

Petitions Committee: Support for new adoptive parents

Activity

The Petitions Committee ran an online survey to ask petitioners about their experiences of adopting a child and how it impacted their working life and ability to work.

This survey was conducted to inform a debate on a petition relating to support for new adoptive parents, to be held on 21 March 2022.

The survey was sent to people who signed the following petition:

[Make self-employed people eligible for statutory adoption pay](#)

We have summarised the key themes below and illustrated them with quotes from respondents.

Response

There were **549** complete responses to the Committee's survey

Methodology

NVivo Pro 12 (a data analysis software) was used to identify and contextualise the most common words and phrases in responses to open questions in the survey. This allowed us to group and summarise recurring themes which were threaded throughout much of the responses.

In addition to this analysis of the data, Committee staff manually reviewed hundreds of individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection.

Survey questions which produced statistical results have been included in the summaries of key themes. The figures quoted are an average across all respondents, unless otherwise stated.

About the respondents

- The vast majority of respondents (90%) told us they have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, a child or children

Key themes:

Adoptive parents feel they need more time away from work to bond with and care for their child than the average birth parents

Quotes:

"I have a birth child and an adopted child. With my birth child i took a blissful period off work with reassurance that I was receiving a small amount of money each month. With my son, he came into our lives frightened, raging and damaged, we barely slept at night for well over a year and my entire family were mentally and physically exhausted, we received no financial support."

"Adoptive parenting is unbelievably demanding. It led to me having a serious breakdown in December, and has made both mine and my husband's careers impossible. It should be a full time paid job to give the kids the best possible chance after all they have been through."

"We HAVE to take maternity in order to help bond with our child and help them settle... These little legends have been through so much in their tiny life and although they are in a 'nicer' or 'safer' home, it still is not their home initially. I have to turn up for my little girl every day. She needs to see my face at the school gates, at the same time every time..."

"Adopted children come with trauma and a history of neglect and loss. They are grieving and need time to adjust and bond with you. They need a routine that is consistent and therapeutic to help them feel safe. Attachment disorder has meant our children fear being taken away again and so we can't easily leave our children with relatives or child minders. It took a whole year of being at home with them before we slowly introduced nursery. Even 6 months on, they still worry I won't turn up to get them after their 3 hr session."

Self-employed parents in particular feel less able to take time away from work when adopting than other parents

- **Significantly fewer self-employed respondents** (61%) told us they **took, or plan to take, any time off work after adopting** than the other adoptive parents who responded (78%)
- Of those who did, or plan to, take time off, **self-employed parents** told us they **took a significantly shorter period off** after adopting than other adoptive parents (30% told us they took more than 9 months off, compared with 75% of the other adoptive parents who responded)
- Of those respondents who **reduced their working hours after adopting**, self-employed parents did so for **less time** than other adoptive parents (65% told us they reduced their hours over a period of more than 9 months compared with 90% of the other adoptive parents who responded)
- Self-employed adoptive parents were **far less likely to feel able to take as much time off work as they**

wanted (only 13% told us they 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they were able to take the time off they wanted to, compared to 65% of other adoptive parents who responded)

- All adoptive parents, but particularly those who are self-employed, felt that **more financial support would have allowed them to take the time off work they would have liked**, with 95% of self-employed adoptive parents saying they 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that it would have allowed them to do so (compared to 84% of other adoptive parents who responded)

Quotes:

"I changed jobs shortly before adopting and, as a result, could not adopt a child for the first six months in my new post, as I would not have been eligible for statutory adoption pay during this time. If I had given birth to a child during that time, I could have received 'maternity allowance' instead of SMP [Statutory Maternity Pay] however there is no adoption equivalent of this. As a result, adoptive parents are financially penalised and children are waiting longer in care."

"I absolutely could not be going through the approval process to be an adopter if I was still self employed. I earned a decent annual "salary" as a self employed community arts worker which would have been a path I could have returned to after adoption leave but we were told on enquiry that taking a year of leave was mandatory with our agency in order to build attachment, bond with the child and establish myself as the primary caregiver. I could not afford to take a year without statutory pay for some of that time."

"As a single adopter it has been very hard at times trying to meet the emotional needs of my child whilst worrying about money. My career has without doubt had to take a 'backward seat'. The transition process from foster care to adopting would have been far easier for me and my child had I not had to worry about finances."

Quotes:

"There needs to be an adoption equivalent of statutory maternity allowance. This would ensure that all new adoptive parents, regardless of their employment circumstances, were able to take the time to be intensively with their child in the early months of becoming a family."

"I would like adoption leave pay to reflect the ages of the children you adopt. While I am fortunate to qualify for adoption leave pay, that pays is the same as the mother who has given birth [however] our circumstances are completely different and the ages and needs of our children are completely different."

