



**Adoption Data Analysis:  
Narrative**

Produced by  
The Association of Directors  
of Children's Services (ADCS)

April 2013

## **ADCS Adoption Data Analysis**

### **Narrative**

**(April 2013)**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Directors of children's services (DCS) and through them ADCS, have a unique perspective on whole systems leadership of services for children, young people and families, including adoption. ADCS recognizes the vital role that timely and successful adoptions play in providing permanent and loving homes for vulnerable children.
- 1.2. In the current market for the provision of approved adopters, local authorities are by far the largest provider. ADCS also recognizes the contribution made by a range of voluntary adoption agencies, supports market diversification for the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters. In diversifying the market however, we must be wary of destabilizing existing arrangements by removing the responsibility for recruiting, assessing and approving adopters from the largest supplier in the market, as to do so would unequivocally not be in the best interests for children for whom adoption is the right route to permanence.
- 1.3. The ADCS analysis of adoption data presents a number of findings relating to the current and future supply of adopters in local authorities in England. This document provides further interpretation of those findings, alongside commentary on other proposed changes to adoption provision. It presents recommendations for local authorities and central government for next steps in developing local and national adoption policy and practice.
- 1.4. The key messages from the data analysis are:
  - The outlook for prospective adopters and children waiting is now far more positive than had been thought.
  - Local authorities are planning collaboratively with voluntary agencies and other local authorities to increase the supply of approved adopters.
  - The number of placements of children with adopters is rising.
  - There are still significantly more children waiting than adopters waiting nationally, and some children in hard to place groups wait much longer than others.

- There are adopters and children waiting to be matched for adoption in every local authority. There is significant variation between local authorities in the numbers of adopters and children waiting and the relationship between the two.
  - When adopters in assessment are taken into account, there are nearly as many adopters waiting and in assessment as there are children waiting for adoption nationally.
  - The numbers of adopters in assessment and waiting to be matched varies considerably between local authorities, with 59 having more adopters than children, and 41 with more children than adopters.
  - Local authorities intend to increase their capacity for adopter assessment by 60% by March 2014 and achieve a 50% increase in the number of approved adopters compared to 2011-12.
  - Local authorities, working with each other and with voluntary adoption agencies expect to recruit sufficient adopters by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 to have met the predicted increased requirements of 3600 adopters a year, and recruited 900 adopters towards the predicted 2000-3000 additional adopters needed to reduce the 'backlog' of children waiting for adoption.
  - More than half of local authorities are in some form of formal or informal partnership with one or more other adoption agency, whether other local authorities or voluntary adoption agencies. These arrangements vary in the degree of formality and in the range of functions that they cover.
  - Over half of local authorities state their intention to make adopters available to other local authorities, and a similar number intend to recruit adopters from other local authorities and voluntary agencies. There is some indication that these exchanges mostly occur within the formal and informal partnerships noted above.
- 1.5. ADCS acknowledges that, in the past, adoption services may not have received the attention, or resources that they needed to be most effective and that recent national attention has played a valuable role in focusing minds on this small but important part of the care system. But this most recent data shows that during 2012/13 local authorities made significant progress, and intend to further improve the supply of adopters during 2013/14. The Association welcomes commitments by the Local Government Association and SOLACE to promote the benefits and challenges of adoption to political leaders and chief executives, as this will sustain the momentum achieved so far. However, a more analytical

approach is also required to make further progress in securing timely adoptions. This is not a question of an absolute shortage of adopters. Instead, the emphasis must be on:

- Recruitment according to an assessment of need;
- Distributing approved adopters among local authorities more effectively.

## **2. Recruiting adopters**

2.1. Local authorities recruit adopters from a range of sources and use a range of strategies to find adopters for children. Different strategies affect the relative numbers of children and adopters waiting. Local authorities do not use any one of these strategies in isolation, but draw on different sources of adopters, at different times in the process, according to the needs of the children for whom they are seeking a match. This suggests that comparing the numbers of children and adopters waiting without further context does not provide sufficient information to judge a local authority's performance.

