

Adoption Leadership Board report on adopter sufficiency

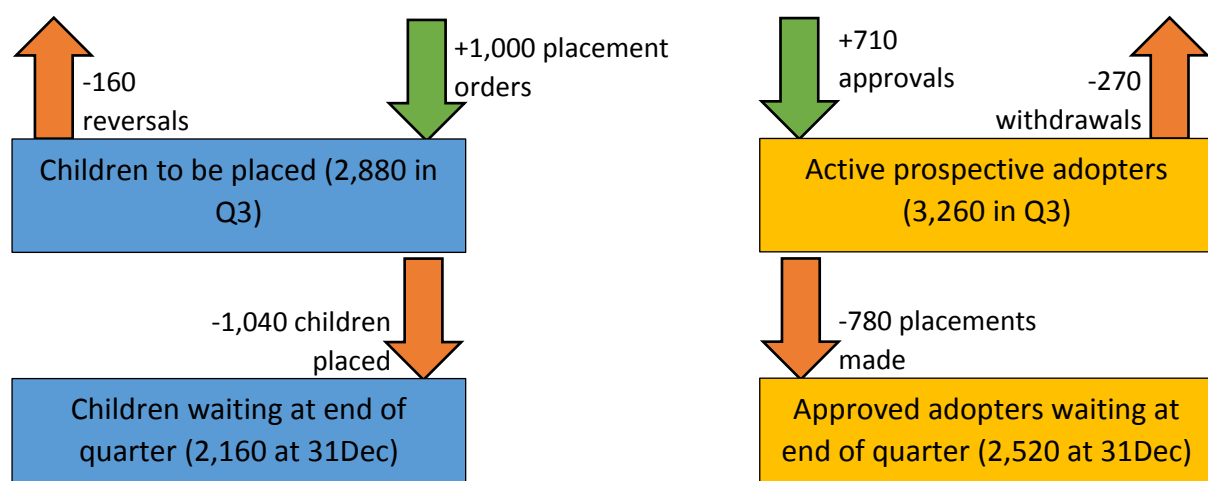
Earlier version presented to the Adoption Leadership Board 20th April 2017

1. This paper outlines findings from work done to forecast the impact of trends in the adoption system on the number of prospective adopters and children waiting. The model has been developed between CVAA, First4Adoption, and DfE analysts.
2. The purpose of this work is to gain a better understanding of the 'stock' and 'flow' of adopters and children in the system, and understand what the impact of trends are at a national level.
3. The ALB wishes to share the findings of this work with the sector to help inform adopter recruitment and strategic planning.
4. Please note that this uses Q3 2016-17 ALB data that has not yet been quality assured.

Approach

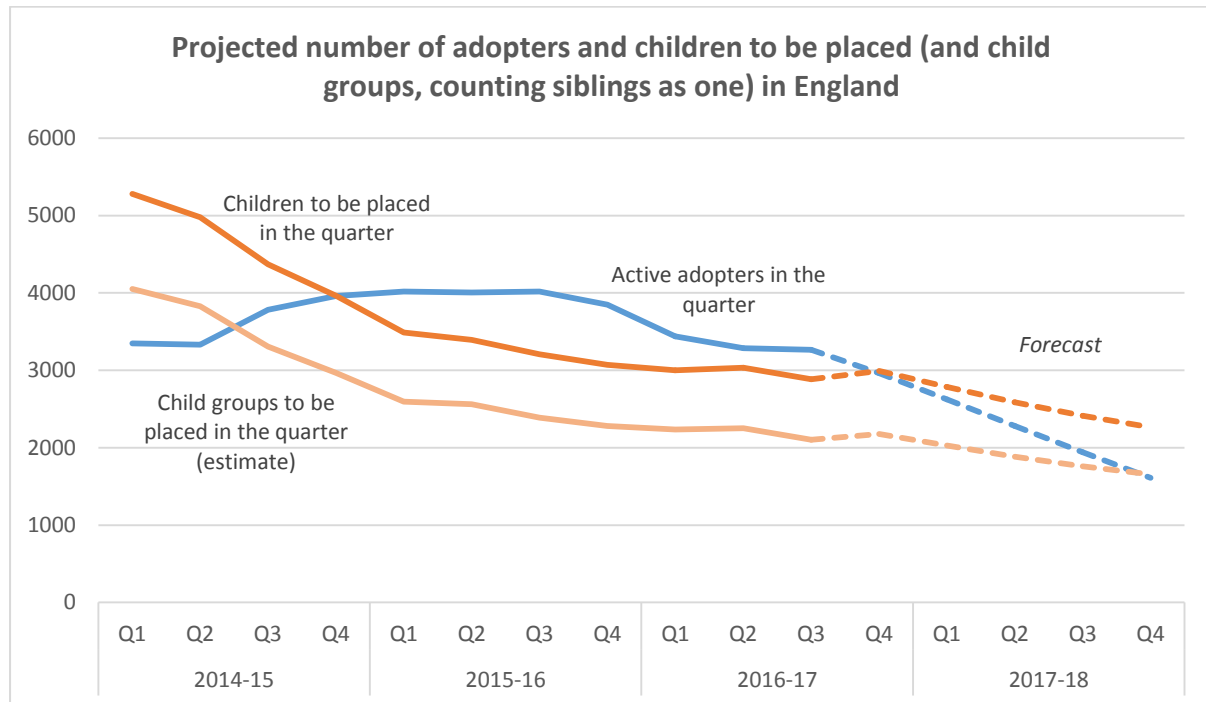
5. The model uses ALB data to calculate estimates for each quarter up to the end of 2017-18 for:
 - a. The number of 'active' prospective adopters in the quarter, approved but not yet matched to a child
 - b. How many children need to be placed in the quarter – i.e. with a placement order but not yet placed
6. On the adopter side, we assume recruitment stabilises at current levels, with approximately 710 adopters approved each quarter. Around 1,050 adopters leave the system each quarter, either through having a child placed with them (c.780) or withdrawing (c. 270). This means a net c.340 adopters leaving the system each quarter.
7. On the child side, we assume c.1,180 ADM decisions each quarter (based on a now fairly stable trend), with an estimated 85% resulting in a placement order. This means c.1,000 placement orders each quarter. Around 9% of children waiting with a placement order have this reversed each quarter, removing approximately 160 children from those waiting each quarter. Once we take into account the number of children placed each quarter (c.1,040), the overall number of children in the system needing to be placed is declining by c.180 each quarter.
8. This approach can only give an indication of general trends. It cannot predict whether these trends will change. Placement order numbers, for instance, can only be reasonably estimated one quarter in advance, because we have access to ADM decisions as a lead indicator.

