

# Corporate Parenting Panel Agenda



To: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair)

Councillors Janet Campbell, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland,  
Maddie Henson, Shafi Khan, Helen Redfern

Co-Optees:

Virtual School Head; LAC Nurse/Doctor; Children in Care Council; Care  
Leaver; Foster Carer and Health Commissioner

A meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** which you are hereby summoned to attend, will be held on **Wednesday, 21 November 2018** at **5.00 pm** in **F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 1NX**

JACQUELINE HARRIS-BAKER  
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[www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings)  
Tuesday, 13 November 2018

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting.  
If you require any assistance, please contact the person detailed above, on the right-hand side.

N.B. This meeting will be paperless. The agenda can be accessed online at  
[www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings)

## **AGENDA – PART A**

**1. Apologies for absence**

To receive any apologies for absence from any members of the Panel.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 5 - 14)**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 September 2018 as an accurate record.

**3. Disclosures of interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and the statutory provisions of the Localism Act, Members and co-opted Members of the Council are reminded that it is a requirement to register disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) and gifts and hospitality to the value of which exceeds £50 or multiple gifts and/or instances of hospitality with a cumulative value of £50 or more when received from a single donor within a rolling twelve month period. In addition, Members and co-opted Members are reminded that unless their disclosable pecuniary interest is registered on the register of interests or is the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer, they are required to disclose those disclosable pecuniary interests at the meeting. This should be done by completing the Disclosure of Interest form and handing it to the Democratic Services representative at the start of the meeting. The Chair will then invite Members to make their disclosure orally at the commencement of Agenda item 3. Completed disclosure forms will be provided to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion on the Register of Members' Interests.

**4. Urgent Business (if any)**

To receive notice of any business not on the agenda which in the opinion of the Chair, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

**5. Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

To update the Panel on any agreed actions from the previous meeting.

**6. Children in Care Performance Scorecard (Pages 15 - 18)**

The Children in Care Performance Scorecard of September 2018 is attached.

**7. Care Leavers' Local Offer Summary (Pages 19 - 24)**

The summary of the Care Leavers Offer is attached.

**8. Engagement and Achievement (Inc. Complaints and Learning Opportunities)**

[To Follow]

**9. Children Missing from Care (Pages 25 - 28)**

The overview report on children missing from care.

**10. Annual Report of Adoption Service and Panel (Inc. plans and updates of regional adoption agency) (Pages 29 - 82)**

The annual report of the performance and developments in the delivery of the Croydon adoption service.

**11. How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?**

For the Panel to consider how its work at the meeting will improve services for children in care.

**12. Work Programme (Pages 83 - 84)**

To consider and approve the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2018/19.

**13. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The following motion is to be moved and seconded where it is proposed to exclude the press and public from the remainder of a meeting:

“That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within those paragraphs indicated in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.”

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## Corporate Parenting Panel

Meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 5 September 2018 at 5.09pm in F11, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon, CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);

Councillors Janet Campbell, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland, Maddie Henson, Shafi Khan and Helen Redfern

Co-optees Martin Williams, Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin

**Also Present**

Adam Stanley-Feron (Authority Designated Officer), Karen Massey, Quality Assurance Manager), Henrietta Delalu (Service Manager for Looked After Children and Adoption), Rem Besim-Avsar (Senior lead in Early Years Primary and Key Stage 3), Shelley Davies (Head of Education, Standards, Safeguarding and Exclusion lead), Fiona Mackirdy (Leaving Care Service Leader), Ashleigh Searle (former Care Leaver), Phillip Segurola (Interim Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care), Wendy Tomlinson (Head of Service for Looked After Children and Resources), Child M (Young Person), Dionne Sang (Consultant Practitioner for Looked After Children)

### PART A

**25/17 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19 July 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

**26/17 Disclosures of interest**

There were none.

**27/17 Urgent Business (if any)**

There was none.

**28/17 Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)**

There was none.

29/17 **Review of the Council's Staying Put Policy**

The Head of Service for Looked After Children and Resources updated the Panel on the review of the Councils Staying Put Policy.

Officers shared that the Council regularly have young people and children at the meetings. Managers responsible for children's care council was encouraged to be represented at the meeting in front of the Panel.

Care leaver Ashleigh was introduced to the Panel as she had delivered fantastic work supporting youth engagement team and experience in the leaving care team and in preparation for adulthood. Ashleigh returned back to the service eight months ago as a care leaver following the Ofsted inspection, to use her experience and support the service. Ashleigh was supporting the Children and Care Council. She also helped with the Local Offer and was very passionate about driving change.

Following the last Panel meeting, questions arose of the Staying Put Policy which was addressed in the report with regards to young person working and their contribution towards homes, and council tax reimbursement.

The Panel Co-Optees had recognised the changes and had seen a fairer system than before. Foster carers who resided outside the borough, was satisfied with the outcome when the issue of council tax was addressed.

**The Panel RESOLVED: To agree and sign off the Staying Put Policy.**

30/17 **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report**

The report of the Independent Review Officers (IRO) was delivered by former Authority Designated Officer and current Quality Assurance Manager Lead Karen Massey and current Authority Designated Officer Adam Stanley-Feron of Croydon.

Officers highlighted that there was more room for improvement following the Ofsted Inspection for the IRO to challenge social work practice and provide evidence. The service needed to evidence challenges of inadequate performance to help the whole service on the journey and focus on good quality care plans.

Drift and delay was highlighted as a main area of concern where things were not quickly resolved. The service had relaunched the Croydon Escalation Resolution Protocol (CERPs) process, which was a way of formalising challenge talking to team managers and social workers first. The role of the IRO would be to focus on the outcome and not the process, and this would be aimed to be completed in a timely way. This way, the IRO service should be able to manage the drift that happens.

Data was shared with the Panel informing that in the two-thousand and nine reviews there was one-thousand one hundred and nineteen with children. This provided a lot of information in what had happened to looked after children within Croydon. The focus was on the activities of what the staff can do as a service of how to improve.

Officers highlighted the gaps in the service which needed to be improved, which included completing reviews on time and knowing when reviews took place.

Since February 2018, there was a number of structures that changed to better the service. This included the processes of how reviews were monitored. Officers informed that reviewing looked after children cases was a statutory requirement for the IRO to monitor, scrutinise, think about planning, listen to the voice of the child, ensuring that the right consultation forms was shared at the meeting where an outcome is later taken into account. Through this the IRO team can service all LAC Reviews, this also included the quality for the IRO work with their quality of report and minutes and family approach.

Officers note that there was sixty mid-year reviews that had taken place in August. This helped the service demonstrate better ways in working with children.

The service was looking into the way children would be better involved in the LAC reviews, and this would be by way of an app or a smiley face form instead of a paper consultation, to engage children. This way the service was putting the child at the centre of attention to ensure a better resolution in a plan that would identify their need.

With questions arising of the use of the consultation form, Child M highlighted that she liked the smiley face form (consultation form) as she was able to identify her emotions of being happy or sad. Ashleigh recalled of the paper work being well used, but understood the difficulty of the form and suggested that a voice note or an app would be a better tool at the LAC reviews.

Members of the Panel welcomed the thorough report although they would have liked to have seen more outcomes and examples of the difference made to children. Some Members pointed out the awareness of the IRO role within the council, as the report was a response to the Ofsted failure of service drift and delay, and it was reassuring to note that there was plans in place to build the service going forward.

In response to questions around handling complaints on the forward plan in specifically to the IRO, officers inform that there was an Annual Complaint Report that was presented at the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and identified how matters was tackled and what the service needed to act on.

Panel Members noted the phrase "Independent Reviewing Officer" as important, as it was a clear indication from the Ofsted report that touches the

independence of the IRO and lack of robustness to the IRO which had not come out in the report.

In reference to the IRO Annual Report of 2017/2018, the CERPs report identified how to deliver a better service. The IRO would be able to take better responsibility in their work with the more the CERPs the more the robustness in addressing to all challenges. The idea of setting appraisal objectives and discussing challenges at team meetings, also was other source to support the team and individual.

Panel Members noted that there was not an IRO sitting on the Panel.

In further discussions of the evaluation process, officers informed that there was an issue to challenge and the entitlement to challenge the service, and that the service would need to be enabled to challenge. The idea that the IRO should hold the service to account if there was underperformance, should be a culture of where the service would need to be prepared to take on the challenge. It was further noted by officers that there was far fewer escalations. The change was noted that the challenge and interaction was difficult to put the child in the middle of the conversation. It started with talking with the child to change to culture of the style and language of discussions.

Panel Members noted that there had been a culture of blame between the services which derived from past expectations. Officers ensured that there was now less confusion of roles from all services involved and a better structure was implemented.

Ashleigh shared her experience in the past where she felt IRO and LAC Reviews meetings tendered to be tick box exercises and a child's view would need to be better collated to get the right level of honesty from a child. In all services there was always room for improvement specifically on time scales for better delivery, planning and preparation to get the most from the meeting from the people involved.

The Panel Co-Optees highlighted the involvement of foster carers and IRO in LAC Reviews and with the young person, and highlighted that there was a set structure for the IRO to spend time with the young person providing better quality in having a true reflection of the child. Foster carers would be able to seek support through the Croydon Foster Carer Association. Officers informed that also the looked after children service manager would be available to provide additional support to help resolve immediate matters. Panel Members informed that the fostering handbook of the role of foster carers and the IRO would need to be readdressed, as foster carers should be able to seek support and know where to go to when making complaints. Complaints was also an option for foster carers to use if the channels are not working or if foster carers was not being listened to. Members would like to see foster carers being supported and the monitoring of their concerns be taken into consideration.



The Panel discussed that the social work service was responsible for the delivery of the children care plan, and it was for the IRO to escalate any underperformance as their role was to challenge a social worker's delivery.

The Chair concluded that the service was not about attributing blame, the service was about ensuring that the right process is in place where everyone knows where to go for support and where to find the support.

**Action: For the foster carers list to be recirculated.**

**Recommendation: To look into where there was a process for the Quality Assurance of IRO.**

**Note: For future reports of complaints to be reviewed to understand how many was dealt with.**

*The Panel adjourned for a short break at 6:33pm*

*The Panel reconvened the meeting at 6:48pm*

#### 31/17 **Care Leavers' Local Offer**

Leaving Care Service Leader presented to the Panel the Care Leaver's Local Offer which had been several months in the making. The document/brochure was presented to internal officers, and more work had been added to this work. The statutory deadlines was within the next few weeks, with an expectation for publication.

The Published Local Offer to Care Leavers was a new duty that came about within the Social Work Act in 2017. A local offer would be required to cover six, and do a corporate piece of work, of the entire council and work done by the leaders.

In depth, officers shared the key part in developing the offer which was the final iteration. The Panel heard that there was two key issues: employment and housing. This version had a strengthened offer where the care leavers would be provided accommodation by the Council, and how young people would be engaged to view properties.

Going forward, care leavers forum and setting up home allowance would be set up as this is a duty for the Council to provide money and goods in setting up their first home.

Feedback was received from the Executive Director for audio files and other summary and development. To summarise key entitlement to the young person via a Care Leavers app that was proposed to go live during Care Leavers Week in October.

Former care leaver, Ashleigh, who sat on the Panel, shared with the Panel of her time as a care leaver. She highlighted that she was not aware of the

entitlements she was to receive from the Council as there was no information, and thus the care leaver's brochure/document would have informative guidelines to help other care leavers that have little support. Ashleigh expressed that when something was in writing it gave the young person something to hold on to as it would be transparent.

Members of the Panel welcomed the brochure which was set in the right direction, and the forum was also welcomed to see the progression going forward. Conversely, there was discussions of the document which was quite lengthy, and suggested a more succinct information for young care leavers to access and have available. In addition, it was highlighted that as the brochure was targeted for young people, it would need to be memorable and identify more with the individual who may rely on the brochure as their bible. Some Members on the Panel wanted the style, culture, pictures and language adaptable to be suitable for the young person and indicate the right message. One Member of the Panel welcomed the comprehensive brochure and made comments that there was no issue with the document in terms of language as it was clear English and referred to the document/brochure as a handbook. Officers reassured the Panel that the deliverance of the brochure was a working process and the delivery would have to be accurate to deliver the right information for the older and the younger children.

Officers shared that there was different ways the document could be received, such as having a hardcopy, online, audio, and translated versions too, which was feedback from young persons. The idea of a mobile app was also welcomed by the Panel, where they learned that it would be downloaded for the young person to access a summary of things they need to know. There was also ongoing consultation around young people with disabilities.

In response to Members questions on pathway plan, officers shared that legally the pathway planning is for young people aged from sixteen years old, and incorporating the plan would be something that would be addressed at the time to network challenge and see what part of the local offer the young person would want. There was a starter point for this at this age and the resource may also bridge the link between the social worker, advisors and young person.

As Staying Put was addressed within the brochure, officers highlighted that for every case in every LAC Reviews and other meetings, conversations of what would be offered on their journey would be a continued dialogue. Officers further addressed that the care leaver's document/brochure was for young people and an offer that they would be entitled to, which the service was required to deliver. It was therefore an important development that the service provided clarification for the young persons' preparation of adult life.

*Cllr Henson left the meeting at 7:10pm.*

The Panel Co-Optees requested for support to be catered to foster carers to provide ongoing provision to their young person, and to be engaged at an earlier stage to address and support to the young person who may have many

questions of their journey and further support in the process of closure. The Panel appreciated the comprehensive document as a tool for the foster carers. Further, Panel Members felt that the way Staying Put was worded seemed to imply that the young person makes the whole decision when it too is also a decision for the foster carer; and also that there was little information of transition for the Staying Put young person and an eighteen year old young person.

The Panel highlighted that there was a large number of care leavers residing within the borough, and the service's expectations needed to be a clear aspect for what the care leavers can expect. It was addressed that not many care leavers get involved in change and this was something the service wanted to improve on.

