

# **CROYDON ADOPTION AGENCY**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

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

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Section 1: Introduction and National Context	3-4
Section 2: Service Structure	4
Section 3: The Adoption Panel	5
Panel Membership	6
Non-voting members	6
Panel Activity and Agency Decision Maker	6
Panel Training and Development	6
Section: 4 Referrals for Adoption, Placements and Adoption Orders	7
Children Referred for Adoption	7
Number of Children Waiting for Placement as at 31st March 2017	8
Types of Adoption Placements	9
Profile of children placed	9
Adoption Orders	10
Section: 5 Prospective Adopters	11
Section: 6 Adoption Support Services	14
Section: 7 Intercountry Adoption	15
Section: 8 South London Adoption Consortium	17
Section: 9 Regionalisation	18
Section: 10 Adoption Scorecard	19
Section: 11 Conclusion	20

## **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:

Henrietta Delalu  
Service Manager Children in Care Croydon

Contact:  
Email: [Henrietta.Delalu@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:Henrietta.Delalu@croydon.gov.uk)  
Mobile: 07587139475