2.2. The recruitment strategies noted by respondents to the data collection included:

- Recruitment from the local population through marketing to establish a pool of adopters who may be suitable to meet the needs of children who are granted a placement order. A pool of approved adopters also allows for matching to begin earlier in the process, before a placement order for a child is finalized. This strategy, if successful, would result in more adopters waiting than children.
- Recruitment from, and recruitment for, a collaborative partnership of adoption agencies. This strategy allows choice from a larger pool when seeking a match for a particular child, and allows adopters to consider a larger number of children. Close partnership working also allows for early matching of adopters to children whose placement order has not been finalized. This strategy should lead to fewer children and adopters waiting.
- Targeted recruitment based on the needs of children with a placement order. Adopters are recruited either locally or from another adoption agency for specific children waiting, including national searches for children considered 'hard to place'. This strategy will result in children waiting while adopters are found.
- Recruitment through a contracted service with another adoption agency to supply adopters that meet the needs of the children waiting for adoption. This strategy offers the contracting agency some certainty about the numbers of adopters that will be provided. The terms of the contract will determine whether the adopters are available when children need them and how long children or adopters wait to be matched. These

arrangements will appear to reduce the number of adopters waiting, because adopters waiting with a voluntary adoption agency are not reflected in the local authority's data return.

- Recruitment of adopters who can act as foster carers for children who do not yet have a placement order, but for whom the long-term plan is adoption. This strategy should reduce the number of children waiting but will appear to increase the number of adopters waiting, as those with a child living with them as foster carers will still appear to be waiting for an adoption placement.

2.3. Whether the strategies above are successful in finding timely and successful matches for both children and adopters depends on how far adoption agencies are aware of the following factors:

- The scale, but also the nature, of the need for adopters;
- How the supply and demand for adopters elsewhere will affect the availability of adopters to meet children's needs;
- How changes to other parts of the adoption process, and other parts of the wider children's social care system, will affect the needs and numbers of children placed for adoption.

### **3. A question of needs, not numbers**

3.1. Successful adoptions are based on appropriate matching of adopters' skills and capabilities with children's needs. The data analysis assumed that any adopter could provide a suitable home for any child with a placement order. It is clear that this assumption does not hold true in practice. If there are children and adopters waiting in the same authority, it seems that these adopters are not considered suitable for the children waiting, otherwise the match would have been made and neither child nor adopter would still be waiting.

3.2. It was striking that many respondents provided commentary explaining the status of many of the children included in the reported number of children waiting. Some of the explanations provided included:

- The child was considered 'hard to place' due to being part of a sibling group, or having additional needs;
- A specific adopter, sometimes a foster carer or relative, was currently being assessed for the child;

- The child's parents were challenging the granting of a placement order.
- 3.3. For some children, finding a suitable adopter will take substantial effort and expenditure both before and after adoption. These groups take longer to be adopted and, in some local authorities, will form a high proportion of the number of children waiting for adoption. In some cases, it may not be a question of recruiting specific adopters, but working with already approved adopters to help and train them so they feel able and suitably equipped to support a child with those needs. This requires sustained support and training over a long period.
- 3.4. *ADCS will encourage local authority and voluntary adoption agencies to respond positively to the joint invitation that will be issued by LGA and SOLACE in summer 2013, to participate in work to develop a full cost recovery methodology for setting fees in the future. It will be important for any methodology to recognise the additional costs of finding, training and supporting adopters who can adopt children with complex needs, and to explore new approaches to pooling public sector finance and alternative investment models.*
- 3.5. The reasons given above for why children wait underline some of the weaknesses in taking a wholly data-driven approach to analyzing adoption. The numbers of children included in the data are very small in many local authorities. Adoption agencies themselves are often run by a handful of staff. There are numerous factors affecting whether a child is considered for adoption, how long a search for an adopter takes, and whether that search is successful.
- 3.6. The small scale on which some adoption agencies operate has been considered a weakness in the sustainability of the existing number of individual adoption agencies. There is a delicate balance to be achieved between the scale of an agency's adoption activity and the opportunities for personal interaction between professionals, children and families that leads managers to think in terms of needs and individuals, not numbers. Such relationships are the foundation of good social work particularly when handling the sensitive issue of adoption. They also allow adoption agencies to collect detailed information about children's needs and adopters' capabilities that cannot be included in any data collection. This information is invaluable to strategic planning and collaborative activity based on professional networks of adoption managers.
- 3.7. It is necessary to combine a personal approach with a more strategic analysis of both current and future needs. This small scale also allows for close attention from senior management to be given to individual cases and ADCS has already proposed that the DCS should consider reviewing the care plans in cases where a child has waited for adoption for

