

Supplementary Paper

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families Decisions

**Date & time**

Tuesday, 5
November 2019 at
9.30 am

Place

Members' Conference
Room, County Hall,
Penrhyn Road,
Kingston upon
Thames, KT1 2DN

Contact

Ben Cullimore
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Chief Executive

Joanna Killian

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This meeting will be held in public. If you would like to attend and you have any special requirements, please contact Ben Cullimore on 020 8213 2782.

Cabinet Member

Mrs Mary Lewis (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families)

AGENDA

3 ADOPTION REPORT AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2018/19

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Please note that this report was not available when the agenda was published.

The Surrey Adoption Service Annual Report (2018/19) and Statement of Purpose seek to provide members with a review of adoption services in Surrey for 2018/19, including information as to the key issues for the Service and statistical data regarding the Service's performance in key areas including:

- Timeliness of adoption for children with an adoption plan
- Surrey's performance based on the Department of Education's Scorecard
- Recruitment of adopters
- Post order support for Surrey adoptive families

This annual review will be the last before the Adoption Services of Surrey, Brighton and Hove, West Sussex and East Sussex Councils all join together to become Adoption South East, a Regional Adoption Agency, a unified entity hosted by East Sussex that will oversee adoption services for the South East region.

Joanna Killian
Chief Executive

Published: Thursday, 31 October 2019

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SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES****DATE: 5 NOVEMBER 2019****LEAD OFFICER: DAVE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE****SUBJECT: ADOPTION REPORT & STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2018/19****COMMUNITY VISION OUTCOME: People****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The Surrey Adoption Service Annual Report (2018/19) and Statement of Purpose seek to provide members with a review of adoption services in Surrey for 2018/19, including information as to the key issues for the Service and statistical data regarding the Service's performance in key areas including:

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This annual review will be the last before the Adoption Services of Surrey, Brighton and Hove, West Sussex and East Sussex Councils all join together to become Adoption South East, a Regional Adoption Agency, a unified entity hosted by East Sussex that will oversee adoption services for the South East region.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member notes the content of the Annual Report and associated Statement of Purpose.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 requires that Local Authority Adoption Agencies present regular reports of agency activity to elected Members. This report captures activity of the Surrey Adoption Service for the period April 1 2018 to March 31 2019.

DETAILS:

1. Please refer to the Adoption Annual Report (Annex 1) and Surrey Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2019 (Annex 2).

CONSULTATION:

2. This report was submitted to the Performance Leadership Team on 2 October 2019 and was approved.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

3. This report does not highlight any financial risk as it is a summary of the performance of the Surrey Adoption Service for the year 2018/19 (1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019).

Financial and Value for Money Implications

4. There are no financial implication based upon the 2018/19 review.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

5. The Council's medium-term financial outlook is uncertain as it is heavily dependent on decisions made by Central Government. With no clarity on these beyond 2020/21, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term. As such, the Section 151 Officer notes the detail in this report and the Finance team will work with the service to monitor the transition to the new Adoption South East (ASE) arrangements.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

6. The Annual Report and associated Statement of Purpose are provided for the information of Members as an exercise of the Council's children's social care functions in respect of adoption, carried out by the Surrey Adoption Service. In accordance with the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and associated Regulations, information should be provided to elected Members with regard to the activities of adoption services on a regular basis.
7. Neither document requires a decision.
8. In accordance with the above legislative requirements, following Members' consideration, both documents will be made publicly available.
9. On 9 July 2019, Cabinet approval was granted for Surrey County Council's participation in the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be known as Adoption South East (ASE) in partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, and East and West Sussex County Councils. Authority was delegated to the Executive Director for Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture in consultation with the Lead Member for Children, Young People and Families to take any action necessary or incidental to the above including entering into and signing off the Partnership Agreement and any other agreement between Surrey County Council and the participating Authorities in order for the Regional Adoption arrangement to be implemented by 2020.

Equalities and Diversity

10. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been completed as the report focuses on the performance of the service during 2018/19.
11. An EIA was undertaken in respect of the establishment of the Regional Adoption Service, Adoption South East.

Other Implications

12. The potential implications for the following Council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	Present and future Implications are highlighted below

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

13. Surrey’s Adoption Service aims to secure adoption in a timely manner for children unable to live within their family of origin, particularly those for whom the authority has corporate parenting responsibilities. It strives to offer Surrey’s children placements through adoption when this is needed, in a timely manner through recruiting a diverse pool of well-prepared prospective adopters from which to seek a match, thus achieving a positive impact for those children, and releasing foster care resources to the benefit of other children.
14. The Service also provides support to all those living in Surrey affected by adoption, in accordance with statutory responsibilities and recognition that adoption confers life-long challenges for adoptees, adoptive families and birth families.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

15. Once Cabinet approval is given, the Adoption Annual Report and Standard of Purpose will be published and made available to all who are interested in adoption through and support services provided by the Surrey Adoption Service.

Contact Officer:

Barrymore James, Service Manager – Adoption (01483 404 969)

Consulted:

Adoption Staff, Children’s Services, Performance Leadership Team

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Adoption Annual Report 2018/19

Annex 2 – Adoption Statement of Purpose (September 2019)

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Surrey Adoption Service Report – April 2018-March 2019

1: Introduction and service overview

The Adoption & Children Act 2002 requires that local authority adoption agencies present regular reports of Agency activity to Elected Members. This report captures activity for the period April 1 2018 to March 31 2019.

As an Adoption Agency we are required to comply with a comprehensive range of legislation, statutory guidance and national minimum standards and are subject to inspection by OFSTED.

Our range of activity is captured on the Service's Statement of Purpose, which is reviewed annually and published on our public facing website. In brief, however, we provide a full adoption service covering the following:

- Family finding for looked after children with adoption plans.
- Recruitment and assessment of potential adopters.
- Adoption support services for all whose lives have been touched by adoption
- Non-Agency adoption.

Surrey's Adoption Service, as is the case for all adoption agencies, is required to produce performance data for the Department for Education (DfE) and the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB). As some performance data was not available during the production of this report, some figures reported here have been sourced direct from the Adoption Team, rather than from our data performance team and from data which have not as yet been published.

2: The national context of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) and Surrey's involvement with ASE.

In July 2019, a report was submitted to Surrey's CABINET MEMBERS FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES to seek approval for Surrey County Council to enter into a partnership agreement with three other local authorities, Brighton and Hove City Council, East and West Sussex County Councils, to establish a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), to be named Adoption South East (ASE). Cabinet approval of the plan was provided.

3: Changes to the Adoption Leadership board

The national Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) was established in 2014 to provide leadership to the adoption system and drive improvements in performance. In 2018 the Board became the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), with a remit to cover previously looked after children subject to Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders. Since 1 July 2019, the management and secretariat service is delivered by Coram.

The ASGLB is made up of 12 senior officials from key organisations in the adoption and permanence system in England. This includes colleagues from local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies, the Department for Education, and independent experts.

The ASGLB is chaired by Andrew Christie CBE, who was appointed by the Education Secretary in March 2016.

4: Summary of trends in adoption

Recent data from the ASGLB suggests that overall numbers of looked after children are rising nationally, with an overall increase of 13% between 2012-13 and 2016-17, but with over 5s and over 16s, in particular, showing sharp rises. As such this would be expected to have relatively limited impact on adoption activity.

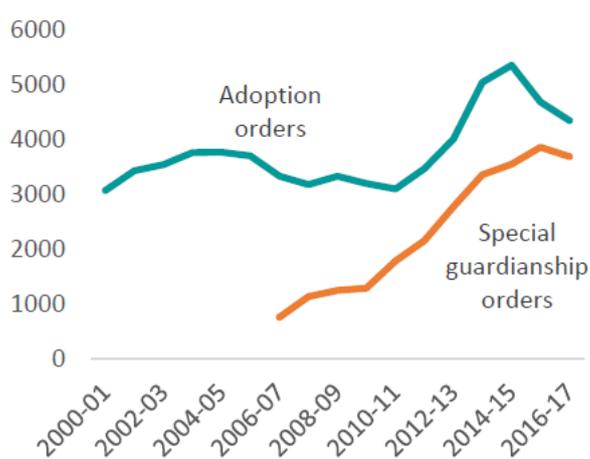
Adoption levels during 2013 – 17 are higher than any other period in the last 20 years and is largely considered to be as a result of the government at the time's ambition to increase rates of adoption, from 2012 onwards. Whilst this resulted in a temporary spike in Adoption Orders peaking at approximately 5,000 per year, two subsequent Court of Appeal decisions (Re B and Re BS) questioned the quality of decision making with respect of some adoption plans, and this appeared to reset the judicial bar with regards to endorsing adoption plans, resulting in a sharp decline in Placement Orders from 2014 (Placement Orders confer permission to the local authority to place a child for adoption.)

Following these recent peaks and troughs, there are now signs that activity is stabilising within the sector, with approximately 4,000 Adoption Orders per year being made-a small but steady increase on the pre- 2012 levels. However, closer examination shows that this is not a uniform picture, with significant divergence across the country.