The Chair addressed in her final remarks that this was a leaving document that would be evolving over time and would return for review. It was noted that since the first document version, there had been two or three other versions and this would continue to change as there was commitment to housing and other matters. A formal twelve month review to put on the work plan was pending, and this document would also be brought to Cabinet for further detailed discussion.

**Action: The Panel advised for officers to look at re-wording the section of Staying Put within the brochure i.e. with further discussions with current carers.**

### 32/17 **Children in Care Performance Scorecard**

Officers informed that there would be a commitment to make a regular performance scorecard. The performance scorecard presented to the Panel was the July outturn. The RAG rating showed some areas of development and progression.

Officers shared that there was issues around medicals, and the review medicals for 2016/2017, pathway plans and care reviews and small administrative business support.

Officers addressed the strength of the performance scorecard which highlighted that basic stability was good. The CIC 3 or remote placements and performance was strong which was a good testament to the foster carers.

The Panel highlighted that there was reasonable consistency. Going forward the Panel Members would want to scrutinise an area in more detail for analytical review on the performance.

**Recommendation: To move performance scorecard to the beginning of each meeting to address particular areas.**

**How has the Panel helped the Children in Care today?**

The Panel highlighted the following accomplishments which helped Children in Care:

- The Panel identified key gaps.
- Time mask.
- The Panel highlighted that it was refreshing to see young people at the meeting in the hope that more young people can attend to challenge officers.
- The Panel highlighted that it was interesting to have Virtual school listen in with LAC reviews and hear the feedback from foster carers. It was also good to know of the ongoing work of Quality Assurance if the LAC reviews and the education of care would feed into it.
- The Panel was delighted to hear of the Local Offer and Ashleigh's engagement in the meeting.
- Having the commitment and the discussion of what the Local Offer would mean to the care leavers
- Generally attending the meeting as an adult, from attending previously at a younger age, and to see how things had change and how people was not afraid to challenge.
- IRO report and the challenge for them to do better; and to hear back from Ashleigh as it is good to see what it looks like when it goes right.
- IRO implementation if fundament to be more affective at corporate planning for hardwiring better practice.
- Staying Put Policy which was fit for purpose and Care Offer for care leavers. Good balanced thorough discussion.
- Ground breaking and the change in the young people. The staff was enthused as the energy is incorporated. The fact it exist was good. Signoff for Staying Put Policy is good. Grateful to Ashleigh and Child M.
- I loved it today. It's great living with foster carers as they take me out, take me to church and give us so much lovely food.
- Giving more confidence to explain to other foster carers who share the same issues. The commitment and passion delivered in here is very different to what we feel outside the Panel. It was about ensuring the process was delivered, and feeling the same passing as other officers in the room.
- Depth of discussion that takes place, as foster carers we raise issues and the fact the department has taken all on board is positive that people are listening.
- Foster carers do feel that they are not listened to, but in the Panel we was able to address some things on behalf of the foster carers. Today we focused on older children as recommended by Ofsted. A great inspired meeting.
- We asked good questions and there was an honest debate. It was not just about the Ofsted comments we were discussing, but the discussion had would ensure that we was making steps to make our services better.

- The discussion about the IRO and recommendations made. They would make big differences to see how we was ensured everyone listed to and more transparent of where people will go to, and care leavers and the conversation and the depth of it. Excited to making a difference to prepare young person to go out into the world.
- To see Ashleigh here and to see her growth and to help in improving service to the care leavers. Passion in LAC and pleased that the Staying Put Policy was now agreed.

The Panel unanimously identified a young person, Kieran, and shared their appreciation of his positive progress and how he was moving on well. The Panel wished Kieran all the best.

34/17 **Work Programme**

The work programme was considered and it was noted that there was flexibility to amend the work programme as required should new items be identified. It was highlighted that the report of the Care Leaver's Offer was to return at the next meeting in November.

35/17 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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OUR  
FOCUS

# Children In Care Scorecard

September- 2018

Produced by  
Performance Intelligence and Data Quality Team

**CROYDON**  
[www.croydon.gov.uk](http://www.croydon.gov.uk)

		2018/19							Comparative Data											
Indicator Number	Indicator Title	Polarity	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Target Owner	2018-19 Target	RAG	2018-19 YTD or latest	2017-18	Croydon 2016-17	Croydon 2015-16	England 2016-17	England 2015-16	Stats Nbr Average 2016-17	Stats Nbr Average 2015-16	
LAC 1	Number of LAC at the end of the month		789	794	779	780	771	784	WT	NA		784	793	785	800	478.09 (Average)	Average 463	507 (Average)	517 (Average)	
LAC 2	Rate of LAC per 10,000 under 18 population		84.8	85.4	83.8	83.9	82.9	84.3	WT	NA		84.3	85.3	83.0	86.0	62.0	60.0	54.1% (average)	59 (Average Rate)	
LAC 2a	Rate of LAC per 10,000 under 18 population excluding UASC		51.8	53.1	53.5	54.1	53.7	54.1	WT	NA		54.1	52.0	42		42		48		
LAC 3	Number of LAC at the end of the month who are Local LAC (Non-UASC)		482	494	498	503	499	503	WT	NA		503	484	396	370	448	Average 436	457	468	
LAC 4	Number of LAC at the end of the month who are UASC		307	300	281	277	272	281	WT	NA		281	309	390	430	4560 (Total) 30 (Average)	4300 - average 28	51 (Average)	395	
LAC 7	Number of missing episodes from Care in the month involving LAC children	SIB	167	180	176	148	181	208	HD	NA			871	520 (all missing incidents not single episodes)	105	399.5 (average) Experimental	57 (Average)	543 (average) Experimental	59	
LAC 9	% of Found episodes in the month involving LAC children where an RHI was completed (New for Feb 2018)	SIB	56% (97/173)	53% (92/173)	55% (99/179)	47% (71/151)	60% (105/175)	57% (119/207)	HD	NA			44%							
LAC 10	Percentage of LAC for whom a visit has taken place within statutory timescales (6 weekly Visits)	BIB	90%	92%	90%	85%	88%	89%	WT	95%		89%	88%		90%					
LAC 11	Percentage of LAC children with an up to date review	BIB	61%	77%	78%	82%	84%	95%	AFS	95%		80%	68%		80%					
LAC 12	Percentage of LAC who have participated in Reviews (aged 4+) in the month	BIB	80%	79%	78%	76%	78%	79%	AFS	80%		79%	78%	Need to establish data source	91%		78%			
LAC 13	Percentage of LAC with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviewed in the last 6 months (Need to get the EPEP Number from the Virtual teams)	BIB	25%	23%	23%	22%	18%	15%	GM	85%		21%	66%		70%					
LAC 14	Percentage of eligible LAC with an up-to-date Care Plan	BIB	95%	95%	89%	87%	84%	96%	WT	95%		96%	92%		n/a					
LAC 15	Percentage of eligible LAC with an up-to-date Pathway Plan	BIB	49%	48%	50%	49%	51%	60%	WT	80%		60%	48%		52%					
LAC 16	% of children in care for at least 12 months for whom health assessments are up to date.	BIB	62%	67%	71%	67%	74%	82%	AT/WT	75%		82%	80%	66.5%	86%	89.4%	90%	94.2%	93%	
LAC 18	% initial health assessments delivered within 20 working days of date child became looked after.	BIB	19%	16%	20%	11%	2%	3%	AT/WT			12%	15%							
LAC 19	Percentage of LAC that have been in care for 12+ months, that have had same social worker for last 6 months	BIB	62%	61%	64%	65%	70%	68%	WT	60%		68%	65%							
LAC 20	Percentage of LAC under 16 in care for more than 2.5 years: in the same placement for 2+ years	BIB	74%	72%	76%	74%	72%	74%	WT	75%		74%	73%		71%					
LAC 21	Percentage of LAC at end of month with 3 or more placements during the year	SIB	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%	9%	WT	8%		9%	9%	9%	8% (2015)	10% (average - 2016)	10% (2015)	11.6% (average - 2016/17)		



Indicator Number	Indicator Title	Polarity	2018/19						Target Owner	2018-19 Target	RAG	2018-19 YTD or latest	Comparative Data						
			Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18					2017-18	Croydon 2016-17	Croydon 2015-16	England 2016-17	England 2015-16	Stats Nbr Average 2016-17	Stats Nbr Average 2015-16
LAC 22	Percentage of LAC placed <20 miles from home	SIB	81%	81%	83%	81%	83%	82%	WT	90%	Yellow	82%	81%	42%	92% (2015)	74.2%	86% (2015)	68.4%	
F 1	Total number of foster carer households	BIB	236	235	229	228	230	233	SD	NA	Grey	233	239	260 Households (2016/17)	390 (total number of approved foster carers).	288 (average 2016/17)	292 (average 2016)	152 (average 2016/17)	170 (average 2016)
F 3	Percentage of Annual Reviews of Foster Carers completed on time	BIB	87%	92%	93%	92%	88%	86%	SD	95%	Yellow	86%	81%						
F 4	Percentage of Foster Carers' most recent announced visit within timescales	BIB	80%	76%	78%	75%	64%	73%	SD	85%	Red	73%	77%						
AD 0	Number of Adoption Orders achieved in the month	BIB	0	2	5	2	0	0	VW	NA	Grey	9	9	Need to establish data source		28.6		26	
AD 1	Number of children for whom the agreed plan is adoption (ADM)	BiB	48	49	0	1	0	1	VW	NA	Grey	99	431		28				
AD 2	Number of children waiting to be matched to an adopter		22	27	19	19	18	17	VW	NA	Grey	17	18		19				
AD 7	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family , for children who have been adopted (days) (12 Months rolling average)	SIB	682	543.2	521.22	523.2	523.2	523.2	VW	558	Yellow	553	309	696 (2014-17) 3 yr average	1073 (2016) AND 779 (3 Year Average)	520 (2014-2017) 3 yr average	558 (2013-2016) 3 yr average	554.5 (2014-2017) 3 yr average	604 (2013-2016) 3 yr average
CL a	Care Leavers with an Up-to-date Pathway plan	BIB	74%	74%	82%	86%	82%	83%	WT	95%	Red	80%	69%						
CL 1a	Percentage in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 17th to 21st Birthday	BIB	63%	63%	63%	61%	64%	66%	WT	60%	Green	63%	60%	53% (19-21 yr olds)	60% (345) (2016)	50% (average 19 to 21 yr olds)		50.2% (average 19 to 21 yr olds)	
CL 3a	Percentage in suitable accommodation on their 17th to 21st Birthday	BIB	84%	84%	85%	83%	90%	92%	WT	85%	Green	92%	85%	77% (19-21 yr olds)	77% (2016)	84% (19-21 yr olds)	83%	81.5% (19-21 yr olds)	83%

Additional Notes:  
 Statistical Neighbours Average Numbers calculated by dividing the totals by the 11 local authorities in Croydon's statistical neighbours group

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# Agenda Item 7

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel 21 November 2018</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Care Leavers' Local Offer Summary</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service, Looked after Children and Resources</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:</b> Ambition 2 – Helping Our Residents to be as Independent as Possible - Safeguarding	
<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT: No new impact</b> Not applicable as this report is for information only	

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable as this report is for information only

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires Local Authorities to publish a 'Local Offer' for care leavers by September 2018 covering the following areas:
- Health and Wellbeing
  - Relationships
  - Education and Training
  - Employment
  - Accommodation
  - Participation in Society
- 2.2 The local offer was published in September 2018 following consideration by the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Cabinet in September 2018.
- 2.3 Due to the length of the written offer, a summary has been produced which ties in with the summary provided on the Care Leavers smart-phone App which is being launched on 19 October 2018. The Summary is provided at Appendix A.

### **3. DETAIL OF YOUR REPORT**

#### **Context**

- 3.1 The Local Offer provides information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority, including information about their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that the local authority chooses to provide.
- 3.2 The local offer should be easily available and accessible to all care leavers, and we have made it available:
- in a printed booklet to be distributed to all current care leavers and those aged 17
  - in an interactive version online
  - in the 5 most used languages by care leavers available on the website
  - in this summary document
  - in the smart-phone App to be launched at the end of October 2018.
- 3.3 This summary document is intended as a companion to the more detailed online or printed version. It has been designed so that it can also be used as a poster for display in areas where young people access the service or for an at-a-glance guide for staff.
- 3.4 Further work is still needed this autumn to produce a version with symbols suitable for people with learning disabilities.

### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Care leavers have been consulted in drawing up the local offer in the following ways:
- Encouragement to complete feedback forms whilst attending the Turnaround Centre and engaging with their personal adviser
  - Consultation session in June 2018 about use of a Care Leaver App to assist with access to the local offer
  - Consultation session in August 2018 about the draft local offer documents
  - Attendance at the Children in Care Council to talk about the local offer

### **5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable

### **6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER**

Not applicable

### **7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

Not applicable

### **8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

Not applicable

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Not applicable

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

Not applicable

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service, Looked after Children and Resources

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

1. Care Leavers Local Offer Summary Document

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# CROYDON CARE LEAVERS LOCAL OFFER SUMMARY

The Care Leavers Local Offer sets out what we offer in full— be sure to read it to see the full range of services that can support you. It can be found at [www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/families/local-offer-for-care-leavers](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/families/local-offer-for-care-leavers)

## Life Skills and Support

There is a range of ways we can support you to develop skills:

- ◆ Floating support from CAYSH
- ◆ Advocacy Services from Barnardo's
- ◆ Esther Outreach support groups
- ◆ FormerR Relevant YouTube channel
- ◆ SEND local offer for those with additional educational needs [www.croydon.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/education/special-educational-needs)
- ◆ Support from the Transitions Team if you meet the criteria for support as an adult under the Care Act.

## Migrant Support

If you have the legal right to stay in the UK we will offer you a list of immigration solicitors who can help you make an application for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Most people can get Legal Aid to fund the application.

If you have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) you will not be entitled to housing or benefits, and in the majority of cases you won't be entitled to work. We still support you by allocating a personal adviser, make a pathway plan and giving advice and assistance.

