

**4. BILL FOR SECOND READING**

**4.1. Adoption Bill 2021 –  
Second Reading approved**

Mr Ashford to move:

*That the Adoption Bill 2021 be read a second time.*

**The Speaker:** We turn then to Item 4 and Bill for Second Reading, Adoption Bill 2021.  
I call on Mr Ashford to move.

**Mr Ashford:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I am pleased to move the Second Reading of the Adoption Bill 2021. Hon. Members will be aware that the Department has had plans to reform adoption legislation for a good number of years. Our adoption legislation has fallen behind legislation in other jurisdictions and no longer reflects best practice. Reform of this legislation is long overdue, and I am pleased that the Adoption Bill is now being progressed through the Branches of Tynwald.

The Bill places the child at the centre of the decision-making process, placing the welfare of the child at the forefront of every decision taken by an adoption agency or a court. The interests of the child are, rightly so, of paramount importance in the Adoption Bill. This is in line with the Children and Young Persons Act 2001, which already operates under the paramountcy principle. However, the Adoption Bill goes further than the Children Young Persons Act 2001 and additionally states that the paramount consideration and the adoption for a child must be that the adoption is in the child's best interests and welfare throughout the whole of their life, factoring in lifelong consequences of adoption.

By updating our legislation, we are aiming to improve the adoption service for the benefit of vulnerable children being placed for adoption both on and off Island. The current Adoption Act 1984 was enacted when predominantly babies and young children were being placed for adoption. Over the intervening years, the face of adoption has changed radically and considerably. There are very few babies relinquished for adoption voluntarily and most adoptions now take place with young children already in the care system, many of whom have experienced some degree of trauma in their early years. It is for this reason that we have placed adoption support on a statutory footing in the Bill to ensure that support is provided to families where it is needed.

Some of the key components of the Bill are the reduction of delay in the adoption process. One way to do this is the introduction of placement orders; this means that children can be placed for adoption at any earlier stage in the process than under the Adoption Act 1984. By the power through reviewing panel to be formed, so that if a child is placed on Island by an off-Island adoption agency, the panel, whilst not changing that decision to place the child, will be able to inquire into the support arrangements to ensure that adequate support is being provided for all parties to the adoption.

The introduction of an adoption contact register to the Island; this enables an adopted person and any birth relatives to contact each other should they wish to do so.

The Bill also makes a few small amendments to the Children and Young Persons Act 2001 to allow parental responsibility to be granted to step-parents and to extend residence orders to the age of 18. I am aware that Hon. Members have previously raised the issue of timescales and care proceedings. Care proceedings are dealt with under the Children and Young Persons Act 2001, and I can confirm that a review of the Children and Young Persons Act 2001 is very much on the Department's legislative programme.

The Adoption Bill is the first part in the reform of children's legislation. The Children and Young Persons Act 2001 is the second part. Furthermore, the amendment of the 2001 Act is broader than

timescales and includes amendments for aftercare and the review of children's placements, making it a substantial Bill in its own right.

To introduce all of these elements now would have meant that the Adoption Bill would not have been ready to progress through the Branches in this legislative year. As I have mentioned a reform of adoption legislation is long overdue, and updating this legislation has been one of the Department's key commitments, it is an important step in ensuring the Island's Adoption Service works for those who are using it.

Mr Speaker, I beg to move that the Adoption Bill 2021 be read for a second time.

**The Speaker:** I call on the Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mrs Corlett.

**Mrs Corlett:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I beg to second and reserve my remarks.

**The Speaker:** Thank you.

If no Member wishes to speak, I will put the question that the Adoption Bill 2021 be read for a second time. I will presume the motion is approved unless anyone indicates dissent which they should do now please.

No dissent having been indicated, the ayes have it. The ayes have it.