5: Growth of use of Special Guardianship

Alongside this, use of an alternative legal order (Special Guardianship Order) has been rising steadily since 2012 with 3,700 such orders made in England 2016-17.

Again, however, there is wide variation across the country. Our local trend in Surrey is for a steady rise of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) - indicating a tendency to place children with connected persons and the high value placed on retaining links with the child's family of origin. This has impacted on adoption outcomes with some children who previously would have been adopted becoming subject to SGOs-which can be seen as a less draconian outcome, given that ties with the birth parents are not severed, albeit that parental responsibility of the parents is significantly curtailed.



6: Surrey children with adoption plans:

Data compiled for the ASGLB and the DfE which is used to compile the national adoption scorecards has not as yet been published at the time of this report. The data is therefore not as yet confirmed. Data used within this report consists of reporting data used for benchmarking between members of Adoption South East, the Regional Adoption Agency which Surrey is jointly developing. Much of this data reflects Surrey's 2018-19 adoption data which is to be reported by the soon to be published 2016-19 scorecard.

Data submitted to the ASGLB shows that the 56 new Agency decisions in 2018/19 showed an increase of 8% compared to the 52 Agency decisions for 2017/18. (An Agency decision means this is the local authority care plan, and this is pre requisite to the court making a Placement Order-if it accepts the local authority analysis and recommendation.)

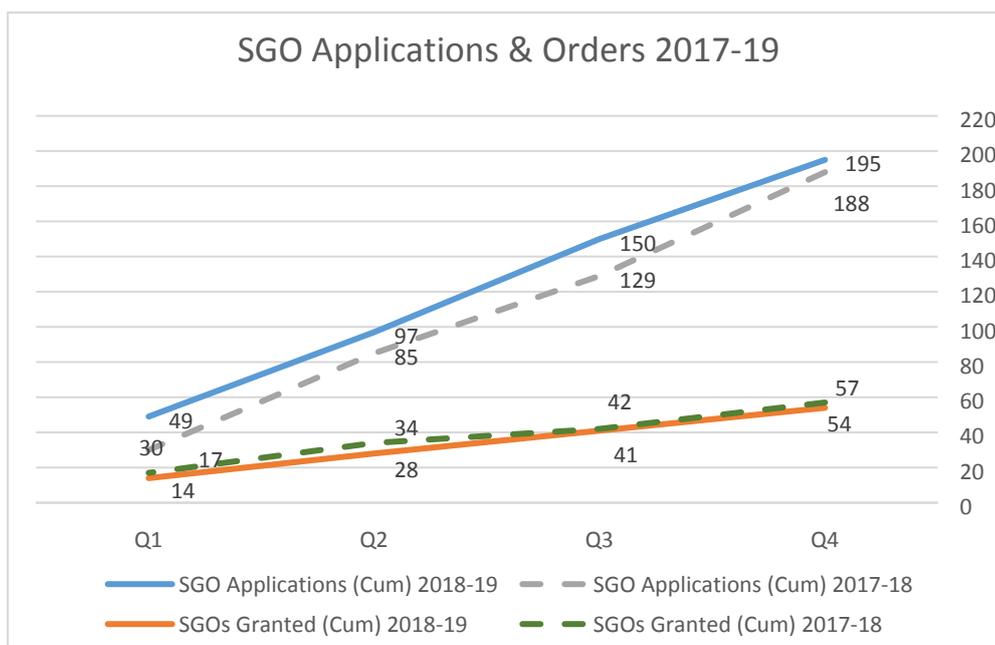
As stated in the 2017/18 Annual Report, Surrey has a relatively low number of children where an Agency decision is made and a Placement Order is granted. The reason for these low figures is in large due to demographic factors: Surrey is an affluent county, and this impacts on the numbers of children in the 0 -7 age range who become looked after-much of the increase in Surrey's looked after population is attributable to over 10s (including a rise in unaccompanied asylum seekers although this still only accounts for 0.04 % of the overall child population)-all of whom are not likely to require adoption.

For benchmarking purposes, the Department for Education lists the following as our closest statistical neighbours in descending order: Windsor and Maidenhead, Buckinghamshire, and Wokingham. ASGLB data indicates that they too have low levels of adoption compared to many other authorities.

A further factor in Surrey is the relatively high use of connected person placements-which often result in an alternative legal order (special guardianship) and a culture of moving away from adoption in favour of retaining links with the child's family of origin.

At the end of the period 2018/19:

- There were 68 children undergoing the adoption pathway, of whom 19 were by then living with their adoptive families and awaiting a final adoption hearing.
- 34 Surrey children were matched for adoption in 2018-19 (a 3% increase to the previous year), meaning that a formal decision was made by the Agency that they should be placed with an identified family following a period of introductions. The number of children placed is a slight increase to 33 matched in 2017/18.
- The number of matches which resulted in adoptive placements was 25 placements which is a 26% drop compared to the 34 children placed in 2017/18.
- A total of 25 Adoptions Orders were made, 7 fewer than the previous year which is indicative of falling numbers of Placement Orders from 2014 onwards and the continued growth of the use of legal orders such as SGO's.
- 48 Special Guardianship Orders made (from the care of the local authority) during 2018/19 which is almost similar to last year's 50 orders granted.



7: Change of plans

Although a local authority may make an Agency decision of a plan of adoption, there are occasions where the local authority may change this plan for the child.

During 2018/19 adoption plans were made for 56 children but 39 actually received a Placement Order during that period. Of the 17 children where a placement order was not granted within the year:

- 5 children did not receive a Placement Order during the reporting period due to legal proceedings still in process.
- 12 children's cases concluded with the Court failing to endorse the local authority plan, and thus driving a change of plan. 4 children were placed for long term fostering, 4 children remained with their kinship carers and the Court supported 4 children being returned to their birth parents with the making of a Supervision Order to the local authority.

8: Matching and timeliness

In 2013, the Department of Education introduced a number of national performance indicators that were focused on early permanence for children with permanent carers. These indicators will be soon be changing but at present, the key indicators that all local authorities are measured against are placed within the scorecard league table.

Currently the main **(A1)** target timescale is still 426 days (14 months) – this represents the number of days between the child first becoming looked after and the date of their being placed for adoption. As such, in order to meet this target it is necessary for both the Court and family finding

processes to be conducted effectively. Where there are delays in issuing proceedings or delay in concluding proceedings, we are less likely to meet this target.

This means that effective management of the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline, in which assessments required to assist the Court are undertaken, is critical. Even when this is achieved, not all proceedings are concluded within the statutory 26 week target with late requests for consideration by connected persons or the requirement for further assessments to be undertaken often leading to an extension of the proceedings being granted. The other variable is the time taken to secure an adoptive family and place the child, with this generally taking longer for the harder to place categories of children and cases where we need to extend our search beyond the local Surrey pool of adopters.

The secondary **(A2)** target is set at 121 days and measures the days between obtaining a Placement Order and ratifying a match between the child and a family - so this is essentially a measure of how long it took for the adoption service to secure a family. At times when the local and national adopter pools are low, this is likely to have a negative impact-especially for siblings, older children and those with complex needs. Currently this is a challenge for the sector following a downturn in recruitment activity over the past 2 years (which was itself a correction against the high numbers of adopters approved and waiting following incentives from central government from 2012 onwards to recruit additional adopters.)

A third measure **(A3)** is not a target per se, but captures the percentage of children who were adopted in the year where placement for adoption was secured within 14 months of becoming looked after. Clearly for smaller authorities, it might be expected that there is year on year variation given that the numbers of adoptions can be very small. For an authority such as Surrey where numbers are greater, we tend to see less fluctuation.

The scorecard for 2016-19 is presently not officially published, but looking at our data for the period 2015-18, it is important to take on board the variables that affect adoption agencies such as Surrey.

For A1, for example, the data shows we were outside of the DfE target of 426 for the number of days a child is in care to the point of being placed for adoption by 93 days. Local authorities that strive to consider permanence for children who may have previously stayed in the care system under a plan of long term fostering, can see this affect their A1 target, due to the time that the child or young person has been looked after up until that stage. Surrey has a number of adoptions within the 2015-18 data where the children have been in fostering placements for longer than planned while exploring permanence or where previous matches had broken down and the children had returned to their foster placement.

The present A1 indicator has therefore been seen as penalising local authorities who have been child-centred in attempting to find adoptive placements for older children, children with special needs, hard to place children who would normally have long term plans. The DfE's plan to change this measure taking on board the fostering element will therefore show local authorities such as Surrey in a far more positive light and acknowledge the good outcomes for these children.

Although outside of the DfE targets, Surrey's key indicators compare favourably to our neighbouring local authorities as can be seen below.

