

# Corporate Parenting Panel Agenda



To: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair)

Councillors Maddie Henson, Bernadette Khan, Pat Clouder, Mike Bonello,  
Sue Bennett and Maria Gatland

## Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Angela Griffiths, Sarah Bailey  
CLA Designated Health Professionals: Dr Julia Simpson, Charity  
Kanotangudza  
Health Commissioners: Roneeta Campbell-Butler  
EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff  
Care Leaver Representative  
Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin

A meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** which you are hereby summoned to attend, will be held on **Tuesday, 8 February 2022 at 5.00 pm**. This meeting will be held remotely

KATHERINE KERSWELL  
Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service  
London Borough of Croydon  
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Monday, 31 January 2022

The agenda papers for all Council meetings are available on the Council website  
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If you require any assistance, please contact Michelle Ossei-Gerning  
020 8726 6000 x84246 as detailed above

## **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**

To approve the minutes of the meetings held on Wednesday 3 March 2021, Wednesday 28 April 2021, Thursday 24 June 2021, Wednesday 22 September 2021 and Wednesday 10 November 2021 as an accurate record.

[To Follow]

### **3. Disclosures of interest**

Members and co-opted Members of the Council are reminded that, in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and the statutory provisions of the Localism Act, they are required to consider in advance of each meeting whether they have a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI), another registrable interest (ORI) or a non-registrable interest (NRI) in relation to any matter on the agenda. If advice is needed, Members should contact the Monitoring Officer in good time before the meeting.

If any Member or co-opted Member of the Council identifies a DPI or ORI which they have not already registered on the Council's register of interests or which requires updating, they should complete the disclosure form which can be obtained from Democratic Services at any time, copies of which will be available at the meeting for return to the Monitoring Officer.

Members and co-opted Members are required to disclose any DPis and ORIs at the meeting:

- Where the matter relates to a DPI they may not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not stay in the meeting unless granted a dispensation.
- Where the matter relates to an ORI they may not vote on the matter unless granted a dispensation.
- Where a Member or co-opted Member has an NRI which directly relates to their financial interest or wellbeing, or that of a relative or close associate, they must disclose the interest at the meeting, may not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not stay in the meeting unless granted a dispensation.

Where a matter affects the NRI of a Member or co-opted Member, section 9 of Appendix B of the Code of Conduct sets out the test which must be applied by the Member to decide whether disclosure is required.

The Chair will invite Members to make their disclosure orally at the commencement of Agenda item 3, to be recorded in the minutes.

**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)**

**6. Croydon Children's Social Care Update on Children with a Plan for Adoption (Pages 5 - 12)**

This report will provide an overview of the children currently subject to a placement order who have a plan for adoption.

**7. Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2020-21 (Pages 13 - 28)**

The Annual Report for the Adopt London South Partnership functioning for the financial year 2020/21.

**8. Children in Care Performance Scorecard**

[To Follow]

**9. 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.

**10. Work Programme (Pages 29 - 32)**

To consider and approve the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2021/22.

**11. 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.”



<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Corporate Parenting Panel 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Croydon Children’s Social Care update on children with a plan for adoption
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	Derek Dyer Service Manager & Permanence Lead, Children and Families
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	Cllr Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>PUBLIC/EXEMPT:</b>	<b>N/A</b>

**SUMMARY OF REPORT:**

This report will provide an overview of the children currently subject to a placement order who have a plan for adoption. Following the presentation by Adopt London South this report will also consider how Croydon has developed its permanence framework in the year 21/22 and the planned improvements for the next financial year.

**COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2020-2024**

Ensuring decision making for adoption in partnership with Adopt London South contributes to the Croydon renewal plan in that we are focusing on providing the best quality core services that we can afford, delivering evidence based outcomes for our young residents across the child’s journey through children’s social care services.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

There are no financial recommendations within this report.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:

1. Review and note the performance in relation to children with an adoption plan

**1. Background and Context**

- 1.1. From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019, 4 Adopt London RAAs were established across London (North, South, East and West) covering 23 local authorities. The 4 RAA’s are hosted by Islington, Southwark, Havering and Ealing and they work collaboratively as Adopt London.
- 1.2. Whilst Croydon retains its status as an adoption agency Adopt London South (ALS) undertake many of the functions of the adoption process. When a parallel plan for adoption is identified a referral is made to ALS and a family

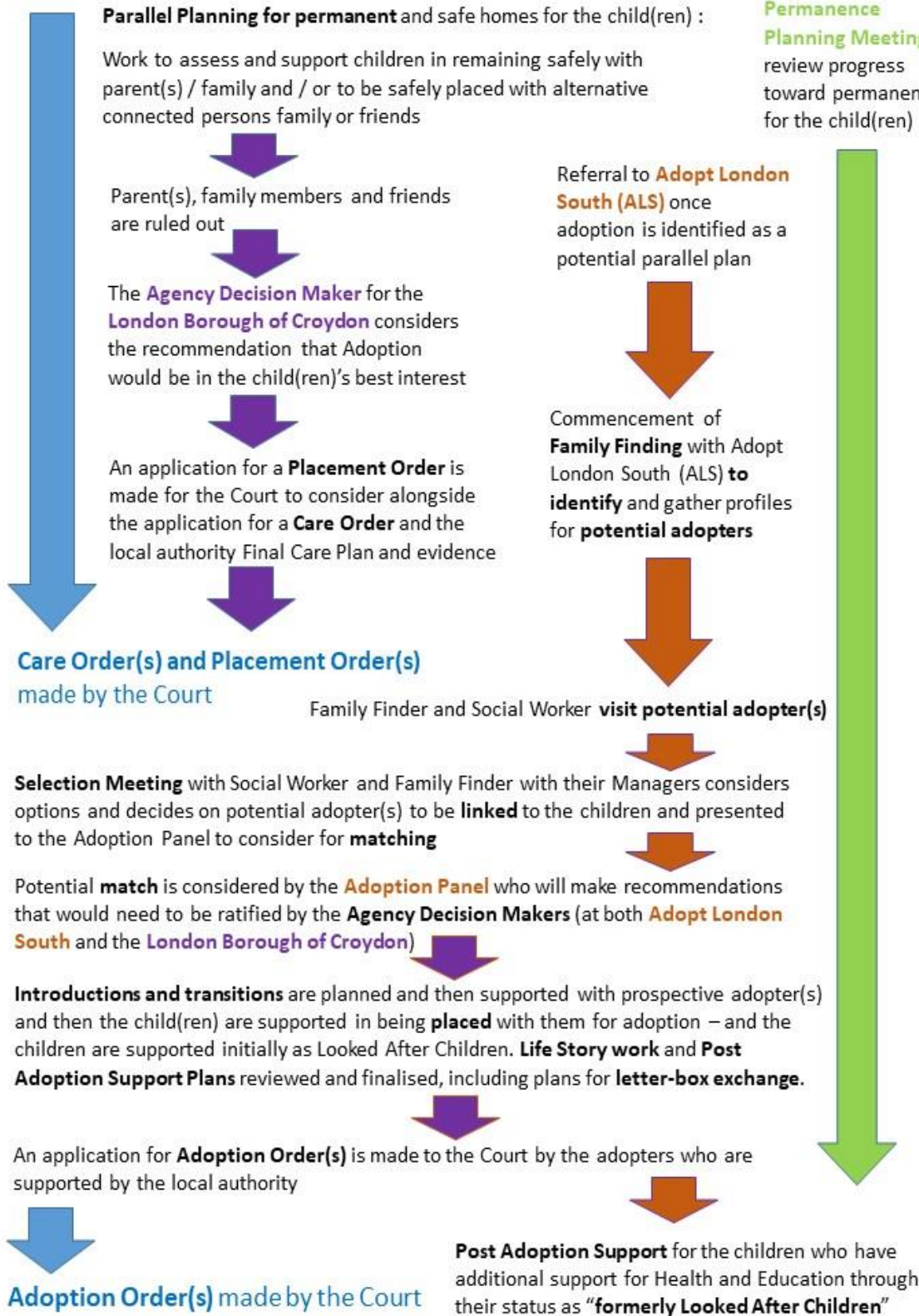
finder dedicated to Croydon children begins the process of identifying possible matches for our young people.

