



REPORT TITLE: Information and services available locally via Adoption West for those adults affected by historic forced adoption and consideration as to how the council can better signpost victims to this support.

Scrutiny meeting	Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Chair	Councillor Dr Andrew Miller
Presenting Officer	Ann James, Executive Director of Children's Services
Item Type	Scrutiny
Purpose of Report	<p>As required by the resolution of the full council meeting held on 22nd May 2024 following presentation of Motion 939 concerning the forced adoption of children of unmarried women, this report sets out for CFOSC members:</p> <p>The information and services available locally via Adoption West for those adults affected and considers how the council can better signpost victims to this support.</p>
Recommendations/ Action sought	That Children and Families Scrutiny Members note the report and make any further recommendations for signposting support as appropriate.
Forthcoming Decisions	None

Background Documents	<p>Council Motion 939 and council resolution dated 22nd May 2024: Motions to Council May 2024 004.pdf (gloucestershire.gov.uk)</p> <p>Agenda for County Council on Wednesday 22 May 2024, 10.00 am (gloucestershire.gov.uk)</p> <p>Joint Committee on Human Rights Report of the House of Lords and House of Commons with recommendations to Government – 15th July 2022: The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976 - Joint Committee on Human Rights (parliament.uk)</p> <p>Government response to the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights Report: The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976: Government Response to the Committee’s Third Report - Joint Committee on Human Rights (parliament.uk)</p>
Appendices	None
Contact Information	Ann.james@gloucestershire.gov.uk

1. Introduction

At the full Council meeting of 22 May 2024, Motion 939 – Apology for the forced adoption of children and unmarried women¹ was put forward and resulted in the agreement to:

- Call on the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee to consider how the Council can better signpost victims to the information and services available via Adoption West for those affected locally to deal with the impact of the historic forced adoptions.
- To call on Government to review if there are any other barriers that can be removed to help victims, such as providing specialised counselling services, reforms to the sharing of medical information and the removal of administrative barriers.

Children and Families Scrutiny Committee (CFOSC) is asked to consider this report on the information and services available to those affected locally via Adoption West, and how the Council can better signpost victims to this support.

¹ [Motions to Council May 2024 004.pdf \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](#)

2. Background

- 2.1. In September 2021, the Joint Committee on Human Rights launched an inquiry to understand the experiences of unmarried women whose children were adopted between 1949 and 1976 in England and Wales. The inquiry considered whether adoption processes respected the human rights (specifically the right to family life), as we understand them now, of the mothers and children who experienced them, as well as the lasting consequences on their lives. The Committee published the report setting out its findings in July 2022² and made ten recommendations to Government, including that a formal apology should be made.
- 2.2. The Government published its response in March 2023 setting out a number of actions in response to the recommendations. Most pertinent to this report were the Government's response to the first two recommendations:
- 2.3. Firstly, in response to the identified need for post-adoption support and counselling it indicated the public consultation³ proposing two regulatory changes that was underway to:
 - (i) exempt providers of adoption support services from the Ofsted registration requirement if the providers are working under contract with an adoption agency.
 - (ii) exempt adoption support service providers from the Ofsted registration requirement where they are providing adoption-related counselling and therapeutic services to adults aged eighteen and over, other than counselling provided in the context of intermediary services⁴
- 2.4. These changes were supported and the legislative amendments⁵ came into force on 18th December 2023, with the planned effect that providers of adoption support and counselling services be more available and easier to access for adopters, adoptees, and birth families.
- 2.5. Secondly, in response to the recommendation that it monitor and publish local authority compliance with timelines set out in guidance for the provision of adoption records when requested, the Government set out the work of Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) leaders in this respect and the establishment of the project, 'Improving Adoption Services for Adults: a time for change', with the University of East Anglia in partnership with RAA leaders. The project is due to report on or after 31st July 2024 and is

² Human Rights Act 1998: [Human Rights Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42)

Article 8 'Right to respect for private and family life': [Human Rights Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42)

³ [Adoption support agencies: proposed regulation changes \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.education.gov.uk/adoption-support-agencies-proposed-regulation-changes)

⁴ Intermediary services are defined as "a service provided for the purposes of assisting adopted persons aged 18 or over, who were adopted before 30 December 2005, to obtain information in relation to their adoption; and facilitating contact between such persons and their relatives." – [The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services \(Pre-Commencement Adoptions\) Regulations 2005 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2005/1000)

⁵ [The Adoption Support Agencies \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2023/1000)

established to identify and propose solutions to barriers to tracing and support services which adopted adults and their birth families encounter.

