**ABOUT ADOPTION**

Highland Council Fostering & Adoption Service needs adoptive parents for Highland children of all ages from very young children, older children up to the age of 8 years and sibling groups so that they can remain together. We also need adoptive parents for babies and toddlers with a disability or ill health, global developmental delay and for children of mixed parentage.

Adopting a child is one of the most challenging, but also one of the most rewarding things you can ever do. It is life changing for everyone involved. Highland Council are looking for adopters who can provide a loving, safe, secure and permanent home for children who cannot be looked after by their birth families. Like foster carers, adoptive parents come from a variety of backgrounds and applicants are welcomed regardless of their relationship status, sexuality, beliefs or ethnicity.

Adoption is a legal process, which allows someone other than the child’s birth mother and father to become their legal parent. Adoption can only be arranged by an Adoption Agency.

The final decision rests with the Court.

When a child is adopted, all parental responsibilities and rights are transferred from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. The child receives a new birth certificate with their name and the name of the adoptive parents. The original birth certificate is stored in the General Register House, Edinburgh. The adopted person can get a copy when they reach the age of 16. At 16, adopted children may also have access to their adoption records. These are kept by the Court, who granted the Adoption Order, and the Adoption Agency.

Most children who are placed with adoptive parents have lived with their birth families. This will always be part of their history. Some will have had positive relationships which need to continue in some form after the adoption.

For a small number of children it is not safe for them to return to the care of their parents and in these situations temporary carers look after the children until permanence plans are made for the remainder of their childhood. Relatives will be considered to care for the child permanently and if no one suitable is identified then depending on the child or young person’s age permanent foster care or adoption will be the plan for the child.

Adoptive parents need to be open and accepting of their child and need to know about their background, identity and why they are adopted.

Adopters will be given as much information as is known about the child and their family for you to explain to the child.

In Highland we usually place children with adopters on a fostering basis until the legal process has concluded. This means that prospective adopters are approved as Foster Carers as well as prospective adoptive parents.

**WE NEED ADOPTIVE PARENTS FOR:**

* Brothers and sisters
* School aged children
* Children and babies with disabilities or ill health
* Toddlers with uncertain development
* Children of mixed parentage

**WHO CAN APPLY?**

Applications are welcome from:

##### Couples

Couples who are married must have lived together for at least three years. They will be assessed as a couple and can apply to jointly adopt.

Couples who are not married must have lived together for at least three years. They will be assessed as a couple, and can apply to jointly adopt.

Couples who have entered into a civil partnership and have been together for at least three years can apply to jointly adopt.

You must tell us if you are still married to a previous partner but do not live with them.

### Single Persons

You will be assessed individually and may apply to adopt individually.

### Lower Age Limit

The minimum age limit on application to adopt is 21 years of age.

##### Upper Age Limit

The upper age for any application is normally 48 years. However, once approved you may be older when a child is placed.

We will consider placing children under 5 with approved adopters until one of you becomes 50 years of age. In the case of a school age child until the elder becomes 52.

There may be certain circumstances, when, because of the particular needs of a child or young person, that older applicants who might meet such needs may be considered

### Size of Family

We are interested in parents who already have children and those who do not.

### Fertility

If you are currently undergoing fertility treatment, please wait for this to finish and leave a period of at least 6 months from the treatment finishing, before you apply.

Where you live

Applications will only be accepted from people who live in the Highland Council area.

SMOKING

If anyone in your household smokes you will not be approved to care for children under 5 years of age, children who have complex health needs or breathing problems as they cannot be placed with you due to the potential impact on their health and development.

Assessment of Prospective Adopters

Adoptive parents have to be able to care for a child into adulthood. This requires commitment, skills and knowledge. The purpose of the assessment process is to ensure that you will be able to parent the child well, safely and securely. We carry out assessments in a variety of ways and normally they should be completed within a 6 month period.

**PREPARATION & ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS**

The first step is to attend a preparation course. You will learn more about adoption and if it is right for you and your partner/family. They are usually held over 3 days, or may be held on several evening sessions, if there are two applicants both must attend all the sessions.