Summary of the Department for Education Scorecard for the period 2015-18

Comparators (England average/closest statistical neighbour)		A1 measure Target 426 England 3 year average (2015-18) 486	A2 measure Target 121 England 3 year average (2015-18) 201	A3 measure
Surrey		519	213	62
Windsor and Maidenhead	Extremely Close	509	206	44
Buckinghamshire	Very Close	583	269	51
West Berkshire	Very Close	529	138	38
Wokingham	Very Close	x	x	75
Hertfordshire	Very Close	487	231	54

Looking at Surrey's 2018/19 data gives a more accurate snapshot of how Surrey and its approach to a whole system is working for children with a plan of adoption. The 2018/19 snapshot shows that over the last year Surrey was well within the DfE targets for indicators A1 and A2 with A1 averaging at 367 and A2 at 113. Where A1 reflected the days stopping for children adopted by their foster carers at the date the child moved in with their foster carer, this showed us to be averaging this year 332 days which is 94 days within the DfE target.

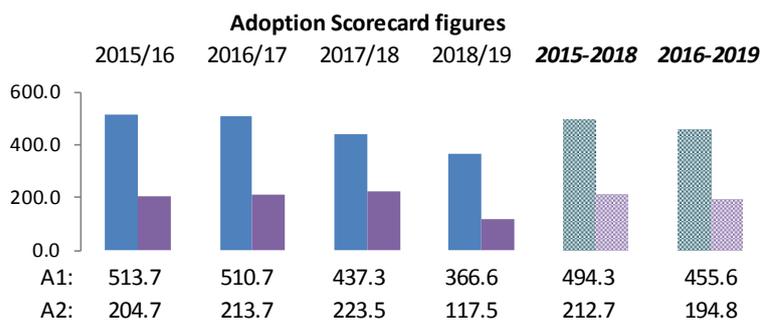
Please note that this data below has not as yet been signed off by the DfE.

2018/19 Scorecard data

Scorecard indicators:

	2018/19 Q1 - 2018/19 Q4
A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	367 days
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	332 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	113 days
A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	14 (56%)

Surrey's predicted 2016-19 Scorecard based upon Coram-I's interpretation of Surrey's Data on behalf of the ASGLB shows that the averaging of the three years of data is producing an A1 of 456 which is 30 days outside the DfE threshold target but comfortably 30 days within the national average. For A2 the data is showing a predictor of 195 which is within both the DfE threshold and national targets.



9: Characteristics of Surrey children who were adopted in 2018-9

- 16% of those adopted in the year were over 5 (compared to 29% in 2017/18)
- 20% were siblings, (compared with 51%)
- 0% had a disability (compared with 5%) and
- 20% were from a BAME background (compared with 11%)

With respect to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children above, we take a positive approach to enquirers who display understanding of the needs of children from diverse backgrounds, mindful that nationally BAME children often wait considerably longer for a family. With regards to matching children from BAME backgrounds, in line with our legal obligations, we take account of the child's ethnic, cultural, linguistic and spiritual needs and consider the ability of prospective adopters to meet these alongside all other identified needs.

This means that in practice adopters matched with our children may not always reflect the child in respect of all these issues, but they would be expected to demonstrate understanding and willingness to promote the child's needs. Given that all matches are presented to Surrey's Adoption Panel for a recommendation and only then able to proceed to introductions if ratified by the Agency Decision Maker, there are clear safeguards in place to ensure that the proposed match does take sufficient account of the ability of the proposed family to meet the child's needs.

Siblings needs are considered on a case by case basis- whilst in most instances it will be in a child's best interests to be placed alongside siblings, however the structure of many families today is increasingly complex, meaning that whilst sometimes the relationship reflects years of shared lived experience, in other instances children actually have very little if any sense of relationship to siblings who have been born and raised under different circumstances. An assessment is completed to determine whether the siblings should remain together or be placed apart.

Unless there are clear reasons not to seek to place siblings together however, we will make every effort to identify a family able to parent the sibling group, including approaching adopters who have adopted a sibling previously. However in recent times, the number of families available for siblings locally and nationally has declined, meaning that sometimes it is necessary to review plans for resource reasons - either in terms of splitting siblings and addressing their relationship and identity needs differently (through contact) or considering long term foster care as an alternative means of securing permanency.

For this reason, we have recently prioritised recruitment of adopters willing to consider siblings in recruitment campaigns.

10: Children still waiting to join a family at year end

As of 31st March 2019, 26 children with Placement Orders were not yet placed, of those 17 did not at that point have a family identified, meaning that 9 children had potential matches but were not as yet placed with their families.

The characteristics of the children waiting to be placed included:

- 4 sibling groups (a sibling group of 3 and 3 sibling groups of 2).
- 19 of the 26 are under 5 years old
- 14 are females and 12 are males
- 4 of the 26 are BAME
- 0 children have a disability.

Regular progress meetings are held in these cases and a Team Manager within the Adoption Service takes an overview of all such cases, applying a RAG rating system to each case-alerting us to the length of time a child has been waiting.

11: Use of inter-Agency placements

In order to maximise opportunities for matching children with available adopters beyond the local pool, agencies increasingly make use of adoption registers such as Linkmaker. Anonymised information can be seen concerning children and adopters who are available for matching purposes to subscribers and this can lead to enquiries and possibly matches.

The register can be accessed by both professionals and adopters-in order to stimulate thinking about possible links that might otherwise not be considered, and where a possible link is identified there is follow up through the adoption social worker with the relevant parties to explore whether the link is viable. This has encouraged adopters to become more active in their own matching process and the vast majority now opt to join one or both registers, often resulting in higher numbers of inter-Agency matches than previously.

Adopters are also able to learn about children through receipt of specialist publications, our own adopter website and through attendance at events organised by the National Adoption Register, Adoption Consortia/RAA's and aimed at promoting matching. We also work collaboratively with our ASE colleagues to provide more local events with a view to promoting matching within ASE.

Where this results in a so called inter-Agency match the placing Agency pays a fee to the receiving Agency. For a single child this would be £27,000 to reflect the cost to the receiving Agency in recruiting, assessing and supporting the family up to adoption. In 2018-9 we placed 2 Surrey children with adopters approved by other agencies and a further 11 children from other local authorities were placed with our own adopters.

12: Early Permanence

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a requirement to consider placing children with dual approved (fostering and adoption) families. This has become known as early permanence, and is now routinely considered for any child who may require adoption. Where the plan is to

place the child directly from hospital, this is known as concurrency. This is viewed as an option for children where there is a family history of abuse and where siblings for example of a new born child have been previously placed for adoption. Making use of this pathway can significantly reduce the time a child is in care and minimises the number of care givers the child has, with the foster carers potentially eventually becoming the child's adoptive parents.

However following this path involves a high level of uncertainty for the early permanence carers, who will not know if the child will be staying with them / be adopted until conclusion of the proceedings. Only when this has happened and a Placement Order has been made can the Adoption Panel consider the match.

In 2018-19, Surrey made 5 early permanence placements under fostering Regulation 25a (fostering for adoption). The outcome was that all 5 children were eventually matched for adoption. In addition, one child was placed with potential adoptive parents under fostering Regulation 24 (this enables a child to be placed with a connected person-typically adopters of a birth sibling to the child in proceedings). This placement was also ratified as a match for adoption.

In order to grow the number of approved adopters willing to consider a child via the early permanence route, Surrey has this year decided that all prospective adopters will participate in the fostering for adoption training as part of their formal training. Making the training mandatory means that all our adopters will have the information at approval to make an informed decision whether they want to be considered at the point of approval. At the present time, the majority of our adopters prefer to restrict themselves to consideration for children where the court has already agreed an adoption plan, and where the pathway to adoption will be more predictable. It is hoped that by making the training mandatory to all prospective adopters, the number willing to consider fostering to adopt pathway will increase.

13: Disruption

In the event of any placement disrupting before an Adoption Order has been made, the Service commissions an independent chair to conduct a disruption meeting to try to identify learning for the Agency, and invites the participation of the adoptive family in whatever form works for them. The report that results from the meeting is shared with all the participants and relevant parts of the Service. In 2018-19, Surrey had no disruptions occurring with Surrey children placed for adoption. Surrey has had no disruptions of Surrey adoptive placements for the last two years. During this period, 17 young people who have come into care of Surrey had disruptions from adoptive families. These young people were placed with their parents by other local authorities or their family moved into the Surrey post placement. The Adoption Service is in the process of auditing the cases of all post order disruptions for non-Surrey adoptive families, so that we can look at learning from these cases and develop planning in how we support potential adoption disruptions in the future.

14: Adopter recruitment

We endeavour to ensure that all enquirers receive a prompt and positive response, through initial information sharing online or by phone, with a focus on myth busting to encourage consideration of what the applicant can offer. Enquirers are invited to attend an information session- we deliver these fortnightly- and to meet with a social worker to discuss their individual circumstances after which they may apply to enter the 2 stage application process. We accepted 49 new applications

in 2018-19, and by the end of the period 42 adoptive households were approved, compared with 27 the previous year.

In thinking about our recruitment needs, we try to make a best estimate of the numbers of children who will receive a Placement Order in the coming year, accepting that we need more families than children in order to meet the range of needs the children will present, and to accommodate matches with children from other authorities.