2.6. The Government also wrote to RAAs and local authorities to remind of their legal duty to respond to requests for access to adoption records and to do so in a timely manner, requesting a review of services to achieve this within six months. (It should be noted that Gloucestershire and Adoption West have undertaken such a review, identifying that Gloucestershire's response is timely).

3. Gloucestershire's Adoption Services to Adults, including those who experienced forced adoption 1949-1976.

3.1. Gloucestershire is a member and owner of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption West⁶, along with Bristol, BATH and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, and Wiltshire. Gloucestershire, like all local authorities is required to deliver its adoption services through a regional adoption agency arrangement. Adoption West was registered with Ofsted in 2019 and has been providing adoption services on behalf of the council since that time.

3.2. The services required for adopted adults and birth family are:

- Access to adoption records.
- Schedule 2 adoption report (required at the time of the court application to consider adoption).
- Intermediary services and counselling.

3.3. It should be noted that the provision of an intermediary service is not a statutory requirement for local authorities. As is the case in Gloucestershire, most providers are independent and offer services at a cost to the adopted person or birth family member. As stated above, the requirement for these services to be provided by an Ofsted registered agency has now changed, theoretically making these services easier for adults to access.

3.4. Adoption West provides a range of services for adopted adults and their families which are set out on the Adoption West website: [Adopted Adults - Adoption West](#). this information is also linked from the council's website [Thinking about adopting? | Gloucestershire County Council](#).

3.5. The Adoption West Birth Links Service works with adopted adults and birth parents providing:

- Schedule 2 adoption report.
- Access to birth record services.
- One session – advice/signposting about intermediary services – Adoption West do not provide this directly.
- Up to six sessions emotional support (not counselling) – both birth family and adopted adults.

⁶ [Welcome to Adoption West - Adoption West](#)

- Birth parent support groups.
- 3.6. The Adoption West Birth Links team provide their services to the five local authorities that own/commission Adoption West and comprises:
- 0.6 Deputy Team Manager
 - 1 FTE Social Worker
 - 1.5 FTE Support Workers.
- 3.7. The team work to a three-month allocation standard, meaning work is allocated within three months of receipt and typically have eighteen adults waiting to start access to the service. The Birth Links service tends to be utilised by parents of children more recently adopted but occasionally the service is contacted by a birth parent whose child was adopted 30 – 50 years ago.
- 3.8. Access to records takes between one and six months to provide, and exceptionally up to a year depending on the local authority and adoption agency which holds the record. The national project referenced at paragraph 2.5 may make recommendations regarding the management of adoption archives which may result in national standards of practice and a standardised process. Currently, the process for accessing records in GCC is considered to work effectively and within a reasonable time frame.

4. Signposting support services

- 4.1. As outlined at paragraph 3.4 Adoption West's website clearly sets out information and access arrangements for adopted adults and birth families. These pages are linked from the Adoption page on the county council's website. Glos Families Directory provides further information and useful links for adoption information and support of all kinds including birth parents and adopted adults: [GloSFamilies Directory | Service Listings](#). Additionally, any caller to the Children's Single Point of Access will be provided with information and signposting to Adoption West.
- 4.2. Having reviewed the information on the council's website and tested search engine responses for 'support with forced adoption, Gloucestershire,' it has been identified that improvements should be made to ensure the web pages more clearly answer this question and can be better identified when a search is undertaken.
- 4.3. Finally, it should be noted that the number of adults making contact following forced adoption is relatively infrequent, that information and signposting should be clear and easily accessed, with support made available on a proportionate basis to the demand required. With the changes to webpages in place, there is no indication that further resources are required at this stage. Should demand increase, the matter will require review and the allocation of appropriate resources.