

Corporate Parenting Committee

Wednesday 26 February 2025

2.00 pm

Ground floor meeting rooms B and C, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1
2QH

Supplemental Agenda No. 1

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Date: 18 February 2025

Meeting Name:	Corporate Parenting Committee
Date:	25 February 2025
Report title:	Southwark Adoption Performance in 2023-2024 and Adopt London South Annual Report 2023-2024
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	N/a
From:	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the committee note the progress of the children with a care plan of adoption in Southwark during 2023- 24.
2. That the committee note the activity of the local authority working in partnership with Adopt London South (ALS) during 2023-24.
3. That the committee note the Adopt London South Annual Report for 2023– 2024.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. This report sets out how Southwark children in care with a permanence plan for adoption have progressed during 2023-24. It gives an overview of all the key performance measures to achieve permanence for every child in the timescale that is right for them.
5. Southwark Council is the host to Adopt London South (ALS) previously providing adoption services to nine south London boroughs. From the 1 April 2022 ALS has grown to ten boroughs.
6. ALS is one the largest regional adoption agencies (RAA) in the country in terms of numbers of local authorities in a partnership. ALS is part of Adopt London, a group of 4 RAAs covering 24 London local authorities. Adopt London brings together extensive expertise. Bringing together children with loving permanent families, offering continuous support and guidance through the process and post- adoption.

7. Permanence involves creating a long-term plan for a child's care that will last throughout their childhood. There are various options for achieving permanence, both within and outside the care system

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Southwark Data – Children’s Activity

Activity Overview - children	23-24	22-23	21-22	20-21	19-20
Decision that a plan for adoption is in child’s best interests (called Best Interests Decision or Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision)	6	7	15	11	9
Children with a Placement Order made (plan for adoption agreed by Court)	5	8	13	8	9
Children matched with adopters at panel and agreed by Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	6	14	10	11	2
Children with an Adoption Order granted	10	9	9	4	5

8. There has been a decline in children being matched with adoptive families in 2023-2024. 6 children were matched with adoptive families, showing a decrease compared to previous years. There has been a decrease in the number of best Interest / ADM decisions and the number of Placement Orders granted in 2023-24 as compared to the previous year.
9. The number of adoptions has slightly increased in comparison to the previous year 2022-23.

Early Permanence Planning Update about early permanence planning

10. During 2023-2024 there continues to be a focus on achieving permanence for every child in the timescale that is right for them. At legal panels the fortnightly pre-proceedings meetings there is a continuous focus on early planning for permanence. The emphasis being on assessment and intervention including regular reviews. A monthly new Care Proceedings tracking Panel started in May 2024 with the focus being ensuring we are keeping to the court directed timescales. The Permanence Taskforce also meets monthly to track all cases in the adoption process with a focus on any drift and delay and understanding the barriers and planning to improve our timescales to achieving permanence.

11. Early permanence placements enable children to be placed with prospective adopters who are also approved as foster carers and who can, if the court agree an adoption plan, go on to adopt the children that they care for.
12. Early permanence shifts the uncertainty away from children to the adults that care for them, enabling children to achieve permanence more swiftly. In 2023-24 two children were placed in an early permanence families. One child previously placed under Early Permanence was adopted in 2023-24 placement.

Matches of children in Care with adopters

13. Six children were matched with prospective adopters at Adoption Panels during 2023-24.
14. The age range of children matched at panel in 2023-24 ranges is from the eldest at three years and youngest fourteen months.
15. Of the six children who were matched at panel in 2023-24, five were recorded as being of mixed ethnicity and one of any other Black background. Of those with mixed ethnicity, four were of White British and Black Caribbean and one was of other mixed background.

Adoption Scorecard and Timescales for Southwark Children Scorecard complete

16. Adoption scorecards have been published by the Department for Education annually since 2012. They measure local authority performance against many adoption indicators but two are regarded as key indicators and these are set out in the table below

Measure	2018-2021	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
A10: Average time (days) between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions	326	340	362	428	644
A2: Average time (days) between Placement Order and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family	162	111	206	223	214

17. The chart above shows a decline in performance for A10 measure, this measure will be impacted for 2024-2025 as several foster carers for older children are expressing interest to adopt and the measure is from when the children originally entered care to when they were adopted.

18. The A2 figures measures from when the Court grant a Placement Order to when a match is agreed. For 2023-24 the A2 figure is 214 days a slight improvement on the previous year. Although the performance in this area does not meet the Government threshold of 91 days, it is understood that this timescale reflects positively that for some children who had waited long-time families were found that are matched to their needs. For this measure the quickest match was within 79 days from the Placement Order being granted. The longest match was for a child with complex needs and took 428 days but was a brilliant outcome for this child.
19. For every child with a plan of adoption from the point of this plan being agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) there is monthly scrutiny at the Permanence Taskforce meeting on the family finding activity by ALS and progression to finding a match. The service has a culture of learning and for every child the reasons for any delay are well understood and there is challenge to consider what more can be done to overcome the barriers to every child achieving permanence in the timescale that is right for them. Some barriers to achieving permanence have been recognised. This has led to improve protocols procedures and coming into place. Introducing a plan for the coming year that includes targeted training on adoption protocol; promoting and improved uptake across the services for training offers from ALS. Acknowledging the expertise withing the service; having accessible resources, and Introducing Permanence and Life Story Champions in the Care Service. To drive and embed permanence in the service.

Change of Plan from Adoption to Reunification to the Care of Parent/s

20. In 2023-2024 the Council did not apply to the Court to seek to change the care plan from Adoption to long-term fostering for any children. However, the court revoked a Placement Order for one child, following an application to court by their parent.

Children Adopted

21. In 2023-24 there were ten children adopted; this is one more than in the previous year.
22. The age range of the children adopted was from aged one year to aged five years old. Five children adopted were of mixed heritage, one child was Black Caribbean, one of Any other Black Background, one of other ethnic background and two White British.

Reflections and Plans for 2023-2024

23. Towards the end of 2023-2024 and into the current year there has been a significant increase in foster carers expressing an interest to adopt children in their care currently. there are six foster carers currently in the adoption process. The permanence Lead in Southwark is introducing a protocol to ensure all areas of the process from viability assessment of foster carers and support and transfer to ALS are completed in a timely way. Training across the services is

imperative to support the system. This will ensure that we reduce drift and delay.

24. Another initiative is on completion of the Child Permanence report (CPR) where the social work team recommend a plan of adoption a meeting will take place with the Agency Decision Maker, Social Worker and Permanence Lead to discuss the report to ensure that all aspects are covered and explored fully, the right contact arrangements have be fully considered with birth family as well as the report is written in a child focussed way. The Southwark Permanence Lead is part of the ALS Group of Practitioners designing training on writing CPR's, to be developed to social workers completing CPR's.
25. The Council offers packages of help and support to adopters to care for children who have additional needs and to ensure that for all children with a plan of adoption, finances for a potential family are not a barrier to being able to adopt. The Council will be implementing clear guides ensuring that they comprehensive ensuring that the right information is provided to enable an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to consider decisions based on the needs of the child.
26. A continuing challenge in adoption is the racial disparity in finding adoptive families and this is a key priority for the Council and ALS. It remains very evident nationally and for children in the borough that Black children and those from the Global Majority to find an adoptive family and they are statistically more likely for their plan to be reversed, Adopt London South have a Black Adoption Project formed in 2020 whose aim is to address the disparity in timescales for black and mixed heritage children. As well as recruiting and improving the experience of black children and their families.
27. The service and colleagues in the Council's legal department continue to embrace early permanence for children and recognise that this offers the best experience of stability for children with a plan of adoption. Advice give is clear and concise and received at the right times.
28. A further focus in 2024-2025 will be ensuring we consider lifelong connections for children and where possible are more able to support children having ongoing direct contact with members of their birth family.

Policy framework implication

29. There are no policy implications

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

30. Southwark is committed to ensuring that children with an adoption plan, from all parts of the community, are enabled to live with families able to meet most of their needs as soon as possible

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

31. Southwark are committed to working with ALS in addressing the inequality noted on this report in how long Black children wait for adoptive families and a key part of this is via the Black Adoption Project.

Health impact statement

32. There are none.

Climate change implications

33. There are none.

Resource implications

34. There are none.

Legal implications

35. There are none.

Financial implications

36. There are none.

Consultation

37. There are none.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance

38. There are none.

Strategic Director of Resources

39. There are none.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Adopt London South Annual Report 2023-2024

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children’s and Adults’ Services	
Report Author	Daisy-May James, Permanence Lead and Audrey Bouazizi , Head of Service, Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency	
Version	Final	
Dated	18 February 2025	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Resources	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		18 February 2025

Annual Report

April 2023 – March 2024



**ADOPT
LONDON
SOUTH**

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Key

 **Link to page within this report**

 **Link to an external web page.**

About Adopt London South

Introduction and Context

This is the 5th annual report from Adopt London South. Adopt London South is a Regionalised Adoption Agency providing adoption services across 10 South London Boroughs and is responsible for the recruitment, preparation and approval of adopters, for finding adoptive homes for children for whom adoption is the plan and for also for the support to adoptive households, adopted people and birth families.

The Regionalised Adoption Agency formed on 1st July 2019 following the legislative changes to the Education and Children Act (2016) which mandated local authorities to provide adoption services through Regionalised Adoption Arrangements. The aim of this was to improve adoption services by bringing services together to provide swifter and more timely outcomes for those in need of adoption services, to improve the service offer in local areas and to reduce the impact and effects of adoption through access to quality adoption support services by strengthening the offer through the economies of scale that regionalisation of adoption services could achieve.

Adopt London South provides adoption services for 10 of the 12 South London Local Authorities in London. The partners in Adopt London South are LB Croydon, LB Greenwich, LB Kingston & LB Richmond (operating as Achieving for Children), LB Lambeth, LB Lewisham, LB Merton, LB Southwark, LB Sutton and LB Wandsworth.

9 of the 10 partners have been working together since July 2019. The last partner to join Adopt London South was the Royal Borough of Greenwich who joined the partnership on the 1st April 2022.

Adopt London South has the largest number of partners in an RAA in the country. The Partnership Agreement supporting this delivery model has been signed and sealed by all partner to extend the partnership until March 2029 and a range of Schedules have been updated and strengthened, together with a Joining Agreement produced for the Royal Borough of Greenwich to legally join the partnership and to commit to the terms of the Partnership Agreement.

CROYDON
www.croydon.gov.uk

ROYAL borough of
GREENWICH

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KINGSTON
UPON THAMES

Lambeth

Lewisham

merton

R LONDON BOROUGH OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Southwark
Council
southwark.gov.uk

Sutton

THE BRIGHTER BOROUGH
Wandsworth

Governance Arrangements

Adopt London South is overseen by as a **Governance Board** which meets quarterly to consider performance and takes a high challenge, high support approach to focus on driving best practice. The Governance Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services of the host Authority (LB Southwark). The membership to the Board includes the Directors of each of the partner Local Authorities. The Board is responsible for the partnership decisions which require collective sign off or sign off above a Head of Service Level. It takes a strategic view to ensure that Adopt London South is focused on meeting key objectives in all service delivery areas that Adopt London South deliver on behalf of the partnership including:

▢ Finding Prospective Adopters

- The focus is to recruit and prepare prospective adopters to meet the needs of the children who are waiting for adoption.

▢ Planning for Children

- Working closely with partners to provide information advice and guidance around care planning when adoption is being considered or to consider Early Permanence

arrangements where this is appropriate as part of the care planning process.

▢ Placing children with adoptive parents

- Timely meetings to secure links, panel process and progressing bespoke plans and arrangements to place children for adoption with families who can meet their needs.

▢ Supporting the Adoption Community

- Understanding that the adoption community includes children, adopted adults, adoptive families, and birth relatives
- Provision of timely access to adoption support to equip families to manage presenting needs through signposting to appropriate service or providing the right intervention as identified by an assessment of support needs.

The **Quality Assurance Group** (QA Group) meets on a monthly basis with a focus on ensuring effective and consistent practice across the partnership. The QA group contributes to the development of policy and practice that has a bearing on the adoption processes for children with a view to evidencing timely outcomes for children across the partnership through high quality, effective and streamlined practice.



The QA group continues to strengthen practice across the partnership by sharing examples of best practice to improve and develop service delivery across the entire partnership by taking and replicating this in the individual boroughs. This serves to improve understanding of current best practice in adoption and permanency planning and provide models of practice to underpin this. Key areas of focus over the past year have included:

- Openness in Adoption and Maintaining Relationships
- Foster Carers who wish to adopt
- Early Permanence
- Improvements in Matching Standards.

There are 5 Regionalised Adoption Agencies in London and Adopt London South works closely in conjunction with 3 other London-based Regionalised Adoption Agencies under the umbrella of **Adopt London**. The work undertaken enables Adopt London to benefit from shared learning opportunities, economies of scale and to come together to deliver services and projects pan-regionally to the benefit of our adoption community and staff teams and to contribute to sector-wide improvements in Adoption England.

Adopt London is accountable to the Executive Advisory Board which consists of the 4 Governance Board Chairs of Adopt London South, North, East and West and is chaired independently by a DCS within the London region. You can read about [Adopt London](#) and the [governance of Adopt London](#) further on in the report.

Workforce

Adopt London South is currently staffed by **64** staff (representing 55.7 FTE) including business support, specialist officers, social workers, team managers and senior managers.

Adopt London South have benefitted from stability in its workforce and there have been opportunities for growth and development for those with aspirations to lead on specific practice issues or through management opportunities.

The stability in the staff team has enabled continued commitment to the service improvement journey and to the service offer as Adopt London South has worked to implement feedback from key stakeholder groups. This has helped Adopt London South to become more responsive and agile in the service delivery model in the areas of recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters, family finding for children, support of adoptive households, support to adopted people and birth families and to enabling children the opportunity to maintain key relationships with significant others along the adoption journey.

The permanent staff team are complemented by the use of independent social workers who undertake discrete pieces of work including prospective adopters assessments, non-agency adoption assessments and adoption support to adopted adults and those seeking their records.

This approach enables flexibility throughout the service to meet areas of increased demand in a responsive way within the financial envelope of the ALS budget.

Ofsted Inspections

Adopt London South support all partners with adoption information in their Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspections and; if appropriate in focused visits. During 2023/2024, Adopt London South have supported 1 of the 10 partners throughout their ILACS inspection with the provision of data and facilitating meetings with Ofsted inspectors with service users and key people in the organisation. The only borough who have been inspected during this year is **Lewisham**.

Inspection of Regionalised Adoption Agencies

Between October and December 2023, Ofsted undertook the first set of inspections for the Regionalised Adoption Agency. There is currently no legislative requirement to inspect RAA's but at the invitation of the Secretary of State, Ofsted were invited to undertake a thematic inspection

and provide a composite inspection report based on the findings.

6 RAA's were selected taking into account the size of the RAA, geography, length of time they had been an RAA and varying models of RAA delivery. Of the inspections that were undertaken, one was based in London and Adopt London West were selected for inspection in the London Region.

There were 5 domains that the inspection focused on as follows:

- 1. The effectiveness of the RAA's recruitment, assessment, family-finding and matching practice in providing safe, child-focused and timely adoptive placements for children.**
- 2. The effectiveness of adoption support for adoptive families, birth families and adopted adults.**
- 3. The extent to which the RAA leader understands the service's strengths and areas for development and is able to take decisive and effective action for improvement.**
- 4. The extent to which the views of those with a lived experience of adoption inform service delivery and improvement.**
- 5. The extent to which the RAA's governance arrangements enable the RAA to deliver effective services and provide the necessary assurance to member local authorities and other RAA partners.**

The inspection report was written based on the findings across the 6 authorities that were inspected. This was published in March 2024. No Ofsted judgement was given to any of the 6 RAA's that were inspected as this was the first inspection of its kind and plans are now underway to explore what a suitable inspection framework might look like. The inspection report can be found [here](#).

The thematic report noted key themes that were common across the RAA's that were inspected and highlighted and identified good practice attributing this to individual RAA's but areas of development were more generalised.

Key findings from the first thematic inspection report included considerations for RAA's ongoing improvements, for Central Government improvements and for Ofsted to consider future inspection frameworks for RAA's.

Commissioned Partnerships

Adopt London South benefit from partnerships through commissioned services with expertise in key areas of adoption which include Intercountry Adoption (provided by Coram IAC), Peer Support (provided by a grant that Adopt London pay annually to We Are Family) and Adopted Adults and Birth Parent support (provided by PAC-UK). These service offers are discussed further in this report.



Outcomes

The work of Adopt London South focuses on 5 key areas of service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption, those children who are living in their adoptive homes and also for people who are affected by adoption including adopted adults, birth families and prospective or approved adopters.

Further details can be found by following the links below or reading further along in this report.