- 1.3. There are a number of checks and balances that ensure plans for adoption are reviewed and tracked as they progress through the system. At team level this occurs through line managers chairing care planning meetings and supervisions. The oversight of independent reviewing officers through the child looked after review process also provides scrutiny of children's care plans. Adoption plans are also scrutinised through the Family Court system where children are legally represented and appointed a CAFCASS Children's Guardian.
- 1.4. During the year 19/20 a permanence service manager had oversight of adoption arrangements in the borough and acted as the service lead for all forms of permanence. During the year 20/21 the elements of this role were divided between the service manager for fostering, who now oversees the team that undertake connected person and SGO assessments, and the service manager for children in care who now acts as the strategic link with ALS and adoption.
- 1.5. A weekly permanence panel has been established that reviews permanency for all children subject to social work intervention, with a specific focus on families entering care proceedings. Children with a parallel plan for adoption are considered within this panel which has representation from across children's services and is chaired by the permanence lead.
- 1.6. Permanence planning meetings (PPMs) are also convened routinely for all children and can be chaired by any manager within children services. In circumstances where specialist knowledge around permanence is needed such as planning introductions between a child and their adopters or perhaps planning more complex life story work, the permanence team manager and permanence lead also chair PPM's regularly to provide consultation, support and learning around specific areas of permanence.
- 1.7. A monthly adoption tracking meeting considers all children where an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision endorsing a plan for adoption has been obtained to ensure that any issues around drift are addressed. This is attended by the ALS family finder and is chaired by the permanence lead.
- 1.8. Where a parallel plan for adoption is identified the social worker completes a 'child permanence report' which provides information on the child, their birth parents and other relevant information to be shared with (i) the court (ii) the Agency Decision Maker and (iii) prospective adopters.
- 1.9. Within the adoption framework the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) endorses the plan at two stages. First, that adoption is in the child's best interests and again when they child is matched to their adopters. In Croydon the agency decision maker is currently the Director Roisin Madden.
- 1.10. Figure 1.1 below sets out the decision making process around adoption:

## KEY STEPS IN ADOPTION DECISION MAKING

### Pre-Proceedings and then Care Proceedings under the Public Law Outline

Permanency Panel and child specific Permanence Planning Meetings review progress toward permanence for the child(ren)



- 1.11. Where it is decided that a child should be placed for adoption during the course of care proceedings, the local authority must apply for a placement order. It is essential that the application be issued without delay and placement orders are therefore applied for at the end of care proceedings along with the local authority application for a care order. A plan for adoption is considered endorsed by the court when a placement order is made at the end of proceedings.

## **2. Children subject to Placement Orders**

- 2.1 As at 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 there are 22 children subject to placement orders who have plans for adoption. 13 have moved to their prospective adoption placement and they have been living in their new home between 3 and 18 months. Of the 13 children living with adopters 5 have adoption hearings already arranged in early 2022.

- 2.2 Where an adoption order application has not been issued immediately after the child has been placed for 10 weeks there has been a range of reasons for delay. For some families monitoring children with additional needs and ensuring they are settled has been meant the social worker remains involved for a longer period and the applications for an adoption order was made slightly later.

- 2.2 In addition to the 13 children placed with adopters there are 9 children still living in a foster placement who are subject to placement orders and family finding is ongoing for them. Where family finding is ongoing there are a range of activities to help them find a family. Activity days, which are usually a useful method to enabling matches with prospective adopters have been significantly impacted by the lock-down. However, there have been a number of successful online events. There are also specific websites and adoptions pathways such as 'link-maker'.

- 2.3 The adoption tracking meeting which is chaired monthly considers all young people subject to an ADM decision where they are at in the process of adoption. Where there is delay this is considered within the adoption tracking process and through PPM's where the social work team and family finder can review the child's profiles and we can be clear that there is grip and pace around family finding.

- 2.3 In addition to the children currently going through the process of being adopted, 10 young people have successfully been adopted since April 2021.

## **3. Early Permanence**

- 3.1 As has been discussed identifying a plan for adoption at the earliest possible stage in a child's care journey contributes to improved outcomes for them



later in life. Early permanence (or foster to adopt) placements are therefore a model of good practice in promoting early attachments to primary care givers.