"Financial support to help more adopters take on sibling groups [is needed]. Many adopters would like to adopt a sibling group but can't because of financial pressures. It's a big jump to go from 0 children to financially supporting 2 or 3 children. Many children in sibling groups end up in long-term care because they can't be separated and it's incredibly damaging for those that are."

Some adoptive parents feel under-supported compared with birth parents

Quotes:

"I would like the government to treat families through adoption as equal to those through birth. It is even more important for our children to have that time to build attachments as they have suffered such trauma. This is why adoption agencies recommend taking at least one year off work, yet the government is actively stopping people from doing that and giving our most vulnerable children the best chance."

"We went from no children to two children within a week. Birth parents have 9 months to prepare for the arrival of their child(ren). The child(ren) shares sounds etc whilst in the womb and forms some sort of bond. Adoptive parents don't have that luxury so need a longer period off work to build that bond with their child(ren) and this must be with full pay to remove the stress of financial loss."

"Caring for someone else's child who has experienced trauma even if a tiny baby is one of the hardest things to do, to help heal them and for them to feel safe. Adopters should be treated as all parents and respected for being a parent to a child who will face many challenges throughout their life."

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was welcomed as a source of financial support, but respondents felt it was in need of reform and long-term security

- The [Adoption Support Fund](#) provides funds to local authorities and regional adoption agencies to pay for essential therapeutic services for [eligible](#) adoptive and special guardianship

order families. On 3 March 2022, the Government announced the ASF will receive [£144m in funding](#) over the period 2022-25.

Quotes:

"Access to the adoption support fund needs to be simplified [...] The main block to accessing the funding is due to poor support from the local authority adoption and post adoption teams. We have had 6 different social workers over the past 12 years and have had several years with no social worker support... The ASF can only be accessed through a social worker, so this kind of disruption often means that support packages are not developed for adopted children and the available ASF is not used to help the families."

"I really hope that the Adoption Support Fund continues beyond the further 3 years that has now been agreed. However, the criteria for accessing the Adoption Support Fund is increasingly restrictive and is making it harder to access the support that is needed. It also cannot be used to fund therapeutic support for adoptive parents. I think this is a massive oversight as many adoptive parents are severely affected by the trauma of parenting traumatised children and experience burn out, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma as a result. I have spent thousands of pounds over the years to access private therapy to support my emotional wellbeing so I can continue to parent my adopted children and meet their needs."

"Last year it took us 6 months to get any funding for support that our son needed, and now after only 4 months we are having to apply again because you have to reapply every April. It's such an enormous waste of

time for social workers stuck completing endless paperwork and leads to problematic delays for children who need therapeutic support. Just give local authorities the money!"

Respondents wanted requirements for adoption support plans to be enhanced to ensure adoptive families receive the support they need

- Local authorities are [legally required](#) to assess the support needs of adopted children and their adoptive families, and to prepare a 'support plan' in accordance with which adoption support services are to be provided.

Quotes:

"An adoption support plan [is needed] before child lives with us which lists their trauma history also and [would mean] that vital therapy (which most children with Developmental Trauma from abuse need) is easy to access."

"An adoption support plan that takes into account potential future needs [is needed, as is] a timeframe for post adoption needs assessments to be started and completed. The services vary too much between local authorities and it is not acceptable that there are waits of 6 months to a year (friends experience) for the needs assessment to be done so that the ASF can be applied for."

"Actual support for those caring for our most vulnerable children needs to extend beyond the basics for adopters. Many are unable to return to work due to the requirements of their child, and this is not always known before adoption takes place."

Better-equipped support services and schools were called for, to recognise and address the impact of trauma on adopted children

Quotes:

"Better funded support services post adoption [are needed]. A recognition that children do not recover easily or even at all from the early trauma they experience and this has life long consequences for them. Families need more support... and it's cheaper to provide that in adoptive placements than in long term foster care, adult mental health or prison."

"Better access to specialist mental health support for adopted children and adoptive parents alike [is needed]. Health visitors seem to have very little knowledge of childhood trauma and how this impacts child development."

"More training for all professionals [is needed], particularly teachers so they understand the ongoing impact of early trauma and pre natal alcohol on children's development. More support workers in schools. Joined up services between education, health and social work so adoptive parents receive help when it is asked for. Ongoing support for adopted young people post 18 as they have a lot of catching up to do in their development due to their pre adoption experiences."

"[There needs to be] recognition of the trauma that adopted children have gone through in order to be adopted. Their experiences will have adverse affects that may impact them for many years, with most requiring significant additional long term support. Adoptive parents willingly take on this responsibility when choosing to adopt, but there is a lack of recognition of this."

Something fairly simple would be to bring PLAC [Previously Looked-After Children] support more in line with support for LAC [Looked-After Children]. A change in the recognition / labelling would enable these vulnerable children to access more support

with education and therapeutic services. I believe doing so would pay itself back long term, with a greater proportion of PLAC becoming functioning, independent, productive adults who are a net contributor to society.”

