to clearly identify what might be perceived risks compared to actual risks, and not to overestimate these. It is always important to consider whether any support can be provided to mitigate or minimise these risks to an acceptable level.

- ASW and FSW also need to support WEP carers’ understanding from a trauma informed perspective why some parents do not always engage, or sometimes not from the start and the reasons for this.
- WEP carers need to understand that some parents might attend together or separately depending on status of relationship, and that contact with wider family members might be added later and be part of the decision making regarding the care plan for the child.
- Note: the training that WEP carers receive helps them understand what contact might be like for them, the parents and the child and suggests tips about what can help and how to manage contact.

WEP Delegated Authority Agreement, Foster Care Agreement and Placement Plan

You can download a useable Word version of these forms, at: www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

This document is a form titled 'Welsh Early Permanence: Delegated Authority Agreement'. It contains introductory text and a list of bullet points regarding the agreement's purpose and legal implications. A download icon is visible at the bottom right.

This document is a form titled 'Welsh Early Permanence: Foster Care Agreement'. It includes sections for 'For the WEP carer' and contains several bullet points detailing the requirements and responsibilities of the foster carer. A download icon is visible at the bottom right.

This document is a form titled 'Welsh Early Permanence: Placement Plan'. It contains a table for 'Child's details' with fields for Name, DOB, Gender, and other information. It also includes a section for 'Foster carer's details' with fields for Name, Address, and Contact Information. A download icon is visible at the bottom right.

Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Approval of Prospective Adopters

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Recruitment and Preparation

Information to introduce Welsh Early Permanence

- Information should be included on the NAS website as well as regional/VAA websites to introduce Welsh Early Permanence. It should be included in any generic materials produced (eg Information packs). Social workers should always ensure that applicants have had access to this information at Initial Enquiry / Initial visit stage.
- A small number of slides have been produced to include in Information event materials to introduce Welsh Early Permanence. These should also be included in Preparation to Adopt training materials; guidance would be to introduce the Welsh Early Permanence slides when talking about the child and applicants' journey.

Additional, more detailed information has been developed for applicants who wish to find out more about Welsh Early Permanence and consider whether it might be right for them. This includes:

- [Welsh Early Permanence Information pack for applicants](#)

This should be given to applicants as soon as possible if they request further information.

- Half-day webinar “**Is Welsh Early Permanence right for you?**” It is envisaged that this half day webinar will be delivered initially by AFA Cymru on a Wales wide basis 6 times over a twelve-month period. All agencies / VAAs are able to refer interested parties to this.

This will be a live webinar that will be delivered by AFA on a Wales-wide basis, 6 times over a 12-month period from September 2022. All agencies / VAAs are able to refer interested parties to these webinars.

We would advise that access to this webinar is available in the latter stages of Stage 1 (after the Preparation training) or in the earlier stages of Stage 2. This will ensure there is sufficient time to explore the additional elements required in assessment.

- A copy of the [WEP Carers and Finances](#) document should be provided to prospective applicants and any specific local arrangements discussed.

Assessment

- A specific additional guide has been developed that sets out the elements that need to be considered and included at various stages of the PAR relating to the assessment of applicants wishing to be approved as WEP carers.

A Guide for Adoption Social Workers: Prospective Adopter's Report (see p28).

The CoramBAAF PAR (Wales) template 2020, widely used by agencies across Wales, currently contains minimal reference to this practice. Part 1 “Becoming adopters – the assessment of adoptive parenting capacity” which focuses on assessing and analysing motivation and capacity specifically asks the question:

Has there been any discussion about whether they would be able to consider a child being placed through a concurrency arrangement? (Section 14)

The information contained within the PAR will therefore need to be sufficiently comprehensive, both in terms of being clear about what is meant by WEP as well as the applicants' capacity to offer a WEP placement to a child or children. As WEP becomes more well-known and established in Wales, with increased knowledge and experience through written information, webinars and training across the professional sector and judiciary, the former aspect (explanation of what WEP is) will exponentially diminish whilst the latter aspect will remain.

- Information has been developed for referees and should be included with the reference request.

[WEP Information for Referees](#)

Is Welsh Early Permanence right for you?

Name of facilitator
Job title

AFA CYMRU
Welsh Early Permanence Association

Approval

- Panel members and the ADM need to be fully conversant with what WEP is, the legal framework, information sharing at early stages with prospective applicants as well as the additional elements that have been included and considered in the preparation and assessment of prospective WEP carers.

Therefore, they should be provided with:

1. Introduction to WEP and [WEP flowchart 1](#) which provides an overview of the process
 2. Legal framework of WEP (see p6)
 3. [WEP Information pack for prospective applicants](#)
 4. Guidance for Adoption Social Workers: Prospective Adopter's Report (see p28)
 5. [WEP Information for referees](#)
 6. Guide for social workers: What needs to be included in the [Addendum Report](#) to Fostering Panel
 7. [WEP Checklist](#) – comparison of Adoption and Fostering regulations, and Fostering Competencies
- A recorded e-module has been developed specifically for Panel members and ADM which they should have access to.

INFORMATION FOR WEBSITES AND MATERIALS

We know how important it is for children who have been removed from their family to have stability as soon as possible, to experience safety and predictability with sensitive adults who help them recover. Often these children have to move multiple times whilst decisions are being made in the court about their future and this is hugely traumatic for them and adds to the distress and loss they have already experienced.

Welsh Early Permanence helps a child or children who have been removed from their family to achieve this stability as soon as possible and reduces the number of moves the child experiences. It means that children are placed with Welsh Early Permanence carers, who are dually approved as both adopters and foster carers from as early a point as possible and before the plan for adoption has been confirmed by the court. If the court agrees a plan for adoption for the child, there will be a seamless transition without the child having to move from carers with whom they have formed a bond.

In a small number of cases, the court will make the decision that it is right for the child to return to parents or wider family members. This means that people who want to consider Welsh Early Permanence will have to manage some uncertainty whilst the courts make their decision, and we know that this won't be right for everyone.

However, if you feel that you could manage some uncertainty so that these children don't have to, and want to know more about Welsh Early Permanence, there's lots more information available and people who would be happy to speak to you about it.

Do you want to know more? If so, please speak to your agency or social worker.

INFORMATION FOR INFORMATION EVENTS AND PREPARATION TO ADOPT TRAINING

What is Welsh Early Permanence?



- Children who have been removed from their family need stability, and a safe and permanent home as soon as possible.
- Permanence might be back with their family or with wider family members
- Permanence might be with adopters
- Welsh Early Permanence involves placing a child with people who are dually approved as foster carers and adopters as soon as possible.
- If the court decides the child should be adopted, they do not have to move. This significantly reduces stress and trauma for the child.




What's the difference to traditional adoption?

<p>Traditional adoption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children who are adopted live with foster carers whilst the court decides about their future • If the court decides that the child should be adopted, the child moves from the foster carer to adoptive parents after they have been formally matched • A child might have a number of moves before coming into foster care and might also have a number of moves to different foster carers 	<p>Welsh Early Permanence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welsh Early Permanence carers are first and foremost prospective adopters but also approved as foster carers • The child is placed with WEP carers as early as possible and before the court has made a decision about the child's future • If the court decides that the child should move back to family, there will be a plan for reunification • If the court decides that adoption is right for the child, they won't have to move and will go on to be formally matched by adoption panel
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What does this mean for the child?

- Children are protected from the disruption and trauma of multiple moves if they are unable to live with their family
- They have the opportunity to receive sensitive and attuned care and develop secure attachments at an important stage in their lives
- The adults involved manage the risks and uncertainty so the children don't have to
- The adults are able to develop relationships with, and empathy for each other which has enormous benefit to the child
- Children experience continuity of relationships which has far reaching positive consequences





What does this mean for me?

- You will be working with the Local Authority as part of a team and will be looking after a child on behalf of their family until the court decides what is best for them.
- There is a level of uncertainty that you will have to understand and be able to manage so you need to be resilient
- We ask you to have empathy for the child's family and be able to accept that reunification with parents or wider family members might be decided as the right option for the child
- You will need to have a good understanding of the fostering role involved and how this is different to adoption
- This will include being able to support contact with the child's family and develop a relationship with them





 You can download these powerpoint slides from adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The information outlined on the following pages (p24-27) is available as a separate information leaflet that can be downloaded from www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

Introduction

You have applied to become an adoptive parent and are about to start Stage 2 of the assessment process. You will have already heard, during an information event, or read in some of the material provided, reference to 'Welsh Early Permanence'. This leaflet explains what 'WEP' is and invites you to consider whether you may want to know more about it.

What is WEP?

