

Non-Executive Template

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 13 th January 2021
SUBJECT:	Croydon Social Care update on children with a plan for adoption
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 Croydon Council work to achieve permanence for children looked after.

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. This will involve listening to their worries and their ambitions and championing their interests.

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

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

N/A – Report is for information only. The cost of placements are budgeted for within existing Children's Social Care budgets.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note the report and permanence activity during 2020.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 Permanence is the long term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. It aims to ensure a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.
- 1.2 There are a number of options and avenues by which a child may achieve permanence. These are remaining or reunification with birth parents, adoption, long term foster care or placement in the care of a family member or friend under a legal order, either a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.
- 1.3 Croydon Council work across the social work system contributes to 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 they can be brought up in loving, secure and stable families.
- 1.4 Where the child's welfare requires a placement outside the birth family via Adoption, Croydon Council works with Adopt London South to secure permanence outside the birth family. Croydon has joined Adopt London South (RAA) in July 2019.
- 1.5 The Family Justice Review, introduced the 26-week timescale for care proceedings and this has had a significant impact on the Adoption Services over the last few years. Local Authorities are required to develop permanence plans for children and place them in alternative family arrangements more quickly.
- 1.6 Nationally there has been a steady rise in the use of Special Guardianship Orders with family members as an alternative route to achieve permanency

as the Courts are increasingly reluctant to make a placement order, with Adoption being the last resort '*where nothing else will do*'.

- 1.7 The number of children looked after who were adopted fell by 4% during 2019/2020 (DfES statistics) and this decline is in line with a reduction in the number of children looked after and continues to reduce since a pick in adoptions in 2015.
- 1.8 The number of children looked after who left care through a special guardianship order (SGO) decreased by 4% as well nationally (DfES) in 2019/2020 compared to the previous year. Most SG carers are family members, whilst a small 9% number are former foster carers.

Special Guardianship

- 1.9 Croydon Council has a Family & Friends Team whose role is to undertake Special Guardianship Assessment and make recommendations to the court as to the support any prospective carers might need in order to meet the needs of children they propose to care for.
- 1.10 The team of Social workers, who are all agency staff, are supported by an Assistant Team Manager and Team Manager.
- 1.11 In the last financial year, April 2019 until March 2020, 65 Special Guardianship Orders were granted. Of these orders, only 3 were granted to mainstream foster carers, one was granted SG's for two children and one was granted for one child.
- 1.12 This financial year there were 4 Special Guardianship Orders granted in Q1 (April 2020 to June 2020), 6 in Q2 (July 2020 to September 2020) and 6 so far in Q3. This is a total of 16 so far this year and if the amount of orders granted continues on this trajectory, there will be a significant decrease this year.

1.13 The main reasons for this are:

- There has been a reduction in care proceedings in LB Croydon.
- Improved quality of assessments resulting in less carers being able to demonstrate in the assessments that they could meet the needs of children. This prevents children placements breaking down in the long term.
- A significant number of kinship carers are progressed via the Fostering Panel and ADM and we have a higher number of connected carers currently.
- Delays in concluding of proceedings due to Covid19 and as such we have an increase in Connected Carers. We do expect to see many of these result in Special Guardianship Orders but this is likely to take until at least Q2 next year.

1.14 The Post Order Support Team is currently made up of two social workers and one team manager. Their role is to offer ongoing support to Special Guardians and the children they care for. Croydon Council is responsible for ongoing support for at least 3 years post order, after which it transfers to the local authority where the Special Guardians reside (this excludes financial support)

1.15 The team has just set a process of undertaking an annual review process for carers who were assessed as requiring a financial support packages. Any financial support package (other than those offered to former foster carers who have this protected for a 2 year period) should be re-means tested annually to ensure any financial support remains appropriate and necessary.

1.16 Every child is entitled to an annual assessment of their support needs and in addition to this Special Guardians can contact the team at any time to seek support. The aim is therefore that every family is contacted annually but that if families are in need we are actively supporting the family.

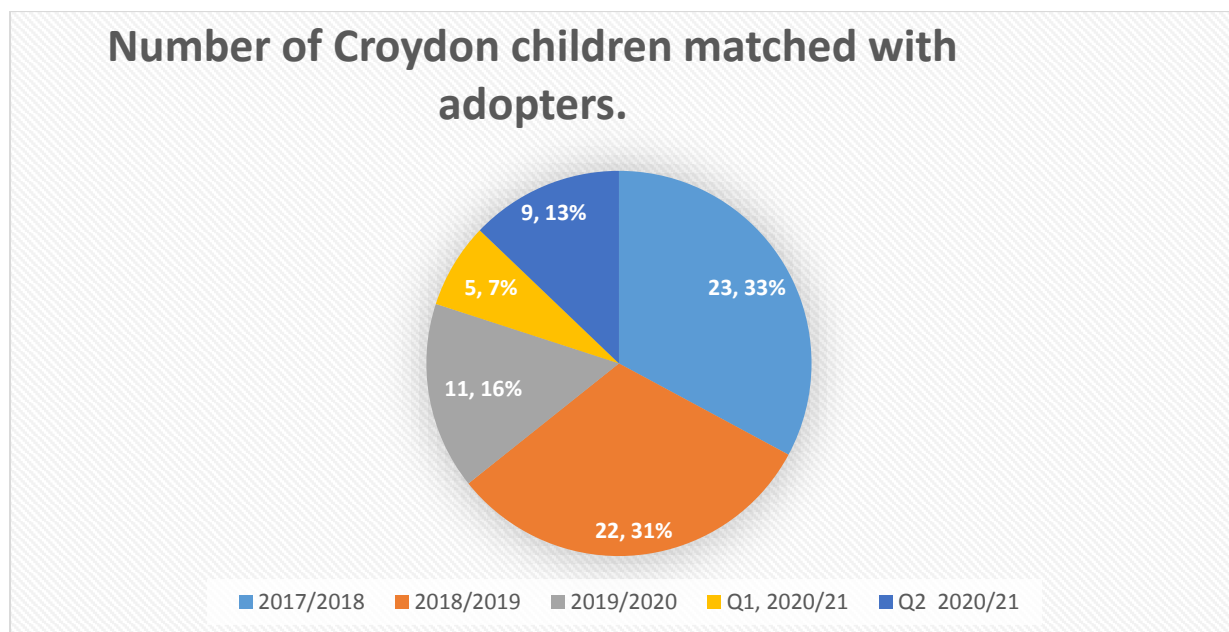
1.17 The post order support team also offers other types of support including solution focussed work, support in managing and negotiating contact,

