

Surrey County Council

Adoption Agency

Report

2013

## Introduction

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The Adoption & Children Act 2002 (implemented Dec 30 2005,) requires that Local Authority Adoption Agencies present regular reports of agency activity to Elected Members. Following recent amendments to adoption regulations, and new national minimum standards and statutory guidance issued in April 2011, reports are now required to be provided twice yearly. This report and the statistics contained within it capture the period April 1 2012 to March 31 2013.

In accordance with the new requirements we therefore propose to provide a further mid year report in December 2012 capturing activity in the first 6 months of the 2013-2014 reporting period.

## Context

The Adoption Agency operates as part of the Countywide Services (Children's Social Care.) As such, we are sited within the Directorate of Children's Schools and Families, Children's Services and Safeguarding under the leadership of Strategic Director Nick Wilson and Deputy Director, Caroline Budden. In common with all agencies concerned with promoting the wellbeing of children under the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda, we reference activity against the 5 ECM outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. As an Adoption Agency we are additionally required to comply with the following legislation, standards and associated regulations:

Children Act 1989

Children Act 2004

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Care Standards Act 2002

National Minimum Adoption Standards, Adoption Agency Regulations and Department of Education Adoption Guidance-all updated in 2011

Restrictions on writing adoption report regulations 2005

Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003

Adoption Support Services Regulations and Standards 2003

As a regulated service we are subject to inspection by OFSTED, the last inspection having taken place in June 2011, with the outcome that we were rated as 'good with outstanding features'. 3 recommendations were made which have since been addressed, namely to write and implement an education policy for adopted children, to ensure that the views of young people inform service delivery and to ensure that birth parents are informed verbally within 2 working days of Agency decisions in relation to adoption.

The Adoption Agency operates within the framework of Equal Opportunities legislation and Surrey County Council's Equal Opportunities Policy – the Agency does not discriminate in any way on the basis of race, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or age in relation to staff and service users and we have recently completed an Equalities impact assessment to ensure that our practice is consistent with this.

## Service Overview

Surrey provides a busy and thriving Adoption & Permanency Service covering the following areas of business:

- **Recruiting adopters and carers** who can offer legal permanence to Surrey's looked after children, or children placed from other local authorities.
- **Family Finding** for children in need of legally permanent placements

- **Adoption support services** Support services range from financial allowances to therapeutic services and support groups for their carers.
- **Non-agency adoption.** Assessment and preparation of welfare reports for the Court in respect of proposed adoption arrangements, which were not made by an adoption agency.
- **Kinship Care services** i.e. Assessment and support services to promote 'kinship care' arrangements for children who are subject to public law proceedings.
- **Services for birth parents whose children have been placed for adoption.** This is required by the Adoption & Children Act 2002, which places on the Local Authority a duty to provide a service to all parties affected by adoption.
- **Facilitating contact** between birth families and children placed for Adoption or Special Guardianship where it is deemed appropriate.
- **Operation of a 'post box' service** whereby birth families and their adopted children can exchange letters, photographs etc. with the adoption service acting as an intermediary in order that confidentiality can be maintained.
- **Inter country adoption** - non agency adoption welfare reports (as discussed previously) and post placement reports to the child's country of origin
- **Services to adopted adults:** the Adoption & Permanency Service undertakes a significant amount of work with adopted adults. The law allows any adopted adult over the age of 18 who wishes to trace their adoption records and/or family of origin to contact their local adoption service
- **Support to relatives of adopted adults** In addition to adopted adults being able to access information and request assistance to make mediated contact with their family of origin, birth relatives of children adopted in the past, who may now be adults, can now approach us for a similar service which is provided by the Adoption & Permanency Team.

## National context: the Adoption Action Plan and Family Justice Review

March 2012 saw the publication of the Adoption Action Plan by the Department of Education. This was preceded by the Family Justice Review- published late in 2011. Jointly, they inform the current policy context.

Adoption regulations and statutory guidance were revised in 2012, with further revisions in 2013. This resulted in the first instance in the removal of the role of adoption panels in scrutinising children's adoption plans. This change was driven by a wish to avoid duplication of decision making (between panels and courts) so from September 2012 the role of the panel became restricted to recommending adopter approvals and matches between children and adopters. As a consequence, Surrey now operates a single adoption panel on alternate Tuesdays.

Progress is being made nationally with regard to reform of the family courts, under the leadership of Lord Justice Ryder which will result in a unified system of courts hearing children's cases. Meanwhile the recent Children and Families bill contains provision to require that care proceedings are completed within 26 weeks from 2014. This is expected to ensure that children's care plans are not delayed by lengthy proceedings, and for those with adoption plans the goal will be earlier placement in their new families with associated benefits of improved placement stability and positive outcomes.

Although the 26 week limit has yet to come into law, local courts have implemented this from this year and this has had an impact on the Adoption and Permanency Service as we provide assessments for court about the suitability of relatives who would like to be considered as permanent carers under a special guardianship arrangement) These assessments are subject to very tight timescales, and the need to ensure that these are met alongside undertaking adoption work is challenging.

Revisions to Care Planning Regulations have also been made to require local authorities to consider placing children with dual approved carers i.e. approved both to foster and adopt. This enables children to live with a family who can offer adoption earlier in the process than is usually the case and we have been pleased to see the first such approvals recently.

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Adoption performance of local authorities is monitored by the Department of Education through League Tables and an annual Scorecard—see performance section of this report.

The current Adoption Scorecard has 3 main measures: the time a child spend being looked after prior to joining a new family (Surrey average is 565 days –looking at the period 2008-11,) the time taken from the court decision to endorse adoption as the care plan and placement in a new family (Surrey average is 182 days) and finally the percentage of children who were placed in a new family less than 21 months from first becoming looked after, (Surrey -69%) As such, Surrey meets the current thresholds as set by the Department of Education.

Surrey has also elected to submit quarterly data on these measures through a Voluntary Adoption Survey conducted by Ofsted. This contributes to the national picture of adoption, as well as enabling us to track our own performance throughout the year, pending the annual publication of the Scorecards in November.

