

There for you every step of the way
Yma i chi, bob cam o'r ffordd



Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin

Information for Adopters



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Information for Potential Adopters

Contents

Who are we?	4
What is adoption?	4
Who can adopt – eligibility?	5
What are we looking for?	5
When adoption might not be the right way forward	7
The children waiting for adoption	7
Concurrent planning	8
Your pathway to adoption	8
The steps to adoption	10
Contact with birth family and relatives	13
Adoption Support	13
Post-adoption support	14
What is the next step?	14
Further information	15
<i>Registration of Interest Form – please complete and return if you wish to proceed with your enquiry.</i>	17

Foreword

As the Head of Service, for the Host Local Authority for the Western Bay Adoption Service, I would like to thank you for coming to our adoption service to enquire about adoption.

Western Bay Adoption Service is a collaboration of three local authority agencies (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea), hosted by the City and County of Swansea.

The three local authorities are committed to the health, safety, education and welfare of all children living in the region. We know that children thrive and achieve most when they are cared for in a safe, caring, nurturing family.

For children that cannot remain with their birth family, we believe that adoptive parents are best able to provide this family environment.

Our guide to the Western Bay Adoption Service has been designed to give you an overview of the adoption process and to answer any of the questions you may have, and some you may not have thought of, about embarking on your adoption journey.

We know adoption is a very big decision, a lifelong commitment. If you decide you would like to embark on this wonderful journey our dedicated staff will be with you, every step of the way.

You have already taken the first step and we very much appreciate that.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Howes', is written over a rectangular box. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Dave Howes

Head of Service

Who Are We?

Western Bay Adoption Service is a collaboration of three local authority adoption agencies, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea.

Operating in South Wales, we assess adopters from not only the region but further afield - enabling children to have opportunities to be placed both within Wales and where needed, outside of the area.

With our dedicated, skilled and committed staff, we have a proven track record of delivering excellent adoption services for children and all those affected by adoption.

What is Adoption?

Adoption is a lifelong commitment to a child. It is a legal process by which parental responsibility for a child or young person is given to a new parent or parents.

Adoption means that children who cannot be cared for by their birth parents can still have the chance to grow up as part of a caring family; a permanent family home where a child can thrive.

Adoption is a permanent, life-long commitment to a child. It means being able to provide a stable, loving home that gives a child a chance to be happy, achieve their best and feel that they have parents who are there for them.

Children need parents who can stick by them through good times and the bad. They may need extra support to overcome a troubled past, make sense of who they are and grow up feeling safe.

This gives a sense of security, which is essential to develop the ability to relate well to other people. Adoptive parents have the ability to offer this safe and nurturing environment.

Who Can Adopt?

We need adopters from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures who will help children to understand their heritage. We are especially keen to

attract adopters to can meet the diverse needs of the children in our care. Your own race, age, religious, cultural or social background should not be a barrier to adoption. People who adopt can be single, married, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, employed or on benefits, and from any religious or ethnic group.

We would like prospective adopters to consider what their own background and life experience could bring to help a child establish their identity and sense of belonging.

To apply to adopt you must be over 21 years of age and preferably older. Although there is no legal upper age limit, you need to have a reasonable expectation of parenting a child into adult life and as such you will need to have a reasonable standard of health.

Adoption can be very demanding, physically and emotionally. This is why age, health and lifestyle of all applicants is considered as part of the assessment process. Being disabled does not exclude you from adopting. If you have any questions about any aspect of your eligibility you can discuss this with the Adoption Service.

If you are in a partnership (heterosexual or same sex, married, in a civil partnership or living together) the expectation is that both applicants are assessed together and that you have lived together in a stable relationship. We do not specify the length of relationship but you will need to evidence that your relationship is strong and has endured some pressures.

Most importantly you will have the ability to develop into a parent that can care and help a child to achieve the best they can be.

What are we looking for?

Adoption is a service for children. We find that the most successful adopters are those who show an ability to empathise with the child. They may already have birth or adopted children or have had experience of children through their own extended family or friends.

Alternatively, they may have experience through volunteering or work with children.

Adopters are patient, are able to cope with some uncertainty, have a flexible approach to life and know the value of seeking help and support from family, friends and professionals.

We understand that for many potential adopters you are keen to get started on the adoption journey quickly. However, there may be circumstances that mean you may need to consider carefully if the time is right for you. For example, you may need time:

- after you have completed infertility treatment
- after a miscarriage
- after a family bereavement

We do not specify a time that must have elapsed but our adopters have told us that it helped them to have a period of time to recover from these difficult events.

As we need to consider the home you live in, those who are about to move or have recently moved may need time to ensure they have completely settled in. Moving home can be stressful and unsettling and as such you might need time to adjust before any new family members arrive.