We also know that some applicants will drop out during the process-having decided perhaps that adoption is not for them after all and in a small number of cases each year we decide not to continue an application as we have significant doubts about the capacity of the applicant to meet the needs of an adopted child. When this occurs in stage 2, the applicant has a right to have their case heard either by the Surrey Panel or an independent review panel although the ultimate decision concerning approval is still taken by the Agency Decision Maker. In 2018-19 we did not have any cases that took this review route.

Whilst our current maximum prediction of the number of Surrey children who will need placing in 2018-19 is **40**, we are aiming to accept registrations of interest from at least 60 applicant households to ensure that we can approve a minimum of **40** additional families on top of our presently approved families in the coming year which will help the Service in its drive to place children promptly and with reasonable placement choice. It is important that we do not just focus on numbers as a targeted approach will offer us a pool of adopters that are diverse and will hopefully meet the varying needs of Surrey's children.

In recent years, we have been pleased to see increasing diversity, including significant numbers of same sex adopters and single adopters, groups which in the past were legally excluded from adoption or underrepresented for other reasons.

Approving sufficient adopters open to parenting children of school age, siblings, children with complex needs or children from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds is always challenging, and it is important in deciding whether or not to accept registrations of interest to consider the potential for an applicant to grow in understanding and willingness to take on complexity, not least given that so many indicate a wish for relatively straight forward children at the initial point of contact.

We therefore highlight the needs of children who risk waiting longest for an adoptive family through our public facing website, our recruitment booklets, publications such as Surrey Matters and digital marketing-all supported by our local communications team.

In reality many applicants make very good use of the learning on offer and do extend their range following training and contact with families who have successfully adopted. The learning for the service over several years has therefore been that it is counter-productive to accept too few applicants based on the initial expression of interest - as the reality is that applicants underestimate their own capacity at that stage, downplaying their potential for adoptive parenting. Whilst some inevitably do drop out during the process (or may be considered unsuitable) we have learnt that it is best to start with a large cohort in order to achieve both range and sufficient numbers.

We continue to review our recruitment strategy 3 monthly, taking account of trends for children and monitoring our adopter pipeline-ensuring that we have sufficient applications tracking through each stage of the process to give us the desired number of adopters.

Characteristics of adopters approved in 2018-19

- 3 single applicants approved (all female),
- 6 same sex households (5 male and 1 female)
- 7 families from BAME backgrounds
- 7 families approved with a birth child
- 6 families approved with an adopted child and 2 with a child under SGO
- 3 foster families approved for children whom they had been fostering (two for 1 child and one for 3 children)
- 2 families were approved with a view to a specific early permanence placement (sibling to child already in the household)

15: Adoption Support

Although research shows that adoption breakdowns are generally low compared to the number of adoptive families nationally, the support that families are wanting post order is growing. Prior to the Department of Education establishing the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), adoptive families were feeding back to government that accessing therapeutic support was often difficult, very much a lottery depending on where they lived and there were relatively few services providing the trauma and attachment based interventions most suited to the needs of adopted children.

In response to this the Department of Education established an Adoption Support Fund (ASF) administrated by Mott McDonald. The aim of the fund is to enable children adopted from care to access timely and specialist therapeutic support by distributing £19 million a year. The funding is applied for on a case by case basis, by the child's local authority. This follows an assessment of adoption support need and identification of an appropriate service provider. Initially the fund was intended only for children whose adoptions had been finalised, although this was later extended to children placed with adopters but not yet formally adopted. It has also now been extended to children subject of Special Guardianship Orders and children adopted from overseas. Funding for the ASF is presently confirmed up to March 2020. Future funding of the ASF is to be looked at in the Government's Spending Review which is to occur in the autumn of 2019.

Local authority adoption agencies have a statutory duty to conduct an adoption support assessment and complete a support plan prior to placing a child with adopters. We then review this pending the adoption being finalised in court. A re-assessment of the child, their parent's needs or the needs of a sibling can be requested at any time during the child's growing years. For families approved by other agencies but living within Surrey, this responsibility lies with the local authority for the child. This is the case until three years post order when it then becomes the responsibility of the local authority where the adopters live.

For many adoptive families in Surrey, the request for post order support starts with informal adoption support through the Adoption Service, including support groups for children and their parents, therapeutic parenting training, and family events. Where identified needs are higher, or of a more specialist nature, then the above adoption support assessment is a gateway to additional targeted support from the adoption service, our specialist CAMHS or an independent provider (with ASF funding.)

In 2018/19 Surrey received 111 requests from adoptive families for an assessment of support. 65 families joined the 149 families who in 2018/19 received provision funded via the ASF. At the end of the March 2019, 43 families were still in the assessment process or awaiting a decision if funding was to be approved.

16 Contact following adoption

The majority of children placed for adoption continue to benefit from some form of contact with people from their past-whether this is a parent, siblings, a grandparent or their former foster carer. Whilst some contacts can be managed independently by the families, in most instances some support is required to enable the contact to happen successfully.

Accordingly we operate an adoption post box which has nearly 600 open case files managing several thousand exchanges of information annually (a single child may have exchanges with several birth relatives more than once a year.) At the age of 18, we write to the young person to ask whether they wish to continue to receive information and if they would be willing to manage this themselves.

Where face to face contact requires our support either to make the arrangements (to preserve the confidentiality of the adoptive family's identity and location) or to help the participants manage the actual session, one of our family support workers provides this help. We currently have just over 35 such cases.

In many other instances families are happy to manage contact independently-often where this involves siblings placed in more than one adoptive family.

Where needs change and more support is required we are able to review the arrangements with the parties involved and hopefully enable them to agree a way forwards.

17 Finance

Under adoption legislation (Adoption and Children Act 2002) adoption allowances can be paid if children meet the threshold criteria for an allowance (e.g. children who have exceptional needs such as a disability, significant emotional needs, large sibling groups, or to enable a person known to the child to offer them permanency) The adopters undergo a means test, in order to determine whether they qualify for payments on the basis of need. All allowances are reviewed annually.

Currently Surrey is paying adoption allowances to 87 families in respect of 117 children, 3 less than in 2017/18. Some allowances are paid for a time limited period, perhaps to enable a parent to remain 'at home' during the child's early years. In other instances, the allowance might continue up to the child leaving full time education because they have enduring and additional needs that are likely to result in additional expenditure.

The majority of allowances are means tested to ensure that they are targeted where they are most needed, and an annual review is conducted accordingly.

18 Adult Adoptees

We continue to receive a high volume of enquiries and service requests in respect of historical adoptions-mainly from adoptees wishing to learn more about their past, or perhaps to initiate contact with relatives from the family of origin (intermediary work.)

Activity is always high throughout the year, peaking at times when adoption reunions are featured in the media. Last year we received 183 new enquiries from adopted adults, resulting in most instances in support that may continue over a period of time whilst records are accessed and then shared -often the search for records is complex given that most were created by what are now long defunct adoption agencies.

This is sensitive work which provides us with a reminder that adoption is a lifelong issue for adoptees, even when their adoption experience has been a positive one. The work in this area was managed mainly by a full time specialist worker, with assistance from our referral and information officer. This is to change in September 2019 with this work being managed by two part time social work adult specialists and a part time family support worker with adult services experience. One of the social work posts is presently being recruited.

19 Birth Relatives

We have a duty to provide a service to relatives who face losing children to adoption or who have previously experienced the loss of a relative to adoption. 29 referrals were received by our birth relative worker during the year from children's teams, involving parents, siblings and grandparents. Information and support is provided and where appropriate counselling can be arranged from a specialist counsellor.

In addition, we supported over 70 birth relatives to maintain contact with the adoptive family of their relative providing assistance with writing letters for post box exchange.

20 Intercountry adoption assessments

We no longer provide an assessment service for Surrey residents who wish to adopt a child from overseas given that this is a highly specialist service accessed by a small number of people annually. We instead contract a service with the Inter Country Adoption Centre (IAC) in London, who provide advice, guidance and assessment to such residents for which they pay a service charge directly to IAC.

21 Non Agency adoption

We provide a service to applicants wishing to adopt a named child, not placed by an adoption Agency. Most of these cases involve a step parent who wishes to assume legal responsibility for their partner's child. This is a significant legal step which severs the child's legal relationship with the other birth parent. Accordingly the court requires a comprehensive welfare report and balanced analysis of the case for and against adoption in order to reach a decision that takes account of all available options.

We received 107 initial enquiries during this period and provided a counselling interview to 25 applicants to support them with thinking about their available options-in most instances there are legal alternatives to making a step parents adoption which would meet the child's needs well, avoiding the need for what can be a lengthy and intrusive process. 10 orders were made as a result of applications made to court for adoption orders.

We additionally provide a service to a small number of children annually who were adopted overseas following assessment of the adults by IAC (see above) and whose adoption orders are not recognised in the UK, requiring a non-Agency adoption application to be managed through our own domestic courts.