Mindful that adoption is not the only means by which children exit care, we are pleased to report that special guardianship is increasingly used in the County to promote permanency, with this activity now also being captured in the scorecard. Special guardianship is now routinely considered if a foster carer wishes to make a legal commitment to a child in their care, or as an alternative to adoption if friends and family carers have been assessed as able to provide safe care.

In line with the Adoption Action plan, the adult adoption pathway will be streamlined from July 2013. New adoption regulations and statutory guidance have recently been published with the objective of achieving more approvals, over a shorter assessment timeframe. Given a national shortage of adopters, and concern that children wait too long to be placed in new families there will be a requirement on local authorities to recruit with national needs in mind, rather than focussing purely on local need.

This will challenge us therefore to produce more adopters than in the year just ended, in the expectation that any surplus adoption placements would be sold to other authorities. (A one off ring fenced adoption reform grant will be provided in 2013-14 to support the extra work that will be needed to increase the overall number of adopters nationally).

A National Adoption Gateway has recently been created as a source of initial information for would be adoption applicants that will help to identify adoption agencies within the applicant's area.

The result is a fast moving landscape, with many challenges to deliver on alongside maintaining 'business as normal'.

## Local Activity

### Children

Activity has been brisk, given continued high levels of children being taken into care. With over 800 looked after children by the end of the reporting year we saw correspondingly high numbers of adoption care plans for 0-7 year olds, with an average of 5% of the total looked after population placed for adoption over the reporting period.

Adoptive placements were identified and ratified for 52 children by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013, with many more provisional matches already identified and booked into adoption panel for matching by that date.

All but 2 children were placed following legal action on the part of the local authority, which is a reflection of modern day adoption. Very few birth parents now request adoption for their children, but in

the few instances where they do it is possible to achieve placement within much shorter timescales given there is no court process to follow, ahead of our placing the child with prospective adopters.

31 children moved into new families by themselves and 21 children moved as part of a sibling group last year. Whilst generally it is considered best to seek placements of siblings together, in some instances the children's care plans are for separate placements. The reasons for this can be wide ranging: sometimes there are older siblings living elsewhere - in adoptive or long term foster families who could not accommodate a further child, or the needs of the children may be different or in conflict with each other, prompting a decision to seek separate placements.

It is also generally recognised as being in the best interests of children to seek families who reflect their ethnicity and cultural, spiritual and linguistic backgrounds as they are in a position to enable the child to assist the child to develop an appropriate sense of identity. Taking account of the difficulties encountered in achieving exact matching however, we consider the need to promote their identity and culture alongside all their other needs. In doing so, we hold in mind the primary need for a family and resist the thought that the child should wait for an indeterminate length of time for a perfect match-which might in all reality not exist Taking this approach has meant that all our children have an equal chance of placement within the national minimum standard timescales.

As a measure of timeliness of adoptive placements, over 80% of children adopted in the period moved to live with their new family within 12 months from the Agency deciding that adoption should be the care plan,) with over 75% majority meeting a more stringent 6-month standard.

Sadly the placement of one child placed for adoption disrupted prior to the adoption order being made, in cases such as this the child is returned to local authority care and the care plan reviewed. A meeting is also convened to look at the reasons for the placement ending, and to try to identify learning. In this instance there has been a change of care plan, recognising that for the young person concerned that adoption would not meet her needs.

At year end, we were still family finding for a number of children. These were children whose adoption care plan was made late in the reporting cycle, or whose needs were such that the search for a family was more protracted. Regular progress meetings, chaired by assistant team managers from the Adoption and Permanency Service and attended by the child's current carer and social worker are held to review measures to identify a family, thus ensuring that they remain very much in our minds. Family Finding activity is directed by the individual needs of the child, but typically we would be looking at how to bring the child to the attention of as many approved adopters as possible, within and beyond Surrey.

For example we have developed a booklet featuring 'waiting children' which has been very effective in encouraging adopters to see the child and think beyond their original acceptance range. This has resulted in several matches which might otherwise not have been achieved. It has also meant that in this period fewer children were placed with adopters from other agencies. We have since extended this approach by featuring the children on a secure web site to which Surrey adopters are granted access.

We also seek matches through various other routes including the National Adoption Register-which links families with children across the UK, and adoption exchanges which are attended by both placing agencies and prospective adopters seeking a match. From 2014, we hope to run adoption activity days at which prospective adopters will meet children in need of adoption following successful piloting of this method of family finding by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering in the Midlands.

Where a match is agreed between a Surrey child and adopters approved by another agency, a fee is paid to that agency. Alternatively, we sometimes find ourselves receiving a fee if Surrey adopters are matched with a child from elsewhere. This means that when Surrey adopters chose to adopt children from other authorities we are able to recoup our costs with respect of the time and investment needed to prepare assess and approve the adopters, as well as future costs (for supporting these placements.) In these cases the placing agency remains responsible for any adoption support needs assessed within the first 3 years following adoption, but thereafter if the family continues to live within Surrey the responsibility shifts to Surrey.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 the fee structure has been equalised between voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) and local authorities (LAs) at £27,000 per placement, with reductions applied where siblings are placed together.

## 6 Trends and challenges: Children

As in previous years, children with health and developmental uncertainty and children whose emotional and behavioural needs are high also feature in the 'harder to place' category. Experience and research shows that children whose health needs are particularly high are often 'claimed' by foster carers who have already formed a close relationship.

These often are very successful placements, not least because there is no element of fantasy about the child, which can be the case when adoption by strangers takes place. We aim therefore always to explore whether the current carer is minded to request consideration, and think creatively around removing obstacles such as lack of resources, which might otherwise deter the carer from offering permanency.

### Post placement challenges

Many children placed by the team had complex needs such as a physical disability, chronic illness or developmental delays, many have birth parents suffering from learning difficulties or health conditions which may have hereditary implications. Some children placed were born opiate dependent or suffering from the effects of heavy alcohol use by their parents during pregnancy, and their future needs may be uncertain. Prospective adopters therefore have to be prepared to accept a degree of uncertainty with regard to the future development of their children, and as an agency we need to be very forthright about the risks and challenges, as well as the rewards of adoptive parenting.