- 3.2 Where it is clear that adoption is a likely option children may be placed with an early permanence carer for the duration of the care proceedings. At the conclusion of care proceedings the child remains with their carer who then goes through the process of applying for an adoption order to become that child's parent.
- 3.3 In the year 20/21 Croydon had 5 EP placements and whilst there has just been 1 at the end of Sept 2020, there are two children currently placed with EP carers going through care proceedings.
- 3.4 ALS run periodic workshops on the use of EP and where they are viable encouraging the use of EP placement is a priority for the practice system.

#### **4. Life Story work**

- 3.1 One of the biggest questions that adopted people have is 'who am I?' as practice around supporting adopted people has evolved a greater understanding has developed that explaining to children they are adopted as early as possible assists them in developing a cohesive identity as an adopted person. Maintaining children's first name is also an important way to help them thread together the elements of their adopted and birth identities, although ultimately this is decided by adoptive parents and some do decide to change their child's full name.
- 3.2 Good preparation for adoption and good life story work contribute towards successful adoption. Life story books provide an accessible and child-friendly method for adopters to explore with their children how they have come to be where they are today. Whilst there are general principles about what constitutes life story work every young persons' story is unique to them and so every life story book is different.
- 3.3 All children who are adopted receive (i) a life story book and (ii) a later in life letter that are quality assured by managers prior to being provided to adopters. Some life story books are comparatively straight forward and involve the social worker being able to collate a full set of photographs about the maternal and paternal birth family, as well as information about any carer(s) the child lived with prior to moving to their 'forever family'. Others are more complex where for example the details of a birth parent are not known or there were complex trauma that led to their removal. The life story book is aimed at age 3-5 or the age of the child at the time of placement if older. These books are designed for the adopters to read the book together with the child.
- 3.4 Later in Life letters are aimed at older children around the age of 14-18 and go into more depth about how the child came to be placed with their adopters. It is important they are considerate of language and provide an honest and

sensitive account of the reasons the child was separated from their birth parents and ultimately adopted.

- 3.5 There are a range of tools that exist to help social workers construct life story books and later in life letters. Guidance is available to staff on the practice library about how to complete life story work and some specific resources have been purchased such as the Richard Rose and Joy Reece Models, which are two of the most popular models of life story work that professionals refer to. The permanence service manager and team manager also provided support to individuals and teams completing life story work using good practice examples and presentations at team meetings.
- 3.6 The guidance around life story work is that for best practice the life story book should be completed by the second statutory review if not before. The Later in Life letter can be drafted before the child is adopted and finalised with the adopters including reference to the Adoption ceremony as appropriate.
- 3.7 It should be noted that life story work for the purposes of adoption is completed often when children are very young and non-verbal. A life story book and later in life letter are provided to adopters who take forward the work throughout their child's minority. There is also life story work that is undertaken directly with children and this occurs for a range of care experienced young people in addition to the work that is completed for adoption. In the year 21/22 social workers in the Children in Care service have received training in 'Narrative Approaches to Why Am I in Care' from a care experienced adult Dr Jenny Molloy and there is a focus within the service around life story work as a continuous and evolving process. These two different forms of life story work, directly with children and for the purposes of adoption, are distinct from each other and require slightly different although related skills.

## **5. Developing the practice framework**

- 4.1 Since a report was last provided to corporate parenting panel January 2021 there has been an audit of 336 adopted children going back to March 2002, ensuring that every child's file was properly secured and adoption case records had been created to protect the anonymity of adopters and their newly adopted children.
- 4.2 The 'adoption pathway' is a system within the local authorities reporting system that provides a clear mapping process of all decisions relating to a young person's adoption. The adoption pathway had not been routinely utilised since the inception of ALS in 2019 and a re-launch is planned for 2022 to ensure that all children being adopted in Croydon are done so using the 'adoption pathway' to record their journey. This will positively impact on the collation of data about key aspects of the adoption process. A review of the design of the adoption pathway is underway to ensure it is accessible to users and training around launching and recording data in the adoption pathway will be launched in April 2022.

- 4.3 The permanence lead is working with key stakeholders to develop a 1 day training course around permanence that will include training around good practice in writing child permanence reports and launching the adoption pathway as well as an applied and informed understanding of permanence practice. This training course is currently under construction and will be implemented with the re-launch of the adoption pathway in 2022.
- 4.4 Helping children understand and develop a clear narrative about why they are in care is a key priority in the children in care service plan for 2022. This work has already begun and a service meeting, dedicated to reviewing life story work techniques took place in Sept 2021 with further experiential learning planned for 2022. We will be expanding the consultations around constructing life story book and later in life letters through a workshop approach where by social workers can attend demonstrations about life story work for adoption. A separate consideration is being given to how to develop skills around life story work for older children and imbedding narrative approaches which is part of our systemic practice model.
- 4.5 A comprehensive review of the systems around adoption allowances is currently taking place which will facilitate a clear and transparent approach to assessing and decision making around adoption allowances. The review of existing adoption allowances is expected to be completed by April 2022. The development of an 'adoption allowances' form to demonstrate transparency around decision making is under construction and this will launch in the new financial year along with the launch of permanence training and the re-launch of the adoption pathway.

**2 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

N/A

**3 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

N/A

**4 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

N/A

**5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

N/A

**6 CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

N/A

**7 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1 WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?**

**NO**

**8** Approved by: Róisín Madden Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care

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**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

None



# ADOPT LONDON SOUTH REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

## Second Annual Report – 2020/ 2021

**Key Contact:**

Susanna Daus

Head of Service – Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency

19<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## 1. Introduction and Context

This is the second Annual Report for the Adopt London South Partnership and its first full year of functioning for the financial year 2020/21.

### **The premise of regionalisation was to:**

- Increase the number of children adopted
- Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted
- Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children from care
- Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness

From 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019, 4 Adopt London RAAs were established across London (North, South, East and West), covering 23 LAs. The 4 RAAs are hosted model by Islington, Southwark, Havering and Ealing and they work collaboratively, as Adopt London. It was envisaged that there would be a Hub at the centre, but this work is all currently undertaken by the 4 Heads of Service.

### **At the heart of Adopt London is the premise that a pooled and dedicated service will deliver better outcomes through:**

- Stronger leadership focusing on adoption
- Pooled resources and joint commissioning
- Collaboration with the voluntary adoptions agencies (VAAs) and other provider services
- Developing resilient and flexible services
- A dedicated focus on best practice and implementing the learning of what works best for adopted children, adopters and those affected by adoption

A Management Board made up of Directors from each borough meets regularly to discuss issues and risks and to provide strategic oversight and support. The working relationship between each of the partner authorities and the RAA has been fundamental to the success of the partnership working. There are discussions about another partner joining the partnership in the New Year.

