

Non-Executive Template

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 13 th January 2021
SUBJECT:	Summary of ALS Adoption activity
LEAD OFFICER:	Rodica Cobarzan Interim Head of Service Children Looked After and Care Leavers Natalie Craig Service Manager – Permanence
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	NA

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

The report provides an overview of the work of Adopt London South (ALS) our Regional Adoption Agency to achieve permanence for children looked after. The report is a summary of ALS annual report prepared by Susanna Daus – Head of Service for Adopt London South. The Report by Susanna Daus is dated 10 July 2020 and was presented to the Board of Directors in September 2020. This full report will be published in due course.

POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

With our determination, we will be the best corporate parent to Croydon’s children and young people in care, supporting them through into successful young adulthood; as any parent does.

[Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022](#)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

N/A – Report is for information only, see below funding arrangements for ALS.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note the ALS activity during 2019-2020.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The creation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) was part of a national agenda to improve the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.
- 1.2 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 required local authorities to combine their adoption services into Regional Adoption Agencies by April 2020 or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis.
- 1.3 In 2018 there was a decision taken to establish 4 RAAs across London (North, South, East and West). Each of the 4 RAAs would be delivered through a hosted model and each would work collaboratively with each other across London on areas where it made sense to do things once, together under the umbrella term “Adopt London”.
- 1.4 Southwark was agreed as the host Borough for Adopt London South (ALS) RAA. Croydon is part of ALS alongside Kingston and Richmond operating as AFC, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Southwark, Sutton and Wandsworth.
- 1.5 Prior to the implementation of the RAA a detailed partnership agreement was developed and approved by all partners. The partnership agreement also set out the governance arrangements to oversee and support the implementation and development of Adopt London South.
- 1.6 A Management Board made up of Directors from each borough meets regularly to receive updates on progress of key priorities, to discuss issues and risks and to provide strategic oversight and support.
- 1.7 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 is effective at an operational level.

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- 1.8 The ALS service comprised 49 FTE at the point of its creation, 30 individuals transferred under TUPE legislation, and 7.5 FTE posts originated from Southwark, with the funding from the remaining post being transferred in to Southwark as the host authority. The transition to the RAA began in July 2019.
- 1.9 These posts created a number of teams, led by a Head of Service, to deliver the core adoption functions.
- 1.10 The Host Authority (Southwark) 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
- 1.11 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

Adopt London South -Year One

- 1.12 Within the first few months of operating, it was evident that demand was higher than previously expected in the post adoption support area and that some of the original base line data that informed the projections for approvals of adopters and the number of children waiting for adoption was flawed.
- 1.13 A significant cause for concern was the continual rise in post adoption referrals (139 were expected to transfer in July 2019, this number increased to 917 by

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March 2020 and is currently at 1033). In addition to the adoption support cases, there is a waiting list of up to 9 months for adopted adults requiring support to access their records or to receive counselling.

- 1.14 An additional 3 FTE posts were agreed on a temporary basis by the Management Board in May 2020 to respond to the rise in adoption support cases. This included additional management capacity. These temporary posts take the establishment to 54 FTEs.
- 1.15 ALS's funding model for the first 2 years is set below. The partnership agreement provides for a demand based funding going forward and the budget for 2021/2022 is yet to be set.

Partner	% contribution
Croydon	17.16%
Southwark	15.44%
Lewisham	14.34%
Lambeth	12.57%
Wandsworth	12.02%
AFC	9.91%
Merton	9.40%
Sutton	9.14%
TOTAL	100%

- 1.16 The funding for interagency placements follow the same pattern as the % contribution for the partner agency.
- 1.17 The Adoption Support Fund has now transferred to ALS and additional COVID funding was made available by DfE to support adoptive placements.
- 1.18 Sufficiency of adopters**
- The same number of adopters were approved from July 2019 as the previous financial year, but not yet meeting the target of 88 families. Adopters of BAME heritage were 38% of families approved, compared to 54% of the children waiting with a Placement order. At the time of completing the report (July 2020) 21 adoptive families are in the final stage 2 of the approval. ALS prioritises adopter applications from families who are likely to be suitable for ALS children.