We are also aware from recent research and our own practice experience that attachment difficulties feature significantly in any cohort of children placed from the care system. Our children usually have been exposed to the detrimental effects of trauma and or neglect, both of which compromise early attachment experiences. Although removal from the home environment ensures physical safety, the emotional impact of these experiences continues long beyond this time, and in spite of most children having little conscious memory of the neglect and abuse.

Having recruited and approved adopters, we then need to support them. The child's needs are considered prior to the making of the order, and appropriate services put in place. Some services such as access to our adoption parent and toddler group, the monthly drop-in and training events are open to all adopters, others including a social work service are targeted, following an assessment of need.

Following adoption there is statutory entitlement to a reassessment of needs at any time during the child's growing years, and last year we provided 57 such assessments leading to provision of a variety of services or referrals to partner agencies.

In addition, we supported contact arrangement for a large number of families where contact with members of the birth family is regarded as in the child's best interest. Contact can either be face to face (direct) or a letter exchange via the Surrey adoption post box service.

### Finance

Under adoption regulations (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 or special guardians 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 in respect of over 200 children . These encompass children who might have been placed for adoption at any time over the past 18 years. 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.

Special Guardianship Allowances in respect of over 160 children are also paid, and given that special guardianship is a relatively new legal order dating from 2005 we are expecting to see year on year rises to costs in this area as new orders are made.

We continue to financially support just under 60 children placed under residence orders. This represents a small decrease as this order is now used rarely as a consequence of the availability of special guardianship which has become the order of choice for most foster carers and relatives offering legal permanence.

## **Developments**

Last year we entered into a joint funded partnership with a voluntary adoption agency (After Adoption) under which a training and support programme can be offered to up to 20 families a year. We consider this will be a very valuable addition to the existing range of support services for our families.

We have developed a policy regarding education for adopted children in line with National minimum Standards for Adoption, and are developing a working relationship with the Surrey Virtual School

We have also offered a series of social events for adoptive families, and have started up a social group for adopted children aged 8-12 years, with a new teenage cafe project starting this summer.

We continue to have an effective and vocal service users group, who meet with us quarterly and take an increasingly active part in service delivery-participating in the production of a newsletter, information, training and social events.

A secure website for adopters-went live earlier this year and has provided an additional platform for us to communicate with adopters and to bring children waiting for families to their attention through Dvd clips.

## **Adopters**

43 families were approved by the team, 5 more than the previous year. Week by week the number of families ready and waiting for a child varies, however from a relatively low resource base in 2010-11 we have successfully increased numbers over the past 2 years and are planning to increase capacity further over the coming year with 5 intakes of applicants across the year in 2013-14, and 6 the year after.

In so doing, we hope to continue to ensure placement choice for most children referred to us, as well as respond to the call from central government for local authorities to recruit beyond their own local needs in the interests of enabling more children nationally to benefit from adoption.

Most enquiries we receive are in relation to one or two children of up to 5 years of age. The majority of applicants were childless, with a smaller number with one or more children of their own

Some of our approved families had been reassessed for a second child having adopted through us previously, and a number were foster carers who wished to claim a child they were caring for through adoption.

The average age of an adopter in Surrey is 45; this is in line with the national average, and the reality that there is no upper age limit for adoption so much as a need to focus on the health and wellbeing of applicants.

## **Adult adoption pathway**

From 1<sup>st</sup> July we will be offering weekly appointments for anyone interested in adopting with us. This is in response to a new requirement for adoption agencies to provide detailed information within 10 working days. This will enable enquirers to spend time with a social worker, and obtain information to help them decide if they wish to register interest with Surrey.

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Checks and references will be taken up and a medical performed following our having accepted an 'expression of interest' and forms the first of the 2 stage process. Within part one, applicants will be expected to undertake their own independent research and attend an information event (lead by adopters) before the agency makes a formal decision about whether or not to progress them to a second, more intense stage lead by an allocated social worker. Stage 2 if successfully completed results in presentation to the adoption panel for a recommendation of approval.

As with the current process, we will expect to see some fall off in numbers over the 2 stages -for a variety of reasons, some adopter lead and in a small number of cases a concern on the part of the agency that the applicant does not have the qualities or understanding needed for adoptive parenting.

For those families who having been approved we provide the option to join the National Adoption Register whereby they can be considered for children outside Surrey after 3 months. This can be a means by which adopters who may not readily be a match for local children –perhaps because of their ethnic background or faith can adopt without too long a wait.

### **Appeals**

If adopters are not approved at Surrey's Adoption Panel following assessment, the applicants are entitled to appeal via Surrey's own internal appeals system or via the Independent Review Mechanism (known as the IRM) an appeals system set up by central government in 2003 and currently operated by the British Agency for Fostering and Adoption. In the period covered by this report there were no Surrey cases heard by the IRM.

Adoption matters that are not within the remit of the Adoption Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism are handled via Surrey's official complaints system.

### **Adult Adoptees**

We continue to receive a very high volume of enquiries and service requests in respect of historical adoptions-mainly from adoptees themselves who wish to learn more about their pasts, or perhaps to initiate contact with relatives from the family of origin. This is sensitive work which provides us with a necessary reminder that adoption is a lifelong issue, even when the adoption experience has been a positive one.

The work in this area is managed mainly by a full time specialist worker, and a part time colleague with assistance from family support workers and the referral and information officer. Activity is always high throughout the year, peaking at times when adoption reunions are featured in the media..

### **Birth Relatives**

We have a duty to provide a service to relatives who have lost children to adoption, with many referrals coming during the course of care proceedings in relation to parents who are in need of support but would not chose to seek this via their child's worker. In addition, we support relatives who come forwards seeking support years many years later, whether this is through direct provision or signposting to counsellors. In some instances team members will offer practical assistance such as helping to write a letter to the family who have adopted the child.

### **Staffing**

At the close of 2012-3 the team was fully staffed albeit that we had some staff absences owing to maternity leave, the staff group being comprised of:

1 Team Manager (the responsible individual)



1 Agency adviser

3.5 full time equivalent Assistant Team Managers

17 full time equivalent Social Workers, all whom are qualified for their posts and registered social workers with the Health and Care Professionals Council.

