

Edward Timpson MP
Children and Families Minister
Department of Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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Dear Minister

22 March 2013

LGA, SOLACE and ADCS commitments to improving adopter recruitment, assessment and approval

Opinions differ about the solution to the problem of the adopter shortage. But councils agree that there is an urgent need to increase the number of adopters to match the number of children awaiting adoption and the complexities of their specific needs. Local government is rising to the challenge by doing things differently and changing current practice.

There is also a high degree of consensus between councils and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) about the way forward. VAAs recruit only one in five adopters and they have been clear that they wouldn't be able to increase the scale of their operations to meet the demand. Councils already contract with the voluntary agencies for elements of their adoption service in some areas but it would not provide the solution to the adopter recruitment problem across the country.

The Local Government Association (LGA), with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), has been working on a package of measures to encourage more adoptive parents to come forward to help ensure children aren't waiting longer than necessary before being placed with adoptive families. Plans for reforming the way councils work together would make it easier for prospective adopters to find children to adopt in any part of the country – not just their local authority area.

The joint local government response has been swift in tackling the need to equalise the inter-agency and inter-authority fees. To drive rapid improvements in the speed of adoption we are working together as a sector to lead change at a time of unprecedented financial turbulence. The measures in the paper include the following actions by the sector:

LGA and SOLACE

Raising the profile of the issue with local politicians and Chief Executives through targeted communications, so that at a local level there is a high level of awareness about adopter shortage and the measures to tackle it.

An offer of support and challenge to lead members in councils who require support to improve and addressing any persistent poor performance or unwillingness to engage in improvement.

Developing a cost recovery methodology for setting fees, working with a number of councils to test this approach and explore what support may be necessary to move to a level playing field.

ADCS

A data exercise to give a closer to 'real time' picture of: the rate at which children are being identified for adoption and the rate at which adopters are being recruited; the number and nature of existing formal strategic alliances between councils, and between councils and VAAs.

Addressing the small scale at which some council adoption agencies operate in order to achieve economies of scale with a specific challenge to councils to join or form formal consortia or develop full shared service provisions.

More targeted work on those children who have been waiting longest.

Taking a whole system view in order to incorporate adoption support, which forms part of the toolkit of incentives to encouraging more adults to become adopters.

Making rapid progress with a range of reforms to the system including the adoption gateway, targeting recruitment campaigns upon previously untapped markets of adults interested in becoming adopters and the introduction of the new streamlined, 2-stage assessment process from April 2013, together with the recent changes to the role and functions of Adoption Panels.

In addition to the commitments made by our respective associations, we are also working collectively under the auspices of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) to support the sector to increase the number of approved adopters:

Children's Improvement Board

Developing a methodology to analyse adoption performance across the spectrum of activity from recruiting adopters to court proceedings and final permanency.

Learning from Consortia and Joint Service Provision for Adoption and Care.

Developing a Care Practice Diagnostic aimed at supporting improvement in permanency and placement stability.

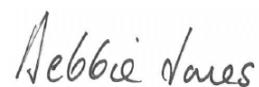
We are all fully committed to working with you to tackle the problem of adopter shortage and we would welcome the opportunity to meet you to continue to discuss the progress of this activity.

Yours sincerely

Cllr David Simmonds

Mark Rogers

Debbie Jones



LGA

SOLACE

ADCS