

Ministerial foreword



It is now more than a year since I started the work to overhaul and improve the adoption process in England and almost exactly a year since the Prime Minister told the Conservative Party Conference that adoption reform was one of his personal priorities.

Much has happened since. In March I published *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay*. That document set out our proposals for tackling delay and for sharpening accountability and introduced local authority adoption scorecards. They have already begun to make an impact.

I am now seeking views on a wide range of additional reforms which I am convinced are vital if we are to make adoption available for more of the children who need it. These reforms include:

- a new, shorter two stage approval process for prospective adopters, and a fast-track procedure for approved foster carers and second time adopters;
- changes aimed at ensuring swifter use of the Adoption Register by local authorities;
- changes restricting the size of adoption panels so that they can carry out their work more quickly and more effectively; and
- changes that will make it easier for prospective adopters to be approved as temporary foster carers and take the child they may ultimately adopt into their family sooner.

These changes will make a real difference. But there is still more to do. There have been entirely well motivated reforms of adoption by previous governments but the improvements made were not sustained. I do not intend to allow that to happen this time, which is why I am determined to look not simply at policy and guidance but at every aspect of professional practice. So, following advice from my Adoption Advisor, Martin Narey, I have recently sought views about two very sensitive issues, birth family contact and the adoption of siblings and I expect to make announcements about those subjects shortly. Additionally I am about to consider advice from Mr Narey on how we can allow adopters a greater role in initiating the match with the child or children they will adopt, ensuring children who need adoption wait as little time as possible.

I am encouraged by simultaneous reform in the Family Court System. The Family Justice Board and its independent Chair, David Norgrove, is now in place to drive improvements in performance right across the court system with a particular focus on reducing delay in care cases. Adoption is the best outcome for many more children in care than the three thousand or so who were adopted last year, and I hope to see this becoming a reality over the coming months as our reforms begin to take hold.

It is also important that we continue to push for improvements to fostering. In May, we signalled action to encourage more people to become foster carers, to make the assessment and approval processes more timely and responsive, to empower foster carers to make day-to-day decisions about children in their care, to develop a more flexible model of support for foster carers who have made a long term commitment to the children they care for and to improving the training and support that foster carers and social workers receive. This consultation proposes a series of practical regulatory reforms, drawing on detailed work by expert working groups, relating to the assessment processes, record sharing, changing a foster carer's terms of approval and delegated authority.

Much of the progress we have made on adoption reform and on fostering during the last two years would not have been possible without the contribution of Tim Loughton, who has recently stepped down as Children's Minister. I should like to put on record my appreciation for Tim's leadership. At the same time, I welcome Edward Timpson as a new Children's Minister. Edward has been a valuable contributor to the adoption reform programme and to policy on fostering, working closely with his predecessor, and I know he will drive forward the reforms initiated by Tim.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Education