A Quality Assurance group comprising of Heads of Services from each participating borough meets monthly with the Head of the RAA and are responsible for monitoring, tracking and developing the delivery plan and ensuring partner engagement.

An Executive Board comprising of the 4 RAA host Directors provides strategic advice to the Adopt London agenda and delivery plan. A Partnership document is being drafted to assure governance of Adopt London projects and the shared website, [AdoptLondon.org.uk](http://AdoptLondon.org.uk).

ALS is the largest partnership involving the following 9 Local Authority services:

Croydon	Kingston and Richmond operating as AFC	Lambeth	Lewisham
Merton	Southwark	Sutton	Wandsworth

ALS is a shared service hosted by Southwark Council and managed through a robust partnership agreement and Management Board to deliver the following functions:

- Recruits and assesses new adoptive families
- Family finding - matching children with adopters
- Post adoption support services
  - Support to adoptive families
  - Letterbox system to enable indirect contact between birth families and children
  - Birth parent counselling
  - Services to adopted adults

## 2. Progress in 2021/2022

The ALS Partnership document dated 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 sets out that

**The Annual Review Meeting shall:**

- Assess whether the Partnership Agreement is operating in the most satisfactory manner
- Assess whether the services are being delivered to the Partnership Agreement standard
- Review the RAAs performance of adoption services in the previous contract year against the performance indicators set
- Review performance against the annual budget for the previous Year, together with a review of the proposed budget for the following contract year
- Review the Councils' performance of the co-dependencies that affect the overall performance of adoption services within the South London region
- Consider any proposals from partner Councils relating to possible contract variations, and note any variations agreed at the quarterly Adopt London South Board meetings.
- Agree any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism, and the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year
- Confirm the Contract Sum payable by the respective Councils to the Adopt London South for the next contract year

**Last year's review recommended the following:**

- 1) *Continued additional funding of post adoption support to reduce waiting times for adoptive families and adopted adults' services in 2021/22, following further data.*  
With additional funding, waiting times reduced significantly for families seeking support from 18 weeks to less than 4 weeks. Waiting times remain a concern for adopted adults. An action plan is in place to reduce the waiting times further.
- 2) *Improve data coherence across the partnership to improve accuracy and analysis.*

Data coherence has continued to improve, and will further improve when the new Mosaic workflows are fully implemented and the Power Bi dashboard work is completed. Adopt London South is also supported by the Corami data team.

*3) A reorganisation of resource allocation, following the impact of Covid, remote working and continued high demand for Post Adoption services.*

The reorganisation will be planned, once the following matters are clearer, outcome of the Adoption Support Fund Review, further work on the ALS Budget and the impact of a new partner joining the Partnership in April 2022.

*4) That Partners prioritise placement with ALS adopters where appropriate to enable more South London children to benefit and there is better use of resources.*

This has been successful with 68% children placed with ALS adopters. These children benefit from South London placements and London based support in the long term. Given the large network of social work professionals involved, this message continues to require reiteration across the Region.

*5) That the partnership reduces waiting times, especially for children of black heritage who are waiting the longest for new families.*

In 2020/2021 this continues to be a concern, for those children matched in 2020/21, children of black heritage waited 146 days longer than children of white heritage. This is a national and London concern. An Adopt London strategic project is due to start in the summer of 2021.

*6) To increase the number of Early Placements, reducing delay for all children.*

Early Permanence placements have increased by 100%, from 7 in 2019/20 to 14 in 2020/21. Over 70 social workers in the LAs have attended ALS Early permanence training, spreading good practice across the Region, indicating a new commitment to Early Permanence. Average waiting times have reduced slightly and some partners have improved waiting times significantly due to improved planning.

*7) To recruit the right adopters for ALS children waiting*

This is a continued focus for action, the right adopters are prioritised for assessment. The Adopt London marketing and publicity team implements a clear strategy to attract the right families to adopt London children. Further Adopt London developmental work is being planned.

*8) To continue to develop the strategic direction for cross London working and commissioning*

Cross London work continues to develop. Covid 19 specialist commissioning was a successful pilot of what can be achieved, with services commissioned across the 23 LAs for adopters and special guardians. Southwark will be leading on re commissioning Birth Parents Support and Counselling across Adopt London.



### 3. Operating Model

The RAA operates as a shared service hosted by Southwark..

The partner authorities delegated the following responsibilities to Southwark to deliver on their behalf.

**The Host Authority will discharge the following delegated adoption functions of the Partners:**

- The recruitment of persons as prospective adopters
- The assessment of prospective adopters' suitability to adopt a child
- The approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child
- The provision of adoption support services

A focused Delivery Plan was developed to ensure the transition was well managed and key priority areas were to be addressed collectively. The responsibilities of the shared services are outlined below.

**The Shared Service is responsible for providing a service for:**

- Adults who wish to adopt
- All adoptive families living in the region eligible for adoption support
- Adopted adults
- Letter box service
- Birth parents and former guardians eligible for adoption support.
- Access to adoption records
- Independent support to birth parents who risk losing their child to adoption

*(Some services will be externally commissioned by ALS or on a Pan London basis)*

The legal responsibilities for Looked after Children remain with their local authority, the following summarises the key responsibilities that are retained.

**Partner Boroughs retain responsibility for the following:**

- Corporate Parenting
- Agency Decision Making responsibilities and all legal responsibilities for looked after children
- Early permanence planning
- Adoption allowance

**Supporting the RAA partnership by contributing to:**

- Quality assurance and performance tracking
- Providing timely data

The workforce is stable with 96% of adoption social workers on permanent contracts, following a successful Temp to Perm strategy, enabling better use of financial resources. Additionally, very experienced Independent Social workers have been recruited to assist with

some assessments of foster carers wishing to adopt, second time adopters and non agency adoptions. Further arrangements are being developed for adopted adults work.