-  **1. Finding prospective adoptive parents**
-  **2. Preparing and approving adoptive parents**
-  **3. Planning for children**
-  **4. Placing children with adoptive parents**
-  **5. Providing support to adoptive families and to birth parents**

Financial spend 2023/24

The Partnership Agreement sets out the financial contribution for each partner during what is described as the “initial period” (from ALS inception until 31 March 2021). The intention was that after the initial period, a demand-based model would define the partner contributions. The model agreed upon by the ALS Board for 2021/22 only is a hybrid, partly based upon most recent demand and partly based upon contribution shares during the initial period. The model was reviewed further during 2021/22 as part of the Variation to the Partnership Agreement, in order to arrive at a more permanent model that all partners were satisfied with. In the 2022/23, a new approved model was applied to include the continuation of an interim “smoothing” arrangement which remained in place until the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

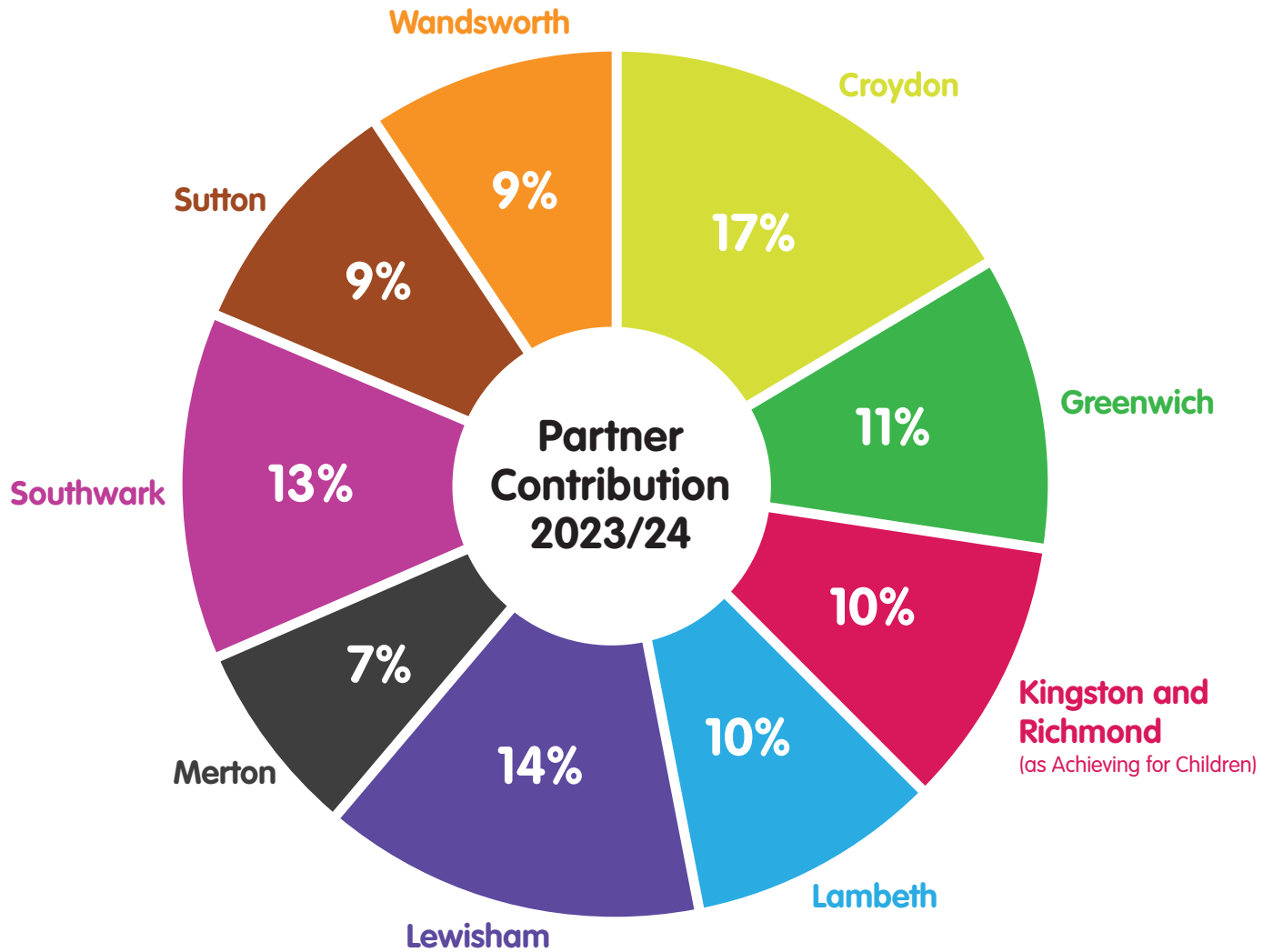
The coming year 2024/25 will see the continued use of the approved financial model for all partners in the partnership.

The cost to each borough reflects the costs for staffing and also reflects the costs for commissioned services, facilities and adoption-related expenses and the total 2023/24 budget for ALS was 4.3million slightly up from the budget the previous year of 4.2million

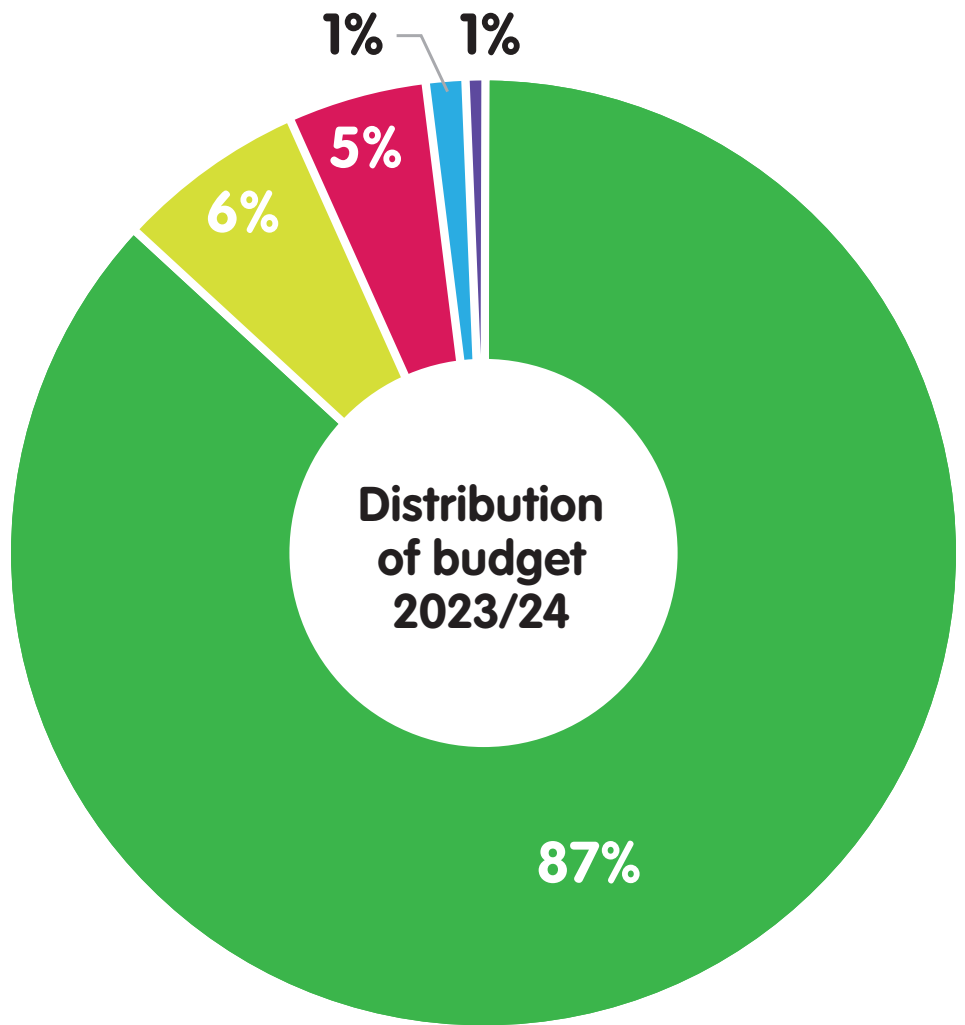
The percentage 2023-2024 partner contributions as per the model described above are reflected below.

The total budget for ALS in 2023-2024 includes all running costs for the organisation, including the costing for staffing, commissioned services and all costs relating to delivering adoption services.





Borough	Contribution
Croydon	£711,906
Greenwich	£471,340
Kingston and Richmond (operating as Achieving for Children)	£437,246
Lambeth	£413,068
Lewisham	£608,256
Merton	£313,829
Southwark	£559,310
Sutton	£403,015
Wandsworth	£402,998



- Staffing including agency
- Professional fees and subscriptions
- Building and Facilities
- Adopt London Shared Costs, Marketing and Publicity
- Sundry Adoption Costs

Expenditure category	amount in '000s
Staffing including agency	£3,815
Professional fees and subscriptions	£281
Building and Facilities	£208
Adopt London Shared Costs, Marketing and Publicity	£63
Sundry Adoption Costs	£22

National adoption landscape

National RAA Leaders Group

There are 32 Regional Adoption Agencies in England working together to strengthen the sector under the umbrella of Adoption England. The Department for Education has tasked this RAA Leaders with developing and implementing the strategic priorities of the **Adoption England Adoption Strategy** which will be launched in April 2024. These priorities build on the original strategic priorities in the earlier strategy Achieving Excellence Everywhere which had a focus on developing national standards across key adoption practice areas, exploring alternative models to service delivery, increasing the use of Early Permanence, developing multidisciplinary support and scoping models for national and pan-regional commissioning in adoption support.

The DfE has provided funding to Adoption England with a view to ensuring that focus is on progressing the 5 key priorities of the forthcoming Adoption England strategy over the which are as follows:

1. Recruitment - Adopters from diverse communities are recruited, prepared and supported to meet children's needs.
2. Adopted people maintain relationships with people important to them and have a good understanding of the reasons why they were adopted.
3. Children and young people, adopted adults and birth families are listened to and have



an influence on the practice and the services provided nationally and regionally.

4. Children are matched and move in with their permanent family in a timely way. Their needs are understood and met and their feelings are held in mind and responded to sensitively.

5. Adopted people and their families get tailored help and support when they need it.

The priorities of Adopt London and Adopt London South are aligned to these 5 key overarching



Image credit: Adoption England 2024

principles and headway is being made in some of the areas through the delivery of interim projects which are funded by Adoption England to pump prime service delivery across specific areas.

Public Law Working Outline Consultation

On September 27, 2023 the **Public Law Working Group interim report: Recommendations for Best Practice in Respect of Adoption** was shared for consultation. The consultation period ran for 2 months to provide an opportunity for sector-wide response. This focused on key areas in adoption including:

- Adoption and Contact
- Access to Records
- Practice and Procedure
- Adoption with an International Element
- Adoption by Consent

There has been a national response to the Public Law Working Outline consultation and the current phase of work is looking at reviewing the feedback to determine what, if any changes should be made to the initial consultation.

Broadly speaking, the direction of travel was considered to be positive and appropriate and feedback included exploration of resources to ensure that these services are delivered in line with the aspired standards.

London Region

Adopt London South continues to work in partnership with adoption services across

London. As well as working with the other three Adopt London RAA's, Adopt London are currently working in partnership with a fifth RAA in London (Coram Ambitious for Adoption) to deliver the London Early Permanence project.

Additionally, there are close links with regional-based Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) to work to improve the service offer and provide choice and flexibility in placement options for children. We work closely to develop the skill set of adoption workers with a view to strengthening the service to everyone who has a need to access adoption services.

This is delivered through the Lunch and Learn programme which offers an opportunity for staff and panel members to hear from experts by experience and professionals around key areas that are pertinent to adoption. The Lunch and Learns are planned as part of sufficiency discussions with the VAA's. Lunch and Learn opportunities over the past year have included:

- Early Permanence from the lived experience perspective
- How do we help adopters to embrace neurodiversity and understand the overlap with developmental trauma
- FASD – hearing from a medical advisor and an adoptive family who chose to adopt a child with additional needs

These valuable learning sessions have reached 100 + staff and panel members each time they have been delivered which is a high proportion of staff who are becoming better equipped to support adopters along their journey which has yielded some positive responses:



“Really appreciate the family sharing their difficult story and sharing their thoughts on what would help other families considering EP.”

“Excellent session. Really helpful to have ‘E’s’ slides and how to reframe questions/views on Autism. ‘R’ was amazing, helpful things to consider when looking for adoptive families for children with Autism i.e. having older birth children. Her love and joy for her daughter was so evident. An excellent session!”

Early Permanence Project

The London Early Permanence project is delivered in conjunction with Coram Ambitious for Adoption. Following a successful bid, funds were awarded to the London region from Adoption England to strengthen practice in this

specific area of adoption including increasing the pool of Early Permanence carers, ensuring that Early Permanence practice is well understood within the adoption services and across the Local Authority partnerships.

Of the 32 boroughs in London, all are involved with the London EP project with the exception of the LB Bexley as their services are delivered through a non-London based RAA.

The project has delivered a research paper Patterns of Early Permanence in London which can be found [here](#).

The London Early Permanence project is led by a project lead who has been seconded from within Adopt London. Work to date has been focused on improving the preparation of Early Permanence carers and streamlining the training offer to them. There are plans underway for a Conference which will be looking at sharing best practice in relation to Early Permanence across the judiciary, within local authorities legal and social care teams and with Cafcass. This project is funded up until March 2025.



“Very helpful event to help us think about how to have conversations with prospective and approved adopters about neurodivergence and specifically ASD. Good insights across the board, useful feedback from participants. Get the impression that there will be immediate impact on practice as a result.”

“Really great presentations – balance of up to date research and understanding, alongside a much heart felt exploration of a child with support needs, placed with a family who have explored finding a world where they can all connect.”

“The different stages in pregnancy of the impact of alcohol. The amazing adopters experience of adopting their little boy, how they saw past the FASD to see his wonderful personality and their desire to ensure he has contact with his birth family. It would be great to hear from them again.”

“Power of profiles, contact, being able to speak with confidence about how FASD is impacted by the consumption of alcohol at different stages of the pregnancy and reinforcing the message to think about the child as an individual”

Adopt London



Structure of Adopt London

Adopt London have been working regionally across four separate RAA's covering most of the North, South, East and West of London. Adopt London provide services to benefit 24 London Boroughs in total and have demonstrated strengths in this type of partnership working which serves to improve the outcomes for adopted children, adopted adults, adopters and birth parents.

Adopt London brings together the best practice to develop shared models of practice, policy development and is developing a London-wide profile for the recruitment of adoptive parents through a shared website and marketing and recruitment strategy.

The host boroughs of each of the Adopt London RAA's are LB Southwark for Adopt London South, LB Islington for Adopt London North, LB Havering for Adopt London East and LB Ealing for Adopt London West.

Close partnership working across the Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Panel Advisors and Marketing and Communications leads contribute to developing shared good practice standards and shared delivery of services.

Adopt London Governance Arrangements

Quarterly meetings with the four Adopt London Heads of Service and the four host Boroughs Board Chairs are chaired by a non-host partner

DCS to form the Executive Advisory Board. This Board oversees the strategic joint working of Adopt London and provides advisory capacity to support with problem-solving or to improve traction in moving projects forward by mobilising support of other senior leaders when their input is necessary to draw attention to and promote key areas of work or to provide strategic considerations and expertise to resolve particular challenges.

The Executive Advisory Board has sought to assure the governance of Adopt London projects, shared assets, branding and social media through an Adopt London Legal Partnership which is being coordinated and led by Adopt London West. Upon securing this agreement the responsibilities of the Executive Advisory Board will be formalised for Adopt London.

Adopt London Activity

The work of Adopt London is delivered by the four Heads of Service working towards a strategic plan that is supported and endorsed by the Executive Advisory Board. There is a pooled budget which comes from the four individual RAA's wider budget to fund shared activity. The strategic plan focuses on:

- Governance and Commissioning arrangements

- Operational and practice development of priority areas of work
- Marketing and communications
- Voice and influence of key stakeholders in the adoption community including birth relatives.

Highlights of the joint work across Adopt London in 2023-2024 include:

Black Adoption Project

The Black Adoption Project is a long-term project aimed at addressing the stark disparity of positive and timely outcomes for black and black mixed heritage children when compared with other groups.

The project began in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd and the global response to this tragedy. Our approach was to reflecting on the impact of the adoption process on black people and work to change and improve outcomes for black people affected by adoption.

The Black Adoption Project is delivered in partnership with the Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy, with the long term aim of creating sustainable systems change to improve the adoption experience of black children and families. More detail can be found [further on in this report](#).



Matching Project

The Matching project is an Adopt London project which focuses on improving and strengthening the matching process for children so that they can go on to be placed with their permanent families as quickly as possible. The Matching project is led by a manager who has been seconded through Adopt London and runs until March 2025. To date, this project has delivered training across the 24 London Boroughs within Adopt London, it has reshaped profiles for adopters and children and has delivered the successful Stay and Plays at a venue in central London, amongst other achievements.

Meet Jayden
One of our Adopt London children



Conversations for Change

Conversations for Change is the Adopt London Adopter Voice. This has been led by Richard Orchard Rowe, an adoptive parent with experience in delivering the Adopter

Voice to ensure that this important line of feedback is captured and helps to shape the delivery of our services in a meaningful way.

