

Adoption Reform

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Overview

A programme of policy development over the course of 2012, with high ministerial and PM priority:

- [February: Government response to the Family Justice Review]
- March: *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay*
- May: Publication of adoption scorecards
- July: early permanence proposals
- Summer/Autumn: Announcement of further proposals – probably for consultation.
- Autumn: Consultation on regulatory change

All happening alongside work on wider children in care issues:

Fostering fortnight, OCC report looking at safeguarding in Children's Homes, Children's Homes Charter, Corporate Parenting Week, Care Leavers Week.

An Action Plan for Adoption Tackling Delay

- Overall aim: to reduce the time children have to wait for an adoptive placement and to see more children placed in stable, loving homes with less delay and disruption.
- Case for reform:
 - Average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family – one year and nine months
 - Variation: last year the average time taken from a child entering care to be being placed for adoption ranged from less than 450 days in some local authorities to more than 900 days in others.
 - A child's chances of adoption are reduced by almost 20% for every year they spend in care
 - Black children take, on average, a year longer to be adopted after entering care than Asian or white children

Chapter 1: finding children loving homes without delay

Aim: Greater urgency in the process; faster family-finding:

- Improving understanding of the impact of delay;
- Removing unnecessary duplication – adoption panels;
- Promoting effective case management practice;
- Legislating to reduce delay – including in the search for a perfect or partial ethnic match;

Chapter 2: valuing prospective adopters

Aim: more approved prospective adopters, especially those who are willing and able to adopt children with high levels of complex needs.

- An Expert Working Group including BAAF, local authorities, CVAA, Adoption UK made a range of proposals for reform.
- Key reforms include:
 - a new six-month approval process, in two stages, and an assessment contract
 - fast-track approval for foster carers and 2nd time adopters
 - a national gateway to adoption

Chapter 3: system improvement

Aim: Stronger accountability for timeliness

■ Case for reform:

- Small numbers of vulnerable children;
- Democratic accountability not straightforward;
- Urgent need for improvement.

■ Focus on timeliness – adoption scorecards:

- performance thresholds set against three key measures;
- highlight good practice;
- trigger sector-led improvement – and in some cases a stronger intervention approach;
- contextual data to reduce perverse incentives;
- intervention must be an art not a science.

Early permanence

Aim: more children being placed with their (likely) adopters earlier, prior to the placement Order, so that the youngest in particular can begin to make attachments as soon as possible.

- 1350 (44%) of children adopted in 2010-11 first became looked after when they were less than one month old. But only 470 children were placed for adoption in 2011 by the time they were one year old.
- Concurrent planning already well-established in the US and well-known here, not least thanks to Coram.
- 'Fostering for Adoption' applies similar principles to children with an LA adoption decision – where adoption is even more likely to be the eventual outcome than in concurrent planning.
- New legislation will require LAs to consider this approach – so there can be no doubt about whether it's legitimate.
- And Coram will work with LAs and other charities to collate and spread effective practice, and support LAs to implement it.

Still to do

- **Implementation**
 - Regulations and Bill
 - Adoption gateway
 - Work with LAs whose scorecards suggest cause for concern
- **Monitoring impact of changes**
- **Recruitment of prospective adopters**
- **Adoption support**
- **Greater role for Voluntary Adoption Agencies**