1 post adoption support worker (who is trained in counseling but not a qualified social worker)

3 FTE Assistant Social Workers

1 Referral and Information Officer

In addition the following staff are commissioned by the Adoption Service:

Independent Chair of Adoption Panel,

Psychotherapist for consultation with carers.

A high percentage of our staff hold post qualifying awards and higher degrees. Specialist courses/training undertaken include Child Protection, Management, Practice Teaching, Child Care Award, Diploma in Adoption and Attachment, Counselling, Play Therapy, and Theraplay.

## Panels

### The Role of the Adoption Panels

- Recommendations-with respect of approval of prospective adopters
- Recommendations of proposed matches between individual children with adopters
- Consideration of disruption reports on placement breakdown
- Consideration of the quarterly review of Agency activity

Since April 2011 we have maintained a 'central list' of panel members, in line with new Adoption National Minimum Standards. This ensures that we can offer sufficient panels for all the cases that need to be heard without incurring delay. Panel currently operates on alternate Tuesdays, with additional sessions added where the volume of business requires this. Independent member Judy Wright chairs the panel, supported by 1 vice chair who is also an independent member.

The agency adviser role (required under adoption agencies regulations) is filled by Jill Nancolas . A medical adviser also sits as a full members. Our legal child care team provides legal advice to the panel, but do not attend panel.

We have also been fortunate to have committed participation throughout the reporting year from our elected member representative, and we believe their participation creates a helpful link between Service and the Executive.

Social workers from each of the 4 areas sit as panel members, as it is a requirement under Adoption Agencies Regulations for there to be social worker representation at each panel, as well as independent members. Independent Members all have a personal interest stake in adoption, and include adoptees, adopters and a birth parent. In selecting independent members we seek to achieve a diverse representation of people, with capacity for sharing their experiences. We are aware however that this an area in which we need to do more to ensure that the panels are truly representative of the community they serve. All our panel members display considerable commitment to Panels, not least given that each panel meeting they attend requires several hours of reading before the meeting.

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

It is panel policy to ensure praise is given when appropriate, and to give any criticism as constructively as possible. All social workers that attend have an opportunity to complete a questionnaire to feed back on their experience of the panel process (similarly applicants also provide feedback which is regularly reviewed by panel)

## 6 Communication

There is an expectation that there is a regular dialogue between the panels and the Adoption Agency as regards both day-to-day business and also standards and service development, and that the panel chair provides reports to the Agency reflecting its independent position.

The Quarterly Adoption Forum instigated in 2011 is attended by senior managers in Children's Services, Adoption Team Manager, Adoption Panel Advisor and Adoption Panel Chair.

Regular business meetings between the panel chair and the adoption team manager ensure that the panel process operates effectively

### Feedback

The service endeavours to be a listening service and to elicit feedback at key points in the service users journey, notably at information events, following adopter preparation and attendance at panel, and we are introducing a further feedback loop following the making of adoption or special guardianship to gather feedback from both the adults and where possible the child too once the final order has been secured.

Feedback is sought following any supported contacts between adopted children and their birth relatives, and where children and young people are provided with direct work.

As discussed previously we have an active service users group which meets quarterly and this provides helpful insights into how the user experience and service development.

We received 8 complaints from service users. It is not uncommon for complaints to be received following a negative outcome from an assessment, whether in relation to adoption or special guardianship. Whilst decisions in relation to assessments are not in themselves considered grounds for complaint (as there is a court or panel process to examine the evidence the assessing worker has collated and analysed), we will look at any issues raised about how the assessment was conducted and the outcome communicated. We have recognised that there have been some inconsistencies in this respect within the service.

5 cases were upheld last year in part or wholly, including one complaint concerning delay in reviewing an applicant's health status. Three complaints concerned data breaches, and finally one case involved communication and support following a placement not going ahead.

Where the Service accepts fault an apology is issued with an explanation, and corrective actions taken.

### Conclusion

This has been a challenging year for the Adoption Agency set within the context of a fast moving policy context, public debate and increased levels of scrutiny in what is already a highly regulated area of children's social care.

Reforms set in motion by the coalition government will challenge the Adoption and Permanency Service, frontline teams and the Independent Review Unit to ensure that care planning for children is of the highest order, with the objective of achieving permanency for a child at the earliest possible point in time. This will only be achieved by joint endeavour and partnership with the Judiciary.

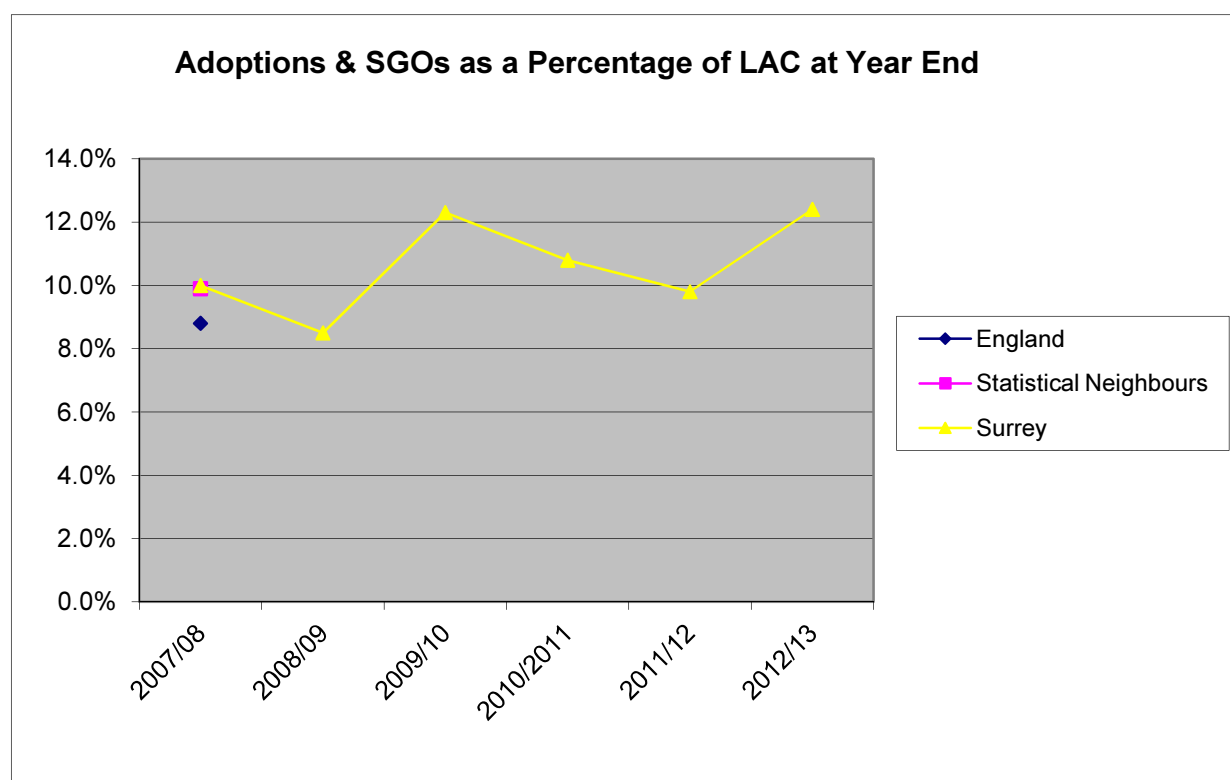
Establishing and maintaining working protocols which stretch across traditional working lines will be essential to the success of this, and require engagement at a high strategic level. We believe however that we are in a good position to meet these challenges, and look forwards to developing closer understanding and cooperation with colleagues who share our objectives of ensuring that children in