Since being launched in October 2023 there has been one survey completed. This survey sought the view of adopters on their key areas of concern. The top three areas are:

- Managing challenging behaviour
- Education
- Accessing Adoption Support

The lead for Conversations for Change has made some recommendations which ALS and Adopt London will be taking into consideration for future shaping of the service and this will be shared with ALS Governance Board and the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board.

Other opportunities to hear from adopters are in the pipeline for the coming year and consideration will be given to how adopter participation can become a more visible and active part of service delivery.

Adopt London Staff Conference

An Adopt London Staff Conference was held in February 2024 bringing together all the staff across Adopt London. The event provided an opportunity to share best practice and seek innovative ways of working to improve our service delivery taking account of the opportunities that the economies of scale that Adopt London offers.

The conference provided an opportunity to consider the journey of Adopt London to date and to think about next steps and priorities exploring how best to harness innovative ideas. Sarah Johal (National Strategic Lead for Adoption) set the scene for the current areas of development in adoption. Key information and progress from the Early Permanence, Matching and Black Adoption Projects were shared and a workshop-



style session encouraging innovation across Adopt London building on from the learning and successes of the existing Adopt London and regional projects concluded the day with key action points to deliver on some of the innovation ideas shared by the groups. The opportunity to work across teams and regions added a depth and richness to the experience, enabling staff at all levels to contribute their valuable input and creativity. The essence of the conference was visually captured as the day progressed by James the Scribe.



Adult Adoptee Support

In recognition of the lack of support for Adult Adoptees, work is well embedded in expanding the availability of support groups across London. The group that was set up last year for who were transracially adopted has become better established through a partnership with the Transracial Adult Adoptee Network (TAAN).

We Are Family Peer Support

We Are Family is an independent peer-to-peer support charity that was founded and is run by adopters for adopters. Adopt London commission We Are Family (WAF) in order to provide formal peer support to adopters. The support from WAF is available at differing levels of access of all stages of the adoption journey. WAF provide a range of webinars, meet-up opportunities and activities and opportunities for adopters that are in all stages of the journey to connect with one

another, share their experiences and effect positive change. WAF membership and reach is growing.



WAF share quarterly feedback to Adopt London detailing their service offer, take up across each RAA and also share plans for ongoing development.

WAF have delivered the podcast Adoption Shared for 4 seasons. Each season has had a specific area of focus. The podcasts have wide reach and have significant download numbers. The focus for future series of WAF podcasts includes focusing on education as members have identified this as one of the significant challenges in the adoption journey.

Adopt London Choir



Adopt London established a choir during the pandemic as a way of increasing well-being and connecting adoptive families together. The choir consists of adopters and some of their children. Adopters report that they continue to meet and perform online and have performed in person at the Adopt London South Fun Day.

The Adopt London choir featured on BBC Breakfast on 24th October 2023 and the excerpt can be viewed [here](#).

Commissioning

Adopt London have been awarded funds to explore opportunities around joint commissioning of services pan-regionally. This project has been funded through a grant from the Department for Education via Adoption England to explore the opportunity to make better use of access to services. This is a phased project and it is currently in phase one which is undertaking a needs assessment to get an understanding of the providers that are used across the region and the services that they offer. The scoping activities can begin in earnest to explore regional commissioning arrangements, which; if successful aspires to transform the delivery of services and alleviate some of the current administrative burden.

The Black Adoption Project

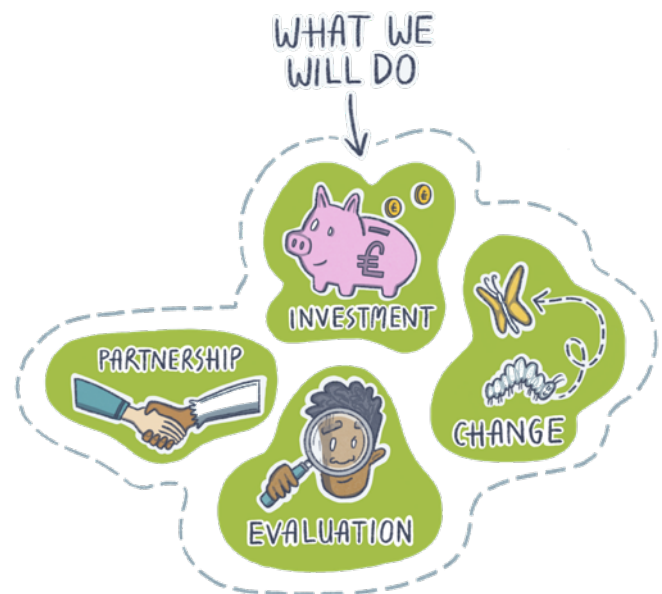


Adopt London in conjunction with Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy are delivering the Black Adoption Project. This project has been borne out of an understanding of the impact of disparity on outcomes for black children in adoption and also for black families who are considering adoption or who go on to adopt.

The Black Adoption project has focused on various areas of the adoption process to consider the effects of this disparity and to actively seek to effect sustainable change in the delivery of adoption services. This is to ensure that black African and Black Caribbean children and those with mixed black heritage do not suffer poorer outcomes compared to their white counterparts as a result of institutional bias and that Black families are not inadvertently marginalised through the application of Eurocentric norms relating to criteria to becoming an adopter, or by the challenge of assessment processes which may not be as culturally sensitive in their design.

The Phase One Report was completed and can be found [here](#) and some of the key findings of this report along with outcome of stakeholder focused Theory of Change workshops have formed the foundation of the development of pilots to seek to test out different approaches to:

- Increase retention by supporting prospective adopters to remain committed to the adoption process through to successful assessment.
- Social and educational groups for Black adopted children and young people.



- Empowering communities to be their own agents of change to raise awareness and deliver the adoption narrative across their communities with a view to increasing recruitment of black families.

There are a number of other pilot project in the pipeline that are being designed and prepared for delivery but work is focussing on increasing the capacity within the project to deliver these pilots.

One of the key project principles is to disseminate learning and the Black Adoption Project has commenced a series of webinars to share the report. The report has been launched to strategic leaders across boroughs, the DfE, Adoption England and to others who have expressed an interest in the findings.

Following an unsuccessful funding bid with Nuffield, the BAP has taken the learning and feedback from this experience with a view to strengthening future opportunities to bid to funds. This is with a view to support the delivery of a number of pilots that have been designed and delivered following on from successful theory of change workshops and the implementation of the findings from these.

The first two pilots to be delivered include support for prospective adopters going through the adoption process, and the development of an adopted children's group focusing on having a better understanding of history and their sense of place within the world. This has come directly from the children's feedback from their [!\[\]\(c507f772dba2b921f86777f01218e570_img.jpg\) **Theory of Change**](#) event and is being prioritised in direct response to their request.

Alongside the delivery of pilots to children and families, the support and development of the

workforce is acknowledged as a critical element to the success of the projects. Over the lifetime of the project to date, whole staff learning and development opportunities have led to more open conversations about the impact of race in all aspects of our service delivery. We believe in equipping and empowering our staff to be able to explore this topic in a safe environment with sensitivity, understanding and cultural humility and in creating a space to enable people to be curious, learn and grow in confidence in addressing issues of disparity in all areas of the adoption pipeline both for children and for families and creating change from within the system.

To find out more about the Black Adoption Project, please scan the QR code and you can sign up to be kept updated about future events, resources and progress of the project.



Adopt London South Adopter Voice and Participation

Adopt London South were delighted to launch the Adopter Executive Group in September 2023. This is a group of adopters who comes together to share their views about things that are important and meaningful to adopters. It is chaired by an adoptive parent and the group consult on service development and ensure that adopter voices are heard in Adopt London South through consultation on of guidance and policy. The group also share their priorities for consideration in Adopt London South development plans.

Since forming, this group have met on 3 occasions to develop the group and identify the key priorities for work that they wish to progress over the coming year.

The core membership of the group is strong and committed but it is recognised that this may shift from time to time depending on the demands of the adoptive families.

To date the Adopter Executive Group have provided the expert by experience voice on concerns around the experience of adopted

children and adoptive families with education, and this is one of the priority areas that will be focused on moving forward.

Coram Intercountry Adoption Centre

Coram IAC are sector- experts on intercountry adoption. They have to keep abreast of all adoption-related changes in countries and ensure that they are aware of the shifts in agreements between the UK and other countries to ensure that an adequate service is delivered withing the legislative requirements of the individual states of origin. Therefore, they lead on all the intercountry work on behalf of the ALS partnership, including supporting adoptive placements and the regulatory monitoring requirements as stipulated from the country of origin for a child.



The Adoption Panel

Structure of the Adoption Panel

Adopt London South run 2 Adoption and Permanence Panels. Their role is to oversee and make recommendations on:

- Matching decisions for children to be placed with adoptive families
- Best Interest Decisions for consented adoption (formerly referred to as relinquished children)
- Approval of prospective adopters, including dual approval as Early Permanence Carers where appropriate
- Reviewing the continued approval of prospective adoptive parents

The work of the panel focuses on reviewing assessments and reports that are presented and making recommendations to Agency Decision

Makers to provide their view about the suitability of plans and assessments presented. This helps them to make decisions about children living with identified adoptive families, whether adoption is a child's best interests if a consented adoption is being made and the suitability of people to become or remain approved as adopters.

There are two types of Agency Decision Makers who the panel share their recommendations with.

- Recommendations relating to decisions about children's best interests, or their future adoptive homes are presented to the **Agency Decision Maker in the child's borough** for the final decision to ratify the panel recommendation or not.



- The panel have access to relevant learning and development opportunities and there is a programme of annual appraisals which provide an opportunity to review the strengths and areas for development for panel members. The panel provide quality assurance feedback to ALS and the relevant local authority which is taken into account to support the shaping and development of the work of the boroughs, ALS and for panel.

The Former Partners check has been developed and agreed across Adopt London to have a better understanding of how to explore this within assessments.

Panel Chairs Voice

The panels are chaired by 2 independent panel chairs. Both are experienced chairs and bring expertise and strength to the panel process. The 2 chairs work closely together to develop a cohesive and seamless panel experience for those attending panel and for panel members. They complete a 6-monthly panel report which focuses on panel activity over the period, quality assurance summary, areas of strength and areas for improvement. These are all considered in quarterly meetings held with ALS management team where key developments and themes are shared, and where we can focus on continuing the improvement journey where needs have been identified.

The most recent report covered the period September 2023 to March 2024. Outcomes for children have been commended; particularly around the matching of sibling groups and black children which are cohorts that are known to wait longer to be matched. It has also been noted that there have been disruptions and that there are still some challenges in achieving the timescales for matches. The chairs also noted that the panel processes were efficient, that there is strong communication between the panel and the agency, and that there has been improvement in the quality of reports presented to panel.

The conclusion of the panel chairs report was:



“The panel process remains efficient, with all paperwork distributed within a timescale, having been effectively quality assured by the panel advisors. Any delays or additional information is communicated ahead of each panel. Panel Members remain committed to the panel process and work diligently to ensure that National Minimum Standards are upheld when considering the suitability of applicants wishing to adopt or be matched with children. It is reassuring that prospective adopters and social workers have consistently provided positive feedback about their panel experience.

The quality of reports presented to panel continues to improve, providing good evidence for approval and matches alike.

Children’s social workers clearly know the children well, as describe them in detail in Child Permanency Reports that also show greater sensitivity towards birth parents. Social workers present well during panel meetings, and even those newly allocated have provided full responses to questions. **Prospective adopters are well prepared for panel and speak with confidence during meetings.**

It has been positive to note the increase in sibling groups placed together for adoption, though sad that two of the sibling groups have experienced disruptions during this period.

Matching older children, particularly those with additional needs or from black and mixed ethnic groups continues to present a challenge for RAAs. Despite best efforts, these are the groups of children that are reported to wait the longest to achieve permanency. It should, therefore, be celebrated that 25 children of Black and mixed ethnicity have been matched for adoption during this period. It is, however, unfortunate that only 32% of all matches were presented in timescale during this period. Although there were good reasons for the delays, it is an area that requires improvement.”

Training for local authority social workers

It is widely acknowledged that the development of the RAA's has created a knowledge gap within the local authorities. In order to bridge this gap, ALS offer training and development opportunities to strengthen the adoption knowledge across the partnership.

The UEA model 'Moving to Adoption' training is offered to local authorities at various intervals to improve practice in transitions for children from foster care to their adoptive homes.

A key area of development has focused on supporting adopted people to maintain links with

people who are important to them. ALS have led brief workshops and offered bespoke training to individual teams to help them to think about how they will embed this practice within their day-to-day service delivery to improve outcome for children.

One area of challenge that is yet to be overcome is the transient nature of the workforce in children's services which means that there needs to be an ongoing programme of learning opportunities to ensure that new entrants to the local authorities have access to learning about key adoption principles and practice.



Finding prospective adoptive parents

Adopt London brand

The single Adopt London presence on the web maximises opportunities for anyone considering adoption in London to easily find us. The professional and creative online presence provides rich information for people considering adoption in a range of formats from frequently asked questions to lived experience case studies and relevant news items.

Adopt London have a shared marketing and recruitment strategy which focuses on recognising and championing the diversity of the London region to focus on the fact that good outcomes for London children with a plan for adoption are the centre of our purpose and to ensure that we amplify the voices of those impacted by adoption by sharing their stories.

The website has recently been reviewed to ensure that it aligns with accessibility standards and the current phase of the website review has a focus to ensure that it fresh, appealing and

“Looking at the profiles of some of your children really brought things to life.”

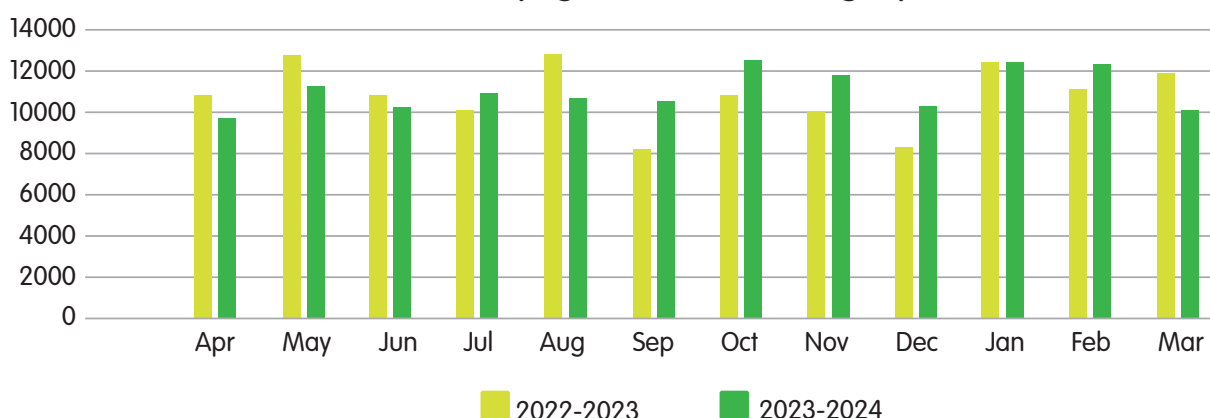
easy to navigate to ensure a smooth, cohesive, informative and intuitive customer journey for anyone affected by adoption.

Data and metrics from the activity relating to the website are reviewed to get a sense of how people are making use of the website and this helps to identify targeted development work.

Metrics currently measure how visits to the website are initiated, how long people are staying on pages, which pages are most popular, amongst other things.

Regular meetings with the Adopt London Marketing and Communications team ensure that we have a good line of sight into the usage of the website enabling us to plan and focus our attention in the right way if there is a need identified.

Adopt London Page views
(total number of pages viewed including repeats)





A comparison of the Adopt London website page views over the past 2 years evidences a relatively consistent picture. Patterns of peaks in October reflect the wider landscapes as this is the month that National Adoption Week is held. Next steps to understand these analytics include improving the recording of tracking of activity v impact, and further testing to identify what influences higher page views.

Recruitment

The recruitment of adopters who are suitable for the children with a plan for adoption remains a key priority for Adopt London South. In order to support the modernisation of this specific area, Adopt London have developed, designed and launched a new digital tool to help people who are considering adoption to think about how they can best prepare themselves for the process. The [‘Am I Ready To Adopt’](#) Tool is an online questionnaire which helps prospective adopters understand the adoption process and enables them to begin early preparation. The tool provides on-the-spot information, advice and guidance to people considering adoption and also provides a bespoke action plan based on the individual's responses as to how best to

prepare for adoption. This advice can be revisited through the assessment process.

The recruitment team provide information to prospective adopters through events such as Adoption Information Meetings or Meet The Adopters events as well as provide 1:1 opportunities to help people consider their readiness to adopt.

The recruitment climate has been challenging this year. For the first time since the RAA formed, there have been more children waiting for adoption than there are adopters/prospective adopters in the pipeline nationwide. In depth national discussions have been underway within the sector and with those considering adoption to try to understand the cause of this decline with consideration being given to external factors such as the cost of living crisis impacting

“The speakers were great. They were informative and experienced. They weren’t patronising or lecturing in anyway - but they had a truthful and honest attitude that cut to the point. Also very open and approachable.”

households considering adoption. There is no answer to this current dilemma this issue appears to be impacting the North of the country although it is predicted to become a more widespread concern.

