

## Adopt North East Partnership

### Dispute Escalation and Resolutions Process

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Author/s	Nik Flavell, Senior Manager, Adopt North East
Owner	Adoption Practice Leadership Group
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#### Introduction

The Adopt North East Regional Adoption Agency provides adoption services on behalf of Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council and South Tyneside Council. It has delegated responsibility for recruiting, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and commissions a specialist service in relation to intercountry adoptions.

Adopt North East works in partnership with the five Local Authority partners to family find for children with a plan of adoption and those requiring Early Permanence. The five partner Local Authorities retain overall care planning responsibility for children in their care.

Adopt North East is also delegated to provide support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives.

On occasions, a Local Authority partner or Adopt North East may feel it appropriate to challenge the decision-making of the other. This Dispute Escalation and Resolution process is intended to enable problems to be resolved in a proportionate, timely and purposeful way and, ultimately, to do so in the best interests of the children, young people and families.

## **Escalation and Resolution Process**

All practitioners from across the partnership are responsible for seeking and securing professional agreement about decisions for children wherever possible. Where this cannot reasonably be achieved and there is a dispute about a decision which would materially impact the care plan or potential outcomes for the child, the practitioner should escalate the concern to seek resolution to the dispute identified.

### Informal Resolution

Wherever possible the practitioner should seek resolution through bringing the matter to the attention of the child or family's allocated social worker. They should do so as soon as they become aware of an issue in dispute as delay can result in resolution becoming more difficult to achieve.

If raising and discussing the matter informally does not achieve satisfactory resolution, the practitioner should notify their own Team Manager.

It will be the decision of the Team Manager whether to raise the issue under Stage 1 of the Formal Resolution process, raise the issue informally with their counterpart Team Manager or accept the decision.

### Formal Resolution Process – Stage 1

The Team Manager should raise the issue by email in writing with their counterpart. The email should be marked 'High Importance' and include details of attempts to resolve the problem informally. The Team Manager must clearly state the problem identified and may recommend the resolution sought.

Within a maximum of five working days the receiving Team Manager should respond in writing, by email, either detailing the actions already taken to resolve the problem or proposed actions to resolve the problem which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited. The responding email should also be marked 'High Importance'.

Finally, the Team Manager who raised the concern should then respond to the Team Manager by email, marked 'High Importance' with a brief acknowledgement as to whether the actions taken or proposed to resolve the problem are agreed and accepted. If there is no agreement and/or satisfactory resolution, the Team Manager should notify their Line-Manager (Service Manager/Senior Manager). It will be the decision of their Line Manager whether to raise the issue under Stage 2 of the Formal Resolution process.

## Formal Resolution Process – Stage 2

The Service Manager should raise the issue by email with their counterpart. The email should mark the email 'High Importance' and include details of attempts to resolve the problem informally. The Service Manager must clearly state the problem identified and may recommend the resolution sought.

Within a maximum of five working days the receiving Service Manager should respond in writing, by email, either detailing the actions already taken to resolve the problem or proposed actions to resolve the problem which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited. The email should be marked 'High Importance'.

Finally, the Service Manager who raised the concern should then respond to the Team Manager by email, marked 'High Importance' with a brief acknowledgement as to whether the actions taken or proposed to resolve the problem are agreed and accepted. If there is no agreement and/or satisfactory resolution, the Service Manager should notify their Line-Manager (Assistant Director/Head of Service). It will be the decision of their Line Manager whether to raise the issue under Stage 3 of the Formal Resolution process.

## Formal Resolution Process – Stage 3

Where no satisfactory resolution to the problem has been achieved at Stage 2, the Assistant Director/Head of Service for the organisation in dispute will convene a meeting (Virtual or in-person) within five working days with the relevant Team Managers, Service Managers and Head of Service. The meeting should seek to agree proposed actions to resolve the problem which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited. Minutes of the Meeting will be taken.

If there is no satisfactory agreement and/or resolution, the Assistant Director/Head of Service should instigate Stage 4 of the formal Resolution process.

## Formal Resolution Process – Stage 4

Where no satisfactory resolution to the problem has been achieved at Stage 3, the Assistant Director/Head of Service will raise it with their counterpart within five working days. The Assistant Director should seek to agree proposed actions to resolve the problem which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited. Minutes of the Meeting will be taken.

This is the final stage of the Resolutions Process. The Resolutions Process should take no more than 20 working days in total to seek to achieve a resolution.

## **Examples of where the Escalation and Resolutions Process may be used**

In practice, it is not possible within this guidance to provide an exhaustive list of every 'problem' that would require escalation under the process. However, the following list may be regarded as indicative of the type of problems that may be appropriate to escalate.

- Incomplete documentation;
- Social Work Visits not undertaken to the agreed level;
- Non-attendance at meetings;
- Where the views and wishes of the child are not sufficiently known to inform care planning;
- Where one or more decisions agreed have not been acted upon and completed within the timescale agreed;
- Where there is 'drift and delay';
- Where there is deviation from the agreed plan;
- Where there is a change to the agreed plan;
- Where there is a concern about provision of services/ resources allocated to meet the child's individual needs.