As your health is important, if you are undergoing any medical treatment which may affect your ability to engage fully in the adoption process you should wait. You can discuss this with the Adoption Service for further advice.

It is important to provide children with a healthy lifestyle and adopters need to understand the importance of this for themselves and for their adopted child. If you wish to adopt a child who is under five years, you should be a non-smoker. Whilst we do not specify how long you must have ceased smoking, you will need to have not smoked for one year before you can be approved as an adopter.

The most important thing is that when you apply to adopt a child, you are at a time in your life when you are able to focus fully upon the adoption process and the needs of the child or children you wish to adopt.

If you already have a child living with you it will be important for you and them to have an age gap between the children. Therefore, we recommend at least one year between your youngest child and the child you adopt. Also, your new adopted child needs to be the youngest in the family.

When adoption may not be the right way forward

Adoption is about being fully able to meet a child or young person's needs and providing a settled and stable home. Consequently, there are certain personal difficulties that may adversely affect your likelihood of being approved as an adopter.

For example, any of the situations below may prevent your application to adopt:

- Serious mental health problems
- Alcohol or drug dependency
- When you, or a member of your household, have a criminal record relating to violent or abusive crimes against children or adults.
- Not being a permanent UK resident
- Not having a settled or stable lifestyle
- At a time of change e.g. moving house, changing career etc.
- Having had a child of your own taken into care in the past or if there have been concerns about your parenting.

Certain laws affect who can, or cannot be approved as adopters. We are happy to discuss any of these issues with you. Please contact us if you are not sure whether something may apply to you, as we still welcome your interest.

The children waiting for adoption

At any given time the numbers of children waiting for adoption can change so it is difficult in this leaflet to give an up to the minute picture of what children might be waiting. We do know that many adopters wish to have children as young as possible, with very few needs.

However, whilst we have many children needing an adoptive family whose ages range from under one year to much older, we particularly need adopters for -

- Babies and young children whose development may be affected by birth parents' substance or alcohol misuse.
- Children who may be affected by parental mental health or learning difficulties.

- Children over three years of age
- Sibling groups of two or more children
- Disabled children of all ages
- Children with emotional or behavioural difficulties linked to their early childhood experiences.
- Children of dual heritage.

A safe, permanent home is vital for all these rewarding children who respond very positively to their new families.

Western Bay Adoption Service is keen to encourage applications from people offering adoptive homes to children in these groups and, where necessary, can prioritise assessments for children waiting.

Concurrent planning

We are also very keen to recruit people who would consider being approved as adopters and foster carers. These carers would foster a child whilst other options are being considered by the Courts.

In most cases these placements lead to the carers being given the Court's permission to apply to adopt the child; however, it is also possible that the Court may decide that the child may ultimately live with birth family.

This process offers the advantage of a placement of a very young child. As different permanence plans for the child are being considered alongside each other, we call this concurrent planning.

If you think you could consider this valuable type of placement, please talk to us in more detail.

Your pathway to adoption

From the moment you first consider adopting you are on a journey to discover if adoption is right for you and what kind of parent you might be.

That journey is undertaken together with the child's social workers and staff at the adoption service, whose job it is to make sure that prospective

adopters are the best possible parents for the children in need of a home. The first part of the journey needs you to map out the route and learn about adopting and parenting a child.

1. Exploration:

Your adoption journey starts with exploration about the road ahead.

2. Contact us:

Phone, e-mail or write to us and talk to an adoption worker. You will be sent an information pack and invited to have a visit from an adoption social worker.

Telephone 0300 365 2222 (local rate)

E-mail enquiries@westernbayadoption.org

Address Western Bay Adoption Service
Civic Centre
Port Talbot
SA13 1PJ

3. If you have asked for written information only, you will have been sent this pack and a Registration of Interest (ROI) form. If you fill in the ROI and send it back to us we will make an appointment with you for a home visit.
4. A home visit will be undertaken, where the social worker will discuss with you any specific issues relating to your circumstances. They will give you more information about the assessment process, what is involved and the time scale. The social worker will complete a short report of the visit and discuss with the Recruitment and Assessment Manager. You will be aware of the social worker's recommendation as they will share this with you during the visit.
5. If you wish to proceed, and the Adoption Service wishes to proceed, you will be invited to complete an application form. You will also need to provide the names of referees and all the places you have lived previously. In addition, you will be required to visit your GP for a medical and will complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

6. The Assessment will then commence. You will be allocated a social worker to complete the detailed home study. This will include attending a preparation course.
7. The assessment report will be shared with you for your comments. You and your adoption worker will attend a panel where your application is considered. The Panel will make a recommendation but a senior manager, the Agency Decision Maker, will make the final decision.
8. Once you are approved as an adopter, it will be important to find the right child and this can take time. When everyone is happy to proceed, the Panel will be asked to consider the match.
9. After a planned programme of introductions, the child will move in with you. You will continue to have the support of your assessing social worker but the child's social worker will also visit you until the Court makes the Adoption Order.