22 Service user involvement:

We continue to meet with adopters quarterly to discuss service development, produce a quarterly adoption newsletter, and consider training needs. Adopters are gradually making more use of Yammer which is a closed membership social media application which uses a format similar to Facebook. This is open to both prospective and approved adopters as well as all adoption staff to discuss various subjects within groups such as education, post order support, children needing placements and general news and information about adoption.

We continue to support an adopter lead initiative 'meet the adopter' sessions during stage one of the application process, enabling first hand experiences of adoption to be shared with new applicants. This has gone from strength to strength and is much appreciated by applicants.

Approved adopters giving the 'adopter's hands on point of view' is now an established part of the training that Surrey offers to prospective adopters. This continues post approval with experienced adopters becoming buddies for newly approved adopters when this is needed and offering advice on their experience such as with older siblings or working with children with special needs for adopters who are considering similar matches.

23 Practice hubs:

We continue to operate practice 'hubs' within the service whereby our staff members can develop special interests

- Stage 1: initial adopter recruitment and the first stage of the adoption application process.
- Training: providing preparation for becoming an adoptive parent, and post approval training.
- Family finding: identifying families for children at greatest risk of waiting for an adoptive placement
- Adults affected by adoption (adult adoptees and birth relatives)
- Post order support for adoptive families.

Membership of the hubs enable staff to take on specific responsibilities in accordance with their grade and experience.

24 Adoption Panel:

The Adoption Panel meets twice monthly on alternate Tuesdays, with added sessions added as needed to avoid delays for children. The purpose of the Panel is to:

- Make recommendations with respect of adoption of voluntarily relinquished children (we had only one case in the past year).
- Make recommendations with respect of approval of prospective adopters

- Scrutinise proposed matches between Surrey children and prospective adopters

Since April 2011 we have maintained a 'central list' of panel members in line with Adoption National Minimum Standards. Under adoption Regulations, the Panel must be chaired by an independent member, the current chair is David Goosey following his appointment in 2014. The non-voting Agency adviser role is filled by Jill Nancolas, one of the managers within the Adoption Service. A medical adviser also sits as a full member of the panel.

Legal advice is provided in writing to the Panel by the corporate legal team, but advisers do not routinely attend Panel meetings. Social workers from each of the 4 areas also sit as panel members as it is a requirement for there to be social worker representation at each panel, as well as independent members.

Independent members all have a personal interest in adoption, and include adoptees, and adopters. In selecting independent members, we seek to achieve a diverse representation of people with different backgrounds and life experience. All our panel members display considerable commitment to the Panel, not least given that each panel meeting they attend requires several hours of reading before the meeting.

Applicants and social workers that attend Panel meetings have an opportunity to complete a questionnaire to feed back on their experience of the panel process, which is shared with the Panel and informs the annual appraisals of Panel members.

Any general themes or trends in relation to quality assurance of work presented to the Panel are discussed with the Agency through the Quality Adoption Forum of which the independent chair is a standing member. This ensures that there is satisfactory communication between the Adoption Panel and the Agency.

25 Feedback and learning:

The Service endeavours to be a listening and learning service. We therefore seek feedback at key points in the service users journey with us, notably at information events, following adopter preparation and attendance at Panel meetings, and we have introduced a further feedback loop following the making of Adoption Orders to gather feedback from both the adults and where possible the child too in order to continue to improve the service.

As highlighted above, we have an active service users group which meets quarterly and this provides helpful insights into the user experience as well as suggestions and help with service development.

26 Complaints and learning

The adoption service received 8 complaints, all of which were resolved at stage 1 of the Council's Complaint's process.

27 Conclusions and looking to the coming year

In summary, 2018/19 has been the beginning of change for the Service, whilst at the same time the continuation of the Service striving to build on its good outcomes of finding families for Surrey children and recruiting families all within a timely way. In terms of changes, there has been a number of staff who for various reasons have either left, planned to retire or reduced their hours in preparation to retire in the near future.

In terms of service management, Suzanne Chamber, the long standing Service Manager for Adoption, took on the role of Project Manager for ASE and has been steering the work to create the new entity, Adoption South East, on behalf of Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. While Suzanne is focused on the development of ASE, Barrymore James, an interim manager, was appointed in April 2019 to support the Service with day to day management and support with the future transition and structural changes that Surrey adoption services will go through in becoming part of the new regional adoption service.

Placing children in a timely manner continues to be our highest priority, underpinned by effective ongoing recruitment of prospective adopters and timely and effective support. Working together with our colleagues in ASE will produce systems to have a unified and consistent approach and strategy that will over time result in a larger pool of adopters that will meet the needs of Surrey and the other members of the ASE.

With the drive to see more children placed and placed quickly, we will continue to monitor timescales and work with other services to try to ensure that both decision making and family finding keep the child at the centre. This will be challenging during the transition but again only a collaborative approach with a clear system of engagement between ASE within Surrey and Children Services is likely to bring improvement for our children. By doing this we will continue to ensure that there is good liaison with the front line social work teams to identify opportunities for early permanence and encourage more prospective adopters to consider this option. We will also continue to provide training to front line colleagues on writing good quality later life letters and work with colleagues to ensure that consistency of quality is improved. The adoption management group has also participated in the Children Service's audits of all children entering the care of the Surrey helping to monitor the quality of all that we do as a service.

A further priority is to ensure that our prospective adopters continue to be well prepared and receive good quality training and support that does not end at approval. We already offer a regular programme of post approval training, but over the coming year ~~plan~~ will be reviewing this and refining our training offer, looking for opportunities to innovate where possible. With Surrey becoming part of ASE, it is hoped that the pooling together of skilled trainers and resources will mean that Surrey adopters will benefit from training that may be available at other ASE hubs. The potential for a regional training programme for adopters is exciting and the possibility of putting together innovative training programmes, which presently we would have to be purchase externally, shows the potential for the joined up working of the new Agency.

Finally, with support and placement stability in mind, we will continue to build strong partnerships with our specialist post order CAMHS service and the Early Help and Family Support Services to ensure that the range of support available to adoptive families is accessible, relevant and comprehensive, where possible evolves based upon need and at all times is child and young person centred.



Barrymore James

Interim Service Manager

Surrey Adoption Agency Statement of Purpose

2018-19

1) Introduction

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 require Adoption Agencies to provide a clear annual statement of the aims and objectives of the service and our strategy for meeting these.

This statement provides details of:

- Service Aims and Objectives
- Service overview
- Activity
- Management structure, numbers, qualifications and experience of the staff
- Quality assurance and external monitoring mechanisms
- Arrangements for the handing of Complaints
- Arrangements for revision and circulation of the statement.

2) Service aims and objectives

Surrey's Adoption Service aims to secure adoption in a timely manner for children unable to live within their family of origin. We also provide support to all those affected by adoption, in recognition that adoption confers life-long challenges, for adoptees, adoptive families and birth families.

Our aims are informed by the following principles:

- Adoption is one of a range of permanency arrangements.
- In matching children with prospective families, the child's welfare is paramount.
- Practice is informed by the best available evidence.
- Promotion of early permanence
- We match both with Surrey families and families approved by other agencies.
- Support is available throughout the child's growing years and beyond.

- Enquiries are welcomed from a diverse range of families
- Enquirers receive a professional, timely and respectful response
- Matching is undertaken in a holistic manner, considering the ability of the proposed prospective adopters to promote the child's needs throughout their childhood.
- Surrey adopters represent a valued resource for our own children and children from other placing authorities

4) Service overview: we provide

- Family finding for children in need of adoption.
- A range of post order services -for families who have adopted.
- Assessment of adults wishing to adopt a child from care (Agency adoption)
- Assessment of adults wishing to adopt known children under a non-Agency process
- Counselling and support services - for adopted adults
- Support services for birth relatives- of adopted children

5) Family Finding:

We find families for children in need of adoption, whether this is a result of a request from the birth parent(s) for the child to be adopted, or more typically because a Family Court has given agreement to place the child for adoption.

We aim to settle a child in a permanent home as quickly as possible, given that this helps to secure positive outcomes for adopted children.

Timeliness is actively monitored both in terms of the average time taken for a child to be placed in an adoptive family, and on a case by case basis.

Holistic matching

We know that children from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds often wait longer to be placed in a family, so we adhere to current adoption guidance, enabling children to be placed within a family that can support their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious needs, without the requirement that the family must match the child in every respect.

Siblings

Children are placed with their siblings, unless there are clear indications that this would not be in their best interests, mindful that for most children this is a life long relationship which confers considerable benefit.

Whilst finding a family for a larger sibling group is challenging, family size and limited placement options should in themselves not be a reason to move prematurely to planning to place siblings separately.

Where there is a belief that placement together is in the children's best interests, it is important to make every effort to find a family that can provide this.

For some, however, early neglect and abuse can result in developmental trauma, with long term implications for the child and parent. This means that careful consideration is needed, looking at both the risks and benefits of placing the children together.

Where it is considered to be in the best interests of children to grow up in separate households from their siblings, contact between siblings placed separately is actively promoted.

