

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.

Agriculture Bill to boost environment and food production

A future where farmers are properly supported to farm more innovatively and protect the environment is a step closer today following the introduction of the Agriculture Bill.

The landmark legislation introduced today will provide a boost to the industry after years of inefficient and overly bureaucratic policy dictated to farmers by the EU.

It sets out how farmers and land managers in England will in the future be rewarded with public money for "public goods" – such as better air and water quality, higher animal welfare standards, improved access to the countryside or measures to reduce flooding. This will contribute to the government's commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2050, while at the same time, helping to boost farmers' productivity.

This will replace the current subsidy system of Direct Payments which pays farmers for the total amount of land farmed, skewing payments towards the largest landowners rather than those farmers delivering specific public benefits.

Instead, the new measures will provide a better future for agriculture in

this country, maximising the potential of the land for food production and for delivering public goods.

The reforms set out in the Bill are supported by the manifesto commitment to maintain overall annual funding for farm support at current levels for the duration of this Parliament.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

Our landmark Agriculture Bill will transform British farming, enabling a balance between food production and the environment which will safeguard our countryside and farming communities for the future.

This is one of the most important environmental reforms for many years, rewarding farmers for the work they do to safeguard our environment and helping us meet crucial goals on climate change and protecting nature and biodiversity.

We will move away from the EU's bureaucratic Common Agricultural Policy and towards a fairer system which rewards our hard-working farmers for delivering public goods, celebrating their world-leading environmental work and innovative, modern approach to food production.

We will continue to champion British produce and support farmers to adapt to our new pioneering approach to agriculture through a seven-year transition period in England, ensuring we unleash the potential of our farmers for the future.

The new Bill champions British food by improving transparency and fairness in the supply chain from farm to fork and through investing in new technology and research to ensure our world-renowned food producers remain competitive and innovative.

Investing in the foundations of food production, such as clean air, soils and water, will safeguard our food security and the Bill will legally require any UK government to report regularly on food security to Parliament.

By collecting data from across the supply chain, the government will also help food producers strengthen their negotiating position at the farm gate and seek a fairer return.

In order to spend more on boosting productivity and environmental benefits, Direct Payments will be phased out over an agricultural transition period, which is due to start in 2021 and run for seven years.

Later in the agricultural transition, the government plans to 'delink' Direct Payments from the requirement to farm the land, a requirement that currently exists under EU law. This will give farmers greater flexibility to plan for their future as these payments will be able to be used by farmers to invest

in their business, diversify their activities or help new people enter the sector.

For farmers new to environmental work or hoping to do more than they currently do under the future Environment Land Management (ELM) scheme, the transition period will also allow them time to understand how new schemes can work best for their farm.

The government has already announced that the funding available for Direct Payments for 2020 will be the same as for 2019, and the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Bill has been introduced to Parliament to enable us to make Direct Payments to farmers for the 2020 scheme year— giving much-welcomed certainty to our farmers and food producers.

For subsequent years we are committed to matching the current budget available to farmers in every year of this Parliament, providing certainty and stability in advance of transitioning to the new system in England and phasing out direct payments in favour of rewarding the provision of “public goods”.

Cameras to broadcast from the Crown Court for first time

- Judges’ sentencing remarks to be broadcast
- Public able to watch online
- Move welcomed by national broadcasters

The Crown Court (Recording and Broadcasting) Order 2020 will allow cameras to broadcast the sentencing remarks of High Court and Senior Circuit judges in some of the most high-profile courts across the country, including the Old Bailey.

Proceedings are currently broadcast from certain Court of Appeal cases. Extending this to the Crown Court means the public will be able to hear judges explain the reasons behind their sentences for the most serious offences.

Filming will be restricted to sentencing remarks only and no other court user – including victims, witnesses, jurors and court staff – will be filmed.

Justice Secretary & Lord Chancellor, Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

This government, alongside the judiciary, is committed to improving public understanding of our justice system and allowing cameras into the Crown Court will do just that.

It will ensure our courts remain open and transparent and allow people to see justice being delivered to the most serious of offenders.

Today's legislation follows a successful three-month pilot that allowed not-for-broadcast sentencing remarks to be filmed in eight Crown Courts and has been welcomed by ITN, Sky and the BBC.

John Battle, Head of Compliance at ITN, said:

This is a landmark moment and an important day for open justice and transparency of our legal system. For the first time the public will see images of proceedings in the Crown Court on television news.

This change will help a wider audience to see and understand the criminal justice process for themselves.

