

## Parliamentary briefing: Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund Westminster Hall Debate – Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025, 1.30pm

### SUMMARY

#### About us:

This is a joint briefing from charities Adoption UK, CVAA UK, Coram, Kinship, Barnardo's and Family Rights Group.<sup>1</sup> As the leading organisations representing adoptive and kinship families, we have been working together to highlight the serious and extensive impacts of changes to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) since April 2025. We have so far issued [two open letters](#) to the Secretary of State for Education calling for a review of the changes made to the ASGSF, and a full public consultation on future reform.

#### What we are calling for:

1. A permanent, ringfenced Fund
2. Confirmation of funding for 2026-27 now, reinstating the former ASGSF funding limits while a review is undertaken
3. A review of the impact of changes to the ASGSF
4. A full and public consultation on the ASGSF prior to confirming any future reforms
5. Commitment to a two-year moratorium on further structural or delivery changes, allowing time to learn from the consultation, review and pilots

#### About the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF)

The ASGSF was [set up in 2015](#) with the aim of providing adopted children and adoptive families with the therapeutic support needed to help the child to address loss and separation, and recover from the trauma, abuse or neglect they may have suffered before they entered care. It was later expanded to include kinship families, where the child had special guardianship or child arrangements orders and had previously been in the care system. In 2023 its name was changed to reflect this change and to encourage applications from more eligible families to come forward.

The high-quality therapeutic support offered by the Fund has made an immeasurable difference to the lives of children in adoptive and kinship care, helping them to heal

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<sup>1</sup> The briefing has been prepared by Adoption UK and CVAA UK with support from Kinship, Coram, Family Rights Group and Barnardo's. All organisations support the central recommendations but this does not mean explicit support from each organisation on every point made or conclusion reached.

and thrive into adulthood and enabling parents and carers to best support them. This year's Adoption Barometer<sup>2</sup> will show that 85% of adoptive families who accessed support through the ASGSF say it has had a positive impact on their family, and 94% of those said they would be likely to seek further ASGSF-funded support. Statistics like these have been consistent across all seven years of the Adoption Barometer.

### **The importance of the Fund**

Around 80% of adopted children have suffered abuse, neglect, or violence before adoption. They also spend an average of 15 months in care, often moving through several foster families, losing everything that is familiar to them along the way. The impact and severity of the trauma early in their lives means the need for lifelong support is common. Data from this year's Barometer (to be published 9<sup>th</sup> Sept 2025) shows that:

- 42% of families reported facing severe challenges or reaching crisis point in 2024 - the highest ever over seven years (an increase from 38% in 2023)
- 77% said it feels like a continual struggle to get the help and support their child needs
- 65% experienced violent or aggressive behaviour from their child during 2024
- 56% asked their adoption agency for support during 2024 and 55% of those were facing significant difficulties or at crisis point at the time of asking for help.

Likewise, in [Kinship's 2024 annual survey](#), more than 1 in 8 kinship carers said they were concerned about their ability to continue caring for their kinship children, with three-quarters of this group highlighting challenges managing social, emotional and mental health difficulties, including violent behaviour.

Without appropriate therapeutic support, children are at risk of experiencing poor educational and employment outcomes, of greater mental health and wellbeing challenges and even of having to return to the care of the state.

### **The ASGSF funding cuts**

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025 the government announced a raft of cuts to the funding available to each child for therapy. These changes included a reduction in the funding limit from £5,000 to £3,000 (a 40% cut), ending the £2,500 allowance for specialist assessments and removing match funding for complex cases. The Fund re-opened for applications however all applications over £3,000 already submitted were sent back to be re-written, causing delays in support.

### **Key points**

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<sup>2</sup> Adoption UK Adoption Barometer (2025) to be published 9<sup>th</sup> September:  
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/the-adoption-barometer>

- The cuts are already having significant impacts for children and families.**  
 A new impact survey led by [Action Against ASGSF Changes](#) had 350 responses as of 6<sup>th</sup> August, these identify themes of family crisis, increased school exclusions and a reduced ability to engage with education; and increased child to parent violence. 98% of parents/carers are 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about the impact of the cuts. The cuts have had a particular impact on children with the most complex needs who are already at the greatest risk of placement breakdown since such children will typically need more sessions than can be funded under the £3,000 cap.
- The cuts will cost the Treasury, and the taxpayer, more in the long term.**  
 The lack of support is already tipping families into crisis, with placement breakdowns resulting in children having to re-enter the care system in the worst-case scenarios. The cuts may also be impacting adopter recruitment, already at an [all-time low](#), and will likely affect family members from pursuing long-term kinship care arrangements too. This means more children remaining in the care system for longer.
- The cuts undermine broader government initiatives,** such as the provisions in the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) to improve support for children in kinship care, and the commitment in '[Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#)' (November 2024) to 'investing in and promoting the use of' the ASGSF so that eligible children can access therapeutic support where they have experienced trauma.

The government has been asked about its assessment of the impact of the cuts in various parliamentary written questions. The responses from the Children's Minister have been generic, [stating only that](#) "the department always assesses the impact of changes on vulnerable children and their families."