Interagency placements

Given the need to ensure that children do not wait longer than absolutely necessary, we will look beyond Surrey where necessary, making use of placements provided by other local authority adoption teams and voluntary adoption agencies.

Family finding process

The child is assigned to a specialist worker from the Adoption Service to work alongside the child's own social worker to identify a family. The family finder meets the child and their carer and together they create a profile of the child's personality and needs.

Where the child is of an age to express their wishes and feelings, these are incorporated into the child's profile, which is circulated to other adoption agencies and made available at events such as regional adoption exchanges-designed to bring the children to the attention of potential adopters. In recent years, children and potential adopters have also attended adoption activity days with their foster carers with the aim of encouraging 'adopter lead matching'.

Use of a national adoption register, Adoption Match, and a second commercial register, Link maker, also provide opportunities for children to be matched with adopters beyond their own local authority area or pool of approved potential adopters.

Foster carers who wish to adopt a child in their care

Where foster carers express interest in adopting a child in their care this is carefully considered. Research indicates that these placements based on an existing relationship often are amongst the most successful. 4 children were adopted by their foster carers in 2018/19.

Activity for the period April 2018-March 2019

34 looked after children from Surrey were matched with adopters, 25 were placed in new families, and 25 adoption orders were made in this period. (There is always a delay between a child being placed in an adoptive family and then formally adopted. This is because of the need for a settling in period, hence some of the adoption orders reflect placements made in the previous year when more placements were made).

23 children were placed with adopters approved by Surrey and 2 with adopters approved by another adoption Agency. A further 11 children from other local authorities were placed with adopters approved by Surrey, meaning that a total of 36 children were placed with our adopters.

9 children were placed with siblings, and 6 children were adopted by adopters who agreed to care initially under fostering regulations, enabling the children to join what might become a permanent family earlier than could be achieved otherwise.

6) Post Order Support Services:

Adoption is a life-long issue for the child, and for both their adoptive and birth families. This is reflected in the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005, which consider the needs of various groups of people whose lives have been affected by adoption.

Adoptive families

Following the making of an adoption order, we review the need for an ongoing social work service, and agree any updates needed to the adoption support plan for that child. Many families choose to remain in contact informally with the Agency following adoption, through attending regular training or family events, and adopted children may attend one of a number of groups we run.

We provide a monthly drop-in for our adopters, with the facility to book a one to one slot for confidential advice. This type of support is available to anyone caring for a child adopted from care and living in Surrey and does not require an assessment of need.

In addition, many adopted children and their families receive targeted help following an assessment. Examples include help to manage direct or indirect contact on behalf of their child with members of the child's birth family, or financial support on a one off or regular basis where this is needed to enable the family to meet the exceptional needs of their child.

We also support young adopted people with regards to accessing and managing their adoption story, or in managing relationships at home or in school.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser

The Children and Adoption Act 2014 requires local authorities to ensure that adoptive families are aware of their entitlement to request an assessment of support needs following adoption, and we currently publicise this through our public facing website, regular newsletters sent out to over 600 adoptive families on our mailing list and also via a secure adoption website, to which access is given to approved adopters and those undergoing assessment.

An Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA), currently Debra Hale, assisted by our Referral and Information Officer, acts as a point of contact for those affected by adoption and seeking advice about support services.

The ASSA accordingly provides information, advice and signposting to relevant support services including partner agencies such as health, education and voluntary sector services.

Eligibility for support where another Agency acted as the placing Agency

Adopters caring for children placed by other agencies (or who move into Surrey) remain the responsibility of the placing authority for the first 3 years following the making of the Adoption Order. A placing Agency may, however, seek advice from the ASSA as regards accessing local support services on the child's behalf. Following three years from the date the order was made, responsibility for assessing support needs passes to Surrey, assuming that the family continues to live here.

Adoption Support Fund

In May 2015 access to a government funded Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was opened out to local authorities in England to enable them to apply for funding for therapeutic services following an assessment of adoption support needs. This has enabled the Service to increase access to support following placement in an adoptive family services, through commissioning independent providers, in addition to the offer of in house support or referrals to a specialist post order CAMHS service operating within the Surrey and Borders Partnership.

7) Assessment Service for adults wishing to adopt a child from care.

The Service aims to recruit a pool of adopters to meet the needs of looked after children with adoption care plans. We review our recruitment needs every 3 months, mindful that these can change over time. In communicating these needs to the general public, we aim to be transparent about the additional challenges involved in adoption, whilst encouraging enquirers to think about how adoption could enrich both their own and a child's life.

Recruiting families for children likely to wait longest for a family is generally a priority; typically these include: children over 4, siblings, children with health issues, developmental delay or uncertainty, children with complex emotional needs and children from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

Initial enquiries

Up to 25 new enquiries are received a month via our web page or telephone. All enquirers are responded to within 2 working days, and the enquirer offered an opportunity to attend a Readiness2adopt session; held twice a month at our offices involving a brief presentation, followed by an interview with a social worker.

The purpose of the sessions is to inform the enquirer about the needs and characteristics of adopted children. We hope that this will enable the enquirer to make informed decisions as regards the following:

- Is adoption for them?
- Is Surrey the right Agency for them to seek to register interest?
- Is this the right time for them to register interest?

We also apply some general eligibility criteria

- Residence: we will consider non Surrey residents in exceptional circumstances, particularly if they are wishing to consider a child from any of the priority groups
- Applicants can be single, married, in a civil partnership or be an unmarried couple (same or opposite sex)
- There is no upper age limit, but applicant(s) must be aged 21 or over,
- They should be domiciled or habitually resident in the UK
- They should have no declared specified offences against children or convictions which might indicate unsuitability to work with children or vulnerable adults. (Formal checks are made later if the Agency accepts an application.)
- The applicants should not still be undergoing fertility treatment or investigations of fertility. (We generally consider that a minimum of 6 months should have elapsed since the last treatment.)
- We consider applicants who have children living as part of their household on a case-by-case basis.
- The applicant(s) need to be able to commit to having a parent at home full time for a minimum of 6 months following placement of a child for adoption.
- Health and fitness levels mean that they could meet the needs of a child through to adulthood
- We follow current evidence based guidance from BAAF on the detrimental effects of passive smoking for children under 5 and children with respiratory problems. We will refer any enquirers wishing to be considered for these children to their general practitioner with a view to working to the goal of cessation for a minimum period of 12 months before they seek to register interest.
- We are currently considering the emerging evidence base as regards the impact of e cigarettes.
- Enquiries are welcomed from single applicants and those applying as a couple (irrespective of whether the relationship is one that is legally recognised or whether it involves a same sex or different sex partnership).
- The applicant(s) should be settled in their accommodation, with suitable and sufficient accommodation for a child to be placed
- Applicants should be willing to engage with the assessment process including background checks.
- Applicants need to demonstrate childcare experience or be willing to extend their experience or obtain this.

Following the initial meeting enquirers receive a brief report for comment and amendment. They can then request to register interest in pursuing an application. We are not obliged to accept a registration of interest, but if we decline to take things further, we will provide reasons, and this may result in further dialogue and possible review of our decision.

Typical reasons for declining a registration might be that we do not have need of adopters for the age range or characteristics that the enquirer is most interested in, or we lack capacity to offer an assessment. Where we do not have capacity, we may signpost the enquirer to another adoption Agency. In other instances, we may decline to register interest where there are ongoing life events or commitments that mean we do not think this is the right time for the applicant to start the adoption journey.

Assessment

Those accepted progress to a 2 stage process. The initial stage lasting 2 months is adopter lead, and consists of the adopter furthering their knowledge about adoption, providing further information about themselves, through a series of self assessment tasks and undergoing background checks including a DBS check.

Whilst in the main, a case by case approach is taken with regards to any offences, our eligibility criteria does preclude offences involving children and we have an expectation that applicants are open and forthcoming with us as regards this, and indeed all other aspects of their application. A medical is also undertaken by the applicants' own GP and reviewed by our medical adviser.

On completion of stage one, the Agency reviews all the information held and determines whether or not to progress the applicant to stage 2, which is adopter lead and results in presentation of a completed assessment to the adoption Panel. Stage 2 should be completed within 4 months.

We agree a plan at the outset of both stages, to enable applicants to know what is expected and how we will work with them.

Bringing adoption to life

Applicants attend a preparation course held at our Woking offices. The learning style is informal, involving a high degree of applicant participation, and days are themed as follows;

- The adopter journey
- The child's journey
- The joining of the ways
- The lifelong challenges of adoption

The facilitators provide feedback on the applicant's participation, which is used to inform assessment, and applicants also complete their own reflections on the experience and what they feel they have learnt.

As part of any assessment, process visits are also arranged to foster carers and experienced adopters to hear real life stories. We also facilitate a monthly 'meet the adopters' session for applicants. Applicants are invited to visit our fortnightly adoptive Parent and Toddler group, providing additional opportunity to meet adoptive families and hear about the role that peer support plays in adoption.

