

Adopting the Future – A Consultation Document – July 2006

Page 8 – Executive Summary

“.....Adoption has not enjoyed a high profile within children’s services.....” – comment – will this remain so if the adoption service “breaks away” from child care?

Page 11 – Contact

“.....there will be no presumption that contact should or should not occur.” – a good change.

Page 11 – Finding the Right Family

A database of families – a positive step.

Page 12 – Placement Stability

Standard practice of dual approval – how will this be legislated to allow voluntary agencies to do this?

Page 12 – Placement Stability

Foster Carers and speedier approval – make sure it is not a ‘quickie’ and poorer system.

Page 13 – Adoption Support Services

Mention of “Statutory Adoption Support Services” only.

Page 13 – Consent and Dispensing with Consent

Independent Counselling – will Trusts have finances available to pay for agencies – not ‘free’ students on counselling placements?

Mediation – is that different from Independent Counselling?

Page 14 – Infrastructure

“.....one regional centre for statutory agencies” what about voluntary agencies and support groups?

Page 14 – Partnership Working

“...gain commitment to an acceptable and sustainable level of investment in voluntary sector services.....” – what does this mean? How will it work in practice?

“...create a culture of co-operation” – will money block culture?

Quality and standards in both sectors – a positive issue.

As we are not directly involved in inter-country adoption we can comment in a limited way only.

Adoption in Context

Page 18

“.....there remain many people who wish to adopt an infant who has no birth family ties – for some people the answer is to adopt from abroad.” Comment – All babies have birth family ties!

Chapter 2 – Trends in Adoption

Page 22 “Dual Approval”

Voluntary Adoption Agencies cannot dually approve.

Page 28 – 3.11

Agree regarding the need to avoid delay in order to benefit children. A need to avoid social work and court delay.

Page 37 3.43

Does not include voluntary agencies – what about co-operation and promoting voluntary and statutory inter-agency working.

Page 39 – Section 3.5

Accept these statements made in this section – a need to strengthen the voluntary sector. It does not mention financial support provided by the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety.

Chapter 4 – Delivering the Future – Domestic Adoption

Page 43 – Key Action 1

Accept this principle.

Funding needed.

Voluntaries need Service Level Agreements and not spot purchasing to be involved – how can this be ensured?

Page 44 – Key Action 2

Accept this – human rights of children need to be made paramount. Legislation change needed.

Page 45 – Key Action 3

Accept this key action. Are we aware what has happened in E & W with regard to delay.

Key Action 4 – Ensuring the Child’s Voice is Heard

Accept.

Key Action 5 – Placement Orders

Accept.

Key Action 6 – Contact

Accept.

Key Action 7 – Finding the Right Family

Accept – a role for voluntary and statutory agencies here.

Key Action 8 – Eligibility

A need for wider agency discussion and not just a view of chief officers.

- Accept the need to change step-parent adoption legislation regarding adoption your own child
- Accept the criminal stipulation
- Age – needs agency debate with regard to what is best for children

Key Action 9 – Placement Stability

Clarification needed on “...the foster carers application to adopt should be viewed positively and processed as a priority – faster than for prospective adoptive parents who are not foster carers.”
Are we entering a two-tier system?

Key Action 10 – Permanence Outside Adoption

Accept “special guardianship”

Key Action 11 – Adoption Support Services

Accept this, although query if ‘the adoption process has been completed.’ A life-long process.

A need for funding.

A need to recognise voluntary adoption agencies and support agencies could be involved here – with adequate funding provided.

Key Action 12 – Consent and Dispensing with Consent

Consent including views on religion (and hence culture/nationality by association) may still be important to some birth parents.

Independent Support

Voluntary Adoption Agencies provide this already. However, funding of the same through Service Level Agreements would allow for developments in this service delivery. Again a funding issue.

Accept grounds for dispensing with parental consent.

Key Action 13 – Access to Information

Accept that this clarification would allow for consistency across agencies and improve service to users.

In England and Wales Adoption Support Agencies can charge service users. Is this the intention in Northern Ireland? If charges can be levied will this reduce access to services?

Key Action 14 – Independent Review Mechanism

More detail is needed on this – who will run it? Costs associated with it? Potentially expensive for agencies.

Key Action 15 – Birth Certificates

Accept.

Key Action 16 – Infrastructure

Involvement of voluntary adoption agencies in this infrastructure even though voluntary agencies are mentioned in point 4.27.

In the potential model for Service Delivery, no mention is made of voluntary agencies. Could such a model lead to development of an adoption service **not** closely linked to its feeder service – the child protection teams? Also, will this mean child protection teams lose further an understanding of adoption, as appears to be the case to some extent at present?

Key Action 17 – Development of the Work Force and Multi-Disciplinary Training

Welcome this.

A need to involve others e.g. psychologists, teachers, health visitors, members of adoption panels, decision-makers in training.

Key Action 18 – Partnership Working

Accept proposals.

Query around this when you reflect on Key Action 16, which does not mention the voluntary sector. How will an acceptable and sustainable level of funding be decided upon?

“Create a culture of co-operation through the identification of opportunities to develop and enhance cross-sector working.” This needs to be more than tokenism with limited funding streams.

Choice is important for service users – therefore we need a vibrant voluntary sector.

Chapter 5 – Delivering the Future – Inter-Country Adoption

The Church of Ireland Adoption Society is not involved in Inter-Country Adoptions – as a result my comments will be limited.

Key Action 19 – Infrastructure

See benefits of restructuring and speculation.

Key Action 20 – Protecting Children

Key Action 8 – good if it is linked in here, otherwise we have a two-tier system and children could lose out by being placed with ‘older adopters.’

Key Action 21 – Charging for Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety Casework

Accept.

Final Comments

- i. The document does focus on the needs of children and improving adoption outcomes.
- ii. While mention is made of voluntary and statutory co-operation this is not always clearly set out. We need to ensure the voluntary sector is a key player.
- iii. The document is an opportunity for positive change in adoption and for increased opportunities for the voluntary agencies.

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