

Adoption Panel Information Pack 2025

Adoption East Midlands is a regional adoption agency operating on behalf of Derby City Council, Derbyshire County Council, Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council.

The Adoption Panel

Our panels are virtual. There is a virtual meeting on a set date and this will be preceded by the gathering of written answers to questions that panel members have identified from reading the panel papers. The virtual meeting will therefore consider any outstanding matters or consequences resulting from the given answers. The record of panel will give an account of the activity prior to the virtual meeting taking place as well as the minutes of that meeting.

The Adoption East Midlands panels will be hearing cases of:

- applications to adopt from within the agency
- matches of children who are the responsibility of either Derby City, Derbyshire, Nottingham City or Nottinghamshire local authorities
- the contested withdrawal of approval from existing prospective adopters
- adoption plans for relinquished children



Panel Management

The panel team is managed by the Team Manager for Adoption Panels who is:

Laura Poxon 0115 8044251 Full time

There is a team of panel managers who manage the panels and sit on the panels in the role of panel advisers. The Team Manager can also act as a panel adviser. They are as follows:

- Brett Horsfall 0115 8041855 alt Wed – Fri
- Bev Lawson 0115 8040163 Wed, Thurs, half day Fri
- Sam Perry 0115 8546499 Mon – alt Wed
- Robyn Harland 0115 8040194 Mon – alt Wed

E: PanelManagers.Adoption@adoptioneastmidlands.nottsc.gov.uk

The panel team sit under the service manager for Adoption Support and Panels who is:

- Jane Bolan 0115 8041499 full time

There is also a team of business support and they are:

- Charlotte Ray
- Danielle Scott
- Joanna Filip
- Shelbi Calow

They can be contacted on:

- E: Adoption.Panel@adoptioneastmidlands.nottsc.gov.uk
- T: 0115 8043236

The business support team are managed by Steve Amess.

Panel Membership

Regulations specify the membership of adoption panels. There is a central list which is the complete membership of all panel members. There are requirements then for who sits on each individual panel and these people are taken from the central list.

Each panel is chaired by an independent panel chair who will usually be supported by a vice-chair. Each panel must also have a social work representative who must be a registered social worker with adoption based experience. Each panel must have at least one independent panel member. These will be people with experience either as an adopter or someone who has been adopted or been in care. Panels might also have other people with backgrounds related to adoption, education, therapy and those disciplines where there are connections to adoption.

Therefore, on our current central list we have the following experience:

- Registered social workers from different agencies and authorities
- Adopters
- Adopted people
- Foster carers
- Therapists
- Family and criminal law
- Family support workers
- Education
- Probation
- Health professionals

Each panel also has allocated to it a medical adviser. These can be voting panel members but might also just offer written advice, having read all the paperwork. In light of the recent demands on the health service written advice has been the more common practice.

We have also made a commitment, in the past year and looking forward, to improve the diversity of our panel membership in terms of identity as well as perspective. This continues to be a key component in the recruitment of new panel members.

Those attending panel

Panel is attended by social workers and applicants or prospective adopters.

Applications will be supported by social workers from Adoption East Midlands or social workers from an agency acting on behalf of Adoption East Midlands and the applicants seeking to become approved adopters. Applicants can bring a supporter to panel if they wish.

Matches will be supported by social workers from the local authority for the child which will be one of Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham or Nottinghamshire. Prospective adopters will attend and be accompanied by their social worker who will come either from Adoption East Midlands or if it is an inter-agency match it will be the agency that has approved the adopters. This could be any regional adoption agency or voluntary agency in the country.

Any plans presented to panel where birth parents have consented to adoption will be accompanied by the social worker for the child from any of the four local authorities. A legal adviser from the same local authority will also be invited to attend.

Consequently panel members tend to get to see regularly, adoption social workers from Adoption East Midlands and permanence team social workers from Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.



