



**Robert Goodwill MP**

Minister of State for Children and Families

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To: Directors of Children's Services

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## **THE ADOPTION SUPPORT FUND**

The Adoption Support Fund has been a great success with over 21,000 adoptive and special guardianship families and over 25,500 children receiving therapeutic support since it was launched in May 2015. Thank you for making this possible.

You will recall that it became necessary to introduce fair access limits and to ask local authorities to share the costs of support over and above the fair access limits through a match-funding approach because of the scale of demand. This approach has been in place for some time and it is good to see that almost half of local authorities have made applications for match-funding, providing additional therapeutic support for almost 250 children. I am also pleased to see that about a quarter of local authorities are providing additional funding where cases do not meet the match-funding criteria – a further 97 children have benefitted from this. I would urge all local authorities to consider using match-funding where this is necessary to meet children's needs.

Demand for the fund continues to grow and is almost three times the level it was in 2015-16. In recognition of that rising demand, I am pleased to announce that an additional £1m will be made available this year, bringing spend on the Fund to £29m this year. Whilst funding has increased, and will continue to do so until 2020, it remains necessary to keep the fair access limits in place. I want to offer the sector some certainty and confirm that the existing fair access limits – up to £2,500 for specialist assessments and up to £5,000 for therapy - will remain in place for the next two financial years.

The recently published evaluation covering the early implementation of the Fund found that the children accessing the Fund showed substantially higher levels of emotional, behavioural and developmental needs than both children in the general population and when compared to looked-after children as a whole. It also found that 84% of parents believed that the Fund had helped their child. You can find the evaluation [here](#).

The evaluation also found that the efficiency and quality of assessments was improving and that parents were generally satisfied with the assessment process. That said, I continue to hear concerns from some parents and the voluntary sector about delays securing assessments of adoption support needs. I would be grateful if you could ask your teams to look into this and consider ways in which

both timeliness of assessments and subsequent applications to the Fund could be improved.

DfE is commissioning a further evaluation that will take us through to the end of this parliament. It will be closely aligned with the evaluation of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) programme, also currently being commissioned.

The RAA programme is progressing well with five RAAs now live. Adoption is in a significant period of change. It is important that the Fund is able to operate successfully in the emerging regionalised system. We are funding three RAAs – Adoption Counts, One Adoption West and Adoption South West – to consider how the ASF would operate in a regionalised framework. We have asked them to prioritise work this year on reaching agreements with local authority partners on the approach to match-funding applications to the Fund. If children and families do not receive the therapeutic support they need, they are more likely to experience an adoption breakdown with the child or children returning to care at great expense to local authorities. It is, therefore, in the best interests of families, local authorities and RAAs to agree a process for match-funding these applications.

I know that some voluntary organisations are anxious about a lack of certainty during this period of change. Some Regional Adoption Agency projects have agreed plans to extend existing support contracts for a year or more whilst they develop their commissioning strategy. This has helped the voluntary sector to make plans, and I would encourage all local authorities to consider how they manage this transition in a way that protects vital services.

The next couple of years will be critical and we must ensure that we build on the early success of the fund and the emerging RAAs, to ensure all adopted children get the support they need.

Please accept my thanks and appreciation for the work that you and your teams are doing to support some of the most vulnerable children in society.

Yours sincerely,



**Robert Goodwill MP**  
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