1.19 Family finding performance was impacted by the transition to regionalisation

ALS data indicates there are 79 children currently waiting with a Best Interest Decision, of whom 59 have a Placement order. Family finders work closely with children's own social workers in the respective authorities to identify new families. ALS data indicates a big reduction in Placement orders made by the Courts during Covid19.

1.20 How long children wait

41 children had already waited over a year before ALS started and some of these children have now been matched with new families. Of the 50 children matched in 2019/20, 38 were aged under 2. Babies waited an average of 112 days but 6 older children had waited over 1000 days. Average waiting times for children of BAME heritage were 135 days longer than children of white European heritage. The average waiting times for all ages were 246 days, compared to pre ALS which was 250 days. 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.

1.21 Early Permanence

Increasing Early Permanence placements is an objective for ALS. Since 1st July 2019, there have been 7 placements. There is no previous South London wide data available, although Southwark led on Early Permanence training. All ALS adopter applicants are encouraged to attend Early Permanence training. Further work will be needed to help local authority children's social workers with early identification of those who will benefit.

1.22 Post adoption support

Despite a 9% increase in the value of Adoption Support Fund services delivered in 2019/20, demand for these services continued to rise from 1st September 2019. 139 cases were anticipated but by 1st July 2020 this had risen to 1033 people requesting a service. Waiting times remain a concern with over 300 cases currently open. The current Covid19 emergency services enable a faster

response, because a full social work assessment is not required to access them. These services will end on 30th September 2020.

1.23 Services to adopted adults

There have been a total of 295 adults requesting services, of whom 90 have now received a service, but waiting times have been up to 9 months. People who were adopted before 2005 are entitled to counselling as well as access to their records. Croydon provided extra resources to help 116 people who had been waiting at the point of transfer. Adopt London plans to develop the webpages for Adopted adults to enable some self-directed help.

1.24 Adoption Panels

It is a statutory requirement to set up and maintain adoption panels, which consider the suitability of adopters and children's matches to new families, recommending a decision to the Agency Decision Maker. For adopter suitability decisions, the Agency Decision Maker is the ALS RAA Head of Service. The decisions with regard to children's matching sits with the child's local authority. Panels started in September 2019, and have operated without disruption. Membership reflects the BAME and LGBTQ communities in South London. During Covid19 19, virtual panels were established with quoracy maintained and new protocols agreed. Panel training has been provided including on Early Permanence and good practice in moving children into new families.

Summary and plan for future

1.25 Croydon Council works with ALS to ensure that children who cannot live with birth families have a timely plan for adoption and access to support services.

1.26 ALS has identified a number of priorities to work on as follows:

- Significant increase in BAME adopters
- Recruiting local adopters for London children
- Supporting approved adopters who are not a match for ALS children adopting from other Local Authorities
- Reducing the time BAME children wait to be adopted

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- Improve early permanence planning
- Increase capacity for post adoption support
- Develop system to track and predict future demand
- Implement activity based budgets
- Improved data, processes and systems

1.27 Whilst ALS is still developing, we see positive signs that our work with ALS will provide positive outcome for children who need a placement outside their birth family.

2. CONSULTATION

NA

3. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations

Croydon is a partner in ALS and as part of the partnership agreement Croydon is financially contributing to ALS's budget. The contribution is calculated on a demand basis and linked with the number of children and adopters requiring services from ALS. For the 2020/2021 Croydon contributed 17.17% of the total ALS budget. The budget for 2021/2022 is currently under review.

3.2. The effect of the decision

As detailed it is legal requirement that Croydon joins a RAA, Croydon works with ALS and the other 8 London Boroughs that form ALS to support better adoptions practices for our children.

3.3. Risks

The budget is demand based and an increase in our adoption activity might lead to a higher contribution into ALS

3.4. Options

There are no options at this stage

3.5. Future savings/efficiencies

Monitoring activity to ensure our children get best possible homes

4. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

NA

5. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

NA

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

NA

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

NA

8. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

NA

9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

9.1. WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

NO

9.2. HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?

NO

9.3. Approved by: Nick Pendry, The Director of Early Help and Childrens Social Care

CONTACT OFFICER: Natalie Craig, Service Manager