

Status: This version of this cross heading contains provisions that are prospective.

Changes to legislation: *Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, Cross Heading: Placement of children by adoption agency for adoption is up to date with all changes known to be in force on or before 18 June 2024. There are changes that may be brought into force at a future date. Changes that have been made appear in the content and are referenced with annotations. (See end of Document for details) View outstanding changes*



2022 CHAPTER 18

PART 1

Adoption

CHAPTER 3

Placement for adoption and adoption orders

PROSPECTIVE

Placement of children by adoption agency for adoption

Placement for adoption by agencies

15.—(1) An adoption agency may—

- (a) place a child for adoption with prospective adopters; or
- (b) where it has placed a child with any persons (whether under this Part or not), keep the child with them as prospective adopters;

but, except in the case of a child who is less than six weeks old, may only do so under section 16 or a placement order.

(2) An adoption agency may only place a child for adoption with prospective adopters if the agency is satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption.

(3) A child who is placed or authorised to be placed for adoption with prospective adopters by an adoption authority is looked after by the authority.

(4) If an application for an adoption order has been made by any persons in respect of a child and has not been disposed of—

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(a) an adoption agency which placed the child with those persons may keep the child with them until the application is disposed of; but

(b) apart from that, the child may not be placed for adoption with any prospective adopters.

(5) References in this Act (apart from this section) to an adoption agency placing a child for adoption—

(a) are to its placing a child for adoption with prospective adopters; and

(b) include, where it has placed a child with any persons (whether under this Act or not), keeping the child with them as prospective adopters;

and references in this Act (apart from this section) to a child who is placed for adoption by an adoption agency are to be interpreted accordingly.

(6) References in this Chapter to an adoption agency being, or not being, authorised to place a child for adoption are to the agency being or (as the case may be) not being authorised to do so under section 16 or a placement order.

(7) This section is subject to sections 27 to 32 (removal of children placed by adoption agencies).

(8) In subsection (4) “adoption order” means an adoption order made under the law of any part of the United Kingdom.

Commencement Information

II S. 15 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Placing children with parental consent

16.—(1) Where an adoption agency is satisfied that each parent or guardian of a child has consented to the child—

(a) being placed for adoption with prospective adopters identified in the consent; or

(b) being placed for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the agency,

and has not withdrawn that consent, the agency is authorised to place the child for adoption accordingly.

(2) Consent to a child being placed for adoption with prospective adopters identified in the consent may be combined with consent to the child subsequently being placed for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the agency in circumstances where the child is removed from or returned by the identified prospective adopters.

(3) Subsection (1) does not apply where—

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(a) an application has been made on which a care order might be made and the application has not been disposed of; or

(b) a care order or placement order has been made after the consent was given.

(4) References in this Act to a child placed for adoption under this section include a child who was placed under this section with prospective adopters and continues to be placed with them, whether or not consent to the placement has been withdrawn.

(5) This section is subject to section 51 (parental etc. consent).

Commencement Information

I2 S. 16 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Advance consent to adoption

17.—(1) A parent or guardian of a child who consents to the child being placed for adoption by an adoption agency under section 16 may, at the same or any subsequent time, consent to the making of a future adoption order.

(2) Consent under this section—

(a) where the parent or guardian has consented to the child being placed for adoption with prospective adopters identified in the consent, may be consent to adoption by them; or

(b) may be consent to adoption by any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the agency.

(3) A person may withdraw any consent given under this section.

(4) A person who gives consent under this section may, at the same or any subsequent time, by notice given to the adoption agency—

(a) state that the person does not wish to be informed of any application for an adoption order; or

(b) withdraw such a statement.

(5) A notice under subsection (4) has effect from the time when it is received by the adoption agency but has no effect if the person concerned has withdrawn the consent.

(6) This section is subject to section 51 (parental etc. consent).

Commencement Information

I3 S. 17 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

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Placement orders

18.—(1) A placement order is an order made by the court authorising an adoption authority to place a child for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the authority.

(2) The court may not make a placement order in respect of a child unless—

- (a) the child is subject to a care order;
- (b) the court is satisfied that the conditions in Article 50(2) of the Children Order (conditions for making a care order) are met; or
- (c) the child has no parent or guardian.

(3) The court may only make a placement order if, in the case of each parent or guardian of the child, the court is satisfied—

- (a) that the parent or guardian has consented to the child being placed for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the adoption authority and has not withdrawn that consent; or
- (b) that the parent’s or guardian’s consent should be dispensed with.

(4) Subsection (3) is subject to section 51 (parental etc. consent).

(5) A placement order continues in force until—

- (a) it is revoked under section 21;
- (b) an adoption order is made in respect of the child; or
- (c) the child marries, forms a civil partnership or attains the age of 18 years.

(6) In subsection (5) “adoption order” means an adoption order made under the law of any part of the United Kingdom.

