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Den Craig,

22 January 2013

Thank you for your letter of 27 November, in which you enclose the notes of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adoption and Fostering (APPG) meeting. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Your letter draws a number of important issues to my attention. It might be helpful if I mention some of our ongoing work on adoption which is of particular relevance to each of the points you raise. I am sure that you will have seen the Prime Minister's interview in *The Times* on Christmas Eve, and this Department published a document on the same day which covers the issues raised in some of your questions. This is at: <http://tinyurl.com/9wj98as>.

The answers to the points you raise in your letter are:

The CVAA's growth rates last year with placements for Adoption has been over 20% and they are committed to ensuring this every year over the next 3 years. There was recognition however that more emphasis was needed on those children 'stuck' in the system – sibling groups; BME; Older and also complex needs children. It was discussed that the costs of keeping each child was costly and a discussion whether some of that money could be earmarked as incentives to Adopters to take children from these groups. Almost an 'Invest to save' programme. Thoughts around the 500 sibling groups being targeted for example where the money could be used for cars, housing requirements and other necessary daily life requirements.

Adoption support packages that involved a guaranteed allowance based on assessed needs would help provide more adopters.

The APPG has made some useful suggestions as to how we might better support families, for example, those who adopt sibling groups. We are working on improvements to the adoption support package so that prospective adopters can feel more confident that they will be able to effectively parent children who are harder to place. It is vital that adoptive parents get the support they need to enable them to give vulnerable children the greatest possible stability, and we know only too well that some adoptive

families struggle to get this help. We are determined to change that, and the Government has already made significant positive changes in this area.

The attached documents set out plans on adoption support with the focus being on treatment of adopters, parental rights, specialist support and raising standards and improving practice.

The costs that LA's charge each other for placements is about half that of VAA's. It was felt that if the costs were comparable and with the record of success that VAA's achieve in comparison, then more LA's would commission the services of VAA's. A direct on charges maybe?

The APPG feels that the inter-authority fee should be comparable with the inter-agency fee charged for voluntary adoption agency placements. The inter-authority fee is set by the Local Government Association, and we are in discussion with them and the Association of Directors of Children's Services about moving this into line with the inter-agency fee, and I understand that they are working to align the fee. I believe that this decision is best made by local authorities as part of their wider changes to recruiting more adopters..

It was felt that there are many adopters who are registered to adopt from abroad because it is a much quicker system. Could we not allow a system which would allow those who chose to register from abroad adoptions also join the UK register?

The APPG suggests that approved inter-country adopters should be able to simultaneously pursue domestic adoption. If prospective adopters were able to pursue domestic and inter-country adoption at the same time, there would be a potential risk to children awaiting adoption. A child's expectations could be raised unfairly if an application was withdrawn at a late stage and/or they might miss out on another match. Alternatively, they might experience delays in being matched. I believe that these risks should be minimised in line with the overarching policy principle of adoption legislation that the paramount consideration in decisions to do with adoption is the welfare of the child. Inter-country prospective adopters who wish to be considered for domestic adoption should have to withdraw from the intercountry adoption process.

You may be interested to know that intercountry adoption reached a global peak in the mid-2000s. Since then, numbers have fallen on a year on year basis. The number of applications in England for 2012 was just under 100. This is partly due to waiting times in the child's country of origin getting longer.

Whilst an incredibly sensitive approach would be needed, the success of the BAAF 'Adoption Parties' seems to be highly successful and it is recommended that these are looked at to be expanded.

Adoption activity days are indeed a useful tool in the recruitment of potential adopters. We are exploring a number of ways in which we might enable prospective adopters to play a more active role in the matching process, including looking at the results of BAAF's "adopter activity day" pilots. We expect that Local Authorities will commission or organise more events, and

are considering whether there is a limited role for government to support an initial expansion.

It was felt that a 'Menu of Options and strategies' be made available to address the large gap between adopters and children waiting.

An advertising campaign headed up by Celebrities who were adopted to Kick Start a national campaign to increase the numbers of adopters.

The gap between the number of children awaiting adoption and the number of available prospective adopters is an issue we are all working to address. Growing the pool of prospective adopters is a huge challenge. In particular, we need to recruit more people who are willing to adopt children who are harder to place. We continue to think about ways of addressing the adopter shortage, including how we might better incentivise agencies to increase the number of prospective adopters they recruit. In terms of marketing and advertising, we have commissioned market research into the motivations for, and barriers to, adoption. Once we have this stronger evidence base, we will make decisions about national and local marketing approaches to improve adopter recruitment. We will share this research in the coming months.

It was suggested that £8m had gone to LA's to assist them in their situation while VAA's received no financial support however they are the ones who have impressive growth rates. It was felt that a level playing field is needed.

You have highlighted the discussion at the meeting about the £8m additional funding to local authorities. We are providing this extra funding to local authorities as they manage the overall system. We have made explicit reference to the importance of the voluntary sector in writing to Directors of Children's Services about their funding allocations, and we are considering whether more could be done for VAAs through the voluntary and community sector grants process for 2013-15, where the bidding process is currently underway.

I will also be making further announcements very shortly.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours ever,

Edward

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