Following your attendance at the Preparation Course you should complete the online application form if you wish to proceed to the next stage.

Once the service has received your application your assessment will be allocated to a Fostering & Adoption social worker to complete. The purpose of the assessment process is to identify your skills, competencies and experience of parenting and how you can use these to help children reach their full potential. The assessment process is very thorough and as an agency, we must ensure that there is no reason why you cannot be entrusted with the care of someone else’s child.

### THE ASSESSMENT MUST INCLUDE:

### PVG Membership & Enhanced Disclosure

### An application for membership to the PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) Scheme will be carried out for all applicants. If you have a criminal record it does not necessarily mean that you cannot foster/adopt a child, it depends on the offence and when it happened. There are some types of offence which would prevent you from being approved as an adoptive parent.

### All other adults in the household age 16+ years will require to have an Enhanced Disclosure. This will be updated every two years.

### Local Authority Checks

### In your application form you will be asked to give a list of your previous addresses. Checks will be made with the Local Authorities where you have lived since the age of 16 years. These checks are carried out to find out if you have had any previous contact with Social Work Services, which might suggest you should not adopt a child.

### Medical Reports

Your GP will be required to give you a medical examination to determine if you are medically fit to have the full-time care of a child. Disability or illness does not necessarily mean that you cannot be an adoptive parent. However, your ability to look after a child throughout its childhood will be assessed by the Medical Adviser to the Adoption/Permanence Panel.

### References

### You will be asked to give the names of 3 people who can give you a personal reference. One of them should be a member of your own family and the other 2 should know you in your personal life rather than professionally in the way a Doctor or Minister might do. Your Social Worker will also be asked to interview two of your referees. Referees who can comment on you skills in caring for children are particularly welcomed.

We will also be in contact, where appropriate, with previous partners and any children of your own or from previous relationships, to seek their views.

Employers References

We will request a reference from your current or last employer. We may also ask a previous employer for a reference where your job has involved caring for or working with children.

Health Visitors Report

A Health Visitor’s report will be requested if you have recently cared for a child under the age of 5 years.

### Educational Reference

We will contact the school of any child under the age of 18 years who was or is in your care, for a reference of your involvement with the school or nursery.

Other Adults

Other adults living in your household will be asked to consent to Police and medical reports. An enhanced disclosure will be required.

We will also ask for consent to contact previous partners of the applicants, where appropriate and/or adult children, for references or information.

### Documentation

You will be asked to produce your birth certificate, marriage certificate and any other relevant certificates, e.g. Extract Decrees of Divorce, gun licence.

### HOME STUDY

You and your Social Worker will work together with your assessment to provide evidence of your skills and abilities. You must show that you are competent to care for children in the following ways:

*CARING FOR CHILDREN*

* 1. *An ability to provide a good standard of care to children which promotes healthy emotional, physical, sexual and intellectual development throughout childhood and into adulthood.*
	2. *An ability to accept the individual child as he/she is.*
	3. *An ability to provide care appropriate to the individual child as she/he is.*
	4. *Knowledge of child development and an ability to listen to and communicate with children appropriate to their emotional age and understanding.*
	5. *An ability to set appropriate boundaries, and manage children’s behaviour within these.*

*PROVIDING A SAFE AND CARING ENVIRONMENT*

*2.1 An ability to ensure that children are cared for in a home where they are safe from harm or abuse*

*2.2 An ability to help children keep themselves safe from harm or abuse, and to know how to seek*

 *help if their safety is threatened.*

*2.3 An ability to recognise the particular vulnerability of disabled children to abuse and*

 *discrimination.*

WORKING AS PART OF A TEAM

3.1 An ability to work with other individuals and organisations and act as an advocate for the child

*3.2 An ability to communicate effectively.*

*3.3 An ability to keep information confidential.*

*3.4 An ability to understand the implications of the effects of discrimination and racism.*

*3.5 An ability to promote an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory approach to parenting.*

ADOPTION AS A LIFE-LONG PROCESS

*4.1 An ability to understand and meet the children’s needs in relation to their birth family and past*