a prolonged period of time, including giving careful consideration to separating sibling groups where that would be in the best interests of the children concerned. The results of such case audits should provide a window into the barriers facing the adoption of some children. Data published by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice relating to the time children spend waiting and in care proceedings also contribute to understanding why some children wait for a prolonged period of time to be placed for adoption. Local authorities should draw on this hard information and on soft intelligence to better understand the reasons why children wait for adoption and the system-wide approaches that might remove barriers.

#### **4. Sharing adopters**

4.1. The variation in the rate of improvement in the number of children placed for adoption in different local authorities, and the different number of children and adopters waiting suggests that, as well as there being a shortage of adopters to meet particular needs, there may also be a problem of distribution, that is ensuring that approved adopters are shared effectively between agencies of all kinds to reduce the length of time children overall have to wait.

4.2. There are a number of ways that adoption agencies can share available adopters to ensure that the small scale on which some adoption agencies operate does not result in an equally small adopter pool:

- A regional or sub-regional consortium sharing adopters recruited from the area;
- A national exchange of adopters using the National Register;
- Formal contracting arrangements with other adoption agencies.

#### **4.3. The National Register**

At first sight, it seems obvious that the largest possible pools of children and adopters will result in the largest number of successful matches and thus that the National Register, including details of all children with a placement order and all approved adopters, offers the best chance of reducing the numbers of children waiting. However, this conclusion ignores the importance of:

- Recruitment based on need, and the lack of incentives to do so on a national scale;

- Finding matches quickly, where possible before the placement order is finalized and increasing the number of children benefiting from fostering for adoption arrangements.

- 4.4. As has been noted, local authorities cannot aim solely at recruiting sufficient absolute numbers of adopters, but adopters who can meet the needs of individual children with a placement order. Given each adoption agency is seeking, first and foremost, to find adopters for local children, it is likely that those referred to the Register will be those who could not meet the needs of those children. There is no guarantee that they will be suitable for children elsewhere in the country. Indeed if the characteristics of children awaiting adoption are fairly uniform across the country, it may be that the adopters referred to the Register are not suitable for any of the 'hard to place' children who are referred there.
- 4.5. The cost of recruitment is only recovered by the approving adoption agency when a placement is made. If adopters are approved who do not meet the needs of children with placement orders, these costs will never be recovered. These risks face voluntary adoption agencies and those local authorities who wish to supply surplus adopters to other authorities. A national exchange of adopters requires much better intelligence about the different profile of needs of children in different local areas e.g. numbers with a disability, to allow those agencies wishing to supply adopters nationally to target recruitment accordingly.
- 4.6. Referral to the National Register is a formal and public step, after which professionals, and in the future, approved adopters, can access information about children to decide if they are suitable for a match. This suggests that all formal decisions relating to the adoption process should already have been taken. But local authorities begin to seek adoptive families for children locally and within collaborative arrangements before the placement order has been finalized, including making arrangements for fostering for adoption. This can mean that a child does not wait at all. In a perfect world, the National Register would not be necessary.

#### **4.7. Regional and sub-regional collaboration**

Regional consortia exist in every region, though the extent of collaborative activity at this level varies considerably. In some regions the collaboration is limited to sharing an adopter pool, with no shared recruitment activity or strategic planning guiding this process. In others close collaboration includes shared contractual arrangements for the recruitment of adopters for children considered 'hard to place', and for whom the regional pool cannot provide a match, and for the provision of post-adoption support.

