

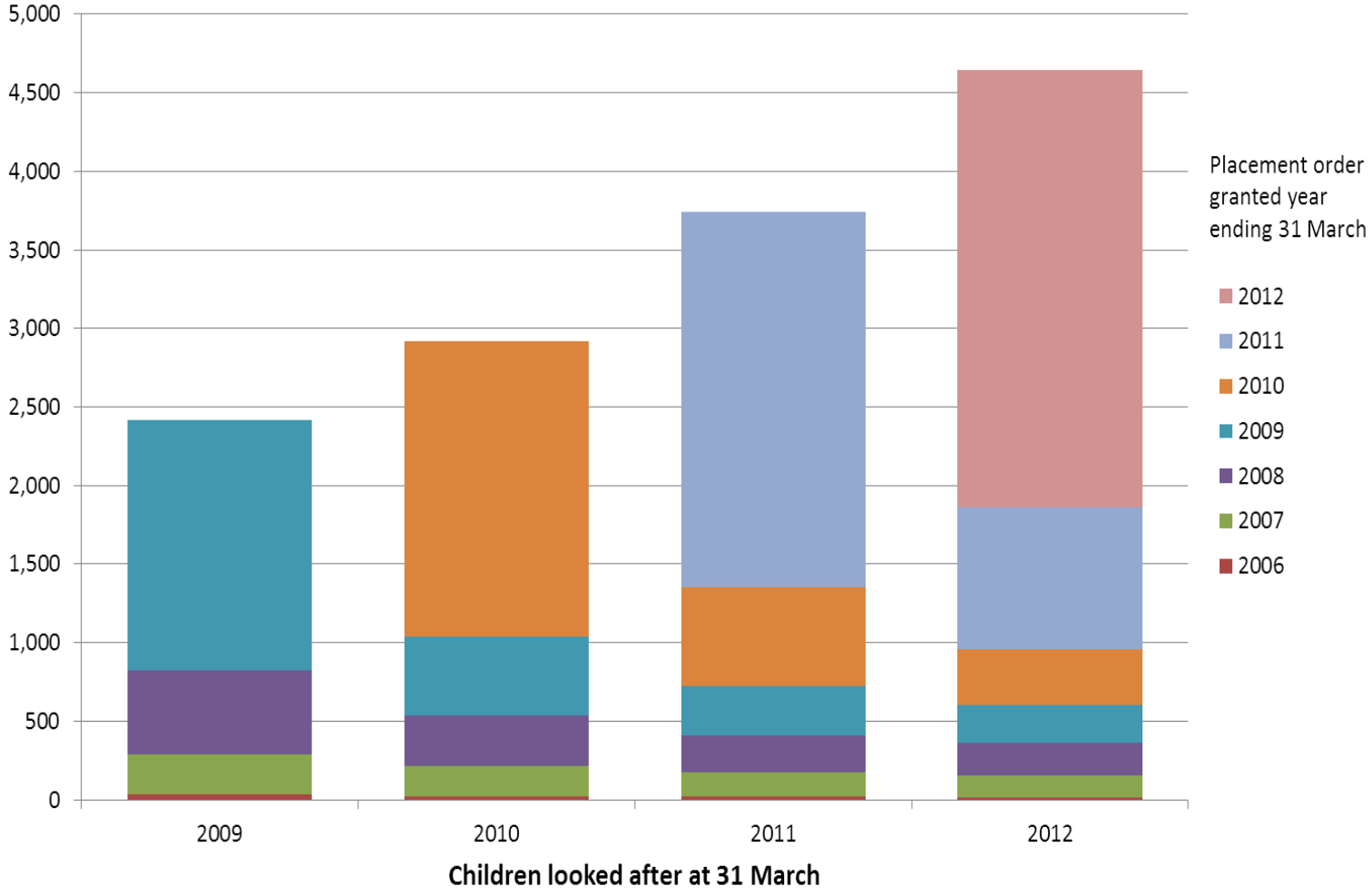
The Recruitment Challenge

Carol Homden

The problem

- The shortage of adopters is critical.
- The number of children with a placement order but not yet placed at the end of the year has grown by an average of **820 in each of the last two years.**
- The number of children placed for adoption has remained relatively static.

Children on a placement order at 31 March by year in which order was granted - children not placed for adoption



The problem

- This rate of increase suggests a required increase of approximately **more than 600** additional adopters each year to prevent further growth in the number of children waiting.
- This is likely to be an underestimate.

The problem

- At the end of March 2012 there were 4650 with placement orders waiting to be placed with a permanent family
- We estimate that this is approximately 3000 children more than there would be if the system was working effectively and children were not having to wait too long to be adopted.
- We need 2000 – 3000 additional adopters to address this.
- Again, this is likely to be an underestimate.

What's the impact?

- This has barely begun to show through in the data – but the adopter shortage will mean children wait longer to be adopted, or do not get adopted at all.
- The 'excess' stock of 3000 children is costing local authorities £1.2-1.5 million per week or £60-80 million per year in foster care costs.

Problem analysis

- LA recruitment tends (understandably) to be focussed on the local, not the national, adopter shortage.
- Many agencies operate at a very small scale meaning they cannot benefit from economies of scale.
- Local authorities tend to look sequentially at adopters, first, their own, then those of other authorities, finally VAA recruited adopters
- This hinders the system from responding effectively to the need for growth in adopter numbers.

Problem analysis

- VAA growth is constrained by uncertainty of demand which results from LAs favouring in-house services and other LAs.
- The current inter-agency fee structure contributes to this barrier faced by VAAs.

What does a solution look like?

- Greater collaboration between local authority agencies and voluntary adoption agencies
- LAs commissioning more adopter recruitment and assessment work from other agencies.
- Equalising the inter-agency adopter assessment and recruitment fee
- Understanding motivations and co-ordinating recruitment approaches
- Creation of the new national adoption gateway – First4Adoption

A new, dedicated information service for people interested in adopting a child:

Telephone line and web information

On-line self-learning resources

Adopter-volunteers, professional advisers, social work and legal skills

Run by Coram Children's Legal Centre, Adoption UK and Coram

Funded and supported by the DfE

To increase adoptive parent numbers by:

Offering a national gateway for adoption
and to distributed adoption agencies

Giving clear, impartial adopter-focused
information about adopting a child

Encouraging more potential adopters to
come forward

Supporting agencies to deliver consistent
national customer service standards

An source of unbiased **advice**
A source of **referrals** for agencies
A referral **destination** for potential
adopters who do not meet your needs
A source of **insight** on adopters
marketing, trends and best practice
DfE-funded market research underway
A source of **support** for campaigns
including National adoption Week

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.... What is it not!

Not a replacement for agencies' own enquiry services

Can handle more early/initial enquiries – enabling agencies to direct more time toward assessing appropriate applicants

Not a source of national marketing spend but aims for effectiveness of spend

Not an inspection or complaints body

Other Proposals

- The Secretary of State will be taking a new statutory power to require all or any local authorities to outsource adopter recruitment and assessment in order to drive improvement
 - Local authorities would become commissioners, not providers, of adopter recruitment and assessment
 - Local authorities would retain responsibility for the children.

Alternative proposals

- Ministers have put forward their proposal for radical systemic change but are willing to listen to other approaches.
- Ministers are willing to use the proposed power if necessary but will look at the sector's own progress when determining whether and how to use it.
- For this reason he is inviting the local government sector to submit initial alternative proposals by the end of February.

Next steps

- Telephone line for F4A is live now:
0300 222 0022
- Website: www.first4adoption.org.uk
- Launch of full website in late March
- Publication of research
- Implementation of DfE developed self-learning materials to follow