It is likely you may have to return home at some point, so we will help you plan about what might happen, who, if anyone, could support you, what dangers you may face, where you could stay and what would help you best be prepared for education or work back home. We can also help you take advantage of any voluntary return schemes.

## Health and Staying Safe

Your Personal Adviser will help you with registering with a GP, dentist and optician, and signposting you to any services you might need for your physical, mental and sexual health such as:

- ◆ IAPT talking therapies provided by the NHS
- ◆ Off the Record Youth Counselling
- ◆ Sexual Health services
- ◆ Turning Point service for substance misuse
- ◆ Just Be Croydon for healthy lifestyle advice.

Before you turn 18 the Nurse for looked after children will send you letter with your health history, health checks and any NHS information we know.

If you are the victim of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence the Family Justice Centre can advise and support.

We work in partnership with the Youth Offending Service based at the Turnaround Centre, with Prisons and the Probation Service to plan for and support young people who are involved in crime or in prison.

## Leaving Care Services

Based at the Turnaround Centre, 51– 55 South End Croydon, CR0 1BF, Tel: 0208 726 6000.

For Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers we offer:

- ◆ A Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan which we review with you at least every 6 months
- ◆ A Social Worker or Personal Adviser who keeps in touch at least every 8 weeks
- ◆ Support and advice detailed in this guide, including finding and maintaining accommodation.

For Qualifying Care leavers we offer:

- ◆ Advice and Support
- ◆ Access to the Higher Education Bursary
- ◆ Vacation accommodation if you are at University.

Care leavers aged 21 to 25 years old can now request a service at any time up to the age of 25. We will meet with you to see if you need:

- ◆ Advice and signposting
- ◆ An assessment of your needs
- ◆ A pathway plan setting out how we will support you.

## Housing and Accommodation

The Council gives priority in our Croydon Housing Allocations Scheme to care leavers in most need and we support you to apply for a place on the Housing Register. Due to the high demand on a limited number of properties we can't guarantee you a council property and you might need to rent privately, possibly in a shared house, for a number of years.

We help you by finding landlords who provide accommodation for care leavers where you won't have to fund lots of up front costs.

If you are 16-17 a **semi-independent** home might give you the opportunity to live more independently with others—we work with a number of providers who offer this type of accommodation and support.

If you are in foster care, you and your carer might agree for you to remain living there after you turn 18 in a **Staying Put** arrangement.

If you are over 18 but need additional support or we are worried about risks, we may offer **Supported Accommodation** for a time-limited period.

If you are at University and need accommodation during the summer and Christmas periods we will support you to find and if necessary fund accommodation.

## Money

Here's the ways in which we help you with money and budgeting:

- ◆ A Setting Up Home Allowance of £1000
- ◆ Support to apply for Universal Credit and a loan whilst your benefits come through
- ◆ If you are eligible, a Higher Education Bursary of £2000 and support to apply for Student Finance if you go to University
- ◆ A Graduation fund of £200 for photos, graduation gown hire etc.
- ◆ Expenses linked with getting and staying in employment or travel to work or college if necessary
- ◆ Exemption from paying Council tax
- ◆ Support to open a bank account and get a National Insurance Number
- ◆ Help to apply for charitable funding or bursaries
- ◆ Discretionary support in an emergency including food, toiletries or food vouchers
- ◆ Access to any savings put aside while you were looked after
- ◆ If you have No Recourse to Public Funds, fully subsidised accommodation including utility bills, a pre-paid money card and weekly subsistence payments.

## Jobs, Education and Training

If you are 16,17 or 18 and still in education you will meet with college and your personal adviser to review your progress and ensure you have the support you need written into a Personal Education Plan (PEP).

If you want to go to University we can support with visiting on open days, making your application, applying for student finance, finding accommodation and adjusting to university life.

We also work with

- ◆ Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) who deliver academic and vocational courses across Croydon. They also provide apprenticeships.
- ◆ Croydon Works, a council service helping people to find jobs and apprenticeships
- ◆ The Health and Work programme run by REED, who provide advice, guidance, skills training and support to help care leavers and other groups to become ready for work and to maintain employment, including self-employment.

## Family and Relationships

Where appropriate we will help you strengthen or reconnect with family and friends through mediation, tracing services or a return home. If you are a parent we will help you connect with our Early Help Service who can offer advice and support.

If you want, we will signpost LGBTQ groups or events or ensure you can explore or express your identity without fear of discrimination.

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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel 21 November 2018</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Overview report on children missing from care</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Philip Segurola, Interim Director of Early Help and Children’s Social Care</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:</b>	
<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT: No new impact</b> Not applicable as this report is for information only	

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Not applicable as this report is for information only

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2.1 Children going missing remains at a consistently high level but there is a much improved Return Home Interview (RHI) offer and acceptance rate.

**3. DETAIL OF YOUR REPORT**

3.1 During September there were 71 LAC who went missing on 208 occasions. This is consistent with previous months. Of these children 33 were placed within Croydon and 38 outside of the borough. The majority of the children who went missing were 17 years old (34 out of the 71), with 54 out of these being males. These children were placed in different types of placements including in-house and agency foster carers, children’s home but with the largest number in independent living (43) which would correspond with the older age range of the more frequent missing children.

3.2 When looking more closely at the 71 children there are 23 who were repeatedly missing during September. The most frequent was a 17 year old male Albanian who went missing on 12 occasions, there are then two 17 year old females who went missing on 11 occasions each. Within the 23 who were repeatedly missing there are 14 who are 17 years old, 2 who are 16 and 5 who are 15 years old.

3.3 There are two categories within the local authority for children who go missing (in line with DfE guidance): missing and away from placement without authorisation. The process within Croydon is that all children are categorised as missing initially and this is then reviewed by the allocated social worker who knows the child and their circumstances. It is proposed that all 17 year olds are now interrogated to ensure that the correct category is being used and that all children are being reviewed as per the process, as it is suspected that we are 'over recording' the number of children going missing. Children who are away from placement without authorisation do not need to be reported on nationally and do not require a RHI. The Head of Adolescent Services is undertaking this task along with staff within the CE/missing intelligence team.

#### 3.4 *Current and proposed developments*

- Social workers can now arrange for RH interviews for children placed outside of LBC and close vicinity to be spot purchased as part of their placement arrangements. This is a new development and increase the timeliness of the offer of an interview.
- Head of Adolescent Service and CE/missing intelligence team to interrogate data of 17 year olds to ensure that the correct category is being used.
- A permanent RHI Co-ordinator is now in post. He was interim and is very experienced.
- Three permanent RHI interviewers have been recruited and will be in post by the end of November. All of them have experience in RHIs, they will also be completing short, targeted interventions for those children who go missing two or more times. This is anticipated to reduce the number of missing episodes.

September 2018 figures:

	Overall	Placed in LBC	Placed out of borough
No. of LAC missing episodes	208	99	109
No. of LAC missing children	71	33	38
%age of children offered RHI	89%	90%	89%
%age of RHI accepted	58%	57%	58%

## 4. **CONSULTATION**

4.1 Not applicable.

## 5. **FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable

**6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER**

Not applicable

**7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

Not applicable

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

Not applicable

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Not applicable

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

Not applicable

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Hannah Doughty, Head of Adolescent Services ext. 65485

**APPENDICES:** None

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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel 21 November 2018</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Annual Adoption Report 2017/18</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:</b>	
<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT: No new impact</b> Not applicable as this report is for information only	

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable as this report is for information only

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The purpose of the annual report is to document the activity of Croydon adoption service; fulfilling obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014, Adoption Service Statutory Guidance 2013 and Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and 2013. It includes performance and developments in Croydon's delivery of adoption services; how the Council is compliant with key National Minimum Standards and the service offered to those seeking to adopt and to those affected by adoption through the provision of adoption support. It also captures the regionalisation agenda for Adoption and Croydon's transition to Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency.

## 3. DETAIL OF YOUR REPORT

3.1 2017/18 noted an increase in the number of Croydon children with a parallel plan for adoption which is a local trend and not comparable nationally. However the number of children placed for adoption declined due to challenges of finding forever families for harder to place children. This report outlines numbers of children with an adoption plan and children placed for adoption in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

3.2 The number of approved prospective adopters declined in 2017/18 in comparison to previous years. This was impacted by the Council's strategic decision to focus on targeted recruitment, resulting in high cohort of Croydon

children being placed with external agencies. More information is outlined about the recruitment and preparation of adopters, taking account of adoption timescales. The Adoption Scorecard attached as an appendix allows Croydon and other adoption agencies to monitor our performance and compare it with statistical neighbours.

- 3.3 There has been a marked growth in post adoption support with the Adoption Support Fund being extended to Special Guardianship. This fund enables Croydon to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families.

**4. CONSULTATION**

Not applicable

**5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable

**6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER**

Not applicable

**7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

Not applicable

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

Not applicable

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Not applicable

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

Not applicable

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting  
ext. 65413

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

1. Croydon Adoption Agency Annual Report
2. The statement of purpose for the adoption service.
3. Adoption scorecard
4. Report of the adoption panel to the London borough of Croydon Adoption Agency.

# **CROYDON ADOPTION AGENCY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 – 31<sup>st</sup> March  
2018**

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## **Section 1 Introduction**

The Statutory Regulations require that Elected Members should be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. This annual report provides information that will assist Elected Members in respect of their responsibilities as corporate parents for Looked After Children, and it should be read in conjunction with the Adoption Agencies Statement of Purpose.

The work of the Agency is governed by the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Children Act 1989, The Children and Adoption Act 2006 and associated guidance. In addition, the borough works within the National Minimum Standard 2014, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and 2013 and the Statutory Adoption Guidance 2013. The Agency has responded to and embraced the Government's Adoption Reform Programme and the Children and Families Act 2014.

The Adoption Service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people. Its key priority is to achieve permanence and stability for Looked After Children ensuring that they are brought up in loving, secure, stable families. Where a child's welfare requires placement outside the birth family, the Adoption Agency's paramount consideration is the welfare of the child throughout his or her life. Permanence outside the birth family will be legally secured through Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order.

This report provided an overview of the Adoption services provided during the period of 1<sup>ST</sup> April 2017 to 31<sup>ST</sup> March 2018.

## **The National Context**

Croydon Council is fully engaged in the change agenda for adoption and we have sought to respond robustly to the challenge by central government to increase the effectiveness of the Adoption Service as set out in "An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling Delay" (2012) "Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes" (2013) and "A vision for change" 2016.

The Family Justice Review which introduced the 26 week timescale for care proceedings has had a significant impact on the Adoption Service over the last few years. Local Authorities are now required to develop permanence plans for children and place them in alternative family arrangements much more quickly. There is a steady rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders with family members as an alternative route to achieving permanence. The Courts are increasingly reluctant to make a placement order unless confident that adoption is the only option to ensure permanency for the child.

Croydon Council has responded to the Regionalisation agenda as set by central government in "A vision for change" (2016) Croydon Council is actively working in partnership with the 32 London Boroughs to map out and implement a fully functional London Regional Adoption Agency or sub Regional Adoption Agency by April 2019.

Please refer to Section 9 for further update on Regionalisation.

In “A vision for change” the government have outlined the following priorities:

- Decisions about placements are always made in the child’s best interests
- Service delivery has at its heart, innovation and practice excellence
- Social Workers are highly skilled professionals who make, high quality evidence based decisions and do not tolerate drift and delay for children in their care
- Matches and placements are made without unnecessary delay
- Fostering for Adoption should be used to offer children early permanence placements
- Every adoptive family has access to a robust package of support with a right to high quality specialist assessment of need as and when required throughout the adoption journey.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy making and delivery of services.

There are national targets for monitoring the performance of Local Authority Adoption Services-the Adoption Scorecards covering three year performance. These performance indicators reflect the national variance in timeliness and the more challenging expectations on ensuring permanency for children.

The first key indicator A1 relates to the overall experience of a child who is adopted. It measures the average time it takes for a child who goes on to be adopted from entering care to moving in with his or her adoptive family.

The second key indicator A2 tests the speed and effectiveness of family-finding. It measures the average time it takes for a local authority to match a child to an adoptive family once the court has formally decided that adoption is the best option. These will be explored further in section 9 of this report.

## **Section 2 Service Structure**

The current structure of the Adoption Service is designed to meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of adoption services. The Team consists of 12 full time equivalents staffing establishment of:

1 Service Manager who is also the Panel Advisor and ASSA

2 Team Managers

10 Social Workers

1 Letterbox Co-ordinator

1 Business Support Unit Co-ordinator

2 Panel Administrator

The service has remained largely fully staffed during this financial year with a number of staffing changes in Quarter 2 and Quarter 4. Most members of staff are permanent experienced and locums stay for an average of a year and half. The Adoption Service carry out the full functions of an Adoption Agency, with social workers completing a range of adoption work and Look After Children work including prospective adopter assessments, adoption support, family finding and work with adopted adults and birth relatives.

### **Section 3 Adoption Panel**

Adoption Panel contributes to the running and quality assurance of the local authority's adoption service and receives annual reports on the service and its performance. In doing so it has an overriding responsibility to promote good practice, consistency of approach and fairness in all aspects of the adoption service, in accordance with its principles.

As part of this function, the Panel makes recommendations on the following:

- Suitability of prospective adoptive applicants to adopt
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption (only for children voluntarily relinquished by a parent)
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with particular prospective adopters.

The recommendations must be unconditional and cannot be 'in principle'.

The panel usually meet twice per month, with extra panels as and when required.

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency not decisions about the cases referred to it. It is the role of the agency to make a decision and for this purpose it is necessary to appoint a decision maker. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is a senior person within the agency.

There are two Agency Decision Makers (ADM) in Croydon Council. One ADM considers recommendations made by the Adoption panel and this is Philip Segurola Director Children Social Care.

The other ADM considers recommendations about whether a child should be placed for adoption and this is Wendy Tomlinson Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.