Panel Details

In 2025 we will be running the following panels:

Chatsworth Panel	Kedleston panel	Rufford panel	Wollaton panel	The Unity panel
Panel Chair Sue Stockdale	Panel Chair Satwinder Sandhu	Panel Chair Alison De Souza	Panel Chair Clive Harrison	Panel Chair Theresa Peltier
30th Jan	17th Jan	14th Jan	9th Jan	28th Jan
27th Feb	14th Feb	11th Feb	6th Feb	25th Feb
27th March	13th March	11th March	6th March	25th March
24th April	10th April	8th April	3rd April	24th June
29th May	8th May	13th May	8th May	29th July
26th June	12th June	10th June	5th June	30th Sept
24th July	10th July	8th July	3rd July	28th Oct
28th Aug	7th Aug	12th Aug	7th Aug	25th Nov
25h Sept	11th Sept	9th Sept	4th Sept	
23rd Oct	9th Oct	7th Oct	2nd Oct	
27th Nov	13th Nov	11th Nov	6th Nov	
18th Dec	11th Dec	9th Dec	4th Dec	

If there is a business need additional panels can be set up. The chair and membership of such a panel would be based on those people available from the central list.

Presenting families at Panel

The following are what would be heard at panel and the paperwork associated with them:

Application

In order for anyone to become an approved adopter their application has to be presented to an adoption panel. These are the documents that must be provided:

- Prospective Adopters Report or Adoption Assessment Report
- Medical Report
- Three references (only 1 can be a family member)
- Declaration of Compliance
- Front Sheet

Adoption Plans for Children

Most plans of adoption are contested in the court and therefore do not come to the adoption panel. In order for a relinquished child (where there is no court involvement) to have an adoption plan agreed by the local authority this must be presented to the adoption panel. This applies to all such plans for all four local authorities. These are the documents that must be provided:

- Child Permanence Report
- Adoption Medical Report
- Genogram

Matches

In order for a match between a child who has an adoption plan and prospective adopters to be agreed this must be presented to the adoption panel. These are the documents that must be provided:

- Adoption Placement Report
- Adoption Support Plan
- Updated Child Permanence Report
- Adoption Medical Report on the child
- Declaration of Compliance on the child
- Front Sheet for the child
- Prospective Adopters Report or Adoption Assessment Report (updated if necessary)
- Adoption Medical Report on the prospective adopters
- Declaration of Compliance on the prospective adopters
- Front Sheet for the prospective adopters
- Minutes of the Panel that approved the prospective adopters and the Agency Decision.

Termination of approval

Panels can also hear where the termination of approval for approved adopters needs to be heard, where this is either being contested by the approved adopters or where they have not indicated their agreement to the withdrawal of their approval. A single report giving details of the reasons and evidence will be provided by the adoption social worker. The adopters can also submit their own report.



Panel Process

The panel process involves panel's questions being shared with those coming to panel prior to panel and the answers to these questions being returned prior to panel. Subsequently a meeting then takes place on the panel day to offer opportunity for further questions to be asked and for the outcome at panel to be shared directly with the applicants/prospective adopters and with their social workers.

The questions that panel will feel it necessary to ask should relate to panel members' need to seek further information to inform the recommendation that they will make. This must not be a further assessment. The strength of each case and the quality of the paperwork presented therefore has a significant impact on the further information and clarification that is being sought through such questions.

Panel will also look to include either in the written questions or in any questions asked during the meeting, a question which represents the voice of the child. These questions have come from adopted children within the Adoption East Midlands region.

There are three forms that will be used as part of this process and as follows:

- Panel Member's Strengths and Questions
- Strengths Questions and Answers
- Record of Adoption Panel

For the process below, please note the significance of the distinction between days and working days. This is particularly important when considering weekends and bank holidays.

All information will be kept confidential. Panel members will access all their papers and make their contribution to all pre-panel activity through a secure SharePoint site.