With most children in Wales, when they are first removed from their birth family either just before or at the start of care proceedings, they are either placed with family members or in a short-term foster placement with approved foster carers. If the local authority plan, ratified by the court, is for the child to either be reunified with birth parents or placed with family members, then the child moves from their foster placement at the end of proceedings. If the care plan for adoption is accepted by the court, then the foster carer sees the child through their transition to their adoptive placement.

With WEP, the foster carers who take the child at the start of proceedings are also approved prospective adoptive parents. They act as any foster carers, caring for the child, facilitating contact with birth family and taking part in the child's looked after reviews. If the care plan is for reunification or placement with family, then they help the child with the transition to their birth family. If the care plan is for adoption, then the child stays with the foster carers who then become their adoptive parents.

What does it mean for the child?

The huge benefit for the child is, if the care plan becomes adoption, they do not have the trauma of the transition from foster placement to adoptive placement, leaving the people with whom they have developed attachments, as they are already there.

With some children the risk of return to birth family is small; with others there is a greater chance of reunification or placement with wider family. Although the number of children who return to birth family or are placed with family members is small, there can never be a guarantee that the child will not return and WEP carers have to be clear that that they are prepared to take the risk.

What does it mean for us?

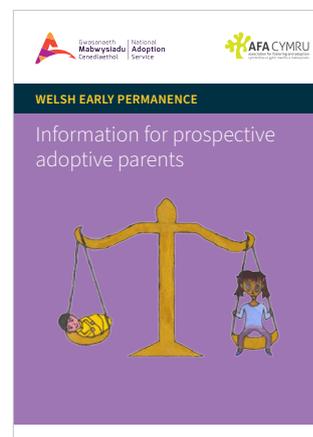
So why would any prospective adopters want to take that risk? Many prospective adopters can see the benefit for the child and are prepared, with support, to take the risk on behalf of the child. With babies who are removed from birth parents shortly after birth the WEP carers have the satisfaction of caring for a newborn (although you will know from your preparation training that there is risk in taking very small babies where their developmental trajectory cannot be known); with older children they have the satisfaction of providing a very high standard of care for the child at an earlier stage of their care experience, whatever the final care plan.

The experience of early permanence placements in some areas of England, where it is common practice to place children with foster carers who are also approved adoptive parents, is that adopters/carers embrace the role as foster carers. The majority of children remain in that placement and the child becomes theirs legally once the care plan for adoption is ratified by the court. The adopters find getting to meet birth parents, at handovers for contact and at review meetings, really helps in talking to the child about birth family in later years. Most importantly, they have prevented the need for a traumatic and disruptive transition from foster to adoptive placement.

The way forward

Becoming a WEP carer is not for everyone. However, if you are interested in learning more about this as an option you can sign up with your agency to a half day remote training course 'Is Welsh Early Permanence right for you?' which will look in more detail at the role of the WEP foster carer. At the end of that course you may decide that WEP is not for you but you will at least have explored the option. Following that half day, if you are still interested, then you can take part in a one day course that prepares you for being a foster carer. All of this will be explained in detail at the half day exploratory course.

If you are interested, talk to your assessing social worker who can discuss this more fully with you and book a place on the half day course if you decide you want to know more.



How is Welsh Early Permanence different to traditional adoption?

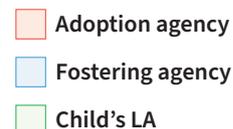
Traditional Adoption	Welsh Early Permanence
<p>You will only hear about, and be matched with, children for whom the court has already made a decision for a plan of adoption. The court will have granted a “Placement Order” giving the Local Authority the power to place the child with approved prospective adoptive parents.</p> <p>Therefore, you have more certainty that the child placed with you will stay with you.</p>	<p>If a child is not able to remain with parents, they move in with WEP carers at a very early point whilst the court makes a decision about their future.</p> <p>The court might decide for the child to return to parents or to a wider family member and if so, a plan for reunification is agreed which the WEP carers supports.</p> <p>If the court decides on a plan for adoption, the child remains with their WEP carers and the WEP carers make a seamless transition to prospective adopters (following Matching Panel and ADM). The child is able to remain with their Secure Base caregivers with whom they have started to formed attachments.</p>
<p>The child holds the uncertainty and has to contend with the possibility of multiple moves in foster care whilst decisions are being made. As they start to settle in foster care, they also have to deal with the uncertainty of having to move again, when this will happen, and what their new family will be like.</p>	<p>The WEP carers, not the child, hold the uncertainty. Although you are first and foremost, prospective adopters, the child will be placed with you as foster carers. You will need to understand and accept that you may never be more than a foster carer for this child as they may return to their parents or wider family.</p>
<p>As the child will have spent time with foster carers and possibly wider family, you will have quite a lot of information about the child, their likes and dislikes, routines, triggers and soothers, and what they need to help them continue to recover and grow.</p> <p>There will be opportunities before you are matched to meet with and hear from a number of people who have been involved with the child and who will help you understand the impact of the child’s early experiences.</p>	<p>When the child comes straight from home or from hospital after birth, there might be limited information about them, their health and development, and their early experiences. This means that you will have to be able to manage and accept this uncertainty.</p> <p>You will always be provided with as much information as the social workers and other professionals have, and will be supported to understand what this means for your child, and for you.</p>
<p>Decisions about keeping in touch with birth family are likely to have been made so you can think about whether these are arrangements you can commit to. The long term benefits of maintaining a connection with birth family is widely recognised and the child’s social worker and the adoption social worker will also be thinking about the child’s predicted needs and how these will change as they gets older.</p> <p>Meetings between birth parents (and other birth family members) are seen as a normative part of the adoption process in Wales unless there are clear reasons why this cannot happen.</p>	<p>Contact with parents and possibly other family members will be part of the court decision making process and is likely to be frequent. If it is safe and possible, you will be involved in contact between the child and their family, maybe at the start and end of each session or via a handover book. You will meet with parents unless there are clear reasons why this shouldn’t happen and be encouraged to develop a relationship with them as we know this sets a positive foundation for future contact that is in the best interests of the child</p>

FAQS

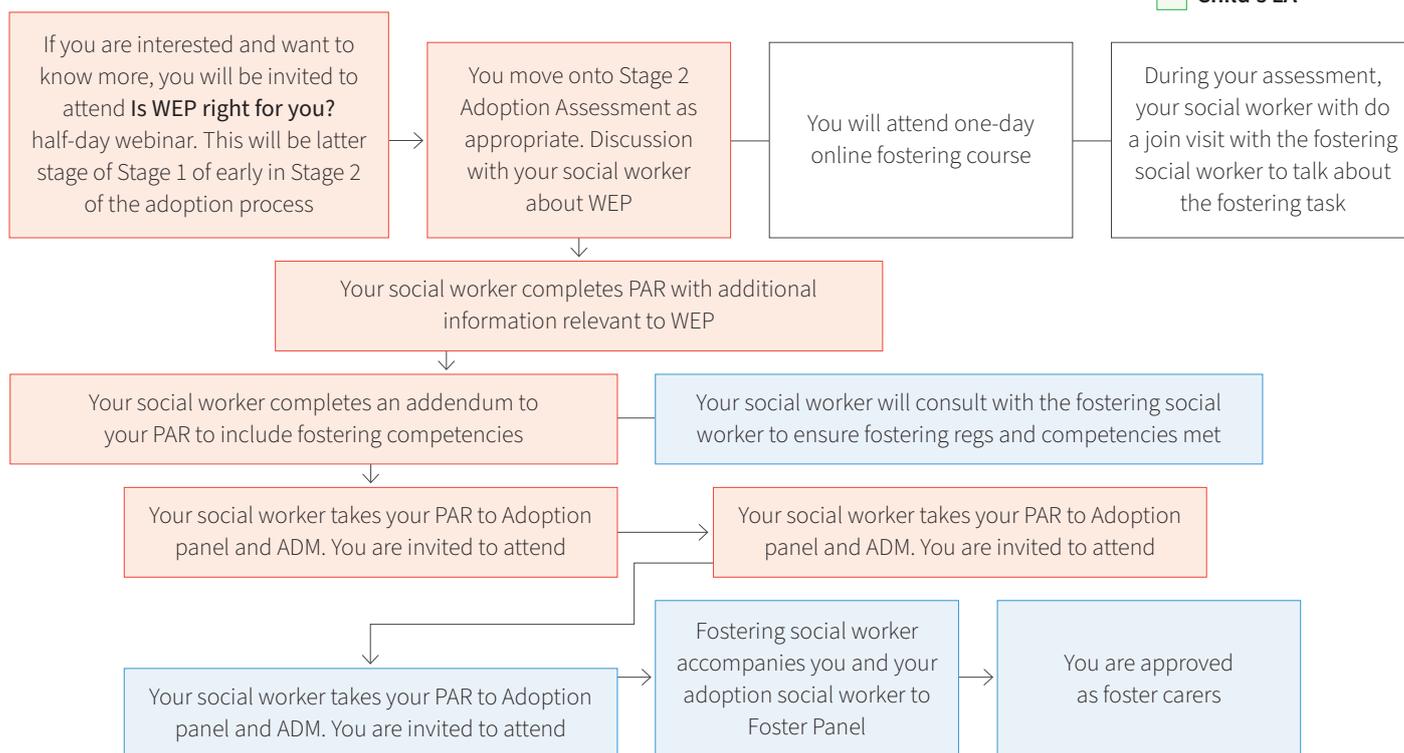
How will I be prepared to be a WEP carer?

