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Department
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To All Directors of Children Services,

SUPPORT FOR ADOPTER RECRUITMENT AND APPROVAL SERVICES TO SPIN OUT AS PUBLIC SERVICE MUTUALS

As you will be aware, the Children's Minister, Edward Timpson, recently challenged local authorities to drive improvements in adopter recruitment, assessment and approval and to reform adopter recruitment. LGA, ADCS and SOLACE responded on behalf of the sector and welcomed the idea of Public Service Mutuals forming part of the solution to the adopter recruitment challenge. We are writing to you to highlight the support that Cabinet Office and the Department for Education can provide for local authorities wanting to pursue this option. We also want to invite you to an event that will showcase existing mutuals and kick-start discussion about the opportunities available for adopter recruitment and approval services.

The opportunity for adopter recruitment and approval services

There is a wealth of adopter recruitment and assessment expertise in the local authority sector. Often, however, a focus on local needs means that the benefits of this expertise are not realised at the national level. The Government believes that one of the best ways to sustainably recruit and approve adopters is through independent organisations operating in a more flexible way. Such organisations are better able to specialise, innovate and respond quickly to meet need at local, regional and national level.

The Department for Education has provided funding to support the sector in making the changes to the system that are urgently required. We hope that local authorities will consider how that funding can be used to support organisational remodelling. Spinning out adoption services into independent Public Service Mutuals that are registered Voluntary Adoption Agencies presents an opportunity for local authorities to create organisations that can focus on ensuring there are enough adopters able to meet the needs of children in the long-term.

What are Public Service Mutuals?

Public Service Mutuals are independent organisations that have spun out of the public sector, continue to deliver public services and provide employees with a significant element of control within the organisation. Evidence shows that by harnessing the energy and passion of professionals they can provide more effective and efficient services.

Innovative mutuals are being developed or have already spun out of an increasingly wide range of local government services, including youth services, adult and children's social care, libraries and housing services¹. The Cabinet Office is currently tracking over 100 emerging and established Public Service Mutuals. Around 70 are already live and trading, together delivering over £1bn of public services. Twenty of these have spun out of local government services with many more at early stages of development.

What support is available?

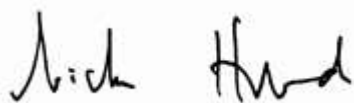
There is already a comprehensive package of information, advice and practical support available. Information and free specialist advice is provided through the Mutual Information Service (<http://mutuals.cabinetoffice.gov.uk> or 0845 5390 543) as well as by Mutual Ambassadors (<http://mutuals.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/mutuals-ambassadors>). The hotline also provides access to the £10m Mutual Support Programme which funds professional expertise and advice for mutuals and the Mutuals Success training programme to help future leaders build commercial skills.

Next steps

Cabinet Office and the Department for Education are keen to identify local authorities interested in exploring mutuals created from their adopter recruitment and approval services. We will work with you to design a bespoke package of support for the most promising projects. As the first step we plan to hold an event to showcase existing mutuals and kick-start discussion about the opportunities in adoption services. The day-long event will be held in central London on Friday 5 July. Please express your interest by emailing Adoption.Reform@education.gsi.gov.uk before Tuesday 28th May and officials will follow up with further information.

We look forward to working with you on this exciting opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



NICK HURD



EDWARD TIMPSON

¹ See <http://mutuals.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/case-studies>