4.8. Inevitably, these arrangements do not offer as wide a pool of potential matches as the National Register. Some local authorities noted in their response to the ADCS data collection that matches are always sought from within the partnership first, before a national search. The success, or otherwise, of regional collaborative arrangements in securing a sustainable pool of adopters suitable for children in the area, will depend upon:

- The current surpluses and deficits of adopters in authorities involved in the partnership: if there is an overall deficit of adopters, competition for adopters will be strong;
- The nature of the care population - if the authorities sharing adopters face similar pressures in terms of the numbers and needs of children being placed for adoption, they will need to collectively target recruitment at prospective adopters who have the capacity to meet those needs;
- Collective analysis and planning to address these challenges.

4.9. The demographic change underway across the country is not uniform, and different areas have experienced the various effects of an ageing population, increased ethnic diversity and more recently an increase in the number of children under five years old. The variation in economic performance between different regions in England is well known. The potent combination of economic and demographic pressures will be felt in the adoption system as they influence the numbers and needs of children in the care system and the availability and willingness of adults to become adopters. Changes to the way that ethnicity is considered in matching children to adopters may help some areas to reduce the number of children waiting, where the proportion of children from particular ethnic backgrounds is high, while the number of adopters from those backgrounds is low. These authorities may also find that broadening their collaborative arrangements strategically could open up new sources of adopters from a broader range of ethnic backgrounds.

4.10. This suggests that groups of local authorities with the following characteristics may struggle to form a sustainable adopter pool:

- Where there are already a large overall number of children waiting;
- Where the group as a whole is a net importer of adopters;
- Similar demographic profiles and thus similar pressures on the care system and on adopter recruitment.

4.11. Trends regarding the specific needs of children, and the suitability of adopters to meet those needs are currently unavailable nationally. Further analysis is required of the existing

regional and sub-regional collaborations in order to better understand the sustainability of these arrangements. Geographically orientated consortia may not always be the best solution, where collaborating with local authorities further away may lead to a more diverse pool of adopters for all local authorities involved.

4.12. Smaller collaborative arrangements involving fewer local authorities provide suitable fora for planning early matching of children with adopters, including arrangements for fostering for adoption, because these arrangements allow for information to be shared at an early stage, and for local and regional processes for fostering and adoption approval to be aligned. Smaller groupings also allow for the provision of shared training and assessment sessions for prospective adopters and activity days, allowing for more events to be held in the areas where they are needed.

4.13. The pattern of collaborative arrangements of various kinds is uneven, with some regions and sub-regions working closely together on a range of projects. A small number of local authorities were not in any collaborative arrangements, suggesting that they are not taking advantage of the potential for quicker matches offered by larger adopter pools and early matching arrangements.

4.14. *ADCS calls on local authorities to:*

- *Examine existing collaborative arrangements for sharing adopters for their sustainability;*
- *Work with their partners to understand the reason for, and take action to alleviate, any shortage of suitable adopters, including through involving more voluntary adoption agencies;*
- *Where they are not already in such collaborations:*
  - *Seek to form a sustainable collaboration with other adoption agencies;*
  - *Explore closer collaboration with a smaller number of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to support early matching and concurrent planning<sup>1</sup>;*
  - *Consider how regional or sub-regional contracts with other agencies could offer efficiencies and alignment of fostering and adoption processes.*

---

<sup>1</sup> In this document the term 'concurrent planning' is used to describe the process whereby a child may live with prospective adopters who have also been approved as foster carers before a Placement Order is made. This can take two forms, concurrent planning and forstering for adoption. Concurrent planning supports a child in forming strong attachments with bith birth family and prospective adopters and work to return the child home continues while s/he lives with prospective adopters

4.15. ADCS will support this process through further analysis of the data collected from local authorities and work with local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to identify possible sustainable collaborations.

4.16. **Formal arrangements with voluntary adoption agencies**

The voluntary sector has long been a supplier of approved adopters to local authority adoption agencies, often specializing in finding placements for children who are considered 'hard to place'. Historically, this was the rationale for the higher level of the inter-agency fee (inter-authority and inter-agency fee levels are equalized with effect from 1 April 2013). More recently, voluntary adoption agencies have been praised by local and central government alike for their efforts to promote concurrent planning. However, voluntary adoption agencies are less likely to recruit more adopters, without reassurance that these adopters will be bought by another agency. (This also applies equally to local authorities wishing to over-recruit).