Firstly, you will attend a half day, online (live webinar) course entitled ‘Is Welsh Early Permanence Right for me?’ The course will provide more detail on what WEP is about and will help you make the decision to go forward or not. If you decide to go on, then there is a day long, online course, that prepares you for being a foster carer. You will also be directed to some additional reading / online material so that you are very well prepared. During Stage 2 of your assessment, your social worker will make at least one visit with a member of the fostering team who will talk with you about being a foster carer – this is part of your fostering assessment, but assessment and preparation go hand in hand.

FLOWCHART 3: APPLICANTS PREPARATION AND APPROVAL



You will have read and heard about WEP from your agency and maybe your social worker



When will I meet the child's parents and will this be safe?

As a WEP foster carer you will be expected to meet the child's parents and develop a relationship with them as you hand the child over for and collect them from contact sessions. A great many carers value getting to know parents over this time, and if they do go on to adopt the child, feel that they have a lot more valuable and personal information to share with the child.

Part of the referral process for considering a child for a WEP placement is a risk assessment in relation to the parents – would they pose a risk to you as carers? If parents are liable to create a risk then a WEP placement might not be appropriate; any potential risks would be discussed thoroughly with you and support given if you decide to go ahead with the match

What will parents know about me?

Although you will be meeting the child's parents and getting to know them, the information they will have about you will be limited. They will know your first names but not surnames. They will not know of your address or any other personal information about you. Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential; for example the bag you keep for contact, containing clothes, toys, nappies etc will be kept just for that purpose so that nothing identifying will be left in the bag by mistake (for example a shop receipt).

Will I get adoption leave and pay, and if so when?

You will be eligible for statutory adoption pay and leave from the time the child is placed with you, even though this is not an adoptive placement. You will also get a fostering allowance for the time you are a foster carer. Most carers save the statutory pay to cover the period of time when the placement transfers from a foster to an adoptive placement.

What if I have children already, either birth or adopted?

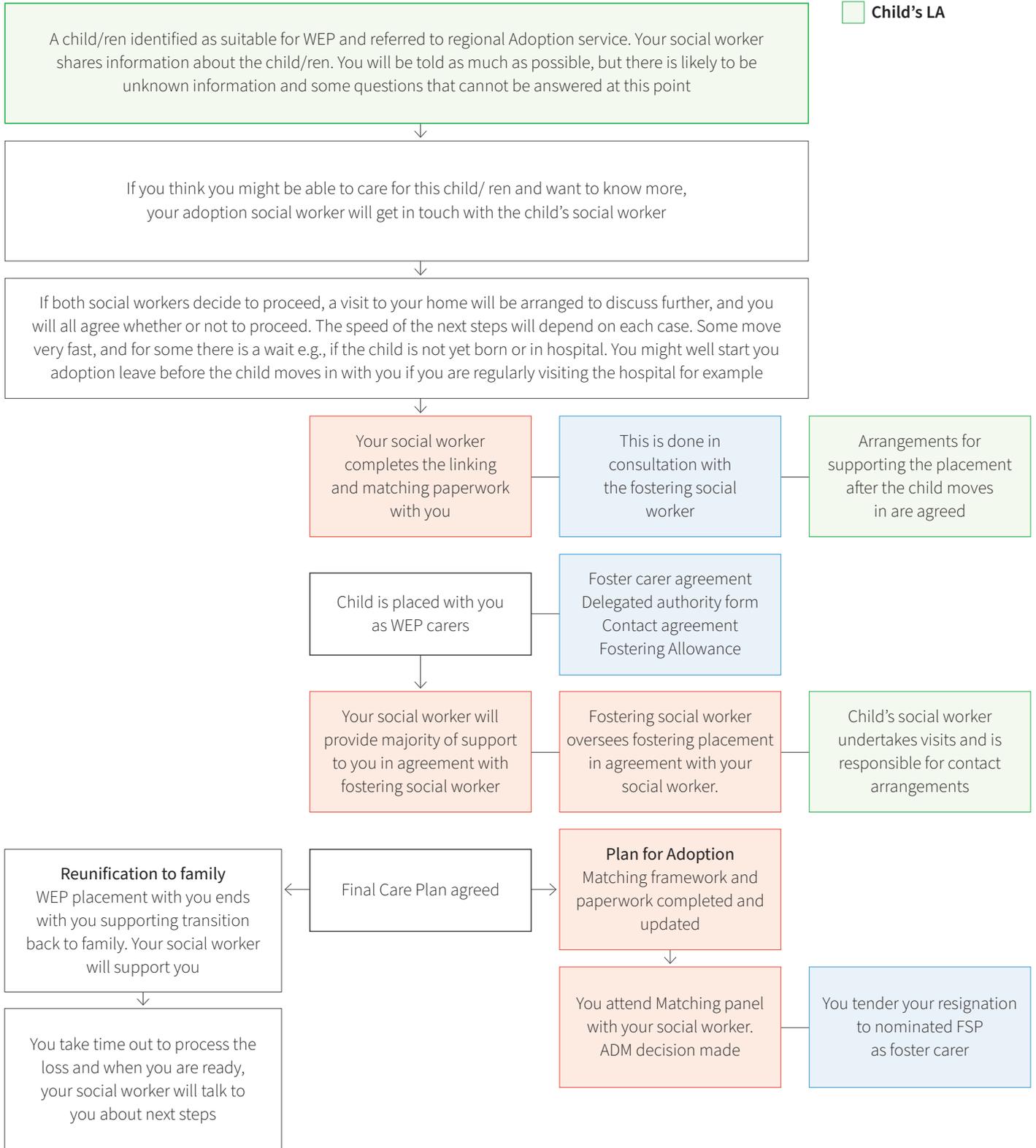
Families do become WEP carers when they have an existing family. Each family will be looked at individually. What we know from research is that children already in the family take the lead from the adults when it comes to living with the uncertainty of whether this child will eventually become a permanent member of your family and accepting that, as a family, you are providing a loving and secure home for the time that the child needs it. During your assessment, if you are considering becoming a WEP carer, you will be able to discuss your own children and the implications for them, particularly if you are thinking of taking a younger brother or sister of an adopted child within your family.

What support will I get?

Your main source of support will be from the family finding social worker and team in the adoption regional collaborative that have assessed and approved you. They will give advice and support in the same way as they would in a mainstream adoptive placement, but at the same time work with you in acknowledging the uncertainty of the placement. You will also get support from the fostering team for your specific fostering tasks, including facilitating contact arrangements with birth family. All of this will be explored in more detail during your training.

FLOWCHART 4: LINKING, MATCHING AND PLACEMENT

- Adoption agency
- Fostering agency
- Child's LA



 You can download this flowchart from adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

A GUIDE FOR ADOPTION SOCIAL WORKERS: PROSPECTIVE ADOPTER'S REPORT (PAR)

This guide is designed to assist social workers undertaking assessments of prospective adopters who also express a desire to be considered as a Welsh Early Permanence carer.

The guide (which is additional to, and sits alongside, the CoramBAAF PAR guidance notes) sets out the elements that need to be considered and included at various stages of the PAR relating to the assessment of applicants wishing to be approved as WEP carers. Only relevant sections are included.

Setting the context from the start

Summary pen picture of the applicant/s and their plan to adopt

- As the pen picture is generally seen as a helpful aid and one of the first parts of the PAR that children's social workers involved in the linking and matching process consider, it is really useful to include brief details about the applicant's intention to be considered as WEP carers and their motivation in doing so.
- Brief details outlining the applicants' understanding of the legal, practical and emotional implications of this as well as any specific and relevant strengths and limiting factors would be helpful. These will be explored and included in greater detail throughout the report.

Family background and early experiences (Section 1 & 2)

- The **Family Tree or Genogram** is a well-known and used tool in all adoption assessment and can be useful in gaining specific information relevant to WEP. It can provide an accessible picture of family relationships, intergenerational experiences, patterns and dynamics and can be used to highlight and explore how the applicants and significant family members approach loss, transitions and trauma.