Other Heads of Service's cover for both ADM's during sickness and holidays.

## Adoption Panel Membership

As at 31st March 2018 the Adoption Panel central list was as follows:

Panel Chair Independent Social Work qualified  
Independent Member, Vice Chair, Social Work qualified and an adoptive parent  
Independent Adopted Adult  
Independent Birth Parent of an Adopted Child  
2 Independent Members and Social Work qualified  
2 Social Work Members Social Workers for the Agency IRO's  
Medical Advisor Consultant Community Paediatrician  
2 Elected Members Croydon Council  
The legal Adviser to the panel provides advice in writing in advance of the Panel Meetings

## Non-voting members

Professional Adviser to the panel  
2 Panel Administrators

## Panel Activity and Agency Decision Maker

In the period between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018 the Adoption Panel met on **18** separate occasions. The Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for **36** children. This compares to **30** in 2016/2017 showing a slight increase.

In terms of matching children with prospective adopters the panel considered matches for **24** children. This is the same number of children matched in the previous year. However, most of the children matched were cohort from the previous year.

Between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018 the Agency Decision Maker approved **7** households as suitable to adopt. This figure has reduced when compared to **11** in households the previous year.

## Panel Training and Development

The Adoption Agency strives to ensure there is a good level of induction, appraisal and training offered to Panel Members. During this financial year, there was a full day training focussing on Fostering for Adoption. This was also aimed at social workers and managers across Children Social Care and within the Legal Service. Panel members are also afforded training opportunities from the Councils Learning and Development programme as sessional workers for the Council. Furthermore, the Agency is open to funding bespoke training requests from panel members such as specialist roles like the Medical Adviser.

All Panel Members had an annual appraisal completed by the Agency Panel Advisor and Panel Chairperson where their personal training needs are discussed and

considered. This enables the identification of learning needs and effective planning of training schedule for the following year.

The Panel Chairperson meets with the Agency Decision Maker to have an annual appraisal undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker. The ADM also observed the panel during this financial year.

## **Section 4 Referrals for Adoption, Placements and Adoption Orders**

### **Children Referred for Adoption**

Croydon's policy is that every child looked after, who is 5 and under must have a statutory review within 10 days of becoming looked after and they should have a permanency planning meeting (PPM) 15 days after becoming Looked After.

Following a permanency planning meeting, a social worker in the Adoption team is allocated the case for tracking, monitoring and family finding. This is not a case holding role but someone responsible for tracking and monitoring the plan until a placement order is granted to the local authority to enable placement of the child in an adoptive home in a timely fashion and in accordance with key performance indicators (the scorecard).

The family finding social worker also provides a written report for the courts around the viability and timescales for securing a forever family. They also attend subsequent review permanence planning meetings with the case holding social worker and their line manager and any other significant professional such as the IRO.

For children who return to the care of their parents or a member of the extended family when adoption is not the care plan, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order or Long Term Fostering with their foster carer may be alternative options of permanence.

Family Finding social workers must be proactive in identifying suitable prospective adoptive families who are able to meet the majority of a child's needs without delay so that the child is able to move to a permanent family in a timely way and ideally, by the time the placement order is granted to the Local Authority. This includes considering whether Foster for Adoption is appropriate for the child at the point of becoming looked after.

Early permanence planning in the Assessment and Care planning Services and a proactive and robust family finding activity early on in the child's journey, will usually provide a platform to achieve the scorecard timescales for all children with a plan for adoption. Where this has not been possible there is usually good evidence why this has not been achieved.

In 2017/18, **56** children were referred for a Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM). This is a decrease of 15 less referrals from the previous year. Not all children referred for a permanency planning meeting will have a final Care Plan of adoption.

In order to avoid drift or delay for children needing a forever family, an Adoption social workers attends all PPM's for all children 5 and under. While a Fostering team manager attends all PPM's for children 5 and above whose plan is long term foster care. Both Team Managers in the Adoption Team also attend all legal planning meetings so that children who may be referred for adoption are tracked and monitored for a PPM and allocations for family finding. This opportunity also affords the Care Assessment and Care Planning teams with professional advice on how to refer children for timely family finding when adoption is a possible outcome for a child.

However this does not mean that all children referred for a PPM will subsequently be adopted, but this ensures that timely and robust tracking and family finding is considered at the earliest opportunity. In many cases, children safely return to parental care or are placed with extended family members under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.

An adoption social worker is allocated to a child for tracking and monitoring after the initial PPM has taken place so that when a placement order is granted, the allocated adoption social worker who has been tracking the case, becomes the allocated social worker until an adoption order is granted.

## **Number of Children with an ADM Decision**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017-31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, **36** children had an Agency decision that adoption should be the plan. The courts did not grant a placement order for **8** of these children. As a result **6** of these children's plans changed to long term fostering, while **2** child went on to live with a relative under a special guardianship order. Care proceedings has not yet been concluded for **1** child.

## **Adoption Placements in 2017-18**

In 2017/18, **24** children were matched and placed with prospective adopters. These children were from 2016/17 cohort. **3** children were matched and placed with adopters assessed and approved by Croydon while, **20** children were matched with prospective adopters approved by other agencies. There were 6 separate sibling groups placed for adoption during this period. No child placed was registered disabled.

From the 2017-18 cohort with placement order, **7** children have been presented to the Adoption panel for a match and placed. **3** adoption orders have already been granted within this cohort. As at March 2018, there were **20** children from this cohort with a placement order still waiting for an adoptive placement.

Within this period Croydon placed **3** children in placements under 'Fostering for Adoption' Regulations. There is now a duty for Local Authorities to consider providing these type of placements to children however it is recognised that this will only be an option for a small number of children in any one year due to the risk of the child returning to parental or family care.

Foster for Adoption is placing a child in local authority care with foster carers who are also approved as prospective adopters. For relinquished babies if the mother or both parents agree, the local can place the child in a foster to adopt placement to avoid multiple moves. In care proceedings, if the court agrees that the child should be placed for adoption, the child can also be placed for adoption with foster to adopt carers. The benefits are that a child experiences only one placement and this will in turn ensure their early months and years are undisrupted by multiple care givers which in turn aids secure attachment.

## **Adoption Disruptions**

In the legal definition of adoption disruption, no adoptive placements experienced a disruption pre adoption order but a recent transition plan fell through which was very sad for both the child and the prospective adopter. An internal review was held to reflect and understand what happened; with lessons to improve practice for the future.

## **Ethnicity of the Children Placed for Adoption**

Of the 24 children matched for adoption by Croydon Council, 15 White British, 3 Caribbean, 1 White Black Caribbean 2 Mix Background , 1 African, 1 mixed Heritage, 1 Gypsy Roma

## **Ages of the Children Placed for Adoption**

Of the 24 children matched for adoption were  
16 were in the 0-2 age range  
7 were in the 3-5 age range  
1 was in the 6-10 age range

## **Gender of Children Placed for Adoption**

Of the 24 children matched and placed for adoption, 15 were females and 9 were male.

## **Adoption Orders**

The number of children who ceased to be looked after via adoption 2017/18 was **11**. This is a significant drop from 16/17 (20) The national figures also reflects a drop in 2015 -16 due to a reduction the number of placement orders and in the number placed for adoption.

Nationally the number of Looked After Children adopted in 2017 decreased, continuing a decline seen from previous year from a peak of 5,360 in 2015. The fall was expected as since 2015, the number of LAC with a placement order has decreased, as has the number of LAC who were placed for adoption.

The Adoption Leadership Board latest quarterly data suggests that nationally there were 5,180 new ADM (Agency Decision Maker) decisions in 2016-17. This is an increase from 4,750 decisions that were reported in the quarterly data in 2015-16.

There were 4,310 new placement orders in 2016-17, this compares to 3,840 placement orders reported in the quarterly data the previous year.

Croydon's percentage rate of adoption (5%) is much lower than our statistical neighbours and the national average (15%).

Croydon's rate of LAC 92 per 10,000 population is higher than both the national average of 60 and our statistical neighbour average of 64.5 because more than half the current number are UASC and this cohort cannot be placed for adoption. This number and demography, has an impact on performance.

The number of children placed for adoption has fallen over the last two years due to the impact of two court judgements Re B (A Child) and Re B-S.

Re B (A Child) reemphasised that the child's interests including ideally being brought up by their parents or wider family unless the overriding requirements of the child's welfare make it not possible. It makes it clear that must be considered as a last resort when "nothing else will do and when all else fails."

In Re B-S the court was clear it required that available information is properly analysed, focus on the facts, evidenced based and conclusion justified. Even when the child is placed with prospective adopters, lapse and passage of time cannot be the determinative factor and the judge must not place undue weight to the adverse impact on the prospective adopters. The judge must always bear in mind that what is paramount in every adoption case is the welfare of the child "throughout his life". This has led to substantially more appeals in relation to adoption cases with successes. Across the country, LA's are experiencing an increase of parents attempting to apply for revocations of placement orders, leave applications and opposing of adoption proceedings.

Notwithstanding the above trend, the numbers of children for whom adoption is the plan or are approved as suitable for adoption have increased (Year to Date) from the 2015-16 position, compared to the same point in the previous year.

As of 31st March 2018 there were **24** children who have been placed with their adoptive family but adoption orders were yet to be granted. It is expected that these adoption orders will be granted for all of these children before the end of 2018/19.

Significant improvements have been made since 2010, in the average time it takes between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family from 2 years or 738 days over 3 year average to end of 2015, to 468 days 2015-16 and a further improvement to Sept 2016 to 402 days which is below the DfE threshold of 487 days.

Less than a third of children (27%) wait less than 16 months to move in.

In contrast to adoption, our performance in the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) as a performance option has continued to improve year on year.



Thirty five children ceased to be in care as a result of an SGO in 2014-15 and this was maintained at 35 (8%) in 2015 -16<sup>1</sup>. In 2017/18 the number was 27 ceasing to be LAC via SGO and 20 for none LAC.

Croydon has invested in 4 social worker posts to undertake SGO assessments which will improve our performance in this area even more. Nationally 12% of children ceased care due to a special guardianship order<sup>2</sup>.

**Action:** to recruit more adoptive families for disabled children, BME groups and to keep siblings together.

**Outcomes:** increase in the numbers adopted and improved outcomes and life chances for LAC.

**Target:** achieve a minimum of 30 adoptions each year and 40 Special Guardianship Orders

## **Disrupted Adoptions**

There were no adoption disruptions in this period. This reflects the extra care given to the matching process between children and adoptive families, the resilience and commitment of adoptive parents and the support given to them and the children in the critical early months of placements.

## **Section 5 Prospective Adopters**

### **Information for Prospective Adopters**

Croydon Council has a single point of contact to the service through its corporate website and a local rate telephone line. Information is also freely available via the council website.

Social workers from the team offer to meet with enquirers within 5 working days of contact and offer attendance at information evenings and initial interviews.

Information Evenings are held monthly where current information on the needs of children requiring adoption and the process of assessment is provided to people who are interested in becoming prospective adopters.

## Recruitment of Adopters

In order to ensure a range of adopters are recruited for children and to meet the needs of children requiring adoptive families, a range of recruitment activity has taken place during the year. This has included local press articles and bulletins, window displays, Social Media posts and email articles. The Adoption website pages and literature has also been updated this year.

Adoption Agencies have a duty to recruit a range of adopters to meet the needs of the children they are seeking to place for adoption. The recruitment strategy considers the sufficiency of adopters required to meet the needs of children this is reflected in recruitment activity.

Prospective adopters approved by Croydon Council are able to consider children from other local authorities with plans for adoption. If they are matched with a child Croydon Council receive an interagency fee.

## The Assessment Process: Enquires, Assessment and Approvals

All assessments are carried out in accordance with The Statutory Guidance for Adoption July 2013, National Minimum Standards 2014 and the Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. Croydon Adoption Agency has implemented the two stage process for adopters, which was introduced as part of the Government's Adoption Reform Agenda.

**149** enquiries were received during 2017/18, of which **28** households attended information meeting during this period. **121** enquires went no further and were classed as a no further action.

**7** Registration of Interest received by the Agency. 3 households were second time adopters, moving straight into stage 2, with the remaining 4 in stage 1. There has been some delay progressing a couple of the applications for health reasons and this required further investigation.

As at 31<sup>ST</sup> March 2018 none of the **7** households have withdrawn their application and none have put their application on hold.

During 2017/18, **7** applications were presented to the Adoption panel. All **7** applications were approved.

## **Makeup of households/Applicants presented to the Adoption panel in 2017/18**

0 Single applicants  
7 were couples

## **Ethnicity of Adopters approved in 2017/18**

Of the 7 households approved  
9 White British  
1 European  
2 Sri Lankan  
1 Chinese  
1 AOWB

## **Pre and Post Approval Support**

All applicants and approved adopters are supported by a Social Worker from the Adoption Team from application right through to approval, the process of placement of children, to the making of an Adoption Order. Once an Adoption Order has been made, adopters continue to access support or request an assessment of their additional support needs through the Adoption Team.

## **Training for Approved Adopters**

In recent years Croydon's has commissioned preparation training for prospective adopters within Stage 2 to Diagrama. Below is the course content for Diagrama's preparation course:

### **Stage 1**

- Legality of adoption
- Parental responsibility and court processes
- Reasons for children coming into care
- Drug alcohol mental health, Learning Difficulties/ disabilities
- Developmental delay
- Introduction to adoption support
- In small group and learning
- Adoption triangle / losses
- Children moving through the care system
- Trauma explained, and how this affects children differently
- Content of assessment, expectations

## **Stage 2**

- Child developmental
- Attachment
- Contact
- Adoption life story
- Exercises – children development, attachment video, contact issue, adoption triangle, strong exercise
- Identity / adoption
- Self esteem
- Matching consideration,
- Important of having information and PAR
- Matching panel
- Activity days and exchange days
- Unresolved issues
- Therapeutic tools / transitional
- Important item
- Issues for adoptive parents
- Process of matching, family finding
- Lots of follow up materials and feedback.