The steps to adoption

If at first it seems that there are many steps to climb before you are approved to adopt, remember that adoption is a lifelong commitment. Together we need to be really sure that it is the right way forward.

The process can be divided broadly into four stages:

- Enquiry and Initial visit
- Information exchange
- Preparation and Assessment
- Approval

1 Enquiry and Initial visit

You can enquire through our website, or by phoning us. This will be your chance to share with us your reasons for considering adoption and for us to explore with you if this is the right time for you to apply. If we agree, then you will be asked to apply. During this enquiry stage and the initial visit it is important to mention any past problems or issues in your life as early as possible in the process as this may help avoid difficulties with your application later on. Issues such as mental or physical health problems or unresolved relationship issues are important for us to know

about and discuss with you. We need to be confident that we can work together in an open and trusting manner so will ask you to be as open as you can be. We need to be sure, as do you, that adoption is the right choice for you at this time.

2 Information exchange

If you and the agency agree it is appropriate to proceed, you will be asked to complete some documentation, providing the adoption service with information that will be used to undertake checks to assess your suitability to become an adopter. This information will include for example, details of your GP, places where you have lived and the names of referees.

You will also be asked to complete an application so that we can make the necessary statutory checks for the assessment. We take seriously how we manage your personal data. Please see our Data Protection & Privacy Statement: Information provided under the GDPR Articles 13 and 14.

3 Preparation and Assessment

You will be visited weekly (usually) by your adoption social worker. Ideally these visits will be in standard office working hours, but we can also accommodate visits outside of these times. The visits and assessment ideally should be completed within 5 months but could be shorter or longer depending on your input or personal circumstances.

The assessment will be a two-way process where as well as being assessed, you will be given information to help prepare you as adopters.

One aspect of this information is the pre-approval training course. All adopters need to attend this course, run over 3-4 days. The training is a valuable opportunity to meet with other prospective adopters and members of the adoption team as well as approved adopters who have already been through the process.

As the assessment progresses, the other checks will be underway. These will include your DBS and local authority checks. It will also include your medical report and enquiries of the areas where you have previously lived.

One aspect that will also be explored is your previous relationships and this will be especially important where there may have been children

involved. If you have children that are adults, we may wish to interview them as well as your previous partners - but will only do so after discussing this with you.

The medical is to ensure that you are likely to remain sufficiently healthy to be able to parent a child through to adulthood. You will not be responsible for the cost of this medical but may need to contribute to any extra medical enquiries if necessary.

Smoking, alcohol consumption, lifestyle and weight issues are taken into consideration. In the light of an increased recognition nationally of the harmful effects of smoking, Western Bay Adoption Service and the Local Authority Adoption Agencies have a policy in relation to this. As a result of the significant risks to children from passive smoking we will not place a child under the age of five with anyone who smokes unless there are exceptional circumstances.

You may be wondering why there are so many checks. These are to provide the fullest possible picture of you. Sadly, there have been cases where adoptive parents have been evasive about their past behaviour and personal history which has led to unsafe placements for children.

Legislation requires all adoption agencies to carry out a wide range of checks. Children in care can be very vulnerable; therefore, we need to safeguard their welfare when we place them for adoption.

4 Approval

Once your assessment is complete you will be given a copy of the report by your social worker to read. It will contain the information we have collected about you, except for the references which are confidential.

Your assessment will then be presented to the Western Bay Adoption Panel which meets approximately three times a month and in venues across the region. You will be invited with you your adoption worker to attend the panel. This is not mandatory but adopters tell us that they have found it is an important aspect of the process.

The Panel is made up of a range of members, including those who have experienced adoption, social workers, independent members and a Medical Advisor. Panel can recommend to approve, not to approve or to defer a case for more information. If the recommendation of the Panel is

to approve and this is ratified by a senior officer, the agency decision maker (ADM), you will then be approved as an adopter and we will start to link you with children needing adoption.

In the event that the ADM does not approve you as an adopter, there is an Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) that can consider your case.

You will be provided with more information about the IRM at the beginning of your assessment. At all times, we aim to provide continuing information and support to help applicants achieve the most appropriate outcome of their application. We welcome all feedback that assists us to do this.

Contact with birth family and relatives

A child's life does not begin the day they are adopted. They have roots and origins that cannot be ignored. Children will have a life story book which will explain their story and why they cannot live with their birth family.

This book is very important to children and is usually one of the first stages of helping a child explore their past. They may also have some very personal items from their past which will need to be kept for them.