Diagram of flows of adopters and children in the system:



Findings

9. Based on this approach, our model suggests that between January and March this year there were approximately just under 3,000 children requiring a placement at some point in this period, and just under 3,000 approved families active over that same period of time. If this is correct, this represents an end of a period (since January 2015) of there being more approved families than children needing to be placed.
10. If current trends continue, we expect that the number of approved families available in any given quarter will continue to fall faster than the number of children needing to be placed.



Evaluation

11. **This does not take into account sibling groups.** 56% of the children waiting on 31 December 2016 were part of a sibling group; and historically an average of 1.3 children are placed in each placement. This means that the actual number of 'groups' of children needing to be placed in any given quarter (counting siblings as one) will be around 25% less than the total number of individual children to be placed, as shown in the graph above.
12. **Only an estimated 1,220 of the 2,160 children identified as 'waiting' are actually waiting.** The ALB figures on the number of children 'waiting' includes all children with a placement order but not yet placed. This includes cases where the local authority is no longer family finding for the child: because the placement order is being appealed/revoked (3%); a family has been found, but not yet formally matched at panel (27%); or for some other reason (13%). Of the 2,160 children waiting at 31 December, there are only an estimated 1,220 that do not fall into one of the categories above, and therefore where the local authority is actively seeking families for those children.
13. **This does not take into account the ability of adopters to meet the needs of the children waiting.** A 'surplus' of adopters might look like sufficiency, but if for whatever reason they are not collectively able to meet the needs of the children waiting then this is insufficient. We cannot conclude that we have 'enough' adopters on a simple numerical calculation. More needs to be done to utilise data from the Adoption Register and Adoption Link to understand in

greater detail than the ALB data allows the needs of the children that wait longest and the ability of prospective adopters to meet those needs.

14. **Most importantly, this does not tell us what a 'sufficient' supply of adopters is.** The data can give indications of numbers in the system. What it cannot provide is a judgement about how many adopters relative to children (or child groups) is desirable in the adoption system. For instance, it might be that the adoption system needs a 3:1 ratio of adopters to children in order to maximise the likelihood that children are placed without delay.
15. **However, these caveats aside, a more basic analysis of the trends suggests that significantly more children are entering the system each quarter than adopters.** Looking at average figures over the last 4 quarters suggests that a net 840 children are entering the system each quarter (taking into account reversals) against a net 460 adopters (taking into account withdrawals). Unless the number of children per placement approaches 1.8 (normal range is between 1.1-1.5), this is not sustainable in the long term. The effect of this in the short term may be mitigated by the existing stock of approved adopters. However, assuming that placement order numbers remain stable, more adopters will have to be approved by the system in future than is presently the case.