The Agency will also utilise the Consortia's preparation training. Adopters also have access to the full annual training programme offered to the agency's foster carers and adopters. This annual programme is available to both approved adopters as well as to adoptive parents after an Adoption Order has been granted. Training is evaluated at the end of each programme. The feedback during the past 12 months has been positive.

## **Section 6 Adoption Support Services**

### **Pre and Post Adoption Support for Families**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 established the right of adopted families to request an assessment of their adoption support needs. Our online brochures inform the public about the level of support Croydon offers both pre and post placement. Also available is a 'Children's Guide to Adoption Support'.

In this period the team received 73 request for an assessment and 64 resulted in the provision of support, each either requiring advice and support only or a prescribed service such as therapy or counselling.

The families either self-refer or are referred via other agencies such as school or health services. In such instances the team either provides direct social work support or where a specific need is identified, a specialist service may be commissioned.

The Department for Education Adoption Support Fund has been available this period and 11 applications were funded to provide therapeutic support to children and their family were completed and enabled therapeutic services to be provided to the families.

The team have a mailing list of adoptive families who are sent newsletters, invitations to support groups for adoptive parents and family days, some of which are provided by the service and some by Adoption UK. The Adoption Team continued to provide some of these events as a shared service to families living in Croydon.

The Adoption & Permanence team also provide groups for adopted children and their families. All adoption support referrals have an assessment of need and adoption support plan upon request.

Each child placed for adoption is required to have a contact plan in relation to their birth family. The service currently manages letter box exchanges on behalf of 105 children and families many of which have required direct intervention to support all the parties involved in the contact arrangements, i.e. adopted children and young people, their adoptive parents and their birth families.

## **Commissioned Support Services**

During this period, Croydon Council remained is a full member of CoramBAAF. CoramBAAF is a leading agency for research, professional advice and development. They also organise the National Adoption Week and Adoption Activity Days where would-be adoptive parents meet children with a plan of adoption.

The Agency has also continued its membership with New Family Social, a national charity supporting adopters and foster carers from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender community. The organisation provides social events, a website and membership events for carers, and support and advice to adoption agencies. The Agency has a service level agreements with the Post Adoption Centre (PAC) we provide support groups for adoptive parents in collaboration with We are Family, PAC, Adoption UK, IAC, and New Family Social.

Croydon facilitated an annual Adoption Fun Day activity for Children adopted and their families. In 2017/18 we aim to develop a Teenage Group, a Black Adopters Group in liaison with TACT and further develop the “We are Family” support group in Croydon for those who are unable to access the Consortia group based in Southwark.

Adoptive parents can request an assessment of their post adoption support needs until their child is 18 years old. Post Adoption support is an increasing feature of the work of the Adoption team. As well as undertaking adoption support assessments, the team manages letter box contact for 105 children.

Adoptive parents have access to the annual training programmes such as “Telling” Safebase and Beyond Consequences.

From 1st May 2015 The Adoption Support Fund has been available to provide therapeutic support and services to parents and children during this period. This has

enabled us to apply and receive funding for **14** children totalling over **£50,000** (**3** more applications than the previous year) to provide services such as Music and Drama therapy, Therapeutic Life Story Work, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Sensory Therapy and Psychotherapy. The availability of funding has been agreed for a further four years. The aim has been to significantly increase funding opportunities for adoptive families needing access to this fund. Improvements have been achieved by appointing a lead practitioner in the post adoption team to process ASF applications.

## **Independent Counselling for Birth Mothers and Relatives**

We have a qualified Social Worker who is also a trained Psychotherapist that provides birth relative counselling. If required, this service can also be commissioned via PAC with whom we have a service level agreement. The aim of the service is to provide birth relatives of children who might be adopted an opportunity to access counselling and support as and when required.

## **Services for Adopted Adults and Birth Relatives**

Social Workers in the Post Adoption Service provide advice and counselling services to adopted adults seeking information and access to their birth records. For all Croydon residents an access to records counselling service is offered. Information is also provided to other councils who are supporting adopted adults living in their area who were adopted through Croydon Council.

An initial counselling interview is offered to those seeking birth records and work is undertaken to locate records held by other Adoption Agencies. Counselling and practical advice during tracing, an intermediary service and pre and post reunion support are also available to adopted adults and their birth relatives.

Birth relatives or those with a prescribed relationship, seeking to make contact with adopted adults are offered information and advice and an intermediary service where appropriate. In the case of birth relatives, they are not provided with any identifying information about the adopted person but the Agency acts as the intermediary.

As of the 31st March 2018, the Adoption Team were providing support to 90 families, adult adoptees and birth relatives who were seeking access to records and support in tracing.

## **Section 7 Intercountry Adoption**

Inter-Country adoption has become increasingly more complex in terms of the legal requirements of those countries that permit children to be placed for adoption outside of their Country of origin. In recognition of this and given the specialist knowledge and expertise of this work, the Adoption Agency has a Service Level Agreement with a voluntary adoption agency based in Reading, Parents and Children Together (PACT), which is recognised as being a leading agency in this area of work, to provide this service on its behalf.

Families who are normally resident in Croydon wishing to adopt children from overseas are advised to contact IAC The Centre for Adoption who will provide information and preparation training and will assess and approve families wishing to adopt children from overseas.

Families are required to pay for their assessment in accordance with Regulations but Croydon Council funds the initial counselling interview.

During this period the Adoption Service did not receive any enquiries regarding intercountry adoption. IAC received 54 enquiries and sent 46 information packs. 11 families attended information session. 3 families started an assessment and 2 were approved as suitable to adopt from overseas.

## **Section 8 South London Adoption & Permanence Consortium**

Croydon Council is a member of the South London Adoption & Permanence Consortium, comprising of 7 Councils and 4 Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

**Local Authorities:** Croydon; Lewisham; Greenwich; Southwark; Lambeth; Wandsworth, Bromley.

**Independent adoption agencies** Action for Children London Black Families Mosaic Diagrama (formally Cabrini) The Adolescent & Children's Trust (TACT) Coram South.

The aim of the Consortium is to work in partnership to improve the services and experiences of children in need of adoption and those seeking to adopt. The approach is to work together to match children with families to enhance support for adopters and to collaborate in recruiting families to meet the needs of adopters.

With the changing landscape of adoption and transition to the regionalisation of adoption services across South London, the future of SLPAC is not yet known.

For further information please visit:

<http://www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk>

## **Section 9 Regionalisation**

In June 2015 the DFE published *Regionalising adoption* outlining proposals to move to Regional Adoption Agencies, which would see all Local Authorities being part of regional agencies by 2020. In March 2016 "A vision for change", the DFE confirmed its commitment to introducing Regional Adoption Agencies with all Local Authorities being part of one by 2020. This would entail operating across boundaries to ensure maximum choice for children, with Voluntary Adoption Agencies being central to the development. In addition, a practice and innovation fund was established to support the development of excellent practice in Regional Adoption Agencies on a national scale.

In September 2015 the London Adoption Board submitted a proposal to the DFE to establish a London wide adoption and Special Guardianship service with London Local Authorities and voluntary partners to enhance the delivery of recruitment, matching and adoption and SGO support functions. Within 2017/18 this proposal has evolved to one that offers a four delivery spoke model. Each would be hosted by a lead Local Authority; in effect having four separate Regional Adoption Agencies. Croydon Adoption will join the South London RAA which will include Greenwich, Kingston, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Richmond, Southwark, Sutton and Wandsworth. It is anticipated that once the four London RAAs are in operation, a London wide hub will be subsequently developed by the four RAAs. Special Guardianship Orders and post SG support is being considered for inclusion in the West London RAA, but not in Adopt South London.

The project is overseen by the South London RAA project board which meets monthly with each local authorities respective Director. There has been a series of engagement workshops with professionals, senior leaders, councillors and adopters; with a launch date of April 2019.

## **Section 10 Adoption Scorecard**

In 2012 the Department for Education published 'An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' in which they outlined the intention to publish Adoption Scorecards for each council outlining performance in relation to numbers and timeliness of adoptions.

The scorecard details the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving in with their adoptive family and the length of time between the council having court authority to place a child and them moving in with their adoptive family. It also measures Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %) This is measured over a three year period.

## **Croydon's Scorecard for Period 2014-17**

### **A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)**

LA's 3 year average (2014-19) = 696

Distance from 2014-17 performance threshold = 426

1 year trend - Improvement from 2016 to 2017 = Average time was shorter in 2017 than in 2016.

3 year trend - Improvement from 2013-16 to 2014-17 = Average time in 2014-2017 was shorter in 2013-2016



England 3 year average (2014-17) = 520

**A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)**

LA's 3 year average (2014-17) = 230 days

Distance from 2014-17 performance threshold = 109 days

1 year trend - Improvement from 2016 to 2017 = Average time was shorter in 2017 than in 2016.

3 year trend - Improvement from 2013-16 to 2014-17 = Average time in 2014-2017 was shorter than in 2013-2016

England 3 year average (2012-15) = 220

**A3: Children who wait less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)**

=35 (42%)

**Section 11 Conclusion**

The second and third quarter of this period experienced some staffing changes which was managed to ensure minimal impact on plans for children and service users. The fourth quarter saw several locum staff join the team and they have remained stable.

There has been a continued increase in all areas of activity across the service in response to several changes taking place nationally in regard to adoption. There has been an increase in children being referred for parallel planning and having plans for adoption which is different from the national trend but there is a reduction of children being placed for adoption due to some level of drift in family finding and from difficulty securing adoptive family for hard to place children. Despite these issues, the Agency has maintained good Scorecard performance.

The number of approvals of prospective adopters has seen a downward trajectory from the previous year as a result of a deliberate strategy from previous years to focus on targeted recruitment as detailed on our corporate webpage. This has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of children placed for adoption with external approved adopters in comparison with previous years. Within this period, 20 out of a total of 24 children with a placement order were matched with adopters approved by external agencies.

In order to meet continued demand in 2018/19, The Agency is actively recruiting prospective adopters and a realistic recruitment target of 30 adopters has been set based on projected numbers and needs of children requiring adoption.

Post Adoption support has also seen a sharp increase in referral and demand. As well as undertaking adoption support assessments, the team manages letter box contact for over 105 children.

Adoptive parents have access to the annual training programmes such as “Telling” Safebase and Beyond Consequences. Adoptive parents can also request an assessment of their post adoption support needs until their child is 18 years old. Support groups for adoptive parents is provided in collaboration with PAC, Adoption UK, Intercountry Adoption, We are Family and New Family Social. Furthermore an annual Adoption Fun Day activity day in the summer of 2017 was organised for children and their families.

From 1st May 2015 The Adoption Support Fund has been available to provide therapeutic support and services to parents and children during this period. This has enabled us to apply and receive funding for 11 children to provide services such as Therapeutic Life Story Work, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Sensory Therapy and Psychotherapy. The availability of funding has been agreed for a further four years.

The regionalisation agenda has initiated our very close involvement with various projects currently being undertaken by the London Adoption Leadership Board. This involvement will be ongoing until the implementation and launch of Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency in April 2019.

Report written by:

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# **CROYDON COUNCIL**

## **Adoption Service Statement of Purpose**

**2017-2018**

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Croydon Council Adoption Agency. The information in this Statement of Purpose is prescribed in the Adoption Services National Minimum Standards. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed regularly and formally updated every twelve months.

The statement is informed by:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended)
- Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005
- The Children and Adoption Act 2006 and associated regulations
- The Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2011 (as amended)
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010

### **1 Values, Aims and Objectives**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency provides a service that is underpinned by the following values statements as described in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS):

#### **Values- Children**

The child's welfare, safety and needs are kept at the centre of the adoption process.

Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.

Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages of the adoption process.

Delays should be avoided as they can have a severe impact on the health and development of the children waiting to be adopted.

A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.

The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.

Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family.

Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

A genuine partnership between all those involved in adoption is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies.

### **Values - adopted adults and birth relatives**

Adoption is an evolving life-long process for all those involved - adopted adults, and birth and adoptive relatives. The fundamental issues raised by adoption may reverberate and resurface at different times and stages throughout an individual's life.

Adopted people should have access to information and services to enable them to address adoption related matters throughout their life.

Agencies have a duty to provide services that considers the welfare of all parties involved and should consider the implications of decisions and actions for everyone involved.

Agencies should seek to work in partnership with all parties involved, taking account of their views and wishes in decision-making.

Agencies should acknowledge differences in people's circumstances and establish policies that provide non-discriminatory services.

Adopted adults have their adoptive identity safeguarded and the right to decide whether to be involved in contact or communication with birth family members.

### **The Aims of Croydon Council Adoption Agency**

To ensure a permanency plan is agreed for all Croydon's Looked After Children five and over, no later than by the second Looked After Review (four months) except if they are part of a sibling group aged zero to four+.

For children aged under five, a permanency plan should be agreed by the tenth day of becoming Looked After.

To ensure that as early as possible, clear action plans are agreed to achieve legal permanence, and where appropriate adoption is the permanence plan.

To ensure that when adoption is the plan, appropriate actions to implement the plan is progressed without delay and effective tracking and monitoring ensures that any obstacle or potential drift is identified and addressed in a timely manner.

To recruit sufficient adopters, who can meet most, if not all, of the needs of child referred to the adoption agency.

To assess and approve applicants within the statutory prescribed timescale of six months.

To provide prospective applicants with information of the adoption process, as well as information of the number and demographics of children available for adoption.

To provide an adoption support service that assists and enables children remain with their adoptive family and to enable children reach their full potential.

To provide prospective applicant's wishing to adopt a child from overseas, with information on inter-country adoption.

To provide information on the process of adoption for those people who wish to adopt a related child, e.g. step-parent and relative adoptions.

To provide support and access to case records to those people wishing to obtain information from their adoption files.

To provide information, help and support for all those who have been affected by adoption whether prior to, or after, the making of an adoption order.

To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those employed by Croydon Adoption Agency.

