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For Immediate release

Directors of Children's Services recommend ways to speed up adoption

Local authorities and the family justice system must improve their procedures to speed up the adoption process, Directors of Children's Services say today. Such changes include allowing social workers increased discretion to make judgments about the suitability of potential adopters, reform to adoption panels, and of inspection and performance data.

Publishing a position statement setting out potential changes to the adoption system in response to criticism that it takes too long for a child in care to be permanently adopted, the Association of Directors of Children's Services recommended that:

- The information required about potential adopters should be reviewed, to ensure that only relevant information is collected;
- Reports to court and to adoption panels should contain more analysis, rather than description;
- Adoption panels should be streamlined so that they focus on the selection of adopters rather than care planning;
- Inspection and performance data should focus on outcomes rather than process; and
- Government policy should promote alternative forms of permanence, such as Special Guardianship, as well as adoption, as offering a permanent and stable home for vulnerable children.

Matt Dunkley, President of ADCS said,

"Local authorities and social workers are at the heart of the system for finding permanent homes for some of the most vulnerable children and recognise that adoption offers the best chance of stability for a lot of children. The current process is cumbersome and does not leave room for social workers to use their professional judgement to make decisions in the best interests of children. We would like to see a streamlining of this process so that potential adopters are asked relevant questions to ensure sufficient rigour, but are not bombarded with questions that do little to help identify the best match between children and adoptive parents.

Of course social workers do not make the final decision about whether a child should be adopted – that is a question for the courts. The Family Justice Review made some very strong recommendations about how the process should be speeded up and these should be implemented as soon as possible. Indeed we believe full implementation of the review's recommendations on public law would go a long way to address these issues."

Mr Dunkley acknowledged the variation in the speed of adoptions between local authorities but noted the dangers in judging performance through a limited dataset that focuses only on some aspects of the care system. He continued:

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“We know that some local authorities get children through the adoption process more quickly than others, while other local authorities manage to achieve better outcomes for those children who stay in the care system. All local authorities need to learn from the best elements of the sector so that we offer the best possible service to these vulnerable children. We will be working with government to support this process.

“It is important that this complex area of work is not over-simplified through the use of crude performance measures or process driven inspection. Adoption is not the best option for every child and there are other forms of permanent placement that might be preferable. Placing a child for adoption is an important decision that must be taken on the best evidence available, in the best interests of the child and at the pace that allows for sufficient rigour as well as a speedy resolution.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

- 1) The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) is the professional leadership association for Directors of Children’s Services and their senior management teams in local authorities.
- 2) The full position statement can be found on the ADCS website:
www.adcs.org.uk/download/position-statements/2011/ADCS%20position%20statement%20on%20adoption.pdf
- 3) As well as being adopted, courts can issue Special Guardianship orders and residence orders that give children and young people stable and permanent placements when adoption is not suitable. statistics published by the Department for Education on 29th September shows that the number of children and young people securing a stable and permanent placement has risen 27% over the last 5 years and 8.3% increase in the last year. The statistics can be found here:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/statistics-by-topic/a00196857/children-looked-after-by-las-in-england>

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