Pre-panel	
At least 12 working days before panel	<p>All papers to be submitted to business support electronically.</p> <p>Once papers are in for each case they will be sent to the allocated medical adviser who will be producing written medical advice for the panel members.</p>
At least 10 working days before panel	<p>Papers are placed on Sharepoint for panel members to access. These papers will include a form (Panel Member's Strengths and Questions) onto which panel members are to record the strengths for each case and the questions they would want to ask for each case as well as any comments on the paperwork presented to panel.</p> <p>The agenda will also be sent out by business support and include the timings for each stage of the process</p> <p>For social workers with cases at panel, business support will send an individual notification of the timings</p>
5 working days before panel	Panel advice, medical and legal advice should be completed and put onto SharePoint by business support.
4 working days before panel	All panel members to have recorded on the form on SharePoint, their strengths and questions to the panel chair. They should then be available for the chair to collate so that they can be sent to those attending panel during the afternoon of the third working day before panel.
3 working days before panel	The chair will have determined the strengths and questions that are to be recorded and these will be put on the Strengths Questions Answers form. This will be sent to the panel adviser and to business support who will arrange for this to be sent out to the social workers for them to record their answer to each question. The social workers must consult with applicants/prospective adopters as this will be the means by which they can contribute to the process prior to panel on the day. The written answer to each question should therefore include the response from the applicants/prospective adopters as well as the social worker.
By noon the day before panel	The forms with the answers should be returned to panel business support by noon on the last working day before panel to give panel members time to read and consider their recommendation, or any additional information they may require, in preparation for the meeting to take place the following morning. These completed forms will be put onto SharePoint for panel members to access.

The Voice of the Child

Every family presented to panel will have a question asked that represents the voice of the child. These questions come from a list that was generated from work undertaken with our adopted young people/young adults across the Adoption East Midlands region. Panel may ask the questions as part of the written exercise prior to the panel meeting or they may keep this question to ask at the meeting.



The Day of Panel

Each family at panel will be allocated a time for a virtual meeting. Social workers will be required to attend, and adopters will be invited and should be encouraged to attend. For an application they may also bring a supporter.

Typically, the meeting will allow ten minutes for discussion and twenty minutes for an application and thirty minutes for a match. It is anticipated that the written answers already given to questions will significantly reduce what panel need to ask. For some cases this meeting may simply be a confirmation of what has already been covered. In other meetings it will need to ask clear and precise questions to enable the exploration of key issues that remain unresolved. There is therefore the possibility that panel may require extended time in such circumstances. With prior awareness of such issues this can be built into the timetable for panel.

The agenda for the panel will be set for the morning and will have twenty-minute breaks between each family. This allows time for a break between hearings but also as a way of allowing for any issues that might take more time than has been planned.

The meeting will go on to allow individual recommendations to be made.

Where further significant questions have had to be asked then the recommendations may be made away from the meeting. If the recommendation is then unanimously positive the meeting will resume so that the recommendations can be given with the applicants/prospective adopters and social workers present. If there is need to defer or the outcome is either negative or a majority positive

recommendation, then only the chair and the panel adviser will resume the meeting to inform the applicants/prospective adopters and the social workers.

Panel members are responsible for ensuring that their recommendations are not lengthy and that they contain statements that positively support their recommendation.

Any additional discussion and questions and answers will need to be minuted.

The outcome at panel can be a positive recommendation, a negative recommendation or be deferred. Panel can first consider deferring if further information and work is required. Otherwise, all panel members then make their recommendation.



Post Panel

After panel	The completed Record of Adoption Panel, including any minuted content, will be put onto SharePoint for the chair to agree for it to be signed off. This will then be sent by business support to the Agency Decision Maker for them to make their decision
7 working days after panel	The agency decision will need to be made. It is noted that there is now more time for this decision to be made and it is not unusual for this decision to be made early.
Once the decision has been made this will be put onto SharePoint so that panel members can see the conclusion of the panel or any significant developments.	