Assessing social workers can also use this tool to gain insight into the applicants' resilience, emotional maturity and reflective capacity as well as any unresolved issues that have arisen as part of their **Family background and early experiences**. These are essential components, both when parenting children who have experienced developmental trauma and in being able to accept and manage the additional inherent uncertainties involved in being a WEP carer.

An applicants' family background and experiences can provide evidence of their ability to manage uncertainty, stress and a lack of control over what is happening in the court as well as their potential to empathise and develop relationships with the child's parents.

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What evidence is there of how family members react to stress and change? How are feelings expressed about this illness/death etc? What sources of support and comfort do the applicants and wider family draw on in times of stress and loss?
- Is there evidence of intergenerational acceptance of attitudes to difference and how are these expressed?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors that have been identified? Are there any mitigating factors?

Adult life – work, health and other issues (Sections 3 – 5)

Work

Applicants will need to be aware and prepared for the fact that they might have a limited amount of time from being notified about a child and the child moving in with them, and this will need to be carefully considered along with any impact on them as a family.

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What are the existing work patterns and how will these change?
- Does the applicant have capacity to leave work at short notice? What is their employer's general understanding and support of their position? Has this position been verified?
- If they work for a national company, have they checked if an HR Early Permanence policy exists?
- How will statutory adoption leave and pay be used in initial stages of the WEP placement?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors that have been identified? Are there any mitigating factors?

Also see **Financial Circumstances (Section 11)**

- What is the applicants understanding of the financial aspects of WEP and is there clarity in terms of fostering payments and adoption leave for the duration of the placement?
- Do the applicants have a good understanding of the Local Authority's role in providing equipment and financial support e.g. for attending contact

Please refer [WEP Carers and Finances](#) for further information.

Relationships and Support networks (Sections 6 – 9)

Relationship

These questions are relevant to traditional adoption but especially pertinent when considering WEP due to the inherent uncertainty and associated risks. Therefore, assessing social workers should consider these additional elements when assessing and providing professional analysis.

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What evidence is there of individual and joint ability to recognise, understand and manage stress and provide support to each other?
- What evidence is there of individual and joint ability to manage uncertainty and cope with not being in control of what happens?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors that have been highlighted?
- What is your professional analysis of their ability to seek out and accept support?

Support network

Good support networks are particularly important for WEP carers, especially during uncertain and worrying times.

The Genogram tool can be particularly useful when assessing applicants' access to tolerant and robust support in their role as WEP carers, family members ability to understand and accept the reality of being a WEP carer, and their role in relation to a child or children and can be included in the information and analysis of Section 6 – 9 (**Relationships and Support networks**)

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What evidence do we have of wider family and support network's understanding of WEP?
- Are family members and friends willing to attend specific Family and Friends training for WEP carers?
- Are wider family members and friends able to manage their own emotions and recognise and accept the child's status as a WEP placement?
- Can this information be triangulated ie from referee interviews?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors that have been highlighted and the quality of support that will be offered to the applicants?

Household

When considering household members and the quality of their relationships with each other, assessing social workers should link details to their understanding of WEP and the impact of WEP on them. This is especially pertinent with any children (birth or adopted) in the household.

If the existing child in placement is an adopted child, include details of their attachment pattern and how the applicants applied reparative parenting styles (this should also be covered in **Section 15: Understanding of the needs of adopted children and adoptive parenting capacity**)

Suggested questions and analysis:

- Is there evidence that WEP has been discussed with household members, especially children, and what elements in the way this has been done provide reassurance to you as an assessor?
- What is the children's understanding of WEP, including the possibility of a sibling being placed on that basis?
- Is there evidence that the child/ren in the household will take their lead from the applicants and what elements of this provides reassurance to you as an assessor?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors that have been highlighted, including your analysis of the likely impact on existing children? What additional support needs have been identified?



Becoming adopters – the assessment of adoptive parenting capacity

Motivation to adopt and expectations of placement (Section 13 & 14)

When assessing applicants to be WEP carers, there are additional elements to be considered in terms of their motivation and expectations of placement; this should always be considered in the context of their understanding of their role and their resilience in coping with a higher level of uncertainty and risk both in terms of the child's development and legal status.

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What is their motivation in general terms i.e. is adoption their first choice? Where infertility is a motivating factor, what evidence is there of acceptance and realistic expectations and particularly in relation to a WEP placement with a baby?
- What evidence is there of the applicants' understanding of WEP and their specific motivation in relation to this? Does this include a realistic and proportionate understanding of risk?
- Is there acknowledgement of the differentiation between adult needs and child's needs and what evidence is there that the applicants are able to hold the child at the centre of their thinking and decision making?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors including the applicants' capacity to manage a higher level of uncertainty and powerlessness in their role as WEP carers? This includes your analysis of any unresolved grief and whether the applicants appreciate, and are able to manage, the potential impact of "losing" another child if they returned to the parents which could trigger past feelings of grief and loss.

The fostering task and what this entails in relation to WEP will be covered in the addendum report that goes to fostering panel alongside the applicants' PAR.

Expectations of placement

In addition to discussion of the applicants view and expectation of background characteristics and experiences, ages or numbers of children they hope to adopt. There are additional elements that need to be considered in relation to WEP carers.

Suggested questions and analysis:

- What evidence is there of the applicants experience of caring for children, and in particular caring for a young baby if this is what they want? Does this include specific experience of a role with, or caring for "stranger" children?
- What is the applicants' understanding and expectations of the information they will receive in relation to a child prior to placement, and is this realistic? Do they appreciate that there might be limited information available, certainly to begin with, and limited opportunity (unlike traditional adoption) to become familiar with the child and develop trust prior to the child being placed with them?

- Do the applicants understand that there is likely to be a high level of uncertainty in terms of the children's functioning and development, especially if placed straight from hospital following birth? Do they have a realistic understanding that this is likely to include the impact of maternal alcohol consumption and/or drug misuse, and what is their understanding of this impact?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors in relation to the above? What support or training needs have been identified and how will these be met?

Understanding of the needs of adopted children and adoptive parenting capacity (Section 15 – 18)

Please refer to guidance above that might also be relevant to these sections. Always try to avoid repetition whilst ensuring that all elements are covered and ensure that professional opinion and analysis is robust.

Of particular relevance:

- Do the applicants have a good understanding of the importance of the relationships that can be developed with the child's parents during a WEP placement and the relevance of this in supporting a child's identity and multiple connections should the care plan be adoption?
- How will the applicants incorporate the child's journey to adoption through WEP in their Life Journey materials?
- What evidence is there that the applicants will be communicatively open with the child and always act in their best interest in terms of continuity of relationships and supporting understanding of their identity?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors in relation to above? What support or training needs have been identified and how will these be met?

Summary Analysis of all key factors

The section pulls together the main points of the social work assessment which leads to the recommendation on suitability to adopt. Specific reference should be made to the applicants' suitability as WEP carers, the key characteristics and strengths highlighted relevant to this route. Robust analysis should provide a realistic evaluation of these strengths as well as any training needs and support that might be required.

Reference should be made to the addendum report that will be completed and presented to fostering panel as part of the applicants' approval as foster carers.

INFORMATION FOR REFEREES

You have been asked to act as a referee for a family member or friend who is seeking to become an adoptive parent. The person for whom you have been asked to provide a reference is also applying to become a Welsh Early Permanence carer.

What is Welsh Early Permanence?

A child is usually placed with prospective adoptive parents after the court has agreed adoption as the care plan for adoption. With Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) a child can be placed with WEP carers when they are first removed from their birth family during care proceedings. The WEP carers act as foster carers for the child, facilitating contact with birth family and attending the child's reviews, until such time as the court decides upon the permanent care plan for the child. It may be that the child returns to their birth parents or is placed with a family member, in which case the WEP carers facilitate that return. However, if the court decides that the child should be adopted, the child remains with the WEP carers who become the child's adoptive parents.

The huge benefit for the child is, if the care plan becomes adoption, they do not have the trauma of the transition from foster placement to adoptive placement, leaving the people with whom they have developed attachments, as they are already there with them.

What this means for your family member or friend

With some children the risk of return to birth family is small; with others there is a greater chance of reunification or placement with wider family. Although the number of children who return to birth parents or are placed with family members is small, there can never be a guarantee that the child will not return and WEP carers have to be clear that they are prepared to take the risk.

So why would any prospective adopters want to take that risk? They see the benefit for the child and are prepared to take the risk on behalf of the child. With babies who are removed from birth parents shortly after birth the WEP carers have the satisfaction of caring for a new born (although there is risk in taking very small babies where their developmental trajectory cannot be known); with older children they have the satisfaction of providing a very high standard of care for the child at an earlier stage of their care experience, whatever the final care plan.