need of adoption are able to join well prepared and supported families in shorter timescales than is presently possible.

## Adoptions & Special Guardianship Orders – Notes on Performance to March 2013

### 1. Orders Granted

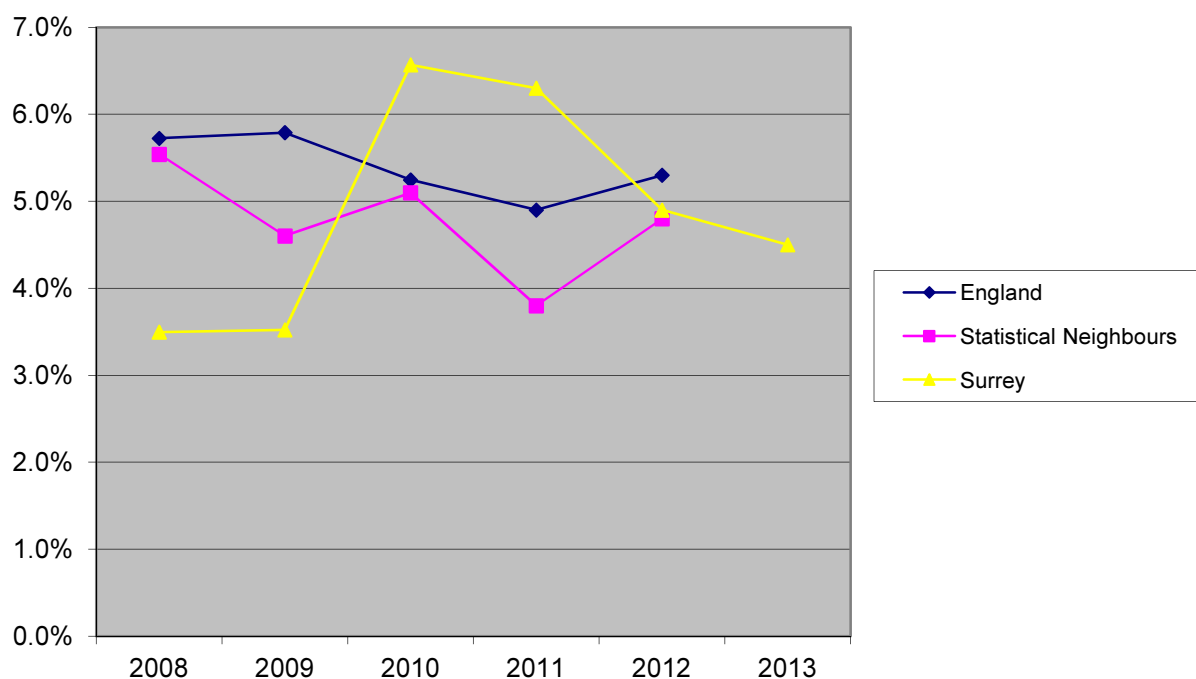
The C23 Performance Indicator shows the number of Adoption/Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) granted, compared to the cohort of looked after children at the period end (children in care for at least 6 months, excluding unaccompanied asylum seekers – “UASC”). In Surrey, over the last 6 years, performance has been in the DfE “Very Good” band. Surrey’s performance was 9.8% for 2011/12, rising to a record 12.4% for 2012-13, 35 Adoptions and 45 Special Guardianship Orders, 80 in total.



**NB COMPARATOR INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DfE CEASED FROM 2008/09 (PAF C23 NO LONGER MONITORED NATIONALLY).**

For Adoptions only, we can compare the number of adoptions to the total LAC population (excluding UASC). In 2011/12, adoptions as a percentage of LAC (excluding UASC) fell for the second year to 4.9% (LAC numbers rose by 77 children in the same period). In 2012-13, there were 35 adoptions (a slight fall), decreasing to 4.5% for the year (against another 24 rise in LAC numbers).

### Adoptions in year as % of LAC excluding UASC



The table below gives the actual numbers of orders granted in the last 6 years.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Adopted	24	26	47	43	37	35
SGO	35	25	24	18	23	45
Total Orders in Year	59	51	71	61	60	80
% of LAC cohort at year end	10.0%	8.5%	12.3%	10.8%	9.8%	12.4%

In 2009/10 – 2010/11, SGOs levels fell to a third or less of orders granted, but rose a little to 38% of all orders in 2011/12. In 2012-13, SGOs have exceeded adoptions to make up 56% of total orders, so are becoming very significant in achieving permanence for children.