Post Decision

The full account of all panel activity for each family will be recorded on the Record for Adoption Panel. Part A of this record will contain all advice given, the strengths, the written questions asked and the written answers given as well as any further discussion at the panel meeting. Part B of this record will contain the strengths and the individual recommendations of each panel member and any advice offered. The full Record of Adoption panel (Parts A and B) will be put onto Mosaic for Adoption East Midlands and sent to any other participating agency or authority.

Business Support will record all decisions on Mosaic and in the process of doing so will alert social workers that the decision has been made. Social workers will then be the people who will inform the applicants or prospective adopters.

Adoption East Midlands will write to all applicants and prospective adopters to inform them of the decision and this letter will also include Part B of the Record of Adoption Panel.

Feedback

Panel welcome feedback and this is built into our process for those attending panel. Panel will also give feedback. This is on an individual basis to those presenting at panel as well as on a broader basis where practice issues have been identified.

The Adoption Process for Children

(For a small percentage of children who are relinquished this process will be different up to the event of the matching panel)

Event	Meaning
Review decision that adoption is the preferred option for the child	Those working with the child and family have concluded that adoption is the best way of securing the child's future and this has been agreed as a decision made by the independent reviewing officer
Agency Decision that the child should be placed for adoption	The agency decision maker has read the Child Permanence Report and Adoption Medical Report and made the decision that the child should have an adoption plan. This can now be presented to the court
Care Order	A care order will be granted where the court have been convinced through sufficient evidence that the local authority must act on behalf of the child. The local authority will share PR with the birth mother and usually the birth father.
Placement Order	This can usually be granted at the same time as the care order. This means that the court supports an adoption plan and gives the authority to place the child on an adoption basis with approved adopters.
Adoption panel and agency decision (matching)	This is the basis on which the particular adopter/s are agreed for the child. Consequently the child can be placed for adoption.
Adoption Order	Parental responsibility is removed from parents and from the local authority and given to the adopters. The child has been adopted.

The Adoption Process for Adopters

Event	Meaning
Stage 1	The applicants undertake training and statutory checks.
Notification to proceed to Stage 2	The applicants express their wish to move on to stage 2. The agency responds with a letter accepting this.
Stage 2	A full assessment is undertaken and the Adopters Assessment Report is completed.
Adoption panel and agency decision (approval)	By which the applicants become approved adopters.
Adoption panel and agency decision (matching)	The basis on which a particular match can be agreed by the local authority and the placement with prospective adopters can go ahead.
Adoption Order	Parental responsibility is removed from parents and from the local authority and given to the adopters. The child has been adopted.

Panel Membership Support

Structured support to all panel members will include two training events. These can either be an opportunity to meet and share experiences as well as discuss practice and/or they can be occasions for presentations on specific topics relevant to panel activity.

There are occasions when further training might be offered. This can be as part of the larger membership of Adoption East Midlands or if we are offered invites to external events. On these occasions numbers are often limited.

Panel members should also feel able to contact panel managers at any time to discuss any aspect of panel membership. For more practical information business support can be contacted.

Training dates:

- Wednesday 30th April 2025 – Managing risk in decision making and learnings from disruptions
- Wednesday 1st October 2025 – LGBTQ+ and adoption venue to be confirmed

As panels are virtual, every consideration will be given to offering training that allows panel members to meet up physically. Training is an opportunity for all panel members to meet without the pressure of the business of individual matters. The content may reflect the need to discuss direct panel matters but we are committed to also bringing in speakers to present on issues that relate to adoption practice.

At some point during 2025 all panel members will receive an individual review of their practice as panel members. This is also an opportunity to discuss other panel related matters. These will be undertaken by a panel manager and a panel chair. It will be a virtual meeting. The review of chairs is undertaken by a panel manager and an agency decision maker and will usually follow an observation of panel by the service manager for adoption panels.