Your role as a referee

You will be asked to comment on some additional factors which will help us to decide whether Welsh Early Permanence is the right way forward for your family member or friend.

We will need to know whether applicants would be able to accept that there might be limited information about a child's development when they are placed with them and have to be able to manage a level of uncertainty regarding this.

We will need to know how you think the applicants would embrace the prospect of meeting birth parents during contact and at meetings.

We will also need to know how resilient you think the applicants would be if they were faced with the prospect of the child returning to birth parents or being placed with a wider family member.

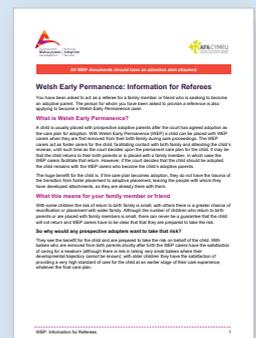
These questions will be asked in addition to the usual questions we ask about your views on the applicant in relation to becoming an adoptive parent in the usual way.

Thank you for helping us to make the right decision as to whether a Welsh Early Permanence placement is right for your family member or friend and so right for any child placed.

Information for Referees

You can download this leaflet, at:

www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



WEP CARERS AND FINANCES

Fostering allowances

Carers are eligible for a fostering allowance from the time the child is placed until either the child is reunified with birth family or the foster placement becomes an adoptive placement. The rate of fostering allowance will be the rate the nominated fostering service provider for the adoption region pays its foster carers.

In the event of reunification or placement with wider family, it is recommended that the carers are paid an additional month's allowance following the end of the placement. This will be dependent on the Local Authority arrangements.

In the event of the placement becoming an adoptive placement, the fostering allowance will cease to be paid upon the matching ADM decision.

Statutory adoption leave and pay

Carers who are dually approved as prospective adoptive parents and foster carers are eligible for statutory adoption leave and pay from the date the child has been placed with them as foster carers. Note: that self-employed carers are not eligible for statutory pay.

The Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2016, regulations 53-54 and 143-148, bring Wales into line with the provisions available in England. For more details of the regulations see below.

The child must be placed with dually approved carers under s81 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The local authority responsible for the child must provide a letter for the carer(s) notifying them of the proposed placement of the child and stating that the placement is made with a local authority foster parent, under s81(6)(b) SSWB(W)A, who has been approved as a prospective adopter. This provides the equivalent of a matching certificate in confirming the employee's eligibility for statutory adoption leave and pay.

From the same date (the date of the letter from the local authority) WEP carers who are expecting a child to be placed will be entitled to time off on 5 occasions (main adopter) or 2 occasions (secondary adopter) for adoption appointments (that is meetings with the local authority / medical adviser etc).

For more details on statutory adoption pay and leave generally, information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/adoption-pay-leave>

If the placement results in reunification with birth family, that has no effect on the leave or pay already received and carers can continue to take the leave already booked, or they can bring the leave to an end eight weeks before it would have ended had the child stayed. If the WEP carers go on to take another WEP placement, they will be eligible for leave and pay for that child. A WEP carer on adoption leave continues to accrue entitlement to adoption leave and pay.

If the placement becomes an adoptive placement, carers are not entitled to additional leave or pay.

Managing finances

Many carers save the adoption pay during the period they are fostering the child as they are also receiving an adoption allowance. This sum can be useful once the placement becomes an adoptive placement and the fostering allowance ceases.



Preparation, Assessment and Approval of WEP carers

7

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Recruitment and Preparation

Applicants who have expressed an interest in WEP will have read materials provided, attended the half day “Is WEP right for you?” webinar and, if appropriate, will be assessed by their adoption social worker in line with the additional elements that need to be considered in their Prospective Adopter’s Report (PAR). See previous section.

They will be aware that they need to be dually approved as an adopter and foster carer and that an **addendum report** will be completed in addition to their PAR to ensure all fostering competencies are met.

- Early communication with the FSP/allocated fostering social worker should be prioritised at an early stage to ensure effective collaboration.

A [WEP Monitoring tool for Approval and Support of WEP carers](#) has been developed to be completed by both allocated adoption and fostering social workers. This can be used and updated as work progresses on each case by the ASW in collaboration with FSW. It is envisaged that this document will act as a helpful aide memoire as practitioners become familiar with WEP.

- In addition to the 3-day Preparation to Adopt training provided, applicants will also need to attend an additional 1-day live webinar training (with additional recorded modules) that covers the fostering elements. This webinar will be initially delivered by AFA Cymru on a Wales wide basis 5 times over a twelve-month period. All agencies / VAAs are able to refer interested parties to this.

We would advise that access to this webinar is available in the latter stages of Stage 1 (after the Preparation training) or in the earlier stages of Stage 2 of the applicant/s adoption assessment. This will ensure there is sufficient time to explore the additional elements required in the addendum report that accompanies the PAR.

Assessment

- A WEP addendum report needs to be completed by the Adoption social worker in consultation with the Fostering social worker. This addendum report will be presented to the nominated Fostering panel alongside the applicant/s PAR as part of their approval as foster carers.
- An All-Wales pro forma has been developed for the [addendum report for Fostering Panel](#)
- The purpose of this report is to facilitate recommendation and approval of the applicant/s, if appropriate, as a short term foster carer. This is done in order to facilitate a Welsh Early Permanence placement with a view to that placement transferring to an adoptive placement should there be authority to place for adoption (either by consent under s19 ACA 2002 or Placement Order under s21 ACA 2002).
- There should be a minimum of one joint visit of the adoption and fostering social workers with the applicants during their assessment (Stage 2 of Adoption Assessment)
- A guide has been developed for social workers on what needs to be included within the **WEP addendum report** to ensure that all fostering competencies are met.
- This guide sits alongside the [WEP Checklist – comparison of Adoption and Fostering regulations, and Fostering Competencies](#) that should be completed jointly by the allocated Adoption and Fostering social workers and be presented to panel alongside the PAR & Addendum report.
- The specific [WEP Delegated Authority Agreement](#) and the specific [WEP Foster Care Agreement](#) documents should be discussed with the applicant/s during assessment to ensure they understand and will be compliant with these.
- ASW should update the [WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers](#) as necessary.

Approval

- Presentation to Fostering Panel should be within 4 weeks of approval at adoption panel. Therefore, early notification should be given to enable timetabling
- Panel members and the DM need to be fully conversant with what WEP is, the legal framework, information sharing at early stages with prospective applicants as well as the additional elements that have been included and considered in the preparation and assessment of prospective WEP carers.

Therefore, they should be provided with:

1. Introduction to WEP and [WEP flowchart 1](#) which provides an overview of the process
 2. Legal framework of WEP (see p6)
 3. [WEP Information pack for prospective applicants](#)
 4. Guidance for Adoption Social Workers: Prospective Adopter's Report (see p28)
 5. [WEP Information for referees](#)
 6. Guide for social workers: What needs to be included in the [Addendum Report](#) to Fostering Panel
 7. [WEP Checklist](#) – comparison of Adoption and Fostering regulations, and Fostering Competencies
- A recorded e module has been developed specifically for Panel members and ADM/ DM which they should have access to.
 - ASW in consultation with FSW to update the **WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers**
 - If and when appropriate, see pro forma for [WEP Carers Resignation letter](#)



This will be a live webinar that will be delivered by AFA on a Wales-wide basis, 5 times over a 12-month period from October 2022. All agencies / VAAs are able to refer interested parties to these webinars.



GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS: COMPLETING THE WEP ALL-WALES ADDENDUM REPORT FOR FOSTERING PANEL

Welsh Early Permanence requires dual approval as 'suitable to adopt a child' – reg 30A(1) (panel recommendation) and 30B (Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision) **Adoption Agencies(Wales)Regulations 2005** and 'suitable to foster a child' – reg 5 (recommendation by panel) and reg 8 (Decision Maker (DM) decision) of the **Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018**.

There is a strong emphasis within the WEP framework of early and effective communication between adoption and fostering teams, and this is essential when completing the addendum report. It will be useful for fostering social workers to have access to the WEP Guide for Adoption social workers when completing the PAR (see p28).

There should be at least one joint visit during assessment (Stage 2 of adoption assessment). The adoption social worker will take lead responsibility for completing the addendum report in consultation with the fostering social worker. Both social workers will attend fostering panel with the applicants.

It is advised that the Addendum report be presented to foster panel within 4 weeks of the adoption approval and so early notification is essential. It is intended to dovetail into the PAR and will cover additional/different information specific to the fostering role to ensure fostering competencies are addressed and fostering regulations are met; the intention is to minimise duplication across the reports.

