

The Adopters' Charter

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Ministerial Foreword



As Children's Minister, I have a responsibility to make sure we do a lot better for the thousands of children who enter care. My first priority is to make sure we support vulnerable families to stay together. But where the safety or wellbeing of a child is threatened, the next step must be to bring that child into care urgently. Most children in care will return to their families when it is safe to do so. Others will need a period in foster care or in a children's home. But for some there will be no realistic prospect of growing up with their birth parents or other family members. In these circumstances, adoption can be a lifeline, and offer the hope of a better future and a second chance at a loving, stable family – something that every child deserves.

That's why this Government has given adoption renewed impetus as a route to a permanent family home for children who have often experienced sustained neglect and abuse. I want to continue to raise the profile of adoption and create a more effective and user-friendly adoption system – a system which is truly fit for purpose. I see the work of Martin Narey, in his role as Ministerial Adviser on Adoption, as key to achieving this aim.

I am determined to see more children considered for adoption – those who may have been overlooked in the past, such as older and disabled children, and children in sibling groups – and, where adoption is right for a child, I want it to happen without delay. I want more people from all walks of life to come forward to adopt these children. When they do, I want them welcomed with open arms and to receive all the help and support they need from the initial point of contact right through the adoption process and, very importantly, as and when needed throughout the adoption journey and beyond.

Above all, I want adopters to feel valued and respected for the chance they provide to transform a child's life. Too often we fail to recognise that adoption is built on the life-long commitment and determination of adoptive parents. This Charter is an important step towards doing just that. I hope that agencies will endorse, implement and build on its principles and that, at the same time, it will give adopters the confidence to question agency planning and decision making. There is no doubt in my mind that, if put into practice, the Charter will make things better for children and their families – and that is my ultimate ambition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Loughton', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

TIM LOUGHTON MP
Children's Minister

The Adopters' Charter

Children come first

- Adoption is first and foremost a service for children who cannot live with their birth family. Children should be helped to understand what adoption means and supported throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Adoption is a life-changing decision that affects the child, and his or her birth and adoptive families. It must be made with the child's best interests, wishes, feelings and needs at its heart and on the basis of sound evidence and high quality assessments.

Adoption agencies must:

- Ensure that children are placed, with siblings wherever possible, within a timescale that is best for them and without unnecessary delay.
- Treat prospective adopters and adopters with openness, fairness and respect.
- Make prospective adopters' first points of contact informative and welcoming.
- Approach adopter recruitment in the spirit of inclusiveness with a view to identifying potential and opportunity – no-one should be automatically excluded.
- Recruit prospective adopters who can meet all or most of the needs of children waiting for, or likely to need, adoption and signpost prospective adopters to other agencies if there is insufficient local demand.
- Explain to prospective adopters the needs and profiles of the children waiting to be adopted.
- Ensure preparation and training, the home study assessment, and approval process are explained and proceed efficiently.
- Regularly review progress on matching with prospective adopters, and inform them about the Adoption Register and refer them to this within required timescales.
- Provide adopters and prospective adopters with information, counselling and support, as and when needed, throughout the adoption journey and beyond.
- Provide prospective adopters with information about the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Work in partnership, and with other agencies and the Courts, to ensure that all decisions are timely and joined-up.

Adoptive parents must:

- Be aware that adoption often brings challenges as well as joy, be realistic about the needs of children awaiting adoption, and accept that with support they may be able to consider adopting a child with a different profile to the child they originally envisaged adopting.
- Make the most of opportunities to develop their parenting skills, and seek support when needed at the earliest stage.
- Do all they can to enable their adopted child to feel loved and secure, and to reach their potential.

In signing this Charter the adoption agency and adoptive parent agrees to reflect the spirit and intentions of the Charter in their actions.

- **The adoption agency**

[Contact details for person responsible for implementing the aims of the Charter]

- **Adoptive parent/s**

The following section is for adoption agencies and adoptive parents to say how they will implement the commitments in the Charter and any additional commitment/s particularly important to their own local context.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for adoption agencies and adoptive parents to describe their implementation of the Charter's commitments. The box is currently blank.

The following organisations have worked to develop the Charter and have pledged to support the Adopters' Charter and help make it a reality in all areas

Department for
Education

BAAF
ADOPTION
& FOSTERING
Every child deserves a family

40 adoption **uk**
years of outstanding adoption support
1971 2011

ADCS
Leading Children's Services

cvaa  uk
Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies