

Parents And Children Together  
7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS  
Public Services Team,  
Office for Civil Society,  
Cabinet Office, Admiralty Arch,  
The Mall, London  
SW1A 2WH

Dear Sir,

This response is from PACT - Parents and Children Together – which has been building and strengthening families across the Thames Valley for nearly 100 years. We support thousands of families every year through our community projects across the Greater London area plus Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and in our role as a voluntary adoption agency, specialising in both domestic and inter-country adoption, fostering, dual approval and post-adoption support.

Further to the green paper entitled **Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery** there are 4 posed questions, to which we respectfully provide the following comments:

***1. In which public service areas could Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?***

Stronger partnering between Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies for the adoption and fostering core service but also the additional post-adoption activities such as reliable, responsive and flexible therapeutic services available to all adoptive families. However this would require a mindset change amongst Local Authority workers to embrace both new forms of therapeutic services embedded in parenting, as well as to look for longer-term measures of outcomes beyond the present one-year horizons driven by short-term budgeting.

***2. How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?***

The role of Voluntary Adoption Agencies needs to be strengthened and reinforced by Government. The Local Authorities approach to adoption appears to be increasingly budget driven and puts the pound before the child. As a VAA we have to be mindful of costs but at the same time work hard to balance this with the needs of the child. Our experience is across the spectrum of children needing placements but in the area of sibling groups or children with complex needs we have minimal disruption rates (<5%) that compare extremely favourably to LA rates. All we ask is for a level playing field that benefits the child and the family and for an opportunity to present our extensive range of services, and the tremendous experience that we have, from being in existence for 100 years.

The commissioning process also needs to be kept open, or extended to ensure that those who are the best providers can bid for appropriate services. A key concern, and potential blocker, in this is the increasing move amongst Local Authorities to commissioning based upon National, or even broad-based local framework agreements. These preclude providers who are specialists in a key field of provision which would not be broad enough to gain a place on a relevant framework.

### ***3. How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?***

It's an imperative that the pound is not put before the needs of the child. The Post Adoption service that we offer at PACT is known as FACTS and we believe that this is a significant differentiator for the services we offer under the heading of Adoption and Permanence Services. Our policy is based upon offering support services to the family for as long as they need it – any shortfall in funding for such therapeutic services is currently found by the family and from our own fund-raising efforts. In the last few months we have worked closely with **Jim Clifford, Head of Charity Advisory , and Chair of the Public Sector Group at leading sector advisors of Baker Tilly** and a researcher at Cass Business School. He has completed a study into the Social Return on Investment which arises from stabilising a child via adoption into a family unit – the startling conclusion is that this is 'worth' over £1 Million per child (to 18 years of age) in economic benefit and cost avoidance. Further information on this study is available from the author at [jim.clifford@baker-tilly.com](mailto:jim.clifford@baker-tilly.com), or through Professor Palmer at Cass Business School. Jim was the lead author of the striking research into the effect on the National economy of the Sector Skills Councils that was so influential in re-forming Government policy towards the SSCs, is a director and trustee of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and is a leading researcher into Transactional decision-making for charities.

### ***4. How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?***

A significant amount of our work already provides for citizen and community involvement through our adoption panel composition. (We also work with local community based committees that we have established within the Children's Centres that we operate). As a Church of England linked charity we also have close ties with our parishes across the Diocese of Oxford area and have access to friends and volunteers from across the 3 counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to complement the salaried workforce of 100+ people. However, we would be keen to support any initiative that increases the transparency of the whole commissioning process and based upon our experiences of community interaction and dialogue we would be delighted to contribute to any further work in this area.

We would be happy to meet to discuss any of the points noted above or to contribute further as this work progresses.

We can be contacted via this email address or at the office address shown below

Yours Sincerely

Jan Fishwick, CEO, PACT

Satwinder Sandhu, Director of Adoption & Permanence, PACT

Jim Clifford, Baker Tilly Corporate Finance

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