



Appendix A

CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT BOARD BRIEFING NOTE ON ADOPTION

In March, the government published “An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay” which aimed to speed up and improve the adoption system. This is a priority for the government and will form part of a wider review of the care system to be published in the summer. A key driver of this initiative will be performance scorecards, published by government for each local council, which will include indicators on the timeliness of adoption processes. It is important to emphasise that there are serious concerns about the use of scorecards and the way in which the data is to be presented. Representations to change this are still being made on behalf of councils through the LGA, ADCS and SOLACE.

The Children's Improvement Board (CIB) has a role in responding to this national initiative. CIB is a partnership board responsible for the overall delivery of a programme to develop sector led improvement for children's services. This note provides information for councils on CIB's role and on what is expected to happen after the publication of the scorecards. At the time of writing, discussions are still taking place with DfE but the note sets out our best understanding of the situation at the present time.

An important part of CIB's role in sector led improvement is to support councils as they manage policy changes on the ground. New policies and priorities present challenges and, as in the case of adoption, may have implications for the view that government takes of council performance. CIB wants to support councils to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and work with their peers to improve performance. Its work is part of a drive by local government to move away from top down inspection and control towards a sector led approach. CIB is therefore of the view that a sector led response to the government's position on adoption will be more effective in terms of service improvement and more sensitive to the challenges that councils face, than one that is driven by government and/or Ofsted.

CIB will be offering improvement support to any councils whose performance falls below performance thresholds set by the government. Some of this support will be delivered through regions so that it can be responsive to the needs of different areas.

In addition, our understanding is that there will be a smaller group of councils that DfE determines are causing significant concern, and for which an

improvement notice could be under consideration. CIB will not be involved in identifying these councils but will support them directly once they are known.

In anticipating the support requirements for these councils, CIB and DfE have jointly commissioned Outcomes UK in partnership with BAAF to carry out a “diagnostic” follow up to the scorecard. This will provide an opportunity for a council to tell its own story behind the data and to look at a wider picture of the effectiveness of support for children in care. Where this diagnostic shows genuine concerns about performance, and that the council would benefit from additional support, CIB will be able to discuss priorities for improvement support with the council and broker links to support available from peers in other councils. The overall process which is due to take place within a condensed timetable over the next three months, is set out in the attached appendix.

The diagnostic will not make any recommendation about particular action to DfE. The decision about whether to issue any improvement notices will be made by DfE following the diagnostic and discussion with the council.

CIB is keen to support councils through this process. If you would like further information, please contact the following members of the CIB team:

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Adoption - stages in the process for councils identified by DfE as causing concern

Stage 1 – Initial discussion

DfE will hold an initial meeting with the council to discuss the scorecard data, the council's analysis and any proposed improvement plan. The CIB team will contact the council to offer support for the meeting. CIB is able to offer a member of its team to attend the meeting and contribute to the dialogue about the current situation and what might be offered by way of targeted sector support.

DfE decides next action as follows:

- no further action by DfE – council is encouraged to take up targeted sector support offer from CIB;
- OR further analysis is needed through diagnostic assessment

CIB will contact the council to offer support for the initial discussion

Stage 2 – Diagnostic Assessment

The aim of diagnostic assessment will be to assist the council in understanding its 'story behind the baseline' and identify improvement priorities. The product of the diagnostic assessment will be a report to the council and DfE setting out a wider analysis of current performance in relation to care and adoption, the barriers to progress, and the improvement priorities. The report could assist the council, working with CIB, to specifying targeted sector support required. The report will be advisory in nature and will not make specific recommendations to DfE as to whether ministerial intervention is required.

Stage 3 – DfE Consideration of Next Steps

In the light of initial discussions with the council and the diagnostic assessment, the DfE will make a recommendation to ministers as to whether intervention is required. The assumption is that where ministers do decide to intervene, a targeted sector support offer is commissioned by CIB in partnership with the council.

DfE decides next action as follows:

- no further action by DfE – council is encouraged to take up targeted sector support offer
- OR DfE recommends ministerial intervention, with targeted sector support offer