4.17. In some places this has resulted in formal contracting arrangements for a single voluntary adoption agency to supply adopters, and to support concurrent planning arrangements. This provides certainty to both the local authority and the voluntary adoption agency, by including contracted numbers of adopters to be supplied. However, such contracts may change the extent to which these agencies draw from and supply to the National Register. Voluntary adoption agencies often have a number of branches and appear to share adopters internally among these branches, in order to fulfill contractual commitments. However, where these commitments cannot be fulfilled internally, they draw adopters from other agencies, including from the National Register. The disincentives to over-recruitment remain, as no payments will be received for adopters that are not matched with children. The effect of a significant increase in formal contracting out arrangements on the national availability of adopters will need careful monitoring.

4.18. *ADCS calls on local authorities entering into contractual arrangements with other agencies to consider carefully:*

- *Arrangements for sharing information about trends in the needs and numbers of children expected to be placed for adoption in the future;*
- *Accountability arrangements that reflect adoption's place in the wider children's services system;*
- *Arrangements that allow social workers to form and sustain supportive relationships with children and prospective adopters.*

*Where more than one part of the system is provided by a third party, close co-operation and contract management will be vital to providing truly integrated and cost-effective services.*

## **5. A system view of adoption**

- 5.1. Adoption is part of the wider social care system for children, young people and families. Effective adoption services form a crucial part of promoting good outcomes for looked after children. Knowledge about the needs of children who may be placed for adoption in the future is an important element in successful strategic planning of adopter recruitment.
- 5.2. The provision of adoption services, including adopter recruitment, by the local authority brings together family support, child protection, care, fostering and adoption services in a shared management and accountability structure that promotes effective strategic planning. It further supports the development of concurrent planning and the provision of post-adoption support, by making use of existing foster care and family support services. As an integral part of the local authority, adoption services have access to legal and financial advice and to additional support for adopters with housing and school admissions and so on.
- 5.3. The adoption process is made up of a number of stages, of which adopter recruitment is only one. Adopter recruitment itself entails a number of steps: marketing, providing information to enquirers, assessing applications, providing training, approval and making arrangements with other adoption agencies to supply adopters that meet children's needs.
- 5.4. In undertaking strategic planning of adopter recruitment, all local authorities will need to consider how national and local policy changes across the entire public policy terrain, not just in children's social care will affect the required number and types of adopters being recruited. National and local policy changes and messaging in respect of adoption are affecting each stage of the process and the overall effect on the supply of adopters is not entirely clear.
- 5.5. The National Gateway for adoption has been established to increase the rate of conversion from an initial enquiry about becoming an adopter to assessment and approval by an adoption agency. Ofsted estimated in 2011-12 there were 25,000 enquiries about becoming an adopter, but only 3000 subsequent approvals. A small improvement in this conversion rate would dramatically increase the numbers of adopters available nationally. However, simply increasing the conversion rate will not necessarily result in increases in the number of adopters that are suitable for the children waiting. In order to contribute to solving the shortages of adopters in particular areas and adopters who are suitable for children with

particular and complex needs, the National Gateway will need to work closely with individual adoption agencies and partnerships of adoption agencies to understand the nature of demand for adopters in their areas.

- 5.6. Targeted recruitment campaigns informed by market research into adopter motivation and the types of people who might be willing to adopt children with particular needs should result in increased applications from prospective adopters suitable for those children. To be effective, recruitment should be targeted at adopters for particular groups of children who are known to wait longest. The groups of children waiting longest will vary from one authority to another, as will the supply of suitable adopters. This means that there may be some advantage to local authorities with a larger proportion of adopters suitable for particular needs to undertake targeted recruitment on behalf of a larger collaboration. Given the costs of more targeted recruitment, it is unlikely that any local authority will target specific groups to supply to other local authorities on an 'ad hoc' basis, that is without any prior reassurance that those adopters will be required.
- 5.7. *Recommendation: ADCS will develop a template for sharing local analysis of current and future needs to allow adoption agencies and the National Gateway better access to the data. This will allow those organizations that wish to do so, to target over-recruitment at those adopters for whom there is most demand. In doing this work, ADCS will seek to work closely with voluntary adoption agencies.*
- 5.8. Adopter assessment is undergoing significant reform to make the process quicker, more adopter-led and more proportionate. Speeding up the adopter assessment process is an important element of the system-wide improvements to children's social care services. A faster process will allow local authorities to respond more effectively to the six month target for care proceedings, by ensuring that adopters can be approved in the same timescale. Failure to improve the speed of adopter approval in parallel with speeding up care proceedings may result in a large number of children waiting for adoption while adopters are approved. In individual cases, this will be particularly important, such as for children who are adopted by adults that they know, as the approval process may not start until care proceedings have been initiated.
- 5.9. *Recommendation: The revised 2-stage adopter assessment process should be implemented without delay.*
- 5.10. The concurrent approval of individuals as foster carers and adopters is a welcome change to the often overly bureaucratic processes surrounding these approvals. However implementation will need careful consideration in light of other proposed structural changes

for example, where fostering and adoption services are provided by agencies external to the local authority. The cost of approving adopters as foster carers is disproportionate to the cost of approving a foster carer, given that a foster carer might be expected to care for a number of children over a number of years. An adopter approved for fostering might only be expected to take one child, who they go on to adopt. The role of the local authority as both fostering agency and adoption agency appears to provide a relatively simple process for dual approval. Where approvals are undertaken by independent fostering agencies and voluntary adoption agencies, the collaborative arrangements will need to be very strong in order to continue to provide a seamless service for applicants.

5.11. *Recommendation: ADCS calls on local authorities entering into contractual arrangements with an independent fostering agency or voluntary adoption agency, to ensure arrangements for concurrent approval of adopters as foster carers are not compromised.*

5.12. Post-adoption support is critically important both for adopter recruitment and for supporting stable adoptions in the longer term. The effect of increased inter-adoption agency working proposed in this paper is likely to result in increased, out of authority placements for adoption, requiring support during the placement, after the final adoption order and into the future. The role of other local partners, particularly health service providers is critical in the provisions of post-adoption support.

5.13. *Recommendation: ADCS calls on the government to clarify as soon as possible proposals for the funding and delivery of post-adoption support in order to provide certainty to all adoption agencies about the expectations upon them and their local partners and the resources that they will need to allocate.*

## **6. Conclusions and implications for policy**

6.1. Local authorities, as corporate parents, retain the ultimate responsibility for ensuring a sufficient supply of adopters for children with a placement order. These responsibilities include strategic planning to ensure that matches are timely and that children do not wait for adoption longer than necessary. Some children are more likely to wait, and some, in waiting, may not be adopted at all. Finding adoptive families for these children is more challenging and often more costly. There are not currently sufficient incentives for adoption agencies to prospectively recruit such adopters to supply to other agencies. Other payment models may need to be explored to secure a sustainable supply of adopters for those children hardest to place.

- 6.2. The ADCS data analysis which accompanies this paper only considered a limited amount of data about the adoption system. This is a small fraction of the data available to local authorities and their partners. This panoply of data offers significantly more opportunity to understand the current and future challenges for adopter recruitment. In addition, individual adoption agencies, as well as other parts of the social care system hold large amounts of information and soft intelligence about the needs of children and the barriers to swift and successful adoptions.
- 6.3. To ensure that adopter recruitment is based on a sound understanding of needs, local authorities should make use of and contribute to the widest possible sources of data, including the more detailed information and soft intelligence held in social care and adoption services to understand the range of needs which adopters might need to meet; and, by routinely making the voluntary quarterly data returns to the Department for Education.
- 6.4. There is a strong argument for retaining the local delivery of adopter recruitment, approval and matching services as part of the wider corporate parenting responsibilities of local authorities albeit in a mixed market of adoption agencies. The future inspection arrangements for adoption services will need to include consideration of the quality of the local authority's strategic planning of adopter recruitment and any formal or collaborative arrangements that the local authority has entered into.
- 6.5. However, the size of some individual adoption services and the geographic areas that they cover does not appear to allow local authorities to recruit sufficient numbers of suitable adopters from within their boundaries. Larger adopter pools increase the likelihood of finding a match for a particular child, but only as long as increasing the number of adopters also increases the diversity of adopters available, and that the diversity mirrors that of the needs of children requiring adoptions. This requires close co-operation in recruitment and marketing efforts and a good understanding of current and future numbers and needs of children placed for adoption. Inter-authority, and inter-agency, collaboration to support concurrent planning and early matching requires closer working and may operate more effectively on a scale smaller than a regional footprint but larger than a single local authority adoption agency's footprint.

