

Adoption Agency Annual Report 2018/2019.

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Section 1 **Background Information.**

This is a report on the performance of the LB of Croydon's Adoption Service in line with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory Guidance.

1.1 Introduction

The work of the LB of Croydon's Adoption Agency is governed by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations and guidance. The adoption services contributes to the improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough.

The key priority is to achieve 'permanence' for Children Looked After, ensuring that they can be brought up in a loving, secure and stable families. Where the child's welfare requires a placement outside of the birth family the Adoption Agencies paramount consideration is the child's welfare. Permanence outside of the birth family can e legally secured through adoption, special guardianship or child arrangement orders.

This report provides details of the adoption service activities from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

I have also included in the report details about the transition to the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption London South, (ALS).

1.2 The National Context and Regional Adoption Agencies, (RAA).

The Education and Adoption Act 2016, provides the Secretary of State with the power to order local authority adoption agencies to combine services if they do not voluntary do so. The expectation is that all local authority adoption agencies join a RAA by March 2020.

The LB of Croydon has been working towards becoming part of a RAA with 8 other south London Boroughs. The plan is to merge on the 1st July 2019 and to be operational from the 1st September 2019. The RAA will be called Adoption London South, (ALS).

ALS will undertake all the statutory adoption functions for the LB Of Croydon. This will include:

- Adopters recruitment
- Family finding for children
- Matching and linking
- Step-parent adoptions
- Adoption Support
- Partner contracts such as PAC and IAC.

The following functions will remain with the LB of Croydon:

- Agreement for a Plan for Adoption
- Agency Decision Maker, (ADM), for a child to be matched.
- Funding of adoption support and funding of inter-agency fees.

Nationally there has been an increase rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders with family members as an alternative route to adoption to achieve permanence. This has also been the case in the LB of Croydon.

Section 2 **Service Structure**

2.1 The LB of Croydon Adoption Service

The Adoption Service provides the following core services in accordance with statutory requirements.

- Recruitment and assessment of prospective parents.
- The selection of adoptive parents and matching of children for adoption.
- The ADM functions and adoption panels.
- The provision of financial support for adoptive parents where appropriate.
- The provision of adoption support services.
- The provision of intercountry adoption services through the Intercountry Adoption Centre, (IAC).
- The provision to assess, supervise and report to court for non-agency adoptive parents.

2.2 The Adoption Teams

The service comprises of 2 teams supported by one service manager. The adoption service manager also acts as an advisory role to the ADM and as the panel adviser to the adoption panel.

The recruitment activity is carried out by the assessing social workers and preparation training is carried out by the South London Consortium for which the LB of Croydon actively contributes some staffing and resources as one of the

largest partners. There is an adoption team manager who leads on this area.

Family Finding is supervised by an Assistant Team Manager who is responsible for finding families in a timely way.

Adoption Support is led by a Team Manager and a team of Social Workers.

The Adoption Service has 4 different Service Managers in the year. This has impacted on performance and consistency of practice and has been challenging for the staff.

Some of the Adoption staff have also had the role as the child's Social Worker.

The current structure was introduced to reflect the structure of ALS and best practice in terms of functions and effectiveness. The current structure started in January 2019.

2.3 The Adoption Panel

The adoption Panel has an independent chair, deputy chair, several independent members and councilor membership. Attached to the panel is also a medical adviser.

All the panel members are very experienced, some are adoptive parents and some have experienced adoption. The ethnic mix and gender is also diverse. This adds strength to the decision making and support for applicants.

The panel has the following functions:

- The approval of prospective adoptive parents
- The matching of children with prospective parents
- The de-registration of approved of adoptive parents who no longer wish to be approved or are assessed as not suitable for continuous approval.

The report by the chair is attached at the end of this agency report.

Section 3 **Finance**

Total Staffing Budget - £1,035k

The Adoption other costs budget is £924k (adoption allowances and interagency fees)

The total budgets for the two Adoption cost centres is £1,959k

Section 4 **Other services**

4.1 Inter-Country Adoption

A service level agreement is in place with IAC. Quarterly monitoring meetings are in place.

4.2 Non-agency Adoption, (Step-parent Adoption).

During 2018/2019 all these assessments were managed by a specialist social worker in-house.