John Ryley, Head of Sky News, said:

The filming of judges sentencing remarks in the Crown Court is a great day for transparency in our courts. This is a further step in helping the public to understand the constraints under which judges work and the complexities of many of the biggest criminal cases.

This has been a long campaign by the three main broadcasters working together.

Fran Unsworth, Director of News and Current Affairs at the BBC, said:

Today's announcement comes after a great campaign by the BBC, ITN and Sky to allow filming of judges' sentencing remarks in the Crown Court and is a momentous day for transparency in our justice system.

By opening up the courts, our audiences will be able to further their understanding of the criminal justice system and witness the judicial process for themselves.

This provision is part of the government's wider court reform and digitalisation programme, using technology and modern ways of working to increase access to justice for people up and down the country.

Notes to editors

- An affirmative SI will be laid in the House of Commons on Thursday, 16 January. Timescales for it coming into force will depend on the passage

of the legislation through Parliament. All Crown Court staff who will be involved with this work will receive training and new guidance before filming commences.

- Broadcasters will only be able to film High Court and Senior Circuit judges sitting in the Crown Court and will need to obtain permission from the judiciary in advance.
- Filming will be subject to the usual reporting restrictions and appropriately edited before leaving the courtroom. In the case where filming is to be broadcast live, there will be a short delay before broadcast to avoid any breach of reporting restrictions or any other error.
- HMCTS will retain copyright of the footage, and HMCTS, MoJ and Judicial Office will be able to access any footage taken by broadcasters.
- The full sentencing remarks of any case broadcast will be hosted on a website to which the public has access.
- Filming is already permitted in the Supreme Court, however this is carried out by the court itself and separate from this contract.

[UK Africa Investment Summit Envoy Philip Parham looks ahead to the Summit](#)

Next week, the UK is set to welcome African leaders and senior government representatives along with British and African businesses to the [UK-Africa Investment Summit in London](#).

By 2050, over 2 billion people will live in Africa and 1 in 4 global consumers will be African. The Summit will harness the potential of the continent and create new lasting partnerships that will deliver more investment, jobs and growth and benefit people and businesses across Africa and the UK.

As the official Envoy for the UK-Africa Investment Summit I have, most recently, just visited Algeria. I met the new Commerce Minister and senior officials, the leadership of the Forum Chefs d'Enterprises (equivalent to our CBI), and members of the British business community. They were enthusiastic about the Summit and the potential for growing business partnership between the UK and Algeria, particularly following the formation of a new Algerian government focused on reform.

In this role I have also visited several other countries which will participate in the Summit. In meetings with Ministers, officials and UK and African businesses which are invested across the continent, I have explained the breadth and depth of the UK's offer. Visits to Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Morocco and Algeria have all shown me that there is appetite for a closer

partnership with the UK.

The UK is already a leading investor in Africa. In 2018 alone, the UK's development finance institution CDC made investments supporting over 370,000 jobs across Africa. Since 2002 the UK's Private Infrastructure Development Group has invested over £1.95bn in 146 infrastructure projects across Africa. The stock of UK investment in Africa is worth £39bn in 2018.

Investment is life-changing. It can create sustainable jobs, boost access to education, improve public services and gives young people the opportunity to shape their own futures.

We are proud to say that UK businesses are already investing sustainably across Africa. Examples include Diageo with its environmentally friendly brewery in Kenya, the solar energy provider Azuri Technologies from Cambridge, and Northamptonshire-based Blue Skies Fruit which invests in fruit farming.

We want to unlock new flows of UK investment, for example tapping into UK appetite for impact investment. We want to increase both the quantity and the quality of UK investment, and for the UK to be the investment partner of choice for African nations. The Summit will demonstrate the quality of our offer and show our partners how we can support them with our world-leading technology, innovation expertise.

Shares from more African countries are listed and traded in London than in any other international financial centre. We want to do more.

The UK is already providing crucial expertise to enable African countries to raise funds from the international markets in their own currencies. This means that they can attract valuable long-term investment while being protected from exchange rate fluctuations. Again, we want to do more.

The UK-Africa Investment Summit on 20 January will mark the beginning of a step change in the focus and effectiveness of UK-Africa partnership – a partnership which will build a better future for us all.

[Prime Minister's call with President Bolsonaro of Brazil: 15 January 2020](#)



The Prime Minister spoke to President Bolsonaro of Brazil today.

The leaders committed to strengthening the ties between our countries in a range of areas, including trade and investment.

They also discussed climate change and agreed to continue to work together ahead of the COP26 summit which the UK will host in Glasgow in November.

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