Recruitment in ALS has been impacted by this. There are still comparable numbers of enquiries year on year but the conversion rates from enquiries to registrations of interest is at lower levels than in previous years.

ALS focus on targeting recruitment to meet the needs of the children waiting. Adopters are considered based on their ability to meet the needs of the priority children in Adopt London

“it was all about the kids which it should be, they gave so much support and explained what it takes to adopt and how important it is that your open right from the start with your child and letting them know their individual story and keeping communication open where possible with the birth family. Having come from a background of adoption (parent was) it was a honest reflection.”

“There was a lot of information to absorb but the hosts of the meeting made it very accessible and so I now know what I need to do before starting the process.”

South (who are those children who feature most frequently as needing adoptive families and include black and black mixed heritage children, sibling groups and children with additional needs). There is also a focus on recruiting those who can consider offering Early Permanence care whilst planning and key decisions are made about a child's future.

Whilst the data shows that just over 100 more people signed up for an information session this year compared to the previous year, numbers are significantly lower than the peak in 2021-2022, however the numbers of families attending an information event have remained the same as the previous year. This suggests increased drop-out rate between sign up and attendance and is an area to focus on how we can develop a better line of sight into the families that change their mind about attending the information session.

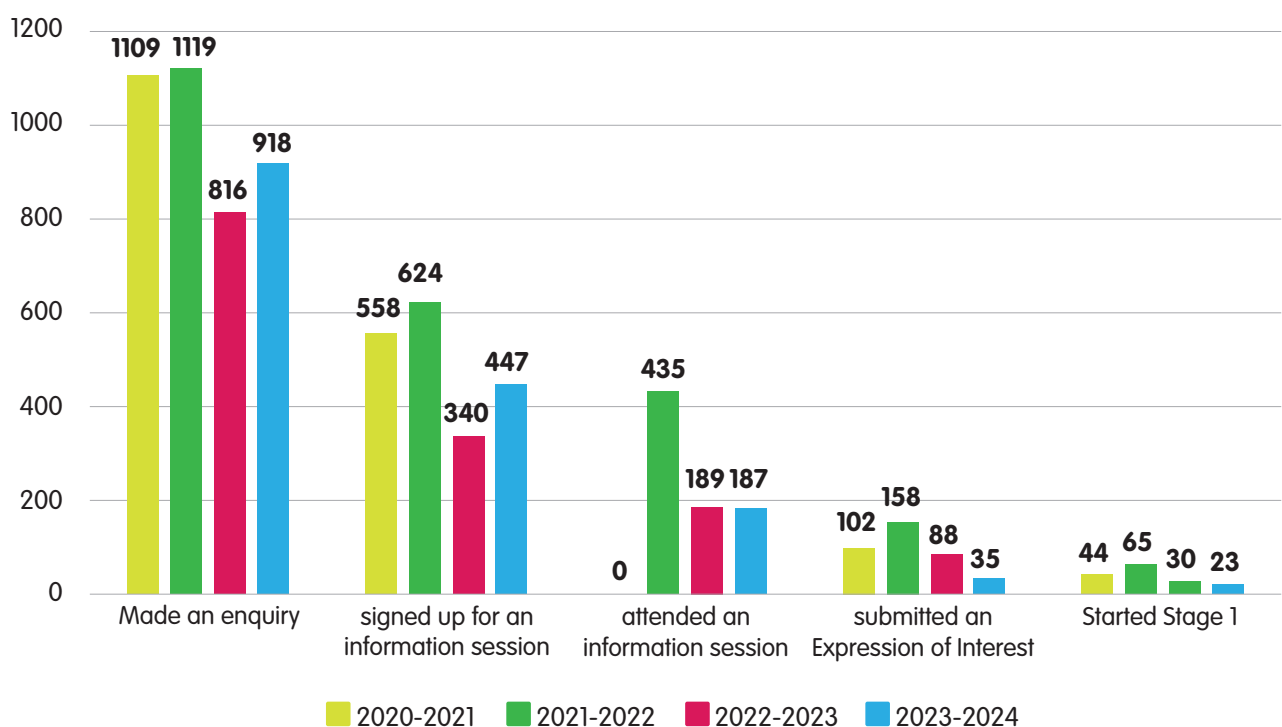
Adopt London South have continued to deliver the Meet The Adopter events which enables prospective adopters to hear directly from experienced adopters about their journey to become adoptive parents and their experience of parenting their children. ALS are currently

the only RAA in the country to deliver this type of event which enables prospective adopters to hear from and ask questions of experienced adopters to cement their understanding of life as an adoptive parent.

We seek a range of voices to reflect the audience and to focus on ensuring that we shine a light on the needs of the children who are waiting for a home, for example brother and sister (sibling) groups, black children, children with additional needs, early permanence carers, second time adopters, adopters with birth children to name a few. This is a key opportunity to imbue prospective adopters with the understanding that there is no 'singular adopter experience' but that the adoption is a rich and bespoke journey which includes a narrative of real and lived experience showcasing the joys and challenges of the adoption journey and parenting an adopted child.

These sessions are delivered virtually to maximise reach and opportunity for those who would like to participate in this event to be able to do so and this has been a successful model which will be continued in future events.

Household Recruitment Journey – Enquiry to Stage One



Preparing and approving adoptive parents

Assessments

Adopt London South have two assessment teams, one primarily covering the South East boroughs and the other team cover the South West boroughs. The assessment teams provide robust assessments of prospective adopters as part of their preparation to become adopters. They facilitate and deliver adopters preparation group training which is a 4-day course covering a range of relevant subjects pertaining to becoming an adoptive parent and preparing adopters to think about how they plan to meet the needs of the children waiting across their lifespan. Critically, greater emphasis is placed on the need to maintain important relationships for an adopted child so that they can grow up with a sense of wholeness and understand their dual family membership identity. This is aligned with the recommendations of the Draft Public Law Outline (adoption) and also aligned with research published in 2022 'Maintaining Relationships with Birth Families After Adoption: What are Adopted Adults Views?' (Rawcliffe et al 2022) which has user voice embedded. The subsequent practice development is a good example of how research influences, shapes and develops our practice with a view to providing the best outcomes for those whose lives are affected by adoption. The research briefing can be found [here](#).

Adoptive household approvals

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
54	58	48	39

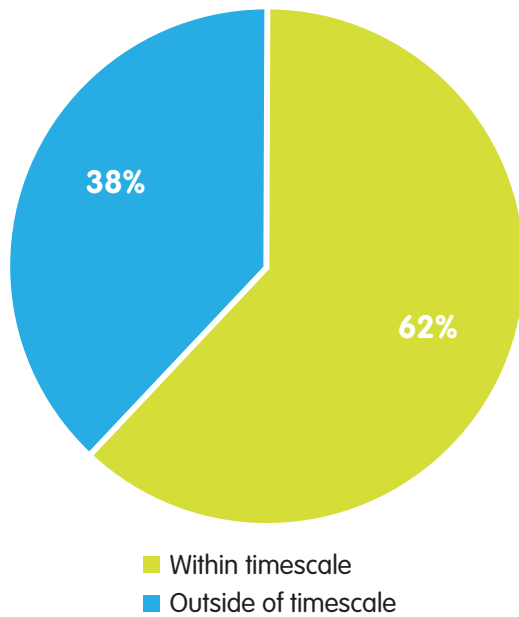
Timeliness of assessments is a crucial factor which is benchmarked against a DfE timescale. Assessments are carried out in 2 stages. Stage 1 of the assessment should take 8 weeks to progress and stage 2 of the assessment is 4 months from the start of stage 2 to the approval sign off by the Agency Decision Maker.

Regular review of the available data shapes the delivery of the service with a view to recruiting families to meet the needs of the children waiting. This helps determine the families who should be prioritised with a view to ensuring that families approved will consider our children who are waiting.

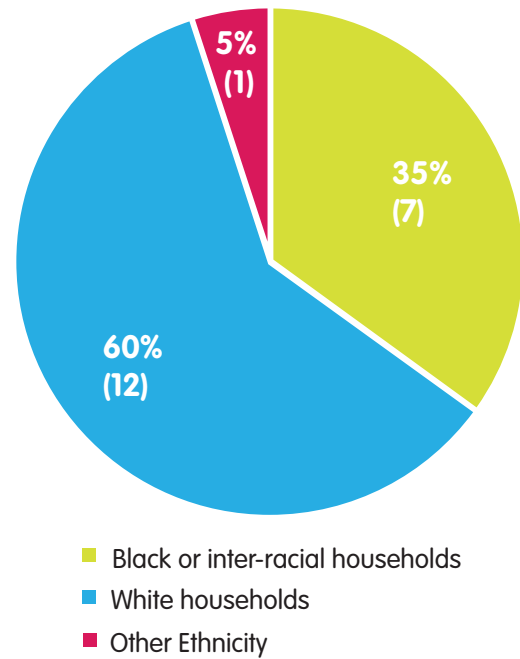
ALS have approved **39** adoptive households in the past year with **62%** being completed within the recommended timescales. A range of factors can contribute to delays at various stages of the assessment, including awaiting information from third parties. There are also occasions when it is right and appropriate to take a break which can often occur because of life changes such as a house move, change in work or family health concerns. Delay can also occur if things arise during the course of the assessment that may need some more time to work through and prospective adopters are guided and supported through this process should situations like this arise.

Black and black interracial households have made up a quarter of the households approved over the past year. Whilst this is showing some improvement in recruiting black families more

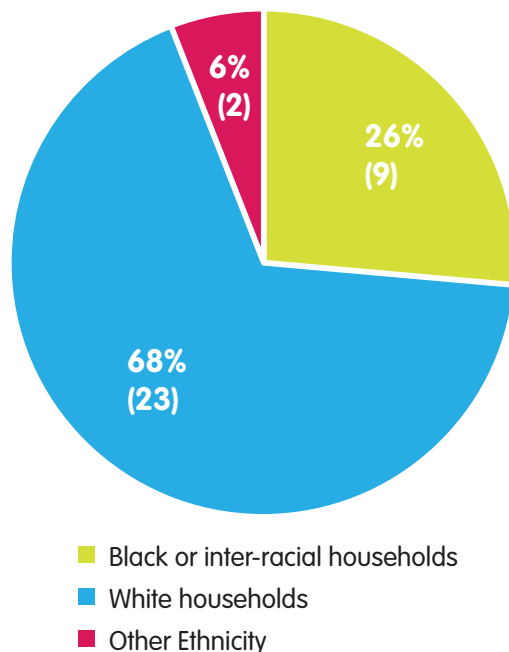
Prospective Adopters Reports completed within timescales 2023/24



Ethnicity of households starting Stage 1 2023/24



Ethnicity of households recommended for Initial Visit 2023/24



work is underway to help ALS become an agency of choice for black families.

Of the **34** families who were recommended for an initial visit, **20** new families started stage 1 of the adoption assessment process in 2023/24. 1/3 of the families that went on to stage one were black and interracial families who went on to stage 1 of the process but almost half of the white households put forward for initial visit were not ready to begin stage 1 following their meeting with the social worker.

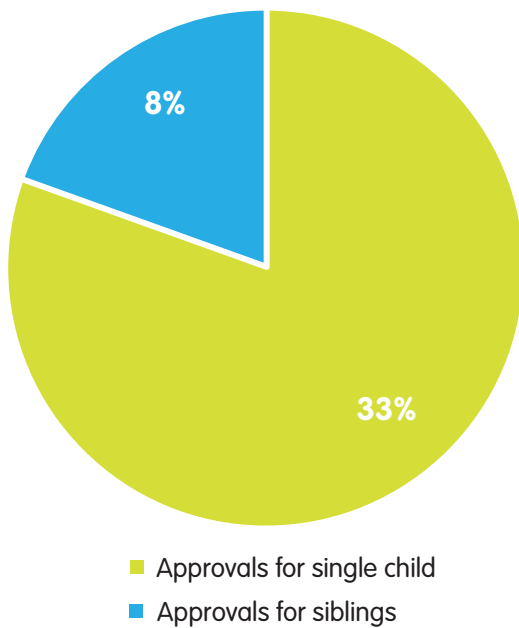
Families presented to Panel

The households presented to adoption panel over the past year have been diverse in family structure and also diverse in their approval criteria.

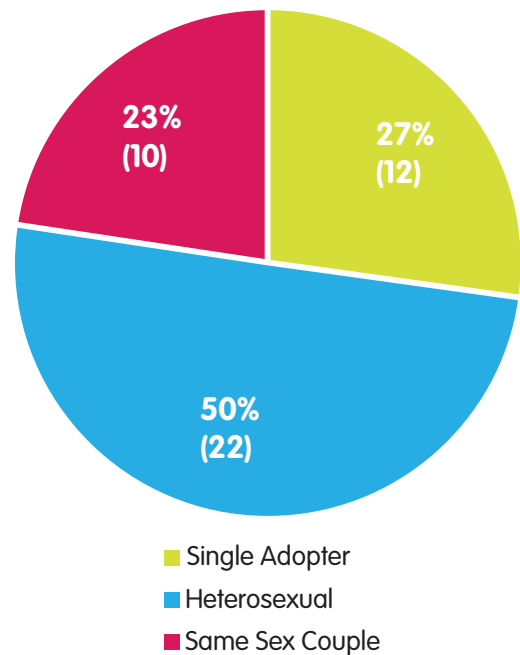
ALS have had **44** families presented to panel over the past year for approval, dual approval for adoption and Early Permanence and for Early Permanence only, as part of an updated assessment.

39% of all families seeking approval were seeking approval for Early Permanence which is a great improvement and provides greater

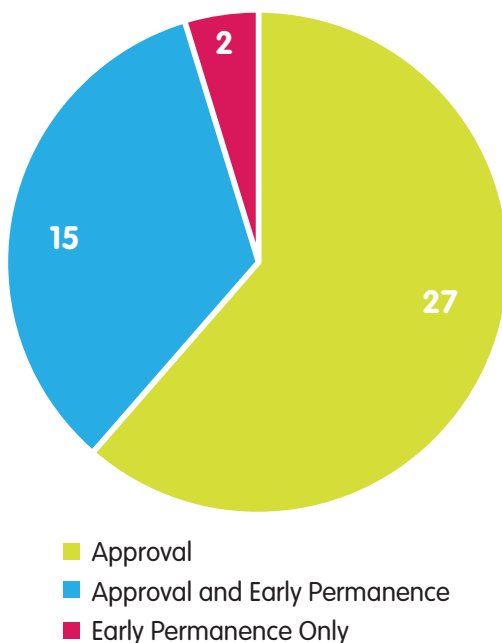
Adopters Approved for Siblings 2023/24



Family Structure of Approved Adopters 2023/24



Approvals for Adoption and Early Permanence 2023/24



flexibility for children for whom Early Permanence is an appropriate plan.

The greatest proportion of families were 2-parent household which made up a total of **73%** of the households presented to panel. Just over a quarter of the households approved were for single parent households and of the 2-parent households, 23% were same sex couples.

A quarter of those approved were approved for siblings.

Foster Carer and Connected Persons Assessments

ALS receive referrals from boroughs to explore the possibility of securing a permanent adoptive home with a child who has lived with foster carers or connected persons for at least a year and for whom the care plan is adoption. ALS provide consultation to the boroughs to explore and advise on the suitability of adoption applications and also explore alternative ways to secure permanence for children through lesser orders than adoption orders if this is a suitable option to explore.

Foster carer assessments and connected persons assessments are undertaken by the team with a view to exploring the carers suitability to meet the needs of the child over the lifetime. When this is successful, it reduces the number of placement moves for children which is a good outcome.

