

Government consultation: 'Adoption support that works for all'

Sector briefing for parliamentary drop-in - 13th July, 2026

Key Messages

- The consultation presents an important opportunity to improve adoption and kinship support, but the government's proposed approach risks poorer outcomes and experiences for adoptive and kinship families
- Children who are adopted and in kinship care will have experienced significant adversity, neglect, abuse and loss - which may present as developmental trauma. Many will have overlapping neurodevelopmental differences and government data shows half this cohort have identified SEND
- The strongest future support model is one that combines a robust universal offer with permanent, nationally protected funding with improved local delivery that guarantees equitable access to specialist therapeutic support whenever it is needed
- There is no evidence to demonstrate the government's proposal to devolve therapeutic funding via the ASGSF to either regional adoption agencies (RAAs) or to local authorities will improve support for children and families. Among published consultation responses from the sector, devolving funding for therapeutic support (via the ASGSF) was one of the proposals which received the strongest opposition
- Organisations and families are calling on government to strengthen adoption and kinship support, protect families' access to specialist therapeutic support, and reform - not replace - the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

Why this matters -

Most children adopted or in kinship care today have experienced early adversity and significant trauma, abuse, neglect, and family breakdown or bereavement. Many adoptees will have experienced multiple moves in the care system before joining their adoptive family.

Crucially, the impact of these experiences unfolds over time. Difficulties do not present in a single, predictable way. We see very different challenges at different developmental stages: early attachment and regulation difficulties in infancy; problems with emotional regulation, learning and behaviour in primary school; increasing mental health risk, identity struggles and placement stress in adolescence; and further vulnerabilities as young people transition into adulthood.

While adoption and kinship care provide stability, they do not remove the lifelong impact of early adversity, trauma, and loss. To help navigate this, many adoptees and children in kinship care will require specialist, trauma-informed therapeutic support at some stage in childhood, as well as in adulthood.

However, too often, families are forced to battle for help until they reach crisis.

Adoption UK (Adoption Barometer 2026)



- 42% of adoptive families experienced severe challenges or reached crisis point.
- 79% said it feels like a continual struggle to get the help their child needs.
- 61% experienced violent or aggressive behaviour from their child.
- 56% sought support from their adoption agency, most only after difficulties had become significant.

Kinship (2025)



- 60% of carers whose child needed specialist mental health support could not access it.
- 66% said their child regularly displayed behaviour they found difficult to manage.
- More than **one in eight** feared they may be unable to continue caring for their child because of unmet social, emotional and mental health needs.

Without timely therapeutic support, children are more likely to experience poor mental health, educational difficulties, family breakdown and, in some cases, a return to care. These are not only devastating outcomes for children and families - they also carry significant long-term costs for public services.

Evidence from both adoption and kinship care shows that the effects of early trauma continues into adolescence and early adulthood, with poorer educational outcomes and high levels of mental ill health. The 2026 Adoption Barometer found that 30% of adoptees aged 16–25 were NEET - around twice the national average - and around half had accessed or sought mental health support, while a quarter of children represented by respondents were known to have self-harmed. Similarly, Kinship reports that almost half of kinship carers said their children's adverse childhood experiences had affected their education, with separate research finding higher rates of depression, self-harm and suicide attempts among 17-year-olds in kinship care than among their peers.

Reform is needed, but it must not come at the expense of specialist support.

The sector agrees the current system is not working consistently enough and too many families face:

- unacceptable variation in support between local areas (resource driven, rather than needs-led);
- long waits for specialist services;
- poor coordination between education, health and social care;
- insufficient trauma-informed support within universal services;
- support arriving only after families reach crisis; and
- repeated uncertainty created by short-term funding.

There is widespread support for improving consistency and strengthening earlier support. However, organisations consistently caution against relying too heavily on lower-intensity interventions to build children's 'wellbeing and resilience' without sufficient evidence that this will meet the needs of children who have experienced significant trauma, abuse, neglect and loss and who often have overlapping SEND and developmental needs.

Across the sector there is agreement that parenting support, peer support and early 'universal' supports (all featured as proposals in the government's consultation) are valuable, but they do not address underlying neurobiological changes caused by exposure to severe adversity. Such universal programmes must therefore complement, not replace, timely access to specialist therapeutic support.

