

Councils urged to prioritise adoption

Councils are being urged to prioritise adoption and ensure adoptive parents are not wrongly turned away to allow more vulnerable young people find a stable, loving home.

Gavin Williamson has called on councils not to shy away from putting children forward for adoption, and has asked them to review their practices following a drop in the number of assessments recommending adoption as the best option for a vulnerable child.

Underlining the government's manifesto commitment to prioritise adoption, the Department for Education has also published new advice for councils today. This makes clear that age, income, sexual orientation and marital status should not be used as reasons to turn away prospective adopters.

Instead, councils are being urged to prioritise adopters' ability to provide a stable, loving home and whether they would provide the best environment for a young person to grow up and flourish in.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Adoption can transform the lives of children waiting in care for a permanent, loving home. I applaud the hard work and commitment of the social workers who dedicate themselves to giving children the kind of home environment that many of us take for granted and urge them not to shy away from putting children forward for adoption.

As long as adoptive parents can offer love, care and the stable home every child in care deserves, I want them to be considered. This government will continue building on the increased support we are giving new adoptive families by making it clear to every council that if they think it is in the best interest of the child, I will back them 100 per cent in recommending adoption.

In a [letter](#) (PDF, 198KB, 5 pages) sent by Children and Families Minister Michelle Donelan to every Director of Children's Services in the country, the government has backed councils to prioritise adoption, and challenged the myths that exist around who can or cannot adopt a child. The letter comes amid concerns that prospective adoptive parents are being turned away despite the law being clear they are eligible.

Children and Families Minister Michelle Donelan said:

Since becoming Minister, I have been struck by the incredible work that social care professionals do to protect and support children in care – but too many children are still waiting for a home to give them the stability they desperately need and together we must

do more.

There are a number of misconceptions about who can and cannot adopt that I worry are putting off potential adoptive parents. Neither age, ethnicity nor sexual orientation should be a barrier to adopting; what matters is the love and protection a parent can provide. That is why I have written to councils asking them to make sure they are following the law correctly so that no-one is wrongly excluded.

The updated advice follows a multi-million pound [investment](#) in an additional year of the government's landmark Adoption Support Fund – making clear the government's continued commitment to get more children out of the care system and into permanent homes.

Alongside this increased funding, more than £1 million will also be provided for Regional Adoption Agencies, working with voluntary organisations around the country, to run recruitment campaigns in 2020 aimed at finding adoptive families for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children.

The latest data shows that of the 2,700 children waiting for adoption, almost 40 per cent have waited over 18 months – of these, 24 per cent were from BAME backgrounds.

The regional recruitment drives will have a particular focus on finding families for these children, as well as groups that the system has not previously prioritised, including siblings and older children, helping make sure there are enough adopters around the country and helping reverse the trend in data swiftly.

Andrew Christie, Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, said:

I welcome the new government's commitment to adoption. The Adoption and Special Leadership Board is determined to improve all aspects of the adoption journey. We want to see higher quality decision making and adoption pursued whenever it is in a child's best interests, a system where children are matched with adoptive parents without undue delay and adoptive families receiving better support. The development of Regional Adoption Agencies offers a new opportunity to transform adoption services, drawing on the best of both the statutory and voluntary sectors. We will support and challenge them to focus relentlessly on improving front line practice to deliver excellence everywhere.

Sue Armstrong-Brown, Chief Executive of Adoption UK, said:

Adoption is a critical route out of care for children who can't return to their birth families and I welcome the government's

renewed commitment to ensuring the adoption sector is fit for purpose. This means investing to value adopters and the love and stability they provide for the most complex and vulnerable children in society. Adoption changes lives and adoptive families deserve lifelong support. Adoption UK stands ready to work with RAAs and the government to help ensure that adoptive families thrive.

Maggie Jones, Chief Executive of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), said:

This is excellent, early evidence of the new government's manifesto commitment to adoption. We wholly support the Secretary of State in urging adopters to come forward from all communities and are ready to offer them a warm welcome. VAAs are working in close partnership with RAAs and local government to find forever homes for the many children in the care system who deserve the love, care and stability of an adoptive family, and to provide support though the lifetime journey of adoption.