The purpose of the addendum report and the recommendation to panel should be clear, and this is stated on page 1 of the All-Wales pro forma. The recommendation on suitability to foster should be specific in terms of suitability of the applicants as WEP carers (i.e. that the applicant is recommended for approval as a foster carer for short term placements and specifically Welsh Early Permanence placements to reflect the possibility that any placement may become an adoptive placement).

The Fostering Competencies have been included with the addendum report for panel reference. Appendix 1 Compliance checklist should be completed by the adoption social worker (in consultation with the fostering social worker).

Suggested questions and analysis

- What evidence is there that the applicants fully understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the fostering task? If there are children in their family, have they considered the impact on them?
- What evidence is there that they will be able to work effectively with Children's Services and keep the child at the centre of their thinking? Are they prepared and able to take a child at short notice? Has this been discussed with employers? Are their plans realistic?
- How will they promote the child's sense of identity and assist with their life journey work (could be particularly challenging if the birth parents are difficult for them to work with but they need to present a realistic view/supporting contact)?
- Are the applicants able to manage all of the practical aspects of the fostering role without becoming overwhelmed? Do they have a realistic understanding that this might include frequent meetings, visits or appointments as well as regular training, supervision and support groups? Do they understand that they will be required to keep daily written records as part of the fostering role?
- What evidence is there that the applicants understand their role in terms of delegated authority and are they able to accept the lack of control and influence, and uncertainty inherent in the role?
- Do applicants understand the principles of Safer Caring and why this practice is essential in their role as a WEP carer? Are they able to evidence how they will put this into practice?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors in relation to above?
- What evidence is there that they will be able to support Contact arrangements (dependant on risk analysis) including meeting and developing a relationship with the parents and / or wider family, and be part of handover at the beginning and end of Contact?
- If the child is school age, have the applicants considered the implications of the child remaining in their current school?
- What evidence is there that the applicants will be able to manage the potential loss of the child should reunification be the care plan? What evidence is there that the applicants will be able to support reunification including a child centred transition plan? Have they demonstrated emotional resilience in other aspects of their lives? Are there any past triggers regarding loss, which may be a contra-indication and need additional support?

Addendum Report for Fostering Panel

WEP checklist

Monitoring Tool

You can download a useable Word version of these forms, at: www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

Welsh Early Permanence
Addendum Report to be presented to fostering panel to accompany Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR)
 Welsh Early Permanence requires that approval is issued in order to allow a prospective adoptive parent to care for a child with special needs. Approval is given by the Welsh Early Permanence Panel (WEP) and is valid for 12 months. It is a requirement of the Welsh Early Permanence Framework (WEPF) and is a requirement of the Fostering Panel (FP) and the Fostering Panel (FP) and the Fostering Panel (FP).



Welsh Early Permanence
WEP Checklist for Fostering Supervising Social Workers and Adoption Social Workers
 This checklist is for use by the Fostering Supervising Social Worker (FSSW) and the Adoption Social Worker (ASW) to ensure that the WEP requirements are met.



Welsh Early Permanence: Monitoring Tool
Monitoring Tool for approval and support of WEP carers
 This document can be used by the Adoption and Fostering social workers to work with the WEP carer to ensure that the WEP requirements are met.



- How will they support any existing children to understand what is happening in an age appropriate way, and what evidence is there that they will be able to take a strong, positive lead that the child/ren will be able to follow?
- What evidence is there that the applicant will be able to access informal and professional support? Does their support network understand the principles of WEP, and the status of the child placed with them?
- What is your professional opinion of any strengths and limiting factors in relation to above?

Summary Analysis of all key factors

Similarly to the WEP PAR guide, this section should pull together the main points included in the addendum report which leads to the recommendation on suitability to foster. Whilst the applicants are first and foremost prospective adoptive parents, there needs to be clear evidence and robust analysis that provide a realistic evaluation of their strengths as a foster carer, specifically a WEP carer, as well as any training needs and support that might be required.

It is important for social workers to include any limitations of the application as well as strengths as this will inform the support offered, both to the applicants as a WEP carer and in the development of the Adoption Support Plan if adoption is the care plan.

Information for, and work with, parents

INFORMATION SHARING AND WORK WITH PARENTS

Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) is one of the options that should be considered by the child's social worker and local authority solicitors from an early stage alongside other the permanency measures of undertaking assessments of parents and seeking out wider family members.

WEP can also be considered at later stages, for example, at the end of a residential parent and child assessment or following a disruption of a connected person's placement.

WEP may also be considered in certain cases when a child is being, or has been, relinquished. These particular circumstances will be covered separately and specific information is available for both practitioners and parents (see **WEP specific considerations for relinquished children** on p11 and **leaflet 3** below).

These should be read in conjunction with the [Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption](#), and adhered to.

Please refer to [WEP flowchart 2](#) for possible options of WEP care planning and referral.

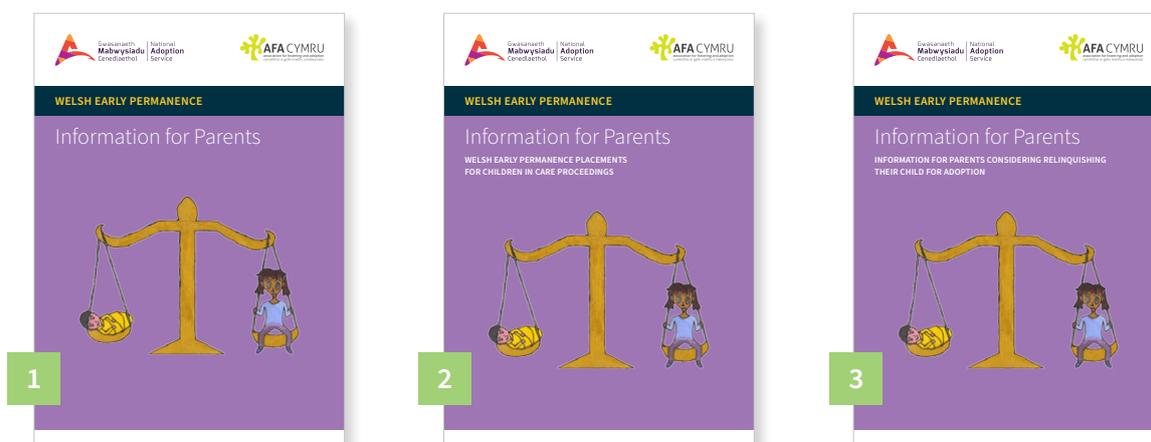
What needs to happen at each stage

It is crucial that parents are given sufficient information about WEP if this is being considered, as well the right support at the right time to ensure they understand what is happening.

It will be helpful to keep a record of actions taken at each stage in terms of information sharing and work with the child's parents. Therefore, a document has been developed for this purpose for the child's social worker to complete. [WEP Information and support for parents' child care practitioner checklist](#).

Consultation with parents and with lawyers representing parents reflected a preference for early information sharing, where appropriate and that this should ideally be in different formats to accommodate different learning styles. Therefore, both written information in leaflet form as well as a short recorded **e-module for parents** that can be share digitally have been developed.

There is a set of leaflets produced to be given to parents dependant on circumstances and timing.



[Leaflet 1](#) is to be given at very early stages. It contains very general information about what WEP is.

[Leaflet 2](#) is to be given to parents, at PLO pre-proceedings, to contain more detailed information and some FAQs about WEP

[Leaflet 3](#) is for parents considering the relinquishment of their child under ss19 / 20 Adoption and Children act 2002

 You can download these leaflets from adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

TWIN TRACK PLANNING STAGE

What needs to happen

- Initial information may be given in early discussions between CSW and parents at the twin track planning stage, possibly as part of a Family Group conference or meeting, where there is a real possibility that the assessment will result in care proceedings and adoption may be an option as part of the care planning process. This information may, therefore, on some occasions be shared before the legal gateway / planning meeting takes place where appropriate.

It must be emphasised that this is only information sharing with parents about WEP at this stage. Careful consideration and a case by case approach should always be taken regarding sharing information at this early stage in order to establish the right balance between what people need to know and when, what they are able to digest and understand, and what support may be needed to enable this and manage their expectations.

Sharing information about WEP at this early stage should be in the context of it being part of a range of information being provided to parents. They should be supported to understand that WEP may be one of the options being considered for their child, and if it becomes the most likely option, further information will be provided.

- “**Information for parents**” leaflet 1 provides a broad overview of what Welsh Early Permanence is and how parents can find out more. It is important that the CSW ensures that parents understand the information in the leaflet, and considers additional support that might be needed.
- A separate leaflet has been developed for parents considering relinquishing their child for adoption (see p8).
- Research highlights the benefits of access to independent support that is trauma informed and from practitioners not involved in the decision making for the child. Therefore, early referral to projects like Reflect should always be considered and discussed with the family.
- Depending on parents’ individual circumstances, the CSW should consider whether it would be beneficial to share the **e-module for parents** digitally with them.
- CSW to complete **WEP Information and support for parents’ Child Care Practitioner Checklist** as appropriate.