Applicants and the assessing social worker work together during stage 2, with some meetings taking place in the applicants' home, others in the office. Adoption stories are used throughout to enable the applicants to consider the needs of children we place for adoption and to think about what life after adoption might entail. The result is a comprehensive prospective adopter's report, seen and commented upon by the applicants.

In practice, applicants contribute significantly to their reports. The assessment is overseen by a manager and a manager's report is also provided to the Adoption Panel. Where there is need of a second opinion to lend weight to the social worker's recommendation or to provide an independent view on any issue, this is arranged in order to assist the Panel.

In the few cases where the Agency is unable to support an application, it has the option to present either a full or a brief report to the Panel, detailing its enquiries and the reasons for its concerns. The applicants are always invited to attend the Panel meeting and present their own views.

Adoption Panel

Surrey has an Adoption Panel which draws on a central list of members, as required by the Adoption Agencies Regulations and National Minimum Standards. Panels must be quorate when they meet with a minimum of 5 members present including the Chair. Panels make recommendations as follows:

- Whether to approve applicants as prospective adopters
- To review approval where there has been a significant change of circumstances
- To consider whether a child should be placed for adoption in the event that there is a request from the child's birth parent(s) for the child to be adopted

- To consider proposed matches of children with prospective adopters
- To hear cases of placement disruption and consider learning
- To hold regular reviews of Agency activity, including updates on children or potential adopters presented previously.

In accordance with the Regulations, National Minimum Standards and statutory Adoption Guidance we have appointed an Independent Chair and Vice Chair. We also appoint a non-voting Panel Adviser to provide advice and support to the Chair and Panel.

Additional voting members include:

- Medical Advisor
- County Councillor
- Independent Members
- Children's Services Representatives

The independent members include a number of adoptive parents, with lived experience of the adoption process and members who were themselves adopted as children.

All Panel Members undergo an application process including the taking up of references and DBS checks. In accordance with National Minimum Standards, they are required to have annual appraisals and the Agency must maintain files for each Panel member which can be made available for inspection by Ofsted. Annual training is provided.

Legal and medical advice is made available to the Panel, and the Panel can make use of additional advice as required from other disciplines. The Panel is assisted by an administrator, who provides detailed minutes from each Panel meeting.

The Panel meets most weeks in order to ensure that there is no delay in cases being heard.

Applicants are given the choice whether to attend Panel meetings. In recent years, it has been the case that all applicants have elected to attend and this has been considered very helpful by the Panel, enabling them to gain a fuller sense of the applicants and what they have to offer our children.

The Panel has three options available: to recommend that the Agency accepts the application, that it rejects the application or to defer the application for additional information. In all instances, the practice of Panel is to provide the applicants with verbal confirmation of the recommendations following its deliberations on the day, with the proviso that formal ratification of the recommendation is required.

The Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker, a senior member of Surrey Children's Services, decides whether to ratify the Panel's recommendation, taking account of all the available information including the minutes of the Adoption Panel meeting. The decision is then confirmed in writing.

In the event that the Agency does not approve an application or decides not to complete a partially assessed case, the applicants have the choice of seeking a further determination by a review Panel (see IRM) or Surrey's own adoption Panel.

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

The Independent Review Mechanism was launched on 30th April 2004. It is currently operated by CoramBAAF on behalf of the Department of Education. The IRM provides a review of the information considered by the original Panel, plus any additional information the applicants think is relevant. No cases were referred to the IRM last year.

Review of approval

All approved adopters who have not had a child placed with them within 12 months of their date of approval are required to have an annual review of their approval. This is completed internally within the adoption service, unless there has been a significant change of circumstance or the approval is of 3 years duration, in which case a fuller review is required and must be presented to Panel.

Following approval

The adoption worker remains in contact with the family following approval, and a matching plan is agreed to look how the prospective adopters and Agency can work together to secure a match.

There is a regular training programme provided, and adopters are expected to continue in their learning and development pending matching and following placement of children, in recognition of the additional challenges that adoptive parenting brings. As such, we try to ensure that adoption remains a 'live' issue following the end of the application process. Sessions typically run most monthly and are held in the evenings as part of a rolling programme.

The subjects are selected to build on the earlier training, with sessions such as: Introductions, Attachment, Related by Adoption (for friends and family of adopters), Matching, Social networks and adoption, Use of the post box, Contact and Life story books.

Matching with a child

We are notified of any child in Surrey where there is consent given for adoption (this might be provided by the birth parents or, more typically, the Family Court following care proceedings.) The Agency Adviser maintains a list of all families currently approved by the Agency to adopt and meets with the child's social worker to identify a family best able to meet the child's needs.

As such, there is no waiting list whereby adopters are matched on the basis of length of time waiting. In practice waiting times vary considerably, influenced by the numbers and needs of children available for adoption and the range of acceptance of the waiting adopters.

The adoption worker discusses any potential match with the family, thus starting a process of information sharing, designed to help all involved to think about the merits and possible risks of the proposed match. As part of this information sharing, the prospective adopters meet the current carer, our medical adviser and any other professionals involved with the child. We also organise an opportunity to see the child-typically at a distance to check that they wish to commit to the next stage.

Only when both the family and the professional network are satisfied about the match and a support plan has been agreed, is the match then formally considered by the Agency-which seeks a recommendation from the adoption Panel and ratification by the Agency Decision Maker.

Matching with a child from another local authority

Adopters are not restricted to adopting from their home authority, and so called 'adopter lead matches' have become increasingly common. We currently are working within an informal partnership with colleagues from Brighton and Hove City Council, and East and West Sussex County Councils. This means that in practice we are likely to approach those agencies first when we need a placement and vice versa.

Adopters can express interest in children from other local authorities following attendance at adoption events and having searched registers such as the National Adoption Register and Link maker. As with local matches, the priority when managing inter agency enquires will be to ensure that the adopter under consideration is able to meet the child's needs throughout childhood

Moving into the new family

The child's social worker and foster carer carefully prepare the child to move onto their new family, using story books and a welcome book which has been made by the adoptive family.

A planning meeting agrees a plan for introductions of the child to its new family, typically over 10-14 days with a review midway to check that things are on course and that everyone remains committed to the plan.

Regular visits are required under Adoption regulations following an adoption placement, weekly for the first 4 weeks of a placement, with a looked after child review held within the first 28 days

of placement. Visits to the family are usually shared between the adoption worker and the child's own social worker during this period.

Working with the local authority

When placed in the new family, the child is still formally a looked after child and as such prospective adopters share parental responsibility with the local authority, and to a limited extent, the child's birth parents.

The local authority will delegate authority for day to day decision making to the prospective adopters under an agreement made prior to the child moving in. This enables the prospective adopters to act in the role of a parent, pending the finalising of the adoption, typically some months later.

The child's progress within the placement is monitored by their social worker who continues to visit the child regularly. This continues until the adoption order has been made. In some instances, additional support may be provided, dependent on individual circumstances such as provision of financial support, visits from a family support worker, or therapeutic help.

Role of the Court

At such time that the family and the Agency are of the shared view that the child no longer needs to remain a looked after child, the family are encouraged to make an application for an adoption order. The timing of this is discussed at the child's looked after child reviews - which happens at prescribed intervals-within 28 days of placement, thereafter 3 months later and then 6 months after that.

The Court cannot consider an application for an adoption order before the child has been in their new home for at least 10 weeks, and in practice the timing of each application varies. When the time is right however, applicants are assisted to submit their application, and briefed as regards the court process.

Birth parent's views as regards the adoption application are sought, and some exercise a right to seek leave to oppose the making of an adoption order, perhaps hoping that the child can be returned to their care. The court applies a 2 stage test to any such application-considering whether there has been a change of circumstances for the birth parent sufficient to warrant consideration of the application and also the welfare of the child.

Approvals

We approved 42 applications in 2018-19, including heterosexual couples, single adopters and same sex couples.

We are pleased to see an increasingly diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds reflected in our approvals, which is helpful given the needs of our children.

8) Non Agency Adoption:

Non agency adoption is a service to families applying to adopt a child who was not placed by an Adoption Agency. Applications are generally driven by the wish of somebody who already is caring for a child to formalise the relationship through adoption.

This service is mainly accessed by step parents, and relatives wishing to adopt a child of their family following placement under a private arrangement. However, we also work with inter country adopters who have adopted a child overseas where the adoption is not recognised in the UK.

With children to be adopted from abroad, there are additional visiting and reviewing requirements as specified under the Adoptions with foreign elements Regulations 2011.

All non-Agency adoption applicants are required to give the local authority 3 months notice of their intention to make an application for an adoption order, and this provides a window for counselling and information gathering, ahead of the need to respond to a request for a report from the Court.

As with agency adoption, extensive checks are made, with other agencies and personal referees. Applicants undergo Disclosure and Barring Service checks, and for most a medical examination is also required.

The service then provides a comprehensive report to the Court. This must include consideration of the welfare checklist as set out in primary legislation, i.e. the social worker is required to consider how the making of the order will impact for the child in the present and in future years. They must also consider whether there are alternative legal arrangements which could better meet the child's needs and the impact of the order for the applicant, the birth parents, and the wider family network.