#### 4. Financial Arrangements

The ALS Partnership agreement sets out the financial contribution for each partner during what is described as the “initial period” (from ALS inception until 31 March 2021). The intention was that after the initial period, partner contributions would be based upon demand. The eventual model agreed upon by the ALS Board for 2021-22 only is a hybrid, partly based upon most recent demand and partly based upon contribution shares during the initial period. The model is to be reviewed further during 2021-22 in order to arrive at a more permanent model all partners are satisfied with.

The 2021-22 partner contributions as per the model described above are reflected in the table below:

Partner	Financial Contributions 2021/2022
Croydon	£658,239
Richmond and Kingston (Achieving for Children)	£380,148
Lambeth	£434,728
Lewisham	£550,092
Merton	£317,363
Southwark	£544,962
Sutton	£350,648
Wandsworth	£435,465

The following paragraphs describe the key areas of financial activity.

- **The Adoption Support Fund**

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) portal transferred to ALS in May 2020. In 2020/21 therapies and specialist assessments to the value of £1,584,454 were funded, an increase of £105, 536 from 2019/2020. Services are spot purchased through 103 small providers. Southwark is holding the risk for the ASF and the Assurance Statement has to be signed off by Southwark’s strategic Director of Finance and governance. Match funding cases agreed by LA Partners, but paid on their behalf by ALS will need to be re paid to ALS. Managing the Adoption Support Fund is an increasing pressure for Southwark and ALS.

- **Interagency approach**

Interagency placements are sought when the right placement is not available within the pool of ALS adopters. 20 external adoption placements were purchased and 17 ALS placements brought in interagency fees. The estimated Interagency costs in the

Partnership pre ALS were £880, 000 but by the end of 2020/21, Partners costs were a percentage share of £267, 789 , evidencing considerable savings overall and also to most LAs who had been reliant on external placements because they were not approving enough adopters.

- **Covid 19**

In May 2020, the DFE awarded ALS Covid 19 Emergency grants of £350,000 for strategically commissioned service. Together, the Adopt London Regional Adoption agencies commissioned and delivered nearly £1m worth of shared services from May to December 2020, across the 23 Adopt London LAs.

- **Early permanence fees**

Early Permanence fostering fees for ALS children placed with ALS are paid by Southwark on behalf of RAA partners. This amounts to £73, 000 which will be reimbursed by partners according to the home LA of each individual child and how many weeks the child spent in the Early Permanence status.

## 5. Performance

The transition into the new RAA came with many challenges. Performance and demand varied in each Borough but it was clear that there were insufficient available and suitable adopters for the number of children waiting to be matched both in ALS and across all of London.

Adopt London is supported by the Coram ASGLB secretariat to measure performance and to provide comparative data with the other 3 Adopt London RAAs.

### **Sufficiency of adopters**

53 adopters were approved in 2020/21, the same as the previous year. However with the reduction in Placement Orders made, the adopter gap between the number of families needed and the number of adopters approved is now reduced to 7%. However, there is still a shortage of the right families to adopt South London children.

### **The right adopters for South London children**

50% of the South London children waiting are children of black and dual heritage backgrounds, mainly of African and Caribbean heritage and we are working towards 50% of our adopters being right for black children. All ALS adopters are offered transracial adoption training.

### **Family finding performance improved considerably during 2020/21**

76 children had a positive panel recommendation. This was a 50% increase compared to the previous year. ALS data indicates that there are 51 children currently waiting with a Best Interest Decision. Family finders work closely with children's own social workers to identify new families. The number of Placement orders reduced during 2020/21 and it is not yet clear

how much was due to Covid Court delays and how much was due to a longer term change in the balance between adoption and special guardianship orders.

### **How long children wait from Placement Order to match**

Average waiting times reduced very slightly from 246 days in 2019/20 to 228 days in 2020/21, compared to pre ALS at 250 days. However, there is still concern that children of black heritage wait 146 days longer than children of white heritage and they make up only 32% of the children matched last year. The average days obscures the improved performance in several LA's and the impact of a small number of children whose adoption journey took a long time. It should be noted that for the children who waited the longest, having a new permanent family is still a good outcome and evidences the LA commitment to adoption for the child.

### **Adopter approval timescales**

Adopter approval performance is far better than the national average at stage 1 and at the national average at stage 2, but they waited some time to get to stage 1. This was partly due to delays at the start of the pandemic and partly due to very high demand but will be monitored for improvement. Additional Independent social workers are being recruited.

### **Early Permanence**

Early Permanence placements have increased by 100% during 2020/21. Since 1st July 2019, there have been 22 early placements, the majority in Southwark, Croydon and Lewisham. All ALS adopter applicants are encouraged to consider Early Permanence training. More than 70 LA social workers have attended ALS Early permanence training, indicating a commitment across the Region to improve.

### **Placement with ALS Adopters**

One of the benefits of adoption regionalisation is the availability of ALS adoptive families and the local support which can be offered. The ALS Board decided to prioritise placing with ALS adopters where they can meet the needs of the child. 68% of South London children were placed with ALS adopters in 2020/21.

### **Post adoption support to families and children**

Demand remains high for post adoption services with 1046 families requesting services. Waiting times reduced from May 2020 from over 500 people waiting over 4 months to very few families waiting 4 weeks by March 2021. This was due to the additional staff agreed by the ALS Board. The Covid 19 emergency services between May and December 2020 enabled a faster response, because a full social work assessment was not required to access them and there were no systemic delays in the Mott McDonald portal, approval of suppliers or individual payment delays.

### **Adoption Support Fund**

The Adoption Support fund, managed by Mott McDonald is being reviewed in 2021/22. Southwark and ALS are working with the complexity of managing 103 spot purchased suppliers, with delays at the ASF portal, with internal administration and with supplier availability. The service to children and families relying on the fund urgently needs improvement as they are facing very unhelpful delays in receiving the services they need.

### **Services to adopted adults**

There have been a total of 528 adults requesting services, of whom 247 people have now received a service, but waiting times have been more than 9 months. Croydon provided extra resources to help 116 Croydon people who had been waiting from before ALS was established and this was nearly complete at the end of March 2021. The Adopt London website now also offers advice and signposting to self help and other specialist services. A plan is in place to further reduce waiting times.

### **Services to birth parents**

These statutory services were commissioned for the first time in 2020/21 and 192 appointments were made. Partial arrangements were in place for the 2 previous years, when there had been 92 and 77 appointments made across some of the LA partners. Southwark is leading on re commissioning across Adopt London with a more up to date approach.