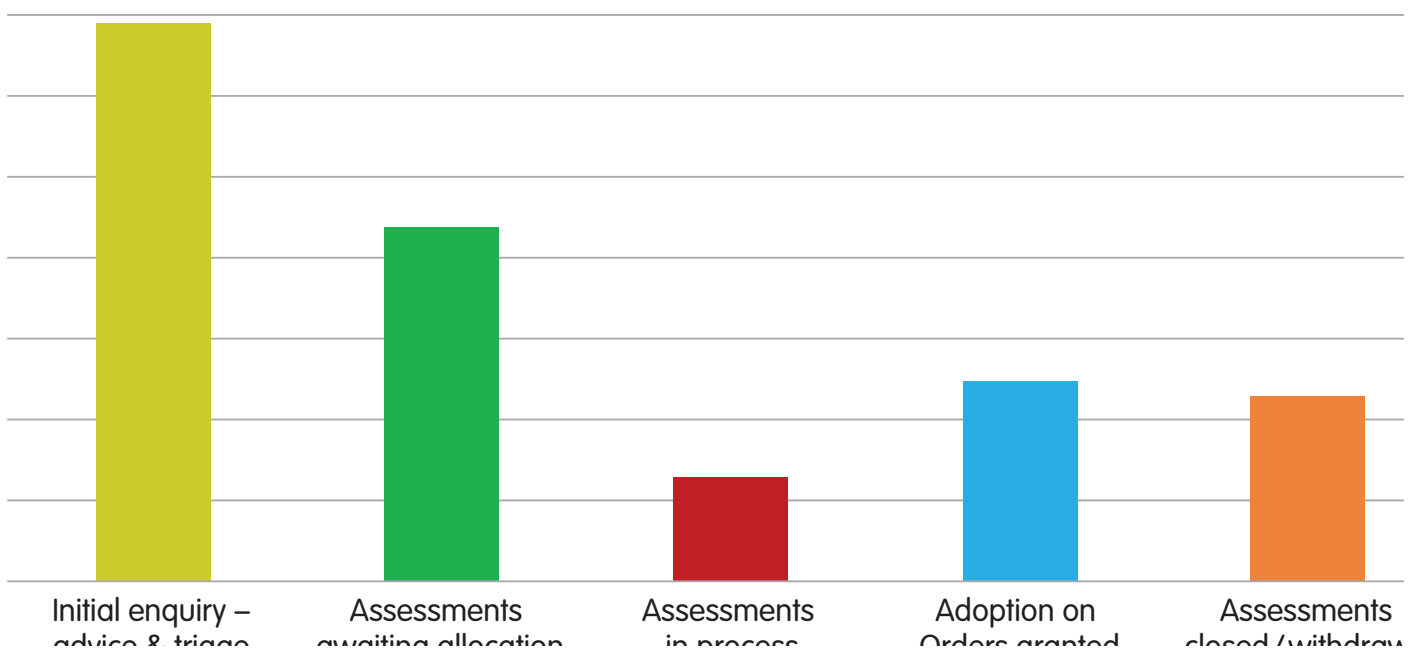
Non-agency Assessments

Non-agency assessments are those assessments that are provided to the court to secure an adoption order for children in circumstances that don't involve court protection processes.

This area of work is growing in volume and complexity reflecting the changes in society. These assessments might be sought to secure an adoption order for foster carers who have looked after children outside of the boroughs plans, assessments for step parents or to secure legal parental responsibility for children born through surrogacy or some IVF arrangements.

There is a high level of demand for these types of assessments and in the past year, ALS have developed a lead practitioner in this area and the completion of these assessments are flexibly supported by Independent Social Workers to meet the demand in this area of the service.

Non-Agency Assessments 2023/2024



Planning for children

Adoption permanency planning

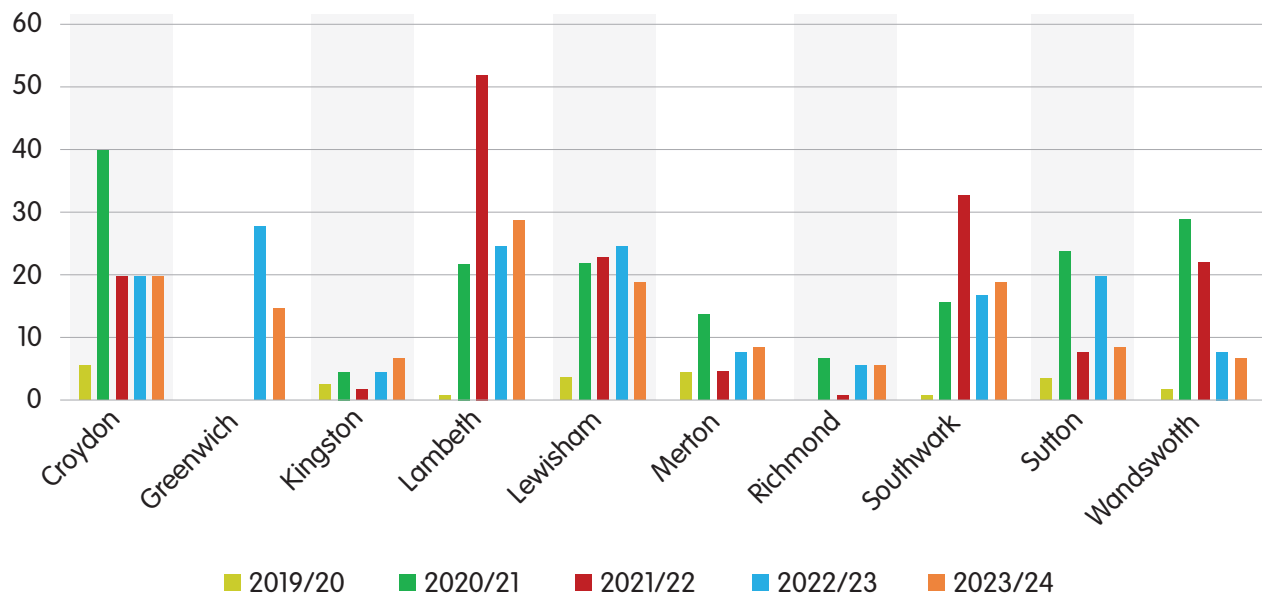
Each borough has a named ALS Family Finding social worker who builds a close relationship with the borough. Through regular attendance at key meetings including permanency planning meetings and tracking meetings, the Family Finder tracks the care planning journey of children and once a plan is agreed for adoption or if Early Permanence is being considered. The Family Finder makes every effort to find the most appropriate family to meet the identified needs of the child ensuring that each ALS approved adopter is considered. The Family Finding team also work closely with the Adopt

London Matching Project and the London Early Permanence project to maximise opportunities for children to stay within the London area, if not within ALS directly.

The referrals that are made into ALS for family finding may result in outcomes that do not lead to adoption as this is often dependent on the outcome of the care planning decisions or court processes. However in order to provide a responsive service, the family finding team become involved early on and start early work to ensure that swift but robust decisions can be made in the event that plans progress to adoption for children.



Referrals Into Family Finding Team by Borough

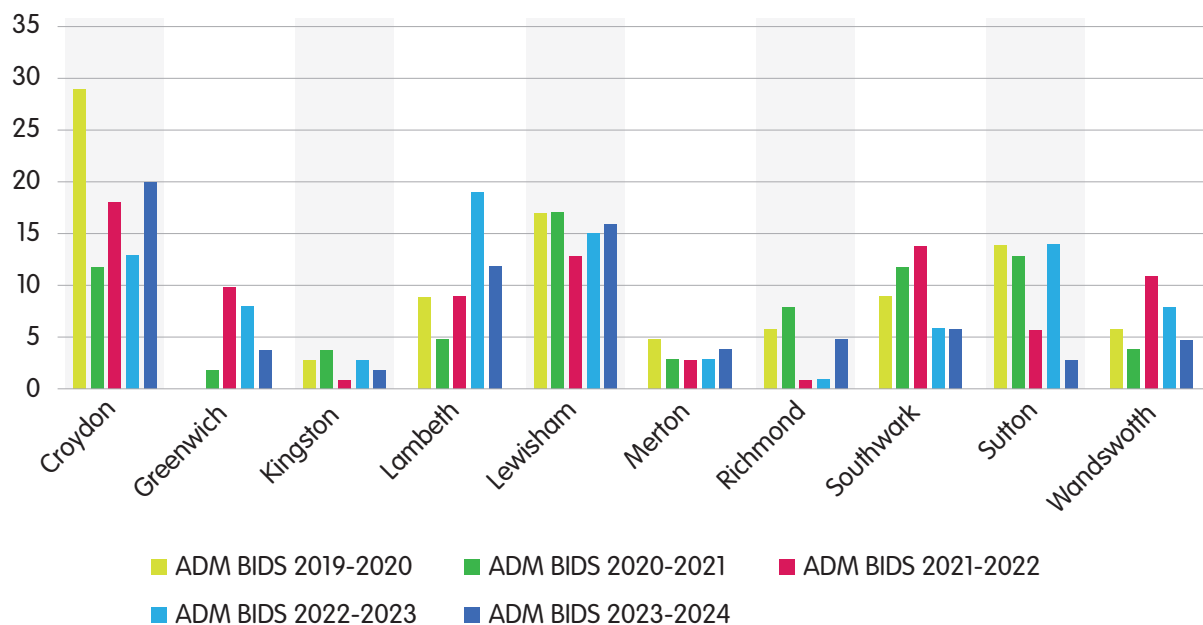


Referrals into Family Finding Team by Borough

Borough	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Croydon	6	40	20	20	20
Greenwich	0	0	0	28	15
Kingston	3	5	2	5	7
Lambeth	1	22	52	25	29
Lewisham	4	23	22	25	19
Merton	5	14	5	8	9
Richmond	0	7	1	6	6
Southwark	1	16	33	17	19
Sutton	4	24	8	20	9
Wandsworth	2	29	22	8	7



Best Interest Decisions by Borough



ADM BIDS

Borough	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Croydon	29	12	18	13	20
Greenwich	0	2	10	8	4
Kingston	3	4	1	3	2
Lambeth	9	5	9	19	12
Lewisham	17	17	13	15	16
Merton	5	3	3	3	4
Richmond	6	8	1	1	5
Southwark	9	12	14	6	6
Sutton	14	13	6	14	3
Wandsworth	6	4	11	8	5

Whilst there are still some children who are waiting for adoptive homes, 58 of the children referred to ALS have not gone on to be matched have been either subject to care plans that don't include adoption or a revocation of care and or placement orders meaning that adoption will no longer be the preferred plan for the child.

Of the 140 new referrals into ALS in the reporting year, 16 have resulted in matches for children and there are 17 children with active family finding activities underway.

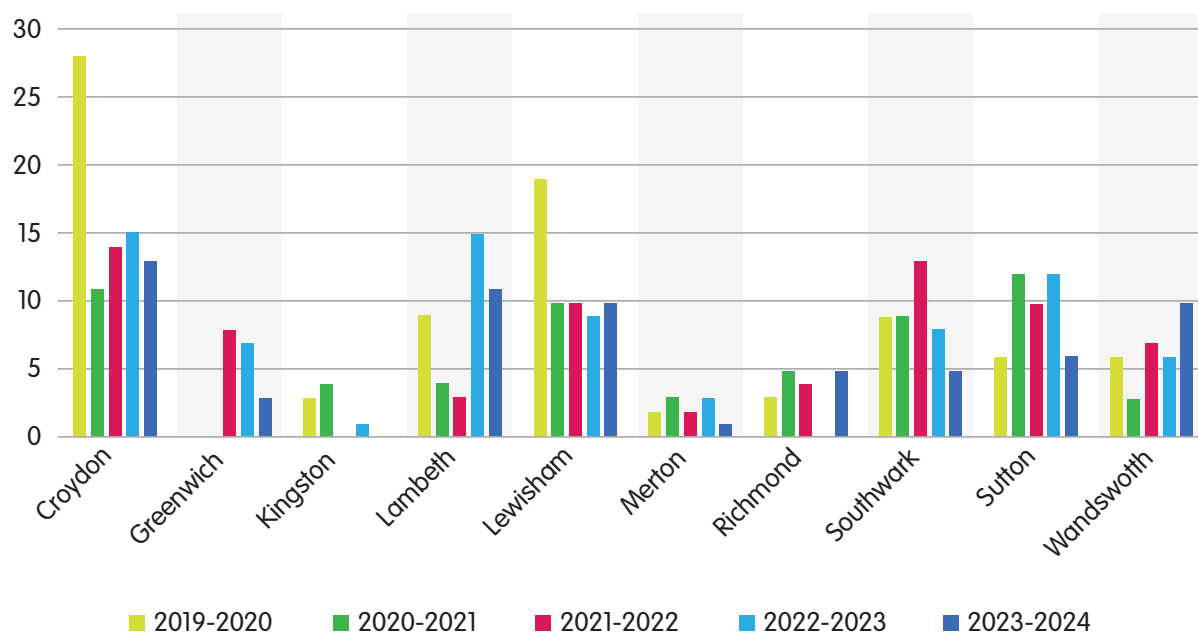
The remainder of the children are in different stages in the process including consideration for Early Permanence, being formally linked with adopters or living with foster carers who are considering adopting them.

Children with a plan for adoption

The pattern of best interest decisions (BID's) from the Local Authority Agency Decision Maker has been variable and but we are starting to see the number of BID's slowly increasing across ALS as a whole, although there is some variability across the partnership.

The numbers of children with Placement Orders is also starting to increase, and remains steady following improvements in the court timescales which are slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Total Placement Orders by Borough



Total PO's by borough

Borough	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Croydon	28	11	14	15	13
Greenwich	0	0	8	7	3
Kingston	3	4	0	1	0
Lambeth	9	4	3	15	11
Lewisham	19	10	10	9	10
Merton	2	3	2	3	1
Richmond	3	5	4	0	5
Southwark	9	9	13	8	5
Sutton	6	12	10	12	6
Wandsworth	6	3	7	6	10



Placing children with adoptive parents

Family Finding

Family Finding refers to the process of finding the most suitable home to meet a child's long term needs if they have a plan for adoption. The Family Finding team in ALS are responsible for identifying families to provide a permanent home for children with a plan for adoption.

While Adopt London South are responsible for the family finding activity on behalf of a child, the corporate parenting responsibility remains with the child's placing authority and they retain responsibility for the decisions for care planning, court process and decision making around permanence plans for children.

Children waiting for an adoptive family

There is close liaison between the Family Finding Team and the Assessment teams to ensure a good knowledge of those prospective adopters in the pipeline and early discussions take place as soon as is practical to ensure that we minimise the length of time that children wait for adoption.

Some children are placed out of the pan-London region but these decisions are always made with the child's best interests in mind and based on what the family can offer the child to meet their needs.

The Adopt London Matching project offers opportunities to maximise successful family finding through regular Stay and Play events, national exchange days and networking events

which enable professionals to share profiles and explore the matching considerations for children against those approved adopters who are waiting. The professional network also come together regularly to share information.

The focused energy around matching is critical to supporting the aim of achieving permanence through placing a child for adoption when this is their agreed plan.

The information below shows matching activity by borough. This is when adoptive families have been identified, for a child through selection processes, the match has been presented to panel and the local Authority Agency Decision Maker has ratified the panel recommendation for a match.

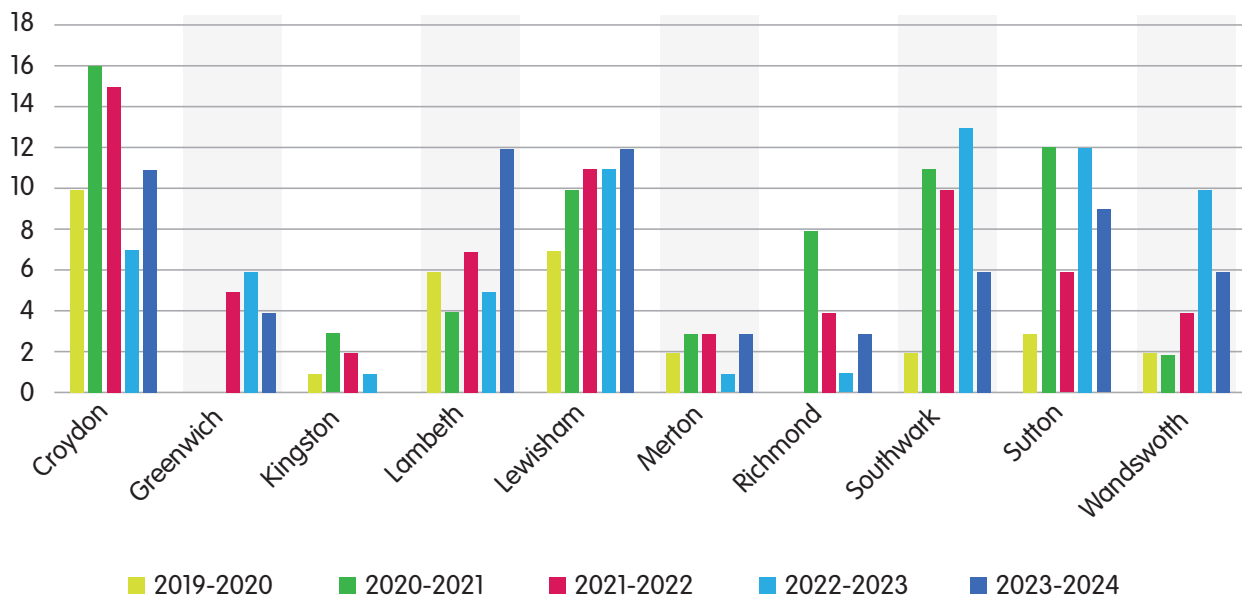
Matching activity remains variable across the partnership but this is culmination of the partnership working between Adopt London South identifying suitable families for the local authorities to consider as to who may best suit their children.

66 children were matched to homes that were identified as suitable to meet their needs.