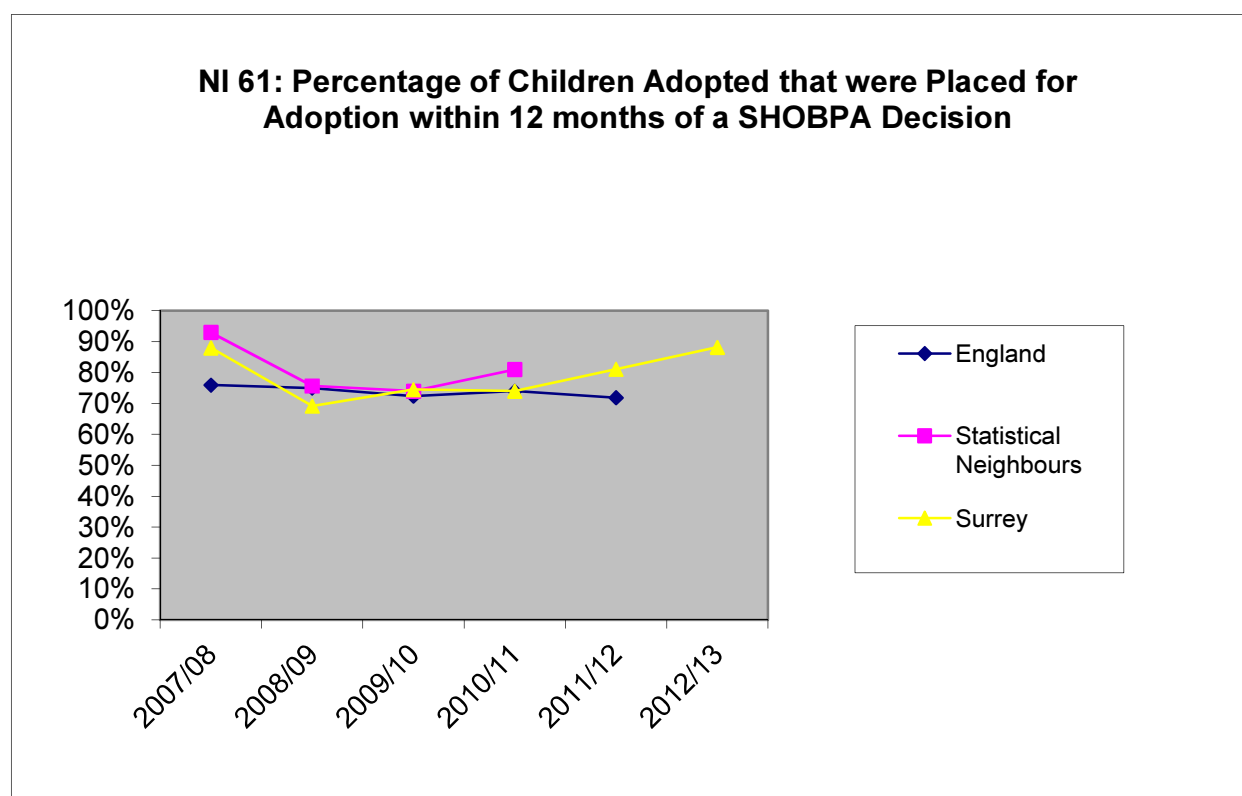
## 2. Time from SHOBPA/Best Interest Decision to being Placed For Adoption – NI 61

Performance for this aspect of adoption is measured by National Indicator NI 61: Timeliness of placements of looked after children for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption.

This indicator looks at the percentage of children adopted in the year that had been placed for adoption (with their eventual adopters) within 12 months of the local authority's decision that the child should be placed for adoption (SHOBPA).

Timescales for placing children for adoption will be affected by how easy or difficult it is to place them. Older children with more complex needs, sibling groups, disabled children and children from black and ethnic minority groups could be more of a challenge to place. Delays could also occur due to availability of in-house adopters, availability of funding for external placements and court delays.

Surrey's experience has broadly mirrored the performance by its Statistical Neighbours in the last few years, and in 2011/12 Surrey's performance rose by 6.7 percentage points to 81.1%. For 2012/13 the figure rose further, to 88.2%.



**1** NB 2011/12 NI61 FIGURES FOR STATISTICAL NEIGHBOURS NOT YET PUBLISHED BY DFE.

### 3. NEW NATIONAL MEASURES

There are two new sets of measures which cover aspects of adoptions and SGOs: League Table Indicators, and the Adoption Scorecard. NB Some indicators are repeated across the sets, and they are provided as three-year averages, rather than individual years.

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#### 3.1 League Table Indicators

This replaces the “National Indicators” set for Children’s Services, and contains 3 indicators relating to adoption and SGOs, including the former NI 61:

League Table Indicators	Average 3 years to 2011		Average 3 years to 2012	
	SCC	England	SCC	England
Adoption 1 – the percentage of children who ceased to be looked after that were adopted (high figures are preferable)	12%	12%	13%	12%
Adoption 2 – the percentage of children who ceased to be looked after because of a special guardianship order (high figures are preferable)	7%	6%	7%	7%
Adoption 3 – the former NI 61 – see section 2 above.	72%	74%	N/A	N/A

#### 3.2 Adoption Scorecard

There are a number of measures relating to children in the Adoption Scorecard (AS):

Adoption Scorecard Measures	Average 3 years to 2011		Average 3 years to 2012		Meets DfE Threshold?
	SCC	England	SCC	England	
Children 1 – For those adopted, the average time from entering care to being placed for adoption (days)	565	625	567	636	Yes
Children 2 – Average time from court authority to place child and LA matching to an adoptive family (days).	N/A	N/A	173	195	Yes
Children 3 – children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.	N/A	N/A	68%	56%	N/A
Related information 1 – adoptions from care (number adopted and % of all care leavers)	N/A	N/A	130 (13%)	9,740 (12%)	N/A
Related Information 2 – children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption.	10%	7%	11%	7%	N/A
Related Information 3 – average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (or foster carers that go on to adopt), in days.	N/A	N/A	474	546	N/A
Related Information 4 – adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to BME care leavers (ie any non-white ethnicity)	8%	7%	8%	6%	N/A