### **Data accuracy and system challenges**

Data accuracy has improved significantly in 2020/21 due to good teamwork between partners and the ALS business team. Within ALS, workflows and child data systems are being implemented to improve data analysis. Adopt London works closely with the Adoption and Special Guardianship data team at Corami to identify London wide performance themes for improvement.

### **Adopt London comparator for 2019/20**

Adopt London South is now the largest recruiter of adopters in London and has the most children's matches. It has recruited 52 out of the 146 adopters recruited in London and it has matched 76 out of 170 matches in Adopt London.

### **Ofsted**

Adopt London South is a partnership of 9 LAs and is not in itself registered or inspected by Ofsted. However, ALS works closely with each LA partner to prepare for inspection and support the adoption inspection process.

### **Adoption Panels**

4 Panels have operated every month without any disruption due to Covid. There are 2 experienced Adoption Panel chairs. Membership reflects the BAME and LGBTQ communities in South London. Panel training has been provided on Unconscious Bias in adoption. Panel Chairs report twice yearly to the ALS Board and the Quality Assurance group.

Feedback from potential adoptive parents about the panel is as follows

## Adoption Panel feedback



## Partnerships with Voluntary adoption agencies and Adoption Support Agencies

Relationships with active London VAA and Adoption support agencies have developed during the Pandemic due to

- Regular feedback at Adopt London VAA meetings
- Covid 19 emergency services commissioned directly with a range of providers
- ALS commissions International work with Intercountry Adoption agency
- Advice line and birth parents services with PAC UK
- Adopted adults services with the Intercountry adoption agency and PAC UK
- Birth parents commissioning to be progressed with London agencies and beyond.
- ALS is currently in membership of CoramBaaf as a pilot to measure its relevance, this includes all the LA adoption leads, the legal advisors and medical advisors.

### Adopter Voice

A strong partnership has developed with We are Family, an adoption peer support community which has 300 members in the Adopt London South area. With 850 London members, it is the adopter voice for London and meets regularly with Heads of Service. We are Family receives small Adopt London grants per Adopt London LA for its core activities and also delivers WAF talks in partnership with Adopt London. It ran 30 sessions and 17 webinars on a range of topics such as Therapeutic parenting, managing difficult sibling relationships, attachment, reflective parenting and contact in adoption. Podcasts are now in development.

### Community of practice for Special Guardianship

The ALS board asked the head of service to continue to offer strategic support to LA's for Special Guardians. The Kinship London project manager attended Quality Assurance meetings in 2020/21 to update on take up. Regrettably most ALS partners were not able to continue Kinship Response after all Covid project funding ended in May 2021.

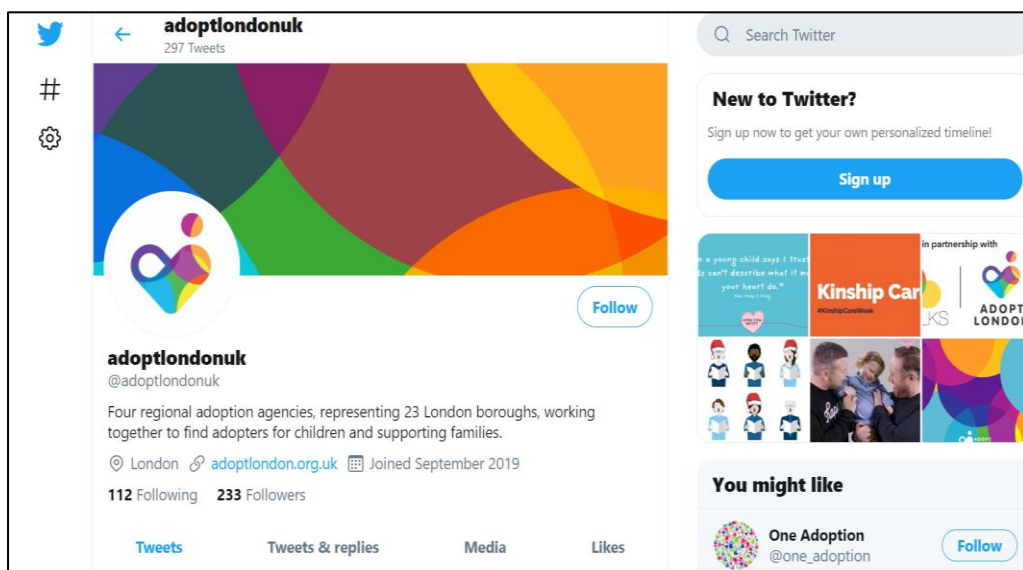
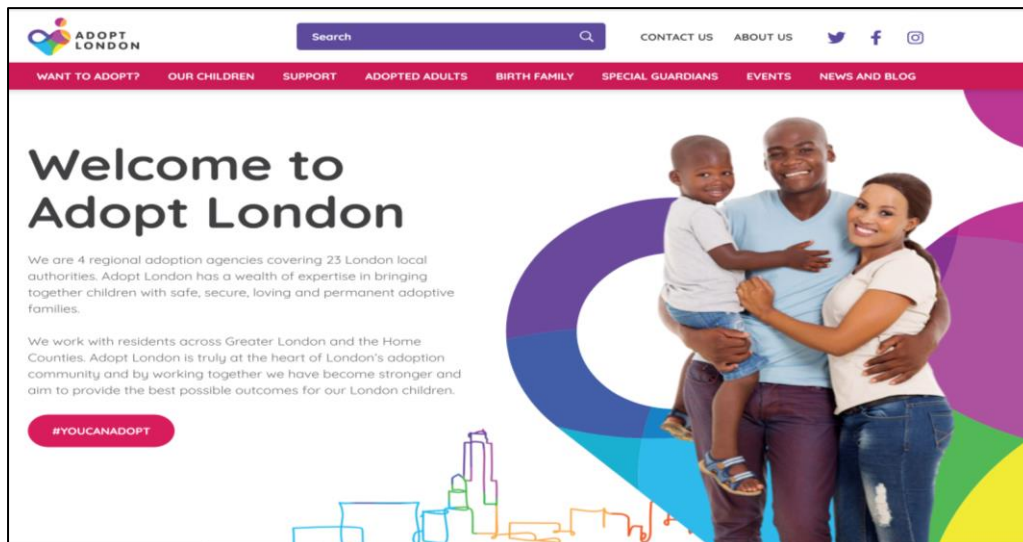
## 6. Adopt London and national RAA leadership developments

### The Adopt London website and Communications work continued to progress

The following new services were available in 2020/21

- Direct booking for Information meetings for prospective adopters
- adoption support including links to Virtual Schools and Early help
- birth parents
- adopted adults with links to self guided searching websites
- A Join Us job opportunity page
- A Get Ready to Adopt self assessment tool is in development
- Daily thematic posts on social media for the target audience

Adopt London North holds the pooled budget for all projects.