Early Permanence Placements

There have been a total of 16 children placed in early permanence arrangements in 2023/24. There has been a dip compared to the numbers placed the previous year. ALS continue to work to build capacity and capitalise on the success of the Early Permanence project. ALS ensure that all prospective adopters receive training around

Children matched by Borough



Total children matched by Borough

Borough	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Croydon	10	16	15	7	11
Greenwich	0	0	5	6	4
Kingston	1	3	2	1	0
Lambeth	6	4	7	5	12
Lewisham	7	10	11	11	12
Merton	2	3	3	1	3
Richmond	0	8	4	1	3
Southwark	2	11	10	13	6
Sutton	3	12	6	12	9
Wandsworth	2	2	4	10	6

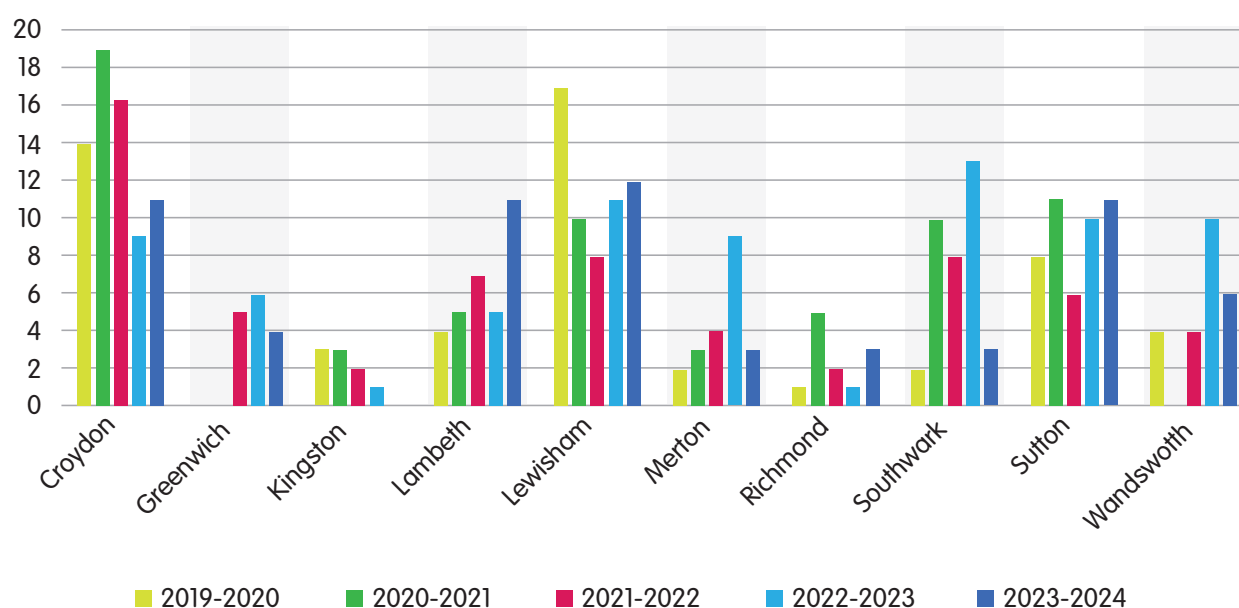
Early Permanence to support them to make the best decisions about whether to proceed with this as part of their assessment. This is known as the 'Opt Out' model as families are given information to make informed decisions about their capacity to provide Early Permanence to children for whom this is appropriate.

A number of households that hadn't considered Early Permanence have pursued this option following the training, reflecting on the benefits for the child and understanding that Early Permanence is no guarantee that adoption will follow.

The improvement of knowledge of EP across the partnership has meant an increase in referrals

and EP consultations with ALS and it is positive to see that this is being considered more frequently as an option for children. The benefits of placing a child in an early permanence placement ensure that they are well cared for, nurtured and supported whilst plans are being considered about permanence arrangement. If plans are for reunification to birth family, EP carers can support this plan having given a child a stable and secure start and if the plan is for adoption, it minimises moves between carers which is universally recognised as beneficial for a child as it limits the impact of loss and the associated trauma that a child can experience as a result of a placement move.

Children placed by Borough



Children placed by borough in 2023-2024

Borough	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Croydon	14	19	10	9	11
Greenwich	0	0	5	6	4
Kingston	3	3	2	1	0
Lambeth	4	5	7	5	11
Lewisham	17	10	8	11	12
Merton	2	3	4	9	3
Richmond	1	5	2	1	3
Southwark	2	10	8	13	3
Sutton	8	11	6	10	11
Wandsworth	4	0	4	10	6

Location of Placements

As practice continues to develop, there is a greater clarion call for local placements for local children. This is in recognition of enabling children to maintain the London link to their identity and because it has been evidenced that children fare better when placed in closer proximity to their placing authority and that accessing support is better understood through well-established relationships with local providers and through well-understood referral pathways.

This notwithstanding, the right placement for children is the priority in decision making and

when the right match is found outside of ALS, these placements are pursued and secured to ensure that matching decisions are correctly driven by the needs of the children and the best available adopters.

In the past year, ALS have placed almost twice as many children with in house adopters than in external placements.

ALS maximises the use of the adopters that we have recruited, prepared and taken to panel to approve. ALS have clear focus to recruit adopters to meet the needs of children waiting therefore we are confident in their preparation for adoption.

Regular formalised meetings between the Recruitment and Assessment service and the Family Finding service enable good flow of information to support early planning and matching considerations for children who have; or are likely to have a Placement Order granted and to ensure that there is a good knowledge of the key strengths experience and skills that families can offer.

The benefits of using ALS adopters is that; through the assessment period, we develop a much stronger knowledge of our adopters strengths and are well placed to support them in their areas of development. ALS are clear about the support pathways and London children get to remain in the London area, thereby retaining their London identity.

The Adopt London Matching project has a particular focus on developing the links between the four Adopt London RAA's and alongside the practice improvements, there are frequent profiling events so that information can be shared about children and families who are waiting. There have been successful Adopt London Stay and Play events which enable approved adopters to meet children informally and play alongside them with their foster carers.

Over the past year, development work has taken place to improve the profiles of children and families to ensure that the best available information and photography is presented and readily available to share across adoption

agencies to secure the best possible match for children.

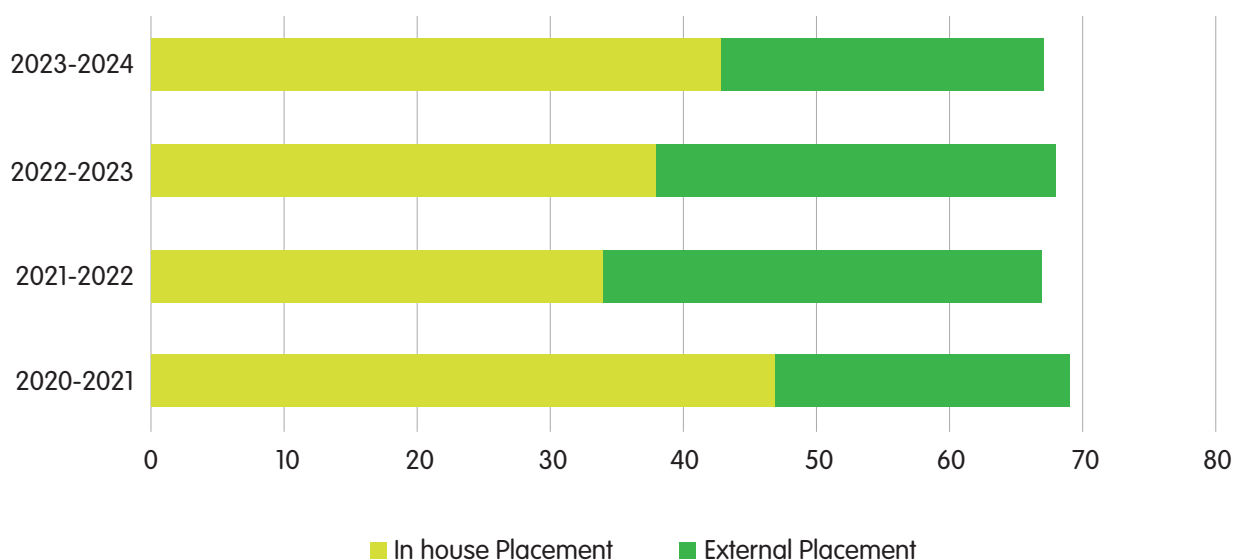
Whilst non-ALS families are always considered for all children in the event that there are no suitable in-house matches, this comes with an inherent understanding and recognition that a key contributing factor to successful adoptions is having local placements that can be scaffolded by well understood support structures based within the locality.

Another benefit to matching children with ALS families is that there is a clear escalation process which is well established in ALS and enables swift discussions with senior managers within the boroughs and ALS to progress matters and find a positive resolution. This escalation pathway is usually less clear with external arrangements and can result in delay in progressing matters for a child and their family.

Disruptions

There have been 4 children who were placed for adoption who have sadly been unable to stay in the homes that they have been placed in. This is a tragic outcome for children who have experienced a disruption and a difficult experience for adopters. The children who have experienced a disruption are in new homes and being well cared for. Disruptions meetings have taken place for all of the children who have had to leave adoptive households and the learning from this will be shared in a learning event in 2024/25

Total Matches



Supporting the Adoption Community

Support offer for families and adult adoptees

Adoption Support is a growing area which continues to be well used across the partnership. There is high demand for this area of the work and there are a high level of identified support needs, ranging from signposting to other services, through to supporting families at times of difficulty or crisis with the support of an experienced social worker, and at times with support from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (formerly known as the Adoption Support Fund).

The Adoption Support workers are highly skilled in a range of therapeutic disciplines which supports families through a 1:1 approach or as part of a wider group.

The adoption support team offer therapeutic training and drop-in workshops including:

- Non-Violent Resistance (NVR),
- Therapeutic Life Story Work,
- Let's Talk about Adoption (which helps families to discuss life story work with their children)
- Introduction to Theraplay (which helps parents to have a taste of the benefits of this therapeutic approach and consider whether this is the right fit for their family).

In the coming year, ALS hope to offer the well-respected Great Behaviour Breakdown training

which will be co-delivered with a certified GBB Trainer.

Adoption Support is a continuous growth area. The Adoption Barometer report has noted that families can find it difficult to access timely support, but once they do, they are generally satisfied. ALS have invested in reshaping the current service delivery model



and the supporting infrastructure to improve the customer journey in accessing Adoption Support to make it accessible, timely and responsive and it is anticipated that this redesign will be fully implemented within the coming year.

In addition to formal support, Adopt London South have an annual Family Fun Day to provide an informal and relaxed opportunity for adoptive



"I take this opportunity to say a warm thank you to all of you for organize an amazing event the last Saturday at Streatham. All was perfect and we had a great fun." – Adopter

"Thank you so much for organising the Fun Day on Saturday it was brilliant, a really lovely environment for the children and for the adults meet other adoptive parents. I really appreciated the way it was so spacious with different areas (thank heavens for the good weather!), it all worked really well... Particularly enjoyed the circus skills area, he was great and so patient. Thanks to your amazing team too and it was great to put faces to some of the names, as I've been emailing with M and P about post-adoption support." – Adopter

"Thank you for allowing us to sing today and all the hard work you and your team put into making the day so special. We were so welcomed and encouraged it was a wonderful atmosphere and the love, inclusiveness and kindness of the team shine through on all the activities- really impressed." – Choir member

families to come together, meet new people in the adoption community, have fun and meet workers across the service. In 2023/24 we had 373 people registered to attend. The families had the chance to participate in a range of sporting, circus and inflatables activities along with arts and crafts in a safe and secure environment. ALS families also enjoyed a live performance from the Adopt London Choir

Helpline

The adoption support Helpline operates as front door access to adoption support services. The helpline is staffed by experience consistent social workers who are able to triage referrals into the service to consider the most appropriate steps to support a family from a range of options available from the support offer. This can include signposting, providing information, advice and guidance to supporting therapy reviews or recommendations of support through a parent consultation with a psychotherapist or recommendations of a time-limited intervention by a social worker. This recommendation is reviewed by a manager and if in agreement, they will allocate a social worker to work with a family to address specific areas of concern.

ALS's role is empower families to be able to learn strategies and approaches to support their children through difficult periods. ALS are

of the understanding that situations are fluid and there are some points which might be naturally more challenging for adoptive families as they navigate the usual challenges at various developmental stages but recognise that this can be compounded by trauma, loss and attachment issues by virtue of the adoption.

It is understood that a multidisciplinary approach is often required and ALS will seek to engage relevant services to ensure that families are able to speak to the right people to find the right solutions.

The current climate is a challenging one as accessing services outside of adoption can be difficult due to capacity issues and pressures in other services. This has an impact on the provision of support to adoptive families as demand for the service in ALS is artificially inflated as families are finding it difficult to manage emerging crises whilst waiting for provision from CAMHS or Education.

ALS run with a waiting list for allocation to a social worker but all families that make contact are offered core support at the point of contact to help them whilst they are waiting. Over this past year, ALS have also developed The [Children](#) and [Young Person's](#) Guides to Adoption Support to help them understand what accessing adoption support means for them.

Adoption Support Social Work

Families who are allocated a worker will have needs that require a more intensive level of support for a period of time to bring stability and explore best approaches.

Adoption Support Social Workers have a good in-depth knowledge of attachment and trauma issues and many of the staff in ALS hold therapeutic qualifications in various disciplines and are able to bring these skills to the team in order to support our families from a therapeutic perspective.

Families who are allocated a social worker will have an Assessment of Support Needs undertaken or reviewed to understand the family experience, and consider with the family recommendations to meet the identified needs. The social workers identify therapeutic providers and support the family to select a provider who is able to work with the family to meet their needs which will require an application to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (this is discussed further below). Social workers will

complete this application process to secure the work for the family.

Frequently once therapeutic support is in place, the family will often remain working with the provider, however there are some occasions where social workers will need to stay involved with a family for an extended period and families will be made aware if this is the case.

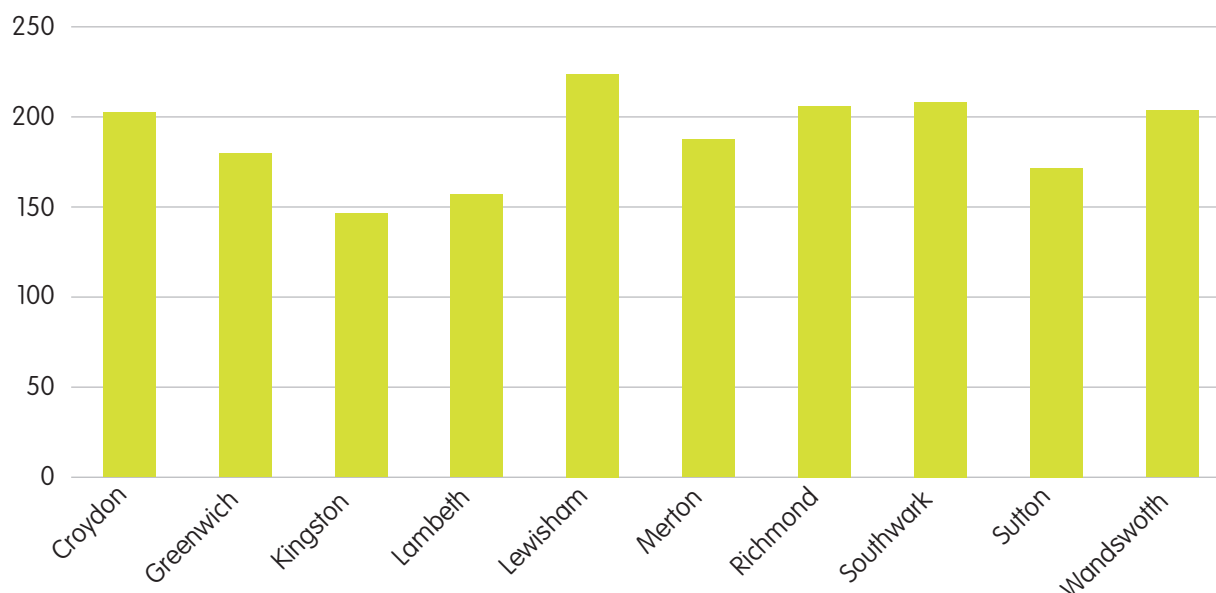
Alongside providing direct support to the family, social workers run various workshops and groups to provide further opportunities for families to self-select and access support as required.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (formerly Adoption Support Fund)

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) is well used within ALS to access funds for therapeutic support for families in need of this. The funding for this is provided by the Department for Education in recognition of the



Adoption Support Requests 2023/24



Adoption Support by Borough 2023/24

Borough	Adoption Support Requests
Croydon	203
Greenwich	180
Kingston	147
Lambeth	157
Lewisham	224
Merton	188
Richmond	207
Southwark	209
Sutton	172
Wandsworth	204

need to provide support for adoptive and special guardianship families.

The ASGSF provides funding for families to access a range of therapeutic support and specialist assessments. They operate a Fair Access Limit which is current set at up to £5k for therapy and up to £2.5k for specialist assessments. The ASGSF has a clear criteria about what is in scope for them and what is not, and any applications made must meet this criteria. The ASGSF usually turn applications around within a month provided all information on the application is correct and within scope of the ASGSF. If there are queries, this timescale is affected and can be difficult for families who are awaiting on the decision.

Keeping In Touch and Family Time

ALS are committed to helping families to stay in touch with people who are important to them. There is a team that supports the families to keep in touch by sending reminders to birth and adoptive families about their next keeping in touch activity, be that exchanging letters or coordinating the next meeting. As part of the development work that took place to help improve this journey, ALS have developed a fact sheet 'Guidance for using the Letterbox Service' for families to ensure that there is good quality information available to help make this important activity meaningful for the adopted child, their birth family, and adoptive family.. A link to the guide can be found [here](#).



