

ADCS position statement on Adoption II
31 July 2012

The government's recent publication of 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' has set out a clear direction for adoption services in England. This position statement affirms the position of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) in relation to the Action Plan and the important debate about how such services can be improved.

1. ADCS welcomes both the general direction and the specific measures set out in the government's Action Plan. ADCS sees the government's approach to adoption reform as being a matter of profound significance for the numbers of children awaiting adoption, and an important part of a range of potential solutions required as a result of continued increases in the numbers of children subject of child protection plans, in care and subject to court proceedings. Like the government, ADCS does not see a hierarchy in the range of permanency arrangements and notes the growth in Special Guardianship Orders and other kinship care arrangements. However, we acknowledge the benefits of a clear focus on adoption in order that this particular arrangement is given the prominence it deserves for the children concerned.
2. ADCS has been pleased to work with government on adoption reform and we will continue to play a full and active part in constructively helping to shape these reforms for the benefit of vulnerable children. This will require both short term procedural and more fundamental shifts in the way we all work. We especially applaud the government's statement in the Action Plan that adoption is first and foremost a service to children, but one which needs therefore to readily welcome potential adopters.
3. The government has rightly focused upon accountability in the adoption system and ADCS welcomes the way in which the adoption scorecard has contained important contextual information which has encouraged a proper and healthy debate about the complexities of adoption systems both locally and nationally.
4. In particular, ADCS agrees with the government's position that early permanency should be a key aim of the system and that children are best served by being placed with loving permanent families at the earliest possible stage. What we need are more adopters who have the capacity, support and skills to take those children who currently wait longest to be placed, for example sibling groups and children with additional and complex needs.
5. ADCS welcomes the emphasis on improved timeliness of decision making in the system and welcomes the approach that the government has taken

to the Family Justice Review to improve and speed up court proceedings. Local authorities must also take their share of the responsibility in improving the process and to that end ADCS fully accepts a leadership role in promoting these changes. They include the pilot schemes for the new Prospective Adopters Report (PAR), and the planned redesign of the adopter recruitment process which should lead to a quicker, more efficient and more customer focused experience for adopters. The Association unequivocally remains of the view that these improvements should not and will not be at the expense of the quality and rigour of assessments because the breakdown of an adoption placement is catastrophic for all concerned, especially the child.

6. We welcome the proposed changes to statutory guidance that will enable concurrent planning and “fostering to adopt” to flourish more easily. We also welcome refinement to guidance so that race and ethnicity should not be an unnecessary barrier to adoption for all children.
7. ADCS believes it is vital that adoption support services are improved and enhanced within local authorities and by other partners, particularly health services, in order to encourage more prospective adopters to come forward. It is also important that we are able to look at the full range of tax and benefit options that may be open to attract more adopters. It is equally important to consider post-placement support for all other types of permanency arrangements.
8. In order to achieve these improvements, ADCS believes that new partnerships between local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and private sector organisations may help to create new and innovative ways of working that will bring additional capacity and expertise to the marketing and delivery of adoption services. We encourage local authorities to work in close partnerships with each other, or seek new shared arrangements, which may include reviewing existing consortia, the inter-agency fee and the inter-LA fee structure. All such arrangements should be the subject of proper scrutiny with regards to their fitness for purpose and the degree to which they reflect cost.
9. In summary, ADCS will support its members and the sector more broadly to put our considerable collective energies into:
 - Marketing adoption to prospective adopters in a more customer-focussed, user friendly way;
 - Recruiting more prospective adopters who are appropriately skilled and supported and matching them more quickly with children for whom adoption is the right decision;
 - Lifting the performance of all adoption agencies to the level of the best with a relentless focus on children who need adoptive families.