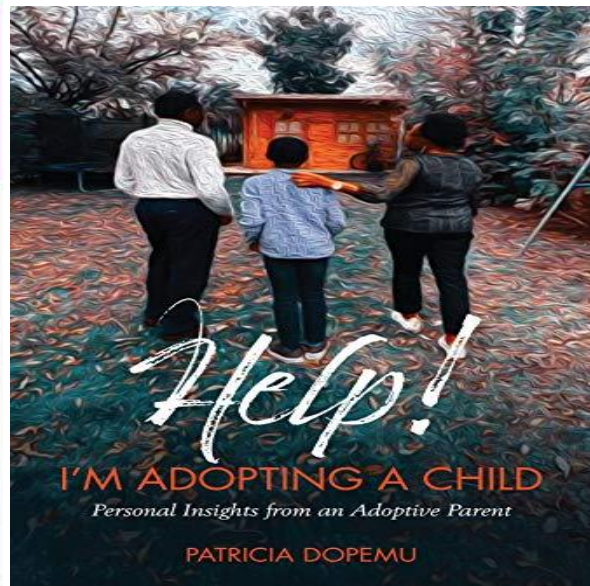






**Ensuring London has the right adopters for London’s black children**

There is more to do to ensure a long term sufficient pool of adopters are recruited for London’s children and in particular to address the need to attract more adopters from black communities. A strategic project is starting in the summer of 2021 to address the London challenges and working with the Black Lives Matter working group of adopters and staff which met in 2020.



**Adopt London Choir**

The choir videos highlight the strength and diversity of Adopt London working together for London children and families and is in itself a supportive community for its members. Other RAA’s are following Adopt London’s example.





## News

# Adopt London Choir Success & New Song!

The Adopt London Choir have come together again to support the wellbeing of adoptive families and staff in this brand new video with their latest song Colour My World .

[READ MORE](#)

## London wide learning

AdoptLondon hosted a training event for 100 Designated teachers about trauma informed schools and there are plans for more events. The University of East Anglia provided training about the Moving to Adoption model to over 100 Adopt London staff. Adopt London also co hosted a Broadening our Horizons workshop about new approaches to adopter recruitment as part of the London Sufficiency project.

## Adopt London Plan

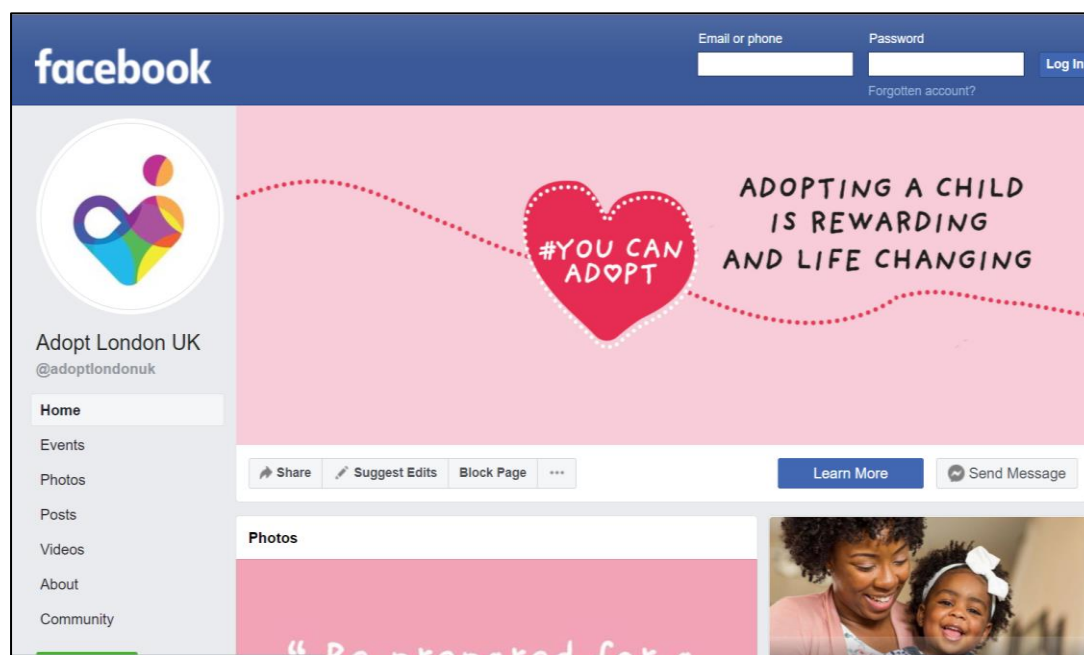
The plan sets out Adopt London's objectives for

- Governance including website, commissioning, London interagency fees, project management, London equalities work, Ofsted readiness, WAF partnership and National leadership projects, implementing the National Adoption Strategy
- Marketing and comms development
- Workforce and practice development including VAA partnerships, WAF webinars and podcasts, Stay and Play and exchange days, Early permanence, staff and adopter training, practitioner forums, Special Guardianship development and implementing the UEA moving to adoption model
- Participation, user involvement and stakeholder participation, including adopter voice, through WAF, children's voice through Body and Soul, birth parent voice through co production for new service, adopted adults voice through new groups.

### National RAA Leadership for sector improvement

Adopt London Heads of Service meet regularly with the DFE and are part of an active development program for National adoption sector improvement. All England RAA Heads of service are engaged with the following strategic priorities-

1. The National Adopter recruitment steering group to plan national campaigns #youcanadopt
2. Improving the child's journey
3. Improving adoption support and early help for adoptive families.