Becoming a panel member

There are times when we will actively seek panel members. People can also approach the panel managers if they are interested in becoming a panel member. Our response to any enquiry will consider what you have to offer against the current make up of our central list of panel members and whether we are needing to recruit at all at the time of enquiry. We will always seek to have a central list that is diverse in both identity and adoption perspective.

Fees to panel members

Panel members are not employees as they must have an independent status. However, fees are paid for the work undertaken. These fees will always be reviewed and compared to those of other agencies. For 2025 they are as follows:

- Panel chair - £550
- Panel vice-chair - £250
- Panel member – £150

If a panel has to go ahead with only one case, then the fee paid will be half.

Panel chairs and vice chairs will be paid a yearly additional allowance to cover training attendance and additional responsibilities for chairs. Panel members will be paid £75 for attending each of the two training events.

Occasionally panel members will be offered the opportunity to attend additional training events. These are not covered by fees and are a personal choice.

Social work representatives will not be entitled to a fee if they are working for Adoption East Midlands. Those working for any of the four local authorities will need to discuss if they are sitting on panel independently or being given time to do this by their local authority.

New panel members

New panel members will undergo a process of further discussion and a DBS check as well as the taking up of two references. Once approved and registered onto the central list an induction session will be offered. There will then be the opportunity to observe a panel, including access to all panel papers and being part of the full panel processes pre and post panel. Ideally this will be the panel and the chair that they are most likely to be on and working with. Following an observation, discussion will take place to determine if the panel member is now ready to start or what further support may be needed.

We recognise that the current process makes it harder for new panel members to get to know their colleagues and therefore to familiarise themselves with practice and to integrate themselves into the panel membership. If practical, a buddy can be offered. Panel managers should also be contacted with any issues that may result from the uncertainties of being new to panel activity. A group meeting with new panel members can usually be offered too.

Confidentiality

Panel members have responsibility for keeping confidential all the information they receive and for not discussing such information away from relevant panel activity. They should also only base their recommendations on the information presented to them and therefore must not seek any information from any other source including social media accounts. Indeed, if they have previously had any involvement and access to any prior knowledge of any case coming to panel then this must be declared and could result in them not sitting for a particular family.

Reviews of Panel Business

- Wednesday 9th March 2025 at 10am – Meeting of panel managers, chairs and vice-chairs
- Wednesday 7th May 2025 at 10am – Annual Review of Panel Activity
- Wednesday 7th May 2025 at 11:30am – Meeting of panel managers, chairs and vice-chairs
- Wednesday 1st October 2025 at 9am – Panel Training, venue and topic to be decided
- Wednesday 5th November 2025 at 10am - Meeting of panel managers, chairs and vice-chairs

Teams and structure within AEM

- Shelagh Mitchell is the Adoption East Midlands Group Manager
- Lisa Drummond is the Service Manager for Recruitment and Assessment
- Melissa Adams is the Team Manager for Recruitment, Assessment and Placement
- Michelle Rice is the Team Manager for Recruitment, Assessment and Placement
- Jo Graney is the Team Manager for Recruitment, Assessment and Placement
- Maxine Bennett is the Team Manager for Recruitment, Assessment and Placement
- Toni Martin is the Team manager for Homefinding
- Jane Bolan is the Service Manager for Adoption Support and Panels
- Claire Elms is the Team Manager for Adoption Support
- Helen Redford is the Team Manager for Adoption Support
- Trescia Gallichan is the Team Manager for Adoption Support
- Vicky Pike is a Team Manager for Adoption Support and is the lead for the Multi Disciplinary Team
- This part of the service also includes the Adoption Panel Managers
- Steve Amess is the Business Support Officer managing business support across all the above services.

Associate Agencies

Adoption East Midlands works closely with Derby City, Derbyshire, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire local authorities. Each of these authorities has a permanence team who are the social workers that work with the children where adoption plans are made and consequently in most cases matches completed and placements supported for those children. Our agency decision makers are also based in these local authorities.