Commencement Information

14 S. 18 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Applications for placement orders

19.—(1) An adoption authority must apply to the court for a placement order in respect of a child if—

- (a) the child is placed for adoption by the adoption authority or is being provided with accommodation by it;
- (b) no adoption agency is authorised to place the child for adoption;
- (c) the child has no parent or guardian or the authority considers that the conditions in Article 50(2) of the Children Order are met; and
- (d) the adoption authority is satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption.

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(2) If—

- (a) an application has been made (and has not been disposed of) on which a care order might be made in respect of a child; or
- (b) a child is subject to a care order and the appropriate authority is not authorised to place the child for adoption,

the appropriate authority must apply to the court for a placement order if the appropriate authority is satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption.

(3) If—

- (a) a child is subject to a care order; and
- (b) the appropriate authority is authorised to place the child for adoption under section 16,

the appropriate authority may apply to the court for a placement order.

(4) If an adoption authority—

- (a) is under a duty to apply to the court for a placement order in respect of a child; or
- (b) has applied for a placement order in respect of a child and the application has not been disposed of,

the child is looked after by that adoption authority.

(5) Subsections (1) to (3) do not apply in respect of a child—

- (a) if any persons have given notice of intention to adopt, unless the period of four months beginning with the giving of the notice has expired without them applying for an adoption order or their application for such an order has been withdrawn or refused; or
- (b) if an application for an adoption order has been made and has not been disposed of.

(6) Where—

- (a) an application for a placement order in respect of a child has been made and has not been disposed of; and
- (b) no interim care order is in force,

the court may give any directions it considers appropriate for the medical or psychiatric examination or other assessment of the child; but a child who is of sufficient understanding to make an informed decision may refuse to submit to the examination or other assessment.

(7) The appropriate authority—

- (a) in relation to a care order, is the authority in whose care the child is placed by the order; and
- (b) in relation to an application on which a care order might be made, is the authority which makes the application.

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(8) In subsection (5) “adoption order” means an adoption order made under the law of any part of the United Kingdom.

Commencement Information

I5 S. 19 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Varying placement orders

20.—(1) The court may vary a placement order so as to substitute another adoption authority for the adoption authority authorised by the order to place the child for adoption.

(2) The variation may only be made on the joint application of both adoption authorities.

Commencement Information

I6 S. 20 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Revoking placement orders

21.—(1) The court may revoke a placement order on the application of any person.

(2) But an application may not be made by a person other than the child or the adoption authority authorised by the order to place the child for adoption unless—

- (a) the court has given leave to apply; and
- (b) the child is not placed for adoption by the adoption authority.

(3) The court cannot give leave under subsection (2)(a) unless satisfied that there has been a change in circumstances since the order was made.

(4) If the court determines, on an application for an adoption order, not to make the order, it may revoke any placement order in respect of the child.

(5) Where—

- (a) an application for the revocation of a placement order has been made and has not been disposed of; and
- (b) the child is not placed for adoption by the adoption authority,

the child may not without the court’s leave be placed for adoption under the order.

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Commencement Information

I7 S. 21 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Parental responsibility

22.—(1) This section applies while—

- (a) a child is placed for adoption under section 16 or an adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption under that section; or
- (b) a placement order is in force in respect of a child.

(2) Parental responsibility for the child is given to the agency concerned.

(3) While the child is placed with prospective adopters, parental responsibility is given to them.

(4) The agency may determine that the parental responsibility of any parent or guardian, or of prospective adopters, is to be restricted to the extent specified in the determination.

Commencement Information

I8 S. 22 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Contact

23.—(1) On an adoption agency being authorised to place a child for adoption, or placing a child for adoption who is less than six weeks old, any provision for contact under the Children Order ceases to have effect.

(2) While an adoption agency is so authorised or a child is placed for adoption—

- (a) no application may be made for any provision for contact under the Children Order; but
- (b) the court may make an order under this section requiring the person with whom the child lives, or is to live, to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, or for the person named in the order and the child otherwise to have contact with each other.

(3) An application for an order under this section may be made by—

- (a) the child or the agency;
- (b) any parent, guardian or relative;
- (c) any person in whose favour there was provision for contact under the Children Order which ceased to have effect by virtue of subsection (1);

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- (d) if a residence order was in force immediately before the adoption agency was authorised to place the child for adoption or (as the case may be) placed the child for adoption at a time when the child was less than six weeks old, the person in whose favour the order was made;
- (e) if a person had care of the child immediately before that time by virtue of an order made in the exercise of the High Court's inherent jurisdiction with respect to children, that person;
- (f) any person who has obtained the court's leave to make the application.

(4) When making a placement order, the court may on its own initiative make an order under this section.

(5) In this section “provision for contact under the Children Order” means a contact order under Article 8 of the Children Order or an order under Article 53 of that Order (parental contact with children in care).

Commencement Information

19 S. 23 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Contact: supplementary

24.—(1) An order under section 23—

- (a) has effect while the adoption agency is authorised to place the child for adoption or the child is placed for adoption; but
- (b) may be varied or revoked by the court on an application by the child, the agency or a person named in the order.