## **7. A vision for the future**

- 7.1. Local authorities will, together, face up to the challenge of recruiting 50% more adopters each year for the next three years. This can be achieved through forming strategic collaborations at a number of levels.

- Every local authority being part of a larger adopter agency pool through which intelligence about current and future needs of children is shared in order to inform shared and appropriately targeted recruitment campaigns;
- Every local authority working with one or more adoption agencies, to operate shared activities as appropriate to local service delivery to achieve efficiencies;
- Every local authority challenged on the effectiveness of their adoption service, including the strategic approach to adopter recruitment and any collaborative arrangements, through sector-led improvement activities;
- Where appropriate, authorities forming more formal shared services or partnerships with other adoption agencies to provide a whole adoption service, including supporting concurrent planning.

7.2. This web of collaborations must be underpinned nationally by:

- A free exchange of data and intelligence about current and future needs of children being placed for adoption and available adopters;
- A system of incentives that recognizes the full cost of recruitment and approval of adopters and that those costs vary according to the amount of support and training that is required;
- An efficient, effective and rigorous process for approving adopters, including provision for dual approval as foster carers and adopters;
- A clear offer of post-adoption support for adopters and the children they adopt and certainty for local authorities about the resources they must find to provide such support.

## **8. Summary of recommendations**

8.1. *ADCS will encourage local authority and voluntary adoption agencies to respond positively to the joint invitation that will be issued by LGA and SOLACE in summer 2013, to participate in work to develop a full cost recovery methodology for setting fees in the future. It will be important for any methodology to recognise the additional costs of finding, training and supporting adopters who can adopt children with complex needs, and to explore new approaches to pooling public sector finance and alternative investment models. ADCS calls on local authorities to:*

- *Examine existing collaborative arrangements for sharing adopters for their sustainability;*

- *Work with their partners to understand the reason for, and take action to alleviate, any shortage of suitable adopters, including through involving more voluntary adoption agencies;*
- *Where they are not already in such collaborations:*
  - *Seek to form a sustainable collaboration with other adoption agencies;*
  - *Explore closer collaboration with a smaller number of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to support early matching and concurrent planning;*
  - *Consider how regional or sub-regional contracts with other agencies could offer efficiencies and alignment of fostering and adoption processes.*

*8.2. ADCS calls on local authorities entering into contractual arrangements with other agencies to consider carefully:*

- *Arrangements for sharing information about trends in the needs and numbers of children expected to be placed for adoption in the future;*
- *Accountability arrangements that reflect adoption's place in the wider children's services system;*
- *Arrangements that allow social workers to form and sustain supportive relationships with children and prospective adopters.*

*Where more than one part of the system is provided by a third party, close co-operation and contract management will be vital to providing truly integrated and cost-effective services.*

*8.3. ADCS will develop a template for sharing local analysis of current and future needs to allow adoption agencies and the National Gateway better access to the data. This will allow those organizations that wish to do so, to target over-recruitment at those adopters for whom there is most demand. In doing this work, ADCS will seek to work closely with voluntary adoption agencies.*

*8.4. The revised 2-stage adopter assessment process should be implemented without delay.*

*8.5. ADCS calls on local authorities entering into contractual arrangements with an independent fostering agency or voluntary adoption agency, to ensure arrangements for concurrent approval of adopters as foster carers are not compromised.*

- 8.6. *Proposals for the funding and delivery of post-adoption support should be clarified as soon as possible to provide certainty to all adoption agencies about the expectations on them and their local partners and the resources that they will need to allocate.*
- 8.7. *To ensure that adopter recruitment is based on a sound understanding of needs, ADCS calls on local authorities to routinely make the voluntary quarterly data returns to the Department for Education.*