PLO PRE-PROCEEDINGS / GATEWAY PLANNING MEETING

What needs to happen

- “**Information for parents**” leaflet 2 provides more detailed information about Welsh Early Permanence for parents with some FAQs. This should be provided to parents at the PLO pre proceedings / gateway meeting where Welsh Early Permanence is considered, and a decision is made whether it is an appropriate action.
- Information about WEP should also be shared with parents’ legal representatives at this stage. They should receive a copy of [WEP Information for parents’ legal representative](#) as well as a copy of **Information for parents leaflets 1 & 2**.
- CSW to update WEP Information and support for parents’ child care practitioner checklist.
- CSW to ensure that the child’s guardian knows about WEP and is aware that this is being considered for this particular child.
- CSW to provide information about, and referral to, Reflect as appropriate.
- At all stages, parents will be advised to discuss information with their solicitor.

CARE PROCEEDINGS

What needs to happen

- Contact planning and risk assessment to be completed as part of **WEP Matching framework**
- CSW to update **WEP Information and support for parents’ child care practitioner checklist**.

REUNIFICATION OR PLACEMENT WITH WIDER FAMILY

What needs to happen

Upon any decision being made to reunify with parents or with wider family members, the WEP carers will work with the CSW, ASW, FSW and parents to ensure a smooth and successful transitions for the child.

- CSW to update [WEP Information and support for parents' child care practitioner checklist](#).

PLACEMENT ORDER PROCEEDINGS

What needs to happen

- Contact plans to be updated
- Please refer to [Good Practice Guides](#) on the NAS website for further information
- CSW to update WEP Information and support for parents' child care practitioner checklist.

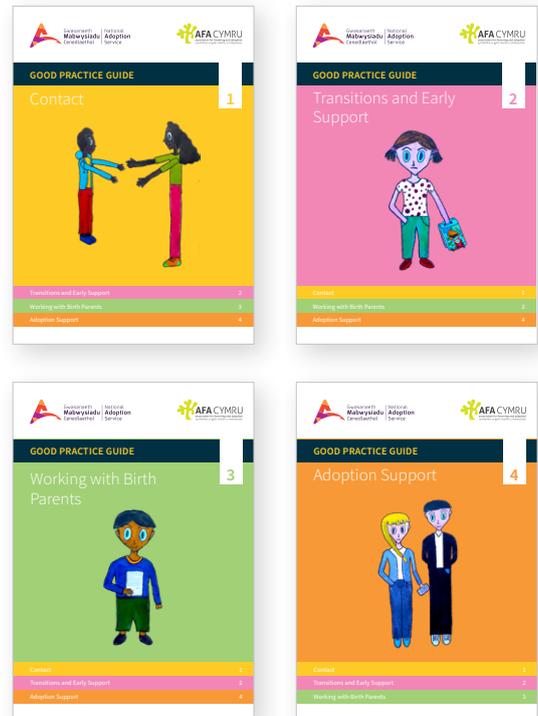
ADOPTION MATCHING

What needs to happen

- Contact plans to be updated
- Parents will need to be officially informed of a match being confirmed as per Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005. They could still apply for permission to seek revocation of the Placement Order.
- Please refer to [Good Practice Guides](#) for further information, particularly the Working with Birth Parents and Transitions and Early Support.
- Planning and delivering of Farewell Contact
- Always consider meeting with parents and PAs even if they have met during proceedings as this will now be on a different basis.
- CSW to update WEP Information and support for parents' child care practitioner checklist.



This recorded e module is available to download from the NAS website from January 2023
www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



Information and support for parents Child Care Practitioner checklist

You can download a useable Word version of this form, at:
www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS' LEGAL REPRESENTATIVES

The information outlined on the following pages (p40-41) is available as a separate information leaflet that can be downloaded from www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework

Setting the scene for early consideration

Babies and children in the care system often have several moves whilst the courts decide who will care for them in the long term, and this is often at a time when days and weeks really matter. Research has shown that this level of disruption has far reaching effects on a child's mental health and development.

Welsh Early Permanence is a framework whereby a child is placed with a family who are fully approved as both foster carers and adoptive parents. You have been sent this information because one of your clients has been informed that Welsh Early Permanence is being considered as an option for their child.

Pre-proceedings

- If there is a possibility that consideration will need to be given to a child being accommodated, Welsh Early Permanence is one of the options that should be considered by the child's social worker and local authority solicitors at "pre proceedings" stage alongside other permanency measures of undertaking assessments of parents and seeking out wider family members.
- Welsh Early Permanence can also be considered at later stages, for example, at the end of a residential assessment or following the disruption of a connected person placement (Reg 26 placement) during care proceedings.

Other possible options where Welsh Early Permanence may be considered:

- Welsh Early Permanence may also be considered in certain cases when a child is being, or has been, relinquished. These particular circumstances will be covered separately with specific information available. This should be read in conjunction with the [Good Practice Guidance for Adoption Agencies and Cafcass Cymru: Children Relinquished for Adoption](#), and adhered to.
- Following the making of a Care Order, upon the disruption of a connected person foster placement or disruption of a Placement with Parents placement, and the contingency plan is for adoption

Please refer to [WEP Flowchart 2: Care Planning and referral and with possible options from birth, during proceedings and following proceedings](#) (see p10).

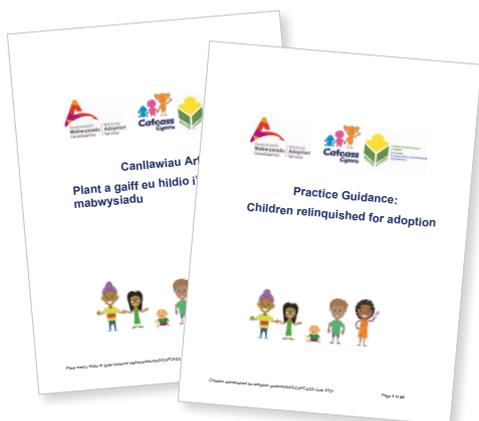
For the child, Welsh Early Permanence removes the disruption and trauma of multiple moves by placing the child with Welsh Early Permanence carers who are dually approved as foster carers and adopters. This means that if the courts agree a plan for adoption for the child, there will be a seamless transition from a fostering to an adoptive placement, without the child having to move from carers with whom they have formed a bond.

All the risks in Welsh Early Permanence are borne by the Welsh Early Permanence carers and they will be fully aware of what these are; that in all cases, the court decides whether a child should return to her family or be adopted based on the evidence presented by professionals and the family.

As well as a chance to bond earlier with carers who might go on to become the child's parents, Welsh Early Permanence carers also have the benefit of getting to know the child's parents and to find out about their background and the reasons the child came into care. We know from research and evidence based practice that this greatly assists the development of empathy and acceptance and sets a positive foundation for communicative openness and ongoing relationships.

The fact that the carers may become the child's adoptive parents does not affect either the status of, or priorities for, the foster placement; neither does it affect the course of the care proceedings and the court's decision on the child's care plan at the end of the care proceedings. Parents should be reassured that their child is being well cared for, that contact is being well organised and that reunification, or placement with the wider family, will be facilitated in a professional and child centred way if that is the court's decision.

Though parents do not have the right to object to a WEP placement, as it is a properly regulated foster placement, every effort is made to inform both parents, their legal advisers, Cafcass Cymru and court, if necessary, of the benefits for the child, and also the parents, of the placement.



INFORMATION SHARING AND SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

Pre-proceedings

- Following consultation with parents and with parents' legal representatives, it was agreed that if Welsh Early Permanence is being considered, information for parents should be provided to them by the child's social worker as early as possible and that this should ideally be in different formats to accommodate different learning styles. Therefore, both written information in leaflet form as well as a short, recorded e module for parents have been developed.

In all of the information for parents there is advice to discuss the information with their solicitor. Parents consulted requested that a copy of the information provided to them should also be provided to their solicitor to ensure transparency and the opportunity to discuss.

There are three leaflets provided to parents at early stages and pre proceedings, the first of which contains brief, general information about Welsh Early Permanence. A copy of this leaflet has been included with this information.

The second leaflet (and recorded e-module as appropriate) will be shared with parents at pre proceedings stage and they should be given the support to understand that this is one of the options that is being considered, what it means for them and their child. A copy of this leaflet has been included with this information.

The third leaflet is specifically designed for parents who are considering relinquishing their child for adoption. This can be made available if appropriate on request.