9) Adopted adults can access the following:

- Birth records counselling.
- Support and advice to adoptees in relation to adoption records held in the Surrey archive, or with regard to accessing alternative registered intermediary services
- Access to independent counsellors
- Access to a monthly support group
- Signposting for Intermediary services for adopted adults

10) Birth relatives affected by adoption can access:

- A specialist Birth Relative Parents worker,
- Counselling via a service level agreement with an independent adoption support Agency
- Assistance with maintaining contact through facilitated meetings or through the Surrey post box with their child's adoptive family, including assistance with letter writing if this is needed.

11) Quality Assurance and performance monitoring

We monitor the quality of our work in a variety of ways:

- Adoption Panel provides feedback on individual cases to the operational teams.
- A Quarterly Adoption Forum acts as a strategic interface between Panel and the Agency.
- Twice yearly Annual Adoption Agency Reports and updates are provided to elected members.
- We submit quarterly data to the Adoption Leadership Board-a national body set up to monitor performance and drive improvement in the field of adoption. We consequently receive an annual 'Scorecard' from the Department of Health based on this data.
- Ofsted inspects the Agency three yearly-most recently in 2018 where adoption services in Surrey were rated as 'good'.

12) Feedback from service users

Feedback mechanisms for service users are built in to all key stages of the adoption process and have recently been revised to improve opportunities for young people to be give feedback on the service. In addition, there is an active focus group for service users which meets quarterly and provides feedback on service delivery and development.

13) Management and staffing (See appendix 1)

The Service is managed within the Care Services part of Countywide Services, which forms one arm of Surrey Children's Services

Joanne Rabbitte was appointed as the Assistant Director for Children's Resources on the 1st of October 2019 and has strategic oversight of the service. She holds a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and a Post Graduate Management Qualification.

Suzanne Chambers, Service Manager is the operational and policy lead for Adoption and registered manager following appointment in 2010. Suzanne holds a B.A. (Hons) Psychology: awarded by the University of Durham in 1981 and a MSc Social Policy and social work studies

and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work from London University (L.S.E.) awarded in 1987 as well as a Diploma in health and social care management level 5 (2013).

4 Full Time Equivalent Team Managers complete the management team, each holds functional leads as well as providing regular supervision to staff.

Casework and group work functions are provided by 15 full-time equivalent Social Workers, assisted by 4 Assistant Social Workers. The team is also supported by a dedicated team of business support staff. In addition the following are commissioned by the Adoption Service:

- Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel - David Goosey
- Adult psychotherapist -1 day per week provides consultation for adopters and carers
- 4 educational psychologists-all seconded to the team for half a day per week.

All social workers are appropriately qualified for their posts and registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council. A high percentage hold post qualifying awards such as the Child Care Award, or higher degrees and many have additionally undertaken specialist courses/training including Practice Teaching, Diploma in Adoption and Attachment, Counselling, Play Therapy, and Theraplay.

A satisfactory enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS, previously known as CRB) check is required for all staff, including business support workers, employed within the Service.

14) Complaints

The Adoption Service adheres to the Council's corporate complaints procedure. All service users, as a matter of routine, are given a copy of Surrey's complaints leaflet. A children's guide appropriate for the age and needs of the children we work with is provided, either directly to the young person or their carer.

Complaints relating to children are handled under the provisions of the Children Act 1989, further defined in the Representation Procedure (Children and Young Persons) Regulations (1991) and extended via the introduction of the Children and Adoption Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) 2003. In addition complaints can be made to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

15) Revision and circulation

This statement has been produced by managers of the Surrey Adoption Service in consultation with staff and users of the service, in compliance with National Adoption Standards and the relevant Adoption legislation. Members of the Children's Social Care Executive will be asked to formally approve the Statement, (the revised Statement is presented to Members annually for their approval).

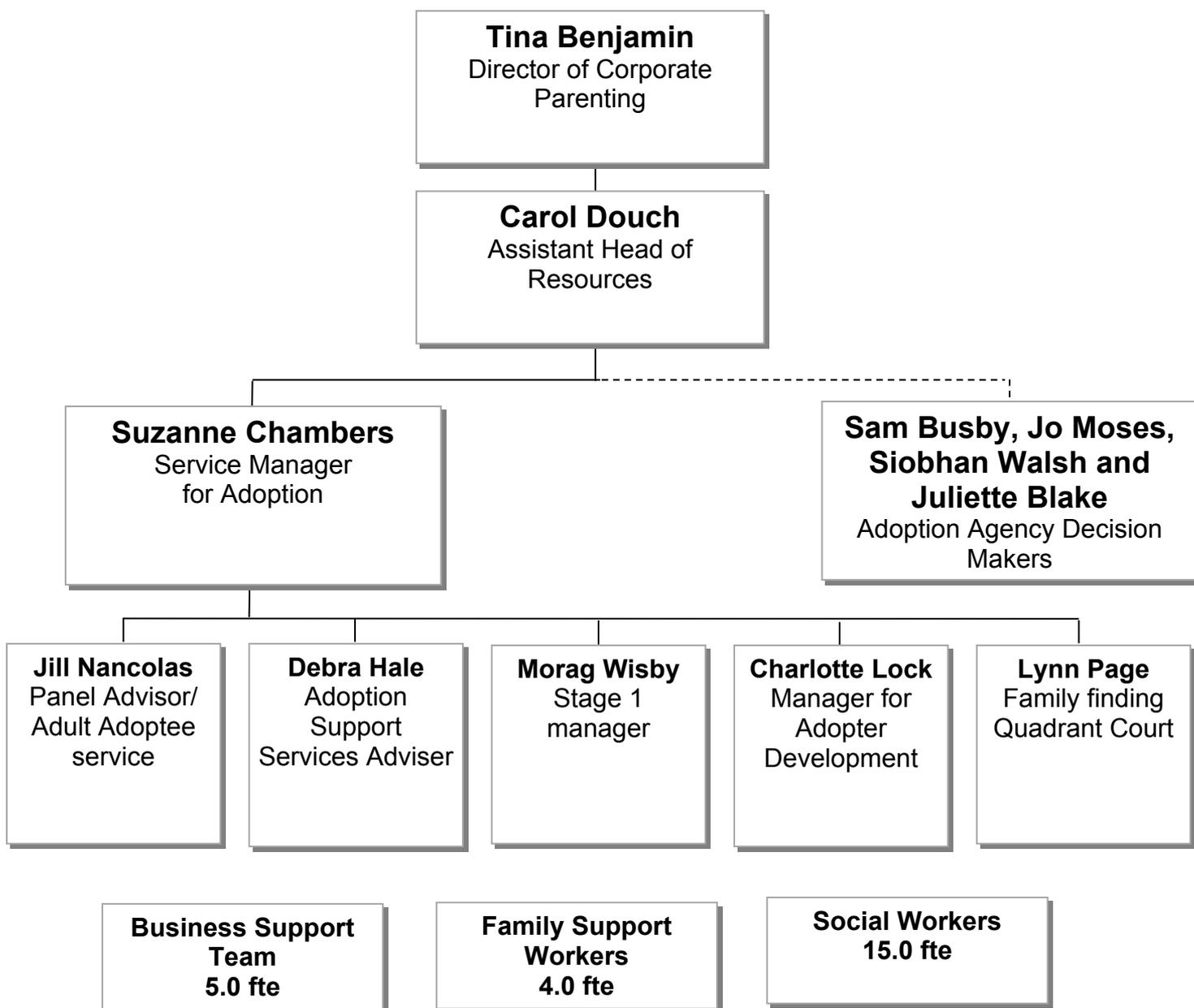
The Service Manager is responsible for ensuring that the Statement is updated or modified when necessary, but at least annually, and that a copy is provided to OFSTED.

The Statement will be provided to:

- All staff including independent specialists engaged in the adoption process.
- All current and prospective adopters and permanency carers.
- A copy of the statement of purpose is posted on the Adoption pages of the Surrey County Council website

APPENDIX 1

Management Structure



Adoption Assessment Services

Person being assessed	Services for which they are entitled to be assessed						
	Services to enable discussion of matters relating to adoption	Assistance in relation to arrangements for contact	Therapeutic services	Services to ensure the continuation of adoption relationship	Services to assist in cases of disruption	Counselling, advice and information	Financial support
Agency adoptive child	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	
Adoptive parent of an Agency adoptive child	◆	◆		◆	◆	◆	◆
Child of adoptive parents				◆	◆	◆	
Natural parents or guardians of an Agency adoptive child	◆	◆				◆	
A relative (or someone with whom the Local Authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of Agency adoptive child		◆				◆	
Intercountry adoptive child			◆	◆	◆	◆	
Intercountry adoptive parent				◆	◆	◆	
Natural sibling of an adoptive child		◆				◆	
Non-Agency adoptive children, their parents and guardians						◆	
Prospective adopters						◆	
Adopted adults, their parents, natural parents and former guardians						◆	
A relative (or someone with whom the Local Authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of a non-Agency adoptive child						◆	

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