Keeping in touch with birth relatives can help young people understand about their roots. It can also sometimes make it easier to come to terms with their personal history. It can provide a sense of continuity in their lives and help the child to attach fully to their adoptive family.

Research has shown that where contact works well, the child grows up having a more realistic view of their birth relatives. It encourages greater openness about adoption and the adoptive placement is more likely to be successful.

Contact with birth family members is important for many children, adoption is now far more 'open' than in the past, and it is generally accepted that links with significant family members can be a positive experience for all involved.

Most of the contact is indirect and is usually arranged through the exchange of letters - using the Letterbox Scheme to ensure addresses are kept confidential.

In some cases it may be appropriate for a child to have face-to-face contact or direct contact with a birth family member who supports the adoption.

Most often the direct contact is with siblings who are also in adoptive placements. Such arrangements are supported by the adoption service, again with all the necessary confidentiality of location being maintained.

Adoption Support

Adopting can be quite a personally challenging journey but you will have an allocated worker to guide you through the whole process. We will ensure you have clear information about how you are getting on and the timescales.

You will attend a preparation course and be expected to undertake additional reading and learning in your own time. You will also receive full information about any child being considered and have the opportunity to speak with those directly involved in the child's care - including carers and medical professionals.

This enables you to consider fully the implications for parenting a particular child before coming to a decision. You will receive full written information prior to placement.

We will continue to offer you support after adoption through groups and events with other adoptive families in addition to more intensive support from the Adoption Service, where this is required.

Post-Adoption Support

We recognise that adoptive parenting brings with it particular and sometimes challenging issues for both adopters and their children, and for this reason all involved need to feel that on-going support is always available.

The Western Bay Adoption Service has a number of social workers who are dedicated to post-adoption support. Post-adoptive services offer on-going support throughout the process and adopters are assisted to obtain the help they need, when they need it.

These services can also facilitate resolving any problems that may arise in maintaining contact arrangements with the birth family. Similarly, where children are seeking information about birth family members, or other information from their past - the post-adoption support service can help.

A post-adoption social worker will be able to assist children and their adoptive families to identify where to find the help they may need. This will include help with behaviour and therapeutic needs.

Support groups we run cater for all – ranging from adopters only to groups that include children as well.

Adopters are encouraged to join a local support group to help build for themselves a local network of support with other adoptive parents. There are a number of these groups held across the region.

What is the Next Step?

Decide whether it is the right time for you to adopt. Contact the adoption service and speak to a social worker for more information – it's as simple as that.

You will need to complete the Registration of Interest form at the end of this information.

If you would like to pursue your interest further or wish to talk to someone about adoption please contact us at:

Telephone	0300 3652222 (local rate)
E-mail	enquiries@westernbayadoption.org
Address	Western Bay Adoption Service Civic Centre Port Talbot, SA13 1PJ

Further Information

Our website - westernbayadoption.org

National Adoption Service – adoptcymru.org

Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru – afacymru.org.uk

Adoption UK – adoptionuk.org

Recommended reading

Adopting a Child – A Guide for People Interested in Adoption, BAAF
Parenting Matters series, BAAF

Many issues covered including parenting a child with developmental delay, with emotional and behavioural difficulties or those affected by parental substance misuse.

Pink Guide to Adoption: Pink Guide to Adoption for Lesbians and Gay Men, BAAF
Essential step by step guide for lesbians and gay men considering adoption

Adopters on Adoption, David Howe

Collection of personal stories covering assessment, feelings about birth mothers, infertility and parenting insecure children.

An Adoption Diary, Maria James

Real life account of an adoption from assessment to matching and parenthood.

Details of accommodation (e.g. type of property):			
How would you describe your ethnic background/culture?			
Religion (are you practising or nominal?):			
Age/s and gender of child/children desired:			
If you are childless, have you sought infertility advice treatment?			
Are the investigations/treatment concluded?		If so, when?	
Have you had any contact with this agency, or any other agency, regarding adoption?			
We are very pleased to hear from you. Can you tell us how you found out about Western Bay Adoption?			
Our usual working hours are 8.30-5pm. We may prioritise applicants who can be visited in working hours. However, if you cannot accommodate visits during these times, please indicate what would be the best time to visit you.			
Please confirm you are aware that we need to complete statutory checks with any local authority where you have lived to undertake records check, and any other relevant checks such as medicals and DBS as well as taking references?			
Yes / No			
Do you have any pets at the home, Cats, Dogs other? This will not impact on your application but may be of significance in allocating which worker will undertake home visits.			
Any other information you feel may be relevant?			
Signatures:			
Applicant 1:		Applicant 2:	
For office use only:	Action:	Initials:	Date:

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