- The child's social worker will need to ensure that the child's Guardian knows about Welsh Early Permanence and is aware that this is being considered for this particular child.
- Research highlights the benefits of access to independent support that is trauma informed from practitioners not involved in decision making for the child. Therefore, early referral to projects like Reflect should always been considered and discussed with the family by the child's social worker.
- The child's social worker will complete a comprehensive WEP matching document prior to placing the child with a Welsh Early Permanence carer on a fostering basis. This will contain risk assessments for the placement and for contact.

Care proceedings

The child's social worker will complete a plan for contact during proceedings which they will share with the child's parents.

This will include consideration of contact with additional family members.

On reunification

Upon any decision being made to reunify with parents or with wider family members, the Welsh Early Permanence carers will work with the child's social worker, the adoption social worker and parents to ensure a smooth and successful transition for the child.

Placement Order

If the court decides that adoption is the best plan for the child, then the carers who have been looking after the child would go on to become the adopters. This would mean a seamless transition for the child; they would have the security of adoption without an upsetting move to a new family and home.

In the case where a child has been placed with a Kinship foster carer on a Care Order or placed with parents (or those with Parental Responsibility) on a Care Order: if the contingency plan is adoption, Welsh Early Permanence will be considered.



Child's return to parents or wider family

9

If the court decides that the care plan for the child is reunification with parents or with wider family members, there needs to be good communication and effective collaboration between the practitioners involved to ensure that the transition plan is appropriate for the child, carefully planned and can be supported effectively and with empathy.

Whilst WEP carers will always have been aware of their role as foster carers and that there is always a possibility of reunification, their role is a complex one and especially at this stage, and this should be acknowledged.

Transition Planning and support

- Child's Social Worker (CSW) in consultation with Adoption Social Worker (ASW) and Fostering Social worker (FSW) should ensure that the transition plan and process continues to hold the child at the centre. This means that the child is unlikely to leave the WEP carers immediately upon assessment of the parent or family member and could take several weeks to fully move from them subject to any directions from the court (in the case of a relinquished child, this move is likely to happen more quickly and could be within 7 days).
- The child would remain in the care of the WEP carers during the transition period, and the WEP carers will continue their responsibilities as foster carers.

Support for WEP carers

- The ASW predominantly will provide support to the WEP carers during this time, in consultation with FSW and CSW, and ensure they are able to support the transition plan.
- Many WEP carers need to take a break following a child's return to family in order to process what has happened and to grieve their loss. ASW will support them as appropriate and plan with them their way forward. If appropriate and at the right time for them, a formal review will be completed. [Carers Review template 1](#)

- If they wish to do so, the WEP carer will tender their resignation as a foster carer to the nominated FSP via the FSW unless they wish to be considered for a further WEP placement. [WEP Fostering Resignation letter](#)
- The applicants do not need to return to either Adoption or Fostering Panel unless:
 - They no longer wish to be adopters, or
 - Significant concerns or changes have been highlighted that calls into question their suitability to be either an adoptive parent or a foster carer. If this was the case, there would need to be a termination of their approval by both panels; this would be a qualifying determination
- The WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers to be updated by the ASW in consultation/ agreement with CSW and FSW as work progresses on each case.

Support for parents/ wider family

- The CSW will provide support to the parents and/ or wider family in developing an effective support plan for them and the child when the child returns home. This will be in line with Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) Care and Support Planning.

Carers Review (template 1) Fostering Resignation letter

You can download a useable Word version of these forms, at: www.adoptcymru.com/welsh-early-permanence-framework



Following Placement Order decision

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Following the making of a Placement Order, a formal Review of WEP carers should be completed [Carers Review template 2](#). This will include the recognition that the child or children have been placed with them under fostering regs i.e. as a WEP placement and will include confirmation that they wish to proceed with adoption matching. This acknowledges the formal change of status of the placement from a foster placement to an adoption placement.

Should the prospective adopters wish to continue at this stage, the Review document will accompany other adoption matching documents, including the Adoption Support Plan, Adoption Placement Plan etc

- ASW should update the child's Trauma Nurture timeline and provide an opportunity to further discuss this with the prospective adopter/s. This should include the possibility of convening an Understanding the Child day/ meeting if one has not already been held. Please refer to [Trauma Nurture timeline / Understanding the Child](#) resources on NAS website
- The WEP Matching framework should be reviewed and updated and considered at the Adoption Matching meeting alongside other Adoption Matching documents. These documents should be included in Matching Panel paperwork
- Prospective adopters attend Matching Panel / ADM decision made.
- As soon as the matching decision is made, the foster placement transforms into an adoptive placement, the WEP carer ceases to be a foster carer for the child and becomes a prospective adoptive parent. The prospective adopter then tenders their resignation by letter (see page 42) to the appropriate FSP.
- This change in status does not preclude required actions taking place as appropriate, including Farewell contact, any adjustments to support and contact arrangements, and direct work with the child.
- Whilst the benefits of early placement for the child and adopters are clear, research has shown that early developmental trauma has far reaching impact for children placed early as with any other child placed for adoption. One third of children in the Coram longitudinal study still needed significant support as they grew up; the Adoption Support Plan needs to reflect this and services need to be resourced to provide this long term support as with any other adoptive placement. (Ponomarenko et al. 2018)

Application to adopt

- In order to apply for an adoption order, the child must have lived with the applicant/s for a minimum of 10 weeks preceding the application (s.42(2) Adoption and Children Act 2002).

For WEP carers, this timeframe is determined from the start date of the WEP placement and therefore, applicants/s are eligible to apply for an adoption order once the placement formally becomes an adoptive placement so long as the timeframe of 10 weeks has been satisfied.

Although in some cases the applicant/s might chose to submit their application prior to the first adoption review (not more than four weeks after the date of adoption placement, no more than three months, thereafter no more than six months (reg 37(4) AA(W)R 2005), this would normally be discussed and agreed at this point.

Again, this would not preclude any required actions taking place as appropriate.

- The applicants do not need to return to either Adoption or Fostering Panel unless:
 - They no longer wish to be adopters, or
 - Significant concerns or changes have been highlighted that calls into question their suitability to be either an adoptive parent or a foster carer. If this was the case, there would need to be a termination of their approval by both panels; this would be a qualifying determination
- The **WEP Monitoring tool for Approvals and Support of WEP carers** to be updated by ASW in consultation/ agreement with CSW and FSW.

Child's Social worker visiting and Reviews

There are specific legal requirements for the visiting and reviewing regime for a WEP placement into an adoptive placement depending on the stage and status of the placement. These are detailed in full in the **WEP Placement: What needs to happen section** (see p19).

The following are relevant to this stage and status of the placement :

1. **From the making of the placement order** or authority to place with a relinquished child, (this is still a WEP foster placement as the child is not yet 'placed' for adoption) the Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005 now apply to reviews but the CPPCR(W) R continue to apply for visiting:
 - **Reviews:** not more than three months after the date of the authority to place, not more than three months and thereafter not more than six monthly intervals (reg 37(3) AA(W)R))
 - **Visits:** These carry on under the CPPCR(W)R as above – not more than six weekly (reg 31)

Visiting frequency for both the ASW and CSW should be guided by the needs of the child and WEP carers.

2. **From the making of the adoption placement** (i.e. from date of ADM matching decision), the CPPCR(W)R cease to apply and the AA(W)R apply to both reviews and visiting:
 - **Reviews:** not more than four weeks after the date of adoption placement, no more than three months, thereafter no more than six months (reg 37(4))
 - **Visits:** within one week of adoption placement, at least every week until the first review and thereafter at such frequency as the agency decide at each review (reg 37(6))



If the WEP carers do not wish to continue with adoption matching

If the WEP carers do not wish to continue with the adoption matching process, this will not be considered as an adoption disruption although there will need to be robust reflection and analysis to ensure that lessons are learnt and incorporated in future practice.

WEP Learning from Practice Meetings

In terms of good practice in these circumstances, all practitioners involved should attend a meeting to consider the learning from each case. This meeting will be convened by the Adoption social worker and chaired by a senior member of staff; it should be held within a reasonable timeframe of the decision not to proceed to adoption matching.

If appropriate, the WEP carers should be invited to attend part of this meeting to share their perspective and experience.

The meeting should consider each section of the WEP framework and actions taken within these in order to identify any potential gaps in information or where issues might have been addressed differently.

A Summary Action Plan will identify any issues to be addressed, with an agreed plan for doing so.

These might include:

- Practitioner / panel training and / or peer support
- Adjustments needed to the WEP framework or the way it is being used
- Practitioner roles and responsibilities within the framework
- Information sharing and support

The WEP Learning from Practice meeting should always be in the context of collaboration and support with a shared commitment to continued practice development.

Carers Review (template 2)

You can download a useable Word version of this form, at: www.adoptcymru.com/WEP-framework



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