The Adoptables

The Adoptables is an activity-based support group run for children by the staff in Adopt London South. It provides a space for children to be with other adopted children and develop supportive friendships without the burden of having to explain their family links, and enabling them to discuss matters which are important to them as part of their adoption story.

There are two groups that are delivered by Adopt London South staff. One group is for children aged 8-12 years and the other for young people aged 13-17 years. A total of 8 sessions have been run during 2023/24 with 4 sessions being delivered for each age group and ALS plan to continue to offer this invaluable space for young people.

This group has seen children grow in confidence and pride, and they have reported that they look forward to coming.

The young people are consulted about messages that they think are important for

other people such as teachers and prospective adopters and share their views. This is shared with prospective adopters through preparation group training or as part of their assessment and helps to shape the delivery of the service.

They have been working towards developing a useful fact sheet to share with educators to help them be able to better support adopted children in the classroom and wider school environment and plan to launch this in the coming year.

There has been a total attendance of **73** 8-12 years olds and **54** 13-17 year olds over the course of the past year.

The Adoptables is a well-used support space that has grown over the past year and is a unique space that offers children the chance to be together with a common and shared understanding of their adopted identity and the additional benefit is that it gives adopters an opportunity to meet and develop their own informal support links within the Adoption community.

What do the young people say about this group?



"The Adoptables is run by kind, caring leaders who are there when you need them."

"The Adoptables is really good because you can feel like you can talk about adoption and not feel like you are the only adopted one."

"The Adoptables are a great group and I would definitely recommend it."

"The Adoptables will definitely make you feel like you are a completely different person in a good way."

What do parents say?

"Many thanks for the afternoon on Saturday. X had a great time and was very enthusiastic, particularly about the music!"

"Just wanted to say thank you for today. Allowed X to have some play time with his peers and I was able to go to a shop to do some shopping for once."

Peer to Peer Support

We are in our 4th year working in a formal partnership with We Are Family which is a peer-to-peer support charity run by adopters for adopters. WAF offers a free membership to validated members of the adoption community and provides opportunities for adopters and adoptees to meet in a range of social settings or virtually for peer support.

WAF have a total of 7 locality based support groups across London and also run a group for single adopters. This is a great way to build support networks and reduce isolation in a space others can relate to. WAF offer meet ups in parks, playgroups and groups around shared common interests such as groups for parents of teenagers. They host annual celebration picnics and through this range of events, parenting an adopted child who may become dysregulated is normalised in a supportive environment. They have a membership of over 1100 adopters within their community and continue to grow which creates lots of opportunity for sharing experiences and finding someone who



“Adoption is the most rewarding but also the most challenging journey. Being part of WAF from an early point meant we felt listened to and most importantly, not alone. Being a WAF volunteer has enabled me to give back to one of the most authentic and special communities out there.”

– WAF Volunteer

“I felt very alone dealing with the challenges of adopting children that experienced so much trauma, meeting experienced adopters gave me more confidence and helped me feel I was not a rubbish parent. The support provided by other adopters was inspiring.”

– WAF Parent



understands the hurdles that adoptive families can face and may be able to provide support.

WAF's delivery model has a small staff team supporting a team of adoptive parent volunteers who lead and coordinate the delivery of activities in various areas. WAF's parent volunteers receive training to strengthen their impact in their role. This training can then be offered to other parent volunteers which creates a sustainable model for ongoing development of the WAF groups.

Adoptive Parent Training

Adopt London South families have the opportunity attend WAF webinars on adoption related topics twice a month. These webinars can be accessed live (which is interactive and provides space to ask questions) or on demand as part of the member hub. The benefit of on demand means that parents can access the same rich information at a time that best suits them.

Adopt London South families can gain a WAF membership at differing levels depending on where they are in their adoption journey. WAF have opened a limited membership offer to

prospective adopters and there is increased accessibility as adopters journey through the assessment process, culminating in full access to adopters who have children placed with them.

The WAF webinars are often led by experts by experience and professionals who have a good understanding of the strengths and challenges that adoptive families can experience.

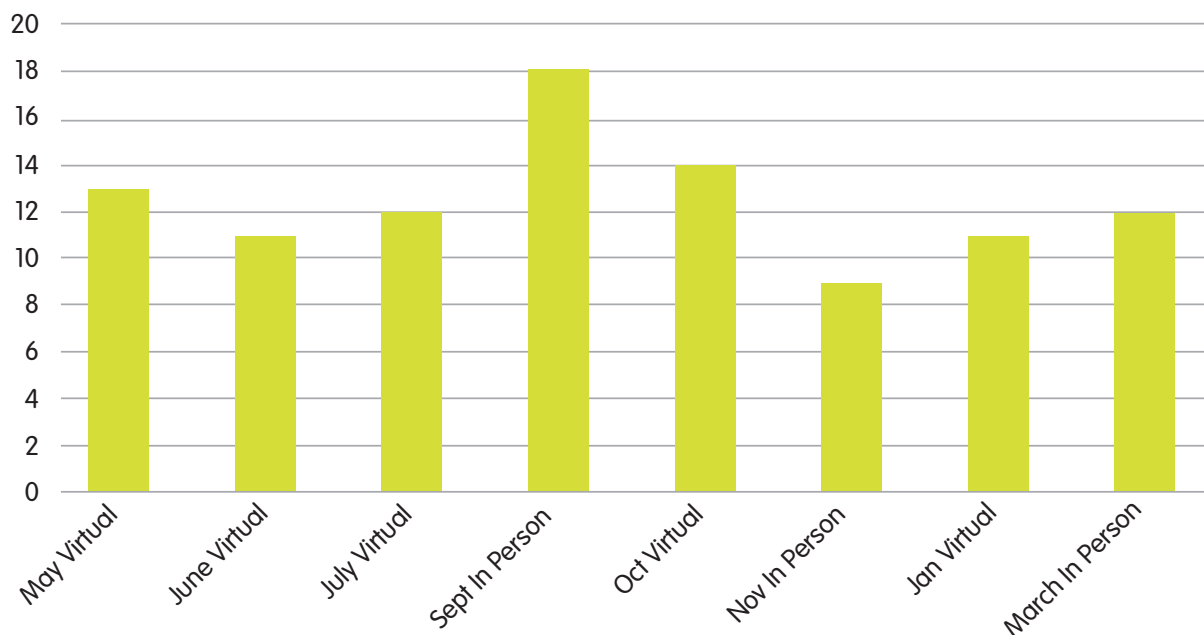
In 2022-23 webinars have included, but are not limited to:

- Child to parent abuse
- Call for Trauma Informed Schools
- Adoptee voices - what we wish you knew
- An Introduction to FAS
- Executive Functioning

- How friends and family can support differently wired children
- Contact and the benefit of openness with your children
- FASD awareness
- Non Violent Resistance (NVR)
- Separation Anxiety
- How to create a meaningful life story book

"This was such a rich session as it offered multiple perspectives. I will definitely listen to the recording later as a refresher of all the great tips offered." – WAF Member

Adopted Adults Group Attendance 2023/24



Date	Number of attendees
May Virtual	13
June Virtual	11
July Virtual	12
Sept In Person	18
Oct Virtual	14
Nov In Person	9
Jan Virtual	11
March In Person	12
Total	100

Adopted Adults

In response to the significant proportion of adopted adults seeking services following the sharing of their records, the adopted adults support group has been formed.

Adopt London South deliver Adopted Adults support in conjunction with the renowned PAC-UK as a part of a service level agreement. It is co-led by an ALS worker and a PAC-UK worker. This has been successful and has seen steady use across the service. This group commenced in November 2023 and has led to the development of the Adopted Adults Steering Committee which formed in February 2024. This committee has a focus on the development of services for adopted

adults ensuring that the voice of the service user is central to any decision making and onward development.

Further to the work of the ALS adopted adults group, there is a wider support group open to any adults which is coordinated and led by adoptees with support from Adopt London North which ALS Adopted Adults can also benefit from.

The ALS adopted adults group has had 100 attendees over the past year. The groups are run in person and virtually to maximise opportunities for attendance and there is a steady core of attendees at each group evidencing the need for and the value of this service offer.



“My experience was very good. I talked through my goals with my counsellor and we spread out the sessions so that I had the time read my files and process the information between the sessions. I felt that we achieved the goals that we set out and there were many ups and downs during the process but I feel at the end of the sessions in a much better place having reopened the past and worked through it with my counsellor. I’m very grateful for that.” – Adopted Adult

“I’m so glad I sought help and found your service. My counsellor was amazing and I really learned a lot about myself in sharing my story and reflecting on my feelings.” – Adopted Adult

“I always knew there’d be some difficulties but the sympathetic support I received was very much along the lines I expected. The rational approach taken was professional and pragmatic.” – Adopted Adult

“The adopted adults group has given me hope to feel that I am not alone in my adoption and life experience. Adoptees are the only humans forced into a lifelong contract without their consent. Therefore, having these groups is often essential to the well-being of many adopted adults and provides the only free and safe space for us to meet others in our community without shame or stigma.” – Adopted Adult

“The adopted adult group is without a doubt one of the most important aspects of my well-being. My whole life I have searched for meaning and connection where I have only felt sadness and loss. To receive the help and identification of other adult adoptees who, like myself, did not have the luxury of modern support with regard to being adopted and the feeling of loss and rejection is of such a huge benefit it’s hard to convey in a few lines. So I hope that to say the service is invaluable to me will suffice.”

– Adopted Adult

Supporting Adopted Adults to Access Records

In addition to the Adopted Adults support group, Adopt London South are responsible for supporting adopted adults to access their records to understand their adoption journey. There are a range of different formats to accessing the information depending on the date that the Adoption order was made and Adopt London South support all these areas of work.

Most recently, this work has changed as a result of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 changes which came into force on 30th December 2005.

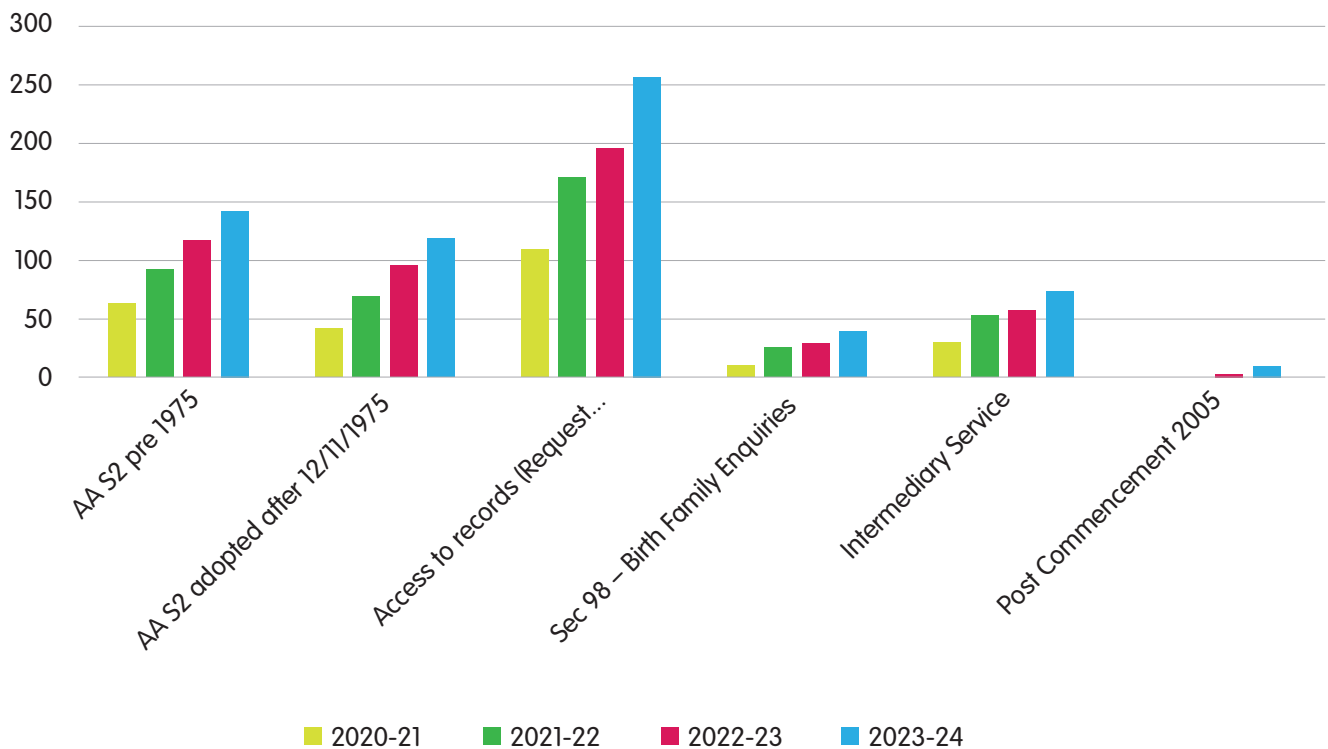
The changes as a result of this legislative update have placed additional duties on Adoption Services to anyone seeking access to their records if they were adopted on or after 30th December 2005. Those who this will be relevant for will have started to become adults since 30th December 2022. This will be a growing area of work that will require a different response to all other areas of delivery of work regarding



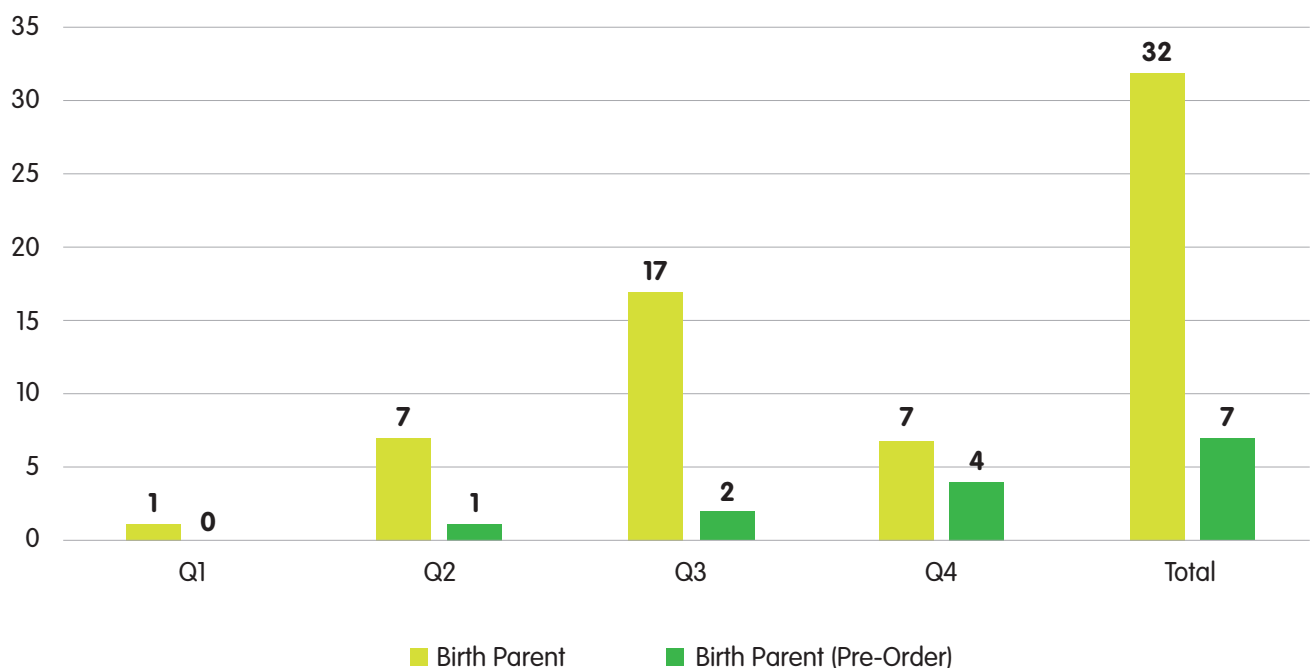
Adopted Adults. To date, these numbers are quite small in Adopt London South but there will be steady increase in this type of work.

Adopt London South have offered small amounts of intermediary work primarily to honour work that was already underway at the point of transition from the individual LA's to Adopt London South however this is not currently a standard part of our service offer.

Adopted Adults Case by Type



Birth Parent Usage of Commissioned Services 2023/24



Birth Parents

Birth parents are key in the adoption community. It is widely acknowledged that birth parents are not always in the best position to seek out services during the process of their children becoming adopted, however, over time, once things have settled down, they often review their position and find themselves in need of support.

Birth parents have access to support through a service level agreement with PAC-UK. This offers up to 6 counselling sessions for birth parents as well as provision for parents who are considering consented adoption for their children.

PAC-UK also offer birth parent groups. One is in-person and is based in PAC-UK's North London based office and the other is a virtual group offering opportunities for birth families to connect in a virtual space. The groups are co-facilitated with ALS staff.

This year has seen an increase in the use of the birth parents commissioned services. This reflects

"So grateful for this service and the wonderful support I have received (from PAC-UK) through an emotional experience." – Birth Parent

"I was helpful and understanding, she gave me a lot of information and support." – Birth Parent

the efforts made to ensure that birth parents have knowledge of access to the service and promotion across the partnership to improve the knowledge in the boroughs of the service to ensure that birth parents are given information and signposted accordingly.