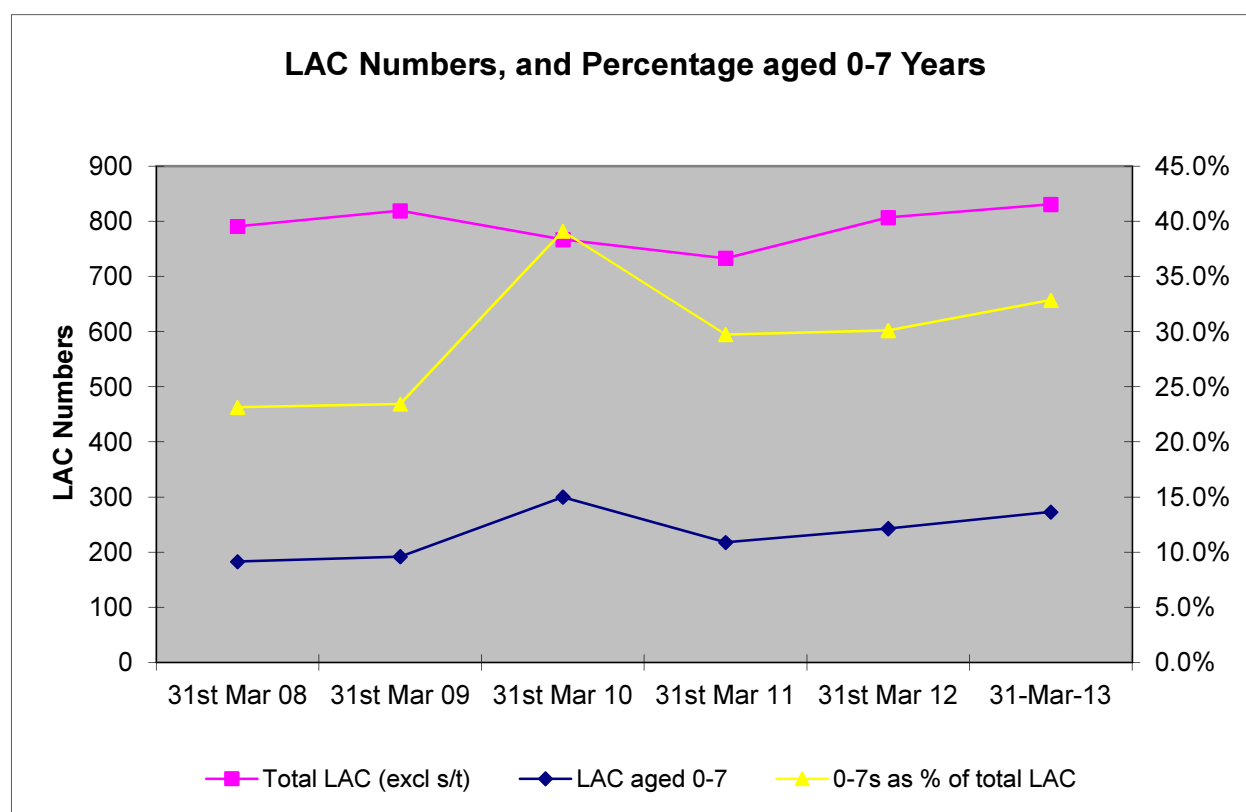


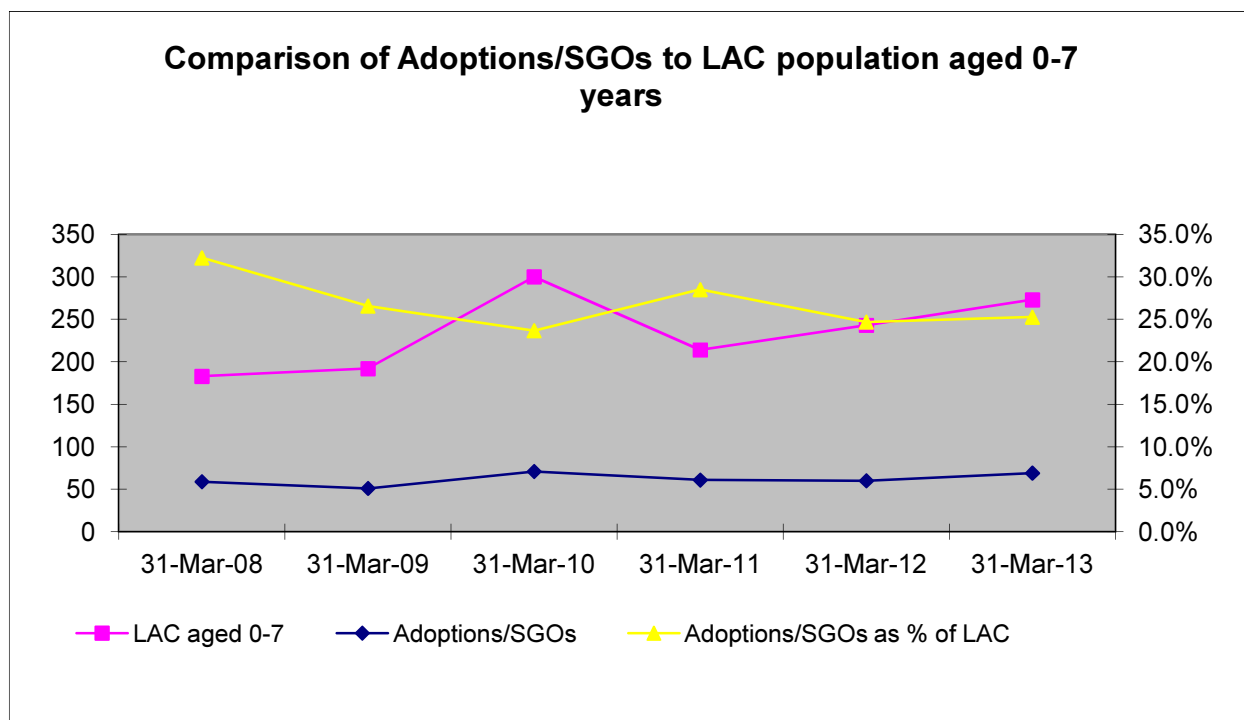
Related Information 5 – adoptions of children aged 5+, compared to all care leavers aged 5+ years	4%	5%	4%	4%	N/A
Related Information 6 – average length of care proceeding (weeks).	N/A	N/A	58	53	N/A
Related Information 7 – number of children waiting adoption (as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2012).	N/A	N/A	55	5,750	N/A

## 4. LAC POPULATION

### 4.1 LAC Age

Overall, in the last six years, Surrey's LAC population (excluding those on short-term agreements) has risen by 40 children, 5%. In the same period, for children in the likely adoption age range of 0-7 years the figures rose by 90 (49%), to 273, hence in comparison to the total LAC population, the percentage of 0-7 year olds rose from 23% to 33%.