The ASGSF should be strengthened—not dismantled

The consultation proposes devolving therapeutic funding to Regional Adoption Agencies or local authorities. However, it provides no evidence that this would improve children's access to support or deliver better outcomes.

We recognise the government's wider move towards devolved and regional models.

The concern is not with regional delivery in principle, but with removing the national protections that currently gives families a clear route to specialist therapeutic support, alongside funding transparency and accountability for delivery.

As the proposal is currently, the sector is deeply concerned that devolving the ASGSF could:

- dismantle the only nationally protected route to specialist therapeutic support for adopted and eligible kinship children;
- recreate a postcode lottery in access to services;
- leave children unable to receive support identified through assessments because there remains no statutory duty to provide it;
- reduce transparency and accountability over how therapeutic funding is spent;
- destabilise specialist providers and reduce family choice; and
- create further uncertainty for families who are already struggling to access support.

Families have already experienced the consequences of reducing the Fund. The cuts introduced in 2025 resulted in therapy being interrupted, delayed or withdrawn, leaving children without support at critical points in their recovery.

Investment in specialist therapy is modest compared with the costs of family crisis and children returning to care. A child with highly complex needs returning to local authority care is estimated to cost around £16,000 per week. For every 100 children looked after in well-supported kinship care rather than local authority care, the state saves £4 million per year.

Kinship families must not become an afterthought

While adopted and kinship children often share experiences of trauma and separation, organisations stress that the context for kinship care is markedly different. Kinship carers are often older and have usually had no training or preparation for their role. The therapeutic support available to kinship families remains fragile and underdeveloped, and reforms should build on recent progress in recognising kinship care rather than treating kinship families as an extension of the adoption support system.

Support should be tailored to children's individual needs and recognise the distinct family relationships and circumstances experienced by children growing up in kinship care. Kinship care helps to maintain connections to important people and places in a child's life, but without appropriate therapeutic and wider support for kinship families, this can be challenging to manage; 3 in 5 kinship carers say their children experience difficulties with the emotional impact of contact.

What the sector is calling for

The sector is not calling for the ASGSF to remain unchanged. Instead, organisations are calling for a stronger national model that:

- provides permanent, ringfenced funding for specialist therapeutic support;
- improves commissioning and reduces delays;
- embeds (clinical) multidisciplinary expertise within assessment and decision-making;
- ensures children receive the support identified through assessments of need; and
- strengthens parenting support and peer support alongside - not instead of - specialist therapeutic intervention

The consultation presents a vital opportunity to improve support. It must not become the moment that children lose the one nationally protected source of specialist therapeutic funding that has consistently demonstrated positive outcomes.

Families' experiences

"We have managed to obtain funding for play therapy through the ASGSF, but the cuts mean we can no longer afford the life story work our child also needs. If the Fund is reduced further, we simply won't be able to access the support our child needs."

(Adoptive parent)

"The assessment completed in 2024 highlighted what was needed but now we cannot access this due to the cuts. We were forced to choose one therapy or another therapy with no real support in deciding which to prioritise but knowing both were no longer an option." **(Kinship carer)**

Parliamentarians can help shape these reforms

The Government is currently considering consultation responses and will publish its response in the autumn. There is still time to ensure these reforms strengthen - not weaken – vital support for children who are adopted and in kinship care.

We are asking Government to:

- provide long-term, needs-led funding for specialist therapeutic support;
- retain nationally protected, transparent and ringfenced funding for therapeutic services;
- strengthen accountability so children receive the support identified through assessments, this could include a legal duty on local authorities as has been introduced in Northern Ireland;
- ensure parenting support and peer support complement - not replace - evidence-based therapeutic interventions;
- recognise the distinct needs of both adopted and kinship children; and
- continue working with the adoption, kinship and therapeutic sectors to develop reforms grounded in evidence.

We are asking parliamentarians to:

- raise these issues through parliamentary questions and debates;
- seek a parliamentary debate on the future of adoption and kinship support;
- write to the Children's Minister requesting a meeting; and
- meet with adoptive and kinship families to hear first-hand about the impact these proposals could have.

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