

Dear prospective adopters,

I am writing this letter, to keep you informed on how we are going to tackle the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on your adoption assessment process. As with so much of all our lives right now, we are in uncharted territory in a rapidly changing landscape and finding our way through as best we can. Your patience and your support are appreciated. I hope by now that you have had some contact with your social worker and have some plans in place.

In Adoption West have been putting plans in place which aim to progress your assessments as far as we possible can. We have been speaking with other Regional Adoption Agencies around the country and the DfE about the regulations for adoption assessments. This has been to share ideas about how we can work virtually, whilst abiding by the rules for social distancing. It is also important for the children who need permanent adopted families that we try to ensure that we can meet those needs and have adopters available.

We are developing plans to deliver training on a virtual basis via Zoom. If you have booked on to your training our trainers Catherine and Raychel will be in contact with you. They plan to run the first virtual stage 1 course on 6th April. Following this they will be refining the courses as they develop these techniques.

You can register for a Basic free account with Zoom here: <https://zoom.us/pricing>

We are also planning to run Adoption panels on a virtual basis and the first will go ahead on 2nd April.

If you are in Stage 2 with all your checks and references completed and your social worker has visited your home during Stage 1 and/or Stage 2. Then with your agreement and assistance we will plan to continue with your assessment with virtual sessions including progression to panel when this is recommended.

For those of you in Stage 1 of the assessment process, we are hoping to still be able to undertake most of the necessary checks and references in as timely a fashion as possible. But this may be affected by for example employers working arrangements. We can now

complete the verification of ID for DBS checks virtually, but they may be impacted themselves in terms of staffing, so there is likely to be a slowdown in response time. Of most concern are the medical checks. Understandably this is something that the NHS is unable to prioritise, at this time. All these issues have been raised with the DfE and we are awaiting guidance as to how we can progress your assessments from Stage 1. We are hopeful that this guidance will be with us in the coming weeks. In the meantime, we do plan to continue with your Stage 1 assessment and will keep up to date with developments. Please continue with your workbooks and reading around the subject of adoption and this will be time well spent as your assessment progresses.

We realise fully that these are unsettling times, and for some people there will be disappointment at the process slowing down. We are working to keep things moving forward and hope you will work with us to do so.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns or questions, you will have your Social Worker's contact details. Like much of the country we are now working from home, but our lines have been diverted. If you do not have your Social Worker's number you can still reach us on 03303 550 333, but please bear with us. You can also check our social media pages for updates (www.facebook.com/adoptionwest and www.twitter.com/adoptionwest)

Thank you for your continued support at this challenging time. Please stay safe and take care of yourselves.

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