Derby City

The permanence team is managed by Jane Cupitt.

The agency decision maker is Suanne Lim.

Derbyshire

The permanence team is managed by Christy Knowles.

The agency decision maker is Pete Lambert.

Nottingham City

The permanence team is managed by Clare Hewitson.

The agency decision maker is Ailsa Barr.

Nottinghamshire

The permanence team is managed by Sarah Tomlinson and Kaneez Naqwi.

The agency decision makers are Sophie Eadsforth, Andy Wells and Jenny Whiston.

Glossary of Adoption Terminology

- **Adoption Support Fund**

This is a national financial resource. Applications can be made to the Adoption Support Fund to access financial support for a range of therapeutic services as identified by the local authority.

- **Bump Into Meetings**

In the process of workers and prospective adopters considering a match, these are occasions where the prospective adopters will have time with the child. It is part of the decision making process for those involved. It should not in any way impact on the recommendations that panel need to make, but may better inform those recommendations.

- **CPR**

This refers to the Child's Permanence Report. It is important to understand that whilst panel members will see this when a match is presented it also has many other uses. The CPR will contain the information that is used to present the case for the agency decision maker to agree that the local authority has an adoption plan for the child as well as for a judge to agree to a placement order being granted. Social workers and prospective adopters will have read it as their initial main source of knowledge about the child in considering the suitability of the match. Once a placement is made it will then be the adopter's main accessible source of information to explain to the child then and into the future the reason for them needing to be adopted and how they are identified with their birth family.

- **Fostering for Adoption**

The placement of a child with approved adopters on the basis of them being the child's foster carers. Should the adoption process conclude in the granting of a placement order and the panel and agency decision maker agree the match then the placement becomes an adoption placement. The great advantage in this is that the child is not required to move from a separate foster placement to the adoption placement and the child gets several earlier months with the prospective adopters. The outcome of the legal process however has been anticipated and therefore there is some uncertainty which does require careful calculation.

- **Later Life Letter**

This is a letter that the child's social worker will write to the child and which their adopters will give to them at the right age. It is a personal explanation directly to them regarding their history and why they are adopted.

- **Life Story Book and Work**

Age will determine how involved a child will be in life story work and what their participation in compiling a life story book will be. This is about giving the child access to information and photos that explains in simple language who their birth family are and the events that have taken place to cause them to be adopted. For older children the life story work will be a necessary part of their preparation for moving to an adoption placement. For all children the life story book should be readily available from the start of the placement as a direct tool to support understanding of their identity and history.

- **Sensory Awareness**

Adoption practice has realised the importance for all people and therefore especially for children who are starting life through times of trauma and change of how we all interact with the world around us. Senses can be heightened and lessened and act as triggers or pressures that could explain behaviour. Social workers will usually assess this prior to any therapeutic work with children.

- **Support Plans**

All matches presented to panel will be accompanied by a support plan for each child. Adoption East Midlands have initiated a new support plan and indeed a new approach to how families are supported. This involves introducing the concept of support as a thread that runs throughout all time, from first contact with ourselves to the years ahead when the challenges will be different.

- **Therapeutic Parenting**

Prospective adopters are given an understanding of therapeutic parenting and why this approach is necessary for children who have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences and early trauma. Therapeutic Parenting provides high structure / high nurture parenting that provides a feeling of safety and connectedness between the child and parents. This information is shared with prospective adopters throughout the approval process and they are introduced to the PACE model (parenting with Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) to inform their parenting, and are encouraged to enhance their knowledge through their own reading around this important area.

- **Virtual Reality**

Adoption East Midlands has the equipment and fully trained staff to use virtual reality to enable prospective adopters to engage with and replicate some of the traumatic experiences that our children may have had. This is a powerful and emotional connection to these events and it enables carers to get a better understanding of behaviour and related contributory factors.