To provide the agency's adoption social workers with positive learning opportunities to increase their skills, knowledge and experience, especially in the areas of new research, training and professional development.

## **2 Named manager**

The **Registered Person** and the **Adoption Support Service Adviser** is Henrietta Delalu, Service Delivery Manager, Adoption and Permanence.

In the event that the Registered Person is absent, Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service for Looked After Children, will act as the Registered Person.

The **Adoption Agency Decision Maker** is Ian Lewis, Director for, Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone E Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

In the event that Ian Lewis is absent, or when delegated, Wendy Tomlinson, Head of Service for Looked After Children, will act as Agency Decision Maker.

## **3 Qualifications and Experience**

The Named Manager: **Henrietta Delalu** Service Delivery Manager Adoption Special Guardianship and Looked After Children. Henrietta Delalu qualified as a social worker in 2002 with a Master's Degree and Diploma in Social Work. She also gained a BSc in Social Policy and Management in 2000. Her experience includes, Social Worker in various Children's Specialist Social Care teams, direct line and operational management of Adoption and LAC services. Independent member Fostering Panel. Professional Adviser to Croydon's Adoption Panel. Henrietta is registered with HCPC.

Agency Decision Maker: **Ian Lewis**, Director of Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care. Ian Lewis qualified as a social worker in 1988. He worked as a social worker, primarily in child protection up to 1996. At that time, he started employment as a Team Manager in a Looked After Children Team in Tower Hamlets before transferring to become Team Manager of the Adoption and Permanence Team. During this time, he was the Agency Adviser to the Adoption and Permanence Panel. In 2002, Ian took up a position as Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering in the London Borough of Sutton. He continued in that position until 2009, when he moved to London Borough of Lambeth as Assistant Director for Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting. He sat on the Adoption Panels in both Sutton and Lambeth. In March 2014, Ian took up his current position at London Borough of Croydon. From 2004 until 2009, Ian represented London on BAAF's Social Work Practice Advisory Group. Ian currently Chair's the London Adoption Board. Ian is registered with the HCPC.



## 4 Organisation and Structure of Croydon Adoption Agency

**The Adoption Agency Decision Maker is:** Ian Lewis, Director of Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care. He is based on 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone E, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

**The Responsible Individual is:** Barbara Peacock, Executive Director, Children Families and Learning is responsible for the overall Management of Croydon's Adoption Agency. She is based on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor, Zone B Bernard Weatherill House 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

**The Appointed Manager:** The day-to-day management responsibility for the delivery of Adoption Services rests with the Delivery Manager, Henrietta Delalu. She is based in the Annex 4<sup>TH</sup> floor, Bernard Weatherill House, 8 Mint Walk Croydon CR0 1EA

The Adoption Team structure is designed to provide a seamless service within the People's Department combining specialist knowledge and skills in permanency work and ensuring timely and effective provision of services to service users. The Adoption Delivery Manager works closely with the Fostering Delivery Manager and the Delivery Managers in the Children's Social Care teams to ensure that services are provided in a coherent and flexible way, and consistent with keeping the child at the centre of the adoption process.

### **Organisation and structure**

The Adoption Service is part of Croydon's People Department Children's Social Care. The Head of Service, Looked After Children, has overall strategic responsibility for the Fostering Service, the Adoption Service, the Business Relations Team (placements) the Looked After Children Permanence Teams and the Leaving Care Team.

The Adoption Service is responsible for securing families for Looked After Children with an adoption plan. It is also responsible for the assessment, recruitment and support of prospective and approved adopters. The Service also have primary responsibility for the provision of adoption support services.

**The current structure of the Adoption Service** is designed to meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of adoption services. The Croydon Adoption Team consists of 12 full time equivalents staffing establishment of:

1 Delivery Manager  
2x Unit Managers  
10x Social Workers  
1X Letterbox Co-ordinator  
1X Unit Co-ordinator

**5 Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff.**

The structure and personal details, relevant qualifications and experience of current staff can be made available to Ofsted upon request.

**6 The Adoption Services provides as advised in the NMS:**

**6.1 Effective publication of adoption services, accessibility and including information about services provided by other agencies:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has a dedicated Freephone number for recruitment. This is widely publicised through literatures and on the Croydon website.

Initial enquirers can be provided with information over the telephone and they have access to a comprehensive adopter's information pack on the Agency's web page. The recruitment of prospective adopters is based on the needs of children being referred to the team. A tracking and monitoring system is in place to ensure that the number and needs of children referred informs the recruitment strategy.

Information is available on the Croydon Council website.

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt>

There are hyperlinks on the website to other adoption organisations. The adoption service information leaflets also include details of useful organisations.

The South London Adoption Consortium, of which Croydon is a member, also has a consortium website with information for prospective applicants and approved adopters.

<http://www.thesouthlondonadoptionconsortium.org.uk>

**6.2 The recruitment process, including effective arrangements to advise, assess, counsel and support those who become approved adopters and those who do not:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has implemented the new Adopter recruitment process as stipulated by legislation and Adoption Statutory Guidance with effective from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. The details of this process are described in our Information Pack for prospective adopters; this is also available in PDF on the Councils website. Prospective Adopters are provided with information for access to the national gateway website 'first4adoption'. <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

Enquiry Stage – Prospective applicants complete an online expression of interest form via the Agency webpage

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/healthsocial/falaservices/adopt>

Once the form has been completed and submitted by the prospective applicant, an acknowledgement email with date the next information meeting is sent to the enquirer within 48 hours.

Croydon holds information meetings monthly to which prospective applicants are invited. These meetings provide an overall picture of adopting in Croydon and nationally, and will include information about children needing adoptive homes. This also provides an opportunity to talk to experienced adoption workers and adoptive parents.

If a prospective applicant attends the information meeting, they will be provided with a blank Registration of Interest (ROI) form at the end of the session to complete and return to the Agency.

If the Agency receives a completed ROI form from a prospective applicant, a duty social worker will contact the prospective applicant within 2 working days of receiving the completed ROI to clarify any required information.

Within 2-3 working days of receiving the ROI form, the agency will allocate the case to a social worker and write to the prospective applicant informing them that the Agency has accepted their ROI form.

If the decision is not to accept the prospective applicants ROI, the Agency will write to them giving clear reasons for this decision. This letter will also have details of other agencies they can approach or sign post to the National Gateway for Adoption. It will contain details of who they can write to, to make a formal complaint. Formal complaints should be made to:

The Service Delivery Manager  
Adoption & Permanence  
Children's Social Care  
People Department,  
London Borough of Croydon  
4<sup>TH</sup> Floor, Bernard Wheatherill House  
8 Mint Walk  
Croydon  
CR0 1EA

The allocated social worker begins the stage 1 process by meeting the applicant within two working days of being allocated the case to draw up a Stage 1 plan and agreement form. This sets out expectations of the Agency and the applicant as well as timescales for completing Stage 1, details of how the applicant will manage any disagreements or complaints should also be detailed in the plan and agreement form.

Stage 1 is a two months process. This is an '**adopter led**' period of information gathering. An allocated social worker will complete a Stage

1 Plan & Agreement with the Adopters. Group sessions will be provided to support the adopters with this process.

Stage 1 is completed when the applicant and social worker can provide physical evidence of the applicants learning through the production of a portfolio which contains details of all the work and research the applicant has undertaken in the two months. The portfolio should contain a list of readings undertaken by the applicant, any training undertaken with certificates. Checks and references undertaken (social workers responsible for these) A written reflection of the applicants learning and meetings with the social worker. Evidence of attending the Stage 1 learning group. Copy of the applicants completed eco map, chronology, and genogram. Any other relevant information such as written commentary of child care observation or experience as well as notes from network support meetings.

A Unit Manager will review the portfolio in order to enable them make a decision whether the applicant has sufficiently done enough learning to enable the applicant move on to Stage 2. Thereafter, a manager will write to the applicant advising them they have successfully completed Stage 1 and accepted into Stage 2.

Stage 2 takes four months. It is social work led assessment. A manager will allocate the case to a social worker preferably to the same social worker who completed Stage 1. The allocated social worker will complete a Stage 2 Plan & Agreement with the applicant. The social worker will also ensure that the applicant is booked to attend a preparatory training. A proposed panel date will be booked at this stage to avoid drift and delay. However, if there are unforeseen issues that could potentially have implications for the Adoption panel making an informed decision, a purposeful delay will be agreed by the Service Delivery Manager.

Where the Agency does not agree that an applicant should move into Stage 2, the prospective adopters will be provided with clear written reasons for this decision. They will also be sign posted to Croydon's on line complaints procedure if they wish to utilise this.

Second time adopters and foster carers who wish to adopt children in their care, will not be required to complete Stage 1. They will be allocated to proceed to Stage 2. Specialist preparation groups are run for second time adopters by our partner agencies within South London Adoption Consortium.

### **The assessment of prospective adopters using objective, thorough, fair and transparent criteria**

In Stage 2, prospective adopters are assessed by a qualified social worker. Information about the applicant will be collated using the

Prospective Adoption Report (PAR) produced by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. Applicants will be visited in their own home as well as asked to attend meeting in the Council Offices. In the case of a couple, they will be seen together as well as separately. Applicants will be invited to make their own written and verbal contributions to their assessment. The applicant's children who are part of their household will be seen alone if deemed appropriate by the social worker. Any other adult member of the household apart from the applicants will be interviewed. Children who do not live in the household will be contacted and interviewed. Significant relatives and referees are seen at this stage. At the end of the assessment, the assessing adoption social worker will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be adopters.

The adoption social worker will give a copy of the written report to the applicant's 10 working days prior to Panel, and offer them the opportunity to discuss or make comments on the report. Prospective adopters are invited to attend the adoption panel when their application is being considered.

Adopters are assessed on their capacity to provide a home and to meet, most if not all, of the lifelong needs of children they then go on to adopt. They are matched on the basis that they may reflect and/or promote the child's race, culture, language and religion.

#### **6.4 Inter-country adopters:**

Applicants for inter-country adoption are assessed by the Inter-country Adoption Centre (IAC) which is commissioned to provide a service to all Croydon's prospective and approved inter-country adopters. IAC is a registered Voluntary Adoption Agency which is registered with and reports separately to Ofsted. IAC provides a full and comprehensive service to prospective adopters, from initial enquiry through to support on return to the UK with a child.

A summary by IAC of their service to inter-country adopters is as follows:

*"Information and initial counselling, which includes written information and an interview with the Assessment Team Manager. Prior to the interview we always suggest that you attend an IAC Information Day, as this ensures that you have access to full information at an early stage about both the process and the potential challenges of inter-country adoption.*

*If you satisfy the overseas country requirements and the Agency eligibility criteria you would then be invited to make a formal application to be assessed as prospective adopter(s).*

*Preparation – all IAC applicants are asked to attend either a three day general preparation course or a two day kinship preparation course at Barnet. These courses are run in small groups, led by two experienced social workers one of whom is generally an adoptive parent. In very exceptional circumstances, bespoke preparation is arranged.*

*Statutory checks – as part of our duties we are asked to undertake checks upon any applicant, including Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau Checks and Health checks.*

*Assessment report – you will be allocated a social worker who will interview you in depth in order to prepare a report about yourself and your adoption plans, including recommendations as to your suitability as a prospective adoptive parent.*

*Adoption Panel – IAC's Adoption Panel meets regularly to hear adoption applications and to make recommendations as to applicants; suitability to adopt.*

*Collating and forwarding of paperwork to the Department of Children, Schools and Families is undertaken by IAC's Assessment Team Manager and Assessment Team Administrator.*

*Annual review of suitability to ensure that your approval remain valid.*

*Opportunity to attend a workshop for inter-country adopters whose application documents are in the overseas country and who are awaiting a child match.*

*Support at the time you are matched with a child, including a counselling meeting with a social worker and a medical opinion from the Agency Medical Advisor on the health of the child (as indicated in the medical reports from the overseas country).*

*One post placement visit from a social worker following the child's arrival.*

*An opportunity to attend an IAC Adoption Support workshop within the first two years of placement. “*

The Inter-country Adoption Centre has established good links with Friends Linked by Inter-country Adoption (FLICA) as well as other Inter-country organisations.

After approval, Croydon Adoption Agency is responsible for post placement monitoring once the approved adopter have been matched with a child. IAC will send Croydon Adoption Agency copies of all paper work relating to the adopter and the child. Croydon Adoption Agency is also responsible for post placement reviews of the child until an adoption order is made. A social

worker will be allocated to monitor the placement and this worker will also be responsible for supporting the family through the application and granting of the adoption order.

## **6.5 Non-agency adoptions**

Enquirers approaching the team for a service are provided with verbal information and sent written information about non-agency adoption within 5 working days.

Prospective applicants are offered an initial visit by a social worker to further discuss their application and the process of non-agency adoption.

Prospective applicants are asked to confirm in writing their 'Notification of intention to apply to adopt' and send to the Delivery Manager.

Prospective applicants are asked to complete an application form that will also enable the Agency complete statutory prescribes checks.

A social worker is allocated to complete the assessment through home visits.

After 3 months of submitting a notification of intention to adopt the applicants can submit their application to court.

The social worker completes an "Annex A" report for court, and attends any court hearings they are required to until the adoption order is granted.

## **6.6 Birth parents - Support, information and counselling:**

Many birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that adoption is decided by the court to be the best outcome for their child. Others will accept that this decision and very few will relinquish a child for adoption.

Croydon Adoption Agency fully accepts and supports the principle in the National Adoption Standards that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognise the lifelong implications of adoption.

The child's social worker and adoption social worker have discreet but complementary roles in providing services to birth families affected by adoption.

Adoption and childcare social workers work together with birth parents to enable the implementation of effective plans for children. They also ensure that birth parents views about the adoption plan and contact are sought, recorded and that birth parents are supported throughout the adoption process.

