

Families across England to receive better support to adopt

Thousands of families are to receive better support when adopting children through a new strategy to tackle the postcode lottery and break down barriers to creating permanent, stable and loving homes as quickly as possible.

Backed by a £48 million investment, the new National Adoption Strategy launched today (Monday 26 July) is set to improve adoption services in England by putting in place better recruitment across the country and removing any unnecessary delays, through more training for front line staff, improving approval process and funding for targeted recruitment campaigns.

Recruitment will focus on matching prospective adopters, from any community, with children and young people and to ensuring adopters are not deterred from pursuing adoption because of their background.

As part of the Government's commitment to level up opportunities for vulnerable children in care, a new framework of national standards will be introduced to end the 'postcode lottery' that too often means the quality of adoption services depend on where a child or adopter lives and ensure support can be delivered swiftly and effectively to improve outcomes for these children.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

There is no substitute for a loving, permanent family. A stable family unit is key to boosting life chances and there are so many adoptive parents across the country who have opened their homes and hearts to some of our most vulnerable children, often with very challenging backgrounds.

We are committed to improving adoption services, as well as breaking down barriers so that parents from all walks of life can adopt and to ensure they are not deterred from adopting simply because of their background.

We have taken steps to ensure these children and young people can be matched with the families that are right for them, but we know there is more to do and this strategy sets out our vision for radically improving systems so that we can be confident that every adoptive family in England is receiving the same high quality service no matter where they live.

Waiting times for children to be adopted has improved over the last eight years, with the average time between a child going into care and being placed with their new family, cut from 22 months in 2012 to 15 months by 2020.

However, there is more to do, and waiting times still remain a challenge – especially children with special educational needs and disabilities, siblings, older children and those from ethnic minority groups.

The strategy clarifies that adopters should never be deterred from pursuing an opportunity to adopt because of their social background, ethnicity, sexuality, or age, building on [advice for councils](#) published by the Department for Education last year, which encouraged councils 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.

It brings together the Government's efforts over the past year to level up outcomes for children in care and improve the inclusivity of the adoption system, such as recruitment work by the National Adopter Recruitment Steering Group and its campaign to encourage adopters of all backgrounds to come forward for children waiting.

This campaign has since helped increase the number of approved adopters as well as reaching out to new communities to raise awareness of adoption, with the Black adopters triage service seeing an increase over 100 enquiries following the launch of the Black adopters' campaign.

Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, Krish Kandiah, said:

Both as an adoptive Dad and as the Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board I am excited by the government's new adoption strategy. I wholeheartedly support the emphasis on seeking families for children rather than children for families.

There is a huge need for people from a wide variety of backgrounds to step up and be the parents that children in care need. Every child has the right to a family. Most will be able to stay with their birth family, or be raised by a kinship carer. But when neither is possible, adoption is a wonderful way to give children the love and security of a family. This new strategy gives us an opportunity as a nation to make sure every child, whatever their colour, age, abilities or gender, knows the love of a forever family.

The new adoption strategy will be supported by £48 million for 2021-22, building on an investment of over £200 million to date for adoptive families. This includes £46 million to continue post adoption help for families through the Adoption Support Fund to provide family support sessions, cognitive therapy, and activities to help children recover from earlier traumas, helping them settle into their new families and homes.

An additional £1 million will also go to Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) leaders to improve recruitment and the adopter approval process alongside additional funding for early arrangements where a child is placed with foster

carers who are also their prospective adopters when first removed from their birth family so bonding can begin straight away.

RAAs in England, which set the adoption practices for families in that area, will also be supported by a newly appointed adoption strategic leader, Sarah Johal, who will bring her experience and expertise from leading one of the first RAAs set up, One Adoption West Yorkshire, to bring together best practice from across high-performing adoption agencies and boost collaborative working so that adopted children and their families can access the support and services they need – whatever their background or where they live. Sarah will empower, enable and motivate the RAA Leaders Group to have high ambitions for the sector embedding a culture of shared accountability and continuous improvement.

The new National Adoption Framework will mean services are delivered to the same high quality across England and that best practice becomes the norm across all areas of recruitment, matching and support.

National RAA Strategic Leader Sarah Johal said:

I'm delighted to be taking on the new role of strategic leader for the Regional Adoption Agencies Leaders Group. Adoption can make a positive difference to children's lives and we in local government want to ensure we have the best adoption system we can. One that is driven forward by excellence and innovation in practice and which uses evidenced based practice in achieving best possible outcomes for children.

Dr Carol Homden, CEO of Coram, said:

As the only voluntary sector leader of one of the country's largest regional adoption agencies, Coram welcomes the government's commitment to ensuring that children and adopters from all walks of life who come forward to provide the loving homes they need have consistent high quality services no matter where they live in England.

Too many children are waiting too long and all parts of the sector – local authorities, voluntary and regional adoption agencies – need to work across boundaries to tackle barriers to adoption whether they lie in practice approaches, decision-making process and public perceptions or in challenges of housing, financial pressures or access to support.

Like adopters kinship carers play a vital role in caring for vulnerable children. The Government is therefore also prioritising improved support for children looked after by their family members or close relatives. This includes £1 million in new funding for 2020/21 to increase the number of local kinship carers support groups, increasing funding to the Family Rights

Group kinship carers helpline and including children in kinship care arrangements in the priority groups which local authorities must include in their school admissions.

Lucy Peake, CEO of Kinship, said:

Kinship carers have stepped up to raise 150,000 children in England, keeping them within family networks and out of the care system. It is life-changing and often challenging. We warmly welcome this funding which will mean that many more kinship carers will be able to access advice and peer support when they need it, helping them provide stable and loving care for vulnerable children.

Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group, said:

Research demonstrates the benefits to children of being able to live with family and friends who know and love them, when they cannot live at home. But navigating the child welfare and family justice system can feel overwhelming for families. Getting accurate, independent legal advice can make the difference between whether a child is able to safely remain within their family network or not. It can impact upon the child and kinship carers' entitlement to support and the child's wellbeing.

Last year the charity's advice line last year received more calls than at any time in its history. We are delighted that the additional monies will enable Family Rights to advise 1300 more callers this year about their rights and options.

This new strategy builds on improved support for adopted children and their families over the last decade. This includes the Adoption Support Fund, introduced in 2015, to help children who have experienced abuse and neglect to get the therapeutic support they need – over 36,000 children have been supported so far and had their lives transformed.

The Government has also developed over 30 Regional Adoption Agencies that are creating a system where children are matched with adopters as quickly as possible and are helping to ensure that there are a range of high-quality support services available nationwide.

These reforms have helped to remove organisational barriers and led to improved services and better support for children and their families. Delivering on our target set out for every local council to be part of an RAA, nearly all local authorities are now in an RAA, with 145 out of 151 having made the transition and the remainder planning to this year.