 *history.*

*4.2 An understanding that adoption is a life-long process and an ability to seek appropriate post*

 *adoption support at different stages.*

*4.3 An ability to understand and promote a young person’s development towards adult status.*

OWN DEVELOPMENT

*5.1 An ability to appreciate how personal experiences have affected themselves and their families,*

 *and the impact adoption is likely to have on them all.*

*5.2 An ability to develop a support system within the community and personal networks appropriate*

 *to the adoption task.*

*5.3 An ability to use training opportunities and improve skills.*

*5.4 An ability to sustain positive relationships and maintain effective functioning through periods of*

 *stress.*

**PERMANENCE PANEL**

All the information gathered during your assessment is presented to the Highland Council’s Adoption & Permanence Panel. The Panel is made up of representatives from the Highland Council’s Social Work services, Health, Education and Legal Services. You will be asked to attend the second part of the meeting, to discuss your application. Your Social Worker will be there. The panel makes a recommendation about your suitability to be an adoptive parent and the age and number of children you can adopt.

**DECISION**

# You will receive a letter within 28 days of attending the panel to tell you whether your application to become a prospective adoptive parent has been successful. This decision will be based on the information provided and the recommendation of the Permanence Panel. This decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker and will be based on the information provided and the recommendation of the Fostering Panel.

If you disagree with the decision, you can appeal within 28 days to the Director of Care & Learning, who will arrange for an alternative panel out with Highland Council to reconsider the decision. If this meeting endorses the original decision there is no further appeals process within the Agency.

**AFTER APPROVAL**

Once you have been approved, your Social Worker will remain in contact with you. We will ask you to consider Highland children who need an adoptive family. Information will be shared with you about the child and you will be given the opportunity to meet the people involved in the child’s care to find out more about them.

##### **UPDATING YOUR ASSESSMENT**

There will be an annual review held which will include an update to the medical reports and any changes in your circumstances and this will be presented to the Adoption/Permanence panel with a recommendation for continued approval or a change in your approval. Other adults in your household Enhanced Disclosures are updated every two years. Should a match be planned it is important that any changes in your circumstances is made known to your social worker and your medical update has been carried out within the last twelve months.

**THE RIGHT FAMILY FOR THE CHILD (MATCHING)**

Any child needing a permanent family is considered by the Permanence Panel. The panel members consider the child’s identify, their health, social, emotional and educational needs. They make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to the legal route to secure the child on a permanent basis, take into consideration any matching criteria and to match the child to a family that can meet those needs. These recommendations will be based on the information and assessment carried out by the child’s social worker and presented to the Permanence Panel.

The birth parents are encouraged to be involved in the selection of the family for their child; the child will know that they have helped to choose the new parents. It may also help the birth parents feel that they have done everything in their power to give the child a secure future.

The matching process ensures all prospective adopters are considered for every child in their age range, until the family who are best able to meet all the particular needs of that child or children is identified.

Children are also registered on Scotland’s Adoption Register and Link Maker to widen the opportunities and choice in identifying permanent families. Link Maker took over the management of Scotland’s Adoption Register on behalf of the Scottish Government. We now have access to the largest adoption matching database in the UK. Prospective adopters can also be registered o this data base.

Approval as a prospective adopter is not a guarantee that a child will be placed with you.

**ADOPTION SUPPORT**

We expect that you and the child you adopt may need help in the future.

Your child may need continuing help to understand their past. This may be something you can do within your own family. Often the knowledge and skills of someone outside the family is essential. The Fostering & Adoption service provide adoption support for the adults. To get the appropriate help and support for the child you should speak to your GP, health visitor, or school. Social work and education may also be able to assist.

Before the adoption order is granted we will discuss what might be helpful given the child’s known history. Previous abuse, neglect, or even uncertainty can produce ongoing worries in the child. These must be understood and worked on.

### Adoptive Allowance

### The Council has an adoption allowance scheme, which adoptive parents may join. The needs of the child and the income of the adopters are taken into account before a decision is made to grant an allowance and this is reviewed regularly.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PROCEEDING PLEASE COMPLETE THE ONLINE ENQUIRY FORM.**