Where necessary and appropriate, a parent will be provided with information and supported to access support from other agencies and organisations.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to explain the adoption process, and obtain written information from the child's birth parents' their views about adoption. This should include wishes and feelings about the type of family, religion and contact. The child's social worker will explain the importance for the child, of obtaining a full medical history not only of the birth parents but also of the wider related family. The child's social worker, with support from an adoption social worker, is responsible for providing the birth family with information about local and national support groups and helping them to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Birth parents are entitled to see information written about them before the child's permanence report is presented to the Adoption Panel for a matching recommendation and to make representation to the ADM and Adoption Panel if they choose to.

All birth parents will be encouraged to provide information, and contribute to their child's Life Story Book and Letter for Later Life.

The adoption team will provide birth parents, via the childcare social worker, with an information leaflets explaining the adoption process and where appropriate counsels the parent's, or refer to another agency to complete this work.

Following the making of an Adoption Order birth parents can access services directly from the adoption team.

## **6.7 Adoption Panel**

Croydon's Adoption Panel is chaired by an independent chair. The panel is constituted from a Central List in line with Adoption Agencies Regulations and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The panel meets twice a month or as and when required and is supported by a panel administrator.

Panel members have annual training, which updates Panel members on changes in legislation, practice and research. In addition every panel members role is reviewed annually.

Whilst it is now a requirement that prospective adopters be invited to attend the panel when their application is being considered, Croydon has followed this practice for several years and positively encourages applicants to attend.

Prospective adopters are provided with a leaflet explaining the panel process and are also asked to complete an evaluation form after the meeting. Their comments are fed back to the panel and the Adoption Panel Advisor retains a copy of all evaluation forms. This feedback informs service development.



## **7 Preparation of prospective adopters for the placement of a child, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Prospective adopters receive preparation for the placement of children through attendance at their Preparation Groups and during their assessments as adopters as well as in the Stage 1 information gathering regarding the realities of adoption.

When prospective adopters are identified as meeting a particular child or children's needs the adoption worker and child's social worker will provide the prospective adopters with verbal and written information about the child.

If the prospective adopters wishes to proceed, they will receive further detailed information which will include written information about a child and their background. In all cases the leave of the court will be sought to disclose relevant court papers to the adoption panel and to prospective adopters and will be visited by the child's social worker, and family finding social workers with the adopter's social worker in attendance to support them throughout the matching process. The Adopters will also meet with the child's Foster Carer. All adoptive parents have the opportunity to meet with the Medical Adviser prior to the adoption panel.

If following a period of reflection all parties wish to proceed, an Adoption Placement Report, and an Adoption Support Plan is prepared in consultation and partnership with the adopters. The Adoption Panel will recommend whether or not the match should proceed. As well as seeking the prospective adopters' views about the placement, children's views are sought where they old enough to express these.

In order to plan introductions and placement of a child, an adoption manager chairs a Placement Planning Meeting and an Adoption Placement Plan is agreed with the adopters.

Following placement, the child and prospective adopters will be visited within one week of the placement and thereafter at least once a week until the first review and thereafter at such frequency as the agency decided at each review until the Adoption Order is granted.

Once placed, the child's needs are reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer who will continue to regularly review the placement up to the making of an Adoption Order.

Croydon provides Post Adoption Support Services. The services, that are available to prospective families before the granting of an Adoption Order, are also available to families post Order. However services provided are based on the assessed needs of the child and the assessed capacity of the adopters to meet this level of need.

Support can be accessed from independent, local and national organisations via application to the Adoption Support Fund. These include but not exhaustive, the Post Adoption Centre (PAC), CoramBAAF, Adoption UK and After adoption. Croydon Council subscribes to CoramBAAF, PAC, and Adoption UK. These organisations operate a telephone advice line, which Croydon adopters can access directly. Workshops and training can also accessed by the prospective and approved adopters at a reduced rate.

Croydon Council is a member of the South London Adoption Consortium with six neighbouring local authorities and four voluntary agencies. The aim of the consortium is to increase the choice of adoptive placements regionally by circulating details of children and approved adopters who have not been linked by their own agency. The consortium also strives to share resources and commission services and to achieve consistent high practice standards. Croydon aims to learn from best practice of other boroughs, primarily in the Consortium but not restricted to the Consortium.

## **8 Preparation of children for placement with prospective adopters, including the provision of appropriate support post-placement and post-adoption**

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets the child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability. However no child should have to wait indefinitely for the 'perfect placement' and Croydon seeks adopters who can meet all or most of the child's needs and can reflect or actively promote the child's identity race and culture.

For every child should have a Life Story Book, a Letter for Later Life and a written guide to adoption. This work in most cases is undertaken by the child's social worker with help and advice from the adoption worker. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history and help maintain their heritage. The Letter for Later Life includes information about the child's birth and early life, and provides up to date information about themselves and their situation. Croydon aims to provide adopted children with high quality Life Story work in a form and style which will be of most assistance to the child in relation to their journey towards adoption. The initial Life Story Book is provided by second adoption review and the final version with input from the adopters no later than a week after Adoption Order by when the Letter for Later Life must also have been provided.

Work is undertaken with children by their social worker to ascertain their wishes and feeling about adoption and the kind of family they would ideally like to live with, taking account of their age and understanding.

Once a family has been identified, children are given appropriate information, depending on their age. The Placement Planning Meeting co-ordinates an age appropriate introduction timetable. This is reviewed during introductions to assess progress and whether the timescale for

the child's move needs to be adjusted in accordance with their needs.

Post placement, the social worker continues to support the child in placement but where more in depth work is identified the child and prospective adopters can be referred to the Post Adoption Team or other appropriate post placement/adoption support services, e.g. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and services related to education, special needs and managing contact with birth families. See Section on Post Adoption Services below for more detail.

Clear criteria for adoption financial support and other payments, and the arrangements for review, are made available to adopters.

The Croydon Council Adoption Service will support adopters financially with introductory expenses, and settling in costs for essential equipment where matched with a Croydon child. Croydon will meet the cost of reasonable legal expenses where the adoption is contested or particularly complex.

At the point of matching all children must have an Adoption Support Plan, which details the child's needs and how these will be met. Adoption Support is a continuum of universal services available to all children, and those provided by the Adoption Agency. The Support Plan will confirm any financial support. The Plan and on-going financial support are to be reviewed annually. The Adoption Support Plan is agreed with the adoptive family before being presented to the Adoption Panel.

Where it is not possible to place a child with Croydon adopters, the Adoption Service has access to a dedicated inter-agency budget.

The process for establishing, maintaining, monitoring and reviewing contact arrangements for each adopted child is usually by voluntary agreement with all parties.

The Adoption Service recognises the importance of children and young people having suitable contact with their birth families and other significant people. Such contact is entirely governed by the best interests of the children. Contact can vary from the annual exchange of written information to face-to-face contact with members of the birth family, at intervals appropriate for the child and agreed by the adopters.

The Adoption Service operates a well established Letterbox contact arrangement for the exchange of information between adoptive families and birth families. Birth families are also supported in arrangements for direct face-to-face contact.

The Adoption Service always considers at least one meeting between a child's birth parent and adoptive parents because of the long term benefits of this for the child. Other significant birth relatives may also be

involved.

Contact plans are first considered at the Looked After Children reviews, and included in the child's Care Plan. Croydon Adoption Panel reviews and comments on contact plans. Identified work to ensure that these plans are viable may take place at any time between the Adoption Agency Decision that a child should be placed with adopters and the placement of the child with prospective adopters. Children's needs change over time and contact plans should evolve to reflect the child's changing circumstances and needs.

Post placement, contact arrangements continue to be reviewed at each adoptive placement review. The Service does not formally review contact arrangements after the Adoption Order is made, but if issues arise these are addressed and supported through the Croydon Adoption Service.

## **9 The review of disrupted placements, ascertaining the causes for the breakdown to aid future planning for the child**

Following a disruption the Croydon Council Adoption Service convenes a Disruption Meeting in order to try learn lessons and to achieve a better understanding of the factors which has led to the breakdown of the placement. This helps in planning future placements. These meetings are chaired by an independent social worker with extensive experience of adoption work.

A summary of the conclusions of the meeting are presented to the adoption management team meeting and the relevant Adoption Panel in order that they can learn any lessons. The disruption rate for children placed by the Croydon Council Adoption Service has historically been below the national average.

## **10 Investigations into allegations that are made known to adoption service staff, adopters and children and young people**

The adoption service has a separate child protection procedure relating to allegations from or about a child in an adoptive placement who may or may not be receiving post adoption support services. This procedure requires consideration of child protection procedures and strategy meetings but in cases where this is not appropriate adheres to the Croydon Child Protection procedures published by the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board: these are in line with the London Child Protection Procedures.

The basic principle is that in safeguarding the child, it should also be recognised that an adopted child may have specific networks and specific life experiences which may impact on planning and decision making.

## **11 The range of post adoption support services available to all those affected by adoption**

The Croydon Adoption Units provides an intermediary service and counselling and advice to adult adoptees and birth relatives.

The team also provides a range of direct services to adoptive families if they are experiencing any difficulties. These include counselling and advice, an assessment of need for adoption support, including financial support where relevant, and is based on the assessed needs of the child.

All newly approved adoptive parents are offered free membership of Adoption UK for one year. Croydon Council Adoption Agency also facilitates the local support group for adopters.

All known adopters in Croydon are sent an annual copy of the Croydon Council Adoption & Fostering Service Training Booklet, with information regarding workshops and training for adopters and foster carers.

## **12 Assessing adoption support needs for previously adopted Children**

Any adopted child residing in Croydon may make representations for post adoption support, including those who have been placed by another agency and for whom the three year post adoption period has elapsed. In these situations, a Post Adoption Assessment will be carried out by an adoption social worker to determine the circumstances and needs of the child, the adopter/s and other family members and make recommendations regarding the level of support required.

Croydon's Adoption Service has a duty system which runs between 10am – 1pm and 2pm – 4pm from Monday to Friday. A duty social worker is always available during these times to answer telephone enquiries, provide information and take referrals as appropriate. A duty manager is also available for guidance.

Queries and referrals are also taken via letter and E Mail. A duty worker will deal with such matters on a daily basis.

Once a referral has been completed, and if assessed as appropriate the case is allocated to a social worker. Allocations take place every two weeks at team meeting. However, if the matter is identified as urgent, the Delivery Manager can make a decision to allocate the case immediately.

A leaflet providing details of the types of services provided is available

contact details.

**13 An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of adoption:**

Croydon Council Adoption Service works in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy, which is available to all staff via the Council's intranet service.

The adoption service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process. Applicants wishing to be approved as adopters will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, and on the basis of being able to parent and to meet the lifelong needs of adopted children.

Every effort will be made to find a placement which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability, without delay being placed with adopters who can meet most if not all of a child's needs.

**14 There is a system in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that services provided by the Adoption Service are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard:**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency has developed a system for monitoring service users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information is analysed and reported in the annual Adoption Service Action Plan. Where necessary the information is used to improve the service. This monitoring includes:

- Adoptive applicants
- Feedback on attendance at preparation courses
- Feedback on attending adoption panel
- Feedback on written information at time of placement
- Birth Parents are asked to include their views when the plan for adoption is presented to the Adoption Panel.
- The Letterbox Service is to set up an evaluation and review system for all parties to arrangements.
- Feedback from children who have been placed via the Looked After Children Review process
- Children are counselled and their wishes and feelings ascertained during family finding process taking account of their age and understanding.

**15 Monitoring of the Adoption Service**

The Service meets with senior managers who review performance in the previous year and sets targets for the forthcoming year, having regard to any serious shortfalls in the service and the standards and timescales set out in legislation.

There are review systems in place for the following:

- All approved adopters are formally reviewed annually by senior adoption social workers and team managers
- The Independent Reviewing Officer reviews the progress of all children placed for adoption.
- Staff within the Adoption and Children's Services supervise and monitor the placement.
- The Adoption Panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice.
- There is a well-established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff on the Croydon Council's Intranet, and an on-going performance review system for all members of the service.
- Additionally each Unit Manager monitors the work in progress.

An Adoption performance meeting, chaired by the Head of Service for Looked After Children, meets bi-monthly and includes all relevant managers from children social care and adoption. The purpose of the meeting is to review the progress of all LAC cases and to identify and address obstacles to permanence.

## **16 Storage, access, maintenance and security of adoption records**

Croydon Council Adoption Agency acknowledges the need to ensure all records are maintained in accordance with Adoption Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption. The indexes to all adoption case records are kept for 100 years, and where the case concerns a placement resulting in an adoption order being made, the related case papers are also kept for 100 years.

All other records are retained in line with Croydon Council Policy on Record Retention and Destruction Handbook. All requests for access to closed adoption files must be made through the Adoption Delivery Manager and the Adoption Service maintains a log of all requests. All files are held in lockable, secure storage.

## **17 A summary of the complaints procedure established in accordance with section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989 (a) and the Complaints Procedure Directions 1990 (b)**

Complaints about adoption fall into two categories.

a) Complaints about the service received by any of the adoption teams are dealt with under the Croydon Customer Services Complaints

Procedure available on request. A service user or any one acting on their behalf can make a complaint.

b) Where the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to recommend the approval of adopters, the applicant will have the opportunity to have their case reviewed by the Agency Decision Maker or refer their case to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The Independent Reviewing Mechanism is managed by the: CoramBaaf on behalf of the Department for Education. The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process, conducted by a panel, which applicants can use when they have been informed that the Agency does not consider them suitable and does not propose to approve them as adoptive parents or has terminated their approval.

The IRM welcome can be contacted directly from people who are considering the use of the IRM or who wish to discuss their options. They also welcome enquires from agency staff.

Their address is:

IRM Contract Manager  
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)  
Unit 4  
Pavilion Business Park  
Royds Hall Road  
Wortley  
LEEDS LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956  
Fax: 0845 450 3957  
(charged at local rates)  
E-Mail: [irm@baaf.org.uk](mailto:irm@baaf.org.uk)

[www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

## **18 The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose**

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually. The information contained in this Statement of Purpose can be made available in alternative formats: Large print, Braille, audio tape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages.

