

Fair Share Proposal: Consultation Briefing

March 2026



Purpose

To summarise findings from a consultation on the [Fair Share proposal](#) and demonstrate how a guaranteed support model could improve adoption outcomes, reduce delay for children waiting longest, and deliver better value for public spending.

Executive Summary

The Fair Share consultation (413 respondents) provides strong evidence that uncertainty about post-adoption support is a major barrier to matching children—particularly those with more complex needs.

70.5% of respondents reported concern, in at least some cases, that the right support would not be readily available

81.0% said guaranteed support would make them more willing to accept a placement involving likely support needs

92.7% (of those answering) believed it would increase the likelihood or speed of matching

The consultation indicates that the key issue is not simply the availability of support, but confidence that support will be real, timely, and accessible when needed.

Fair Share should therefore be understood not only as a funding proposal, but as a confidence mechanism—one that could unlock existing adopter capacity, reduce delay for harder-to-place children, and improve placement stability.

The Problem: A Confidence Gap in the System

Adopters consistently report that decisions about whether to pursue a match are shaped by perceived risk, driven by uncertainty about support.

“Unsure of guaranteed support... I did not pursue many profiles.”

“We lacked confidence in the support we would get with these children.”

This results in:

- Narrowing of adopter criteria
- Withdrawal from potential matches
- Delays in progressing placements

Importantly, this is not due to lack of willingness, but practical risk assessment by families considering long-term responsibilities.

Evidence of Suppressed Matching

The consultation contains numerous real examples of matches not pursued due to support concerns:

“We withdrew our interest mainly because we don’t feel that the child would have received the required level of support.”

“Had this been provided or support guaranteed we would not have withdrawn from the process.”

“This issue... has let me delay progressing an adoption order.”

This demonstrates that:

- The barrier is active and current, not theoretical
- There is likely suppressed capacity within the existing adopter pool

Why Current Arrangements Are Not Working

Respondents repeatedly describe existing support systems as:

- Uncertain – availability unclear at point of matching
- Delayed – support often arrives too late to prevent escalation
- Difficult to access – requiring repeated applications or advocacy
- Inconsistent – varying by area (“postcode lottery”)

One respondent summarised this starkly:

“Adopters are being tricked into thinking the support will be there... but in reality it’s a fight for survival.”

This reflects a credibility gap, not just a funding gap.

What Fair Share Would Change

The consultation strongly supports the proposal’s central mechanism: a guaranteed, visible support offer attached to the child and available from the outset.

Respondents indicate this would:

- Increase confidence at the point of matching
- Expand willingness to consider:
 - older children
 - sibling groups
 - children with additional needs
- Reduce delay for children waiting longest
- Improve placement stability by enabling earlier intervention

“If the funding was guaranteed and readily available... I would feel more able to look at more complex children.”

The Importance of Early and Accessible Support

A consistent theme is that timing matters as much as availability.

“Specialist intervention... wouldn’t be available for about a year... [the placement] broke down.”

“Anything that makes it easier... without delay... can only be beneficial.”

Earlier access to support is seen as:

- Preventative rather than reactive
- More effective for children
- Likely to reduce long-term costs

Financial and Practical Realities for Families

Respondents highlight that support needs often affect:

- ability to work
- family finances
- sustainability of placements

“One of us will not be able to return to work... financial support would be useful.”

“We would not have been able to afford the level of care needed.”

This broadens the policy case:

Fair Share is not only about therapeutic services, but about making adoption viable for families who could not otherwise offer permanence.

Design Conditions for Success

The consultation also identifies clear requirements for effective implementation:

1. Genuine guarantee

Support must be reliable, not subject to later approval processes.

2. Simplicity

Access should avoid complex applications, delays, or repeated gatekeeping.

3. Early visibility

Support must be clear before matching, influencing adopter decisions.

4. National consistency

The model should avoid postcode variation in access or entitlement.

5. Distinction from existing systems

It must clearly improve on current arrangements, not replicate them.

Economic Framing

While concerns were raised about feasibility within local authority budgets, the proposal aligns with an invest-to-save model:

- Adoption avoids significant long-term costs associated with care
- A small, structured reinvestment into support can:
 - increase successful matches
 - reduce delay
 - lower risk of disruption

This positions Fair Share as:

a targeted reinvestment of avoided cost to improve outcomes and system efficiency

Key Policy Insight

The consultation supports a clear conclusion:

Adopter hesitation is driven less by the child's needs themselves than by uncertainty about whether adequate support will be available when it matters.

Addressing that uncertainty is likely to:

- unlock existing adopter capacity
- widen the range of children considered
- improve stability and outcomes

Conclusion

The Fair Share proposal is strongly aligned with adopter experience and behaviour.

It addresses a specific, evidenced barrier in the system:

- lack of confidence in support

By making support visible, guaranteed, and accessible, it has the potential to:

- increase matching for children waiting longest
- reduce delay
- improve placement stability
- deliver better long-term value for public spending

This consultation demonstrates that the key barrier to adoption for children with greater needs is not a lack of willing families, but a lack of confidence that support will be there when it is needed. A guaranteed support model offers a practical, evidence-based way to address this and improve outcomes for children.