The only formal impact assessment to date has been the [Equalities Impact Assessment](#) published on 17<sup>th</sup> July. While this report found that making these changes should potentially overall lead to a neutral impact on those with protected characteristics (which does not currently include those with care experience), it did highlight a number of potential negative impacts on children with two protected characteristics: sex and disability. Specifically, it identified potential impacts from stopping match-funding on girls with a special guardianship order and children with SEND, disabilities, or EHCPs.

This does not constitute a full assessment of the estimated impact of the cuts. The conclusion suggested that making lower-level support available to a greater number of children offsets the disproportionate negative impact on children with protected characteristics, including those with additional needs. However, this is questionable,

particularly as the cuts will have a disproportionate impact on those with the most complex needs.

### **Impact on children and families**

In the short term many children and families have had to cope with therapies abruptly stopping while applications were resubmitted, in line with the lower funding limits. This, along with the delays announcing funding for this year, created a backlog of applications. National data is not available on the extent of the delays but numerous families have reported gaps in therapy of around 4 months. This aligns with what providers have reported. For example, in mid-July one adoption support provider reported that only 50% of their families waiting for support had any ASGSF funding in place at all.

For some children and families these long periods without support have caused extreme difficulties – sharp declines in mental health, suicidal thoughts, self-harming, escalation of violence in the home, and so on. These are children whose lives have been characterised by loss and separation, for whom trusting and consistent relationships are paramount. For some children and young people, gaps in therapy greatly risks their willingness to engage with therapy in the future.

The full impact of the cuts are yet to be seen, but for many families the reduced therapy will have significant long-term consequences. [The Action Against ASGSF Changes](#) campaign group is running a survey to understand more about the impact of the cuts on adoptive and kinship families. At 6<sup>th</sup> August the survey had 350 responses, representative of 582 children. Only 1.2% (4) of respondents felt that the new £3,000 funding limit was sufficient to meet their child's needs. This compared to 40% of respondents who felt that the previous funding limit of £5,000 was sufficient.

The survey found that:

- 71% of respondents now have a reduced number of therapy sessions
- 34% have been forced to choose between their child having an assessment and having therapy
- 54% have had to wait longer for support
- 36% have experienced unplanned cessation of therapy.
- 35% have experienced reduced treatment options.

Already the vast majority of families surveyed stated that they have seen 'very negative' or 'negative' impacts on their child's emotional wellbeing and mental health, behaviour, risky behaviours, family relationships and stability at home. Likewise, most parents and carers reported 'very negative' and 'negative' impacts on their ability to meet their child(ren)'s needs and their own mental health.

Key themes which have emerged from the impact survey are:

- Increased school exclusions and reduced ability to engage with education
- Increased CPV (child on parent violence)
- Disruption to therapeutic relationships, contributing to feelings of abandonment amongst children
- Children experiencing suicidal ideation and being unsupported through this
- Family crisis and parents/carers feeling unable to cope
- Fear for the future

### The ASGSF beyond March 2026

The Minister stated that funding for the next financial year would be made subject to the Spending Review, which took place in June 2025. However, no announcement has yet been made.

The government is considering major reforms to the ASGSF, as outlined in this [Adoption England paper](#). As of August 2025, we understand the DfE intends to decide the Fund's future model this Autumn, including whether it should remain centralised; be administered by Adoption England; or be devolved to Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) and/or local authorities. Organisations have been invited to share views informally on proposals, however there has been no public consultation to inform this decision which has significant implications for children and families. Neither has the Department put forward any evidence base to support plans for reform.

Pilots [have been agreed](#) which will test the devolution of some ASGSF funds to RAAs, but the Department plans to make its decision before the pilots have even started. We believe this will prevent the government from learning from the pilots they have funded, and defeats the point of the pilots.

Overall, this is creating a picture of great uncertainty resulting in significant difficulties for children, families and those who are trying to support them. Providers report that they remain unsure what, if any, support they will be funded to provide after April 2026 and this makes it difficult for them to commit to supporting any family if they are assessed as needing a longer programme of sessions to support them safely.

### Key points

- **The proposed reforms would bring huge disruption and upheaval, and the evidence so far presented on any potential benefits for children and families is poor.** Autumn is too soon for government to take decisions on how the Fund should be administered in the future.
- **We are calling for a full public consultation, alongside evidenced proposals, prior to any decisions being taken about ASGSF reform.** This recognises the fact that any form of devolved ASGSF funding constitutes a

major reform of adoption support, with extensive implications for children and families, both in the short and long term, and that adoptees, those in kinship care, parents and carers, and the sector must be involved in decisions about the future.

- **April 2026 is too soon for the implementation of any reforms the government decides upon.** Sector leaders seem to be unanimous in agreeing the risks for children and families are too great if reform is rushed. The architecture of the Fund alone, currently administered via contractor Mott MacDonald, is complex, has been developed over time and is understood by services and families alike.
- **The government needs to provide a long-term commitment to the fund to provide greater certainty over the future availability of funding.** Confirmation of funding for 2026-27 is needed now.