4.3 Support to birth parents

The Post Adoption Centre, (PAC), has a service level agreement with the LB of Croydon. PAC offer local surgeries and support/counselling for birth parents. The service level agreement has been monitored on a quarterly basis.

Section 5 **Disruptions**

A strength of the LB of Croydon's Adoption Service is the low level of disruptions. This is attributed to careful matching and management of arrangements.

There were no disruptions in 2018/2019.

There was one disruption in 2019/2020, which occurred during introductions. A meeting was held to review the circumstances and understand any learning points.

There was some vulnerabilities with the prospective adoptive parent that had not been fully understood and this combined with some challenges from the child

Table 2

Child characteristics:	Aged under 5 years old	Aged 5 years old and over	Female	Male	BME	Disabled	Part of sibling group	Harder to place
Number adopted in last 12 months	17	6	15	9	10	0	7	17
Number waiting with a PO...	13	2	7	8	7	0	5	11
..of which have been waiting at least 18 months since BLA	7	2	3	6	3	0	4	7

A = becoming looked after = entering care

Table 3 displays the number of days that children wait. This indicates that the LB of Croydon is slower than the England 3 year average and that most of the delay is pre the placement order being granted. This can be due to delays in going to court or delays in the court. The profile of the children who are being sought adoption placements for are and are waiting a long time is children who are from ethnic backgrounds and children with a disability. These are clear areas that ALS will have to address. Croydon’s position with these children is the same as other LB in ALS.

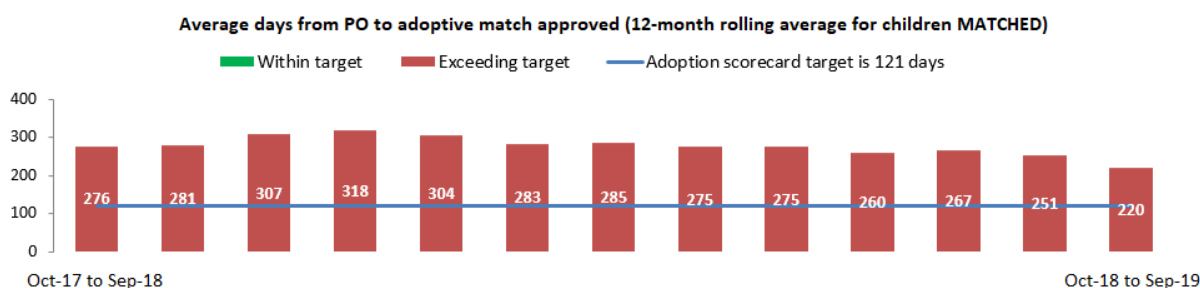
Table 3

Scorecard indicators:

	2018/19 Q3 - 2019/20 Q2
A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	526 days
A10: A1 timeliness where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family	502 days
A2: Average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family	261 days
A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	20 (30.3%)

Table 4 displays the underlying data of children who have a Placement Order and who have been placed. This date demonstrates an improvement in placement times. The England National average is 201 days and the LB of Croydon is now just above this

Table 4



There were 11 prospective adoption families approved in 2018/2019. This was particularly disappointing and was as a result of some performance issues.

Section 8

Key Service developments 2019/2020

The service development was disrupted in 2018/2019 by too many management changes and lack of a clear development plan.

One key development was the restructuring of the service to ensure clearer lines of accountability and effectiveness in terms of key performance areas such as recruitment, family finding and adoption support. This restructuring took place in January 2019 and therefore had limited impact on performance for 2018/2019 but has had an impact on timeliness in 2019/2020.

The adoption service was also enabled to use the Children's Recording System, (CRS). This has meant better record keeping and the ability to obtain performance data more easily.

The main areas to develop for 2019/2020 are focused on preparing for the RAA, Adoption London South.

- Preparation of staff for TUPE to RAA.
- Preparation of data for transfer
- Alignment of working practices.
- Ceasing of the LB of Croydon Adoption Panel – (August 2019).
- Weekly tracking of all children with a plan for adoption and a Placement Order.
- Reducing the waiting lists in Adoption Support specifically adult adopter enquiries.
- Improvement in links with Social Work with Families Teams.

Service Manager
December 2019