(2) The agency may refuse to allow the contact that would otherwise be required by virtue of an order under that section if—

- (a) it is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard or promote the child's welfare; and
- (b) the refusal is decided upon as a matter of urgency and does not last for more than seven days.

(3) Regulations may make provision as to—

- (a) the steps to be taken by an agency which has exercised its power under subsection (2);
- (b) the circumstances in which, and conditions subject to which, the terms of any order under section 23 may be departed from by agreement between the agency and any person for whose contact with the child the order provides;

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- (c) notification by an agency of any variation or suspension of arrangements made (otherwise than under an order under that section) with a view to allowing any person contact with the child.
- (4) Before making a placement order the court must—
 - (a) consider the arrangements which the adoption agency has made, or proposes to make, for allowing any person contact with the child; and
 - (b) invite the parties to the proceedings to comment on those arrangements.
- (5) An order under section 23 may provide for contact on any conditions the court considers appropriate.

Commencement Information

I10 S. 24 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Further consequences of placement

- 25.—**(1) Where a child is placed for adoption under section 16 or an adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption under that section—
- (a) a parent or guardian of the child may not apply for a residence order unless an application for an adoption order has been made and the parent or guardian has obtained the court’s leave under subsection (3) or (5) of section 44;
 - (b) if an application has been made for an adoption order, a guardian of the child may not apply for a special guardianship order unless the guardian has obtained the court’s leave under subsection (3) or (5) of that section.
- (2) The following subsections apply where—
- (a) a child is placed for adoption under section 16 or an adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption under that section; or
 - (b) a placement order is in force in respect of a child.
- (3) A person must not remove the child from the United Kingdom unless the court gives leave or each parent or guardian of the child gives written consent.
- (4) Subsection (3) does not prevent the removal of the child from the United Kingdom for a period of less than one month by a person who provides the child’s home.
- (5) A person must not cause the child to be known by a new surname unless the court gives leave or each parent or guardian of the child or the adoption agency gives written consent.
- (6) The adoption agency must not give its consent under subsection (5) unless it has given at least 14 days’ notice of its intention to do so to—
- (a) every person with parental responsibility for the child; and

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- (b) if the agency considers that the child has sufficient understanding, the child.
- (7) Subsection (5) is subject to any direction of the court.
- (8) The court may vary or revoke a direction under subsection (7)—
 - (a) on the application of—
 - (i) any person mentioned in subsection (6)(a);
 - (ii) if the child appears to the court to have sufficient understanding, the child; or
 - (iii) the adoption agency; or
 - (b) in any family proceedings in which a question arises in relation to the welfare of the child without an application having been made.
- (9) In subsection (8)(b) “family proceedings” has the same meaning as in the Children Order.
- (10) This section applies whether or not the child is in Northern Ireland.

Commencement Information

III S. 25 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

Further consequences of placement orders

- 26.—**(1) Where a placement order is made in respect of a child and either—
- (a) the child is subject to a care order; or
 - (b) the court at the same time makes a care order in respect of the child,
- the care order does not have effect at any time when the placement order is in force.
- (2) On the making of a placement order in respect of a child, any order mentioned in Article 8(1) of the Children Order, and any supervision order in respect of the child, ceases to have effect.
- (3) Where a placement order is in force—
- (a) no prohibited steps order, residence order or specific issue order; and
 - (b) no supervision order or child assessment order,
- may be made in respect of the child.
- (4) Subsection (3)(a) does not apply in respect of a residence order if—
- (a) an application for an adoption order has been made in respect of the child; and

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- (b) the residence order is applied for by a parent or guardian who has obtained the court's leave under subsection (3) or (5) of section 44 or by any other person who has obtained the court's leave under this subsection.
- (5) Where a placement order is in force, no special guardianship order may be made in respect of the child unless—
 - (a) an application has been made for an adoption order; and
 - (b) the person applying for the special guardianship order has obtained the court's leave under this subsection or, if the person is a guardian of the child, has obtained the court's leave under section 44(5).
- (6) Article 14A(7) of the Children Order applies in respect of an application for a special guardianship order for which leave has been given as mentioned in subsection (5)(b) with the omission of the words “the beginning of the period of three months ending with”.
- (7) Where a placement order is in force—
 - (a) Article 14C(1)(b) of the Children Order (special guardianship: parental responsibility) has effect subject to any determination under section 22(4);
 - (b) paragraphs (3) and (4) of that Article (special guardianship: removal of child from UK etc.) do not apply.

Commencement Information

I12 S. 26 not in operation at Royal Assent, see [s. 160\(1\)](#)

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Changes and effects yet to be applied to the whole Act associated Parts and Chapters:

- Act applied (with modifications) by S.I. 2018/412, Sch. 3 (as substituted) by [2022 c. 18 \(N.I.\) Sch. 3 para. 83](#)