In the 6 years to March 13, the proportion of Adoptions/SGOs in comparison to the size of its “core” 0-7 age group fell by 7 percentage points. For those aged 8+ in 2011/12, there were no adoptions, and 5 SGOs (22% of all SGOs). For 2012/13, the 0-7 figure is 25.3%, a slight improvement on the 2011/12 figure (24.7%). In 2012/13, for those aged 8+, there was one adoption, and 10 SGOs (22% of all SGOs).

The average age at Order date for the SGO group was 5.8 years (2011/12) decreasing slightly to 5.5 years in 2012/13. The average age at Order for the adoption in 2011/12 was 2.7 years, rising to 3.5 years in 2012/13.

The age range of children granted SGOs in 2011/12 was 0-15 years, whilst the age range for children subject to Adoption Orders was 0-6 years. In 2012/13 the range for SGOs was 0-16 years, and 0-9 years for adoptions.

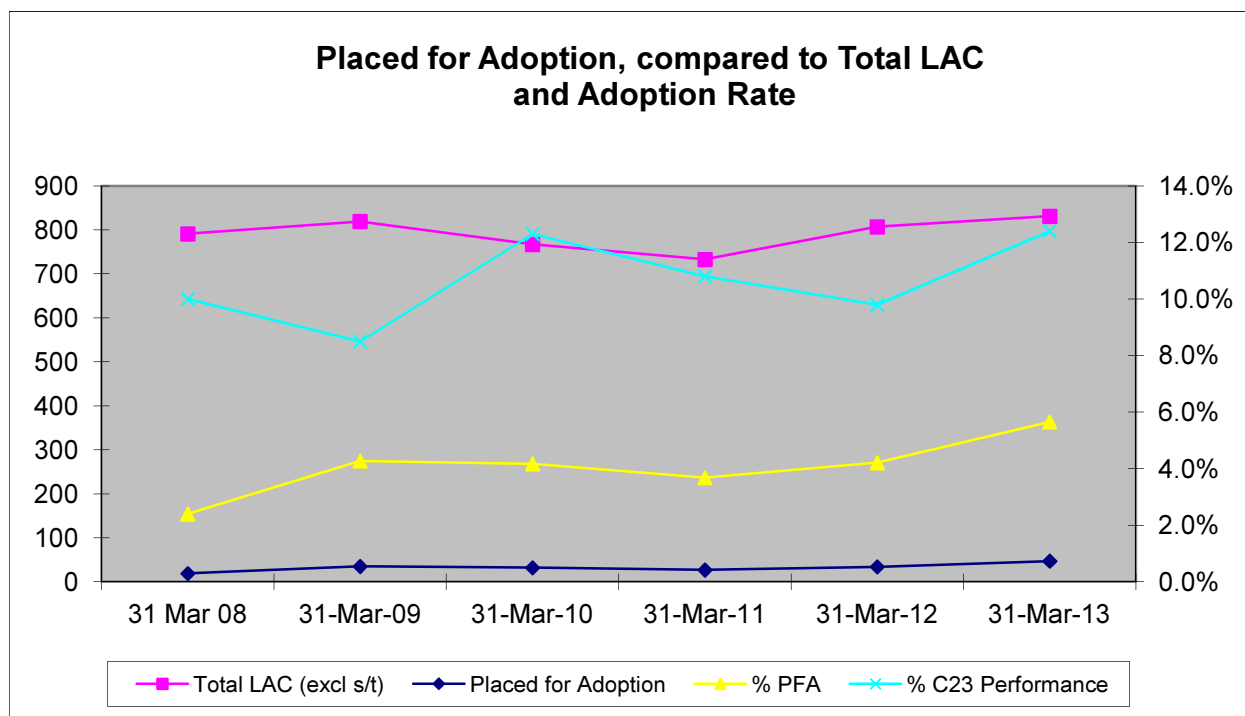
#### 4.2 Duration Looked After

Another aspect for consideration is the relationship between adoption numbers and the length of time looked after.

Looking at the average length of time a child is looked after prior to adoption, for adoptions in 2012/13, the average time was 2.3 years (2.2 years in 2011/12). The average for Special Guardianship Orders in 2012/13 was 2.0 years (from 2.3 years in 2011/12).

#### 4.3 LAC Placed for Adoption

The number of children placed for adoption, as at March 2013, had risen by 28 (more than doubled) overall in the past 6 years. There doesn't appear to be any direct or inverse link between the number of SGOs and those placed for adoption in the period. There were 47 children placed for adoption as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.



## 5. Kinship Care as an alternative to Adoption

One factor that the Adoption & Permanency Service believes has impacted on Surrey's adoption numbers in recent years has been the move, where appropriate to the child, to seek a kinship care placement rather than adoption/long term foster care.

This affects the numbers of (particularly young) Looked After Children in two ways: firstly, the availability of an appropriate kinship placement (usually outside the LAC system) is now routinely explored (without the child ever entering the LAC system, if this is appropriate to the child's circumstances).

Then, secondly, for children identified as never being able to return home, a kinship placement with the legal & financial support of a Special Guardianship Order (from Dec 2005) has given families an alternative to an Adoption or Residence Order. The SGO is intended to give relative carers greater security than the Residence Order can offer, without the perceived awkwardness of becoming the legal parent of one's own niece, grandson etc. Of the 45 SGOs granted in 2012/13 thirty eight (84%) were to kinship carers (the remainder to other former foster carers).

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