## 7. COVID 19 Impact

Since March 2020, ALS swiftly adapted to remote agile and innovative ways of working enabling better use of staff time due to reduced travelling. Very few days were lost due to staff sickness, but the long term personal adjustment to home working has impacted people in different ways, especially when responding to very distressed people from home. ALS teams have regular meetings to promote support to staff.

### The service has responded to a variety of changes including:

- ⇒ Emergency adoption regulations
- ⇒ Undertaking virtual assessment
- ⇒ Video information sessions, training and preparation groups
- ⇒ Moving letterbox to digital for most families
- ⇒ Developing the website to market new services
- ⇒ Delivering virtual panels without disruption
- ⇒ Providing commissioned services to Special Guardians ( previously not part of the RAA)

**Adverse impacts have been as follows:**

- ⇒ Foster carers health concerns caused some delays for children moving
- ⇒ Uncertainty about the long term impact of becoming a new family in a pandemic
- ⇒ Adopter assessments have been delayed
- ⇒ Staff expressing workload pressure

**Covid 19 enabled emergency commissioning:**

- ⇒ Pan London commissioning arrangements
- ⇒ Targeted support for South London families

The take up across the ALS Region was very positive. All of these services were self-referral and available without delay:

- ⇒ Adoption Plus specialist therapies delivered to South London families
- ⇒ Specialist therapies delivered by Parents and Children Together
- ⇒ Parent consultation from the Anna Freud centre and a specialist psychotherapist
- ⇒ Great Behaviour Breakdown and Child to Parent Violence therapeutic training
- ⇒ Regular webinars from WAF, the Adopter Hub, Little Stars and the Kinship carers cooking club
- ⇒ Helplines daytime, evening and weekends from PAC-UK, PACT, Grandparents Plus and the association of Therapeutic parents
- ⇒ Kinship response support for individual special guardians for up to a year from Grandparents Plus, including help with grants.

## **8. Recommendations of this annual review**

This has been a positive year for Adopt London South, with an increase in children's matches, increasingly with ALS approved families and a reduction in waiting times for families requesting adoption support. Adopt London's media and communications work is more and more effective in spreading the message about the right adopters for London children. Challenges remain in reducing waiting times for black children needing new families, waiting times for adopted adults services and delays with Adoption Support Fund therapies. Together with Adopt London, ALS is ambitious for change and improvement for the benefit of London children and everyone affected by adoption.

As a result of this review, the following recommendations are proposed-

1. Improve the outcomes for South London children of Black heritage, reduce waiting times and improve the adopter journey for Black families ready to adopt them.
2. Work with Adopt London on the new project to address the race disparity for children in the 23 Adopt London LAs.
3. Develop improved commissioning and finance systems to improve the experience of families and children using Adoption Support Fund therapies.

4. Reduce waiting times for adopted adults, by developing improved pathways and collaboration with London Adoption support agencies.
5. Ensure a smooth transition for the services users of the new partner joining ALS.
- 6 .Once the new partner has joined the partnership undertake an organisational review of staffing to ensure the best use of resources.
7. Continue to develop Adopt London services for the benefit of London children.

Susanna Daus  
Head of Service  
Adopt London South



<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Stephen Rowan, Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny</b>
<b>ORIGIN OF ITEM:</b>	The Work Programme is scheduled for consideration at every ordinary meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel.
<b>BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:</b>	To consider any additions, amendments or changes to the agreed work programme for the Panel in 2021/22.

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This agenda item details the Panel’s proposed work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year.
- 1.2 The Panel has the opportunity to discuss any amendments or additions that it wishes to make to the work programme.

## 2. WORK PROGRAMME

### 2.1 The work programme

The proposed work programme is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Members are asked to consider the work programme in the context of the Panel’s terms of reference and whether the proposed items will support the Panel in meeting its delegated responsibilities.

### 2.2 Additional Items

Members of the Panel are invited to suggest any other items that they consider appropriate for the Work Programme. However, due to the limited time available at Panel meetings, Members are strongly encouraged to not propose meeting agendas that contain more than three hours of substantive business in order to allow full consideration of the items on any given agenda.

The Panel should also be mindful that the Council is operating under both very restricted resources and, while no longer formally subject to section 114 spending restrictions, the Council has resolved to continue to operate in accordance with such restrictions. To that end, Members should be mindful

that requests for additional reports will need to be considered in the wider context of demand for Council resources and the requirement for the Council to only incur expenditure on statutory functions.

### 2.3 **Participation in Corporate Parenting Panel**

Members of the Panel are also requested to give consideration to any persons that it wishes to attend future meetings to assist in the consideration of specific agenda items.

## 3 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Panel is recommended to agree the Work Programme 2021/22 with any agreed amendments.

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Michelle Ossei-Gerning  
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020 8726 6000 x 84246

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:** None

**APPENDIX 1:** Work Programme 2021/22 for the  
Corporate Parenting Panel.

# Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme 2021/22

Meeting date	Thurs 24 Jun 21 <b>NEW DATE</b>	Wed 8 Sept – Postponed to <b>NEW DATE – Wed 22 Sept</b>	Wed 10 Nov	Wed 12 Jan 22 – Postponed to <b>NEW DATE – Tues 8 Feb</b>	Wed 2 Mar	Wed 27 Apr
Theme	<b>SUFFICIENCY</b>	<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>HEALTH</b>	<b>ADOPTION</b>	<b>CARE LEAVERS</b>	<b>FOSTERING</b>
	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard
	Annual Report of Corporate Parenting Panel 2020-2021	Exam Results Exclusion SEN	Initial Health Assessment and Review Health Assessment Report	Summary of ASL Adoption activity	Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers	Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel  Statement of Purpose
	Update on the South London Commissioning Programme (Service/Strategy)	Mentoring and Careers guidance for LAC an CL  Independent Visiting Report work	Update on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Offer for Children Looked After	Croydon Social Care update on children with a plan for adoption	Leaving Care Offer and pledge	Recruitment and Deregistration
	IRO Annual Report	Engagement Achievement (inc. complaints and leaving opportunities)	EMPIRE Presentation	Renewal Plan and the Impact on Children	Missing Children	Review of Fostering Services Escalation Policy for Foster Carers
	Children's Social Care Placement Sufficiency	Annual Report of Virtual School	IRO Annual Report			Annual Report of Corporate Parenting Panel 2021-2022
	Terms of Reference	EMPIRE – the summer provision overview report				
		EMPIRE – Engagement Report				

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