

Public Consultation on the Future of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF):

Terms of Reference / Scoping Paper

This paper has been authored by CVAA and Adoption UK, with support from Kinship, Coram BAAF, Coram and Barnardo's.

1. Overview

This scoping paper follows the government's commitment to "public engagement in the new year to consider the future of the adoption and special guardianship support fund into 2028 and beyond", made during the Westminster Hall debate on 4th September 2025 and reconfirmed by the current Children's Minister during oral Education questions on 1st December.

The purpose of this paper is to inform planning for the upcoming public consultation and ensure that it is independent and comprehensively gathers views from children, families, professionals, and wider stakeholders on the future of the ASGSF. It is imperative that this consultation robustly underpins all future government decisions on whether and how the ASGSF should evolve to continue meeting the needs of adopted and kinship children and their families.

We urge that no decisions about future reform are taken before the consultation exercise has been completed, as this would undermine its purpose. We propose a two-year moratorium on further structural or delivery changes to the Fund, and either a reinstatement of the former ASGSF funding limits throughout this time, including a return of the Fair Access Limit, assessments of need, and match-funding, uplifted to account for inflation; or, a commitment for the Fund to meet whatever therapeutic needs are identified in an assessment, carried out by a suitably qualified clinician. Furthermore, any future reform should begin no earlier than 2028 to allow time to learn from the consultation and the current RAA pilots overseen by Adoption England, which began in summer 2025.

We believe adherence to these core principles would give the consultation a clear and coherent purpose.

2. Objectives

The consultation should aim to:

1. **Understand the therapeutic support needs of** adopted and kinship children, and what is needed to ensure these needs are effectively met. Hearing from children and families directly will be key.
2. **Assess the efficacy and limitations of the current ASGSF model**, including outcomes for children and families, accessibility, barriers faced by local authorities, providers concerns, capacity, and practical realities, emerging risks or unintended consequences,

timeliness, equity of provision, and the interventions offered. This includes reviewing the impact of the ASGSF cuts made in April 2025.

3. **Identify any impacts from ASGSF changes to date, and include these in the impact assessment and costings.**
4. **Seek views on clearly defined options for future reform**, including potential alternative models (including one that incorporates adaptations to the current system), funding mechanisms, delivery systems, and eligibility criteria. Give space for respondents to suggest alternatives.
5. **Gather views on implementation considerations**, including timescales, affordability, costed options, and transitional arrangements.

***Potential alternative models**

It is important that a range of models are considered and consulted, including retaining the current model with improvements. Some of these have already been proposed by adoption and kinship stakeholders throughout 2025. Below are some of the models proposed so far, on which feedback should be invited:

Model 1: Current-style central fund, centrally administered, with improvements

- Applications made on an individual basis, based on national criteria
- Views to be sought on improvements – streamlined application process, criteria, accessibility, revised funding limits, ability to block purchase, more flexibly therapy packages, availability of group interventions etc.

Model 2: Pan regional deployment of Fund to Adoption England and/or local authorities

- As proposed by Adoption England in its June 2025 [paper](#), although detail on the mechanism for kinship families needs developing
- Views to be sought on cost implications, accountability, resourcing, feasibility.

Model 3: Needs-based tiered support model

- Specialist support via early assessment of need and funded centrally, complemented by early, lower-level support available universally and offered proactively

Model 4: Child based funding approach

- Funding is allocated per child at the point of Placement Order / Special Guardianship Order / Child Arrangements Order and ringfenced.

Model 5: Outcomes-based contracting model

- Providers funded directly based on progress/outcomes.

3. Scope

The consultation should cover, but not be limited to:

- The current purpose, remit, and impact of the ASGSF.

- Trends and forecasts in relation to therapeutic support needs and demands.
 - The needs and experiences of children across different ages, backgrounds, geographies, and care histories, including consideration of how the ASGSF is meeting and might continue to best meet the needs of both adoptive and kinship children.
 - The intersection of adoption and kinship with wider social care, health, and education systems, including the government's ongoing children's social care reform programme.
 - Feasible future scenarios for the Fund into 2028 and beyond, including both adaptations to the current centralised model and alternative models.
 - A timeline for development, including consultation phase, design stage (including any detailed engagement e.g. focus groups, roundtables) and implementation stage (including co-design and testing).
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4. Stakeholders to be included

To ensure the consultation is representative and inclusive, engagement must be open to:

Children, young people and families

- Those who are currently accessing, or who have previously accessed, ASGSF-funded support, including both adoptive and kinship children.
- Those who have been affected by the recent ASGSF cuts, whose support has changed or who have become ineligible for support.
- Adoptive parents and families.
- Special guardians and kinship carers and families, including previously looked after children cared for under a Child Arrangements Order.

Professionals and service delivery stakeholders

- Regional adoption agencies.
- Voluntary adoption agencies.
- Adoption support agencies.
- Local authorities.
- Kinship care teams.
- Therapeutic service providers (private, and voluntary).
- Social workers, psychologists, and mental health professionals.
- Schools and education providers.
- Health partners, including CAMHS.
- ASGSF current provider (Mott MacDonald).

Wider public and interested parties

- Academics and researchers.
 - Representative bodies and advocacy organisations, including:
 - Adoption UK
 - Adoption England
 - Coram BAAF
 - Family Rights Group
 - Kinship
 - CVAA (Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies)
 - The POTATO Group
 - Action Against ASGSF Changes
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5. Approach and Methodology

The consultation must be run as a formal, **independent public consultation**, open to all, with written responses published (subject to confidentiality, safeguarding, and data protection considerations).

Our proposed engagement methods include:

1. Online Public Consultation Document

- Hosted on GOV.UK.
- Sets out background, evidence base, and clear reform options to comment upon.
- Allows open submission from the public and stakeholders.
- Different questions and formats for families/professionals/organisations but with the proposals presented to all groups of respondents and with sufficient opportunity to give feedback.
- Use of child-friendly and accessible formats.

2. Targeted Engagement Activities

- Workshops with children and young people using creative, age-appropriate methods.
- Roundtables with families, carers, and representative organisations.
- Technical workshops with professional stakeholders.

3. Publication of Consultation Outcomes

- Key themes identified in initial summary report.

- Subsequent report to outline case for any policy developments or reforms, alongside fully costed strategy and timeline.
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6. Timeline

Indicative timeline (to be confirmed):

- **January 2026:** Confirmation of ASGSF funding until March 2028 at the minimum, to allow sufficient time for running and learning from the consultation, and planning and implementing any reforms. We urge government to reinstate the previous Fair Access Limits of £5,000 per child, match funding and specialist assessments during this period – uplifted in line with inflation – while reform is considered.
- **January–February 2026** Launch of public consultation.
- **6–10 week consultation window**
- **March–April 2026:** Analysis and synthesis of responses.
- **April 2026:** New FY for the Fund begins at previous levels/to meet need, with a commitment until the reforms are implemented in 2028.
- **May 2026:** Publication of consultation findings.
- **June–September 2026:** Development of policy proposals and costed options. Incorporation of learnings from pilots to date.
- **Autumn 2026:** Government decision on the future of the ASGSF from 2028 onwards. This should be accompanied by a costed strategy for any reforms.

December 2025