signposting, life story work and referrals to the Adoption Support Fund which is available to children who were looked after immediately before the Special Guardianship Order being granted.

- 1.18 Financial assistance was provided by government to Adopt London South to commission additional services to support Special Guardians during Covid19. These were commissioned through Grandparents Plus at tier 2 and had the added benefit of being ongoing until May 2021 as long as referrals were made before the end of December 2020.

Adoption

- 1.19 The current process for adoption is:
- All children who enter our care have a Permanence Planning Meeting as early as possible to consider the child's plan and all assessments completed. If adoption is a possible plan, the social worker would ask the 'Agency Decision Maker' ADM to consider the information available and decide if the adoption is in the child best interest as soon as no other options are left available that would offer the child permanence.
 - The Local Authority will make an application to the court for a Placement Order.
 - Once an Order is granted Croydon Council and ALS work together to identify the best family for the child and proceed to a matching panel, this is organised by ALS. The final matching decision is made by Croydon Agency Decision Maker.



1.20 The priorities of Croydon Council and the ALS partners are :

- Decisions about placements are always made in the child's best interests;
- Social Workers making decisions about adoptions are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care;
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay;
- Fostering for Adoption to offer children early permanence placements;
- Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a high-quality specialist assessment of need;
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart services.

1.21 There are currently 4 children with a best interest decision for adoption who do not yet have a Placement Order. There are currently 12 children with a Placement Order where active family finding is taking place.

1.22 There are currently 4 children for whom applications are being made to discharge a Placement Order. Two children had their Placement Orders revoked on 3rd November 2020, they are brothers and we had looked for adopters for over a year. Two other children had their Placement Order revoked as part of an appeal and are being placed with a family member.

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- 1.23 The Local Authority have a duty to consider Early Permanence for every child. LB Croydon have had 3 early permanence or foster to adopt placements this calendar year. Early Permanence is becoming more embedded through the Permanency Planning Process and more pre-birth PPM's are taking place to consider whether early permanence is an option. This will limit placements moves and allow children to form attachment to their carers from as early as possible.
- 1.24 We are considering a number of foster carers as prospective adopters for the children in their care.
- 1.25 There are currently 14 children placed for adoption who await an Adoption Order.
- 1.26 In 2019-2020, 23 children had Adoption Order made. Since 1st April 2020 15 children have had Adoption Orders made. This appears on track with last year's figures, however there are significant delays in the court system which are leading to a longer waiting time.
- 1.27 There have been no placement breakdowns this calendar or financial year.
- 1.28 Corporate parenting duties for children placed for adoption are implemented and monitored using the following processes:
- Placement Planning Meetings taking place until such time a child has been placed for adoption, ensuring key tasks such as later life letters and lift story work are underway.
 - All children will have a CLA review within 15 days of placement with prospective adopters.
 - Their care/needs in adoptive placements will be monitored by the child's social worker alongside ALS and the Independent Reviewing Officer as the child remains looked after until the Adoption Order is granted.
- 1.29 Adopt London South had 970 enquiries for post adoption support from Sept 2019 – March 2020, of these 15% were Croydon families. In Quarter one of

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2020 there were a further 47 enquiries and in quarter two a further 30, making up 15% of the enquiries to ALS so far this year. This is therefore consistent.

- 1.30 The increase in post-adoption support may be due to a number of issues, it does not seem to directly correlate to the length of time a child was in care. However children placed for adoption at an older age, who were in the care of their birth family for longer often need a higher level of adoption support. The level of enquiries from Croydon families has been consistent since ALS became operational. It is however likely that Covid19 will lead to an increase in referrals due to the pressures of children and parents being at home without school provision.
- 1.31 Post-Adoption support can be a number of different requests from support to make an application to the Adoption Support Fund for an assessment of need to plan for a course of therapy to support in accessing the right school provision, provision of courses or a period of support sessions offered by a social worker. At present families are being Triaged to ensure those with the highest level of need are offered a service first.
- 1.32 Post-Adoption support is an area on ongoing improvement for Croydon and ALS.

Summary

- 1.33 Croydon Council work around permanence for children is improving is in line with our vision to achieving good outcomes for children in care.
- 1.34 Whilst there remains a challenge regarding the timeliness of matching there are strong indications of improvements in timeliness for the last 12 months.
- 1.35 We are committed to work with ALS to pursuing plans for adoption for children and sibling groups with complex needs.

- 1.36 We also continue to work in close partnership with the local Family Justice Board, to consider all matters regarding timeliness in matching and placement of children with a plan for adoption to make further improvements.

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 financial contributing to ALS's budget. The contribution is calculated on demand bases and linked with the number of children and adopters requiring services from ALS. For the 2020/2021 Croydon contributed 17.17% of 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

3.6. NA

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

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