Please contact:  
Croydon Council  
Adoption & Permanence Team  
Children's Social Care  
People Department,  
London Borough of Croydon



4<sup>TH</sup> Floor, Bernard Wheatherill House  
8 Mint Walk  
Croydon  
CR0 1EA

By free phone: 0800 389 0129  
By telephone: 020 8726 6000  
By fax: 020 8760 5665

By email: [adoption.enquiries@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.enquiries@croydon.gov.uk)

**This Statement of Purpose has been approved by:**

**Councillor, Chair, Corporate Parenting Panel** (Original Signed copy held by the Adoption Service)

Signed:.....

Date: .....

**Ian Lewis, Director, Children & Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care**

Signed:.....

Date: .....

Review date: .....

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### **Operational Performance**

As a new interim service lead, much of the work is reactive with case direction and management decisions and challenge required on current and legacy cases. There are still 20 LAC cases being held by adoption staff within the recruitment and assessment team. This is impacting on the timeliness and responsiveness of pre stage 1 (initial enquiries, information events and registration of interest). A refreshed adopter recruitment process has been agreed and recently implemented which will need management oversight and grip to ensure Stage 1 and Stage 2 are progressing without delay.

The adoptions teams are realigned however there is still a transition phase for staff. Inputting on CRS needs to be a priority for staff as this is impacting on extrapolating accurate data. TM's need to investigate where there are gaps and resolve with individual staff members. Business support needs to be more integrated in the service to enable them lead on data and finance tasks with the support of TM's.

### **What is Helping**

- Previous Service Manager cleared CRS cases that needed closure so all staff are now clear of the cases allocated to them.
- Utilising panel advisor capacity to have a professional curiosity about potential matches. This has highlighted specific case examples where barriers to timely decision making and processes were addressed and resolved.
- Attended Contract review meeting with PAC UK who have capacity to take on post order backlog. TM currently reviewing work to be allocated.
- Letterbox coordinator is moving from business support line management to Post Order Team which will afford better management oversight of allocation and monitoring of work.

### **What is Hindering**

- Adoption footprint is not well evidenced on CRS. Difficult to find the adoption activity on the case as most of recording is under casenotes.
- Too many gaps in data, TM's needs to understand and hold management grip.
- Completion of adopters journey is hindered as no adoption oversight on cases where children are placed outside of Croydon. There has been examples where children are placed in adoptive family, with no clarity on when AO will be secured. Examples of practice where work is being completed sequentially as oppose to in tandem, this was evident on a particular family finding in case in terms of selecting a family.
- Since SG support has moved to Post Order Team, increasing challenge with volume of SG cases coming through that require immediate sign off by service manager. This piece of work is time consuming, arrives to the service out of timescale and not

quality assured. In addition considerable time is spent dealing with legacy cases relating to financial matters that need immediate resolution.

- Access to Records is allocated to one staff member on a fixed term contract with flexible hours. The demand of work and resource offered is not sustainable. Completion of the backlog exercise will help post order service understand level of need.

### **Staffing**

- The service is comprised of 11 full time equivalent Social workers which is made up of both permanent and agency workers. In addition there are 2 business support staff and 2 panel administrators.
- No current vacancies in the service and
- One staff member due to return from maternity leave in November 2018.
- No known staff sickness levels
- No known performance management issues at this time
- Understanding emotional resilience in assessment and attachment style interview are identified learning and development needs for the service. Both courses can be delivered in 2108/19.

### **Practice**

- TM has met with SW in response to audit findings. This is being monitored via supervision and reflected on CRS. Aware of one audit where SW met with Auditor to explain the findings which has been helpful.
- Voice of the child is discussed during supervision and is not always translated well on CRS.
- Quality and timeliness of recordings is an area for improvement. TM's to sample two files at each supervision

### **Key Priorities for next quarter**

- Introduction and maintenance of an up to date Adoption Tracker for Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding and a Post Order tracker. Business Support will lead on data and TM's to reconcile data to ensure it is accurate and accessible for the service.
- Trackers will be reviewed weekly by TM and overseen by Service Manager to reduce delays and remove blockages for children where adoption is the plan.
- A plan to be developed and implemented for the Adoption service to share knowledge and skills better with colleagues across the service to secure earlier permanence for children.
- Post Order backlog to be understood with allocation of work underway
- Review paper to consider where SG should be based. Current arrangement is not sustainable.

# REPORT OF THE ADOPTION PANEL TO THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON ADOPTION AGENCY.

Period 1/4/2018- 30/09/2018

## Introduction

All Adoption Agencies have to set up an Adoption Panel. The Agency has to create a 'Central List' of people who have experience, expertise and knowledge about adoption matters who will make up the Adoption Panel. The three main functions of the Adoption Panel are to make recommendations to the Agency about the suitability of potential adopters, to recommend the placement of a child with specific adopters and to recommend an adoption plan for a relinquished child. The Adoption Panel has an independent status and a role to assure good standards of practice, consistency of approach and fairness in the adoption service. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption require a report to be made by the Adoption Panel to the Agency on the local authority's adoption service.

## The Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panel has functioned well and efficiently during this period. The panel members are committed to ensure that the work of the panel is conducted with due care and professionalism. I would like to thank my colleagues for their commitment to complete the duties required of them. The contribution of panel member's to the consideration of the cases shows the importance with which they approach the business of the panel. The level of attendance by members is excellent and their attention to the reports they are required to read and consider is worth mentioning. The panel meets twice a month and there is always a willingness to convene quickly or in addition if delay needs to be avoided. The varied skills and experience of panel members strengthen the contribution of the panel to the adoption service.

The Agency Adviser to the panel has continued to be diligent to ensure that the reports to the panel are prepared correctly and that she exercises an active quality assurance function. The long standing advisor has recently departed and we thank her for her service to the panel. Legal advice is available should an issue arise on a particular case and this has been available when needed or when a particularly complex case is being considered. The Medical Adviser to the Agency attends the panel meetings and Health Summaries on the child or potential adopters are provided.

The Panel Administrator continues to provide an efficient standard of administration of the panel business. The reports arrive with members in good time and the production of the minutes is timely and accurate.

## Panel Statistics

During this period there were eight meetings of the Adoption Panel. There were no extra panel meeting needing to be convened to avoid delays.

<b>Applicants Data</b>	
Panel Meetings	8
Suitable to Adopt Recommendations	10
Not Suitable to Adopt Recommendation	0
Recommendation to Terminate Approval	0
Brief Reports	0
<b><i>Applicant's Ethnicity</i></b>	

Number of White British Applicants	6
Number of South African Applicants	1
Number of Asian/Mauritian Applicants	1
Number of White European Applicants	2

There were five couples approved as suitable to adopt in this period.

<b>Children's Data</b>	
Number of Children Recommended to be Placed (Matched)	7
Number of placements made with Croydon adopters	
Number of Disruptions	0
Number of Relinquished Children	2
Number of Sibling Groups	0
Number of children placed in foster to adopt scheme	2
<i>Ages of Children at the time of Placement</i>	
Number of Children Placed Aged 0-2 years	4
Number of Children Placed Aged 2-5 years	2
Number of Children Placed Aged 5+	1
<i>Ethnicity of Children Placed</i>	
Number of White UK	4
Number of Black Caribbean	1
Number of Gypsy Roma Heritage	1
Number of British Asian. Heritage	1

## **Panel Feedback**

The Adoption Panel has to monitor the quality of the agency's work and pay attention to the issues of delay in the placement of children. There are requirements to prescribe those who may write adoption reports and the agency has ensured that these are met.

The standard and quality of the Prospective Adopters Report is consistently good. The quality of the Child Permanence Report is generally adequate to good and where the panel has comments for improvement these are positively received and acted upon. In an effort to improve the quality and standard of these Reports specific training has been provided in the past and it may be appropriate to provide it again as the workforce has changed and those social workers likely to have to complete them may benefit..

When asked by panel to comment on their experience of the assessment many adopters comment constructively on their experience. The adopters value the commitment and professional relationship they have received from their assessing social worker. Many consider they have been well prepared to be adopters. It is perhaps an indication of the level of approval that adopters hold the agency in that the annual Adoption Fun Day is very well attended by adopters and their children.

## **National Minimum Timescales**

The Adoption Panel has to measure some aspects of the work against the Adoption National Minimum Standards to see how far the standards are met. The National Standard for the assessment and approval of adopters is six months.

<b>National Minimum Timescales – Approval of Adopter’s</b>	
Number of adopters approved	5 couples
Number of adopters approved within the timescales	1 couple

There is a National Standard that prospective adopters need to be approved within six months of their application. The reasons for the delays were for one couple they asked for a break between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the adoption process and also some feedback from their training needed to be followed up. Another couple required more time to obtain further medical information and enquiries needing to be made that arose from that information. For two couples there was a freeze on the recruitment of adopters due to a drop in numbers of children to be adopted. These were understandable reasons for the delays. The agency generally endeavours to complete the assessments of adopters within the National Minimum Timescales.

The National Standard for the placement of children with adopters is six months from the date of the decision that the plan for the child is adoption to the date when the decision to match the child with a new family is made.

<b>National Minimum Timescales – Placement of Children</b>	
Number of Children Recommended to be Placed	7
Number of Children Placed within timescales	1

It is important to avoid delay in the placement of children for whom the plan is adoption. The reasons for the delays in the six Matches were; a failed SGO placement and a failed adoption placement prior to this adoption placement, protracted legal proceedings, a delay in making the decision as to whether the siblings were to be placed together or apart, difficulties in placing a child of black ethnic origin and for the two Relinquished Children, the Cafcass officer did not feel the birth mothers were ready to relinquish their respective child and requested that they each needed to seek legal advice, which took longer for their agreements to be made..

The agency may wish to review these outcomes and establish whether there needs to be any changes made to the monitoring process or the family finding activity.

**Quality Assurance Monitoring.**

The agency and the panel introduced a system in May 2017 to collect and monitor feedback in a more systematic manner. Comments were elicited from adopters and social workers about their experience of attending the panel. Panel member’s views about the quality and content of the Child Permanence report (CPR) and the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) were also collected.

**Panel Feedback on the Quality of PAR’s Presented**

Excellent	3
Good	1
Adequate	1

The PARs were generally of a good standard and some analyses of the adopter's strengths and vulnerabilities were very thorough.

<b>Panel Feedback on the Quality of CPR's Presented</b>	
Excellent	3
Good	2
Adequate	1
Poor	1

The CPRs generally require a little more attention and consideration to create a document that will be of value to the adoptee in the future. There is a need to review the contents, update the information and ensure the document is presentable from its first presentation to the ADM to when it is provided to the panel for a matching recommendation. They did set out the child's needs well and the child's identity needs were also well addressed. The descriptions of the birth parents could benefit from more attention to not portray the parents, their histories and personalities in a harsh light.

It is a strength to note were that the majority of Adoption Placement Reports provided good or excellent evidence of the child's current needs, and evidence that the adopters were able to meet the child's needs.

### **Prospective Adopter and Social Worker feedback**

Three prospective adopters gave feedback on their experience of attending the panel. They felt positive about their experience of attending and being interviewed. Their evaluation of the process was that it was excellent for two and good for one respondents. There were no critical comments.

Feedback on the panel from seven social workers attending to present cases was received. Their evaluation was that one rated their experience as excellent, six as good. Generally, they felt the questions put were clear, relevant and that the panel listened to them. Most considered that the adopters found the experience to be excellent or good.

During this period, the number of children for whom the Agency Decision Maker decided that the preferred plan for them was adoption was four.

The Agency is currently looking for new adoptive families for nine children.

Currently, the Agency has nine approved adopters waiting for a placement.

For those adopters approved and awaiting a placement a number of training courses and groups have been provided to support and enhance their skills in parenting adopted children.



There were no training sessions for panel members during this period.

The Government's adoption reform agenda continues. The intention to establish a regional London adoption service continues to be developed. The change in the court's attitude to agreeing to adoption plans continues to have an impact on the number of children available for adoption placements.



Bernard Monaghan.  
Independent Chair Adoption Panel

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**Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme 2018/19**

<b>Proposed Dates</b>	<b>Tues 17 July 2018 5pm</b>	<b>Wed 5 Sept 2018 5pm</b>	<b>Wed 21 Nov 2018 5pm</b>	<b>Wed 16 Jan 2019 5pm</b>	<b>Wed 6 Mar 2019 5pm</b>	<b>Thur 25 April 2019 5pm</b>
<b>Standing Agenda Items</b>	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?	Update on actions agreed at previous meetings  Children in Care Performance Scorecard  Work Programme  How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?
<b>Proposed Agenda Items*</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Role of Panel Members &amp; Terms of Reference</li> <li>2. Staying Put</li> <li>3. Children and Social Work Act 2017</li> <li>4. Review of Fostering Services</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report</li> <li>2. Leaving Care and Housing (inc. care leaver care offer)</li> <li>3. Staying Put Update</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Placement Stability, Sufficiency; Permanence and Population</li> <li>2. Engagement and Achievement (Inc. Complaints and Learning opportunities)</li> <li>3. Children missing from Care</li> <li>4. Annual Report of Adoption Service</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Health of Looked After Children</li> <li>2. Education &amp; Employment, NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) Young People</li> <li>3. Annual Report of the Virtual School</li> <li>4. Review of the Fostering Allowances</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fostering                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual Review of the Statement of Purpose</li> <li>- Recruitment and De-Registration</li> <li>- Fostering Action Plan update</li> <li>- Adoption Statement Purpose</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Annual Report of Corporate Parenting Panel</li> </ol>

\*All proposed items to include a short section detailing 'how it relates to the Improvement Plan'

Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme 2018/19

			and Panel – inc. plans/update of regional adoption agency			
			5. Care Leavers Offer Review			

\*All proposed items to include a short section detailing 'how it relates to the Improvement Plan'