ALS are working towards increasing the current service provision by offering a support group to parents with a planned launch early into the next year.

Review of plans

23/24

Review of Recommendations

Finding prospective adoptive parents

- 1 Continue to progress the aims and objectives of the Black Adoption Project, including implementation of new pilot projects to improve services to Black prospective adopters.**

OUTCOME: The Black Adoption Project is now well established. The report has been launched and plans are underway to secure funding for a programme lead to implement the pilot projects. One of the priority pilot projects is to support prospective adopters on their journey. The pilot delivery is currently in design so that this can be taken forward once a project lead is in place. The Black Adoption project has delivered 2 webinars to date raising awareness about the project and has shared the project with the Department for Education and Adoption England and its members.

- 2 Maximise opportunities to prospective adoptive parents by increasing reach on social media with local material and appropriate material from the National Adoption Recruitment Programme Board.**

OUTCOME: The marketing and recruitment team have made use of all assets provided and have continued to run a digital first strategy in engaging prospective adopters, taking opportunities to focus on topical and seasonal themes as appropriate. Assets are shared across the partnership and partners are encouraged to endorse and share with local communications teams to extend the reach.

Preparing and approving adoptive parents

- 3 Launch the 'Am I Ready to Adopt Tool' to improve the experience and bolster the preparation of prospective adopters and ensure that they are well informed and well prepared when they come to the process.**

OUTCOME: The Am I Ready to Adopt tool has been launched as planned. This is a self-help option to enable people to start to think about how best to prepare for becoming an adopter. The tool provides guidance in response to the questions that are answered and provides a bespoke plan to support prospective adopters to become adoption-ready.

4 Adopters have access to quality preparation training which includes hearing from those with lived experience of adoption.

OUTCOME: Each preparation group training has been delivered to prepare prospective adopters through the adoption process and the expectations of them as adoptive parents to practically and emotionally be able to meet the needs of the children waiting. Clear messaging is shared to ensure that adopters are ready for modern adoption including the importance of maintaining significant family links for children, promoting children's identity and supporting them as they navigate their membership to two families.

5 Strengthen and embed the use of analytics tools to ensure timely progression through the service and bring the adopter journey closer to the average England timescales.

OUTCOME: The implementation of Power BI has supported the work of the organisation to provide real time analytics to support the delivery of the work and identify delay. This is invaluable to the service to better understand the adopter journey.

Planning for children

6 Implement recommendations from the Early Permanence research report into barriers to Early Permanence in London to bring about improved outcomes for children needing Early Permanence placements.

OUTCOME: The Barriers to Early Permanence in London report was commissioned by Adopt London and has shaped and influenced the work of the London Early Permanence project which focuses on ensuring that the appropriate professionals have the right information about EP. The project work commenced in October 2023 with a 41 point work plan which harnessed and includes the recommendations of the Patterns of Early Permanence in London Research Report which can be found [here](#)

7 Increase communication with partners to better understand and improve children's journey's with use of shared datasets and regular dialogue to promote swift and timely progression of care plans.

OUTCOME: Adopt London South have implemented regular 1:1 meetings with the individual boroughs within the partnership to review performance routinely. These are held 6-weekly with the permanence leads and the service manager with a focused view on improving outcomes and timeliness of decision making for children.

There is the opportunity for on-the-spot discussions with clear escalation process within the RAA and the borough to minimise delay where this is needed.

Due to current information governance challenges, full datasets cannot be readily accessed across the partnership independently of ALS but detailed discussions that take place with each borough are scaffolded by the performance data for each borough to ensure robust scrutiny of each child's journey.

Placing children with adoptive parents

8 Taking into account identified trends ensure sufficiency of adopters who are suitable to meet the needs of the children waiting and those who may have a plan for adoption.

OUTCOME: Quarterly data is shared and regular weekly meetings between recruitment, assessment and family finding teams to ensure that there is a clear line of sight into the characteristics and needs of children waiting which informs the messaging at the front door. Due to the frequency of the meetings the service can be agile and respond quickly to changes in the adoption landscape focusing key messages during the Adopter Information Meetings and the Meet The Adopter events, showcasing the highest level of need, be that for Early Permanence carers, families for black children, families for siblings or children with additional needs.

9 Increase the number of children being placed with in-house and local adoptive families.

OUTCOME: ALS have been successful in placing two thirds of the children placed this year with ALS-approved adopters.

Providing support to adoptive families and others

10 Implement phased developments to the website to make it more accessible to all those accessing support, including adult adoptees, birth parents, and families with adopted children.

OUTCOME: Webpages have been reviewed and adjustments have been made. The user experience has been audited and in the coming year. Required content has been identified and changes will be implemented so that those affected by adoption will be able to quickly find quality information that is pertinent to them.

11 Embed bi-annual data analysis of adoption support audit data for Adopt London to compare and understand different levels of demand and models of adoption support and to determine focus on identified need to improve services across Adopt London.

OUTCOME: Adopt London South have implemented a bi-annual adoption support audit to regularly capture the requisite data to better understand patterns of demand. Learning from this data is shared across the partnership to inform decision making around focus of resources.

12 Remodelling current adoption support services to ensure that anyone affected by adoption should have timely access to support at the requisite level.

OUTCOME: A programme of change has been initiated and is still underway with the adoption support team processes. This is to ensure timelier access, reduce waiting times and offer quality services to families before the reach crisis point.

Maintaining Family Links

13 Implement a phased introduction of the digital letter exchange system.

OUTCOME: This priority has not yet been met. This will remain a priority, however the focus has been in response to the sector-wide developments to keeping in touch to ensure that ALS are responsive to increasing the quality of links and supporting adopted children to maintain relationships in a meaningful way through ensuring good quality contact between birth family and adopters.

14 All people coming to the adoption process are prepared and committed to maintaining family links to support a child in developing an understanding of their heritage and identity.

OUTCOME: ALS provide consistent messaging through literature, development of the website information, the Am I Ready to Adopt tool, information meetings and preparation group training to ensure that Adopters are clear about their active role in maintaining family links and keeping adopted children in touch with important people in their lives.

Working as part of Adopt London

15 Strengthen arrangements through a legal partnership agreement for Adopt London.

OUTCOME: Work is still underway within Adopt London to implement the legal partnership agreement. The process is being overseen by the Executive Board to steer work in the right direction. This work is being led by Adopt London West and their legal team and the legal partnership agreement will serve to protect the shared brand and assets in Adopt London.

16 Develop adopter voice to ensure service benefits from hearing from adopters with a focus on continuous improvement and development of service delivery to meet the needs of our families.

OUTCOMES: The development of Conversations for Change across Adopt London and the Adopt London South Adopter Executive Group has created a foundation for ensuring that the Adopter voice can be embedded through full participation. Opportunities to involve adopters in various processes, to provide consultation on service development (practice and policy) or to consider other forums to embed participation in a meaningful way remain on the agenda.

Partnership Working

17 Develop information-sharing platforms for partners to access information relevant to the work ongoing for their individual Borough.

OUTCOME: This objective has not yet been met but this aspiration is being pursued. Interim arrangements to share information are in place to ensure that there is regular and meaningful sharing of borough-specific information between the partners and ALS.

Workforce development

18 Ensure workforce is sufficient, competent, skilled, prepared and well-informed about practice issues.

OUTCOME: ALS staff have access to regular learning and development opportunities through focused training, Lunch and Learn sessions and ensuring that best practice opportunities are available across the service.

19 Workforce are well informed about key developments in adoption policy, guidance and best practice and have access to a range of developmental opportunities to ensure quality service to anyone affected by adoption.

OUTCOME: ALS have quarterly service days to share key and relevant information across the service. An annual Adopt London staff conference provides an opportunity for staff to be well sighted on developments within the national landscape as well as local developments. A series of learning and development opportunities from Adoption England and more specifically, the Culture Change series with an emphasis on upskilling practitioners in the area of keeping in touch is available for all staff to attend. An opportunity to learn from a serious case review has also preceded service developments in response to this learning.

Strategic Priorities April 2024 – March 2025

Strategic Priority Area	Activity	Measures
Finding Prospective Adopter and Early Permanence Carers	1. Make use of the all promotion materials from Adoption England National Adoption Recruitment Programme Board to support recruitment activity.	Increase in use of Adoption England material across website, social media.
	2. Increase number of enquiries by prospective adopters by 20% in the coming year.	Increase in number of adopter enquiries.
	3. Messaging around Early permanence to form part of information meetings to ensure that this is an early consideration for prospective adopters.	Each information session will have contained information about Early Permanence as part of the delivery plan.
	4. Increase availability of Early Permanence Carers through active an targeted recruitment campaign.	Early permanence focused campaign will be delivered with specific measuring of impact and outcomes of this campaign.
Preparing and Assessing Prospective Adopters for Adoption and Early Permanence	1. Embed use of adopters in delivery of Adoption Preparation training with a focus on sharing assessment experience and key messages about modern adoption including the importance of life story work, early access to support and maintaining links for their adopted children.	Approved adopters will co-facilitate Adopter Prep group.
	2. Adopters to be co-facilitating Early Permanence Training.	Experienced Early Permanence carers will co-facilitate Early Permanence training.
	3. Increase numbers of prospective adopters to be dually approved as early permanence carers thereby creating a larger pool of ALS Early Permanence Carers for Early permanence arrangements for children.	30% of all approved adopters in 2024-2025 will be dual approved for Early Permanence.
	4. Improve timescales for adopters assessments. 80% to be completed within timescales.	Adopter assessment rates will be completed within timescales.

Planning for Permanence	1. Reduce average waiting time for children to be matched with suitable adoptive families with improved Permanency planning being considered across the partnership and earlier alerts and insights in to children who may need an adoptive home.	Matching times for children will improve and closer to the National average.
	2. Targeted responses to individual boroughs to focus on improving outcomes to enable development of practice and consequently improve overall performance.	Improvement in individual borough outcomes where there has been a persistent challenge in progressing plans for children.
	3. Ongoing programme of learning and development to support boroughs in better understanding the permanency route for adoption work including appropriate consideration of Early Permanence if this is suitable.	Boroughs will be better sighted on the timescales, options and planning parameters to be able to progress identified plans for adoption underpinned by quality work and within acceptable timeframes.
	4. Improve outcome as benchmarked by England national averages from 62% to meeting timescales of 70% over the coming year.	Children's journeys will reflect improvements on information systems.
Placing Children with Adopters	1. Improved quality of records to ensure timely access to panel.	Reduction in panel deferrals due to improved quality and/or timeliness of paperwork received.
	2. CPR training offer to be co-facilitated by ALS and boroughs.	Reduction in panel deferrals due to improved quality and/or timeliness of paperwork received.
	3. Co-development of guides to support partners in understanding timescales and processes.	Guides will be available to share across the partnership which can be used during induction or to support inexperienced workers in understanding processes.
	4. Implement UEA Model Moving to Adoption across partnership stakeholder group including social workers, IRO's fostering services and foster carers through delivery of workshops or bitesize learn opportunities.	Increased understanding across all stakeholder groups of the importance of planning moves for children to support healthy and positive transitions into adoptive homes.

Supporting the Adoption Community	1. Design and embed improved recording systems to better understand the areas of need in adoption support to reflect messages that have been understood by specific areas of work including the Adoption Barometer, Conversations for Change, Improving Adoption Services for Adults, Public Law Working Group consultation paper.	Workflows in case recording systems will be accessible in Adoption support with clear points to measure service activity.
	2. Service reshape to increase helpline capacity and review of delivery model to reduce waiting times to access adoption support.	Helpline role will be redesigned and piloted with brief paper of initial review within 6 months of launch of new model.
	3. Review and refine core support offer to include recommended early training to support adopters pre and post order to develop their therapeutic parenting skills.	Adoption Support offer will be available to families and partners to understand early model of adoption.
	4. Implement core offer of workshops and training for adoptive households to access as a rolling programme of events to provide an early support offer to pre-order and post order adoptive households.	Training offer will be available across the service and for partners to support adoption support planning and to support partners in articulating service offer to Ofsted.
	5. Design and delivery of in-house training opportunities across ALS to strengthen understanding of therapeutic approaches across the service.	At least 3 in house learning opportunities will be delivered across ALS across different therapeutic modalities which will be open to all staff to participate in.
	6. Support groups to be delivered across 4 main groups in adoption community (adopted children, adult adoptees, adopters and birth family).	Fully implemented support groups will be in place across all service areas either delivered by ALS or partners.
	7. Explore development of specialist support groups to target specific types of adopters (e.g. adoptive fathers, single adopters, black adopters, transracial adoptive households).	Scoping paper alongside consultation document from reference groups to identify specific areas of need with proposals to meet the need from within existing resource or across strategic alliances.
	8. Scope development of bi-annual group for birth children in adoptive households.	Scoping document to identify if this is an area of need to be undertaken and if appropriate, presented to Board for consideration of experiences of this under-represented group of the Adoption Community.

	9. Scope use of digital systems to maintain links between birth and adoptive families.	Early pilot of digital system delivered and brief paper with onward recommendations as to next steps.
Panel	1. Ongoing development of shared panel training to improve consistency in panel delivery across London.	Positive feedback from panel member appraisals. Positive feedback of the panel experience from all stakeholders attending panel.
Business Support	1. Early scoping of the current business model to focus on underpinning specific service delivery areas to ensure business continuity planning arrangements.	Good understanding of the current strengths and vulnerabilities with opportunity for development of practice to ensure business continuity.
	2. Development of written systems processes to ensure clarity of approach and consistency in application.	Practice guidance for business support.
	3. Strengthen business support skill base in relation to service-wide data and present key periodic reports as required.	Improved understanding of business modelling and service delivery informed by data output.
Digital Development	1. Exploration of digital opportunities to transform business function.	Better understanding of digital formats and their ability to transform current service delivery.
	2. Pilot use of AI to improve efficiencies in the service.	
Value for Money	1. Reduction in staffing costs by recruiting to vacancies across the service.	Agency spend reduction and service stability.
	2. Review of all contracted services to ensure that they represent value for money services that meet the identified need.	All contracted work will have been reviewed and appropriate adjustments to service specification made accordingly.
	3. Scope opportunities for collaboration across specific service delivery areas and creative ways to build links across VAA partnerships.	Strategic working opportunities across service areas will be identified and options presented to Board to consider direction of travel for strategic alliances where this can strengthen service offer and outputs.

Participation	1. Embed expert by experience voice across various user groups including adoptees, adult adoptees, adopters, birth parents within service delivery model to work towards full representation across the business of Adopt London South. 2. Reflect and review outcomes from consultations with user groups bi-annually across the service to look at how we are able to implement feedback and identify areas that are appropriate but ALS are unable to meet through further discussion with Governance Board.	Each stakeholder group will have an opportunity to participate in various activities and forums to ensure their voice forms part of the delivery of the ALS service. Stakeholder group meetings will take place every 6 months to look at how feedback is being embedded in service delivery.
	3. Participation with the Voice and Influence work led by Adoption England.	ALS will have a lead working alongside the National Voice and Influence lead to embed learning across the service.
Staff Development and Retention	1. Explore opportunities for secondments into ALS from across the partnership if vacancies arise to develop adoption knowledge which will be taken back into individual boroughs. 2. Develop management and leadership skills through supporting students in ALS. 3. Focused training and management development to strengthen and improve service delivery at management level. 4. Accessing opportunities for learning as offered across Adoption England or by others in the sector to strengthen practice. 5. Explore opportunities for discrete research and action projects to develop project management skills across the service.	Boroughs will be aware of secondment opportunities and encourage their teams to consider these where appropriate. ALS will host students for the first time since becoming a RAA, offering a quality student placement and giving staff the opportunity to develop their management and leadership skills. Managers will be equipped with the right training and development to support them in their role and strengthen the core of the service as a result. Staff will have taken up learning opportunities offered across the sector to ensure contemporaneous understanding of best practice. ALS (possibly in conjunction with Adopt London) will seek opportunities for leads to develop practice across the Board, exploring any available funding opportunities for research or pilots that may be available.

References

Rawcliffe, C., Neil, E., Hancock, M. and Elias L. (2022) Maintaining relationships with birth families after adoption: What are Adopted Adults' Views? Centre for Research on Children and Families Research Briefing; Norwich: University of East Anglia. Available at [🔗 https://www.uea.ac.uk/web/groups-and-centres/centre-for-research-on-children-and-families](https://www.uea.ac.uk/web/groups-and-centres/centre-for-research-on-children-and-families)

Adoption Barometer for England [🔗 Download.ashx \(adoptionuk.org\)](#)

Public Law Working Group (Adoption) Consultation [🔗 https://www.judiciary.uk/guidance-and-resources/public-law-working-group-interim-report-recommendations-](https://www.judiciary.uk/guidance-and-resources/public-law-working-group-interim-report-recommendations-)

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CORPORATE PARENTING DISTRIBUTION LIST (OPEN)**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2024-25**

NOTE: Original held by Constitutional Team; all amendments/queries to
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Councillor Natasha Ennin	1	Dated: 18 February 2025	
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